The private and the public in online presentations of the self

A critical development of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective

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Summary

Erving Goffman is an important sociologist whose dramaturgical perspective on social interaction and presentation of the self is classical within sociology. However, social interaction and presentations of the self occurs increasingly more online. Goffman's perspective is, unfortunately, limited to face-to-face interaction. The aim of this study is to discuss how far Goffman's dramaturgical perspective can take us in a discussion on the private and the public in online presentations of the self in Facebook and personal blogs. The aim is specified with the following research questions: What are the possible constrains and possibilities? What happens to the central concepts in the model? How can the model be critically developed to online presentations of the self? The discussion connects to the distinction between the private and the public, as it implicitly is presented in Goffman's model.

The discussion draws on empirical material consisting of reflections of ten individuals on their social practices on Facebook and personal blogs. As all respondents use both applications, it opens up for a comparison between how they present themselves in each forum.

All respondents presented themselves differently on Facebook compared to their personal blogs. Goffman's model works better on self-presentations on Facebook than on personal blogs, which are contradictive to the model. Facebook is about staging a successful character. Conversely, the idea with the personal blog was to stage the front stage as a backstage. Performances on the personal blog constitute an inverted model where the intimate is sublimated and ritualized. Additionally, impression management follows an altered logic of selective opening of the backstage. However, the performances are just as, if not even more, theatrical and dramaturgical as performances in Goffman's model. Moreover, social situations on Facebook and personal blogs are dissimilar to face-to-face situations. Both settings can be seen as an abstract sociability rather than a concrete sociability. There is no immediate co-presence between the interactants which has the consequence of creating an uncertainty of in front of whom the performance actually is held, which in addition makes the social situation diffuse, scattered and harder to define.

Key words

Goffman, Presentation of the Self, Private, Public, Mediated Interaction, Facebook, Personal Blogs, Social media, Impression Management, Backstage, Front Stage, Performance, Rituals.

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Contents

We do not content ourselves with the life we have in ourselves and in our own being; we desire to live an imaginary life in the mind of others, and for this purpose we endeavour to shine. We labour unceasingly to adorn and preserve this imaginary existence and neglect the real.

Blaise Pascal, 1660 (thought 147)

1. Introduction

How and why the dramaturgical perspective of Erving Goffman is relevant for an understanding of the distinction between the private and the public in online social practices is explained and motivated in this introductory chapter. The research objective, research questions and demarcations for the study are also presented.

1.1. Opening

The distinction between the private and public is a core dichotomy within sociology (Slater, 1998, p. 138) and one of the grand dichotomies of Western thought (Weintraub, 1997, p. 1). The dichotomy has been a point of departure for different types of analysis (see for example Weintraub, 1997, for an exposition). A *dramaturgical perspective* emphasizes the dichotomy on the micro-level of social interaction and social behavior. It accentuates the dichotomy with regards to public and private life, making a distinction between hidden and visible information, between openness and secrecy. The dichotomy in this manner designates "fundamental ordering categories in everyday life" (Bailey, 2000, p. 384) where the private constitutes a "realm of personal intimacy, of relationships which are to be defended from public scrutiny or interference, of values which cannot or should not be experienced in public life" (Slater, 1998, p. 140).

Some have argued that behaviours associated with each of these two spheres has transformed over time. In what Elias (1939) labelled the *civilizing process* intimate behaviour has successively been considered something that shall be kept in private. "[T]he lives of human beings are increasingly split between an intimate and public sphere, between secret and public behaviour" (Elias, 1939, p. 160). Sennett (1977) claimed that the balance between public and private life defines the characteristics of a society. Sennett delineates a change in the balance between the private and the public (or what privacy means) from the 1700s to the modern world. An *intimate society* has emerged, where the public life has declined and the inward private world has grown (Sennett, 1977)[3].

However, sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-1982) was first to talk in terms of a dramaturgical perspective. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) Goffman used the theatre as the leading metaphor for presentations of the self in social interaction. He treated individuals as performers, similar to actors on the stage of a theatre. Following the theatrical metaphor Goffman made a distinction between *backstage* and *front stage*, which has similarities to the boundary between private, and public life (i.e. Wolfe, 1997, p. 182-183). Backstage connects to the private realm where the audience is absent and the "performer can relax, he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 115). As Wolfe (1997) suggests, Goffman "leaves the impression that the real reality is always offstage and behind closed doors. Indeed, the door may be the most important of all Goffman's images... the area behind the door allows people to let off the steam" (Wolfe, 1997, p. 183). Performances are held in the front stage which constitutes the public and social realm. To perform is to engage in *impression management*

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[3] *See also the five volumes of Aries and Duby* (1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991) *who covers the history of private life from pagan Rome to the modern times of the 1990s.*

and gain control over the expressions exuded about them in social situations where they are in the immediate presence of each other. Depending whom the other interactants are, each individual adapt their behavior to their definition of the situation as they want to present an idealized picture of them. Impression management is about separating backstage information and behavior from the front stage-performance. It is an information game where some information must stay hidden if one successfully wants to stage a character. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is, in that sense, very much about the distinction between the private and the public.

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is, unfortunately, limited to face-to-face interaction[4]. However, social interaction on the web is not unproblematic to interpret as social interaction as the concept is understood by Goffman, where the interactants immediately are present in front of each other. Rettie (2009) argued that Goffman is better applied to social interaction on synchronous media (i.e. phone calls) rather than asynchronous (i.e. e-mail). Nevertheless, efforts to develop Goffman's dramaturgical model to mediated contexts has already been made. Meyrowitz (1985) is perhaps the best-known example of that. Unfortunately, his analysis is dated to the mid-eighties and limited to television and there is a huge difference between mass/broadcasting media like television and the web of today. The web of today is interactive and collaborative in a way that also makes it incomparable to previous versions of the web. As sociologist Manuel Castells argues; we now live with the web rather than watch it (Castells, 2009, p. 64). Social interaction has intensified with forums on the web like Facebook, Twitter and blogs that constitute a large and meaningful part of contemporary social life. Moreover, people are more and more open with their real names on these forums which add an extra dimension, or stage, to social life and presentations of the self, which also is part of the motivation for using Goffman in this thesis. The web and how it is used has "raised questions regarding the ways in which the boundaries between public and private are (re)negotiated" (Lehmuskallio, 2009, p. 2). However, the focus on privacy within the contemporary web mainly deals with surveillance and personal security and not so much on privacy in terms of "connotations of the personal, of secrets, and of intimacy" (West, Lewis, & Currie, 2009, p. 616). A part of my ambition with this study has been to explore this gap. It has been argued that people experience insecurity towards decisions regarding how they shall present themselves and what kind of information that they want to reveal (Sjöberg, 2010, p. 15). Hence, I believe that a dramaturgical accentuating of the private/public dichotomy has gained new applicability, and importance, with regards to how the contemporary web is used in ordinary people's everyday lives.

Moreover, it has been argued that comparisons between different kinds of technologies are missing within online privacy studies (Lehmuskallio, 2009). This study has the ambition to compare self-presentations on Facebook and personal blogs. Both applications are well known and widespread in use. Facebook is a social networking service (SNS) that focuses on reflecting and building on the users' social network and communicative activities. A blog is an interactive publishing platform/tool where the individual publishes longer texts and/or images in blog posts and shares them in public. What kind of information individuals reveal in these forums, and in front of whom they do it, are the underlying themes for this thesis. Where, and how, they draw their

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[4] However, Goffman has not constantly excluded media. Ytreberg (2002) differs between an 'early' and 'late' Goffman. The dramaturgical perspective (1959) belongs to the 'early Goffman who limited his analyzes to face-to-face interaction. The works of the late Goffman (e.g. Goffman, 1974; 1979; 1981), marked a turn to mass media (Ytreberg, 2002, p. 483). However, Goffman's theoretical work on mass media has received little attention (Ytreberg, 2002). On the contrary, Pinch (2010) argued that the early Goffman constitutes a "hidden sociology of technology" (Pinch, 2010, p. 412) as his works from this period are filled with materiality and technology, even if they are not explicitly dealt with.

boundaries is the central issue that I want to study and connect to the dramaturgical perspective of Goffman, outlined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959).*

1.2. Aim and research questions

The aim with this thesis is to discuss Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on social practices and presentations of the self in Facebook and personal blogs respectively, and in comparison. As Goffman's perspective connects to the private/public dichotomy, which also seems to be an important issue within the web, the study has a focus on this distinction. This aim is specified in the following research questions:

- *How far can Goffman's dramaturgical perspective take us in a discussion on social practices and self-presentations within the online environments of Facebook and personal blogs? What are the constraints and possibilities?*

- *How can Goffman's dramaturgical model be critically developed to understand the online social practices and self-presentations on Facebook and personal blogs respectively?*

- *What happens with the central concepts in Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, such as the social situation, expressions 'given' and 'given off', back/front stage and impression management, within these two environments, respectively?*

The discussion draws on empirical data consisting of statements from 10 individuals that use both Facebook and have a personal blog. This study focuses on individuals personal reflections on how they want to present themselves in these two forums. It differs from previous research that foremost use observations and content analysis. However, it is the negotiation and regulation between the private and the public that I want to highlight and study, which observations and content analysis never can grasp. As the respondents use both applications it opens up for a comparison between the respondents reflections on their behaviors and self-presentations on these two online environments.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is explained in detail in the next chapter (2). Previous research where Goffman's model has been used on mediated interaction, and neighbouring research, is highlighted in the subsequent chapter (3). The methodological and theoretical choices related to collection and analysis of the data are described, motivated and problematized in the next chapter (4).

The empirical findings regarding Facebook (5) and personal blogs (6) are presented in the next two chapters. The empirical findings on each forum are compared and discussed in relation to the theoretical background, and relevant previous research, in the discussion (7). The findings from the discussion are synthesized and discussed in broader terms in the conclusion (8) which ends with a proposal on possible future research that the findings of the thesis raise.

