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Exploring the impact of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) on modern gossip from female perspectives

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ABSTRACT

With many adults actively using social networking sites daily (Davidson, 2015; Prescott, 2016), this research looks at the ways social networking sites (SNSs) may impact gossiping behaviours in women. Literature commonly portrays women as either the victims or perpetrators of gossip (Subramanian, 2011), which made them the ideal population to interview. This research has taken an in depth, qualitative approach to the ways SNSs may be influencing gossiping behaviours in women. Seven semi-structured interviews were employed, using seven female participants, ages ranging from 18-30. Thematic analysis was conducting following the steps outline by Braun and Clarke (2006) and identified five themes that highlight the role SNSs has on gossiping behaviours in women. These themes were, Facebook as evidence, manipulating online gossiping evidence, accessibility to online gossiping topics, identifying gossip worthy online updates and the language surrounding online gossiping behaviours. These findings can be the starting point for future research into the area of social networking sites and gossip in women and the ways in which information from social networking sites can be spread.

KEY WORDS:	GOSSIP	SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES	FEMALE	EVIDENCE	GOSSIPING TOPICS

Introduction

In the United Kingdom, it has been reported that 82% of adults used the internet daily in 2016 and 75% of the adults accessing the internet used their smartphones (Prescott, 2016). It was further found that 91% of 16-24 year olds uses the internet to access social networking sites (Prescott, 2016). Another survey reported by Davidson (2015) found that the majority of individuals have on average approximately five social media accounts and proceeds to spend over an hour and forty minutes daily on these social media accounts. This highlights a clear area in which individuals dedicate a lot of time and therefore should be explored to find out how individuals use these social media accounts. Okazaki et al. (2014) noted that online gossip is one area that is a highly popular social media activity that individuals actively engage with.

With conversation being a uniquely human phenomenon, Dunbar (2004) noted that two thirds of free forming conversation were devoted to gossiping. Gossip has been defined by Bertolotti and Magnani (2014) as an evaluative conversation between two or more friends about another individual who is not present but is known to everyone in the conversation. The definition does not signify whether the information shared must be negative to be considered gossip. Wert and Salovey (2004) state how gossip is often seen as an intention to decode the way others present themselves and their identity and how an adult conversation that can start off with just relaying a fact about a third party can soon have opinions added to it about the third party, this highlights the negative connotations that are often associated with gossip, even though the definition does not state whether the opinions are positive or negative.

As Subramanian (2011) reported literature commonly portrays women as victims and/or perpetrators of gossip, and this is often done in a negative way, this view can be supported by McAndrew (2013) who stated that women are more likely to engage in aggressive and competitive gossip in comparison to men, therefore supporting the literature reported by Subramanian (2011). This viewpoint states that the aim of this type of gossip aims to exclude the individual from social groups and prevent the individual from creating a social group of their own (McAndrew, 2013). This research comes from an evolutionary perspective and show a link between women and gossip. Further support for the evolutionary link between women and gossip comes from McDonald et al. (2007) whose research involved looking at gossiping behaviours in girls aged 9 to 10 years old, they found gossip to be a dominant feature of the conversations held between the girls and their closest friends. McDonald et al. (2007) further noted that the nature of those conversations was neutral gossip, but in the conversations observed of the popular girls the gossiping behaviours were about the other children and were more evaluative of them. This research provides support for McAndrew (2013) and Subramanian (2011) as it highlights that at a young age girls are already engaging in gossiping behaviours although the gossiping behaviour does

not always have to be negative as suggested by McAndrew (2013) and Subramanian (2011).

Briefly mentioned in the research by McDonald et al. (2007) was the topics of the gossiping conversation, and whether the gossip was positive or negative. Watson (2012) found that women were more likely to engage in gossip about other people's physical appearances, it was believed that this type of gossip is more common among women and leads to a high level of social comparison, which may be the underlying reason for women engaging in this type of gossip, and comes from an evolutionary perspective liked McAndrew (2014) and Subramanian (2011). Watson (2012) provides support for McDonald et al. (2007) as it was reported that popular girls were involved with evaluative talk of the other children, which could have been about their appearances or the girls could have just been comparing themselves to their peers. McKeown (2013) stated that researchers should pay closer attention to the topics that women gossip about as there is a complex interplay between gossiping, women's talk and leisure lives which can get confused. This highlights a clear area in which research should look at the topics women engage with when they are gossiping.

