

There are Two Sides to Every Story:

Young People's Perspectives of Relationship Issues on Social Media and Adult Responses

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Abstract

This paper reports on a recent research project undertaken in the UK that investigated how young people negotiate their identities and relationships online, including how they experience interventions by adults. Drawing on qualitative interviews with young people in two schools and a voluntary youth organisation in England, we argue that young people engage rather successfully in practices of self-governance. Our findings based on this sample of young people's agentic practice and care for their peers challenge some dominant perceptions of young people's online practices as risky and/or harmful to themselves and/or others. Furthermore we found a lack of evidence concerning the effectiveness of, and need for, interventions orientated around surveillance and zero tolerance.

Key words: Youth; social media; self-identify; peer support; intervention

1. Introduction

For decades, young people and their life styles have been the focus of debates by media, policy makers and academics (e.g., Ireland, Brooks and Cleaver 2009; Furlong 2012). Recently, there has been a significant shift in focus regarding negative aspects of young people's use of social media (e.g., Davies 2010). Many of their online activities have been placed under a largely undefined umbrella term – 'cyberbullying' (e.g., Cesaroni, Downing and Alvi 2012), generating a 'moral panic' about young people's online activities (Wang and Edwards 2016; Cohen 2011). Influenced by this moral panic, debates around cyberbullying tend to over-signify concepts of risk, victim and perpetrator (e.g., Kernaghan and Elwood 2013). They favour instead assumptions of poor interpersonal behaviours and unjustified intent to harm (e.g., Livingstone and Brake 2010). Consequently, interventions on cyberbullying largely focus on censorship and punitive measures (Wang and Edwards 2016; Marczak and Coyne 2010) in which adults primarily act on behalf of young people to protect them from online risks.

This paper presents the findings from the second stage of a three-stage research project, which responds to calls for a more complex understanding of young people's perspectives on their online social practices (Livingstone, Mascheroni and Murru 2011). By way of an online survey, the first stage explored how young people were managing six categories of social behaviours,¹ and relationships² across eight³ prominent social media sites (Wang and Edwards 2016). The findings indicate that the primary use of these sites was to manage and re-construct positive relationship building behaviours within already existing relationships (cf., Livingston, Mascheroni and Murru 2011). Moreover, young people were strategically managing

¹ These social behaviours, emerged from Edwards (2016), were building relationships; maintaining relationships; supporting someone; protecting some; exploring relationships; and welcoming someone.

² These relationships were parents; family/brother/sister/cousin; close friends; friends (not close); adults (you know but not friends); school/class mates; new people; and boy/girl friends.

³ These sites were (1) Facebook, (2) Texting, (3) Instagram, (4) WhatsApp, (5) Snapchat, (6) Email, (7) Twitter, and (8) Google Hangouts.

relationships across different social media sites, and effectively managing risks and potential harms on these sites.⁴

This second stage, the focus of this article, is a qualitative study that investigates young people's perspectives on i) their identities and relationships on these eight social media sites, and ii) interventions of these actions online by school staff when they encounter issues online. Building on our findings from the first stage, we aim to locate young people's socializing practices in social media sites within the shifting contours of identity formation, where identity is no longer given but rather is constantly constructed (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2000). We also consider how language and behaviours are managed by young people within relationships on these social media, so as to construct and maintain their self-narratives. We explore young people's experiences when they encounter issues online, and ask them how adults might support their relationship building practices on these sites.

Our findings demonstrate that these social media sites provide young people with opportunities to manage simultaneously different categories of relationships. Although vulnerable by way of their personal circumstances (e.g., biological, psychological and social), their actions are neither solely determined nor influenced by these circumstances. Our findings also show that young people develop personal agency by initiating, conducting and controlling their own and their peers' behaviours and conversations in order to manage complex relationships online. In this way, each young person maintains tensions between individual and collective responsibilities by i) maintaining his/her self-narrative, and ii) ensuring that his/her and others' actions do not restrict peers maintaining their own self-narratives.