2. The dramaturgical perspective of Erving Goffman

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on social life is explained in this chapter. As Goffman's model can be described in terms of symbolic interactionism the chapter begins with a section on symbolic interactionism and the self. Thereafter follows an exposition of the most central concepts within Goffman's dramaturgical perspective.

2.1. Symbolic interactionism and the self

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) laid the foundation to what sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900-1986) later on would develop and label as *symbolic interactionism*, which deals with how individuals give meaning to certain aspects of themselves and the social world they live in. Central to the symbolic interactionism perspective is that meaning emerges through social interaction. The self, for example, is the product of social interaction where individuals "interpret each other's gestures and act on the basis of the meaning yielded by the interpretation" (Blumer, 1969, p. 66).

A symbolic interactionism approach to the self involves the reflexive process in which people see themselves as objects, in which the human being is an object to himself. "The human being may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act towards himself" (Ibid., p. 62). Blumer argues that Mead's concept of the self is to be seen as a process rather than a structure or a bounded unit (Ibid., p. 62). In Mead's own words: "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (Mead, 1934, p. 135).

Goffman's conceptualization of the self can by interpreted as symbolic interactionism. The self in Goffman's model is the product of the on-going dramatic interaction between the actor and the audience. This turns us to the fundamental context for Goffman's dramaturgical perspective; face-to-face interaction and social situations.

2.2. Face-to-face interaction and social situations

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is restricted to face-to-face interaction where the participants immediately are present in front of each other in time and space. Interaction in Goffman's terms is "the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence" (Goffman, 1959, p. 26). When two or more individuals are in the immediate presence of each other, they are involved in a mutual expressiveness. Even the mere presence of an individual leaves an impression for the observer. "Individuals, in brief, exude expressions" (Goffman, 1969, p. 5) as Goffman puts it.

Goffman makes a distinction between *expressions given* and *expressions given off*. Expressions given involves "verbal symbols or their substitutes" (Goffman, 1959, p. 14) and are

foremost intentional. Expressions given off include "a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor" (Ibid.) and can be both intended and unintended. The latter embraces non-verbal communication, i.e. physical appearance, facial expressions, gesture, tone of voice and bodily movement and have a "more theatrical and contextual kind" (Ibid., p. 16). Goffman argued that expressions given off are less controllable then expressions given.

As individuals give and give off expressions they consequently present their selves. According to Goffman, they find it important to present a self that is accepted by the audience they are in front of. When individuals enter the presence of each other they simultaneously project a definition of the situation and interpret the definition of the situation projected by others. Together they try to establish a single primary definition of the situation (Ibid., p. 23). Goffman argued that individuals want social life to flow smoothly without *faux pas* and interference and therefore adapts to already established routines and social roles. In that sense, Goffman's analysis deals with how social order is reproduced and maintained in social interaction.

Similarly, Goffman claimed that bodily and vocal behaviour gets standardized through socialization, and spoke in terms of social *ritualization* (Goffman, 1983, p. 3). The late Goffman, who was interested in media, explored the ritualization of gender aspects in magazine advertisements (i.e. Goffman, 1979) where made a distinction between scenes from real life and how they are depicted in advertisements. Goffman (1979) argued that rituals in commercial settings are exaggerations and *hyper-ritualization* of the rituals from real life. Furthermore, he argued that in both advertisements and real life we are "interested in colourful poses; in externalization, but in life we are, in addition, stuck with a considerable amount of dull footage" (ibid., p. 84). It is the editing of "real life" that lies behind the concept of hyper-ritualization.

2.3. Backstage and front stage

Goffman makes a distinction between *backstage* and *front stage* (or *back- and front regions*) and what happens on stage and behind the stage. "Performers appear in the front and back regions; the audience appears only in the front region; and the outsiders are excluded from both regions" (Goffman, 1959, p. 144). When individuals are onstage they are on guard, aware of not giving off the wrong impressions to the present audience. A performance is usually held in front of an intended audience. Individuals apart from this audience are unwelcomed; however, they can be welcomed in the front stage in other situations.

As have been noted, the dividing line between back- and front regions is similar to the distinction between private and the public life. The front stage is the social and public arena where the performers are in front of an audience. Backstage is the private realm, or informal arena, where the individual can relax, and step out of character, in an environment where the audience is absent. It is also here individuals rehearse and prepare their performances. Individuals behave differently in each region; we have backstage and front stage behaviour. Onstage individuals perform and adapt to rituals and roles and it is only backstage that the suppressed behaviour and informal behaviour can appear. "Backstage conduct is one which allows minor acts which might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present and for the region, while front region conduct is one which disallows such potentially offensive behavior" (Ibid., p. 129).

Goffman talks in terms of front region control and the importance of keeping audiences separated from each other by appearing in front of the different audiences "in different front regions

or sequentially in the same region" (Ibid., p. 138). Challenging problems may arise if an outsider stumbles upon a performance that not was meant for him. A glimpse of the back region can destroy the whole performance. The key in Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is found here, i.e. in the regulation of access between the different regions. Goffman's concept of impression management, or techniques of impression management, deals with these issues.

2.4. Impression management

In social situations individuals consciously, or unconsciously, engage in a process where they try to control the impressions others have of them. This is what Goffman (1959) defines as impression management, which also can be understood as putting on a performance (Asplund, 1980, p. 105). Impression management is about "successfully staging a character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 203).

However, as performances are not an individual act, it "would be a limited view and can obscure important differences in the function of the performance for the interaction as a whole" (Ibid., p. 83). Instead, individuals cooperate in the staging of a single performance. That is why the notion of teams is important in Goffman's model. Goffman defines a *team* as "a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained" (Ibid., p. 108). Team-members are reliant on each other because other team-member can expose or destroy the whole performance if they have bad acting skills or adapts to discrepant roles. "Each team-mate is forced to rely on the good conduct and behaviour of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him" (Ibid., p. 88).

There are several techniques of impression management. Defensive attributes and practices like *dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline* and *dramaturgical circumspection* are techniques used to avoid disruptions, incidents and scenes. They are about preventing situations from becoming scenes, which would happen if the back region is exposed to unwelcomed individuals.

Dramaturgical loyalty is used by team-members in order to be loyal to the team and behave in accordance to the team's performance and never "exploit the presence in their front region in order to stage their own show" (Ibid., p. 208). Dramaturgical loyalty is about maintaining a strong team solidarity, keeping distance to the audience, and never becoming sympathetically attached to them so that the team's performance is about to be jeopardized.

With dramaturgical discipline, Goffman meant that in order to successfully stage a character and a team-performance each performer must have a "presence of mind" and "self-control" so that he remembers his parts and does not commit any unintended gestures while performing and is able to save the show if that would be the case (Ibid., p. 210-211). The performer must "show intellectual and emotional involvement in the activity he is presenting" (Ibid. p. 210) but it can also be dangerous if the performer is too deeply engaged with empathy to the performance, because the "presence of mind" and "self-control" can become impaired (Ibid. p. 211). Much of this kind of impression management is found "in the management of one's face and voice" which also is "the crucial test of one's ability as a performer" (Ibid. p. 211).

Dramaturgical circumspection is about carefully selecting the right team-members and making sure that they are dramaturgically loyal and disciplined. Additionally it is about selecting the audience "that will give a minimum of troubles in terms of the show the performer wants to put on

and the show he does not want to have to put on" (Ibid., p. 213). Goffman also argued that short performances are less risky than longer (Ibid.).

The audience, just as the performer, wants social life to flow smoothly without any awkward situations or scenes. Hence, individuals "voluntarily stay away from regions into which they have not been invited" (Ibid., p. 223) and they can warn when they by mistake are entering a back region. In that sense, impression management also includes *protective practices*. As the audience is tactful the performers are *tactfully protected*.

Goffman argued that there are "facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt or make useless of the impression that the performance fosters" (ibid., p. 141). In order for a team to sustain a definition of the situation includes that some information is over-communicated and other information, which he calls destructive information, is under-communicated. Goffman argues that teams constitute a kind of secret society. "If a performance is to be effective it will be likely that the extent and character of the cooperation that makes this possible will be concealed and kept secret" (Ibid., p. 108).

2.5. Concluding notes

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective excludes mediated interaction and the most obvious constraint for applying Goffman to online self-presentations relates to interaction and the social situation. We know *a priori* that individuals not are immediately present in front of each other on the web like they are in face-to-face encounters.

Nonetheless, individuals still presents themselves in front of each other on the web, even if the prerequisites for the social interaction are different. To discuss constraints and possibilities with Goffman's dramaturgical perspective in relation to the private/public dichotomy (i.e. back/front stage and impression management) on Facebook and personal blogs we are in need of empirical data on each forum.

Reconnecting to the research questions we can at this point at least say that Goffman's perspective seems to be relevant for online self-presentations, despite the obvious constraints regarding the interactive aspect. However, these constraints enable possibilities for developing Goffman's perspective to online environments.

3. Goffman's model in mediated environments

How Goffman's dramaturgical perspective has been used on mediated environments in previous research is highlighted in this chapter. The chapter includes neighboring research, which in some way relates to Goffman. All highlighted themes from the previous chapter are covered in this chapter and follows the same structure.

3.1. Social interaction and social situations in mediated contexts

Even if Goffman's notion on social situations is restricted to face-to-face interaction it has been used (Walker, 2000; Robinson, 2007; Rettie, 2009), and in some cases developed (Meyrowitz, 1985), within the context of mediated environments. This section highlights studies on mediated communication with a focus on the prerequisites for social situations and interaction from a Goffmanian perspective.

3.1.1. Abstract sociability and information systems

Mass media includes broadcasting media like newspaper, radio and television. The invention of the printing press and the entrance of the newspaper (which also was the entrance of the first mass media) was also the entrance of the *public* as separated from the *crowd* (Tarde, 1901). The public is a "purely spiritual collective, a dispersion of individuals who are physically separated and whose cohesion is entirely mental" (Tarde, 1901, p. 277) compared to the crowd that in various forms has been bound together by the physical presence of its members. The public consists of people that are disconnected from each other in what Asplund defined as *abstract sociability* (Asplund, 1987a) and Tarde defined as an *inter-mental sphere* (see Asplund, 1987a, p. 158). This kind of sociability is far from social interaction as presented in Goffman's model.

