Facework on Facebook as a new literacy practice

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on 25 UK teenagers' language and literacy practices on Facebook; it draws on data from interviews as well as from Facebook 'walls'. To explore whether Facebook provides opportunities for new literacy practices through text-making, the research considers how teenagers use the site to present themselves and 'do friendship'. Continuities of the teenagers' interactions were traced across the domains of school, home and Facebook and were found to reflect both 'traditional' and new ways of self presenting and of 'doing friendship'.

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1. Introduction

Teenagers' pre-occupation with social network sites (SNSs) is well-documented (Boyd & Ellison, 2008a, b). We have evidence not just in terms of numbers - the UK National Statistics Office (2010) report that 75% of UK 16–24 year olds use social network sites on a daily basis, and that Facebook is used most of all. But researchers have also been quick to document qualitative research reflecting on young people's industrious attention to and enjoyment of interacting within social network sites (boyd, 2006; Boyd, 2007; boyd, 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Selwyn, 2007; Selwyn & Grant, 2009). Much of this work has concentrated upon friendships and 'public displays of connection' (Donath & boyd, 2004). This paper pays similar attention to the importance of online social networking in young people's lives. It describes data from interviews with teenagers in friendship groups and draws on discourse analysis techniques to identify how the teenagers represent themselves and enact their friendships online. Further, it explores whether these teenagers' text-based interactivities on Facebook represent new social literacy practices. In so doing, Goffman's work (1959, 1967) is invoked, to help describe the social acts in which the teenagers are involved.

1.1. The research questions

The research explored how several groups of friends were using Facebook. My research questions centred around four main issues. In asking the first question,

1. Can literacy practices on Facebook be considered new literacy practices?

I focused on previously theorized social practices to consider whether Facebook brought new dimensions to these theories.

2. Does Facebook provide new ways for teenagers to present themselves?
3. Does Facebook offer new ways of friendship management?
4. Do literacy practices in Facebook affect presentations of self in other contexts (and vice versa)?

In looking at these questions I used a multidisciplinary approach drawing on New Literacy Studies, Social Network and Narrative theories, Sociology and Social Anthropology.

Before moving ahead to my conceptual framework, I briefly give an overview of Facebook with details relevant to this study.

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2. Facebook structure

Facebook is a social network site (SNS). Boyd and Ellison (2008b: 211) provide a useful definition of social network sites as allowing

individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system

Like most SNSs Facebook invites new users to complete a template, giving name, date of birth, place of residence, interests and so on as well as a profile image. Not all details are obligatory and users may set privacy levels for each Facebook area – varying from allowing anyone to see all content, to only friends having access. Users can group friends into categories, allowing different degrees of access to content. Existing networks are utilised as users are prompted by Facebook to invite friends from email lists to join. Users receive friend requests via internal messaging systems; acceptance is not obligatory. Friends are listed publically on user profiles with hyperlinks to each friend's space. Most participants predominantly operate within these networks although other links are possible, such as via games.

An individual's Facebook space has a 'wall' where a user's friends' updates and comments appear; they also have a 'profile' for their own updates, and an area for photographs. 'Updates' or 'status updates' refer to content added to a profile or Wall and are organized chronologically, date and time-stamped, with the most recent at the top of the screen. Users can view updates in multiple combinations; e.g they can view just their own profile updates; a friend's updates; they can also view how their wall appears to any friend. Walls are framed by advertisements, lists of friends and profile information. Users can instant-message, talk in groups and send private messages within an internal email system. Updates can be words, images, video and/or hyperlinks. While the template is the same for everyone, because Facebook consists mainly of users' content, and because each person's network is different to each other's, then no individual person's Facebook looks the same as anyone else's.

3. Conceptual framework

My epistemological and ontological roots are set firmly within Language and Literacy research; these roots frame the approach to the current study, where I consider what individuals are doing on Facebook as literacy and language practices. I draw on Goffman's theoretical frameworks, considering the concept of Facework as demonstrated through textual practices and use narrative, and discourse analysis to explore the data. Similarly, while I consider theories from social network research, I look at how these are played out textually on my participants' Facebook pages.

3.1. The New Literacy Studies and new literacies

As Luke indicates (2003: 401) 'the last breakthrough' in literacy research is marked by a shift from a psychological to a social model recognising the implications of context, discourse, identity and power, (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Street, 2003). The New Literacy Studies (NLS), conceptualized by The New London Group, (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) looks at literacy as a social practice. This insight marks a step change from a paradigm where literacy is regarded as a set of straightforward, transferable, non-context specific, coding and de-coding skills. In this 'autonomous model' (Street, 1993), educators are seen as custodians of literacy where a unitary way of reading and writing is enshrined within academia. Other types of literacy had been at best seen as of less value, but largely ignored, unrecognized, or regarded as incorrect (Street, 1993). By recognizing other ways of being literate, the NLS recognizes a plurality: 'Literacies'. Barton and Hamilton describe literacy as 'something people do' it is always 'a social practice' (1998: 3) and the social context frames the meanings. Thus different kinds of literacy are used in different contexts meaning that a textual feature used in one context may mean differently elsewhere. Being literate therefore involves an understanding not just of how to de- code alphabetically, but also involves being aware of all kinds of social "stuff " that surrounds texts. One needs to decode cultural and social context clues as Lankshear and Knobel (2006:13) argue:

From a sociocultural perspective it is impossible to separate out from text-mediated social practices the bits concerned with reading or writing (or any other sense of literacy) and to treat them independently of all the non-print bits, like values and gestures, context and meaning, action and objects, talk and interaction, tools and spaces. They are all non-subtractable parts of integrated wholes. "Literacy bits" do not exist apart from the social practices in which they are embedded and in which they are acquired.

Thus, following Street (1984), New Literacy scholars commonly use ethnographic approaches to explore literacy practices, since this method ensures that researchers consider context and not just text. Working within the paradigm of The New Literacy Studies, Barton and Hamilton (1998) developed the concept of Vernacular Literacies – voluntary, self-generated practices about getting on with the business of living, rather than (for example) producing texts for academic assessment.