Friendship and gossip are closely interlinked with Ellwardt et al. (2012) noting how gossiping facilitates friendship. Ellwardt et al. (2012) further found that individuals who were frequent gossipers in the workplace were found to have fewer workplace friends, showing how gossip does not attract friends but may facilitate already established friendships. Farley (2011) came to the same conclusion as Ellwardt et al. (2012) in that high frequency gossipers are less liked by others in comparison to low frequency gossipers. In addition to this, Farley (2011) found that those who gossiped negatively were less liked as well, in comparison to those who shared positive gossip. Grosser et al. (2010) noted that positive and negative gossip happened more frequently with those individuals who have a multiplex friendship, due to them having more social interacts and may communicate more frequently with each other, however negative gossip only flows between individuals who have a friendship ties and no between those who only interact in a workplace setting. Therefore, highlighting that Farley (2011) did not state whether the individuals were friends or not with the gossipers before stating that negative gossipers were less liked, possibly highlighting that a prospective friendship may be halted if the individual is known to frequently engage with negative gossip, but not what would happen if the individual was already friends with the gossiper. Research by Bosson et al. (2006) found that in those individuals who share negative gossip about another individual, it was effective at promoting closeness between people, therefore highlighting how negative gossip only occurs between those with a genuine friendship and may make them feel like they have closer friendship as the individual may only engage in this behaviour if they are friends with who they are sharing the negative gossip with. This research does not support the findings stated by Farley (2011) and Ellwardt et al. (2012) but did support Grosser et al. (2010), however the research by Farley and Ellwardt et al. (2012) was more recent

than the findings stated by both Bosson et al. (2006) and Grosser et al. (2010), maybe highlighting the need for more recent research into this area.

However, none of the above research mentioned where the negative gossip is obtained from. Social networking sites (SNSs) have a permanent presence in everyday life, this view can be supported by Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) who found that many individuals used SNSs to reconnect and connect with friends and families who they communicate with in real life, creating a seamless transition for individuals between their online and offline friendships and allowing them to stay up-to-date and in contact without the need to see each other in real life. Lin and Lu (2011) provide support for Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) as they found that SNSs are the main way for individuals to develop their personal relationships and is one of the reasons why many individuals continue to use them along with, for females, how many peers an individual has on a SNS. Additional support can be provided by Tufekci (2008) who found that SNS users used them due to their efficiency and the satisfaction that was achieved from the social interaction that SNSs provides individuals with. Tufekci (2008) additionally found that those who frequently used SNSs, used it as they enjoyed learning about their friends' and even strangers' lives and that heavy frequent users used SNSs as they were driven by a curiosity to find people from their past and find out what they were doing now and if they had changed, and that satisfaction was achieved for individuals who observed other peoples' SNS activity. This research begins to explain why includes may be continuing to use SNSs and can be a starting point into the role that SNSs have in modern life as well as their effect on friendships. Research by Wang et al. (2014) found that those individuals who used SNSs to communicate with their friends had a higher level of well-being in comparison to those individuals who used them less frequently. This highlights how social networking sites are having a positive effect on individual's wellbeing which means that it's permanent presence may be good for individuals. All the above research highlights a clear link between SNSs and friendship and may be a starting point for looking at how gossip may be linked into this relationship.

Research that directly relates SNSs and gossip is by Okazaki et al. (2014) who found that those who use SNSs frequently talked about what was going on in their friends' lives, with the intention to find hilarious, novel or scandalous stories that had been posted on a SNS. Research by Beersma and Van Kleef (2012) noted that information gathering was the most prevalent reason for individuals to instigate gossip for social enjoyment, this research supports Okazaki et al. (2014) who noted that the true purpose of online gossip was to provide an entertaining activity, and both pieces of research came to this same conclusion. This research shows that the information used when individuals are gossiping may be coming from what they have seen on a SNS, showing a direct link between SNS activity and gossiping behaviours.

As there is little research into the area of SNSs and gossip and how the two are interlinked, it highlights a clear area where more research can be conducted.

Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore the ways women specifically, due to the research history stating that women are more likely to gossip (McAndrew, 2013; McDonald et al., 2007; Subramanian, 2011), use SNSs to facilitate gossip and the different ways that SNSs may influence gossip in the modern age.

Methodology

Design

The design that was employed for this research was a qualitative approach to gossiping behaviours of women involving social networking sites. Seven semi-structured interviews were employed. Gill et al. (2008) and Pathak et al. (2013) both highlight how qualitative methods allow the researcher to explore in depth an individual's own experiences, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, behaviours and interactions. Pathak et al. (2013) further noted that one of the aims of qualitative research is to evaluate human behaviour, which can be complicated if using quantitative methods. As this research explored the ways women use social networking sites to aid with gossiping, this approach allowed the research to get personal in depth accounts of the way women may use modern technology in which to gossip. The social nature of this research means that the decision to use a qualitative approach allowed for the researcher to have a deeper understanding of an individual's experiences with this topic (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were employed for this research, due to the interviews being the sole data source for this research (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Seven interviews were chosen due to previous research by Madill et al. (2005) who stated that undergraduate qualitative research should have 3-4 hours' worth of data to analyse, therefore seven forty-five minute interviews created a minimum of 4 hours of data to analyse, and meant that if an interview was shorter than forty-five minutes then there would still be the required amount of data for this project. Each interview was between forty to fifty minutes in length, which allowed for the interviewee to expand and explore their answers and allowed the researcher to ask all questions that they had. All seven interviews took place on university premises.

Participants:

Seven female participants were recruited using opportunity sampling on the social networking site Twitter, where the researcher had advertised the research. Twitter was the chosen platform in which to recruit participants for this study due to it having over 13 million UK users, and 100 million daily active users (Aslam, 2017), this meant that the advertisement was accessed by anyone who was interested in participating in this research. O'Connor et al. (2014) evaluated twitter as a cost effect means of recruitment, that can access a wide variety of people, and noted that Twitter gave participants a more accessible method by which to participate in the research.

Female participants were chosen for this research due to the influence from previous research on gossip, that noted the long-term interest in female gossiping behaviours (McAndrew, 2014), with research by McDonald et al. (2007) highlighting that gossiping behaviours begin in females at the age of 9 years old.

Once participants had contacted the researcher on Twitter, highlighting their interest in the research, the researcher sent the participants a participant invitation sheet (Appendix 1). If a participant still wanted to take part in the research, they were then sent a participant information sheet (Appendix 2) to make a more informed decision about their participation in the research.

Data Collection:
The researcher organised a meeting place at the university where the interview could take place and be easily accessed by the participant, if the participant still wanted to take part. Before the interview took place, the participant was required to sign a participant consent form (Appendix 3) outlining their right to withdraw and to ensure they understood what was being asked of them.

Once the consent form was signed, the researcher began the interviews following an interview schedule (Appendix 4), which included prompts to ensure that researcher got full and detailed answers from the interviewee. The interviews were recorded on a password protected device, that could only be accessed by the researcher. When the interview finished, the interviewees were thanked for their time and given a brief debrief and debrief form (Appendix 5) that allowed participants to choose a pseudonym if they hadn't at the beginning of the interview, to keep their identity anonymous.

After completion of the interviews, all interview recordings were transferred from the password protected device to the researcher's password protected university account where the researcher began transcribing the interviews, which were saved onto the password protected university account. The password protected account meant that only the researcher had access to the recordings and the transcriptions. When the transcriptions were completed, the researcher deleted the recordings of the interviews, to ensure that the anonymity of the participants was kept. The transcriptions were titled with a number to ensure that the interviews gave no personal details as to which participant they related too.

Data Analysis
The data analysis method used once the interviews were transcribed was a thematic analysis. The transcribed interviews were printed off while the researcher was conducting the data analysis, to allow for annotations. The researcher followed the thematic analysis outline and steps by Braun and Clarke (2006). A thematic analysis was chosen as this qualitative descriptive analysis equipped the researcher with the core skills to conduct further qualitative analyses (Braun and Clarke, 2006.,

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Vaismoradi et al. 2013). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) noted the flexibility of thematic analysis, with Boyatzis (1998) noting that this flexibility allows the researcher to interpret aspects of the data in relation to the research topics rather than a theory. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) further noted that thematic analysis is mainly used when there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon that is being researched and concluded that thematic analysis is an independent and reliable qualitative approach. It is these pieces of research that influenced the researcher's decision to choose a thematic analysis.