2. Background – Identity and intervention

Current research studies on cyberbullying among today's youth may over-signify concepts of risk, victim and perpetrator (e.g., Kernaghan and Elwood 2013; Tokuma 2010; Ttofi and Farrington 2011). Further, these studies have tended to favour assumptions of poor interpersonal behaviours and unjustified intent to harm (e.g., Kowalski, Limber and Agatson 2012; Livingstone and Brake 2010; Ofcom 2014). Consequently, online settings are now increasingly seen as encouraging and even creating criminogenic environments (e.g., Presdee 2000; Wang and Edwards 2016). In these environments, young people could simultaneously

⁴The first stage survey research, including justification of the choice of social media sites and the strengths and limitations of the survey can be found at our previous paper (Wang and Edwards 2016).

be viewed as both perpetrators, who are vulnerable to their own choices and risk taking behaviours, and also victims, who are at risk of being harmed by social circumstances.

In the first stage of this research project, a quantitative study (Wang and Edwards 2016) was undertaken to explore young people's social behaviours, interactions and relationship management across eight social media sites. Our findings suggest that young people primarily use these social media sites to manage and re-construct positive relationship building behaviours within already existing relationships. This challenges the belief that young people are exposed to risks on social media because they indiscriminately befriend strangers. Our findings, in line with Walrave and Hiermann (2011) and Livingstone, Mascheroni and Murru (2011), suggest that risks and harms on these sites are primarily associated with exposure to unknown adults. Our young people seemed to be strategically managing risks and potential harms by restricting their engagement with high risk behaviours, such as, for example, exploring new relationships with strangers. In fact, the use of these sites provided them with an opportunity to manage simultaneously different categories of relationship in a multiplicity of 'spaces' created by these sites. The findings indicate that some young people's responses, which might be seen by adults as aggressive, were motivated by the need to support or protect those with whom relationships had been established. This suggests that social media can provide young people with a challenging 'space' with which to practice relationship management strategies.

In reality, a growing body of research claims that central to young people's practices online is the co-production and maintenance of a developing self-narrative in different social spaces (e.g., Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan and Spyer 2016; Livingstone, Mascheroni and Murru 2011; Livingstone and Brake 2010; Ofcom 2014). Moreover, Livingstone, Mascheroni and Murru (2011, 3) claim that, in relation to social networking, "the task of interpretation is highly focused on the developing self – to borrow Mead's terms (1934), both the 'I' as in, who am I in and for myself, and the 'me' as in, how do others see and respond to me, what community am I part of". Thus, identity can be understood as a reflexive project, that is collaboratively produced and managed both online and offline (Giddens 1991; Livingstone and Brake 2010) through interactions with various social contexts (e.g., family, friends and peers). It is through the management of these routine relationships, these young people's ontological security and narrative identities are both established and maintained (Giddens 1991).

For Matei (2005), one of the most difficult tasks of contemporary life is to balance the emancipation of the self and the maintenance of the communal. We suggest that social media sites provide individuals, particularly young people, with a space to balance their individual and communitarian responsibilities (cf. Matei 2005) – to balance individual identities and community cohesion.

As a result, a more positive approach to investigating relational issues young people encounter when they use social media sites is needed, which would explore their social worlds and experiences. If research facilitates meaningful changes, there may be scope to develop personal agency and social transformation. The position of young people needs to be shifted from being *acted upon* (Riley, Morey and Griffin 2010) to being *supported* to develop their personal-agencies in order to maintain both their individual identities and online community responsibilities.

In terms of intervention, schools and youth services in the UK often encourage young people to participate in the running of the institutions they attend. This is in line with the Youth Work National Occupational Standards (Lifelong Learning UK, 2012) and other wider school and statutory youth work practices. For example, the youth organisation supporting this study trained young people as junior youth leaders to support adult youth workers to plan, deliver and evaluate sessions and interventions. Youth and community work policy actively encourages practitioners working with young people “to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential” (Lifelong Learning 2012, 4).

Most research exploring young people’s practices significantly under-considers their perspectives (Livingstone and Third 2015). Therefore, responses to issues related to perceived harmful or risky behaviours by young people online are primarily adult-led (DfE 2017). They thus rely primarily on adult interpretations of young people’s actions located within dominant discourses of the institution in which they are encountered. Consequently, interventions related to incidents that young people encounter in their online relationship building practices, particularly in secondary schools, tend to involve censoring and protective measures. These are often based on the premise that their actions are underpinned by either intent to harm, poor inter-personal relationships or risk taking behaviours (DfE 2017; Ofcom 2014; Ortega-ruiz and Nunez 2012).