Within the paradigm of the NLS I see Facebook as a context for literacy practices that are social and that are vernacular. The NLS is a new approach to looking at literacy; it does not refer specifically to the ways in which new digital technologies have impacted on literacy. However, because the uses of digital technologies are so often vernacular and so overtly social, to help us to do things online (buying, selling, making friends etc) many practices using new technologies exemplify literacy as a social practice very clearly.

Within the NLS, a concept has been developed describing 'New Literacies' which involve new digital technologies. There have been suggestions (Davies, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) that new technologies have facilitated new social literacy practices - that through interactions mediated by digital technologies, people are able to perform new social acts that were not previously possible. Moje (2009), however is less sure that what we are witnessing is anything more new than the technologies themselves.

Moje (2009: 349) insists on the importance of making a distinction between digital tools and new literacy practices; this can be difficult, since 'it is often difficult to tell where the medium stops and the practice starts; they are after all intertwined'. She suggests that sometimes we perceive a new practice when it is simply that new technologies are involved. She asks 'Are we, in our fascination with new media, seeing the concomitant changes to literate practice (or cognitive process and social practices) as more radical than they are?' (2009: 350).

Creating a text using new technologies might simply enable 'more polished performances of old practices', (Davies & Merchant, 2009) but which cannot be considered as new literacy practices. Thus Lankshear and Knobel (2006) suggest new literacies must involve not just 'new technical stuff' but also 'new ethos stuff'. This suggests we should look to social effects in order to define new literacy practices. Lankshear and Knobel distinguish between new literacies that are chronologically new, or new 'in kind' (2011:184–185). The new 'in kind' signals a new 'mind-set' and perceives a new ethos emerging where new literacy practices are more: collaborative; participative; multi-modal and distributed and therefore less individuated and less author-centred. This definition accounts not just for digitality and multi-modality, but also collaboration and distribution; authors can be synchronically and geographically dispersed. I argue therefore that new literacies combine digitality with new social acts. Steinkuhler, Black, and Clinton (2005: 95) talk about the 'new contexts and resources for forms of semiotic work or play that challenge antiquated models where production and consumption are held as separate ends of the meaning making process'. In terms of Facebook this describes how texts are constantly being re-made, extended, amended and annotated. Publication is immediate and participation can be distributed across geographical spaces and time.

Luke (2003: 401) points out that, 'texts of the new technologies have mutated into complex hybrid systems that have made new demands on reading and writing, viewing, social exchange, and communication.' Thus new texts create new challenges for consumers and producers of texts. The increasingly multimodal textual landscape of our digital literacy practices has attracted attention (Carrington, 2009; Davies, 2007; Jewitt, 2005; Kress, 2010) as have the increased possibilities for complex text production. Facebook is no exception to this multimodal trend enabling users to easily embed content from other sites, and combine written text with other modalities. Hull and Nelson (2005: 225) argue, multimodality can afford, 'not just a new way to make meaning, but a different kind of meaning'. However, multimodality is not a new phenomenon and it cannot define a new literacy practice.

There is, as Moje argues, more work to be done in articulating what it is that is new which is happening around the use of new technologies within literacy. Moje argues for 'an analysis of new and old literacies that resists the dichotomy of old and new and instead situates literate practices on more of a continuum' (2009: 359). I share Moje's desire to exercise caution and this current research responds to Moje's (2009) 'Call for New Research' in this regard.

3.2. Social network research

Facebook is a social network site. (SNS) Already there is a wealth of research looking at SNSs and here I briefly outline aspects considering how friendship and identity work are expressed through these sites. Boyd and Ellison (2008a, b) describe SNSs as spaces where individuals can create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; display a list of users to whom they are connected, and can reciprocally view and traverse other users' lists of connections. It is like showing your hyperlinked address book so friends can connect to them too (Greenhow & Burton, 2011).

According to one of boyd's informants, 'If you're not on Myspace, you don't exist' (boyd, 2010: 79). Boyd shows that for many teens not only is a presence on a social network site desirable, but essential; she reflects not just on why the young are attracted to such sites, but also how their participation impacts on their sense of themselves, their identity formation. Boyd's informants tell her they use the sites because that is where their friends hang out and because they would be 'bored' otherwise. In looking beyond these explanations, Boyd (2007: 129) identifies the ways in which the teens behave in the space and drawing on Goffman (1956), describes for example their identity and impression management. Pre-empting further discussion below of Goffman's work, this term refers to how individuals manage the way they present themselves to others to fit particular social contexts, so that others will see them in a positive light. This involves careful reading of situations, understanding what are the important codes and rituals, how to speak and so on. This must all be done without compromising the identity that one also wishes to project; as Sundén (2003) describes, in online spaces, this is about writing oneself into being. This work is executed through careful profile design – changing the template, looking at others' profiles and building a profile that fits in with the crowd; she talks about the young 'writing themselves into being', using images, audio and video to create a 'virtual presence' (p12). Multimodality is crucial and she argues 'music is the cultural glue' among youth and describes its central role within Myspace where participants use this as a key identity marker.

By managing friend lists, a network or community is created, facilitating what Donath and boyd (2004) describe as 'public displays of connection'. By managing their identity and other's impressions of them online, Boyd (2007) argues that teenagers position themselves within the Myspace social world; the space is seen to function as somewhere your identity is tied to not just with who you are, but with whom you are connected.

Boyd's participants tell her they understand the difference between an online friend or 'friendster' from a 'real' friend (boyd, 2006). Concurring with sociological work, (Spencer & Pahl, 2006) she finds that friendships are context dependent – that in different cultural spaces, the meaning of friendship adapts; moreover this view suggests that they have an understanding of the literacy context here and that 'friending' is a social literacy practice within Friendster that has different meanings from elsewhere. Similarly Miller (2011, 167) suggests friendship is a heterogeneous concept and despite fears that concepts of online friendships have apparently diminished people's abilities to form 'proper' friendships, he argues no evidence supports the notion that peoples' relationships are less genuine than before.

boyd (2006) points out that because in SNS templates friendship is the token by which others are able to see your site or not, then this influences friendship choices – this is the context of the friendship – often leading to long friendship listings. Indeed, friends behave like the 'walls' to your social network space, (p9) since it is according to who your friends are, that your online space is defined – being either narrow and accessible to a few; or wide and accessible to many. Friends in many ways, argues boyd, therefore create the context of your space.