As mentioned above the researcher followed the six steps for a thematic analysis that were outlined by Braun and Clarke in their 2006 paper. The first step that was followed involved familiarisation with the data by rereading the data and noting down a list of ideas (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The second step that the researcher then followed was to generate codes about anything that they had noted in the list from step one (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The third step that was followed was searching for the themes from the codes generated in step two, the researcher did this by combining codes to create one overarching theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In step four, the researcher reviewed the themes formed in step three and refined them by removing some that did not have enough evidence and ensured that the themes were valid and consistent in relation to answering the research aims (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Once the themes had been checked, the researcher then named each theme and gave a brief detailed analysis of the themes and explained how they fit with the research aims, this was step 5 (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the final step the researcher produced the written report and gave a final analysis and write up of the themes created to explain their importance in the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Consideration

Before the researcher began collecting the data, ethical approval was obtained through the university in line with ethical considerations outlined by the BPS, the researcher completed an ethical approval form (Appendix 6). Participants were not deceived during this research, as they were required to read a participant information sheet and sign a participant consent form before they took part in the research to ensure that they understand what was being asked of them and the topics that the research was looking at, so their decision was fully informed when they consented. The participants were told that direct quotes were going to be used in the journal report, so the information would not remain confidential but the participants were required to choose a pseudonym so that their data remained anonymous. Any other confidential information (e.g. signed consent forms) were destroyed upon completion of the journal report, this ensured that participants were non-identifiable. Throughout the whole recruitment process and during the interviews participants were continually reminded of their right to withdraw if they no longer wanted to take part in the research, or they decided during the interview that they didn't want to answer any more questions. This ensured that participants who were not comfortable, did not feel pressured into continuing with the research and they were ensured that their data

would be destroyed once they left the interview. Although the nature of the research was not sensitive, it did involve participants acknowledging their behaviours in relation to social networking sites and gossip which may have made participants feel uncomfortable, so they were reminded of their right to withdraw. Participants were given a debrief when the interview was completed, and they were given a debrief form that contained The Samaritans' Freephone number if the interview had left them feeling uncomfortable and wanted to talk to a professional. Participants were given up until the 24th February 2017 in which to withdraw their data, if they didn't want to be included in the journal report.

All interviews took place on university premises, however the researcher notified their supervisor and family where and when interviews were taking place. This ensured the safety of both the researcher and the interviewee.

Analysis and Discussion

After conducting thematic analysis on the seven interviews, five themes were discovered. The main theme that appeared in many of the interviews was the use of the information posted by third parties on social networking sites (SNSs) to enable a gossiping conversation. The five themes discovered were; the use of Facebook as evidence, manipulating online gossiping evidence, accessibility to online gossiping topics, identifying gossip worthy online updates, and the language surrounding online gossiping behaviours.

Theme 1: Facebook as evidence
Women are reported to spend more time on Facebook than men (McAndrew, 2014) which can be supported by this theme as many participants named Facebook as the place to gather information about the individual/s they intend to gossip about. SNSs, specifically Facebook, was the main SNSs that participants used and allowed them to gather personal recent posts about third parties in which to gossip about.

> Jess, Line 79: *'I guess social media gives gossiping evidence these days'*
> Beth, Lines 81-82: *'we took the information mostly from Facebook as it's considered the best place online to post achievements and misfortunes in people's lives'*
> Charlie, Lines 79-80: *'social media can always supply something to talk about...'*
> Ellie, Lines 85-86: *'sometimes there are posts that people make and well you know you just have to share it with someone'*