As a result of this, much school based interventions have primarily focused on surveillance, censorship and the implementation of adult-led protective measures (Marczak and

Coyne 2010). Livingstone and Third (2015, 1) have argued “children’s needs and experiences in the digital age (are) often treated as merely a minority interest but they are also often seen as essentially problematic, as demanding exceptional treatment from adult society or causing unwarranted restrictions on adult freedoms”. The effectiveness of many adult-led interventions are highly questionable. This is because since cyberbullying incidents remain widespread with possibilities of increasing greatly, considering the availability of new apps (Görzig and Frumkin 2013; Walrave and Hierman 2011; Olafsson, Livingstone and Haddon 2014). Therefore, more research is needed to locate young people’s perspectives of their lives online in a more central position within many adult-led discussions and debates (Livingstone and Third 2015).

3. Methodology – Researching young people’s perspectives of their use of social media

A grounded theory approach provided the basis for our overall research project (Wang and Edwards 2016). By way of focus groups, this second stage of empirical work uses qualitative methods to take the participants through a series of questions and scenarios. It was carried out in two schools and a youth organisation in Sussex, England who commissioned the study (and were involved in the previous stage) to explore how young people negotiate their identities and relationships online and how they experience interventions by adults.

This study provides some general explorations into how our participants maintain and construct their self-identities, and how they perceive adult interventions on eight prominent social media sites. It aims to provide a theoretical framework to guide subsequent interventions with young people in the organisations involved. Here, we explore the two main research questions below:

- How can social media sites be used to establish, build and maintain better social relationships?
- What interventions do our participants think would be appropriate to support their relationship issues, especially those that might otherwise be perceived as cyberbullying by adults?

We invited four young people who attended the youth organisation funding this project, along with two of their youth workers, to co-develop a range of subsidiary questions guiding the development of our scenarios. These questions neither assumed that all young people’s practices are acceptable nor overlooked their knowledge of their lived online experiences.

Thus, our approach not only brought young people's voices to adult research, but also further supported inclusion by enabling them to participate in the research design (Fleming and Boeck 2012).

Actually, incorporating young people as co-researchers is representative of wider trends across social and medical sciences both researching on and with, young people (Gavrielides 2014; Fleming and Boeck 2012; Ireland, Brooks and Cleaver 2009). These trends, drawing on Freire's (1972; 2005) liberation education, reflect the core values of youth work in both UK statutory and voluntary youth work sectors (Lifelong Learning 2012). It takes young people's perspective of their concrete reality as a starting point for dialogue, to enable mutual understanding of their lived experiences. Thus, adult and young people can work collaboratively to support young people's social or knowledge development. The role of the adult is to help young people to recognise that they have an individual voice, and at the same time, a responsibility to listen to the views of others (English 2016).

A summary of key findings from the first stage, and draft questions and scenarios for the second stage were emailed to youth workers to pilot focus groups with young people, and to also test and revise each question and scenario. We designed three subsidiary research questions, based on the findings of these pilot focus groups, which the young people believed would encourage broader discussion of data relevant to the two main research questions. These were:

1. Why do you think it is important to maintain friendships and communicate with people online?
2. How do you manage different relationships online and offline when you fall out or disagree with one another?
3. How could schools and communities support young people's relationship building practices in this range of social media sites?

These questions, although exploratory, correspond with the wider literature, which considers the motivations for maintaining relationships on social media (Livingstone and Brake 2010; Wang, Tucker, and Haines 2013) and offline (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2000) as a means of primarily building and developing the self-narrative.

Two head teachers from the secondary schools and the senior worker of the youth organisation were thereafter contacted via a cover letter explaining the purpose and process of

this stage of the research. Upon agreeing to participate, and in line with University ethics board's approval, they then acted as gatekeepers to maintain their organisations' policies and procedures for child safeguarding and protection throughout the research. They were asked to obtain parental consent using a consent letter, which was forwarded to them through the schools' and youth organisation's internal procedures. Upon receiving consent, a copy of the questions and explanation for the research was then sent to the gatekeepers. They then selected the young people and emailed the questions to the selected prior to the focus groups. These gatekeepers were available throughout the study in line with their organisational safeguarding and child protection policies.