Ellison et al. (2007) found that most of their informants use Facebook to keep in touch with old friends or to intensify current friendships - and that in the main it serves a local user base. While Facebook can obviously be used to traverse global distances, individuals predominantly use it to communicate with those who are geographically proximal. They note it crystallizes relationships that 'might otherwise remain ephemeral' (1162) and paves the way to convert a 'latent' relationship into something more active (1162). Similarly, Miller's study (2011) of the way in which Trinidadians use 'Fasbook', shows how Facebook acts as a social 'buffer' for people who may be 'potential friends' without requiring 'awkward face-to-face interaction', one can research others prior to meeting them (p165).

Because 'public display of social connections' are important within these spaces, other content, not just lists of friends, is also crucial. Livingstone (2008) describes how some of her informants wrote joke profiles which did not match with their real circumstances – such as saying they were in a relationship, or married to someone when they were not. Building on peer knowledge of each other beyond the online

space, she argues such tales are more about display of the self (as fun and lively) and about play, than a desire to deceive. This acknowledges that the context of SNSs usually extends beyond the online space into the 'offline'. Livingstone argues this may involve 'flouting communicative norms' and indulging in risky behaviuor to accumulate comments and friendship requests. Such literacy activities place Facebook firmly within Hamilton and Barton's definition of a vernacular literacy practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Drawing on Buchner, Bois-Reymond and Kruger (1995) and Giddens (1991), Livingstone (2008: 396) proposes

… for teenagers, the 'online realm' may be adopted enthusiastically because it represents 'their' space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance, an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task of adolescence - to construct experiment with and present a reflexive project of the self in a social context

This links to the third theoretical arm of my research detailed next.

3.3. The ongoing story of the self

The importance of narrative in making sense of our everyday life, as well as in presenting particular versions of ourselves to others, is well-documented (Bruner, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Narrative theory describes how our ongoing stories of our lives reflect and shape our understandings of the world, ourselves, and each other.

Hymes (1996, 118) refers to an 'iterative' process, of telling and re-telling, 'a grounding of performance and text in a narrative view of life …. life as a source of narrative.' He continues, ' even apparently slight incidents, have pervasively the potentiality of an interest that is worth retelling.' He emphasizes how we present aspects of our everyday life to ourselves and to others, as meaningful stories. Like Giddens he sees how we make sense of our world by imbuing it with narrative, giving it form and through that, a particular interpretation. Similarly Ochs and Capps (2001) describe storytelling as a problem-solving activity – where meanings within the mundane are extrapolated for focus as a separate event (255). Langellier and Peterson (2004:1) explain 'People make sense of their experiences, claim identities, interact with each other, and participate in cultural conversations through storytelling'. They explain how storytelling becomes a new performance in itself, and that by presenting a story from one's own life, one re-enacts it for the sake of oneself as well as for others. In describing stories that people tell orally, they explain how such tales are often incomplete; distributed across spaces; have multiple tellers and can be multimodal. They continue to describe how storytelling within particular contexts, such as in family domains, the family itself may be 'produced' through discourse. Storytelling they argue, is a 'stylised repetition of acts' and often acts as a regulative force within particular domains. Ochs and Capps (2001) and Langellier and Peterson (2004) are clear that stories mediate cultural and historical values; Haas-Dyson also talks about the ways in which young children's written texts 'are not containers into which meaning is poured; they are mediators of cultural practice through which meaning is produced' (Haas-Dyson, 2007: 117). Similarly, in previous studies I have demonstrated how collaborative online text-making practices have not just been about the mediation of ideas but about the creation of new cultural spaces for both play and learning, (Davies, 2006, 2007, 2009a; 2009b).

3.4. The presentation of self in everyday life

Goffman (1967, 1–2) describes how studies of the ordinary, of the rituals of the everyday, reveal 'the natural units of interaction'. He advises '… we need to identify the countless patterns and natural sequences of behavior … we need to see these events as a subject matter in their own right'. (p2). Goffman explores ways in which individuals present themselves, manage the information they give out and continually perform to others, and themselves, following a consistent narrative across domains. He describes this as a 'line' (p5) and that 'Regardless of whether a person intends to take a line, he (sic) will find that he has done so in effect' (Goffman, 1967). Goffman refers to 'perfomances' in his description of the way individuals consciously enact a chosen 'line', a way of being, or of appearing to others (1959: 24). This performance of the self, he argues, involves actors as part of their own audience. Face, he explains is the positive value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes. Facework describes everything someone does in order to maintain this positive face – whatever the context; this requires social skill and the ability to read situations and work out how to fit in – without compromising the identity already established for oneself elsewhere (Goffman, 1959 pp. 12–15).

When a person follows a 'line', Goffman explains that this is, 'a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself' (1967: 5). The line is mediated through language, mannerisms, clothing and so on; what Gee (1996) refers to as 'Discourses' with a large 'D'. The performance is thus 'multimodal'. Goffman (Gee, 1996) continues,

The term 'face' may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact.

Face is 'diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted.' (Goffman, 1967: 7). Consistency is crucial to avoid being considered fake and genuineness can be ascertained through contextual clues (Goffman, 1967)

…while concern for face focuses attention of the person on the current activity, he must, to maintain face in this activity, take into consideration his place in the social world beyond it.

Here Goffman emphasizes context, saying that groups evolve for as befits these evolving codes (1967:p7). When someone takes a line, in order to keep face they need to fit not only with the group, but with the line he is known to have taken elsewhere – not to do so may be seen as 'fake' or inauthentic.

