The Story of Your Life On a Single Page: Assessing the Narrative Coherence of Life Storytelling

through Facebook's Timeline Profile Design

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This is dedicated to:

My Kate, the most wonderful, beautiful woman in the world

My mother and father, the best anyone could hope for in life

My sister, the strongest person I know

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Abstract

Facebook's transition to the Timeline profile design brought with it a new focus: Life storytelling. Walther Fisher posited the narrative paradigm as a way of understanding all communication in the form of stories. The paradigmatic component of coherence assesses the structural integrity of a narrative, the characters, and the encompassing themes found within. This study applies narrative coherence to the Timeline profile design to assess the coherence of life narratives told through individuals' Facebook Timelines. The researcher observed the Timeline profiles of 15 participants on the basis of three research questions. The researcher's observation yielded data suggesting that life narratives told through the Facebook Timeline maintain structural integrity through an ascertainable beginning, middle, and soft ending, possess characterological coherence through interactions of the self and interactions with others, and retain thematic coherence through six overarching content narrative categories. Limitations of the present study and recommendations for future research are also provided.

Key Words: Facebook, Narrative Paradigm, Narrative Coherence, Life Storytelling, Fisher, Social Networking, Timeline Profile

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In just the past few years, the world has witnessed the development of multiple

technological innovations that have influenced the way individuals interact in their personal and

professional lives. Whereas at in the past, a handwritten letter and a postman were required to

send messages and relay important information, the average internet user is now able to "reach

more people with a few keystrokes than Paul Revere reached during his entire ride" (Hlinko 3).

Perhaps the largest catalyst for this powerful ability to reach so many individuals with a single

message is the rise of social networking websites such as Myspace, Twitter, and of course,

Facebook. Facebook is especially responsible due to its ability to reach nearly 730 million

people worldwide (Carter 16). Given Facebook's vast reach and its widespread usage, it is a

significant topic for research in the field of communication.

It is with little doubt that when such a significant service such as Facebook changes,

critical response is often divisive. Such is the case with the most recent iteration of Facebook

profile designs: the Timeline. This new profile design purports to allow users to tell their life's

story through their Facebook profile page ("Introducing Timeline"). While this may be a lofty

endeavor, public opinion over Facebook's requirement that all users must begin using the

Timeline profile design is not as elevated. A website devoted to technology and social media

recently ran a poll asking users whether they liked the new Timeline profile design and found

that 79% of the 1,500 participants wished that the Timeline profile design was optional as

opposed to mandatory (Olmstead). A CNN article on Timeline suggests that the new profile

design and Facebook's mandatory enforcement of its usage is "one of the most polarizing issues

among people today" and those opposed to the redesign find it confusing and too invasive of

personal privacy (Rodriguez). The same article does, however, mention that there are

individuals who enjoy the ability to be more creative with their profiles (Rodriguez). This divisiveness and, of course, the mere fact that perhaps the most popular website ever created has recently instituted one of the most significant redesigns in its eight year history is the primary catalyst for the engagement of this study.

While this study does not necessarily seek to answer or solve a "problem" with Facebook's new Timeline profile design, it does seek to investigate the validity of Facebook's claim that individuals can tell their life's story through their profiles. This investigation may shed light on many users' dissatisfaction with the redesign, or may explain its popularity with other users. This study may also serve as a framework for future research to be conducted on the Facebook Timeline considering that, after much inquiry, no scholarly articles or studies have been found that address the profile redesign.

Many studies have, in the past, investigated previous iterations of Facebook from a variety of frameworks. Some such studies have investigated interpersonal relationships through Facebook, such as a study focusing on how dating partners portray their relationship through their personal profiles (Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). Other studies have been conducted on how organizations and professional institutions interact with or are impacted by Facebook, such as a 2010 study on implications for Facebook (and other social media) usage between law firms, lawyers, and their clientele (Dryer 16). As previously stated, however, after much investigation, not a single study on the Timeline profile design has been discovered. Hence, a primary deficiency in current scholarship about the Facebook Timeline is simply that there is a noticeable lack of scholarship on the Facebook Timeline.

This study is significant to multiple audiences. To communication scholars, this is a foundational qualitative study that may be built upon in future research. To the non-academic,

this study may serve to increase knowledge about how individuals share their life stories. To both scholars and non-scholars, this is an informational study that may provide deeper insight into how effectively Facebook is able to provide a platform for users to share their life stories with others.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to utilize Walter Fisher's theory of narrative paradigm to discover how Facebook's timeline profile feature, which appears to allow users to share their life stories with others, provides adequate means for Facebook users to do so by examining components of users' Facebook profiles for narrative coherence. It is the researcher's intention to utilize Fisher's narrative paradigm, as well as extant research on narratives, to accomplish this purpose.

Three research questions guide this study. These questions will be further discussed in the methodology. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How does a life story told through the Timeline profile design possess a coherent beginning, middle, and end?

RQ2: How is there an interaction of characters present on Facebook users' Timeline profiles?

RQ3: How do users of the Timeline profile design utilize all available implementations to tell their life stories?

The following chapters will expound upon this purpose and discuss the entirety of the current study. The literature review chapter provides an expansive inspection of past scholarship on Fisher's narrative paradigm and Facebook in order to establish a strong foundation for the current study. The methodology chapter details the specific approach the researcher utilized in order to gather data for this study. The results chapter is devoted to reporting the findings

provided by the gathered data. The discussion chapter provides a more in-depth analysis of the

findings, as well as suggests possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Facebook has incited both widespread hostility and acclaim—albeit over time—for various changes made to the design of its user profiles. Multiple iterations of profile designs may invoke this hostility because those changes are altering what many individuals have become personally comfortable with using (Potter). This makes sense when considering that Facebook is thought to be the web's "ultimate timesink," with the average American Internet user spending more time on Facebook than on Google, Yahoo, YouTube, Microsoft, Wikipedia, and Amazon combined (Parr). In addition, Facebook averages about 100 billion hits per day (Crum). It is estimated that users spend about 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (Carter 27). The average Facebook user is estimated to spend about 23 minutes on the website per visit, at a visitation rate of roughly 40 times per month (Carter 27). These statistics provide foundation to the notion that Facebook users become intimately attached to the website and to their profiles.

As of 24 January 2012, the newest redesign of Facebook user profiles began going live across all user accounts (McDonald). This new design, called the "Timeline," gives Facebook users the chance to "Tell your life story with a new kind of profile" ("Introducing Timeline"). Prior to the Timeline profile design, Facebook's stated purpose was simply to connect individuals with each other. Whereas the Timeline profile design displays a vertical blue line specifying the passage of time in the center of individuals' profiles, pre-Timeline profiles simply displayed all content (posts by the profile owner and posts by others) on the same page. Mark Zuckerberg, creator and CEO of Facebook, commented on Timeline, saying, "It's how you can tell the whole story of your life on a single page" (Terdiman). As is the case for previous versions of Facebook profiles, this redesign has initially been met with skepticism,

dissatisfaction, and hostility (Choney). Unfortunately, for those who try to resist the change, all

Facebook profiles will inevitably be switched to the new Timeline design.

Narratives are both pervasive and powerful—capable of reflecting, shaping, and

influencing the lives of individuals (Rodden 149). Furthermore, life stories are primary

components of self-talk and also of interpersonal conversations within daily life. Some scholars

would even go so far as to say that life itself is a story (Rodden 148). In 1989, Walter Fisher

proposed the narrative paradigm: a model through which a story could be evaluated for its

narrative rationality, which is composed of both narrative coherence (structural integrity) and

narrative fidelity (truth value). Given that the Timeline design gives users the ability to share

their life stories with their established Facebook social network, it is to the interest of the author

to investigate whether Facebook users are indeed able to share these stories through the Timeline

profile with narrative coherence. In order to provide a firm foundation for this investigation, a

review of previous literature on the topic and theory to be explored is necessary. The following is

a comprehensive review of literature on Fisher's narrative paradigm and on the topic of

Facebook. First, a definition of narrative paradigm and subsequent literature will be provided.

Review of Literature on Narrative Paradigm

Two certainties can be deduced about the concept of narrative; it is pervasive throughout

all cultures, across time, around the globe, and a clear denotation is, at best, elusive (Rudrum

202). Defining narrative and the elements that compose a narrative is no simple matter; in fact, it

is unlikely that there will ever exist a single, infallible definition of narrative. However, what

many scholars agree upon is that a representation of a series or an understandable sequence of

events characterizes a narrative at its most basic form (Rudrum 196). Self-proclaimed specialist

in narrative theory and teaching, James Phelan, offers a rudimentary definition of narrative that

expands upon the notion of narratives as understandable sequences of events: "…[A] narrative is somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose or purposes that something happened" (Phelan 219). A key element included in Phelan's definition of narrative is the presence of some form of human communication. If narrative is only understood as an understandable sequence of events, then does an automated machine set to process raw elements into a finished form (clearly an understandable sequence of events) constitute a narrative? The inclusion, then, of the element of human communication is important to the definition of narratives and forms the foundation of Fisher's narrative paradigm.

Another crucial part of the foundation of the narrative paradigm is the precept that humans are inherently storytellers and that the stories they tell about themselves are filled with characters and conflicts and have a beginning, middle, and ending (*Human Communication as Narration* 24). The aspect of universality regarding narratives is important when considering that the narrative paradigm was conceptualized as a reaction to the rational world paradigm. The universality of narratives essentially makes the narrative paradigm less "elitist" than its paradigmatic "opponent" (Roberts 131). Furthermore, Fisher posits that humans make decisions and evaluate narratives on the basis of good reasons and that the world is basically a "set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation" (*Human Communication as Narration* 65). Fisher suggests that human narration (or *Homo narrans*, as he calls it) is a kind of incorporation of Burke's consideration of man as a symbol-using or abusing animal (*Human Communication as Narration* 63). Commenting further on how humans tells stories through communication (through using symbols), Fisher states:

> …symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give
>
> order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them in order to

establish ways of living in common, in intellectual and spiritual communities in

which there is confirmation for the story that constitutes one's life. (63)

In other words, Fisher contends that humans make sense of the world by sharing stories about

their experiences within the world with other individuals—it is narratives that "enable us to

understand the actions of others" (*Human Communication as Narration* 66). The narrative

paradigm, then, is a way of conceptualizing the whole of human communication—both

discursive and nondiscursive communication is "encompassed by the metaphor of narrative as it

is understood in ordinary, everyday terms" (Roberts 132).

Central to the present study and to the narrative paradigm is the component of narrative

rationality. Rationality may be assessed by analyzing a story's fidelity and coherence (*Human*

Communication as Narration 68). A graphic depiction of the narrative paradigmatic components

of narrative rationality may be found below in Fig. A. Fidelity is concerned with the truthfulness

of the story, and is generally assessed through a proper application of the logic of "good reasons"

(*Human Communication as Narration* 106). While fidelity is indeed an important component of

narrative rationality and, therefore, narrative paradigm, the present study is more concerned with

the coherence of a narrative, as it seeks to assess the notion that Facebook allows users to tell the

story of their lives *coherently* on a single page.
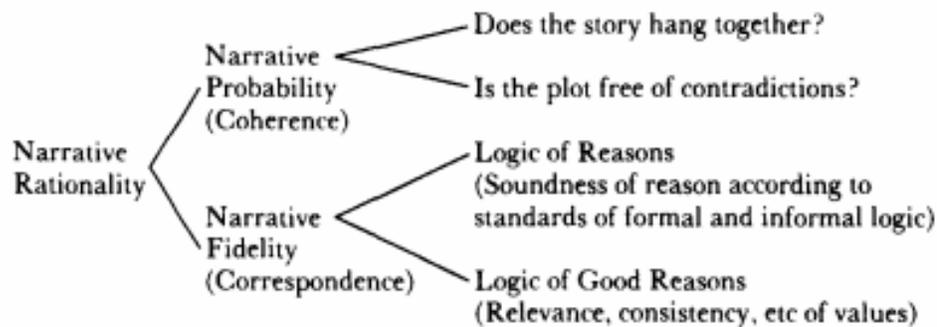
(Fig. A)

Fisher contends that some stories may be considered better than others because they "better satisfy" the necessary criteria to be considered coherent (*Human Communication as Narration* 68). Coherence is concerned with whether a story makes sense structurally—whether it "hangs together" (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). Coherence also considers whether a story has material coherence and characterological coherence (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). Assessing material coherence means attempting to analyze if a story is told with all pertinent information intact and whether the narrative has an understandable beginning, middle, and end (or progression of events) (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). Characterological coherence presupposes the claim that a story's believability is contingent upon character interaction and the "reliability of characters" within that story or by the narrator (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). Hence, assessing characterological coherence means analyzing the interaction of characters within a narrative and considering whether characters act predictably, since "coherence in life and in literature requires that characters behave characteristically"—if they do not act with predictability, then there is little trust that can be established in them (Fisher 47). Narrative coherence and its subsidiary components are central to the present study.

An important extension, as far as this study is concerned, of the coherence component of narrative paradigm set forth by Habermas and Bluck specifies four criteria for assessing the coherence of a life narrative. The four criteria as specified by Habermas and Bluck are comprised of three narrative forms of coherence and one cultural aspect of coherence. The three forms of narrative coherence are: (1) temporal coherence, which assesses whether the narrative follows a logical, understandable progression of events from beginning to end; (2) thematic coherence, refers to whether a narrative is able to create and maintain understandable,

comprehensive themes within which the narrative can be framed; and (3) causal coherence, which refers to a narrative's ability to demonstrate logical meaning—the life story should clearly display how individuals came to be who they are at the present time (Habermas and Bluck 745-750). The fourth criterion, cultural coherence, is specific to each individual life story and is "used to form a basic, skeletal life narrative consisting of an ordered sequence of culturally defined, major life events" (Habermas and Bluck 750). Habermas and Bluck discuss how these four criteria form the backbone of autobiographical reasoning and go on to construct life story schemata within individuals. Their study is markedly founded on the psychological tradition, but the narrative coherence criteria they define within their research is beneficial to the present study.

While Fisher is the original proponent of the narrative paradigm, other scholars have extended his original ideas. These extensions are valuable for two reasons. First, they are useful to the present study for the purposes of defining exactly what is meant by narrative coherence. Second, they emphasize the importance of narratives and life stories and illustrate how narrative study is not restricted only to the study of communication. Now that a definition of narrative paradigm and coherence has been established, an analysis of existing literature would be beneficial to constructing a firm frame from which to view the narrative paradigm.

Criticisms of Narrative Paradigm

Upon release, Fisher's *Narration as Human Communication* garnered both widespread critical acclaim and nearly immediate criticism (Hanan 2). While narrative paradigm shares some similar components with other narrative theories, one potentially aggressive claim is that it is ontological—that is, it absorbs all forms of discourse (Hanan 3). If this is true, then it inadvertently asks all disciplines of scholarship to "fundamentally rethink the way discourse is

created, transmitted, and assimilated" (Hanan 6). While many criticisms have been leveled

against narrative paradigm, especially for this reason, it seems as though they primarily aim to

deconstruct the paradigm's methodological orientation (Hanan 18). In other words, it is not so

much the claims of the paradigm that garner the most criticism, it is the way individuals utilize

the paradigm as a form of criticism/theory of inquiry (Hanan 18).