A total of 42 young people (16 male and 26 female) aged between 13-15 years participated in the focus groups. Most of the young people were white British with English as their mother tongue, and were not from a disadvantaged background. This study does not attempt to draw out distinctions between gender, age nor socio-economic status, due to the nature of this sample. Nine focus groups, consisted of between 2-7 students, were carried out during a school day or a youth club session: two in the youth organisation, four in school a, and three in school b. After some detailed clarifications of the purpose of this research, the young people read and completed a consent form at the beginning of the sessions. They were then asked to complete the questions online. On completion, they were asked to discuss and expand their answers. Discussions were also audio recorded. In line with our previous stage, a grounded theory approach provided the basis for data analysis, in which concepts and hypotheses emerging from data in the first stage were tested against research findings at this stage. The purpose of this study is to provide some insights into the subject area, we do not claim that our data have representative value or generalizable trends. A much larger-scale research study is needed for that purpose.

4. Main Findings and Discussion

In this section, findings from this research are presented and analysed under each subsidiary research question displayed in the last section.

4.1. Why do you think it is important to maintain friendships and communicate with people online?

The young respondents were first asked why they thought it was important to maintain friendships and communicate with people online. The extracts below show that social media

sites are primarily used to maintain and build existing relationships offline by reducing time/space distance between themselves and peers:

Fran: I think that it's important to talk to friends through social media because you can message them easily. Also if you haven't seen a friend in a while you can contact them so that you can stay in touch.

Marcus: As I enjoy the feeling of connection from anywhere, I also have friends outside of education that I only get to see around once a week, and social media such as Skype and Facebook group chats lets us as a group enjoy each other's company without having to all coordinate a meet up or spend any money on travel. If you don't use social media you are losing out on a lot of potential conversation, and as everyone uses it, if you drop out you can sometimes get left behind – Which isn't bad, it's just the world we live in and how we've progressed, and I love it.

Extract from focus group, June 2015

Corresponding with Livingstone and Brake (2010) the findings show online socialising does not replace offline socialising, but rather extends opportunities to keep the relationship going without face-to-face interactions. For these young people, the maintenance of their relationships is central to their daily lives and it creates routines of normalcy from within which their narratives are orientated (cf. Giddens 1991).

To better interpret these young people's online activities, we then asked them what they talk about on these social media. They said that when maintaining and building relationships with friends and family members on these sites, topics of conversation range from school, general chat, joking, small talk, meeting up, opinions, recent events, and random matters (e.g., films). In line with Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2011), these young people uniformly indicated that their communications primarily act as a vehicle to strengthen relational ties, where these topics of conversation serve to revisit or develop shared and individual experiences. As the example demonstrates:

Tom: Just talk about how are they, if they are all good and stuff. Don't really care about anything else (...) When I haven't spoken to someone for ages then I try to contact them, then when they answer, like what do I say to you now but when I have done that before I talk about the past like do you remember when we did this and that and then we start talking a bit more.

These findings validate that an individual's development of the self-narrative is being managed within a complex network of historical, and ongoing community ties and relationships (Wang and Edwards 2016). It is within these relationships, managed daily online and offline, that ontological security is established. Thus, these relationships online must be constantly nurtured and protected (ibid.).

4.2. How do you manage different relationships online and offline when you fall out or disagree with one another?

We asked the young people to consider how they manage relationships in four relationship scenarios: when a) they fall out with family members or close friends; b) they fall out with a peer who is not a close friend; c) someone has sent a hurtful message to a close friend/family member; and d) someone has sent a hurtful message to a peer who is not a close friend.

4.2a Managing relationships with family members or close friends when they fall out

It seems that our sample of young people rarely use social media to resolve issues with family members online. Face-to-face discussion is, in fact, almost unanimously preferred as Lucy explains:

If you've fallen out with a family member it's gonna be different to when you have fallen out with your friend because you can't really be as horrible to you family member.