Goffman describes how one can be 'in wrong face' (p. 8) if information from elsewhere does not fit the line being taken in the current context. As will be evidenced later, and as boyd discusses, Facebook helps individuals avoid situations associated with losing face or being in

wrong face by providing the tools to talk 'backstage' through its messaging system; it allows one to build up photographic evidence in a profile that can substantiate a line that has been taken; it allows one to manage people's access to data which might be embarrassing if seen by certain groups.

A basic structural feature of interaction according to Goffman, is that everyone accepts the line anyone takes and works hard to help them maintain the line chosen. If this is not accomplished, a person may 'lose face' and need to 'save face' through remedial action. In order to 'save face' participants may resist challenging an inconsistency and pretend that a social gaffe has not occurred; they may alternatively act as if the inconsistency were a joke; they may try to re-configure the line they have been taking in order to accommodate the aspect of behaviour that did not seem to fit. It is considered embarrassing for everyone if a line is found to be fake and so while working hard to present one's own line, interactants generally also work to authenticate each others'.

All the above is part of facework.

Taken together the above theories form my conceptual framework and it is through these lenses that I regarded the data. As a starting point, the New Literacy Studies shaped my perception of 'Facebooking' as a social literacy practice; I saw it as a vernacular literacy practice a literacy embedded in people's everyday lives. Drawing on Goffman's theories around face and presentation of the self, I considered whether Facebook afforded the teenagers any opportunities for facework not accounted for by Goffman. The idea of 'the ongoing story of the self', was used to guide me in looking for instances of new ways of narratives impacting on people's sense of themselves and of how others' see them. Social network theories exploring the nature of friendship and ways of presenting the self were drawn upon to make sense of the social context of Facebook. Finally, using Lankshear and Knobel's (2006; 2011) framework about new literacies, which demands not just the use of digital technologies, but also a new 'ethos' I sought to assess whether Facebook instantiated a new kind of social practice and therefore a new literacy.

4. Methodology

The 25 (13 male, 12 female) research participants were from a city in northern England and aged between 16 and 18. Teacher contacts in local schools and a college were asked to invite friendship groups of Facebook users to meet me. In this way the sample was a convenience one, but participants had to meet certain criteria. Volunteers were all asked to meet the following criteria – that they used Facebook regularly and enjoyed using it. Members of each group had to be friends with each other online and offline so that I could trace interactions amongst them without needing to ask for additional permissions from their Facebook friends. I met each friendship group just once, for about half a day, in a mutually convenient place. The group interviews took place at these meetings, followed by the 'facebook tours'. Venues included the University (two groups); the College (two groups); and participants' homes (three groups). The research process followed four steps:

Step One: Semi-structured interviews with friendship groups.

The questions were intended to motivate group interaction– and participants enjoyed the banter and prompted each other. They were able to refer to their own and each others' Facebooks as they were familiar with everybody else's pages. Questions included:

- Why did you join Facebook?
- Who do you have as Friends on Facebook? (How do you choose them?)
- What is Facebook for? Is it important?
- Would you think it strange if one of your friends were not on Facebook?
- Do you get to know people in different ways on Facebook?
- When you go on your computer, do you exclusively look at Facebook? (Or open multiple windows?)
- What do you use to access Facebook? (Mobile phone; computer, etc)
- Where will you usually be when you go on Facebook?

These discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed. These data were considered in relation to the data collected in steps two and three as well as to the literature.

Step Two: Facebook tours.

Immediately after the interviews I asked each participant to sit at a computer and talk through their Facebooks; they controlled what I saw. All participants stayed and could comment on each other's Facebook tours. During each participant's tour, the friends chipped in, about their own contributions to each wall and the surrounding 'off-screen' contexts. Because of the way in which friends' Facebook pages overlap with each others' this meant that they often clicked on to their friends' Facebook pages. This was a very useful aspect of the friendshipgroup approach. We did not look at the pages of anyone not present. I asked them:

- Can you show me your Facebook and talk me through what's on it at the moment? What do you like about your space?
- Will you show me what you usually do when you first open up Facebook? What are your usual rituals?
- Can you tell me about your profile pictures?

Step Three: Requests for screenshots of data.

Each of the 25 participants was invited to send me screenshots of particular posts and comments they had talked about. I did not access the participants' Facebooks and did not join their networks. Each person sent me two screenshots. I let them choose what to send me; some sent images of the profile picture albums; some sent examples of online comment exchanges and updates. They only sent items they had talked about with me in the interviews.

Step Four: Screenshot analysis.

Using a discourse analytical approach I considered the texts in relation to the research questions as well as in the context of data from steps one and two.

In sum, I had interview data, talk aloud data and screenshots from all 25 participants.

4.1. Comments on the process

The participants enjoyed the research. It was useful having the participants provide me with a tour of their Facebook spaces and to be able to interview them in groups where they showed, talked me through and even analysed their activities with me. All but two of the participants shared a great deal in common and keenly updated their Facebooks regularly through writing.

Two college boys rarely updated the text of their Facebook profiles directly; their participation was predominantly via games consoles – X-Box and PS2 and their Facebook walls displayed medals to their friends. These boys' Facebook activities were very different to other interviewees and it emerged that although involved in Facebook through their consoles, they struggled with writing. This kind of participation will be followed up elsewhere.

4.2. Analysis

I used an eclectic approach in my discourse analysis (Coates, 1996; Goodwin, 1998) of the data, considering how the participants were able, through linguistic and other modes, to signal friendship to each other and to perform identity work. I looked at patterns within the language and focused on textual aspects which displayed friendship; patterns which reflected inclusivity (or not); which reflected connections and which betrayed ways in which Facebook was affecting how they saw themselves and their relationships. For instance, I looked at the linguistic expressions or metaphors interviewees used to describe their behaviour and considered how their linguistic choices betrayed their attitudes. I also looked at phrases that were repeated for emphasis paying attention to how the meanings were therefore key. For example I noticed how Pete's language often drew from vocabulary about growing up and progress 'a mature person's website'; 'moved up', 'moving on', and so on. I also looked at language which was inclusive or which sought to exclude – may be using 'in jokes', trendy phrases, or even purposefully obscure. This meant that I could see where participants made connections with some people while excluding others. In this paper I provide examples which are unremarkable within the dataset, which are typical and reflect salient Facebook behaviours as they relate to the research questions. I analysed the interview data by selecting quotations which represented 'typical' views and which spoke to my research questions. I use pseudonyms for students' names.