One example of such criticisms is that equivocal statements within Fisher's explanation

of the paradigm may make it difficult for those wishing to employ the paradigm within a

criticism or research project (Warnick 172). Another criticism is that Fisher's attitude toward the

"logic of good reasons" (narrative fidelity) has seemed to change over the years and/or become

more ambiguous. Fisher, at first, expressed a sense of ambivalence toward traditional

rationality's being incorporated into the narrative paradigm, arguing that traditional rationality

had limited usefulness when compared against his narrative paradigm and its narrative rationality

component (*Human Communication as Narration* 5). Fisher later attempted to qualify his

criticisms of traditional rationality, subsequently incorporating elements of it into the narrative

paradigm but warned that they should only be used "when relevant" and leaving no marked

criteria for assessing when utilizing elements of traditional rationality would, indeed, be relevant

("The Narrative Paradigm" 350). Therefore, this makes it more difficult to establish a standard

set of criteria for assessing narrative rationality (Warnick 174). Hence, while these criticisms

against the methodological orientation of the paradigm may influence those who intend to utilize

the paradigm, they do little to undermine/offend Fisher's guiding precepts (Hanan 19).

Jeong-Hee Kim, a self-proclaimed "narrative researcher," elaborates much on the

"problem" of narrative inquiry. Specifically, Kim cautions that engaging in narrative research

may cause the researcher to become too close to the texts or individuals being examined and may

result in a sense of narcissism (Kim 253). This narcissism may then lead to a skewed study,

thereby undermining the quality and legitimacy of the researcher and his/her research (Kim 254).

Kim further elaborates on the problem of narrative inquiry by elaborating on the lack of

narratology (the science of narrative) in narrative inquiry, such that studies focusing on

narratives may avoid or may forget to establish a theory as the foundation of the study (254).

Regarding narratology and narrative inquiry, Kim exhorts novice researchers to make their

methodologies transparent and understandable so that audiences and readers can readily identify

how and why the conclusions of the study were reached (255). A final elaboration by Kim

regarding the problem of narrative inquiry regards the discrepancy between considering narrative

inquiry an art form or valid scientific research—a narrative researcher may be an effective

writer, but the question of whether they are actually engaging in research continues to exist

(255).

Some scholars, such as Susan Opt, have challenged Fisher's notion that certain stories

could be considered better than others due to how those stories adhere to narrative coherence and

fidelity. Opt emphasizes the line of questioning about what makes one narrative better than

another is, by its very nature, seeking to resolve the seemingly unsolvable quandary of what

makes one individual's interpretation of reality more "real" than another's (298). In an

evaluation of differing/competing narratives regarding the same relationship using Brown's

model of social intervention, Opt posits that "neither seems to be more 'correct' than the other"

(307). Instead of considering two narratives with similar focus or theme as dichotomous, Opt

suggests embracing the idea that multiple stories about the same experience simply offer

different interpretations, depending on what the author considered important to his/her

experience(s) (309). It should be noted that the present study does not seek to determine the

rightness, wrongness, or comparable quality of participants' narratives. Rather, it utilizes the

component of narrative coherence to assess how individuals, through Facebook, communicate

coherent life narratives.

Regarding coherence, Bernard Williams, in his article *Life as Narrative*, promotes the

importance of coherence within narratives. Williams considers that an individual's life story is

not merely the account of his/her life, it is the foundation of the "unity" of his/her entire life, and

this unity derives from structural narrative coherence (Williams 305). Interestingly, Williams

contends that whereas fictional characters must be narrated under the assumption that they are

already "whole," human beings must narrate their lives under the assumption that they are still

incomplete (Williams 311). This makes sense when considering that when humans tell their life

stories, they are sharing stories that are, as of yet, incomplete because they are constantly *living*

those stories and their stories becomes complete, presumably, once they cease to exist. While

Williams raises an interesting point, it may still be possible to evaluate the structural coherence

of a life-story-in-progress, as it were, because it may still contain all of the necessary

components to fulfill the criteria of coherence.

Fisher, in "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," offers a direct response to

criticisms leveled against the paradigm. He explains that it is a misunderstanding to think of the

narrative paradigm as comprising a specific set of standards/practices that "characterize inquiry

in a specific discipline" ("The Narrative Paradigm" 347). The paradigm, then, should not be

limited only to use within, for instance, the discipline of communication, but rather it embodies

existing ideas held by scholars across multiple and varying disciplines ("The Narrative

Paradigm" 347). Fisher further argues that the paradigm may be applied to examine both

macroforms and microforms of discourse—there is no episode of communication, no matter how

ambiguous and unstructured or how technical and composed, that does not contribute to the story

of life ("The Narrative Paradigm" 347).

Although criticisms have been levied by scholars against the narrative paradigm, they do

little to undermine the continued importance and prevalence of this theory—as illustrated by the

following section, a bevy of research has utilized the narrative paradigm as a foundational theory

applied to a variety of contexts. While the criticisms listed above raise issues with the concept of

narrative fidelity and the lack of measurable criteria to assess it, the current study focuses strictly

on the narrative coherence of life narratives through Facebook. The following paragraphs,

discussing past studies conducted utilizing the narrative paradigm, adequately convey Fisher's

notions that the paradigm may be applied across disciplines and that the paradigm can be used to

examine multitudinous communication forms. The following studies also illustrate that the

narrative paradigm can serve as a solid foundational framework to guide modern scholarly

research.

Research Utilizing Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

Narrative paradigm has been utilized in a handful of past academic studies. One such

study, conducted by Nancy Stutts and Randolph Barker, explores image branding and advertising

through narrative paradigm to assess a branded/advertised story's coherence and truthfulness

(Stutts and Barker 224). The study utilized a qualitative open-ended survey, which was taken by

73 participants, composed of 13 advertising professionals and 60 undergraduate business

students (Stutts and Barker 224). Specifically, the researchers wanted to discern whether there

would be a difference in the perceptions of coherence and fidelity between the advertising

professionals and the undergraduate students when viewing the "Driver Human" television ad campaign by Exxon (Stutts and Barker 224). It was found that both the advertising professionals and the undergraduate students perceived the ad to be internally consistent, but that overall, there were some missing components, arguments, or contradictions (Stutts and Barker 228). Regarding fidelity, it was found that the majority of both the undergraduate students and advertising professionals found the ad to be truthful and containing sound argumentation (Stutts and Barker 229). The values of individuality and human-connection were identified by participants as being incorporated within the story's internal consistency (Stutts and Barker 231). The researchers concluded that the narrative paradigm was useful to their study of Exxon's advertisement in that it was able to elicit discussion and evaluation of the ad's coherence and fidelity (Stutts and Barker 236). Now that narrative paradigm has been defined and related research has been explored, it is necessary to provide a foundation for understanding Facebook from a variety of past research studies.

Jennifer Bute and Robin Jensen conducted a study examining how low-income women perceived their formal sex education experiences and how those experiences connect with their knowledge of sexual health, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors (Bute and Jensen 212). Bute and Jensen conducted interviews with 30 women and used the data from these interviews to construct a typology of sex-education narratives. Each interviewee's narrative was analyzed, and the dominant, recurring themes were extracted to construct the combined typology (Bute and Jensen 220). The completed narrative typology revealed three major narrative themes regarding the participants' prior sex education: regret, satisfaction, and uncertainty (Bute and Jensen 220-226). Bute and Jensen elucidate that these findings "demonstrate the importance of retrospective sensemaking" in an attempt to relate those narratives to the broader spectrum of an individuals'

life (228). Bute and Jensen's research lends support to the current study by demonstrating the

validity of utilizing narratives as a method of research and emphasizing the importance of

narratives to individuals' everyday lives.

Annette Bohn directly utilized the extensions to narrative theory as set forth by Habermas

and Bluck in a study focusing on acquiring and analyzing cultural life scripts. The study

attempted to ascertain at what age children are able to grasp the formation of life story schemata

within their own lives (Bohn 24). The study included 120 school children across three age

groups (with average ages of 9½ years, 12 years, and 14½ years). as participants and required

them to write a story about their fall vacation, to write their life story, and to create a cultural life

script (Bohn 24). The findings of the study indicated that as individuals increase in age, they are

better able to construct coherent life stories (Bohn 24). Participants at a younger age were easily

able to construct stories regarding specific life events but had trouble crafting and grasping the

essence of life stories (Bohn 25). However, upon growing older, individuals were better able to

understand how to compose life stories. Bohn contends that this increased understanding of life

storytelling and autobiographical reasoning as individuals age derives from acquiring a "fairly

normative cultural life script" (28). In other words, it is important for individuals to understand

how a typical life is lived within their respective cultures in order for them to understand how to

select life events and fit them together into a coherent life narrative (coherent to their specific

culture) (Bohn 28). Bohn's study lends support to the research conducted by Habermas and

Bluck and illustrates how narrative coherence can be studied in a practical context.

A study by Barbara Fiese and Arnold Sameroff investigated the role of narratives within

family structures and analyzed family narratives in the pursuit of validating reliable narrative

dimensions and assessing the ability of family narratives to reveal other components of family

functioning. The participants of Fiese and Sameroff's study included 63 premarital couples, 50

families with at least one child between the ages of five and seven, 27 adoptive families, and 52

parent-families whose youngest child was a toddler (Fiese and Sameroff 19). Each of the units

within these samples was interviewed for a set period of time and the transcripts of these

interviews—and the narratives shared within—were used in deriving the results of the study.

The researchers applied a 5-point scale coding measure to assess the reliability of the narrative

dimensions of narrative coherence (composed of internal consistency, organization, flexibility,

and congruence of affect and content), narrative interaction (composed of couple narrative style,

coordination, husband confirmation/disconfirmation, and wife confirmation/disconfirmation),

and relationship beliefs (composed of relationship expectations and interviewer intimacy).

In general, it was found by the researchers that applying narrative dimensions to family

narratives could be reliable (Fiese and Sameroff 35). Interestingly, the dimension of narrative

coherence was easily identifiable and unified for male participants; however, female participants

elicited two distinct aspects of narrative coherence more than their male counterparts:

organizational and affective coherence (Fiese and Sameroff 35). The researchers attribute this to

the likely difference between how men and women develop and relay narratives—it is more

probable that females place more emphasis on relational and affective bonds than do men (Fiese

and Sameroff 35). This study acts as further validity for the use of elements of the narrative

paradigm, specifically narrative coherence, within academic studies. Furthermore, this study

emphasizes the flexibility within which the narrative paradigm and its components can be

adapted.

A similar study to Fiese and Sameroff's, conducted by Jennifer Bohanek and her research

associates, explored narrative interaction within family units during dinnertime conversations.

The researchers purport that dinnertime conversations provide a good setting for analyzing narratives because the events of daily life, whether they be mundane or emotionally impacting, are often shared within this context among family members (Bohanek et al. 488-489). The researchers' primary purpose with this study was to examine differences within spontaneous family narrative interactions at the dinner table (Bohanek et al. 489). Thirty-seven families with at least one child between the ages of 9-12 years participated in the study; the researchers provided these families with a tape recorder and tasked the families with recording two to three dinnertime conversations over a two-week period of time (Bohanek et al. 494). Coding of narratives (specifically narratives of past events) focused on the descriptions of those narratives (theme, time of occurrence, type of narrative, initiator of the narrative, subject of the narrative, and length of the narrative) and family members' interactions about those narratives (requests for more information, providing/presenting more information, confirmatory responses to narrative, and negative responses to narrative) (Bohanek et al. 496).

The researchers found that when narratives of past events were shared, these became "extended and collaborative," involving the interaction of multiple family members who would each contribute, in their own way, to the evolution of the original narrative (Bohanek et al. 507). The majority of the narratives in this study were found to focus on and include both children and parents; the researchers note that many past studies found narratives only to be focused on children (Bohanek et al. 507). Interestingly, the researchers found that mothers, more than fathers, are responsible for facilitating increased elaboration and co-construction within shared family narratives. According to the researchers' exploratory analyses, "mothers who provide, confirm, and negate information…have children with fewer internalizing and externalizing problems" (Bohanek et al. 509). However, fathers still played a role, albeit smaller, in

elaboration and co-construction (Bohanek et al. 508). The researchers posit that due to the active

role of children in elaborating and co-constructing stories, family narratives (and narratives in

general) are essential catalysts for creating and maintaining "emotional and identity bonds across

time" (Bohanek et al. 509). Perhaps this same notion—that co-constructing narratives may

create and enhance emotional and identity bonds across time—applies also to the landscape of

Facebook, due to the fact that family members and friends may co-construct narratives digitally,

regardless of distance.

Scholars have also applied the narrative paradigm to the context of reality television

shows. Michael Eaves and Michael Savoie examined the concepts of narrative coherence and

narrative fidelity as applied to popular reality show *Big Brother*. Eaves and Savoie posit that

reality television—*Big Brother*, especially—is a perfect genre of narrative storytelling wherein

the narrative paradigm may operate due to the presence of narrative conflict; this contributes to

the creation of inconsistency in the mind of viewers and prods them to seek reconciliation in

their minds, which is attained through proper application of narrative coherence and narrative

fidelity (93). Eaves and Savoie suggest that *Big Brother* presents a story that is coherent and

understandable and that the narrative portrayed within the show generally adapts (thanks to the

writers and producers of the show) to the viewers' beliefs, values, and experiences about life in

some way (94). Therefore, the researchers argue that *Big Brother* is an outstanding example of

Fisher's narrative paradigm and that it "unites viewers under Fisher's broad conceptually based

paradigm" (Eaves and Savoie 96).

Related to Eaves and Savoie's study because of its focus on television programming,

Michael E. Burns applied Fisher's narrative paradigm to NBC's coverage of the 2006 Olympic

Games. Burns draws attention in his study to how NBC's coverage of the narratives of

American athletes reinforces American hegemonic values (19). Burns' employment with NBC while completing this study allowed him the ability to view firsthand how NBC producers and writers sorted through stories of athletes and selected narratives purposefully to reinforce a set of American idealistic themes (Burns 20). Burns spent 54 hours reviewing NBC's Olympic coverage of nine American athletes and used the narrative paradigm as a foundation from which to uncover overarching themes in athletes' narratives (23). Burns then transcribed the text of the narratives in order to search for common thematic elements (23). Overall, Burns found that the narratives predominately conveyed the message of the American dream and that this primary theme was subsequently conveyed in three ways: overcoming obstacles, working from the bottom up, and making sacrifices (24-27). This study is a good example of how one culture makes sense of the narratives it is told; it would be interesting to have individuals from other, non-American, cultures evaluate the same nine narratives to determine whether their analyses would differ from Burns', or if their media reflect the same themes in their coverage of their athletes.

An interesting study conducted by Molly McCartha and Elena C. Strauman applied narrative paradigm to the popular American tabloid magazine, the *National Enquirer*. The purpose of McCartha and Strauman's study was to investigate how celebrities are portrayed through the tabloid and subsequently how the narratives written about those celebrities contain moral lessons for the public. Although tabloids are often criticized for their sensationalized storytelling, McCartha and Strauman build their study on the assumption that Fisher's narrative paradigm would consider stories, no matter their medium, as cultural narratives and never insignificant (72).