Broadcasting and mass media, such as radio and television, similarly contributes to an abstract sociability. Mass/broadcasting media is a one-way form of communication. Sennett (1977) argued that passivity is the logic of this kind of media and speaks of a "paradox of visibility and isolation", where "one sees more and interacts less"; where people know more about each other but interact less (Sennett, 1977, p. 282-284). However, media theorist Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) explicitly developed Goffman's model to electronic broadcasting media, and Television in particular. He argued that "it is not the physical setting itself that determines the nature of the interaction, but the patterns of information flow" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 36). As a deduction, he argued that social situations in mediated contexts should be seen as *information systems* where information can be accessible "in ways that defy traditional laws of time and space" (Ibid., p. 86). Furthermore, he argued that as previously separated information systems merge, a new single situation emerges with a single set of rules, instead of mixture of different situations and rules (Ibid., p. 44). However, as his analysis is focused on Television it deals with an abstract sociability.

3.1.2. Mass-self communication and synchronicity

Castells (2009) speaks about the web in terms of *mass-self communication*. The content within mass-self communication is self-generated, the emission is self-directed, the interception is self-selected and it has the potential to reach to a global audience. It constitutes "a new communication realm, and ultimately a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive" (Castells, 2009, p. 70). Even if it is far from identical, mass-self communication has more likeness to face-to-face interaction than mass media. Mass-self communication is better defined as *interactive communication* rather than media in its traditional sense (Castells, 2009). Individuals are empowered to publish content and interact with each other on the web in a potential two-way form of communication. Mass-self communication merge senders and receivers into one. Castells define this new audience as a *creative audience* where the production of meaning is interactive (Ibid., p. 132). Compared to mass media the audience within mass-self communication are no longer passive receivers of information. A *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2006a; 2006b) is established where the individuals generate the content instead of the commercial industry. "A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with each other (at least they care what other people think about what they have created)" (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 3).

However, communication on a homepage or site is *asynchronous* (similar to the SMS-function on mobile phones, or e-mails). The social situation, if one can talk in such terms, is not mutually shared in time and space. *Synchronous* mediums like instant messaging (IM) clients, stresses the interactants to reply fast or immediately. Asynchronous communication allows the interactants to think before they reply or communicate with each other. Rettie (2009) argues that Goffman is better suited for synchronous mediums as it is more likely that there is mutual monitoring in real-time similar to face-to-face situations (Rettie, 2009, p. 425). Moreover, Rettie (2009) argues that the encouragement for a concentrated interaction is higher in interaction between two people than in interaction that includes more than two individuals. Incidentally, synchronicity is not only technical but also depending on the interactants' social expectations on social response and sustained, focused attention (Ibid.). Furthermore, Rettie highlights differences between the presentation of self in synchronous and asynchronous mediated communication. For example, expressions given off are more controllable in asynchronous communication (Ibid., p. 434).

Despite the lack of the physical presence in the web environment some researchers have seen a likeness to the physical world. The theoretical tools created for analysing online interaction are in general drawn from face-to-face interaction and Goffman in particular (Menchik & Tia, 2008, p. 334). The web is defined as a social environment where people still meet face-to-face, but with new meanings of both meet and face (Stone, 1991). Internet has made us unsure of what it means to "enter the presence of other" which is essential for face-to-face interaction and self-presentations in a Goffman (Walker, 2000, p. 99). However, expressions given and given off are still exuded through text in online environments and are important for framing cyberinteractions (Robinson, 2007, p. 107). Moreover, it is argued that the Web has likeness to physical environments because of "the ability to 'wander' from location to location and the opportunity to happen across strangers" (Walker, 2000, p. 118).

3.2. The back/front model in mediated contexts

The back/front model has been used in different ways in mediated environments. It has been argued that when users hide behind a pseudonym they engage in back region behaviour where risks can be taken and where the potential consequences are few (Ross, 2007). Behind a pseudonym they can disclose intimate information in front of people they don't even know and perhaps never will meet (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). However, the best-known example of how the back/front model is developed to mediate environments is limited to mass media (i.e. Meyrowitz, 1985). Meyrowitz (1985) nuances the model by adding a *middle region* which in some way can be read as a critique of Goffman.

3.2.1. Middle region, deep backstage and the forefront of the backstage

Meyrowitz (1985) worked explicitly with Goffman's theoretical framework. He argued that the division between backstage/front stage is not necessary physical and that the expansion of television, and other electronic broadcasting media, blurred the boundary between the public and the private as back region behaviour and information got exposed in public. Formerly distinct situations merge and opens up previously separated worlds for each other and, so to say, demystifies and breaks downs barriers in the social world (Meyrowitz, 1985). The use of new media (referring to the context of the mid-eighties) leads to a shift in the pattern of social information-systems according to Meyrowitz (1985). "The ease or difficulty of learning to use the medium, the form of information it conveys, its patterns of dissemination, and so forth, will all work to foster different structures of 'who knows what about whom' and 'who knows what compared to whom'" (Ibid., p. 92).

Formerly distinct boundaries between backstage and front stage has widened and developed into a *new middle region* which can be seen as their intermediate. A middle region can be interpreted as a new front stage as it "contains elements of both the former onstage and offstage behaviour, but lacks their extremes" (Ibid., p. 78). Meyrowitz (1985) also divides the backstage into a *deep backstage* and *the forefront of the backstage*. It is only the latter that is visible in media and constitutes the new middle region; the former is still concealed according to Meyrowitz (1985). Meyrowitz's (1985) development of Goffman's back/front model highlights a direction of behavioural change, and a change in the dividing line between the private and the public, due to increased use of electronic media.

3.3. Online impression management

Impression management has been applied to self-presentations in online environments (e.g. Chester & Bretherton, 2007; Pearson, 2010; Siibak, 2009). However, these researchers never go into depth with Goffman's use of the actual techniques of impression management and rarely relate it to the private/public dichotomy and privacy regulations. Instead, online impression management foremost refers to the visual aspects of online impression management, mainly referring to images and photographs (see for example Pearson, 2010; Siibak, 2010). By selection and control of the visual elements of their presence in online forums, individuals engage in online impression management, which is important for online identity performances (Pearson, 2010).

Impression management is also about controlling the audience and the access to the performance. However, the audience within online interaction on the Web is obscured and we can no longer see who really is looking at our performances (Tufekci, 2007, p. 22). An obscured audience is problematic for finding a balance in what to reveal and what to conceal (Palen & Dourish, 2003). With Facebook's increased popularity for people in different ages it is possible for younger people to become friends with older adults. A study on Facebook by West et al (2009) showed that parents were unwelcomed in students' Facebook environment as it could lead to embarrassment. The participants in this study wanted their Facebook accounts as a private social sphere, with different social worlds separated (Ibid., p. 617). According to a quantitative study by Zeynep (2008) users of Facebook (i.e. college students) use the technological privacy regulations within Facebook instead of changing or restricting the information they reveal. Regarding blogs it has been reported (Viégas, 2005) that the authors don't have much information on their audience, but, Viégas argues that this doesn't affect what they wrote about.

3.4. Concluding notes

Previous research connecting Goffman's dramaturgical perspective in mediated environments is not homogenous. It connects to several different aspects, and forms of media. The most highlighted constraint within previous research for applying Goffman's perspective to the web seems to be the social aspect of mediated interaction. As suggests by Rettie (2009), Goffman's perspective is better suited for synchronous media than asynchronous media. Even if Facebook and personal blogs are more synchronous than mass media, they are far from being synchronous and similar to social situations occurring face-to-face. The constraints of online social interaction are making the distinction between the private and the public less central in this thesis.

Studies that implicitly have worked with Goffman's back/front model are out of date (i.e. Meyrowitz, 1985). It also seems that previous use of impression management for mediated interaction only draws on Goffman's notion of impression management in broad terms and does not go deeper into the actual techniques of impression management, i.e. protective practices and defensive practices and attributes (dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline and dramaturgical circumspection). There is a lack of research which emphasizes impression management in relation to the private/public dichotomy (which I would like to argue is essential for Goffman's dramaturgical perspective). I would like to explore and fill this gap with this study.

Before the empirical data is to be presented (chapter 5 and 6), and discussed (chapter 7), the practical and theoretical choices relating to the construction, and analysis, of empirical reality is to be highlighted.

4. Method and data

Practical and theoretical choices relating to data collecting and analyzing procedure are described, motivated and problematized in this chapter. The ambition has been to discuss and reflect upon the empirical reality and the construction of it in a critical and transparent manner.

4.1. Motivation of research method and methodological approach

Interviews are preferred as a research method as they, at least to some extent, make it possible to capture individuals' perceptions and reflections on their social practices, and the internal selection of what to reveal and what to conceal. Alternative research methods as observation (which are popular research methods within media studies and sociological studies on the Web) miss to capture the subjective process of the actors and the process behind the social action of publishing content. These types of methods can only create an empirical reality based on the content *per se*. However, the actual content was only viewed by me to a small extent (under the sampling procedure) and is only present in the respondents' reflections about it. This inquiry connects to the tradition of subjectivism and the empirical material never leaves the mental and cognitive level of the users.

There are other advantages with interviews for studies on online social behavior. Interviews have the potential to include data on the participants' offline social world and embrace the interplay between online and offline environments. This is particularly of relevance when the individuals use their real names. Furthermore, interviews make it possible to include several forums and give a more complete picture of the interviewees' use of the web, including every forum they use (even where they are anonymous). It opens up for comparisons between their social practices in different forums. Furthermore, interviews make it possible to include the interviewee both as an actor and as an audience of other users.