In order to keep participants' identity confidential, I present the Facebook content in tables as opposed to showing screenshots. This extrapolation means that the whole context of updates is not shared – losing content such as the lists of friends, advertisements and other updates. Screenshots would have made my participants identifiable, unless I blurred the images – which would then have rendered screenshots somewhat unnecessary anyway. I did not have permission to show photographs but do include participants' stories about photographs. The data I discuss is mainly linguistic because the participants did not share music files and their video sharing was limited. This was a surprising finding amongst these participants, suggesting that differing modes find favour within different friend networks.

5. Data presentation and discussion

The data for the project comprises interview transcriptions and content from profiles and walls.

5.1. Interview data

Participants' responses to 'Why did you join Facebook?' were uncannily similar, and are typified by Pete's comment:

I joined about 2 years ago. I was on another network site called Bebo. **And a lot of my friends had moved up**. A lot of my friends were like … well it was just that Facebook seemed like a **more mature person's social networking site**. I think Bebo was aimed at a younger generation of er .. I think that Bebo was a bit more ridiculous really. And I thought that **I was ready to move on** really. It was nice to just start doing something a bit newer too. A bit intriguing. Also a lot **of older people**, like my cousins and older friends, **just older people** I knew of were all on Facebook and they kind of smirked at the idea of Bebo.
                   (Emboldened text is my emphasis)

Here Pete interprets my question as 'why, *out of all social network sites*, are you on this one?' reflecting an assumption that everyone should have an online presence. Pete's language suggests that transition to Facebook is a rite of passage, an age-related phenomenon, ('more mature person's'), about keeping in step ('my friends had moved up') almost like moving to the next class in school. We sense how Pete views himself online, thinking about how he fits in and how others view him. Keith concurred with Pete's explanation, commenting,

You have to go on (Facebook) otherwise its like you don't exist. If you are not on there, then where are you?

Later as we look at his Facebook, Pete reads one of his updates aloud to me. (For clarity the updates from his Facebook wall are underlined, whilst the italicised text is Pete's explanation to me):

There's nothing like a bit of Mumford & Sons (a band) in the morning.
Cos this is a band I like listening to at the moment of a morning. So I have got comments from people like my friends basically, my friend's girlfriend and stuff.

I have lots of comments on that really and they are making an in-joke out of it I think.
<u>There's nothing like two pairs of espadrilles for 20 pooonds</u>
After about five seconds the topic of my conversation and status loses its meaning cos people add stuff to it. Added an in-joke, a private joke to take it on. And you forget how it started. It's like a game. So then when you see them after you say something about espadrilles kind of thing.

He showed me how the comments within the Facebook space derive from daily conversations and rituals, but once transferred to text, new kinds of games develop – which move back into the morning walk to school ritual.

Facebook keeps a public count of each member's friends. This facility makes numbers significant and many of the participants mentioned the number of friends they have as if they were a kind of credential. Samitra said

That's how many friends I've got. 762. I think it's stupid if you add people you don't know. I know all these people. Well not know them KNOW them. I know who they all are. Facebook friends is not the same as normal friends. I have two best friends. And they are normal friends who I mostly talk to on chat. … I have put my friends in lists so I can sort out who sees what.

Participants reported they only added people they knew. My participants said they didn't just add people in order to look popular, but suggested others did this.

Facebook provides a space for declaring your 'relationship status' providing various options, such as 'married'; 'single'; 'it's complicated'. Four of my informants had selected 'married' as a joke while Gina narrated how she and Toby jokingly set their Facebook statuses to display they were 'in a relationship', with each other. As part of this masquerade 'the couple' planned to arrive 'linked arms' at a gig.

…so on Friday night at the gig, we're arriving as a couple, yeah? … It's gonna be well wicked. … just can't wait to see everybody's Facebook on Saturday morning. Seriously, it'll be a riot, the photos will be priceless!

Showing similar significance of photographs being used as evidence of a particular type of identity performance, Lisa showed me a set of photographs she had uploaded:

Look this is when I brought my camera to school. My profile was looking boring and so I needed pictures to brighten it up. So we decided to have a bit of a mad day and even the teachers joined in. Look at this one. That was a great day in the end, so we could put all this lot on Facebook.

In showing me this set of images, I could see Lisa had uploaded 1759 photographs. As with the accounting algorithm for numbers of friends, Facebook also counts images and so numbering is made a significant aspect of the content – and of one's online identity.

All the teenagers I interviewed owned mobile phones with cameras. These were principally employed to take photographs for Facebook and they reported they were frequently on the look-out for good 'photo-opportunities'. The images were all arranged in labelled sets, such as Lisa's Party'; Schooldays; Spain 2010. These images all depicted people, many of them were taken at an angle showing they were taken by someone in the photo – arms outstretched to enable a self-portrait. In this way, the photos tended to have a lot in common; all taken recently – at least within the last year, (most participants had been on Bebo before); smiling out from social events and betraying that the people were happy, sociable and involved in a busy world.

5.2. Screenshot data

I now show two examples of written interactions, selected to exemplify common types of ritual across participants' walls.
Happy Birthday.