From this theme, when participants were talking about gossiping with friends they spoke about individuals that were known but not present in the conversation, then the information and individual gossiped about came from what that individual had recently posted on Facebook, especially in the case of Beth who specifically noted that Facebook is where many individuals were likely to post their personal achievements

and misgivings. McAndrew (2014) noted that women spend more time on Facebook and have more friends, and were more interested than men in keeping tabs on the activity of other women, this finding might explain why the participants could locate and gather their information as it is something that they spend more time doing. Tufekci (2008) noted that SNS users found enjoyment learning about their friends' lives, it is possible that for participants Beth and Ellie they appeared to find enjoyment from being on Facebook and observing what their friends had been posting. Specifically Ellie noted that some of the posts that are made on Facebook make them want to gossip and share the information, possibly creating the enjoyment that is mentioned in Tufekci (2008). This theme supports the finding of McAndrew (2014) and Tufekci (2008) as it shows that these findings can be supported by research as all the participants were women and, as evidenced by the quotes from the interview they had to be frequent Facebook users and interesting in seeing what their online friends were doing and possibly deriving enjoyment while on Facebook. Future research on personal gossip and social networking sites can focus on Facebook as part of the gathering process for gossiping topics and shows distinct difference from what others may know as traditional gossip as Jess reported that SNSs give gossip evidence, as there is proof of what has happened rather than the traditional word of mouth gossip that is stereotyped about in the media.

Theme 2: Manipulating online gossiping evidence
When participants were asked about whether they shared more positive or negative news that they had found on social media, three participants noted how they shared the positive posts that they had seen but changed the context so that it was done in a negative way, depending on their view about what had been shared.

Charlie, Lines 32-35: *'say if someone makes a controversial post . or something that isn't what you're used to seeing . I think it's just the sort of thing [2] I guess it'd be worthy of future gossip because of the nature of what has been posted'*
Kate, Lines 196-197: *'there have been times when I've shared positive news but gossiped about it in a negative way'*
Daisy, Lines 121-123: *'someone might have made a post about something positive and exciting in their life but my preconceptions might end up with me sharing it in a negative light'*

This theme highlights how social media has impacted upon modern gossiping behaviours due to the participants managing to share other people's happy news but with negative connotations. Research by Feinberg et al. (2012) noted that by sharing negative evaluative information about a third party protects others from anti-social or manipulative behaviour and that this behaviour could be a prosocial gossip act as it can warn others of behaviour that is not permitted in their social group. This research although it does not directly relate to this theme, could show that the way that the participants portrayed the information that they have gathered from a SNS to their friends, and how it could be beneficial from an evolutionary perspective. This would

be the case in the quote from Charlie who noted that controversial posts are often the reason why they are gossiped about, as for example Charlie and her friends would be protecting their social group as it would establish their group norms so that other individuals do not violate them (Beersma and Van Kleef, 2012; Bosson et al., 2006). As Bosson et al. (2006) reported, sharing negative attitudes with friends is effective at creating closeness between people, therefore it is possible that the participants felt comfortable and close with their friends, allowing them to be able to manipulate the information and highlight that they thought the information although it was positive was not something they believed to be positive information due to the way they saw the world and what they thought about the information that was being shared, this was especially the case in the quote from Daisy who clearly stated that someone's positive information might not be positive for them due to her preconceptions.

Theme 3: Accessibility to online gossiping topics
With 71% of adults using smartphones to access the internet (Prescott, 2016) and dedicating approximately 2 hours a day to SNSs on a smartphone (Davidson, 2015), participants highlighted how the modern era and the use of smartphones allowed for gossiping topics to be easily found and allowed their gossip to be kept recent.

> Beth, Lines 22-24: *'online has become more common and easier to do due to having mobile devices that connect to the internet ... this also means people can gossip all day and not just in a room with friends'*
> Kate, Lines 28-31: *'with social media now being accessible on mobile phones it definitely makes it easier to gossip about things that you've seen as you can pull up someone's profile and show someone what they've posted'*