Extract from focus group, June 2015

In contrast, they often use social media to resolve issues with close friends, although wherever possible they prefer to meet up offline. Coinciding with Paul, Smith, and Blumberg (2010) these findings show that when social media are involved to resolve issues online, these are normally used as a starting point from which to re-negotiate the relationship offline. At this point, the language used changes from the friendly (e.g., informal jokes and small talks used to build and maintain the relationship) to the formal, with limited emoticons and/or abbreviations. According to the young people, this change is brought about by a momentary loss of the relationship. Thus care is needed to negotiate a way forward. However, the change itself is often not thought through because they are often angry during this change.

All of these 42 respondents indicated moreover that they would attempt to re-establish the relationship, albeit after a calming down period. Just under 55% of these 42 people (n = 23) indicated clearly that rather than responding immediately they would delay their response in order to either ‘calm down’ or meet up for face-to face discussion. In this scenario, the relationship management strategies employed mainly focus on: i) ignoring or avoiding the issue, or ii) addressing the issue directly but formally. The following extracts highlight these strategies:

Amy: I use quite short sentences rather than long sentences to kind of get to the point instead of taking time on them. But then after I get my anger out I try to sort it out more than just waiting for them to apologize I would try to make up.

Holly: The sentences that I use become even shorter because I kind of want to make it up to them but I’m still really quite annoyed or angry at them because of what they did.

Extract from focus group, May 2015

Emily: I would talk to them to try and resolve the argument, go through what’s happened and talk about different solutions to resolve the argument. Also, you could ask a friend for advice as they might know what the friend is like and may help the situation.

Jade: I wouldn’t use abbreviations or emojis because they wouldn’t really be taken seriously. Also I wouldn’t talk to them as much but if I did I would probably try not to talk about falling out because it might make things worse.

Extract from focus group, July 2015

These extracts show that in this scenario, re-building and maintaining relationships are key motivations behind young people’s use of formal language online. Coinciding with our previous discussion in section two, these also suggest that the change from friendly and informal language to ‘the formal’ could be very abrupt.

This could be interpreted by the recipients as aggressive, even to the extent of anger. Some of the extracts above indicate that perhaps re-building and maintaining relationships are key motivations behind young people’s occasional angry and aggressive responses on social media when they fall out with friends. In line with Livingstone, Mascheroni and Murru (2011), our findings suggest that communicating via social media sites has become an essential means

for maintaining the continuity of a young person's self-narrative, which is located within highly complex relationship strategies. The purposeful delay in responses suggest that over time/space, offline relationships are being re-constructed and extended online to maintain the continuity of the relationship. This corresponds with our previous discussion supported by Miller et al. (2016). It seems that the management of this self-narrative involves a careful balancing of individual responsibilities within relationships (cf. Matei 2005).

4.2b Falling out with someone who is not a close friend

In contrast to the previous scenario, all of the young people said when falling out with someone who is not a close friend, they would attempt to re-establish the relationship. More than 33% (n = 14) of them said that they would avoid any confrontation or conversation with the person. Just less than 31% (n = 13) of them said that if they do talk to that person, they are likely to be confrontational rather than friendly. Only just over 14% (n = 6) of them would attempt to apologise. Our findings show no evidence at all of deliberate attempts to make the situation worse. Instead, the finding that just over 7% (n = 3) of them would communicate online, indicates that although their use of language might be formal and abrupt, there is a measured desire to re-build the relationship. Below are some examples:

Lucy: I probably wouldn't as it might make it awkward if we met in public or I'd just snapchat them and say "Sorry for earlier" or something along that line.

John: I don't harshly joke at them though, I normally make harsh jokes about things around us (...) Then they start laughing more and more and then they just start talking.

Gemma: I wouldn't talk... online as I wouldn't be happy with them. I would rebuild the relationship slowly in real life.

Extracts from focus groups, May and June 2015

Coinciding with our previous discussion supported by Livingstone, Mascheroni and Murru (2011) and Matei (2005), the findings show that these young people are attempting to take responsibility for their own actions and manage their relationship-building strategies. The significance of the relationship to the individual's self-narrative is, for the responses, a key motivator by the young people in these scenarios. When someone is viewed as significant to the maintenance of the daily routines of normalcy, e.g., a family member or close friend, it is more likely that attempts would be made to re-build in person this relationship. Although the

communication style might be formal and abrupt, when someone not so close is involved, the motivation is still to maintain positive community ties.