To analyze the tabloid and complete their study, both researchers separately read each of the *National Inquirer* issues released from July 2007 through December 2007 (McCartha and Strauman 73). Both researchers took note of common narrative devices, themes, and plotlines throughout each issue and then, together, placed commonalities in categories to compare overarching narratives. The researchers found that the two primary categories of narratives found within the *National Enquirer* are human interest stories and exceptional, sensationalized stories of celebrities (McCartha and Strauman 74). Specifically, narratives regarding "fallen stars," or celebrities who, because of either external circumstances or personal decisions, have been disgraced, were prominent within the analyzed issues (McCartha and Strauman 74). McCartha and Strauman, note that although these stories are sensationalized, they also convey moral tones and lessons for readers. The authors discuss how by highlighting instances of drug addiction, affairs and breakups, and celebrities' physical public images and ailments, the *National Enquirer*, at times explicitly and at other times implicitly, attributes blame for the downfall or disgrace of celebrities (McCartha and Strauman 74-79). In this way, the authors find that although the tabloid tends to paint celebrity figures in a negative light, it also somewhat aids their situation(s) by attributing blame to extrinsic circumstances and, at times, offering direct sympathy for the fallen and disgraced (McCartha and Strauman 79). Relating back to Fisher's narrative paradigm, the researchers suggest that readers who become uncomfortable reading and indulging in others' misfortunes and find a disparity with their personal beliefs and the narrative fidelity of the stories can find alleviation within the tabloid due to the morals conveyed through the stories (McCartha and Strauman 79). The researchers conclude by suggesting, in line with the assumptions of the narrative paradigm, that no stories should be considered insignificant and that "although tabloids focus on the less significant acts of culture," the content of the *National*

Enquirer makes "it an interesting site of cultural discourse and knowledge" (McCartha and Strauman 80).

The concepts of narratives and life storytelling are oft discussed within the realm of academia, but they are not limited only to scholarly usage. Applied fields such as healthcare, social sciences, and law utilize narratives and storytelling to some degree by adhering to the notion that human life is interpreted through the lens of storytelling (Lai 75). Accordingly, this interpretation is said to occur in roughly three ways: (1) as a re-enactment of the past by rethinking the thoughts of actors; (2) as a dialogue between individuals wherein they attempt to engage in sense-making regarding a text; and (3) as a process of placing/examining a text within a different context (Widdershoven 256-257). Within the medical sphere, for example, the field of "narrative medicine" is gradually beginning to emerge. Within this field, the medical practitioner places a high degree of importance on the narratives expressed to him/her by his/her patients in an effort to "recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved" by those narratives in order to garner empathy, insights, and observations so as to comprehend what patients are experiencing (Lai 81). Within the field of law, researchers are beginning to investigate the usage of narratives and to attempt to understand how narratives used by lawyers or witnesses within the courtroom affect judges and juries (Chestek 100). After examining a number of court cases and the competing narratives expressed therein, it was found that narratives can provide both motivating and justifying arguments, that *credible* stories can be important to fact-sensitive issues, that the ethos of the storyteller is a matter of importance, that the audience must be considered when sharing narratives in the courtroom, and that a narrative must *sound* true if it is to have any affect on the outcome of a case (Chestek 126-132). These examples emphasize the

pervasive quality of narratives and highlight the fact that narratives are not merely cognitive

concepts limited to the realm of scholarly and academic discussion.

It is clear from existing research that Fisher's narrative paradigm is a central, and

somewhat controversial, component of the study of human communication and other disciplines.

When seeking to apply this paradigm to that of a publicly operated website such as Facebook, it

is necessary to convey the notion that humanity has seemingly progressed to a point of individual

emotivism, beyond the constraints of a common narrative. In other words, narratives are

becoming unique and particular to the individual telling or experiencing the narrative—each

individual's interpretation is likely to differ from others (Roberts 131). For example, there exists

no solitary narrative or metanarrative regarding "the Church or the family"—they are subject to

individual interpretation (Roberts 131). Furthermore, as Roberts notes, we have traded "every

narrative that might have given us hope for a single community" for a world that is founded upon

emotivism, where the feelings and desires of the individual reign supreme (131). Therein lies the

importance of Facebook and its provocation of individuals to share their life stories with others.

Individuals are drawn to this social network because it gives them the ability to express their

personal feelings, their personal desires, and their personal beliefs with others, and it allows

others to share their own stories and share *in* others' stories. The following pages are devoted to

providing further understanding of the impact of Facebook (and other social networking

websites) by highlighting past research on this important artifact.

Review of Literature on Facebook

Given the worldwide pervasive use of Facebook, an abundance of literature exists that

considers the social networking website from a variety of theories and frameworks. The

following section will explore many different studies on the topic of Facebook. Specifically, this

literature review on Facebook will discuss motives for Facebook's use, relationship growth

through Facebook, and how business(es) and professionalism influence/are influenced by

Facebook usage. The literature review is split into sections highlighting studies on these themes

because the majority of research on Facebook falls into one these three thematic categories.

References to how this literature affects/is affected by the Timeline profile feature will be

mentioned throughout this section. This exploration of previous studies should establish a

thorough foundation upon which the current study may be understood.

Facebook is many different things to many different people. Some regard Facebook to be

the most powerful advertising platform in history, considering that it reaches more than 757

million people worldwide (Carter 16). Some utilize Facebook as a hub of connection for

individuals to form discussion/collaboration groups around shared interests ("Groups"). What

remains consistent, across the board, is that Facebook gives users a personalized platform from

which to communicate with others and personally "brand" themselves, as it allows users to

"paint a picture" of who they are (Schawbel). In order to gain a greater understanding of the

many uses of Facebook, it is important to understand why it is that people choose to devote time

to it.

Motives for Using Facebook

A landmark study on uses for Facebook (and other social networking websites) by Pavica

Sheldon examined the motives that people have when using social networking websites.

Sheldon, in framing her study, proposed that Facebook and other social networks could be

utilized to provide a variety of advantages to users (Sheldon 41). After conducting a survey of

172 college students from a variety of majors, Sheldon drew a number of conclusions from the

acquired data. Regarding user motives for Facebook, Sheldon found that the primary motive was

to engage in relational maintenance activities (Sheldon 45). These activities consist of sending

private and public messages to friends, keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances, and

getting through to someone who is hard to reach (Sheldon 45). This data reporting relational

maintenance as the primary motive lends credence to the belief that Facebook pertains to the

"age-old human desire to enjoy each other while sharing news, stories, and ideas" (Carter 18). In

addition to relational maintenance, it was found that individuals also utilize Facebook in order to

pass time, to engage in virtual community, to be entertained, to increase "coolness," and to seek

companionship (Sheldon 46).

As to the frequency of use, it was found that over half of those participating in the survey

both logged into Facebook daily and re-logged in more than once per day (Sheldon 44). Half of

the participants also admitted to updating their profiles in some way every couple of months

(Sheldon 44). Considering the changes to user profiles that have occurred since this study in

2008, it would be interesting to investigate whether the statistical numbers derived from these

surveys have increased or decreased.

Positing that scholars have, as of yet, failed to agree on a comprehensive list of the

primary motives that provide the foundation for college students' use of Facebook, Chia-Chen

Yang and B. Bradford Brown conducted their own study attempting to specify the primary

motives of use (405). This study explores how these motives influence associations between

Facebook use and the social adjustment of college students (Yang and Brown 405). In order to

assess motives for Facebook use, the researchers developed a 20 item Likert scale instrument

that described different motives for using Facebook—eight items were adapted into Yang and

Brown's scale from Sheldon's study, mentioned in the above paragraphs (Yang and Brown 406).

Two scales were also included in the questionnaire that assessed students' social adjustment in

order to seek correlations between students' Facebook uses and their social behavior (Yang and

Brown 407). The questionnaire containing these scales was completed and returned by 193

participants (Yang and Brown 406).

After analyzing the data from the participants' completed questionnaires, the researchers

discovered, unlike in Sheldon's study, that college students' primary motive for using Facebook

is to form new relationships (Yang and Brown 408). The second primary motive for Facebook

use among college students in this study is to engage in activities that seek to maintain already

existing relationships, which was found to be the primary motive in Sheldon's study (Yang and

Brown 408). An interesting additional finding of Yang and Brown's study is related to the social

adjustment of college students as influenced by their use of Facebook. It was found by the

researchers that the more students sought new relationships through Facebook, the worse they

scored on the measure of social adjustment and the more feelings of loneliness they experienced

(Yang and Brown 412). Reciprocally, the more students used Facebook to maintain existing

relationships, the higher they scored on the measure of social adjustment and the less they

reported feeling lonely (Yang and Brown 412).

It is important to highlight the fact that Yang and Brown's study was published in 2012,

when the Timeline profile design was implemented for Facebook users, and Sheldon's study was

completed in 2008, before the inception of the Facebook Timeline. This is an especially

important consideration because Yang and Brown's study suggested a different primary motive

than Sheldon's study, conducted before the use of the Facebook Timeline. This discrepancy

suggests the possibility that the Facebook Timeline could be responsible for a shift of the

primary motives for which individuals use Facebook. It could be that the newly provided focus

on sharing life narratives has increased the ability and perceived importance of individuals to

engage in relational maintenance activities for already existing relationships through their Facebook Timeline profiles.

Another study regarding motives for use conducted by a group of researchers utilizing the uses and gratifications theory found, after interviewing 50 undergraduate college students in focus groups, that there are five major reasons for Facebook use. The major reason these young people tended to use this social networking website is that it is an efficient way to communicate with friends (Urista, Qingwen, and Day 221). Other reported reasons for using Facebook were to act on curiosity of other people, to increase their popularity, to reinforce and form relationships with others, and to be able to send a single message to a large amount of people at once (Urista, Qingwen, and Day 221). Indeed, Facebook continues, even with the redesign, to allow users to send both public and private messages to a vast number of other users at one time and to provide a channel through which to learn about and engage in relationship management with other users.

When considering popularity, research has also shown that people make inferences about another's popularity and status based on a number of factors included in their personal social networking profile. Data gathered by Joseph Walther and associates revealed that if a user's friends appeared to be more physically attractive on his/her profile, that user would generally be perceived to be more physically attractive him/herself (Walther et al. 41). It was also found that the type of interaction and the quality and purpose of messages being left on a user's wall contributes to the viewer's perception of the profile owner's credibility. The researchers found that when a profile owner's friends left positive, "complimentary" messages on his/her wall, the credibility of the profile owner improved (Walther et al. 44). While this can sometimes be misleading because the profile owner does not necessarily always control what other's post on his/her wall, it is possible for the user to remove posts at his/her discretion. It is possible that this

type of editing/censorship may be one facet in which an individual can modify or present his/her life story to others, as the type of messages he/she allows as well as the friends he/she accepts seem to have a definable effect on users who view his/her profile.

Although in the past it was thought that increased Internet use by individuals served as a harbinger or catalyst for negative psychosocial well-being, such as depression or feelings of loneliness, current research is yielding data that challenge these notions. A study conducted by Amy Gonzales and Jeffrey Hancock applied the theoretical concepts of objective self-awareness and selective self-presentation to individuals viewing their own Facebook profiles to evaluate what effect this Internet activity had on their psychological well-being (Gonzales and Hancock 81). Sixty-three university students participated in the study and were split into three separate research conditions; Group One examined their Facebook profiles alone in a small room without any further instruction for a period of three minutes; Group Two participants were placed alone in the same room but, in place of their Facebook profiles, a mirror was laid across the computer screen; Group Three participants were placed alone in the same room but were given neither the ability to use Facebook nor to look at themselves in the mirror. The participants were then instructed to complete a questionnaire with measures assessing self-esteem and selective self-presentation (Gonzales and Hancock 81).

The researchers found, when compared to those exposed to the mirror or those exposed to neither the mirror nor Facebook, that those who were given the ability to browse through and manipulate their Facebook profiles before answering the questionnaire demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem (Gonzales and Hancock 81). The researchers deduced, from this data, that selective self-presentation, as afforded by digitally mediated environments such as Facebook profiles, positively influences individuals' self-esteem (Gonzales and Hancock 81). This

indicates that individuals may use Facebook, and other social networking websites, because it

gives them the ability to manipulate their public self-image within a digital, shareable personal

profile. It may also serve as an indication of why individuals would choose to use the Facebook

Timeline profile to communicate their life story to others. If they experience higher levels of

self-esteem by manipulating their own profile, then perhaps they have similar experiences or

emotions knowing that others can view their Timeline profile and share in their enhanced life

story.

Relationships and Communication through Facebook

It is clear from studies focusing on user motives for utilizing Facebook that

relating/communicating with others is a primary impetus. Researchers have increasingly

investigated whether relational maintenance through Facebook serves as an extension or a

replacement of traditional face-to-face relational maintenance and communicative activity. In

one such study, researchers investigated the perceptions of 183 college students by distributing a

survey and asking them to answer questions about their usage of social networking websites.

Participants of the survey were asked to estimate the number of friends they had on their social

networks whom they did not know in person (Kujath 76). Participants were asked to answer

questions regarding how often and in what ways they interacted with others whom they had

never met in person as well as those they already knew over their social networks (Kujath 76).

It was found that 40% of the participants within this study had never interacted/made

friends with individuals whom they did not already know in person (Kujath 76). In addition,

only 8% of participants reported frequently using social networking websites to meet others

whom they did not already know in person (Kujath 77). Interestingly, it was found that 55% of

participants admitted to sometimes or frequently communicating with their social network

friends online more often than they did in person (Kujath 77). This finding suggests that, while

social networking may not function as a replacement for face-to-face interaction for all

individuals, it is becoming a more viable option for interpersonal communication. Perhaps

unsurprisingly, collected data revealed that 75% of participants reported that they frequently

used social networking websites to keep in touch with others whom they already knew (Kujath

77). This corroborates with studies mentioned above by Urista, Qingwen, and Day as well as

Sheldon who found relational maintenance as the primary motive for using Facebook.

Another study by Kirsty Young verifies the previously discussed studies about motives

for the usage of Facebook by highlighting making and maintaining contact, as well as

convenience, as central to why adults engage in Facebook activities (Young 24). Young's study,

unlike already discussed articles, suggests that in addition to posting status updates, commenting

on others' walls, inviting others to events, and posting images, individuals may also engage in

"facestalking" activities (Young 26). Facestalking is defined by Young as "the act of reviewing

in detail another person's Facebook page to follow their activity without necessarily engaging in

any form of communication with the person" (Young 26). The extensive engagement of this

activity among Facebook users is evidenced by the fact that 67% of the 758 participants in the

online survey admitted to participating in facestalking of others' profiles/lives (Young 27). It is

possible that users' engagement of facestalking activities may be due, in part, to a reluctance or

shyness of communicating with others directly/in person but also to an eagerness to learn more

about others.

A group of researchers further investigated the concept of Facebook stalking by

specifically investigating the facestalking of ex-partners. A total of 411 participants with

Facebook profiles, who reported having recently been in a serious relationship with an ex-partner

who had his/her own Facebook profile, participated in the study (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, and

Cratty 712). The participants completed an online survey that presented them with questions

related to Facebook stalking behaviors of ex-romantic partners, obsessive relational intrusion,

and cyber obsessional pursuit (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, and Cratty 712-712). Utilizing the

acquired data from the survey, the researchers found that 67% of participants admitted to

engaging in some, usually covert, Facebook stalking behaviors with ex-partners (Lyndon, Bonds-

Raacke, and Cratty 714). It was additionally found that those who used Facebook to

monitor/harass ex-partners also tended to engage in obsessive relational intrusion and cyber

obsessional pursuit behaviors and that those who engaged in cyber obsessional pursuit behaviors

tended to enact obsessive relational intrusion behaviors offline as well as online through

Facebook (Lyndon, Bonds-raacke, and Cratty 714).