This highlights how the modern era has impacted upon gossiping topics among women, who now can change the outcome of other people's profiles and posts so that they may be the subject of gossiping behaviours minutes after the individual has made a post on a SNS. Research by Okazaki et al. (2014) found that SNS users had stronger motives and inclination to gossip when they were using handheld devices than if they had been using a traditional computing device. This themes provides support for this research as the participants noticed that their ease of accessibility to SNSs allowed them to gossip about individuals more frequently and ensure that their gossip was up to date and recent. Okazaki et al. (2014) additionally noted that SNS users derived greater entertainment value, social enhancement value and were more likely to engage in online gossiping behaviours when they were using handheld devices in comparison to those using traditional computing methods to access SNSs. This research highlights a clear link between using handheld devices and the possible reasons why individuals may continue to use SNSs. The theme further supports the research by showing the reasons why someone may use SNSs to gossip. Participant Kate noted the way in which individuals may use the handheld devices while gossip in a real-life setting, showing a link being drawn between ability to access SNSs so that gossip can be recent and showing how SNSs may allow individuals to engage in

gossiping behaviours more frequently, whereas participant Beth states how individuals may use the ease of accessibility to gossip online rather than just in person. One participant noted that mobile devices allow screenshots to be taken of recent posts so that they can be seen by people who may not have access to the individual's SNS account;

Jess, Lines 34-35: *'cos of smartphones and you can screenshot things and send it to them'*

This quotation shows the modern age makes it easier for individuals to participate in gossiping behaviours and allows for individuals to gossip in private without the fear of being caught. This theme shows how SNSs allow for individuals to engage in gossiping behaviours quickly and easily as they can access anyone's SNS profile providing they are friends with them or the individual being gossiped about does not have high privacy settings.

Theme 4: Identifying gossip worthy online updates
McKeown (2013) noted that researchers should pay close attention to the topics that women gossip about due to the complexity than can be involved, so this theme was created due to the way that the participants spoke about the way they choose which social media posts would be gossiped about, when engaging in gossiping behaviours.

Beth, Lines 27-30: *'I tend to talk about things seen on other people's profiles online . especially if it's something significant like someone's got engaged or has announced they're pregnant'*
Jess, Lines 26-27: *'I guess it depends who's put something on and whether it's relevant or a bit odd'*
Daisy, Lines 37-40: *'sometimes it can be about stuff that's just insignificant like they made a post about their child and I don't think it's something that should have been posted for everyone to see . I guess it's personal and it tends to be about stuff that's happened or been posted recently'*
Kate, Lines 22-25: *'it depends what has been posted by others on Facebook either on a daily or weekly basis ... it depends how you react to what has been posted'*

This themes shows how online gossiping topics are dependent on what has happened in other people's lives and it's the individual who is using it as gossip and their interpretation on the post that depend whether the individual will gossip about that person or not. Robinson (2016) and Feinberg et al. (2012) both reported that evaluative gossip can establish and enforce group norms. The research may explain why participants Jess, Daisy and Kate all mentioned that the information they shared from a SNS was something that had caused them to feel something, or it was something that they believed did not fit with their preconceptions and the morals and values that they had, therefore leading them to gossip about the post to establish that they were not the only individual who believed it was not in line with their ideology.

Okazaki et al. (2014) noted that topics SNS users usually choose to engage with are those that are novel, hilarious or scandalous about a third party, therefore when participants in this study mentioned that the topics were dependent on what had been posted online, it may be possible that the participants were searching for the topics that have been described by Okazaki et al. (2014). This theme could provide insight into the ways females may use SNSs to choose the information in which to gossip about, even though no topics were specifically detailed in the interviews.

Theme 5: Language surrounding online gossiping behaviours

Even though gossip is hard to avoid in face-to-face interactions (Grosser et al. 2010), there is a negative stigma surrounding gossiping behaviours, and this appeared to affect the language used by participants to describe their gossiping behaviour during their interviews.

> Jess, Lines 36-38*: 'if I'm friends with someone say on Facebook and my friend knows them but isn't friends with them ... I guess I'd feel like I'm keeping my friend up to date on this person'*
> Jess, Lines 149-152: *'I don't know whether it would be considered gossiping though it was more just having a moan about them ... I'm not really friends with the girl in real life'*
> Ellie, Line 14-17: *'we mostly talk online ... just keeping up to date so we don't forget anything by time we get to see each other'*
> Ann, Line 106-108: *'it was just about celebrities and our opinions on what had been shared on the page about the show . it wasn't anything serious though'*

Participants Ellie and Jess described their gossiping behaviours as keeping their friends 'up-to-date' on someone, they may have engaged with this expression due to it taking away the negative connotations associated with gossiping as it is being described positively and like they are doing their friends a favour. However, this theme may link with the theme about accessibility to SNSs allowing for the gossip to be up-to-date, and this may be where the participants were drawn to the phrase 'up-to-date'. As literature commonly portrays women as victims or perpetrators of gossip (Subramanian, 2011) Ellie and Jess may have engaged with this language due to social desirability and although they knew that the research would be asking about their gossiping behaviours they didn't want to be associated with the negative connotations.