Name	Time	Words	Likes
Kate Dent	Saturday 10.05	Happy Birthday Sam!	1
Poppy Stilgoe	Saturday 11.05	Happy Birthday Sami!	1
Sinead Fox	Saturday 11.20	Happy Birthday Sami!	1
Beth Little	Saturday 11.37	Happy Birthday Sam!	1
Becky Sands	Saturday 11.54	Happy Birthday from me too!	1
Anita Vashi	Saturday 12.30	Happy Birthday from your favourite auntie! Have a good day!	1
Ali Lord	Saturday 12.35	Have a great day! See you later!	1
Poppy Stilgoe:	Saturday 12.38	Happy Birthday to Yoo! Happy Birthday to yoo!! Happy Birthday dear Sa-a-a-a-a-a-a-am, Happy birthday to yooooo!! * singing * LOL!!!	3
Samitra Balu	Saturday 12.40	LOL!!!Thanks everyone!! Hope to see some of you later @ Happy Wik! Message me for where we're going after.	
Lindsay Barr	Saturday 14.03	And Hapy Birthday from me too, Will CU laters. Hopefully there'll be some good photo opps during@ 'Happy Wik'.	1
Samitra Balu	Saturday 14.05	I mean Happy Wok!	1

This is an example of an age-old ritual reformatted for Facebook. The repetition of birthday greetings accumulates a display of friendship on Samitra's wall. Not quite like a row of cards on a shelf, this list nevertheless works to showcase Sam's friendships. Facebook friends are able to view each other's greetings, drawing the girls all together; this is a group effort, not just a series of separate contributions. The textual cohesion –

(the repeated phrases) provides a sense of social cohesiveness too as if they girls all occupy the same social space. The greetings act as prompts for others to follow suit – as would occur in a physical social gathering. Yet, according to Samitra's comments to me, such a physical social gathering would be unlikely. It would be embarrassing if Auntie Anita had turned up physically to her party, yet it was acceptable for her to join in this virtual gathering. Becky also, was described to me by Sam, as a 'friend on the edge of my friends'; Sam said that she would never expect a card from Becky and she was not invited to the meal out later, but that it is easy to see someone's birthday on Facebook and say 'Happy Birthday'.

This series of updates took place across a number of hours, however the format of Facebook, similar to a play-script, allows the script to be read as if one person's words are uttered immediately after those on the previous line. In this way Facebook's template gives the impression of a present crowd, of people talking with each other – and in the end this series had 25 'Happy Birthday' wishes offered across three days. The accumulation suggests a party atmosphere, especially with Poppy's attempt at 'singing'. Poppy also uses two conventions, spreading fast across social network sites and chat forums – the expression of laughter in 'LOL' (Laugh Out Loud) and in the use of asterisks to denote a kind of stage direction as in *singing*.

Sam has clicked the 'like' button on each of the birthday wishes; this 'like' facility could be translated as a kind of smile; a non-verbal contribution that shows a comment has been read. In Facebook, it is a convention showing acknowledgement, an indicator of positivity. It can be quickly performed and on a mobile phone for example, when someone is on the move, means a person can participate online without having to take time to text a complex message. Sam for example, told me she was at the hairdressers when she 'liked' some of these comments.

In this exchange we see Sam making a request, 'message me for where we're going after'. This comment signals Sam is aware her wall is public to many friends, not just those who are going with her to 'Happy Wok'. To keep some discussion private, Sam asks for the information to be obscured from others – via a backchannel. Sam shows awareness, but does not say explicitly, that this interaction has potentially taken place in front of non-participating witnesses. We again see Facebook participants planning to take photos which will appear on Facebook afterwards.

In this next example, two school-friends talk via Facebook while watching the UK soap-opera 'Eastenders'. The conversation occurs across the length of the programme and so it is as if they are watching together. This is a conversation that begins on Amy's wall, where she describes what she is doing; it extends to a discussion about the programme and about school and at the end the girls, as in the Birthday example, move backstage to private chat.

Eastenders.

Name	Time	Words	Likes
Amy Beal	Friday 20.10	Lying on the sofa watching Enders	1
Ali Lord	Friday 20.11	Me too and eating chips. Nom Nom Nom.	1
Amy Beal	Friday 20.11	Is that your tea? Are you calling for me tomorrow?	
Ali Lord	Friday 20.15	No & yep. *Burp*.	
Amy Beal	Friday 20.20	I pay you to work not to like me. Lol	
Ali Lord	Friday 20.22	Zainab	
Amy Beal	Friday 20.23	Yep. I totally hate her. Such a troll.	
Ali Lord	Friday 20.23	Wouldn't it be totally mint to live in Albert Square	
Amy Beal	Friday 20.27	ROTFL. Nightmare more like.	
Ali Lord	Friday 20.30	Have you done your statement thing yet? I'm thinking of putting something about being an expert on Enders.	
Amy Beal	Friday 20.31	And Facebook. Lol)))))))	
Ali Lord	Friday 20.31	Popular Culture Consultant.	
Amy Beal	Friday 20.31	OMG!!! PCC. Let's go on chat. I need to ask you something. Have you got time?	

Amy begins by sharing what she is doing – mundanely watching television. Ali states she is doing the same, but also eating. Linked by the television programme and their shared contextual, circumstantial information (eating chips; lying on the sofa) it seems like they share the same physical space too. Their talk is elliptical and casual, not supplying explanations to outsiders; for example in an apparent non-sequitor, Amy says 'I pay you to work not to like me'. Seemingly an out-of-context remark, she is quoting something one of the Eastenders characters has said; Ali identifies this, saying 'Zainab', (the character's name) as if answering a quiz question. The girls' real-time conversation undermines their physical separation; while watching the tv screen and simultaneously viewing their Facebook pages they signal social and synchronic proximity through their colloquial text.

The girls take social risks considering their conversation could be viewed by their friends; some remarks are extreme 'I hate her. Such a troll'. They signal 'taboo' behaviour *burp* and suggest extreme reactions: 'ROTFL' (Roll on the Floor Laughing; big smiles signified through the convention of punctuation as emoticon))))))). In addition their language reflects extreme contrasts, 'totally mint'; 'Nightmare'. They collaboratively produce a text that suggests a private girls' night-in where they are indulging in unguarded, uncensored behaviour watching television together. Yet it is clear they are aware that this is public, because they later talk in a different space when they decide they want privacy. At this point it is as if they have left the room.