Boundaries between the private and the public are manifested in what individuals chose to reveal and what they chose to conceal in front of others. Where the boundary is drawn is something that is negotiated by the individuals themselves. Where the users draw their boundaries makes them participants in the construction of the social reality on Facebook and personal blogs. Their online behaviour is an important resource for how the social world of Facebook and personal blogs is constitutes. The users' social actions on these applications constitute the structures off online intimacy. Furthermore, they are also engaged in constructing meaning about their own selves in the social interaction. This motivates the choice methodological approach for the study which connects to a social constructivism. A social constructivist approach emphasises the social world in the making, how it is constructed, derived and maintained compared to a naturalistic approach that strives to see reality how it really is (Holstein et al, 2008, p. 374; Holstein et al, 1997, p. 6). Facebook and personal blogs are relatively new phenomenon and the social situations that emerges has perhaps not become institutionalized yet (even if there can be patterns of how to behave and

not). The conventions are in the making and the users participate in the construction of it, both regarding the content and the meaning about it.

4.2. Sampling

A population is a group of individuals that have some shared and objectively defined characteristics (Aspers, 2007, p. 90). The population for this study is Facebook users that have a personal blog. The actual population was something that developed during the sampling procedure and in the meeting with the field. It was not something that was predominated from start.

I reasoned that the best way to get hold of participants was to go through application after application and contact users. I assumed that user's of a specific forum probably would use other applications and that we could talk about their use and experience on several of the applications that they used. I began with personal blogs and it turned out that all the bloggers that I got in contact with also used Facebook. Some did also use other applications but only to small extent. After a few interviews, it lead me to the decision to only focus on the Facebook and personal blogs. If I would have started with another application the study would probably look different.

However, the definition of a personal blog is problematic, because all blogs are personal by nature (Castells, 2009, p. 66). No matter if it is a blog about cars, fashion, or personal reflections. My ambition was to find users that had their blogs as diaries where they wrote about personal reflections on experiences in everyday life. In the back of my mind, I assumed these kinds of blogs would constitute an interesting empirical material for a study on the private/public dichotomy. To get hold of authors behind these types of blogs I used a service where several Swedish blogs are listed and catalogued in different categories. Far from all the blogs in Sweden that are listed here as the author behind it actively must add it. However, systematically I went through the blogs listed under the category "everyday reflections". I concentrated on blogs from the Stockholm region and blogs where the authors used their real names. Nine respondents were found through this sampling procedure. All of them also used Facebook.

However, most of the contacted bloggers never answered, and some waited a week or two. Eager to get hold of informants, I extended my search to Facebook and created a Facebook group where I explained my study and announced for interviewees. I invited all my Facebook friends and told them to spread the group and invite their friends to get hold of participants outside my own Facebook network. This turned out to be successful, after only a few days the group had over seventy members. However, only one participant was recruited through this process and she had a password protected blog (after having it open for over three years) that wasn't listed on the blog service I used.

At this time I had conducted ten interviews with users that had a blog and a Facebook-account. In the context of a master's thesis, this seemed be a fair amount of interviews. The sampling procedure can be defined as convenience sampling. Not all the individuals in the population had the same chance of being selected for the study.

4.3. Description of the final sample

The final sample is constituted of ten individuals, eight females and two males, in the ages between nineteen and twenty-nine. They share the characteristic of having at least one personal blog (two

respondents had two blogs each) as well as a Facebook account. On both these applications they used their real names (only one of the respondents was anonymous in her blog). All respondents live in the metropolitan area of Stockholm, Sweden. This is mainly due to my intention to conduct face-to-face interviews. If I had included mediated interviews from the start I could have widened the geographical spread. It can be added that I don't have any relation to the research participants other than the established contact from the sampling.

It is not all Facebook users that have a personal blogs, but, it can be assumed that most personal bloggers have a Facebook account (which the final sample for this study also indicates). By other means, the final sample does not consist of average Facebook users. The respondents are better defined as personal bloggers that have a Facebook account, and the findings are foremost generalizable to this specific group of individuals. Furthermore, the respondents as moderately active users of the web.

Only a minority of the initial sample that answered the participant request. It is impossible for me to identify the actual causes behind the low level of response to the study and see any systematic patterns in the segment falling off. However, several of the respondents told me that they gladly wanted to participate in the study as they considered it an interesting topic. Perhaps, it gives the respondents a special characteristic and makes them a subgroup of the population. However, the same kind of problem would probably arise no matter what sampling procedure employed.

4.4. Interviews and interview guide

All interviews were accomplished between the middle of March and early April 2010. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, two over an Instant Messaging (IM) client, and one over e-mail. I let the respondent decide how they wanted to do the interviews. All face-to-face interviews were recorded with permission from the interviewees. Excluding the small talk before and after the interviews the length of the face-to-face interviews varied from forty-five minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes. The two IM interviews took around two hours each.

I developed an interview guide (attached in Appendix A) which I used in an advisory manner, rather than to follow strictly. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) argues that both the interviewer and interviewee are involved in the production of meaning. The interview guide sets the conversational agenda and "engage the respondent and designate the narrative terrain... as a meaning making occasion, the active interview is guided by the interviewer and his or her research agenda" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 76). My interview guide includes questions that open up for the respondents' to reflect upon their social activities on Facebook and personal blogs.

The questions within the interview guide are analysing, interpretive and descriptive. Within this study it has been just as interesting to take part of their reflections on what they have shared as well as their reflections of what they haven't shared. Both inputs provide us with information about the boundary between the private and the public. It gives us meaning about front stage behaviour as well as the backstage behaviour and what is left out from the performance and why. In this context, that is something that content analysis and observations never can capture.

4.5. Coding and analyze

The interviews have been transcribed word-by-word and the total amount of transcribed material contains of 178 pages (about 70 000 words). I have read through the transcripts twice in order to closely examine the data and identify different themes and categories. Then, as a first analytical step, the data was coded.

Early on in the research process I decided to use Goffman's dramaturgical perspective and my interview guide is much influenced by the work of Goffman. However, I wanted to bracket the theoretical background during the coding procedure. Consequently, the coding procedure was an inductive process where the codes emerged from tendencies in the empirical data rather than being predominated from the start by theory. This kind of coding is influenced by open coding where the ambition is to open up for interpretations in the empirical material, rather than apply preconceptions (Aspers, 2007, p. 162). The codes were created continuously while reading the transcripts and wherever I found new themes in the empirical material that wasn't overlapping with already existing themes. If I exclusively would have used deductive coding, with codes deriving only from the theoretical background, I would have missed any contradictions between the theory and the empirical reality which is essential for the research objective, research questions, and discussion.

The actual coding was done in an Excel document. In the top horizontal column the respondents got one cell each. All codes had their place in separate cells in the far left vertical column. If a specific quote already had an existing code I basically pasted the quote under the respondents' column and under that specific code, and if there wasn't any I created a new. When all the transcripts were coded I summarized each theme/code in the far right column after each column. Those summaries constitute the empirical findings that are presented in the next two chapters (5 and 6). However, there were many codes and themes that are excluded in the presentation of the empirical findings. Only the most relevant themes in relation to the research objective are selected and presented. The selection was made in a constantly on-going dialogue between the empirical material and the theoretical background where also contradictions to Goffman's model is presented, analysed and discussed. Thus, while the coding itself was fairly open, the presentation of the empirical findings is quite structured.

4.6. Validity

Validity is rooted in a positivist tradition and is a key issue within quantitative research. However, several efforts have been made to transfer and redefine validity from a quantitative to a qualitative context. Validity is here to be discussed on the processes of describing, interpreting and explaining the empirical material in relation the theoretical choices, and in relation to the selection of research method and to what extent I have captured what I intended to capture.

Descriptive validity connects to the descriptive accuracy in the presentations of the empirical material and findings (Maxwell, 1992, p. 285; Johnson, 1997, p. 284). Several factors might lead to bias in the presentation of the empirical material. It is possible that I have mis-heard and mis-transcribed the respondents' statements during the transcription. The translation of the interviews from Swedish to English might have had a negative impact on the natural description of the respondents' statements. There can be differences in the meaning of what words actually mean in

each language and how the reader can interpret them. Descriptive validity in that sense, is also limited by my language skills.

Interpretive validity refers to "the degree to which the participants viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions and experiences are accurately understood by the qualitative researcher and portrayed in the research report" (Johnson, 1997, p. 285). Interpretive validity is of importance because it is the inner world of the respondents and their reflections upon their social activities on each forum I would like to understand. However, the accounts of the participants' meanings are "never a matter of direct access, but are always constructed by the researcher(s) on the basis of participants' accounts and other evidence" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 290). I have tried to obtain objectivity in the interpretative process and not to let my own pre-assumptions and values steer my interpretations. However, it would be wrong to assume that my interpretations are completely valid. Interpretive validity can be tested with member check and participant feedback (Johnson, 1997, p. 285). Conversely, as new meanings from the respondents can emerge when they read and reflect upon their statements, participant feedback can be hazardous.

Theoretical validity refers to "the degree that a theoretical explanation developed from a research study fits the data and, therefore is credible and defensible" (Johnson, 1997, p. 286). With other words, it connects to the transformation of first-order constructs to second-order constructs and to the relation between the empirical material and the selected theoretical background. Does the dramaturgical perspective of Goffman as a theoretical explanation fit to the respondents' reflections on their social practices? To some extent, this is what the study is all about. Hence, theoretical validity connects to the research questions, research objective, and is central in the discussion. Whenever Goffman's model is invalid for explaining the empirical reality it has been my ambition to critically develop the model in order to give a more valid theoretical explanation of the empirical data. The discrepancy between the empirical reality and the theoretical background is, so to say, the interpretive area where I critically can, and must, develop Goffman's theories to the online context of personal blogs and Facebook.