4.2c Someone has sent a hurtful message to a close friend/family member

Responsibility to maintain community ties also extends to supporting family members or close friends when they receive hurtful messages. More than 92% (n = 39) of the sample said they would intervene. Some of their responses demonstrated that they desire to remain objective:

Amy: I would ask face to face because there is always two sides of the story.

Tom: Before I would stick up for someone, depending on the rumour that's being spread round about my friend or college friend, I wouldn't stick up for them straight away, I might say that might not be true but after all that I would re-go to them and say these rumours are being said about you and say "are they true?"

Extract from focus group, May 2015

Just under 20% (n = 8) of them hinted at the use of aggression online:

Matt: Lay off my friend you stuck up (insert insult that relates to thing are doing) why are you being a (insert insult) to my (insert person.)

Sarah: I would say quite a lot of rude words.

Lisa: How dare you talk to... the way you did, what did they ever do to you. You can bugger off if you think I am going to talk to you ever again.

Extracts from focus groups, April and June 2015

These findings evidence our discussions supported by DfE (2017) – the use of aggression in the young people's responses against actions that they view as bullying to protect others, might be seen by adults as bullying or harassment. Joleen explains:

Joleen: I think they (teachers) just think we are trying to provoke it when actually you're trying to prevent it.

Extract from focus group, May 2015

Corresponding with our discussion in the previous stage (Wang and Edwards 2016), the primary motivation behind these young people's interventions lies, in general, in protecting

their family members and close friends. Care is taken where possible not to make the situation worse where possible.

4.2d Someone has sent a hurtful message to someone who is not a close friend

When someone who is not a close friend receives a hurtful message, just over 50% (n = 22) of the sample said they would get involved in supporting a peer they didn't know. Here, corresponding with the findings from the first stage of this study (ibid.), their involvements significantly focus on being supportive rather than protective. Just over 11% (n = 5) of the sample indicated that they are prepared, if necessary, to become aggressive with the message sender if necessary. The two main motivations behind either not getting involved or offering support rather than protection are i) they were unsure about the risks associated with being aggressive with the person sending the messages; and ii) they felt that they were not in the position to interfere with other people's lives. As the following young people explained:

Joleen: I would leave it then (...) because if it's someone that's not close to you then... because when your friend is upset about something, it kind of makes you upset because you are so close with them and then that's what would propel you to talk to the person who is spreading the rumours but if you didn't know the person that well, it would just be a bit more like difficult to kind of get involved.

John: You feel like you would just kind of feel like you were meddling with their life in a way and if you don't know them that well then I mean, you would want to do something but at the same time you would know that there are other people who would be better to do it for you.

Extract from focus group, May 2015

Again, corresponding with our discussion in section two, there is a perceived responsibility here for self-governance in which responsibility lies in the maintenance of individual and community ties. However, there is an acknowledgement of the limitations of their own capabilities to self-govern and intervene positively in a community.

Within the tension between balancing individual and community ties, the findings from each scenario indicate that the young people's individual agency, when responding to relationship issues they encounter online, are bounded by two main criteria:

- 1) The importance and status of the relationship in which issues occur in relation to the self-narrative.
- 2) Actions by peers, which require some form of intervention where justification is based on an individual's freedom to build relationships and maintain his/her narrative without harming others.

These findings correspond with Matei's claim that the creation of online communal spaces can be seen as 'expressions of the modern tension between individualism and communitarianism' (2005, 7). These spaces allow for the simultaneous rise of community bonding and self-emancipation within the contours of these highly reflexive relationships (Wang, Tucker and Haines 2013). Thus, the main purpose behind young people's participation in social media sites could be seen as 'to counter the tendency of modern society toward uniformity and regimentation (Kanter 1972; Roszak 1995; Veysey 1978)' (Matei, 2005, 4) by enabling the emancipation of both individuals and groups.