This study by Lyndon and research associates clearly illustrates that behaviors performed

through Facebook may not be restricted to enactment in online settings. It is interesting to note

that this study was being conducted as the new Timeline Profile design was being rolled out

across user profiles. Given that the Timeline profile design is dedicated to offering more

information about users' lives through its storytelling approach, it could be that such Facebook

stalking behaviors have increased as more public information about users' lives is posted and

made visible to others through users' loosened privacy settings.

Whereas the previous study explored the Facebook stalking of ex-partners, Millie

Darvell, Shari Walsh, and Katherine White investigated the monitoring of current romantic

partners through Facebook. This study builds on previous scholarly research that suggests

romantic partners often monitor each other's Facebook profiles in order to search for "evidence

of unfaithfulness" (Darvell, Walsh, and White 717). The researchers utilized a questionnaire to

assess the monitoring behaviors of 244 university students. The results of the study

demonstrated that partner monitoring is a regular behavior among romantic partners due to the

fact that information on individuals is easily accessible through Facebook (Darvell, Walsh, and

White 720). Furthermore, partner trust was highlighted as a determining factor of whether

individuals would monitor their romantic partners; if partner trust was high, there would be less

of a proclivity toward monitoring. Conversely, if partner trust was low, there would be a higher

proclivity toward monitoring (Darvell, Walsh, and White 721). The length of romantic

relationships showed itself to be a determining factor in monitoring behavior to the extent that

shorter, less developed relationships contained more instances of partner monitoring than did

relationships that were established and existent for a longer period of time (Darvell, Walsh, and

White 721). This study illustrates how Facebook has become a pervasive and powerful social

networking technology, considering it is not only allows individuals to interact, but also to

privately investigate the actions of others.

One reason that some individuals may be more actively engaged in communicating with

others and seeking new friends over Facebook is due to shyness. After administering

questionnaires and receiving 241 responses, Levi Baker and Debra Oswald found that Facebook

users who were ranked high in shyness tended to perceive stronger associations than less shy

individuals between Facebook use and friendship quality (Baker and Oswald 873). In other

words, they were seemingly able to overcome their face-to-face interpersonal shyness by

engaging with others over computer-mediated communicative activities—in this case, social

networking. The researchers considered, after analyzing the data, the social networking websites

may provide a "comfortable environment" wherein individuals prone to shyness could interact

with others (Baker and Oswald 873). Considering these findings, there is a possible implication

that individuals—especially shy individuals—may feel more comfortable sharing their life stories through social networking websites like Facebook than in person.

Considering that the primary motive for using Facebook has been suggested to be relational maintenance and communicating with friends, a component worth investigating is how individuals express affection for their friends over Facebook. Daniel Mansson and Scott Myers conducted a study in which they explored the specific behaviors individuals use to communicate affection to others on Facebook. The specific behaviors were examined in light of the amount of affection individuals express to close friends and the appropriateness of that expressed affection to close friends (Mansson and Myers 160). Data gathered from this study revealed 29 different expressions of affection, ranging from displaying simple emoticons to posting on close friends' walls/sending them messages, to posting a personal profile picture including the other close friends (Mansson and Myers 162). Gender analysis revealed that female participants generally express affection to their close friends more frequently and also generally perceive expressions of affection to be more appropriate than males (Mansson and Myers 163). These findings relate to narrative communication because relationships and expressions of affection may serve as component parts of an individual's life story, provided he/she deems it important enough to share in person or display on his/her profile.

Despite the fact that Timeline changes much of a user's Facebook profile, many components still remain—albeit they are categorized and reorganized in a different way. One primary feature of a user's Facebook profile that remains largely unchanged is the ability for a user to display his/her relationship status to his/her social network. Since an individual's relationship(s) is central to his/her life story, this is an important component of Facebook to

explore. Interestingly, research exists that indicates interaction among those in a romantic

relationship on Facebook impacts actual relationship satisfaction.

To research romantic relationships and Facebook, a study conducted by Lauren Papp and

associates explored how 58 couples utilized Facebook and portrayed their romantic relationships

through their individual Facebook profiles (Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). It was

found that the individuals within romantic couples generally matched each other in Facebook

usage and connection (Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). Individuals within romantic

couples also communicated information about their relationship similarly over their individual

profiles, generally in the form of displaying profile pictures with both partners and sharing

similar status updates (Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). The data gathered from this

study also suggested that both men and women experience higher levels of relational satisfaction

as a direct result of these similarities in Facebook usage and choices between romantic partners

(Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). Specifically, men tended to experience higher levels of

relational satisfaction when sharing similar status updates; whereas, women tended to experience

higher levels of relational satisfaction when displaying profile pictures containing them and their

male counterparts (Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). This study is one such example that

illustrates the impact Facebook has on individuals' perceptions and relationships outside of the

computer-mediated communicative realm.

As suggested by the previous study, the image users select to display as their profile

image seems to have identifiable ramifications for both the image displayer as well as the viewer

of that user's page. Michele Strano utilized an open-ended qualitative online survey of 427

participants to explore self-presentation through Facebook profile images. Strano specifically

wanted to investigate interpretations about varying profile images as well as possible reasons for

why users might select specific profile images (Strano 3). Results indicated that the largest

single percentage of participants, at 49%, displayed profile images of themselves alone, with no

one else in the image (Strano 6). By extension, roughly 17% chose to display images depicting

the user with friends, and roughly 14% chose to display images depicting the user with his/her

romantic partner (Strano 6). The most significant reason given by participants for why they

chose to display the image that they use as their profile image is that they perceive they are

physically attractive in that image (Strano 6). By extension, participants also reasoned that their

choice of profile image displayed them as having fun or because it was a humorous shot, at

roughly 12% and almost 11% respectively (Strano 6). The primary reason given for why

participants change their profile pictures was that they wanted to update to a more recent image

(Strano 6). Beyond this, participants also indicated changing profile images because they were

bored with the current photo or because they wanted to select a more attractive photo of

themselves (Strano 6).

      This study by Strano suggests that individuals do not arbitrarily update their profile

images but rather do so with determination and purpose. Strano's study also yields merit when

considering profile images in light of narrative and storytelling. Facebook users' purposeful

selection of profile images may serve as one primary component of telling their life stories, as it

is one of the most definable/customizable features of users' profiles. The Timeline profile

design keeps the profile image feature intact and also adds the possibility of a banner image,

which functions as a larger image backdrop at the top of users' profile pages ("Profile Banner").

This allows Facebook users even more customization and personalization options for their

personal profiles, which may also be utilized by users to share more about their life stories.

      Facebook's Influence on Business and Professionalism

Facebook provides individuals with the opportunity to connect not only with their personal friends but also with the organizations and products that they support and use on a daily basis. With the advent of "Pages" for Facebook, businesses are now able to create entire profiles for themselves or their products that are dedicated to networking with the public. The ramifications are twofold. On one hand, it is beneficial in that it allows businesses to reach the public through an entirely new and pervasive medium.

On the other hand, the presence of businesses/employers on Facebook and other social networking websites may incite a number of issues ranging from employer/employee legality problems to intellectual property infringement. An article by Randy Dryer briefly highlights the benefits of employers' maintaining a social media presence, such as the use of social media technologies to screen potential employees (18). However, Dryer dedicates a majority of his efforts toward discussing the potential risks. Among those risks are, as mentioned above, employer/employee risks and intellectual property infringement (Dryer 16-19). Employer/employee issues arise when a social media policy is either not developed by an organization or is developed but not followed by organizational employees (Dryer 17). Intellectual property infringement over social media platforms is an issue that arises when use of organizational elements (e.g. name or logo) are misappropriated in various ways (Dryer 18). Regardless of how misappropriation occurs, it is often difficult over social media platforms to fully avoid it due to the fact that social media is "global, ever changing, and essentially everlasting" (Dryer 18). In other words, it is often extremely difficult to pinpoint the source of intellectual property misappropriation because anonymity is prevalent over social media platforms.

Research, like the study by Dryer previously discussed, indicates that individuals should be wary of the images and posts that they present on their Facebook profiles. While Facebook offers many privacy solutions for users to moderate who is able to view the content on their profiles, Facebook does not stipulate the usage of these privacy settings. This may become problematic for individuals who post inappropriate information pertaining to issues such as drug abuse, explicit sexual behavior, or profanity, because without engaging privacy settings, virtually anyone who uses Facebook could view their profile (Peluchette and Karl 30). In fact, social networking websites such as Facebook are now increasingly being utilized by human resources personnel to explore potential/current employee's personal profiles. (Roberts and Roach 111). With access to individuals' profiles, human resources personnel can examine the type of lifestyle being led by those individuals (Roberts and Roach 111). If that lifestyle, as communicated through the social networking platform, is somehow in conflict with the rules or views of the entity that the human resources personnel represent, actions can be taken against those individuals, including being fired (Roberts and Roach 112). The authors of this study recommend that users of social networking websites should take into account what information they have divulged or information that has already been divulged about them over the Internet when seeking jobs (Roberts and Roach 113-114). Clearly, this is a powerful indicator of the influence that Facebook and other social networking websites have in society. It also suggests that some restrictions, albeit by entities extant to Facebook, may exist on how much individuals could (or should) divulge about their life stories through the Timeline profile design.

Facebook is also increasingly being used by businesses to drive web traffic to their respective websites. By posting deals on the business' Facebook account, the over 200 million individuals who utilize Facebook on their mobile phones may be more inclined to make

purchases if they find they are near a business promoting a specific deal (Bradley 28). By

strategically using Facebook to communicate with the public, businesses are able to stimulate

conversations about their products, services, and brand, as well as utilize Facebook as a platform

for marketing ("Best Practice Guide: Marketing on Facebook").

Research also exists that suggests when a business allows employees to use Facebook

when they are working, increases in both employee correctness and employee satisfaction may

result (Beck 29). Furthermore, businesses who allow Facebook usage may increase in their

return on investments for employees because those employees are becoming more integrated

with their personal community, as well as the consumer community pertaining to the business for

which they work (Beck 30). Employees may also benefit from the sharing of knowledge that

takes place over Facebook and other social media websites, possibly reducing the time it would

otherwise take for employees to learn or be taught skills relevant to their job/career (Beck 30).

Strikingly, using social media in businesses has been reported to increase overall productivity by

37% and increase idea stimulation among employees by 32% (Beck 30).

Politics and politicians will also be affected by the shift to the Facebook Timeline. The

2008 presidential election saw candidates utilizing Facebook and other networking websites such

as Myspace in order to reach mass amounts of the public. Edward Erikson studied the personal

profile and the subsequent discourse that was initiated on the social networking page of Hillary

Clinton. In his study, he concludes that the ability to reach the public on a personal basis,

thereby establishing a kind of "fan base," is an advantage over traditional politics (Erikson 11).

The reason for the advantage, he claims, is that this personal touch with the mass public

discourages dissentious attitudes and rather builds a sort of team or alliance between the political

candidate and his/her "fans" (Erikson 11). Considering this impact, even in 2008, the Timeline

feature may open the possibility for increased interaction and influence since businesses (and politicians, for that matter) can now tell the "life story" of their businesses/professional lives and endeavors ("Introducing New Facebook Pages").

Summation and Conclusion of Literature Review

Fisher's narrative paradigm and its focus on assessing the narrative rationality of stories act as the central component the present study. Specifically, the element of coherence subsequent to narrative rationality will be useful in evaluating the utility of Facebook's Timeline for allowing individuals to communicate life stories with structural integrity. The negative criticisms, primarily centering on the methodological orientation of the paradigm, as well as the positive criticisms on narrative paradigm provide a beneficial foundation from which to understand the paradigm in light of the present study. Exploring past studies utilizing narrative paradigm also demonstrate and reinforce the utility of the paradigm for present use.

Literature on Facebook, at first glance, seems to be widely varied. Upon closer inspection, however, it is possible to trace convergent ideas and topics within the multitude of studies that exist which focus on Facebook. The primary topics discussed about Facebook concentrate on motives for Facebook usage, personal/relational growth and communication through Facebook and how business(es) and professionalism influence and/or are influenced by Facebook.

There is seemingly a multitude of literature discussing motives for Facebook usage. The above literature suggests that individuals predominately utilize Facebook in order to create and maintain relationships, communicate with friends and acquaintances facilely, and increase their popularity (Sheldon 41-46; Urista, Qingwen, and Day 221). Research on each of these

components of motives for Facebook usage seem to vary minimally in their results, adding

strength to the overall findings of each study.

Literature focusing on relationship creation, maintenance, and communication through

Facebook is also widespread. Derived from the literature discussed above, there exists the

suggestion that the majority of Facebook communication takes place in order to maintain (more

than to create) relationships between individuals (Kujath 76). Given the nature of computer-

mediated communication, individuals with a proclivity toward shyness may benefit from

Facebook in that they are able to form and maintain relationships through a largely non-

threatening communicative channel (Baker and Oswald 873). Interestingly, romantic couples

seem to experience higher degrees of relationship satisfaction when both individuals within the

relationship communicate and display components of their profiles in similar ways (Papp,

Danielewicz, and Cayemberg 85). Additionally, research suggests that individuals create and

maintain their profiles purposefully, due in part to the fact that they perceive these

communicative choices may make them seem more popular, attractive, and fun-loving—perhaps

also in order to elicit various reactions from viewers of their profiles (Strano 6).

In addition to literature discussing motives for Facebook usage and relational creation

and maintenance through Facebook, research also exists that focuses on how Facebook affects/is

affected by business and professionalism practices. Research suggests that individuals should be

careful of what they post on their Facebook profiles and how much information they divulge

because human resource divisions within companies are beginning to utilize Facebook to check

up on current employee/potential employee activities (Roberts and Roach 111-114). Businesses

are also seeing increases in social interaction and the establishment of "fans" through Facebook,

as referenced by Hillary Clinton's social media profile during the 2008 presidential election (Erikson 11).

Facebook is a pervasive communicative channel throughout the world and, as such, has acquired the focus of a multitude of research. Fisher's narrative paradigm has received both acclaim and criticism since its inception in 1987. A review of existing literature on the topics of Facebook and narrative paradigm is necessary to establish a strong foundation from which to approach the current study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Now that a foundation has been established for the understanding of narrative paradigm and the topic of Facebook, it is important to discuss the methodology for the current study. While there have been many past studies analyzing the precepts of narrative paradigm and as well as Fisher's responses to criticisms raised against the paradigm, few studies have directly utilized narrative paradigm toward a specific focus—especially with regards to Facebook or other social networking mediums.

Adding to the fact that there is a low existence of research specifically appyling narrative paradigm to Facebook and other social networking mediums is the fact that few research studies focus on the Timeline profile design. This lack of previously completed literature on Timeline is, with little doubt, due to the relatively recent release of the profile design. While this lack of previous literature prevents a reference between the current study and past studies, it does mean that the current study may provide a foundation for future research to be conducted.