Validity also connects to whether the researcher has measured what he intended to measure (Kvale, 1997). In that sense, validity can connect to the selection of research technique, the interview guide and the sample procedure. With Goffman as a point of departure it can be argued that the selection of research technique should follow his example. However, Goffman never used interviews as research method. He mainly used observations as research method and never captured the subjectively meaningful aspects of social interaction. Interviews are in that sense more suitable to capture the inner world of the respondent even if we never can be sure if we actually have done that. It can be argued that the respondents in the interview situation engage in impression management and do not reveal everything from their inner world. However, this is a general problem with interviews and it is impossible to capture the inner world of other persons entirely. Hence, I can never capture what I have intended to capture completely.

Moreover, a too radical attention on validity can be counterproductive and undermine the validity with the result that the validity itself must be validated (Kvale, 1997, p. 227). The readers must be able to interpret the validity of the research on their own. That is why it is important to be transparent, critical and detailed in the description of the methodological choices and issues, which I have attempted to be.

4.7. Ethical considerations

Ethical aspects have been considered throughout the entire working procedure. As a guiding directive I have used the ethical demands and recommendations outlined by Vetenskapsrådet (1990). The participants have been informed about the objective of the study in general terms before they voluntarily decided and approved to participate in the study. They are aware of that they will are treated confidentially and that their statements only are to be published in a scientific context where they are presented anonymously. In order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents in the study their names have been changed.

All possible information that noticeably can connect the quotes to the actual person or her/his usage of the applications has been reduced. The respondents' statements have been translated from Swedish to English and the participant's style of talking or writing has perhaps been toned down. This can have made the interviewees even more anonymous with the cost of a more alive and natural presentation of their statements.

The interviews included talk about others behaviour besides the respondents. Their passive and unintended participation has not been voluntarily. However, these kinds of statements that are present in the thesis are not specific and it is presumably difficult to connect the statements to the actual persons they are referring to.

4.8. Concluding notes

The research process has been process in which I constantly have moved between each step of the research and constantly reflected upon each parts in the process as well as the whole. The work on this study has not exclusively been deductive or inductive; it has been a process where I have jumped between induction and deduction. The research has been deductive to the extent that I early on made my choice of theoretical background which also influenced the interview guide and consequently the construction of the empirical data. However, I have tried to bracket the theoretical background when I worked with the empirical material and work inductively. It has been a process of continuously interaction between the empirical reality and theoretical background. I have considered both parts equally important. However, most important is the relation between both these parts.

The work of this study has been a process where I have learned a lot. My presumptions that Goffman would be applicable to online environments had to be revised. It wasn't that simple as I thought it should be. My revised assumption also turned out to be central in the aim of the study and the research questions. This is an example on how I have moved between each parts of the study and where I have let the empirical material interact with the theoretical background and let it influence the study. My pre-understanding was that people in general would be more intimate on personal blogs than on Facebook. However, I never really assumed that people who use both these applications would present themselves as radically different in each forum as we shall see in the next two chapters, where the empirical material is presented.

5. Social practices and self-presentations on Facebook

The respondents' reflections on their social practices and self-presentations on Facebook are presented thematically in this chapter. The empirical findings are concentrated towards the respondents' own social actions within Facebook even if others presence and actions is mentioned.

5.1. Usage

The respondents' main motive with Facebook was to stay in contact and socialize with their friends and acquaintances. It was common for the respondents' to have Facebook running in the background. However, they spent more time at observing the activities of their Facebook friends, compared to the time they shared content and information themselves. The attitudes towards sharing information could vary, being to active was foremost considered as something negative.

5.1.1. Motives

The respondents' described Facebook as a "meeting place" (Johan), where the main motive was to "maintain contact with friends and so on" (Lisa). Respondents' reported that Facebook was an effective and "a genial instrument for talking to people" (Emma) because it lets them interact with many people simultaneously, over a wide range of time. "You can chat without really chatting, well, you leave a comment and when the person enters the next time she sees that" (Ann), as one respondent expressed it.

Additionally, some respondents' used Facebook only to take part of photographs of them that their Facebook friends had published. One respondent told me that she mainly used Facebook "to see what horrible pictures people have uploaded on me and to look how old classmates looks nowadays, otherwise I don't like Facebook so much" (Saga).

5.1.2. Activeness

Respondents' reported that they more or less constantly had Facebook running in the background, but only having a look from time to time. Facebook was accessible through their mobile phones, their home- and work computers, at lectures, and on the subway. It was only at their jobs that they were restrictive to show that they were online on Facebook, because they know that the managers could see it. However, they all assumed that this was something that everybody did. "You know in principle, all colleagues are online on Facebook during work" (Ann).

Respondents' conveyed that they spent more time to observe than to participate in communication and uploading content, and sharing information. One respondent told me that In relation to what you write, you see more than you share" (Lars). Furthermore, respondents' reported that being active mainly was defined as participating in conversations and sharing information. To observe was not included in that definition. "I spend a lot of time on Facebook, but I am not that

active… I don't comment so much… I log on and have a look from time to time... you have it there in the background" (Lisa).

Respondents' argued that you could easily see whether a person was an active user by looking at their profile. "You can see it so clearly, who really are the active users" (Ann). The attitudes towards being active on Facebook varied. A few respondents' reported that they saw themselves as "Facebook maniacs" (Eva). One respondent told me: "...if you leave me a message you will receive an answer within fifteen minutes, they are making jokes about me, I am the Facebook-nerd in our gang" (Ann). However, most respondents' took distance from being too active in regards of sharing information and content. One respondent told me:

> I don't want to be seen as someone that lives with Facebook. Even though I am logged in several
> times a day and could write an update every time. But no, I don't do that, I don't want to be seen
> as a freak... I almost think of them as freaks, these people that updates often, like four or five
> times a day, and mainly writes the same things… you know like 'I drink tea", 'I forgot my phone
> at home', not like information, just to…[sighs] (Lars)

5.2. The social and public context

The respondents' friends on Facebook was very mixed, ranging from their closest friends to people they only have met on single occasions. The prerequisite for letting people be their Facebook friends were that they, at least once, should have met them face-to-face. Some respondents' also restricted the access of information within their Facebook network; a few of them even deleted certain of their Facebook friends.

5.2.1. The mixture and amount of Facebook friends

It was evident that the respondents' networks on Facebook were mixed, ranging from people they knew well, to people they only have met on a few occasions. "It's mainly people that I meet on a regular basis and that I am superficially acquainted with" (Lars). Almost every one of the people they knew had a Facebook-account. "In some way Facebook has accomplished to collect all… everyone is actually there" (Ann). The respondents' were Facebook friends with people from all over their social network from real life. One respondent clarified; "It's very mixed, old class mates… acquaintances… family, relatives, colleagues, old friends, my children's friend's parents and such" (Eva).

Respondents' reported that they were cautious with who they became Facebook friends with. In general, respondents' meant that they usually had met their Facebook friends' offline at least once. One of them told me; "I have been very cautious, those I have as friends, those are people that I socialize with or have socialized with, worked or have worked with, so I know that they are controlled, they are green" (Johan). Another respondent reported that she had "all types of friends you can imagine… I was, and still am rather careful with who I accept as friends, still it is people that I know well or at least are familiar with, well you know, I would at least say hi to them if I met them (Karin).

Some respondents were friends with their employers and colleagues. One respondent reported that her Facebook-network included "people that I've worked with, colleagues, and then I'm friends with one or two employers as well" (Emma). It could also be the case that they knew these people as friends rather than employers. One respondent enlightened; "Those that I have worked or work

with, those I know are alright… I am also friends with my boss… and that is because he is such a good person… I mean he is a person that I want to socialize with even after he leaves the school within two weeks (Johan). However, in general, most respondents were not friends with their employers.

Distant relations included old classmates that they have not spoken to since they studied together. "But it really is funny… if Facebook hadn't existed we wouldn't have spoken at all, but now you know a little about what's going on, and it feels really good and is funny" (Ann). These kinds of friends were in general people that they didn't want to socialize with but they wanted them there. One respondent meant that:

> *You have more contacts than you really want to socialize with, maybe I don't want to chat with this girl from primary school, but I anyhow I want her there... These people that you have spent very much time with they know that I exist, they know that this is happening in my life, and I was a totally different person in primary school for example, so those who see me now, they don't see the same person at all (Johan)*

The amount of Facebook friends varied between seventy and four-hundred. One of the respondents reflected upon her sum of four-hundred Facebook-friends in the following way: "I don't understand how they could be so many, because I'm so cautious, it's really strange, because I don't know four-hundred people" (Karin). Another respondent reported; "I have three-hundred-sixty friends, or so… it is not the case that I socialize with all these persons, so that the picture they have about me is the picture they get from Facebook" (Emma).

Furthermore, respondents' argued that having many friends on Facebook was connected to status and success. One respondent stated; "Appearance and success, to have as many friends as possible, that's what Facebook is all about… it looks that you have more friends than you actually have, many of my Facebook friends are people that I haven't talked to in years" (Saga).

5.2.2. Restrictions in the access of information

The respondents' had their Facebook profiles closed to the Facebook friends only. However, it didn't mean that all people in their audience had the same access to the shared information. Some respondents' used the privacy settings and restricted the access of information mostly for distant relatives and managers. "For some relatives I have a restricted profile so that they can't see everything. I really don't know why I do such things. I am open with other things... But they don't need to see all photos and know everything" (Karin). Another respondent told me that: "My boss... he can't see my status updates, because I use Facebook from work sometimes... but I don't restrict myself just because those and those and those see it, because most of them know who I am, as long as you don't violate someone else" (Johan).