Coinciding with the findings from stage one and with Livingstone, Mascheroni, and Murru (2011), our findings also show that language used to manage behaviours in relationships online, has the same meaning as language used for the same purposes within these relationships offline. These also imply that as these young people develop friendships online, they would perhaps use these online sites to maintain their relationships, often via the use of jokes, abbreviations and emojis.

Our findings further suggest that each young person, which carefully maintaining his/her individual reflexive self-narrative online, also recognises each of his/her peers' right of individual expression freely. For example, in the final two scenarios (4.2c and 4.2d), the findings demonstrate that these young people feel a moral obligation to protect a peer they don't know who has been hurt. This shows that individual agency is still morally bounded on social media. In line with the findings from the previous stage, these findings demonstrate that individual actions are justified, within the constraints of a reflexively constructed self-narrative managed within communal responsibilities. Responses to actions, which are seen as unjust or would restrict a peer's freedom to assert individuality or to build relationships, are carefully considered within this moral framework.

4.3. How could schools and communities support young people's relationship building practices in this range of social media sites?

To develop interventions, which enable young people to manage these relationships building processes and resolve relationship issues they face online more positively, we finally asked the young people for i) their views on current adult interventions in their schools; and ii) how they thought these responses might be developed further to support their relationship building strategies.

We asked first how they viewed adults' interpretations of their communications in the four scenarios in Section 4.2, and how they viewed adult interventions. Responses ranged from young people viewing adults' perceptions of their actions as aggressive, bullying/cyberbullying, or about teenage cliques and protecting friends. These young people further suggested that based on these misinterpretations, subsequent adult interventions can make things worse. For some examples:

John: Sometimes the school like over reacts but sometimes when it is like actually quite serious they normally just get involved and sort it out but normally they take it a bit too seriously.

Simon I don't really know to be honest. I mean, this school it has its policies and it's quite hard for them to judge what's going on with the students so they've just kind of got to act in the way they think is best even when sometimes it isn't.

Extract from focus group, May 2015

Megan: Supposedly 0% tolerance of bullying, my friend and I reported a situation in which we were being threatened and bullied. Though the teachers supported us and helped us, we both felt the situation wasn't solved, the bullies were not made to apologise.

Extract from focus group, June 2015

Supporting Byron (2008), this sample of young people appear to balance their desire for self-governance with some understandings of the role of adult interventions and school polices expressed as for their benefit. Yet, these interventions do not seem to support the development of the self-narrative. Zero tolerance approaches do not seem to be effective.

However, their responses do not reject adult intervention but rather address the role played by adults:

Tom: Maybe give them space. Maybe give them time to sort it out and stuff and then maybe like adults could suggest what to do, instead of taking students' issues into their own hands, let the student do it and just ask "is this going OK, have you sorted it out yet?" And ask "do you want us to get involved?" Instead of just going straight in there.

Extract from focus group, May 2015

Anika: I honestly think the best thing to do is to just let people sort it out themselves UNLESS they seek advice. Too often teachers intervene and make things more awkward between two people. But it is good to give e-safety advice and explain what to do IF something happens.

Extract from focus group, July 2015

It would appear that these young people recognise the need for adult support. Yet they desire a support strategy that enables the development of self-governance and personal agency to re-build their own relationships. This desire is in line with their transitional stage of adolescence (Erikson 1968); in this stage, the role of adult intervention shifts from guardian towards a more participatory mentor role to support social and developmental processes.

5. Further Discussion

Two key themes emerge from the findings and discussions in Section 4. First, each of the young people involved in this research is maintaining a developing and reflexively produced self-narrative within a complex network of community ties. This involves balancing individual and community responsibilities within these relationships in order to manage the self-narrative. Secondly, their relational practices support self-governance and personal agency.

The findings provide some understanding of how young people perceive their behaviours used within their relationship building strategies via a range of eight social media sites. These correspond with findings from the first stage of the empirical work. They represent strategically managed behaviours within a network of carefully negotiated relationships. Central to the young people's interventions and practices is a sense of self-governance. Here each young person is responsible for i) maintaining their self-narrative; ii) ensuring that their actions do not restrict a peer attaining this goal; and iii) ensuring that their peers' actions do not restrict other peers' attaining this goal.