This chapter is devoted to explaining the methodology of the present study. Such an explanation is important, as it should provide a necessary understanding of the analytical framework of the thesis paper. In order to achieve a worthwhile understanding of the methodology, a description of reasons for using Fisher's narrative paradigm and Facebook, the research questions and measurement strategies, a description of the participants of the study, ethical considerations of the present study, as well as an exposition of *how* the Facebook Timeline will be analyzed will be provided.

Why Narrative Paradigm?

Fisher's narrative paradigm was chosen for this study due to its unique focus on analyzing stories told by individuals. As previously discussed, the narrative paradigm considers

stories to be pervasive throughout all cultures; Fisher, through the narrative paradigm, suggests

that there are no cultural or other extrinsic limitations placed on individuals for sharing

meaningful narratives. Furthermore, the foundational components of the narrative paradigm

(narrative coherence and narrative fidelity) offer valuable, useable criteria for assessing

narratives shared by others.

The narrative paradigm was also chosen because it is a well-established theory within

scholarly communicative study. As can be deduced from the literature review in the preceding

pages, there have been many critiques, applications, and extensions made by various scholars on

Fisher's original proposal of the narrative paradigm. Although some have criticized the narrative

paradigm, it is clear from the paradigm's continued application that this theory has been

established as a driving force in narrative study to the present day.

The three research questions discussed within the present study are derived from the

narrative paradigm's criteria for assessing narratives. This study will specifically analyze the

narrative coherence of Facebook Timeline profiles. A full description of how this study's

analysis will make use of narrative coherence will be provided within this chapter in the

"Research Questions and Measurement" section. Now that reasoning has been provided for the

use of Fisher's narrative paradigm, attention will turn to the use of Facebook in the present study.

Why Facebook?

The choice of Facebook as the primary artifact of this study is twofold. The first reason

is the new Timeline profile design Facebook has instituted across all user profiles. The stated

purpose of this redesign, according to Facebook, is to provide Facebook users with the ability to

share their individual life stories through their personal profiles ("Introducing Timeline").

Facebook, since its inception, has been a platform that connects individuals together across time

and space. However, with the release of the Timeline profile, Facebook has provided a specific, more narrowed focus to its users—that purpose being to develop content for their profiles around sharing the story of their lives from their birth to the present time.

The second reason for choosing Facebook as the artifact for this study is based on the fact that the Timeline profile design is a relatively new feature. In light of the recent development and subsequent transition of all Facebook users from the previous profile design to the Timeline profile design, little research exists focusing on the Timeline. This lack of research affords a unique opportunity allowing this study to be one of the first that advances scholarly research on the Facebook Timeline profile design.

In addition to the two reasons listed above for choosing Facebook as the artifact, the Timeline profile design's focus on harnessing Facebook users' creativity toward developing their life story through their personal profiles links well with Fisher's narrative paradigm. Given that both the narrative paradigm and the Facebook Timeline focus their attention on narratives, applying the coherence criteria of the paradigm to the Facebook Timeline provides a unique understanding of how Facebook users tell coherent narratives through their personal profiles. Having established justifications for the usage of the narrative paradigm as the theoretical foundation of this study as well as Facebook as the artifact, the research questions and measurement strategies will next be provided.

<div align="center">**Research Questions and Measurement**</div>

Considering that this study utilizes a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach, research questions, rather than hypotheses, will be asked by the researcher. The research questions and design are based heavily on Facebook's proposal that users can tell their life stories through the Facebook Timeline profile design ("Introducing Timeline"). Data gathered

from the participants' Facebook Timelines will be used provide answers to each research

question. After analysis of the data and answers to each research question, a discussion will

follow that provides a more detailed inspection of the answers as well as the data that led to their

evocation.

Fisher's narrative paradigm will serve as the central theoretical framework for this study

due to its ability to assess a narrative's structural integrity. Narrative thought and study has

found considerable validity in a number of academic fields such as sociology, psychology,

history and cultural studies, and communication studies (Spector-Mersel 205). This emergence

and increased significance of narrative study serve as foundation for utilizing narrative paradigm

as a framework for the current study. The integrity of a narrative is measured by narrative

rationality, and narrative rationality is achieved when a story has both narrative coherence and

narrative fidelity (Fisher 68). Although fidelity is indeed an important component to narratives,

this study is more focused on with how the Timeline profile design gives users the ability to tell a

coherent life story.

By way of summation, narrative coherence analyzes whether a story has all of the proper

component parts to constitute a story (beginning, middle, end, and characters) and whether those

parts act congruently and predictably within the story (*Human Communication as Narration* 47).

In order to assess how the Facebook Timeline serves as a successful channel for the purposes of

communicating life narratives, the paradigmatic component of coherence will be evaluated

within the context of the Timeline profile design. The following is a presentation of the research

questions as well as explanations of how each will be measured:

RQ1: How does a life story told through the Timeline profile design possess a

coherent beginning, middle, and end?

This research question is based on the aspect of structural coherence—one of Fisher's foundational components for assessing whether a story has narrative coherence (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). In order to provide an answer to this question, the researcher analyzed each of the 15 participants' Timeline profiles to determine how and to what extent each profile tells a life story with a beginning, middle, and end. This research question is based on one of the key components of criteria that determine whether a narrative is told with coherence. The researcher will observe participating Facebook profiles in order to recognize "beginning," "middle," and "end" similarities across the majority of participating profiles to provide an answer to this question.

> RQ2: How is there an interaction of characters present on Facebook users'
>
> Timeline profiles?

Aside from a beginning, middle, and end, Fisher also contends that characters are central components to all stories (*Human Communication as Narration* 47). Therefore, it is necessary to consider how and to what extent an interaction of characters exists on Facebook Timeline profiles. The researcher observed participating Timeline profiles to determine how and through what Facebook implementations an interaction of characters takes place. A discussion of the observations related to RQ2 will be provided in the results section.

> RQ3: What comprehensive narrative themes are communicated by Facebook
>
> users through their Timeline profiles?

This research question is derived from Habermas and Bluck's extensions to Fisher's original paradigmatic precepts. Specifically, this research question applies the thematic coherence component of Habermas and Bluck's extension (745-750). In order to answer this research question, the researcher evaluated participating Timeline profiles on the basis of what

comprehensive themes that serve to frame each Timeline profile life narrative are formed by users through their personal Facebook profiles. The researcher examined posted content from all 15 participants' Timeline profiles in order to deduce and discuss the overarching themes represented from the study's sample. An explication of the overarching themes will be provided in the following results chapter.

Participants

A call for participants was posted on the researcher's personal Facebook profile, personal Twitter profile, and personal LinkedIn profile. This call for participants contained a brief description of the research study and then directed individuals interested in participation to email the researcher for further information about the research design. Participants were given the ability to ask questions of the researcher about the study before agreeing to participate. Once individuals affirmed their willingness to participate by contacting the researcher, the researcher then emailed them a disclaimer highlighting the ethical considerations of the study along with an informed consent form requiring their signature. Upon signing the informed consent form, participating individuals were then asked to return the signed copy of the form to the researcher via standard mail or email. The participants were required to open their profiles to the researcher by adding him as a "friend" on Facebook, so he could analyze the construction and composition of their Facebook Timeline profiles. After acquiring all signed informed consent forms and being given viewing access to participants' Facebook profiles, the researcher began analyzing the participants' profiles in pursuit of answering the above research questions. Participants' profiles were each examined in depth (both old and new content was analyzed) each day, for a period of one month in order to yield the data described in the following results chapter. Although elements of this study could have technically been completed without participants by simply

assessing the tools provided by Facebook during profile creation, the researcher chose to

examine already established profiles in order to analyze how individuals actually setup and use

their Timeline profiles.

The Timeline profiles of 15 individuals (nine females; six males) were analyzed in order

to accomplish the goal(s) of this study. This sample size provided enough data to assess the

Timeline profile for its potential to allows users to communicate complete, coherent, and quality

life narratives, as they are defined by Fisher in the literature review chapter. A significant time

investment was required to analyze each participant's Timeline profile, as this study took a

qualitative analytical approach. This sample size was selected, in addition to being able to

provide a significant amount of data, because the researcher deemed it a manageable size to

fulfill the criteria of accomplishing a narrative, qualitative study. Also, because individuals

operate their Facebook profiles at irregular intervals, a sample of 15 participants should result in

timely content/interactions being posted on a daily basis by at least some participants during the

two-week period.

Ethical Considerations

A disclaimer of the nature of the study and the data to be analyzed was made available

through an email message to all potential participants who contacted the researcher. The fact

that this study analyzes and discusses specific nuances of participants' profiles was made clear

on the disclaimer that was provided to all individuals before their participation was

acknowledged and confirmed. This statement was immediately followed by an assurance to

possible participants that their personal identities would not be divulged to the public in any way.

The researcher made clear to participants that their identities would not be compromised as there

would be no dissemination of data that could personally link back to any participant.

Given that this study inspected specific elements of participating individuals' profiles, the individuals' identities were made anonymous if mentioned in the study in order to protect any personal information from being divulged en masse. In order to make anonymous the participants' identities, photo-imaging software was utilized to place a blur over any individuals' names. These measures were taken in order to ensure that participants' identities are not compromised in any possible way in accordance with the researcher's assurance that participants' identities would be protected as well as the Institutional Review Board guidelines.

Full disclosure of the methodology of the study was provided in order for the University's Institutional Review Board to make recommendations, ask for revisions, or express concerns. After making appropriate corrections to any revisions or addressing any concerns from the Institutional Review Board, the investigator received approval for this study on 27 November 2012. A call for participants was then posted on the personal profile of the principal researcher on several social networking websites including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Scope of Study

The scope of this study is limited to researcher observation of participating Facebook profiles over the course of a one-month period. This is because each participant's Timeline profile contains a vast amount of information exceeding the limitation of a single researcher's observation in a constrained amount of time. During this period of time, the researcher analyzed participants' Facebook profiles each day for a one-month period of time in the pursuit of providing answers to each research question. This applies especially to RQ2 and RQ3 because observing ongoing and current, rather than archived, content will contribute to more timely responses. In the pursuit of responding to RQ1, during the first week of observation, the

researcher engaged in an examination of the entirety (from beginning to end) of each

participant's Timeline in order to comment on overall structural coherence.

Conclusion to Methodology

The answers to the three research questions discussed above will be the determining

factors of how users communicate their life stories through the Facebook Timeline profile design

with narrative coherence. A participant sample of 15 Timeline profiles should provide a

significant quantity and quality of data in order to provide sufficient response(s) to the three

research questions. Institutional Review Board approval was sought and confirmed before

conducting this study, and it was made clear to individuals before they acknowledged their

willingness to participate that their identities would be made anonymous.

This study is unique in its utilization of Fisher's narrative paradigm applied to the context

of the Facebook Timeline. Given the relatively recent release and continued transition of users

to the new Timeline profile design, this study breaks new ground in the area of communication

through social networking website services. Although this study utilizes a qualitative data

measurement format wherein the researcher interpreted data based on his observations, the

research questions are based on Fisher's original ideas on the narrative paradigm and utilizes

extant literature to further define and constrain the study. Now that the methodology has been

established, the results of the research will be discussed.

Chapter 4 – Results

The following paragraphs report the results of analyzing participant's Facebook Timeline profiles. In order to maintain consistent organization, each research question will be repeated. Following each research question, a description of the "answer" will be provided. After reporting the results of the study and providing answers to each research question, a discussion of the results will follow.

Response to RQ1

RQ1: How does a life story told through the Timeline profile design possess a coherent beginning, middle, and end?

With the introduction of the Facebook Timeline profile design, users have been given tools to clearly demarcate various stages of life. A thin, light blue line now graces the center of each Timeline profile. The profile ascends with each new status update, picture upload, check-in to "Places," or comment by another user, meaning that the newest interactions and posts on each Facebook Timeline page are displayed at the top, while the oldest interactions and posts are displayed at the bottom of each profile.

On the right hand sidebar of each Timeline profile, a list of dates is displayed, with "Now" at the top and "Born" at the bottom. Immediately following "Now" is displayed the preceding month, followed by the six most recent years in relation to the current year (a screen capture of this list of dates may be found below in Fig. B). Each of these dates/demarcations is clickable and, when clicked, allows the individual viewing the profile page to immediately be taken to the Facebook interactions and posts that were made by the profile owner during the span of time specified.
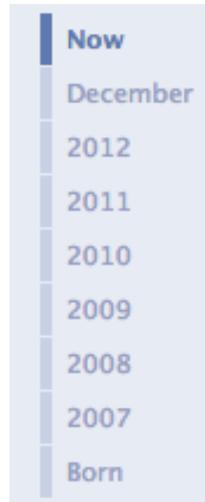
(Fig. B)

When an individual viewing a Timeline profile clicks the "Born" tab, he/she is taken to a post at

the very bottom of the profile, the contents of which specifies the profile owner's birthday and, if

the profile owner has uploaded one, a picture associated with his/her birth (below, in Fig. C, is a

depiction of what is displayed when clicking on the "Born" tab; names and dates have been

blurred to protect the anonymity of this participant).

(Fig. C)

In this way, a life story told through the Facebook Timeline profile can be said to have a clearly

demarcated "beginning."

All participants' profiles contain the "Born" tab at their bottom (beginning) of their

Timelines; however, the content developed therein is variable among each individual. Of the 15

participants observed in the study, six participants included their date of birth and hometown

within the "Birth" Lifetime event:
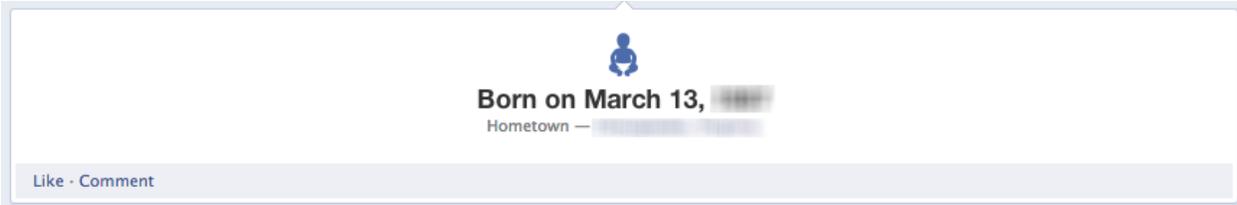
Three participants included only their date of birth within the "Birth" tab at the beginning of their

profiles:
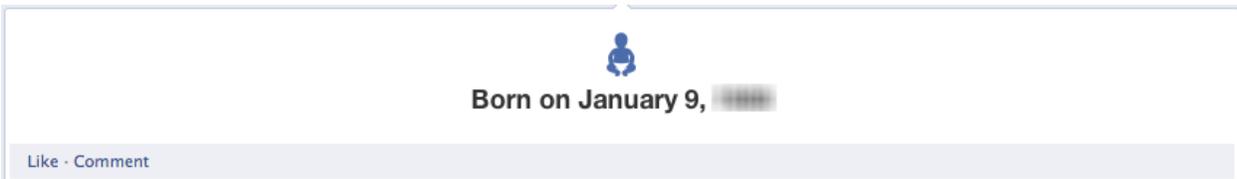
Two participants identified their parent(s) within the born tab. Only one of these two

participants included his birth date along with the identification of his parents:

Two participants included birth date, hometown, and an identification of their parents within the

"Born" tab:

Only two participants included no birth date within the "Born" tab. One of these participants

included her hometown; however, the other participant included no information within her

"Born" tab on her Timeline profile:

It is interesting to note that while users have the ability to upload a picture associated with their

birth, none of the observed participants' profiles contained one within the "Born" tab.