Ali says 'Have you done your statement thingie?', assuming Amy knows what she means. Indeed Amy has no trouble following the conversation and responds. Other Facebook friends may not follow this, but keeping to their chosen line, the girls provide no explanations for other potential readers. Yet their awareness of potential onlookers is clear when Amy suggests 'Let's go on chat.'

When Amy was talking to me about what she puts on her wall and what she keeps private, she seemed aware of what she was doing and acted according to criteria she had considered carefully:

I have put my friends in lists so I can sort out who sees what. I have 4 lists That's what's quite good. You can let some people see a few things; more people see a few more things and then there's totally public. Well public to who you've friended.

6. Discussion

Leander and McKim (2003) emphasise the importance of using 'connected' methodologies for research across online and offline spaces. A connected approach in the method was important in this project where borders between online and offline spaces were permeable; interviewing in friendship groups was fruitful as friends filled 'narrative gaps' in the data from Facebook walls.

I now discuss my participants' use of Facebook to enact not just traditional ways of presenting themselves, doing 'facework' and doing friendship' but also as new social literacy practices.

6.1. Does Facebook provide new ways of presenting the self?

boyd (2010) talks of the idea of 'perpetual presence' referring not just to frequent updating, but how Facebook is read and commented on when participants are away from technology. Livingstone (2008: 399) similarly sees SNS profiles as 'placemarkers', keeping spaces open even when owners close their computers down. Evocative of Boyd's (2006) informants, my participant Keith reiterates, 'You have to go on Facebook otherwise it's like you don't exist'. Further, Pete talks about how he keeps in step with the peer group as part of a 'mature' crowd, demonstrating Facebook is not just communication but social participation - and as Livingstone (2008) indicates it evades adult surveillance. Simply belonging to Facebook is a statement of identity for these young people and my work echoes that of Livingstone and boyd in at least this respect.

As mentioned earlier, Facebook counts photos; thus not only are users encouraged to take photographs, but to consider being involved in 'photogenic events'. It is as if images are used to provide evidence of a certain kind of life, and to give evidence again of a lifestyle that traverses across spaces. The images reflect events but seem also to construct pictorial narratives, archives of social lives that friends comment on and add meanings to. Thus photo and friend lists work as credentials on each person's Facebook showing levels of sociability and being networked.

The 'always on' aspect of Facebook is crucial, since Facebookers can be present and 'with friends' online, even when they are away from technology.

6.2. Does Facebook offer new ways of managing friendships?

Since much of the work around self presentation and impression management is also about fitting in with the social context, much of the friendship work was also about presentation of the self. I found that in commenting on how the teenagers were presenting themselves, they were often taking a particular line in order to show and develop friendship.

Facebook allows participants to continue previous conversations, for staying in touch when they were apart; they simply translate conversations from oral to written mode. In Goffman's terms, it facilitates a coherent performance across spaces – of demonstrating authenticity even. This coherence was an important aspect of demonstrating that Pete is a particular type of person, but was also closely tied to 'doing friendship'. Taking a particular line and impression management can be seen as closely allied to 'doing friendship'. Thus when Pete muses aloud that 'there's nothing like a bit of Mumford and sons' etc, he continues a line that shows even when alone, he listens to 'in vogue' music (Mumford and Sons). By mentioning this in an update he writes at home in the evening, he invokes his morning walk to school, bringing this space into his current present; his co-walkers (Facebook friends) add to Pate's update, bantering as usual and create a kind of co-operative re-enactment of their morning gossip. Pete creates a kind of window on his 'private' home world and is thus able to do something through the SNS that would not be possible without the technology.

Pete analyses how one update develops and becomes an incident in its own right. Bakhtin (1981: 279) explains:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.

Haas-Dyson (2007) explains writing both mediates and creates cultural meanings; the teens thus not only celebrate their friendship through a re-statement of earlier conversations, they also collaboratively create a new cultural construct – for themselves and others to read and re-read at different times. Its meanings draw from and feed into other spatial and chronological domains. The boys thus display their friendship to others, as well as enact it for themselves. Translating word play into digital writing reaps benefits from being semi-public allowing collaboration from multiple participants. As Lankshear and Knobel (2006) describe, the new literacy texts are collaborative and distributed, and as Luke (2003) points out, these new texts require greater skills in order to participate.

The data shows other kinds of cultural construction too – for example creating a sense of physical space. In the 'Happy Birthday' and 'Eastenders' extracts, there is a sense of interlocuters being physically co- present. The accumulation of birthday greetings resembles a play-script, although the people interacting would be unlikely to ever share the same physical space. In this way individuals were able to use technology to participate in ways that 'saved face', by not actually being present, but appearing so. In this situation the sense of co-presence was about inclusivity. We see in this 'Happy Birthday' segment, that Sam was quick to 'like' each 'Happy Birthday' thus maintaining the face of all participants, reflecting back to them that this was appropriate behaviour.

When Amy and Ali discuss Eastenders, there is something companionable about the way they identify parallels in their respective situations – evocative of Coates' (1996) work about female friendship talk where women are shown to repeatedly demonstrate similarity as a way of 'doing friendship'. There is strong agreement between the pair and they both declare they are involved in doing the same things. A sense of unity is expressed through such parallels and companionability is emphatically expressed. The girls make efforts to recreate the idea of physical co-presence by using stylised conventions to suggest particular behaviours, such as the sound of eating ' Nom. Nom. Nom', and burping. These para-linguistic features would normally be ignored in 'polite company' but are here used for comic effect and the girls obviously chose to suggest such features through their writing. As with Pete's Mumford and Sons update, this creates an atmosphere of 'as if' they are watching television in a private, but overlooked space and they invest in this greatly for a complex display of friendship. The girls, through their writing also invoked other modes, and were performing a line, behaving as if they did not realize they were being witnessed, behaving in an 'unguarded way'. They share information that seems private, but we later see that they are making definite decisions about what really is confidential and move to another space when they really want privacy. This decision to discuss some things covertly is the final clue to the idea that the scene was not authentically private; the whole thing was of course a game, a display of fun. Others did not interrupt, maintaining the line that this was indeed a 'quiet night in' between friends. Again we see how this social work is achieved through complex text-making practices and a skilled reading of the situation – as well as an ability to create particular contexts.