For these young people, self-responsibility and determinism have been replaced by collective notions of responsibility, self-governance and determinism. These stand between underlying democratic principles of negative and positive notions of freedom (Berlin 1969). They view personal liberty as the freedom from external (organisational) restraints on their actions. They also recognise the need for online safety training and adult intervention, which might support more positive notions of freedom. They view current school interventions, however, as largely counter-productive to their relationship building strategies. This is because these interventions constrain young people's actions within punitive and coercive strategies. They are framed within universally applied notions of unjustified aggression and moral deviance. They found it hard to conceptualise their actions within the dominant discourses of the school's moral framework and its subsequent interventions as a result.

Contrary to assumptions surrounding moral deviance and lack of social skills to manage their relationships online, our findings indicate that young people are attempting to take responsibility for their actions and reach their full potential. It is important to emphasise the fact that there is no evidence of intention to harm or make a situation worse, even when our young people were faced with unpleasant scenarios. They are, however, as Arendt (1958) claimed, conditioned beings – acting and re-acting within the conditions under which they exist. The group's interpretations of these conditions are located within morally bounded social strata.

Our findings also reflect Lemish's (2014, 7) claim that young people have, in relation to their use of social media become 'prosumers' – producers *and* consumers of meaning. They are no longer primarily *consumers* of meaning and identity as Bauman (2000, 2007) argued. Rather, as she claims young people "react to, think, feel and create meanings. In doing so they bring to media encounters a host of predispositions, abilities, desires and experiences" (ibid., 7). Supporting this a recent ethnographic research indicates that social media sites are being adapted, within a localised context and from their intended core purposes, to support the relational needs of the person using them (Miller et al. 2016).

Lemish (2014) further argues that since young people could make sense and develop personal meanings within their local social contexts, their local actions can no longer be understood through the lens of any generalised theoretical framework. This is because young people adapt the use of each social media site. Their language used on these sites reflects their

individual needs and levels of relationship encountered in every single social context and time combination.

6. Conclusion

In summary, our sample of young people are able to manage simultaneously different categories of relationships online via eight prominent social media sites. They are able to learn how to maintain a balance between individualism and communitarianism. Each young person is simultaneously responsible for i) maintaining his/her self-narrative; and ii) ensuring his/her and others' actions do not restrict peers maintaining their self-narratives. Although we have found evidence of the value of e-safety measures and adult intervention we have not found evidence, which sufficiently supports the effectiveness of online surveillance and zero tolerance policies. Rather, these young people favour interventions with trusted adults in safe spaces offline. They wish to develop their personal-agencies to maintain both their individual identities and online community responsibilities. Supporting Riley, Morey and Griffin (2010)'s call for a shift from acting upon young people to supporting them, the sample of young people prefer interventions that support self-governance and personal agency when they encounter relationship issues online.

Our findings, therefore, challenge current trends in policy and educational practice (DfE 2017) when dealing with issues of cyberbullying. These place little emphasis on face-to-face interventions based on pastoral care and restorative justice approaches within schools; and favour instead 'quick' adult led responses with increased censorship and punishment of young people's online practices. These trends, according to our findings, would damage the relationships they ostensibly support. We propose, therefore, that a more supportive and participatory range of interventions might be better employed to re-focus the role of the adult from guardian to mentor. This would enable young people to manage their own relationships.

Of course, our respondents' relationship building practices and language used on a range of social media sites in this research might be different from that used by young people in another social context and at a different time, etc. Interpretations of, and responses to, young people's actions and language used on each of these social media sites, depends therefore on how they adapt, in response to the relationship being managed.

We recommend a third and final stage within our overall research project with young people. This is focused on the development of possible interventions. We aim to explore a more relational and collaborative approach to resolving issues that are encountered online. We intend

to address the question: ‘how could adults support young people’s self-governance and development of suitable skills to negotiate and communicate on social media sites, and thus develop individual and communitarian responsibilities?’ This could potentially prove to be a highly productive line of investigation for the next stage of our work. Moreover, enabling young people to engage as participants in school policies and practices might lead to policy changes that alter the circumstances of young people in that setting (Connor 2015).

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