Two respondents reported that they had removed vague acquaintances from their Facebook network. One of them told me; "sometimes I delete friends whom I don't speak to ...people that you only met once at a party, whom you never will met again" (Karin). It was also the case that they were too kind to delete any of their Facebook friends. One respondent told me;

> *There are some old friends that I don't want to socialize with today, but I can't delete them because they continue to write comments to my pictures, 'what a nice photo', 'you seem to have so fun', and on. Then I don't have the heart to delete them, because they will really know that they are gone (Ann).*

Even if the respondents were aware of whom they were Facebook friends with, there seemed to be an uncertainty of who really followed them and constituted their audience. One respondent told me;

> *That's what's so tough with Facebook, you really never have a clue of who really keeps tracks of you and sees what you are doing… there are people online that never write anything, so you can't see that they are online and lurk around on Facebook, even though they don't share anything themselves (Emma).*

5.3. Published content and shared information

The published content on the respondents' Facebook profiles were seldom intimate; instead, it was dominated by silly comments and funny talk. The status updates should be as original and inventive as possible. This lead to feedback to a wider extent, which was something, they all strived for. Respondents' meant that the jargon was tough, cocky, and sometimes internal between specific Facebook friends. Positive posts dominated, and the respondents' reported that they wanted to show a positive side of themselves. If something negative was expressed it was mostly something common about a television show, or expressed vaguely if it was about happenings in their real lives.

5.3.1. Silly comments and positive posts

Respondents' declared that they practically never were intimate Facebook. On respondent told me: "Even if I update my Facebook often, it's rarely private stuff" (Ann). The information that they shared was instead dominated by information that they defined as "funny talk" (Johan) and silly comments: "I'm rarely serious on Facebook. I mean, it's just silly comments. It's just for fun for me" (Johan).

Respondents also reported that the status updates should be special and original. "You want to stand out in that news feed" (Ann), as one respondent told me. Another respondent stated;

> *… It is more that you should be peculiar, funny and amazing, 'now I shall show myself', you know, it's very much like that on Facebook, that you shall be so peculiar as possible… it's more that… 'now I shall come up with something really funny' so that others will think it's marvelous, but it can't be any longer than one or two sentences, because people must manage to read it and directly understand what's so funny about it (Emma).*

The respondents' thought that it only was the most interesting parts from their lives that should be published. One respondent told me; "You choose the most interesting parts, of course you do, and I wished that all did sometimes, sometimes it really can feel like why, why did they share that" (Ann).

Positive posts dominated the respondents' Facebook profiles and this was also how they wanted to be perceived. "You have to pick out the good parts, like when you upload a photo to Facebook, that is what one always says, you only add the good pictures, and that is like so true, it is the same with the other information, you only chose the best information" (Ann). One respondent similarly stated;

Maybe they gain a somewhat positive image of myself, you only upload images that are good, everything good you have done, perhaps it is a more positive image of myself than in reality, there are no updates of the worst fights from home, you only upload things that are good (Eva).

If the content was negative it was mainly about peculiarities. One respondent told me;

I only show a positive, happy side of myself... that I think is funnier to share with others... or if it is something more common that I am annoyed over, like if the wrong person won Paradise Hotel [the TV-show] or like 'god, how boring it is that it is snowing today again... I don't write that 'today I and my boyfriend argued a lot and then he left me and now I am sad'... I don't want this to be the first thing that people think of me when they see me... it wouldn't be as fun as if I had shared something more positive" (Emma).

The jargon tended to be tough and cocky according to the respondents'. "It shall be a little tough maybe, to show the others that you are cool and awesome… it feels more that, it shall be a little bit cocky… people are not intimate in that sense" (Lisa). Respondents' argued that people were "stuck-up" on Facebook. One respondent told me;

People are more… cocky… you know that you can't write anything there, everyone can see… it' strange really that you are more personal on a blog compared to Facebook… on Facebook, you know who you are friends with, so it is really strange actually (Karin).

However, it was a great mix cocky posts and everyday life revelations. "Some are so very inventive all the time, and they shall be so very jauntily and inventive, and then there are those that just like, 'I have just woke up and now I shall eat this for breakfast', it's so very mixed" (Ann).

5.3.2. Concealing intimate information

Respondents' reported that the information they shared on Facebook rarely could be defined as intimate. "I don't write so much about my inner feelings or share things about my relationship… I'm not so intimate, I mostly write about what I do in the days" (Sara).

The awareness of the audience was one factor that restricted their statements. "I only write unnecessary status updates, if I'm going to meet a friend for a coffee or something. I never ever write about my wellbeing if I feel bad. There are old colleagues and relatives there. I don't feel that Facebook is a safe medium" (Saga).

If the respondents' dealt with intimate topics on Facebook, they usually were diffuse in the way they shared this information. One respondent reported;

It doesn't feel good for me to be aware of that all people on my Facebook knows that I feel bad one day. Sure you can write something like 'ups and downs' or something like that, but never to intimate, I never do that… If I have written anything personal I have done it very subtle or by sharing a song or something… I can formulate it in a way that if there is someone I don't want to understand it, I can formulate it so that only the others can understand (Lars)

Intimate topics were also dealt by being restrictive with the details. One respondent told me; "I never go into details, well it might be that, the details that make it intimate… I can write that it has been a rough day at work, but nothing more than that, if someone wonders we can take it in private instead" (Eva).

Respondents' argued that their Facebook friends, and users in general, revealed intimate information on Facebook more than themselves. One respondent told me;

I think that people are more intimate on Facebook than they should, pictures of them in lingerie, party-pictures etc. that anyone can see, and that will stay there even after they delete their accounts, it's scary... some people also write that 'I am so hung over today', or 'I Facebook at work, I am so bored' or 'I have such an angst that I want to cut up my wrists', in their Facebook status, I would probably think more than once or twice before I wrote (Saga).

5.4. Interactive aspects

Respondents' reported that feedback in forms of comments and "thumbs-up" was central on Facebook. What they wrote and what kind of images they shared was steered by as much feedback as possible, and to avoid the misery and silliness of not receiving any. Furthermore, respondents' meant that you should have respect of others and never write things that could hurt anyone else. Respondents' were also aware of the possibilities for misinterpretations of the statements they shared.

5.4.1. Feedback

Feedback could take shape as in comments, conversations and Likes[7]. To get feedback was important for the respondents. "You want the comments, you want this 'Like-button' to go ahead and so" (Johan). It was of importance "come up with a really great status update so that people will manage to leave comments on it" (Emma). It was argued that feedback "was the whole point" (Ann) with Facebook and if there wasn't any "you could feel silly" (Ann) or "get really sad" (Emma). It was widely argued that feedback was some "sort of confirmation" (Lars). One respondent told me;

You write a status and you want someone to like it, otherwise you feel totally untreated and unseen, I just wrote in one of these status updates. 'Have you all blocked me or?', because there was no one that had made any comments for very long, I felt unseen (Johan).

In general, it was the silly comments, rather than serious posts, that generated comments on Facebook according to the respondents'. One respondent told me;

You can write something really, really silly and people just love it, then when you write something of importance like politics, then, all of a sudden, no one cares anymore... it is quite clear on Facebook that people don't really dare to answer such things, well, because they are scared about that you shall know what they think (Lars).

Respondents' argued that they knew who would comment their activities in beforehand, and that there were people that liked everything. "There are people on Facebook that likes everything, you know that they will give you a thumbs up shortly, they like everything, but what's the point really, sometimes you know that this person will like this and she will like that" (Ann).

The published information could also be directed towards specific Facebook friends. However, it is accessible for all the respondents' Facebook friends (unless the respondents' had restricted the access to their shared content to them). One respondent told me; "You can be personally directed in

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[7] *Facebook users can "like" other users published content. It is manifested in thumbs up and the text "x likes this".*

the communication… you can also hit straight out in the darkness, but you don't know if you hit, and that is what I like about Facebook" (Johan).

5.4.2. With the others in mind

Respondents' were very aware that all their Facebook friends could take part of the revealed information. On respondent told me; "On Facebook you are more a part of a network so that everybody can see what you write. You don't want to force things on people if they don't want it, the information will become visible in their news feed, so you try to be positive on Facebook" (Lisa).

A common theme within the empirical material was that you must have respect for others on Facebook. "I usually just write what's on my mind as long as it doesn't hurt anyone… No one else should have to suffer for what I write" (Eva). This was especially important for people they knew well. One respondent told me; "Just as long you don't reveal any information that could hurt you, or someone you're near" (Johan).

Having the others in mind could also restrict what kind of information they revealed. One respondent highlights this with a hypothetical example;

> *Perhaps I wouldn't write that I like Satan, not because I do, but like an extreme example. I wouldn't write it because I have some very Christian relatives in Finland who doesn't know me very well as a person. We only meet like once a year or so, under very formal circumstances (Lars).*

Respondents' reported that the risk with sharing information on Facebook was that people could change the perception of them. One respondent stated: "You chose to write about it, well, it's a part of your personality, and if you chose to write about it then you must expect that relatives, employers, or ex-partners can change their perceptions about you" (Lars).

However, some respondents' meant that they had a right to be themselves on Facebook. One of them told me; "Those people that in some way don't like the person I am or what I'm doing, it doesn't really matter, because then I don't have any contact with that person anyway… if they don't like it, it is their problem" (Emma).

5.5. Concluding notes

The empirical findings that has been depicted is the respondents own interpretations of the social practices on Facebook. All respondents had a lot to say about Facebook and their statements have, on the whole, been remarkably similar. The conventions relating to Facebook seem to be widely spread as their relationship towards Facebook appears to be natural and obvious.

In summary, the social practices on Facebook are very much about impression management and successfully staging a character. The empirical data shows no noticeable constraints on the parts of Goffman's perspective which connects to the private/public dichotomy besides the widely mixed audience that is invited. However, the empirical findings on the respondents' reflections on their social practices on their personal blogs is first to be presented, before they are compared and discussed in chapter seven.

6. Social practices and self-presentations on personal blogs

The respondents' reflections on their social practices and self-presentation on their personal blogs are presented thematically in this chapter. The empirical findings are concentrated towards their own actions on their personal blog even if others presence and actions is mentioned.

6.1. Usage

The respondents' motives with their personal blogs were multifaceted. They had their blogs to keep contact with their friends and family and to keep them updated of themselves and their lives. They used their blogs diaries, but also to get new friends and to be a part of the blog world. One respondent used her blog to inform others how it is to live with a diagnosis of psychic illness. Another respondent wanted to provoke and create debates with his blog. The respondents' argued that the blog should be updated often so that the potential readers wouldn't lose interest.