Any posts by the profile owner and interactions by his/her friends between the "Born"

and "Now" demarcations would represent the logical "middle" of life stories told through the

Facebook Timeline profile. This "middle" section of a Facebook Timeline profile contains the

primary thrust of interactions of characters, unfolding of themes, and progression of life story

sequences. In addition to posting status updates related to one's life events or interacting with

others, Timeline profile users are able report their current location by checking into "Places,"

upload pictures and tag themselves and others, and add "Life Events" to their Timelines.

Checking into "Places" gives users the ability to report their current location by allowing them to

post a status update with an attached location tag that places a blip, representing their location,

on a digital map. Regarding pictures, users are able to upload and categorize collections of

pictures into various albums as they see fit; they are also able to attach captions and tag

themselves and others in pictures, further emphasizing the social nature of the Facebook

Timeline. Perhaps, however, the most significant tool given to users to develop their life stories

through the Facebook Timeline is the "Life Event" tool.

Utilizing the "Life Event" tool, depicted in the picture below, gives Facebook Timeline

users the ability to access a drop-down menu where they may select from a number of life events

that can be added to their Timeline to provide further information and development to their life

story.

(Fig. D)

Each of the life event categories, depicted in the picture above, when selected, provides the user

wealth of additional options to provide exact specification of the life event they wish to add to

their Timeline profile. When an individual chooses the appropriate specification and adds a Life

Event to their Timeline profile, he/she is given the ability to add text in order to describe the

event, as well as to upload a picture in order to serve as a kind of visual memoir. This tool,

however, is completely optional; hence, an individual who adds more life events may be said to

have a "more developed" depiction of his/her life story than an individual who choose not to add

any life events to his/her Facebook Timelines.

The "middle" sections of participants' Timelines were found to be devoted primarily to

the unfolding of the narrative content themes discussed in response to RQ3. While specific

examples of narrative content will be provided within the response to RQ3, it is worth

mentioning that after observing each of the participants' profiles, it was found that the

overwhelming majority of content within the "middle" section addresses issues/topics that were

relevant to the participant at the time of posting. In other words, although the "middle" section is

composed of content that was developed and posted in the past, the content does not change

tense—if the profile operator posts content in the present tense, it will always remain in the

present tense on that user's profile. Examples of status update (the most prominently used

Facebook implementation observed on participants' profiles) content from the "middle" section

of participants' profiles are as follows (each of the following screen captured pieces of content

derive from different participants; names have been removed to protect anonymity):

This weather is stupid and I hate it.

_____

The waves decided to be awesome for my birthday today :-)

_____

Hillsong's new cd is prettyyyy good

_____

Had the best week here. Feeling very spoiled and blessed.

Each of the examples just provided reflect content that was developed and posted in the past by

participants. Although these pieces of content that contribute to the overall life narrative of

participants were developed and shared in the past, it is clear from the examples that they still

read as though they address the present.

In addition to status updates, as depicted in the examples above, participants were found

to use the "middle" section of their profiles to upload photos pertaining to life events and other

interests and to share hyperlinks to content on extant websites. Along with picture uploads and

hyperlink shares, participants would often provide a short explanation of what they were

uploading or sharing, seemingly in order to provide clarification to individuals who may view

their profiles. The following is a selection of examples from various participants demonstrating

how pictures and hyperlinks are used within the "middle" section of Timeline user profiles:

Im not sure why this tot has a better voice than me....
BUTTT cant you totally see me being the hype girl, that
never is singing the right words and only dancing next to
the singing bff hahah!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McElfcfFICE

Lovin the new Mac! I think the studio's done...for now.

If anyone needs help with recording a demo or something
let me know!

I am a sweeeepy guy http://t.co/DIXsqduy

this parody will make you LAUGH!

Meet the Actress Who Parodied Anne Hathaway in 'Les Miserables' Spoof
shar.es

Emma Fitzpatrick, who stars in the parody video of Anne Hathaway's "I

The final observed implementation used by participants within the "middle" section of their profiles is the previously discussed "Life Event" tool. Although the "Life Event" tool provides a significant amount of options for users to provide detail and depth to their Timeline life narrative, only a handful of instances of its usage was observed among participants. The following is a selection of examples displaying the usage of the "Life Event" tool in the "middle" section of participants' Timeline profiles:
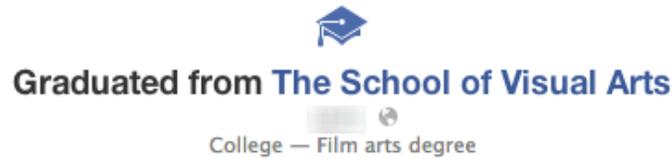
In a Relationship with
March 21,

Married

See Friendship

Graduated from The School of Visual Arts

College — Film arts degree

_____

Started Working at Weis Markets

— Cashier

While it is easy to identify the "beginning" and "middle" components of a life story told through the Facebook Timeline, accurately pinpointing the "end" is slightly more difficult. This is because the Facebook Timeline allows for the possibility of a continuous flow of information on a user's profile page, as long as the user wishes to continue posting and interacting with others. Although the frequency differed between all 15 participants, all Timeline profiles observed during the course of this study were updated in some continuous fashion—no participant indicated at any point on their profile that they would cease activity and "end" the development of their life story through Facebook.

Therefore, the "end" of a life story told through the Facebook Timeline would be the most current information posted or the most current interaction(s) on a Timeline profile page at the time of viewing. The most recently posted information (labeled "Now" on the sidebar image in the preceding pages) is found at the top of a user's Timeline profile page and may be considered a "soft ending" indicating that more information can be posted and more interaction can take place at any time, as long as the Facebook user wishes to continue managing his/her Timeline profile. Now that an answer to RQ1 has been discussed, an answer to RQ2 will be provided.

Response to RQ2

RQ2: How is there an interaction of characters present on Facebook users'

Timeline profiles?

In addition to providing options to demarcate various stages of life, the Timeline profile design also acts as a canvas upon which Facebook users can provide further depth and definition to their stories by hosting interactions of and between "characters." These interactions primarily occupy two forms: interactions of the self and interactions with others. Facebook then offers a variety of tools that Facebook users can utilize in order to interact with others and disseminate interactions of the self. Before highlighting these tools and then discussing their usage in response to RQ3, a brief description of interactions of the self and interactions with others will be provided.

After analyzing participant Facebook Timelines, the researcher identified two interactions (interactions of self and interactions with others). Interactions of the self refer to posts or alterations that a Facebook user makes to his/her own profile that are self-interested in nature. Status updates (depicted in Fig. E) are the primary tool through which these interactions are shared on a user's profile.
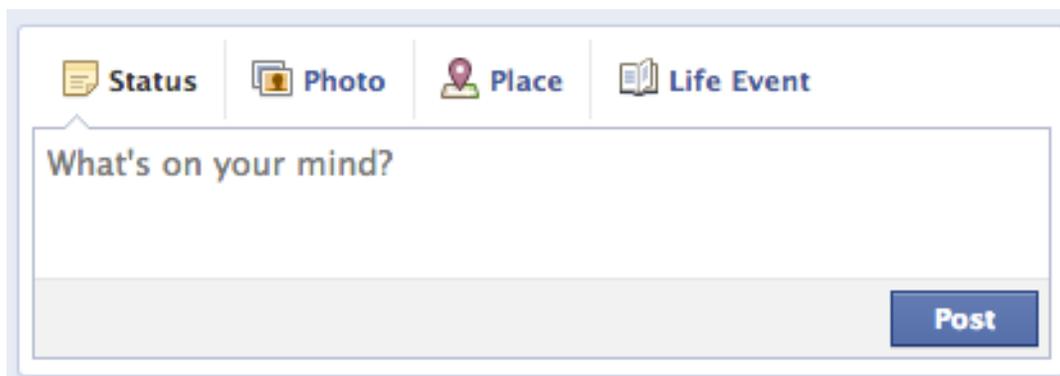
(Fig. E)

Such interactions may vary widely in specific subject matter, but these interactions generally

offer the user's commentary on past, current, or future life events:

> I love finding out that I owe the government nothing and in
> fact, they're sending ME money! Tax season just got a little
> happier.

_____

> I try to incorporate the phrase "Am I right, ladies?" at least
> weekly in my teaching.

_____

> I hate Microsoft because Microsoft hates me.
>
> I hope Apple puts them out of business.

_____

> i can't believe how wrinkled my pants were today--must
> have grabbed the wrong ones!!! ugh. embarrassing...

As referenced from the above examples, interactions of the self may address a wide variety of

content, but they are self-serving/motivated in the sense that they simply serve to voice the

opinions and feelings of the profile owner and do not explicitly seek to elicit interactions with

other users. This specific type of interaction was present on all 15 Facebook Timeline profiles

examined by the researcher. Given the social landscape of Facebook, users' friends may still

comment, like, or share these status updates, but they have been categorized separately from

interactions with others because these reports neither directly reference others nor contain any

indication of the user seeking interactions with other Facebook users.

Interactions with others, as the phrase suggests, indicates users' posts that directly

reference other Facebook users, friends, and/or family. When a Facebook user directly

references others, he/she is prompted with the option to "tag" them. Examples of interactions

with others and "tagging" are as follows (names have been changed in order to protect the

anonymity of participants; italicized names represent individuals who were "tagged"): "Enjoying

some time in PA with *Bob*, *Joan*, and *Craig*." "Sooooooo excited for my cousin *Jill*! Sooooooo

grateful for love and laughter!!!" "Congrats *Helen* on your Oscar for Inocente! Glad to see you

are doing amazing things girl!" "Doing work with *Ann* in the office to the sounds of steady

snores from a couple cubes over. The history department must've had a rough weekend." "So

happy for one of my oldest and best friends who got engaged yesterday! Love is in the air or

somethin'! Congratulations *Ellen* and *Dan*! So happy for you two!" When one Facebook user

tags another Facebook user, as represented by the italics in the examples above, a notification is

sent to the tagged user(s) informing them of their reference and creating the opportunity for

further interactions between the tagged user and the user who tagged them. Commentary and

discussion on user's status updates represent one form of interacting with others and are

exemplified in the following:

Referring to the above examples, the content at the top of the post was posted by the participant

on their own Timeline profile; whereas, others viewing the participant's Timeline post the

content found beneath.

Another form of interaction with others that can take place on a user's Timeline profile is

found when one Facebook user comments directly on another Facebook user's Timeline. As

deduced from observation during this study, when a Facebook user posts a message on another

user's profile page, the message appears at the top of their Timeline until more current

information, as it is posted, pushes it further down the Timeline. A post from one user to another

is identifiable by a right-pointing arrow between the two Facebook user's names at the top of the

post, as depicted in the following examples:

happy valentine's day to one of my favorite couples!
wishing you a "date night" sometime soon (maybe with thai
curry lol)?!!?

_____

I hope you are watching RHOBH. ___ and ___ are
everything we need.

The interactions with others depicted in the preceding examples were found to be a common

occurrence on each participant's Timeline profile, although the amount varied by individual

participant. Users are given the ability to write response comments to any message posted on

their wall by another Facebook user and, often, this type of interaction was found to encourage

lengthy dialogues or discussions between the profile operators, the individuals who posted on

their profile, and potentially even others who are friends with the profile operator, may or may

not have been directly referenced and chose to comment on the post:

In the above example, the participant received a message on her Timeline wall from another

friend, which led to interactions between the participant, the friend that posted on her wall, and

other friends/family who happened to see the post and chose to respond.

A slight difference exists in the message prompt when a user is posting on his/her own

Timeline profile (depicted in Fig. E) versus when he/she is posting on another user's Timeline.

When posting a comment on another user's Timeline profile, a slightly different message box is

provided (depicted in Fig. F).
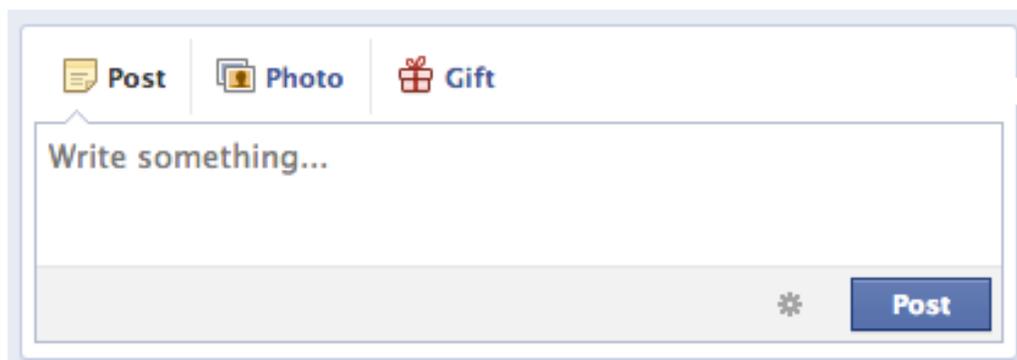
(Fig. F)

Whereas with status updates on a user's own Timeline profile, users are elicited to share what is on their own mind, the prompt for writing on another user's Timeline profile suggests writing something pertinent to the user whose page is being viewed. Simply by analyzing the message prompt that appears when a user views his/her own Timeline profile as well as the prompt that appears when a user views another individual's Timeline profile with whom they are Facebook friends, it can be understood how and why users may choose to post self-motivated/self-serving content on their own status updates and how and why they are elicited to post content pertinent to others on their Facebook friends' Timeline profiles. Like interactions of self, interactions with others were also found to be present on all 15 Facebook Timeline profiles that were analyzed by the researcher.

In addition to directly referencing and/or tagging others in status updates, participants were found to have frequently uploaded photos of either just themselves or themselves with a various number of friends. When participants uploaded pictures of themselves with others, they often would tag the other individuals in the picture, which works similarly to tagging in status updates—the users who are tagged are sent notifications informing them that they have been tagged in a picture and can select to view that picture and interact in a comment box associated with the image. Examples of pictures uploaded including tags/interactions with others were photos of family vacations, photos with friends at social events, photos with coworkers at work functions, and photos depicting the participant with his/her romantic partner. All 15 participating Timeline profiles users were found to have uploaded pictures and tagged themselves or others at some point over the course of this study. Extended interactions with others were found to take place in a handful of circumstances on pictures, especially on pictures containing multiple individuals who were all tagged by the participant who uploaded the photo.

Marcus   67

Another form of interaction between individuals through the Timeline profile design may take place in the form of gift giving (the "Gift" tab can be seen in Fig. E above). Facebook users are given the ability to give gifts to their Facebook friends by clicking the "Gift" tab. These gifts are practically usable by the individual receiving the gift (e.g. an iTunes or Starbucks gift card) and range widely in monetary value. When gifts are sent to other users, they are given a notification and interaction between the user who gives the gift and the user who receives the gift may ensue. Although this is a viable option for interaction with others amongst Facebook users, gift giving was not observed on any of the 15 Facebook Timeline profiles over the course of the study.