Ann used the term 'it wasn't anything serious' when describing her gossiping activity which was done through SNSs, therefore trying to justify the reasons behind the gossiping behaviours. However, Dunbar (2004) noted that two thirds of free forming conversations were dedicated to gossiping, so even though the literature may state that individuals frequently engage in this behaviour, many individuals still believe that gossiping is bad. McAndrew (2014) did report that the assumption of women engaging

with negative gossip was more than just a stereotype, but recent research by Brady et al. (2017) reported that literature commonly portrays gossip as malicious talk but it can be important and part of functional human behaviour.

Limitations

Although this research, is one of the first looking at the direct impact of SNSs on gossiping behaviours in women, there is still more work that can be done in this area. This research only had 7 female participants that were obtained by an opportunity sample for an undergraduate research project, therefore the results may only be found in the 7 women that were interviewed and due to the researcher not having a lot of time in which to conduct the research and write out a report, the limited sample size cannot be generalized until more work has been conducted into this area, although this research does highlight some clear links that can be expanded upon in future research. The research look solely at the way women engaged with SNSs to gossip and men cannot be generalized into this finding, however future research could include men into the sample.

Summary

The themes that were found after a thematic analysis - Facebook as evidence, manipulating online gossiping evidence, accessibility to online gossiping topics, identifying gossip worthy online updates and language surrounding online gossiping behaviours - show how SNSs may have become interlinked with the gossiping behaviours that are exhibited by women. This research has highlighted clear areas into the role that SNSs play in modern gossiping conversations by women and shows the complexity that is at play when trying to disentangled the relationship that has evolved between SNSs and gossip. It is recommended that future research into the role of SNSs on gossiping behaviours should look at having a larger sample size, including men to see if there is a difference and future research could possibly consider the language that people use when discussing their gossiping behaviours due to the stigma and stereotyping that surrounds gossip. This research has shown how the way gossip is stigmatised by society, impacts upon the way participants responded to the questions in the interview and as Wert and Salovey (2004) reported gossip is often seen like it is intended to decode another person's self-presentation. However, this research could be the starting point for future research into SNSs and gossip to further consider the role of SNSs on modern gossip and the complex interplay.

Reflexive Analysis

Shaw (2010) states that the reflexivity section allows the researcher to reflect on how they might impact the research when data collection and data analysis are being under taken, due to the researcher having to make sense of the data and experiences of other individuals in a meaningful way that allows others to learn about human behaviour and consequently to allow change. The research idea for this report came

from my own experiences and observations that I wanted to investigate further. I wondered if there was any research into the way social networking sites had progressed gossip, as I was aware that when I was with my friends, I would often comment about posts I had seen on social media and would sometimes show these posts to my friends. My own experiences, led to a curiosity about the ways in which social networking sites might be evolving some of the innate human behaviours that everyone experiences.

From studying psychology in college through to the end of my degree, I knew that there was an evolutionary perspective in which gossip has arose and evolved and from my own experiences and from the media, I knew that women are most often associated with gossip, being a woman myself I felt like by doing this research I was trying to justify why women gossip as well considering the role that social networking sites might have on modern gossip.

The process of finding participants and then completing the interviews allowed be to become more confident and by the last interview I was more comfortable about my role as a researcher. I think completing the interviews was the hardest part of my research due to me having to hold a long conversation, I did at the start of the interviews before the recording started have a chat with my participants to ensure that we were both comfortable and allowed the interview to seem less like an interview. I was surprised at how some participants did not mind sharing their experiences with gossip knowing how much the media had built it up and how often gossip is negative.

Knowing that gossip wasn't defined as negative meant that in my interviews, I tried to keep the questions on gossip neutral, unless I was asking if the participant engage with more positive or negative gossip and tried not to lead the participants to believe that gossip is negative. I think my overall learning experience from conducting this research has allowed me to understand that human behaviour is constantly changing to match with the technological advances.

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