6.1.1. Motives

A common theme was to keep their friends and family updated about themselves and their lives. It could include people they met on regular basis and friends and family that lived in other cities or countries that whom did not met regularly. One respondent told me that her friends were geographically spread all over the world; "so we have one blog each, and we read each other's, and it is very private actually, what you are doing within days and if something has happened, showing pictures from the weekends and such" (Ann).

Respondents' reported that their blogs sometimes was used instead of a telephone for updating their families. One respondent revealed that; "my friends, acquaintances and family that you never have time to phone, like my mum, well [laughter], they shall be able to follow my life, what I'm up to, it's a little update so to say" (Johan).

Respondents' also reported that it was fun to "meet people through the blog" (Ann), and get contact with the blog world. One of the respondent told me; "It is a bit funny to enter that world… to have one foot in the blog world, and maybe have some contacts and so, to know what's going on. It is like a little world so to say, it sort of gets like a community, all the blogs. It's pretty fun actually" (Karin).

The respondents' defined their personal blogs as a kind of diary. One respondent told me; "The blog is some kind of diary, you can go back to specific dates and have a look… I often do that… you remember your everyday life in another way, otherwise it's so easy to forget" (Ann). However, respondents' meant that it was different from a traditional diary."You only write for a few people and for yourself… but maybe not as honest as when you sit and write in the evening [as in a traditional diary], when you have angst or something" (Lars), as one of the respondents told me. Respondents' also reported that blogging was a way of clearing their minds. A few respondents' also mentioned meant that they had a bad memory as a reason for their blogs.

I have always been interested in writing, during my teens I have written a traditional diary, but then I ended with that when I realized you could do it on the Internet, so it became more of a fun thing to write. And I have such a bad memory, so I need to write things down (Karin).

Another respondent meant that her blog was some sort of therapy because she likes to write and it's a way of getting her feelings out. She told me;

I write about my mental illness, but the message with the blog is to keep distance from the illness and try to live such a normal life as possible. And to spread information of course, because it is sort of taboo-coated area this with mental illness… to show that you are no serial killer just because you have a diagnosis. I'm still a young girl that lives just like many others in my age, with the little exception that I sometimes feel awful. (Saga)

6.1.2. Activeness

A common theme was the ambition to update the blog often. One respondent reported; "I usually write every day, maybe I spend half an hour, an hour on my blog every day… I try to keep it updated, so that the readers won't lose interest" (Lisa). If the blog was not frequently updated there was a risk that "you lose the readers" (Karin), as one respondent told me.

The respondents' activity on their blogs varied depending on their current situation in life. "Me and my girl have been so busy lately, otherwise I write about four to five entries a day, but it lies on ice now" (Karin). The activity could also depend on how they felt. One respondent told me;

It can be so different depending on how I feel. I usually write after something has happened, like if I have been in treatment or had any contact with psychiatry, employment services, unemployment fund, or other instances… then I write about so that the readers won't worry if I am away for a week… It's mostly concentrated about happenings and emotions… or happenings connected to emotions (Saga)

6.2. The social and public context

Respondents' reported that the patrons within their audience consisted of their immediate friends and family, acquaintances, Internet friends, and people in the same situation as themselves. Most respondents' had their blogs open and indexed on search engines. They were aware that anyone could find their blogs and access the information. Respondents' had access to statistics, which for the most showed that they had more visitors than their actual audience. However, it was only in comments from the audience that they could know if their audience actually read their posts. Respondents' also claimed that by publishing posts of the more intimate kind, they would gain a wider and larger audience.

6.2.1. Visitors and statistics

Respondents' kept track of statistics of the amount of visitors, which they took part of often. "I almost have a look every day, the statistics, checking for comments and such" (Eva). The amount of visitors in the respondents' blogs could vary from zero and over hundred, and in one case between six hundred and thousand visitors per day. In the latter, the respondent wrote about her diagnosis and life with her mental illness. She meant that the variation of the amount of visitors could depend on her psychic well-being:

It depends on how I feel. I get fewer visitors when I feel well, that's a little bit tragicomic actually. People rather want to read about me having death anxiety. But, I'm happy for the attention I get, I receive posts from readers with drawings, presents and thank you letters for that my words had helped them on their way, even though I only write about myself (Saga).

Respondents' suspected that most of their audience for their blogs was their immediate friends and family, even if the statistics only tracked country, date and time. "It is mostly the regulars, foremost my father, and my friends... I think it's mainly people that I know that reads it, and then perhaps some that likes it and that thinks that they have some similarities" (Lisa). Another respondent told me;

I could guess that I have eight or nine friends that read my blog every day, and then perhaps there are like twenty more that goes in and reads it sometimes, but not like every day... My dad reads my blog every day, my mother reads it sometimes, my little brother finds it ridiculous, but lately he have started to look on it sometimes (Emma).

6.2.2. Strangers and stalkers

A few respondents' reported that it could be felt odd to have strangers and stalkers as visitors on their blogs. One respondent mentioned that someone from Norway visited her blog several times a day, "but I don't know anyone in Norway, it's just so strange… perhaps it is just someone who thinks my blog is good" (Lisa). Another respondent told me;

If I notice that there are over hundred visitors, then I'm like, 'how on earth have they found out, why are they stopping by, why are they reading this'… But I don't mind actually, because I am not paranoid or so, like I was before, a couple of years ago, then I thought it could be unpleasant… People could get know so much about me, even though I'm not aware of it (Karin).

But the general idea was also that the blogs should be open for the public eye. They had all made an active choice to blog and share what they shared. One respondent told me; "Actually I don't bother so much, because, basically I have made an active choice to upload what I write on the Internet so that anyone could read it" (Saga).

Another respondent meant that it was not her intention to have strangers reading her blog. She reported that she once received comments from total strangers that wanted to know more information about her than she was willing to reveal.

It was a comment where it stood 'I saw you this morning, you were standing there digging in your purse and it really was you', and there was no name. I thought it was a joke, I thought that it was funny. But who was it… other times people have asked me to tell more about things, like if I wrote something, they wanted me to reveal things that I really didn't want to reveal, like can't you just tell me more about that and so, some people were so strange, it's good to be set free from that now [when the blog is closed]*… I usually just let them be… But these people seemed to actually have read the post, but they didn't want to tell who they were, then you get thoughtful, my blog was not so big, it just was so strange... The point with the blog was not that all these unfamiliar people should read it, it was supposed to be my friends only, but I was so naive, it wasn't only those that read it, sometimes I had fifty visitors a day, what did I think, I don't have so many friends, I was just so naive and stupid (Ann)*

6.2.4. Restrictions in the access of information

The respondents' used their real names on their blogs. They were aware that anyone could find their blogs through search engines like Google. One respondent told me; "There are many that are anonymous, but I'm not … If an employer searched on my name [e.g. on Google], it will come up there, so I can't write exactly anything, you have to think about that a little" (Lisa).

Most respondents' had their blogs accessible for the public eye. However, one respondent had her blog open for over three years, but made it password protected and accessible to her closest friends only, after her employer confronted her. After that, she knows exactly who visits her blog. She told me; "I can be pretty private in my blog now that I know who reads it… It is about fifteen, sixteen persons that have the password. I have chosen that they can read it" (Ann).

Another respondent had two blogs; one that was open for the public eye, and one that was password protected. She told me that she was intimate in both her blogs, she wrote about her life with a mental illness. She could write about it on a deeper level and with more details in the password protected blog, compared to the blog that was open for the public eye.

6.3. Published content and shared information

Respondents' reported the content and shared information should deal with intimate and personal issues. It was natural to reveal tasty details in the personal blogs, it was what made the personal blog personal. They argued that a higher level of intimacy was more interesting to the readers.

6.3.1. Disclosing intimacy

Respondents' reported that the topics within their personal blogs should deal with personal and intimate topics. A personal blog should to tell much about the author. One respondent stated; "when you are private, you tell much about yourself" (Lisa). Respondents' argued that a personal blog shall be personal and give the readers "the tasty details" (Karin) about them and their lives.

Moreover, respondents' reported that being intimate resulted in more readers. "You want it to be tasty, that attracts the reader to come back and read some more" (Johan). They argued that the personal blog should say something more than the ordinary and mundane.

> Well, if you write something special, especially stuff of the personal kind, then of course you get more readers, because people want to know you, they want to know the tasty details, people wants to read interesting things, no one cares what I eat for breakfast, people want to know something deeper than that, something more personal… you must think about that, it's a bit tricky, if you are a little personal and tell things then and then, then you get more readers and they stay as well (Karin).

The topics could include relations: "I write much about relations, mostly my own relationships" (Sara), and personal reflections: "Its most how I perceive things, what I feel, how I think, if it's something I have seen" (Eva), and everyday life and experiences:

> I write about things that makes me wonder, things that I like, things that make me angry, sad, happy etcetera, things that I think is worth leaving a comment… it is much everyday things, things that I do, have done… it's mostly about myself, about my surroundings, it's rather ordinary, most everyday things, a little funny, easy to read, everyday things (Karin).

Respondents' also reported that feelings were revealed in their blogs. One respondent told me; "psychologically private feelings, and views, are mirrored in my blog, even if I don't express them clearly, I think that they are present in my texts… The most personal [you can do], it is to share your thoughts" (Johan). Another respondent told me;

When I had my blog without password, then I was really intimate in it sometimes, especially when it comes to feelings, not what I did and such things, but feelings, and that I can feel like, well now it is nothing to regret, now that it is gone… the whole blog started out as a diary about my life… and then I didn't think so much about it, but I was really so stupid, but it is not something I regret now, it doesn't matter, those who have read it have read it, so it can be, I guess you always learn something, but I guess that I wasn't thirty-five and stupid, I was twenty and stupid (Ann).