Therefore, by way of directly responding to RQ2, an interaction of characters may take place within Facebook Timeline profiles either through interactions of self (content developed primarily to serve the interests of the profile user) and interactions with others (content developed primarily to evoke interaction with other Facebook users). Although, as previously mentioned, friends of a Facebook user can generally leave comments on any content within a Facebook user's Timeline profile, it is clear from analyzing each of the 15 Timeline user profiles that there is a clear difference between life story content that seeks to interact with others and content that is simply meant to self-report on the Facebook Timeline.

Response to RQ3

RQ3: What comprehensive narrative themes are communicated by Facebook users through their Timeline profiles?

After analyzing participants' Facebook Timeline profiles for a one-month period, a number of consistent narrative themes were found to be present within content posted by users and within interactions with others. The primary Facebook implementations that contained the

content contributing to the discovery of these comprehensive themes were status updates, posts

by others, uploaded pictures, and the development of users' Facebook Timelines through

utilizing the "Life Event" tool. The following is a discussion of the prevalent themes that

emerged after observing posts and interactions on participants' Facebook Timelines (the order of

the following themes is not reflective of their importance).

Theme One – Narratives of Affiliation and Dislike

Affiliative content was found to be a consistent narrative theme throughout multiple

participants' Timelines. This content was specifically developed and posted by participants in

order to display their affinity for or their affiliation with a wide variety of artifacts and activities.

Some of the artifacts and activities contained within affiliative posts were the participants'

claimed religious beliefs, favorite sports team(s), favorite elements of popular culture (e.g.

television shows, movies, books), and designated political beliefs. The following are examples

of affiliative content narratives as observed on participants' Timelines:

Watched "Stranger Than Fiction" tonight. What a beautiful
movie.

_____

Bill Burr does not get enough credit

_____

I'm just going to say what we're all thinking at this point:
RAND PAUL 2016. #standwthrand #filiblizzard

_____

LA vs LA tonight. Lets go Clips! Lob City

Participants also tended to post content representing their dislikes. The most frequently observed

content expressing dislike addressed participants' dissatisfaction with current popular culture

artifacts, the political climate, and various life events:

Ugh, I'm so tired of people calling America a "democracy".
We are NOT a democracy folks. America is a Constitutional
republic, and it was designed as such to ensure that the will
of the majority never infringed on the rights of minorities.

———————

economy, please pick up. i have bills to pay¡

———————

This wasn't covered on the newscasts by the Liberal Media
but over 650,000 marched to save the lives of the unborn.
50 million unborn children have been murdered in the
abortion mills since Roe V Wade. Obama wants to ban guns
to help save our children – how about ending abortion.

———————

just to shake things up before bed, i will say this: one thing
we ALL can agree on is that obama is MUCH nicer to look at
and listen to. c'mon, ppl....i know there is more than that

There is a clear difference between content that is affiliative and content that expresses

dissatisfaction. A difference in tone and attitude can be perceived by analyzing both sets of

categories depicted above. Whereas affiliative content seems to be lighter and more positive in

tone and attitude, dissatisfaction content reads in a way that is expressly more hostile, discontent,

and negative.

Within this category of narratives is also participants' affiliation and/or dislike with their

jobs, careers, and educations. Content discussing the work life of participants was found to be a

frequent theme on nearly all participants' Timeline profiles. While this type of content was

frequently observed, the detail varied by user:

never leaving an assignment til the last minute again,
spring break and being sick got the best of me, grad school
woes kicking in!

———————

This is why I'm writing my thesis on The Coca-Cola
Company. Because they ROCK. And also because watching
this constitutes as research. Yay.

_____

's network just blocked me from searching for my
local walmart's contact info. Good thing, because I was up
to no good.

Some users would share detailed analyses of situations occurring at work followed by their

opinions through status updates, while others would share ambiguous thoughts on their work

life—likely to protect their work reputation.

      Theme Two – Narratives of Humor

      Another frequently observed narrative content theme across participants' Timelines was

the posting of humorous content. Often, participants were found to share links to online

webcomics, humorous pictures, and popular Internet memes:

_____
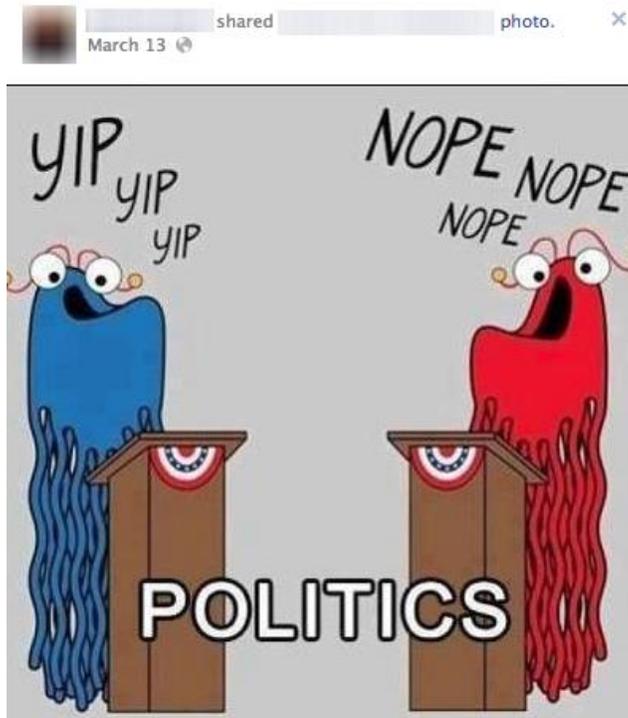
Some participants were found to post original content and/or others' posts tailored to elicit

comedy (e.g. through irony or sarcasm), as exemplified in the following screen captures:

My sis-in-law on Pocahontas: In real life if a raccoon acted like that, you should suspect rabies. #buzzkill

There's a mystery bump on my forehead. I can only conclude that my brain has actually started to explode. On another note, I just finished my thesis. Mystery solved.

Em: , I love you, but I'm watching the Olympics and I've gotta go.
Me: I feel very neglected by you as of late.
Em: Well   , I mean, the Olympics only come every four years but your stories will be here every day...

Can't argue with that.

> I think I'm more excited about the fact that my graduation
> robe makes me feel like I'm from Hogwarts than I am about
> actually graduating.

One participant's entire Timeline during the duration of the researcher's observations seemed to be devoted to the sharing of humorous content—the majority of his posts contained links to comedic pictures and YouTube videos with minimal sharing of the other themes observed by the researcher.

Theme Three – Narratives of Relationships

Narrative content focusing specifically on personal relationships was observed on nearly all participants' Timeline profiles in some form. Content focusing on relationships was one of the most pervasively observed themes on participants' Timeline profiles. This narrative theme is not restricted only to romantic relationships—content with a relational focus was found to encompass romantic relationships, family relationships, and friendship relationships. This theme was observed as participants posted status updates, uploaded pictures, and specified life events through the "Life Event" tool that associated themselves with friends, family, and romantic partners:

> Psh, Flowers? My hubby knows the way to my heart!

> Thankful for friends like   who bring me
> soup, medicine and (my favorite) naked juice when I have
> the flu. I am such a baby when I am sick so I'm glad you put
> up with me anyway :)

>   is probably the greatest person I've ever
> met.

> Had a wonderful lunch today with
> Blessed to have an amazing Grandmother!

_____

♥

In a Relationship
January 17,

Often, these relationship narratives contained content suggesting the participant was attending

some event or engaging in some activity with the associated friends, family, and/or romantic

partners at the very time the narratives were posted to their Facebook Timelines. The following

are examples of status updates and descriptions associated with pictures that display relationship

narratives about current events and activities with friends, family, and romantic partners. The

examples including a hyphen followed by the word "with" are associated with pictures on the

participants' Timelines depicting their engaging in the activities referenced in the description:

LACA w these lovely ladies one last time before break #t bt
#greatweekend ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ —
with ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ and ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

_____

Getting s long awaited face time with ▓▓▓▓! — with
▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

_____

Lunch with great friends

_____

YAY! Our return labels arrived for the wedding invitations!!

_____

These flowers are so beautiful!!! Thanks ▓▓▓▓▓▓ :) ♥

In this way, users viewing the participants' Timeline profiles would be provided with insights

into participants' current relationships through the participants' sharing of relational content.

Participants in romantic (dating, engaged, married) relationships were found to regularly post content regularly pertaining to their relationships. This included the sharing of pictures wherein the participant and his/her romantic partner were tagged, posting status updates addressing the romantic partner and the participant's relationship, and using the "Life Event" tool to demarcate the stages of the relationship, as referenced in examples above. Users viewing these Timeline profiles would be given a clear picture and would be able to track participants' relationships from beginning to end. It is, however, interesting to note that participants made no explicit references on their Timeline profiles to previous romantic relationships (if any existed). It could be possible that due to privacy concerns, participants chose to remove references (status updates, Life Events, pictures, etc…) to previous romantic partners in order to mark a clear separation from them.

Theme Four – Narratives about the Anticipation of the Future

In addition to posting narrative content addressing their thoughts and activities about current events, participants were also observed to share content pertaining to future events. Often, this type of content was posted in an anticipatory form, in which participants would share their excitement about future life events on their Timeline profiles. Generally, this content would reference specific life events or activities, such as an impending vacation or time spent with friends; however, sometimes participants would share emotional content contrasting their current feelings or life situation(s) with a hypothetical, often exaggeratedly paragon future:

Officially booked to be cruisinnn in March! Nassau, Half
Moon Cay and Turks & Caicos...here we comeee

_____

In 1 week I will be Mrs. ▓▓▓▓▓ :)

_____

Announcement two for any of those who missed it. We're
expecting a little ▮▮▮▮ on November 14th!

———————

Some people say that we'll know everything once we arrive
Home. I'd like to believe the opposite. How cool would it be
to philosophize with C.S. Lewis, Thomas Aquinas, and
(perhaps) Aristotle with Jesus at the table, a wry smirk on
His face as we try to unravel the mystery of the Trinity?

———————

Geopolitics will be the death of me. Come on August!!

This content, found to be shared solely through personal status updates, offers users of the

participants' Timeline profiles a glimpse into the future lives and, in some cases, emotional

quality of participants.

Theme Five – Narratives Reminiscing about Past Events

Similar to narrative content forecasting the future, participants were found to share

content reminiscing about events in their past. This was observed to take place in a few primary

ways. First, participants were found to post status updates containing content that shared their

thoughts or feelings on past activities, relationships, or moments in the history of their culture:

:this past week I have finished my undergraduate degree in
television broadcast, got accepted into graduate school
here at ▮▮ and I helped plan the largest ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮: I
am blessed! :)

———————

Had the best week here. Feeling very spoiled and blessed.

———————

… is thankful to be alive. Crashed today going 65, got ran
off the road by some lady. It's weird to think how fragile life
is. In other news, my Camaro freakin rocks (or rocked--I
think it's totaled, waiting to hear from mechanic). Any
other car would

After a Year (June 2011 to June 2012) with FOUR PHASES
with HCG Weight Loss Program – I went from 275 pounds
to 180 pounds – It was the easiest diet I've ever done.

Second, participants would post status updates with content pertaining to the past events that

"tagged" friends and family members who were also involved in some way:

3 years ago I met ▓▓ ▓▓▓▓ at a superbowl party :)

_____

Sitting at work listening to this song right now .. Reminded
me of a certain car ride home from one of our many beach
trips with ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ ...
.."I wanna talk about me wanna talk about I wanna talk
about number one Oh my, me, mine

_____

Honestly had the BEST birthday. I couldn't have asked for a
more perfect day or better friends to spend it with. Thank
you to everyone who came out, all the birthday wishes and
a special thanks to my awesome friends who planned
everything! I'm so blessed! Great way to start 24 ;) — with
▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓ and 5 others.

_____

17 years ago, I was excused from my first grade class to go
to the hospital with my family to meet my baby brother. I
am so thankful God blessed our family with the greatest,
funniest kid ever. I love you ▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓ !! Happy Birthday!

Whereas the first form of past narratives serve as personal reflections, the second form where the

participants tagged friends and family who shared in the past event serve as more collaborative

effort of reminiscing.

Theme Six – Narratives of Personal Achievement

The final comprehensive narrative theme found across participants' Timeline profiles was

the narrative of personal achievement. This type of narrative content focused on highlighting

various forms of achievement or success in the lives of participants. Most frequently, narratives

of personal achievement were found to be focused on the context of career success and/or

educational success.

Unlike affiliative content, which was primarily developed to share thoughts and opinions

on a variety of contexts including jobs/careers, personal achievement narratives were found to

frequently highlight career success by reporting the attainment of a new job, a promotion, the

completion of work projects, and new ideas for work tasks. Personal achievement narratives

were often coupled with emotional exclamations highlighting participants' happiness or relief in

reaction to the achievement. This content was found to be shared primarily through status

updates by participants:

hard work is paying off! I'll be interning this summer at a
major production company in Manhattan! Thank you God
for these opportunities!
_____

thanking God for getting an internship with WSET (ABC
affiliate) Channel 13 here in ▓▓▓▓▓▓!!!:)
_____

When you're editing a wedding video and the clip you've
added has the couple kissing at exactly the moment the
singer says "I wanna kiss your lips." Success!

_____

She got the job!!!

Much like personal achievement narratives focusing on work contexts, as referenced by

the above examples, participants also shared content highlighting achievement in educational

pursuits. Educational achievement narratives were predominately found to highlight the

attainment of high (or desired) grades, the passing of a difficult class, or the completion of

various educational assignments (e.g. papers, exams, etc…). Like career achievement narratives,

educational achievement narratives also frequently contained content exhibiting the participants'

emotions about achieving educational success:

finished my first year of my master's! can't believe it! :)

_____

GOT AN A ON HER JURISPRUDENCE FINAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!

_____

So ready to be done with busy work...a few more weeks and
I'll have my Masters!!!

_____

Two worst assignments this week: done.

_____

Except for the 70 papers yet to be graded...finals are OVER
and I have officially survived my first semester of grad
school!!

       In addition to achievement narratives regarding career and educational pursuits, the

researcher observed general achievement narratives. These achievement narratives pertained to

miscellaneous personal achievements by participants unrelated to professional success. The

following are examples of general achievement narratives as observed on participants'

Timelines:

I'm pretty proud of my new ability to build a roaring fire in
our fireplace from scratch. However, it should be noted that
_____ and I could fill a book with our adventures, each
chapter ending, "And that was the time they almost burned
the house down."

_____

Went to the gym this morning, at the prompting of my
loving roommate, _____. I am so proud of myself
that I'm now going to bake chocolate chip cookies to
celebrate my healthiness.

_____

Perfectly brown on top and not burnt! Maybe I can do this
wife stuff after all. (:

As referenced by the preceding examples, these personal achievement narratives have a more

generalized focus and do not pertain to career or educational accomplishment. Overall, these

generalized achievement narratives were observed less frequently than career/education

achievement narratives.

Discussion

The researcher's observations of participants' Timeline profiles provided a number of

unique insights into how Facebook users share their life stories through the Timeline profile

design. The results of the present study confirm some findings from previous research, while

also suggesting a handful of interesting conclusions related to the narrative paradigm and life

storytelling through Facebook. This subsection is devoted to discussing the findings of the

present study with extant scholarly research and highlighting implications suggested by the data.