We see repeatedly how the teens make great social use of the fact that some people are closer than others on Facebook, that there are different levels of proximity and inclusion. One way is through using information only known to a particular social circle, having the effect of including some and excluding others, as above and also by adjourning some discussions to different online locations or to text on the mobile phone. The idea of invoking other modes is one I saw exemplified quite often, with participants even pretending to bump into each other, or passing objects. Such games have insiders and outsiders and while boundaries are set up within friendship lists, others are not explicitly articulated and are more subtle. Friendships are enacted through literacy practices as well as declared within lists, including the flouting of social norms as exemplified by Amy and Ali.

6.3. Do literacy practices in Facebook affect presentations of self in other contexts (and vice versa)?

Four of my informants had selected the 'married' or 'in a relationship' status as a joke, something which Livingstone (2008) also observed. Gina talks about going to a gig after saying she is married to Toby. Her account betrays her confident assumption that her friends follow her Facebook updates and that they would inevitably become co-producers of her drama by taking and uploading photos to Facebook. Gina anticipates orchestrating a Facebook mediated story, at which she is the centre, sharing the relation of this narrative with her friends. In the event, the story would become co-constructed and narrators could become co-performers, implicated in the events, as they added their photographic perspectives and comments within their own Facebook spaces. This story would not just be reportage of a night out, but an act of co-creation, an online and offline enactment. The narrative could later be read at leisure, added to, and disseminated. Those involved would not only present themselves and others through their updates (photos and comments), but would at the same time read about themselves and others. Thus the narrative would weave across online and offline spaces; it would be produced and consumed by numbers of people; authors would be able to review representations of themselves online, and could change the meanings of the whole narrative as it became distributed across authors, readers, time, and space. This event thus fitted all Lankshear and Knobel's criteria for a new literacy practice, moreover finding new ways of presenting lines which could be authenticated repeatedly. The possibility that the whole affair was ironically meant, suggests an even more complex social literacy practice was evolving.

Gina's narrative reflects she understands ideas around giving a consistent performance across spaces, taking a 'line' across domains. Her trick was to involve others in this and solicit documentary evidence in the form of photographs, and have those uploaded to Facebook. This means that Gina's online text affects her off-line behaviour, reflecting the embeddedness of technology in everyday life and the blending of online and offline spaces. This notion of life being affected by Facebook is also shown when Lisa orchestrated a 'good time' at school in order that she could provide photographic evidence on her Facebook. These new practices are enabled by the easy publishing facility and show how Facebook not only reflects life but affects it too.

7. Conclusions

Facebook is a vehicle through which individuals are able to perform a range of social acts through social literacy practices. These are vernacular practices; literacy activities embedded in everyday lives; Facebook provides an additional space for being. In Facebook, as elsewhere, my participants presented themselves in particular ways – and managed different lines by varying who was able to access different areas of online content. In picking a particular line, and by using a range of multimodal affordances, they could enact stories of themselves which they - and their online friends – could read. They were able to do friendship work through their social literacy practices and here social network theories were helpful.

As I discussed earlier, Steinkuhler identifies that new technologies provide new resources for play, and we see this demonstrated here; we also see how interactants co-construct texts across spaces and how they use Facebook as a creative opportunity. We see how friendships are maintained, but further we see complex layers are woven to demarcate further levels within networks. Much of this requires skillful authoring and careful reading as the teens co-construct meanings across sites in ways not possible without SNS affordances.

It has been reported how new technologies seem often to engender polished performances of old practices (Davies & Merchant, 2009: 2) - regarded by some rather disparagingly as 'old wine in new bottles' (Lankshear & Bigum, 1999: 456). McLuhan (1964) points out that old practices will always be repeated with new technologies before new ones are spawned. This data suggests that there is a drift towards new practices where a combination of traditional and new aspects co-exist. I have shown 'blendings' of old and new practices and I see how these provide new ways of connecting and of making meaning.

SNSs seem to be ubiquitous; interactions between individuals who see each other daily are no longer bounded by time and space. Our presentations of self, and our relationships are increasingly being enacted through screen-based text-making, and this activity allows us to read our presentations of self and each other in multiple ways. Text-based social networking has become something that people 'do' and for many has become embedded in their quotidian lives. It seems that Facebook, in particular, has become an integral part of our identity work and of 'doing' friendship; I see it as a vernacular practice with many new possibilities.

In this paper I have shown how Goffman's work remains a useful model to explore presentations of self on Facebook. I have further shown how these young people at least are managing social relationships in new ways via Facebook. I have been interested in how they give value to certain sets of credentials because of the way algorithms within Facebook (such as counting friends) or the way the template facilitates particular actions ('liking'). I have highlighted how much of what goes on in Facebook is similar to the routinized talk from other spheres of life, with discussions of routine mundane activities; but these are sometimes used to display friendships in ways that may not have been possible before, since they occur in front of 'silent' audiences who although may be identified as Facebook friends, can keep their presence hidden at any time. I have shown how displays of seeming private lives are often performed with a strong sense of audience (amongst chosen friends) and how careful judgement is exercised to decide what kinds of talk might nevertheless be kept private. I regard this to be a new literacy practice; it makes use of something that might be aligned to dramatic irony.

My participants seem fluent in the different affordances of Facebook and use them judiciously. They are clear about what they want kept private and use the various modes and media with discrimination. This is not a space where 'anything goes' however and conventions seem to be emerging to show that choices are being made in often sophisticated ways. I look forward to the next phases of this research to explore what other conventions are emerging in what seems to be a space ripe for new social literacies. Following work will be based exclusively in

the college, looking at those whose literacy skills are limited; and a further project will look exclusively at female trainee hairdressers' uses of Facebook.

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