Relating to past research on the narrative paradigm and narrative coherence, the

Facebook Timeline profile design proves itself to be a viable life storytelling platform as far as

narrative coherence is concerned. This can be induced from the present study's observations that

participants utilizing the Timeline profile design communicate life narratives with clearly

understandable demarcations of life stages, as well as share interactions of the self and host

interactions with others on their personal profiles. Furthermore, comprehensive narrative content

themes can be deduced from observing individuals' Timeline profiles. These elements satisfy

key criteria for narrative coherence as originally outlined by Fisher and extended through extant

scholarly research (*Human Communication as Narration*; "The Narrative Paradigm"; Habermas

and Bluck 745-750).

Regarding demarcations of life narrative periods, it is easy for observers to ascertain the beginning and middle of Facebook Timeline narratives. Although it was found that the most recently posted content may serve as a "soft" ending, due to the fact that Facebook Timelines are ongoing, it is difficult to specify a "hard" or conclusive ending. This notion is supported by Bernard Williams, as he contends that whereas fictional characters can be narrated as if they are already "whole," human beings must give accounts of their lives acknowledging that they are "incomplete" (Williams 311).

All of the 15 observed participants of the current study were found to post new content to their Timeline profiles on a regular basis—no participants indicated a desired cessation of Facebook activity. In light of this, the researcher was unable to analyze a Timeline profile with an actual ending marked by ceased user activity. Given the social and ongoing nature of Facebook, even if, hypothetically, a user were to post a status indicating he/she would no longer update his/her profile, if his/her profile were to remain active, friends and family over Facebook could still post on his/her Timeline, thereby maintaining the page with updated content. Considering this, it would seem the only way to conclusively end a life story told through the Facebook Timeline would be to terminate the profile when cessation of activity is desired.

The present study served to implicitly confirm prior scholarly notions regarding individuals' motives for using Facebook. Considering individuals tend to host interactions with others on their Timeline profiles, as well as engage in the development of narrative themes that highlight relationships of various kinds with others, the fact that past researchers suggest individuals use Facebook as a hub of relational connections is evident (Sheldon; Yang and Brown; Urista, Qingwen, and Day). Considering the variety of content narratives shared through Timeline, as well as the amount of personal information that can be ascertained by viewing

individuals' personal Timeline profiles, it is easy to understand how individuals might utilize

Facebook for the purposes of "stalking" other individuals of interest (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke,

and Cratty; Young). Evidence of this specific behavior was not observed on any of the

participants' Timeline profiles in the current study due to the fact that it is virtually impossible to

observe this behavior—users could theoretically stalk others without any indication of their

observational presence if they choose not to leave comments or posts on others' Timelines.

Although stalking behavior was not observed, the wealth of information that can be obtained by

even a cursory viewing of another individual's Timeline profile implies the importance of

understanding privacy options offered by Facebook. It is worth mentioned that the studies

conducted by Lyndon, et al., and by Young, were conducted when the Timeline profile design

was just beginning to be released across the Facebook platform. Hence, new studies focusing on

the Timeline profile and facestalking behaviors may be merited.

Given the vast amount of personal information that was observed to be shared through

individuals' Facebook Timelines, it is all the more important to consider prior research

conducted on how Facebook affects individuals' business and professional lives. Studies cited in

the literature review chapter discussed the research of Dryer, and Roberts and Roach, who, in

two different studies, suggest that although Facebook may benefit individuals in many ways, it

also may serve as a risk. Both of these studies were conducted and published before all

Facebook users were shifted to the Timeline profile design. Considering these studies

illuminated the use of Facebook by human resources and business professionals to investigate

potential employees and clients and to assess already existing employees and clients, the

implication arises that it is all the more important for individuals to filter the content they share

on the Timeline. In other words, if the Timeline profile design was created by Facebook to serve

as a representation of users' lives, then individuals hoping for employment or positive rapport

with businesses should tailor their Timeline profiles (a reflection of their life story) to project an

image of credibility and professionalism. Therefore, it becomes especially important to consider

closely the content being shared through individuals' Facebook Timelines. This can be achieved

by taking into account the overall narrative themes shared through individuals' personal profiles.

The observation of distinct comprehensive narrative content themes is an exciting

prospect that should provide multiple avenues for future study (discussed in the following

chapter). The fact that participants' content could generally be classified into six distinct

categories shared with variable frequency across each Timeline profile confirms previous

research suggesting that humans have, for the most part, moved past the point of a common

narrative (Roberts 131). It is also clear from the six content themes and the fact that Timeline

profiles are themselves personal to the individual operating them, that emotivism, as discussed

by Roberts, does indeed reign surpreme—especially in the realm of Facebook (131).

Although the distinct content themes and variable frequency of being posted on

participants' Timelines served as confirmation of Roberts findings of individual emotivism, it is

interesting to note that a category specifically tailored toward personal emotional content was not

developed. After observing the 15 participants' Timeline profiles over the course of a one-

month period, it was clear that although interactions of the self were found to exist on

participants' profiles, content was generally not self-centered and inclusive; friends of

participants were observed to interact on content developed by the participant that did not

mention others. Hence, the resulting implication is that while Roberts may be correct in

assuming that mankind has progressed past the point of a common narrative, perhaps individuals

tailor their life narratives through Facebook in such a way that elicits community interaction across a network of uncommon, yet still united, narratives.

Life narratives shared through the Timeline were found to be relayed through a number of implementations offered by Facebook. These implementations include status updates, photo uploads, and through the development of life events through the "Life Event" tool. These implementations host interactions of the self and interactions with others, which themselves can be viewed as narratives. Especially when users tag others in content shared through the Timeline, "mini-life-narratives" emerge that contain characters and basic narrative sequential plot devices. As such, the implication arises that the Facebook Timeline is a meta-life-narrative platform: an individual's overall life narrative on the Facebook Timeline is itself composed of a compilation of several mini-life-narratives.

Based on the sample of this study, it bears mentioning that the Facebook Timeline profile design provides sufficient implementations for users to share life detailed, emotional, and exciting life narratives that engage friends and viewers alike. This, however, is completely contingent on the storytelling skill of the Timeline profile owner and the time that he/she wishes to devote to developing his/her life story through Facebook. Some semblance of narrative coherence was readily identifiable for all participants within this study. Fiese and Sameroff suggest in their study examining narrative coherence in family structures that the men seemed to communicate with more narrative coherence than women (35). Although their study applied the narrative paradigm to a different context, it is interesting, nonetheless, to consider that narrative coherence was achieved by both genders through their Facebook Timelines.

It is somewhat difficult to compare comprehensively the findings of the present study with past research. This is because this study marks the first time that the paradigmatic

component of narrative coherence has been extensively applied to the Facebook Timeline profile design. As such, this study breaks new ground in the practical application of the narrative paradigm. This research also serves to extend individuals' understanding of how life storytelling occurs through Facebook. There are myriad possibilities for further research, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 – Limitations, Recommendations for Future Research, and Conclusion

This study was successful in furthering research on both the application of narrative paradigm and the Facebook Timeline. As stated previously, little, if any, research exists on the Facebook Timeline profile design. This study is the first to practically apply elements of Fisher's narrative paradigm to the Facebook Timeline profile design. As such, further research utilizing the narrative paradigm is merited, as is research focusing on the Facebook Timeline as the primary artifact. The following pages will be devoted to discussing limitations with the current study and proposing recommendations for how future research can expand upon the findings of this study.

Limitations

This study, while worthwhile in providing further understanding of Facebook's Timeline profile design and Fisher's narrative paradigm, was not without limitations. The primary limitations are concerned with the scope of the study, the execution of the analysis, and associated issues regarding the inclusion of participants. A brief discussion of each of these limitations will be provided before suggesting possibilities for further research.

Although this analysis was successful in its exploration of the developed research questions, the study itself was limited in scope. That is, this study only took into account how Facebook Timeline users meet the criteria of narrative coherence as it is understood through the lens of Fisher's narrative paradigm. Narrative coherence, however, is only one component of narrative rationality within the narrative paradigm. Narrative rationality also contains the component of narrative fidelity, which, if applied to a future study, could provide an entirely new set of standards by which to analyze the Facebook Timeline profile design.

In addition to the limitation of the overall study's scope, the narrative paradigm itself may serve as a limitation of its own. Previous studies (mentioned in the literature review as well as others) have successfully applied the narrative paradigm in a variety of ways; however, many of these studies examine specific stories or overarching narratives, assess those narratives in terms of their dissemination of cultural values and their narrative worth, and generally apply the fidelity portion of narrative rationality, rather than narrative coherence. The present study was successful in demonstrating that guiding precepts of the narrative paradigm (specifically narrative coherence) can be applied to artifacts such as the Facebook Timeline; however, it is more than likely that a study such as this can be criticized (for being subjective rather than objective) considering that one researcher's experience applying the narrative paradigm to a specific artifact may interpretively vary from another researcher's application of the paradigm to the same artifact. This might especially be the case if researchers hail from separate cultures, as they would likely adhere to their acquired cultural values when making assessments on the basis of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity.

This study's third primary limitation is centered on the participants of the study. The researcher did not collect certain demographic information such as age and ethnicity, which would have aided in understanding the data derived from participants' Facebook profiles. Also, although utilizing participants provided some aid in the furtherance of research on Facebook and the narrative paradigm, elements of this specific study could technically have been conducted without the recruitment of participants and analysis of real individuals' Timeline profiles. This limitation is linked to the fact that this study only considered the element of narrative coherence from Fisher's narrative paradigm. Analyzing the narrative coherence of Facebook Timelines could, in theory, be achieved simply by examining the tools provided by Facebook to Timeline

users. Participants would have aided in this study especially if it had considered narrative

fidelity, as analyzing fidelity requires directly examining the narratives shared by individuals,

which would be an exciting opportunity for further research.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

Addressing the limitations of the present study could allow researchers to conduct similar

studies analyzing narrative coherence on Facebook as well as other artifacts. This study,

although successful, was not comprehensive. At the time of the completion of this study, a

number of future research possibilities have become apparent that scholars could pursue and

develop in order to extend scholarly understanding on how individuals share life stories through

various channels. The following is a selection of suggestions regarding future research

recommendations related to the current study.

While conducting the present study, it was found that individuals compose content on

their personal Timeline profiles that represent either self-interaction or other-focused interaction.

While analyzing participants' Timeline profiles, there were a number of instances on multiple

participants' profiles in which a status update containing self-focused content was posted that

elicited widespread interaction between the profile owner and his/her Facebook friends (the

interaction took place within the "Comments" section of the status update). This was interesting

considering the posted content elicited discussion between multiple individuals yet did not "Tag"

or directly mention other Facebook users. In light of this discovery, future research could be

conducted that seeks to analyze content that is self-focused and determine if there is any

correlation between thematic content and the elicitation of discussion. Such a study could utilize

symbolic convergence theory to determine whether fantasy themes/fantasy chains have a role in

eliciting embedded interaction with others in Facebook status updates that are self-focused.

This study was beneficial in its broad approach to applying the narrative paradigm to the Facebook Timeline. Future studies could build off of the present study by conducting in-depth analyses of the specific components of the Facebook Timeline highlighted within the study. For example, future studies could be constructed that utilize a content analysis to examine strictly the content of status updates posted by Facebook users on their own Timeline profiles and could emphasize the differences in posted content between genders. Age differences could also be another factor considered in the same or a similar study. It is possible and likely that the Timeline profiles of digital natives would differ in some ways from the Timeline profiles of digital immigrants.

The Timeline profile design is unique in its guiding mission to allow users to share their life story with others. However, other social networking websites also exist that allow users to share personal information and construct narratives as they see fit. Future studies, then, could be conducted applying the component of narrative coherence to other social networking platforms. For example, narrative coherence could be applied to LinkedIn profiles in order to determine the consistency of shared professional narratives. Considering Twitter strives to create global conversations through its social platform, future researchers could also analyze how individuals host interactions of self and interactions with others through their Twitter profiles. It would also be interesting for future researchers to apply elements of the narrative paradigm within a study that compares individuals' narratives across multiple social networks. For example, such a study could examine narrative differences/similarities between individuals' Facebook Timelines and LinkedIn accounts; this would be interesting due to the differing guiding focuses of each social network—Facebook is devoted to personal use/overall life narratives, LinkedIn is devoted to professional/career profile development. Also, considering Erikson's research on the affects of

celebrities (specifically politicians) using Facebook to connect with the public, future research could be conducted that focuses on applying the narrative paradigm to celebrities' public Facebook Timeline fan pages.

Facebook acts as host not only to personal profiles but also to professional profiles developed by organizations and brands to connect with consumers on a widespread scale. As such, future researchers could apply the narrative paradigm to public brand and organizational Facebook Timelines in order to assess how (and through which Facebook implementations) coherence is created and maintained. Public brand and organizational Facebook Timelines offer an exceptional landscape to observe interactions between Facebook users because they often implement content marketing strategies focused on eliciting user interactions.

Another interesting possibility for future research would be to examine the Facebook Timelines of users who have passed away. In light of the question and subsequent discussion of recent legislation regarding what happens to Facebook profiles after death, researchers could examine how deceased individuals are memorialized by others on their Timeline profiles (Fama). Examining the profiles of deceased individuals would technically offer the most "complete" observation of individuals life narratives, as there would be a clear ending, in addition to the already identifiable beginning and middle sections.

Future studies could focus specifically on differences in the ways narratives are developed between genders. Specifically, researchers could apply the six narrative content themes found in the present study in order to assess how both genders develop those themes on their Facebook Timelines. This study could also seek to analyze what themes are found to be most prevalent for each gender.

Conclusion

Considering the rapid rate at which technology changes, it is unknown for how long the Timeline profile design will remain a part of the Facebook landscape. This study has provided insight into the notion that for the remainder of the Timeline's existence, it will continue to be a powerful tool in the sharing of coherent life stories for Facebook users. Communication researchers should take advantage of the opportunity given them by the Timeline profile design to examine individuals' life narratives and how they are shared within a popular social media sphere of influence.

A vast amount of research exists on both Fisher's narrative paradigm and the Facebook platform; however, this study marks the first known time that narrative coherence, an integral component of the narrative paradigm, has been directly applied to the Facebook Timeline profile design. This study may serve as a foundation from which further practical applications of the narrative paradigm toward social media websites may be developed. After all, the examination of social media websites provides researchers with a unique glimpse into individuals' publicly shared lives and life stories. This study should not be the last that utilizes the narrative paradigm toward social media life storytelling.

A number of interesting conclusions regarding how individuals' share their life story through the Facebook Timeline have been suggested by this study. These conclusions include the hosting of interactions of the self and interactions with others on individuals' Facebook Timelines, the clearly observable demarcations of a beginning, middle, and "soft" ending of individuals' life stories, and the discovery of six comprehensive narrative content themes. The occurrence of these elements on each of the 15 participants' Timeline profiles suggests that life storytelling narrative coherence is widely achieved by Facebook users on their personal profiles.

Further research could utilize this study as a foundation, and scholars would do well to consider and correct the noted limitations of the current study when conducted future research utilizing the narrative paradigm toward social media platforms. A number of recommendations for further research have been provided that can be used in the development of further studies in this area of focus. Research on life storytelling will continue to evolve, just as individuals' lives continue to develop in exciting, unpredictable ways.

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