It was reported that the respondents could reveal intimate information that they never would reveal in face-to-face situations, not even to their closest friends and family. "It's very humoristic actually. Some things that you write open in blogs for the world you never would have told a new friend. In my case I'm not very fast in telling about my illness, in real life that is" (Saga). Another respondent revealed:

Once, it was pretty awful actually, I had suicidal thoughts, and I wrote about it on the blog. I would never be able to write, or say that to somebody in person [face-to-face]. Then I received phone calls from people who were worried ... I would never have dared to say it face-to-face, in that way, you are of course protected when you are sitting there, in front of your computer (Lisa).

The respondents' also argued that people wrote more freely on the personal blog, and were not restricted to the same extent as on Facebook.

On blogs it's more common that you can write that you hate your manager or, that you write rather open about a boy you are interested in, or that people describe their sexual lives… You never see that on Facebook, perhaps because there are people there that you know from your real life (Lars).

6.3.2. Making boundaries

Even if the blog was a forum for the personal and the intimate, respondents' argued that there still were things that they never revealed. One respondent told me; "It has happened that I have written something and being close to publish it, but then I chose not to, since it was too personal, so it's good that you think in beforehand sometimes, it has happened several times" (Karin). It seems to be a fine line regarding the revelation of feelings. Respondents' argued that the blog posts could be too intimate if they were of the negative kind. One respondent told me;

I don't want people to know too much, so there can be a boundary there, regarding feelings, there is a boundary very much, it's okay to tell that you like someone, it's okay for me to write that I am in love, but I would never write that I'm feeling really down today, because, such things with feelings, there is a boundary I think… it's mostly feelings were the boundary goes, because, it can get too intimate (Karin).

One respondent had a popular blog where she wrote about her life with a diagnosis as bipolar. She had one public blog and one password protected, both dealing with her illness, but on different levels. She meant that; "some things are a little too private to be written in public, then I can write them in my locked blog or not at all" (Saga). She also told me;

Both my blogs are personal, I write about my life and how I feel, I write about my relationship with my boyfriend and my relatives. I'm only private in the password protected blog, but even there I have boundaries for how private I can be. I never write to intimately about the rape, about my sexual life or how I cut myself or other self-damaging behavior, that's my own business, my burden, and it can also be encouraging for others that feel bad… In the locked blog I write more about psychosis, self-damaging behavior etcetera, things that can be a trigger to other ill people. This is not a part of my open blog, which is about living a healthy life (Saga).

6.3.3. Spontaneity

The respondents' argued that the blog posts should be written spontaneously and with a spontaneous style. Respondents' reported that they wrote "just from the heart" (Sara) and that "it shall be spontaneous, you shall not have the impression of it being stilted, it's not a bachelor thesis, so to say" (Johan).

However, they were not as spontaneous as if it would have been a traditional diary. One respondent told me; "I write spontaneously, but it's not really a regular diary, because I have one of those as well. I can't hang out people and so, I can't write that I have conflicts with people, because, there would be trouble if I would" (Lisa).

Respondents also reported that they sometimes came up with ideas for their blogs when they were out, on the subway or during a walk for instance. "When my blog was public I used to think a lot during the day, that now I shall blog about this, I think that some people are just totally, well, that they really live with their blog, like doing things for the sake of their blog, I'm totally convinced about that" (Ann).

6.4. Interactive aspects

Respondents' considered it fun and exciting to receive comments on blog posts. Comments could confirm that people actually reads their blogs. Otherwise, the respondents were uncertain about who actually read their blogs. Respondents' reported that they never wrote anything that could damage other persons. They were also afraid that employers could find their blogs, as two respondents' encountered.

6.4.1. Comments

Respondents' argued that comments were fun but also that it not was essential for blogging. Receiving comments was part of the excitement with their blogs. One respondent told me; "Sometimes it can be excitement in it, now I have revealed something, now I have written a view that I want to be answered, it shall be fun to see if I gets any comments" (Johan).

However, some respondents' also reported did not get any comments even if they wanted to. "I hardly receive any comments, but I want more readers, and comments, to get some sort of response" (Sara). It was reported as boring if they never received comments. One respondent told me; "it can be really boring if you have blogged for a week and no one has commented anything" (Emma). Even those respondents that did not receive that many comments found comments important. One respondent told me; "It's fun in a way, because then you know that people read and that they are interested, then you know, not just only by stats and numbers, you actually know that

people have read it, so that's fun and it keeps you motivated to continue writing, of course it is so, but it's not so very important really" (Karin).

Respondents' reported an insecurity regarding who actually read their blogs. One respondent told me; "But you never know where it [the blog posts] ends up after you have clicked the send button, it ports somewhere out in cyberspace, and it will always remain there even if you erase the post, it is a bit scary, this thing with the Internet" (Lisa). Comments also worked as a confirmation that the audience really had read the blog post and received the information. It could be a confirmation more than just numbers and stats, and you could get a face of the audience.

> *It is mainly from people that say that they can see themselves in what I write, sometimes it is from young girls that feel bad and asks how they shall manage to get help from psychiatry, sometimes it is relatives to sick that like reading my blog as a consolation, as they get more insight... then it happens, but very seldom, that people think that it's mostly whining (Saga).*

It has already been stated that the respondents' thought on getting comments could depend on the level of intimacy. One respondent told me; "During the latter years it hasn't been so much comments at all, not like it used to be, but I have also written more and more shallow posts" (Johan). Respondents' also reported that being intimate sometimes could be a positive thing. One respondent told me; "In some way, when you are crossing that line, then you can get closer to each other, if someone leaves a comment, then it feels like you are bonding" (Lisa).

6.4.2. With the others in mind

Respondents' reported that they had respect of other persons when they wrote on their blogs. All of them meant that you could not write or share anything that can damage other persons, and they rarely wrote other persons names in their blog posts. One respondent told me; "I must censor myself when I write in my blog, I can't write about other persons... I can't write the others names, I can't write that I have conflicts with people, it would be trouble if I did" (Lisa). Another respondent similarly told me; "Just as long as you're not damaging anyone else, so that you can take all the hits yourself, then you can be just how intimate you want" (Karin).

Respondents' also reported that they could be especially careful with different topics in regards of different people, that they knew read their blogs. One respondent told me; "I can write sarcastic if I knew that it's someone I knew well that reads it, but I have also an old girlfriend that I know reads my blog, we are friends now, but perhaps I chose not to write about love-related things because of that" (Lars).

6.4.3. Confronted by employers

Respondents' reported that they were afraid that present and future employers would find their blogs. Within the empirical material there are two scenarios where the respondents got confronted by employers.

One respondent wrote a little about her employment in her blog. Her employer stumbled over the blog, confronted her, and demanded her to delete all posts about her employment (which only was a few posts). She had published around three thousand posts over more than three years in that blog. As she never mentioned any names on her blog and felt that so much could be interpreted as dealing with her job. "I could write that I had a bad day with a friend, maybe I write that it is someone that never thinks before she acts, and then they think it is about the job" (Ann). Hence, she

felt that it would be quite an effort to find, and delete these specific posts, so, she decided to delete the whole "just to get rid of the problem" (Ann). Neither did she want her employer to read all the other posts. "I don't want them to read about me being unhappily in love and stuff like that, it wasn't supposed they should, that's why I deleted it... I became so amazingly chocked by realizing, you know, that they have read this now" (Ann). After the incident she started a new blog under a new address and restricted the access by making it password protected and only accessible to selected friends and family. She argued that the incident was an awakening and that it changed her way at writing in the blog. She told me;

> *I am more diffuse now, but I thought I was that before as well... I still never mention the name on my job, colleagues and stuff like that... it really was an awakening for me, because I was very blue-eyed [cough], I didn't share stuff in the same way, now I only write if there has been anything fun that made me happy. It is very seldom that I write about being annoyed... If it's negative I take it with me home instead and talk about it, because, well, still with a password people can come over the blog, if they are good, so what the heck, I'm not so sure anyway (Ann)*

Another respondent argued that one of his blog posts made his husband lose his employment. His husband worked at a hotel and the blog post dealt with a stay on this particular hotel. "I didn't exactly write positively about it, because it was not positive. The bed was sloppy, I felt very bad, the food was terrible and all stuff like that, it smelled really bad, it was not sanitary, even though it was one of the finer hotels in town" (Johan). His husband also had a blog and; "wrote a little about it as well, and didn't wrote so positive things either, and he had linked to my blog post, and that wasn't really popular either" (Johan). The hotel manager, likewise his husband's employer, stumbled over their blogs which resulted in his husband being fired.

6.5. Concluding notes

Just as the empirical findings about Facebook, it is the respondents own interpretations of their own social practices on their personal blogs that has been depicted here. As the last chapter showed, all of the respondents had a lot to say about Facebook. Regarding the personal blogs, however, it was a few respondents that spoke more than others; they were dominant in this part of the empirical findings. The social conventions regarding the social practices on the blog are perhaps not as obvious and natural as for Facebook, which could be a possible bias in the forthcoming comparison between self-presentations on the two forums.

In summary, based on this empirical material, social practices in both forums are very much about presentation of the self. However, how the respondents' present themselves is different between the forums. In regards of the personal blog's we can, at this point, see that there are major constraints in regards of the parts of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective that relates to the distinction between the private and the public (i.e. back/front stage and impression management). These differences, and others, are discussed further in the next chapter.

7. Discussion and comparison

The empirical findings for Facebook and personal blogs are discussed and compared to each other in this chapter. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is, of course, the point of departure for the discussion which highlights the most central concepts in his model; the social situation, back/front stage and impression management.

7.1. The social situation in Facebook and personal blogs

In order to understand the social situation of Facebook and personal blogs it is of importance to understand whom the respondents are in front of, and how. The composition of the audiences, how expressions given and given off can be interpreted in these two settings, and how mediated presence differs from the immediate presence of face-to-face interaction are highlighted in this subchapter.

7.1.1. Composition off the potential audiences

The composition of the audience constitutes a framework for the social situation. Individuals require information about their audience in order to know what definition of the situation they ought to project. Therefore, it may be of interest to start the discussion with the composition of the potential audiences for these two settings. The empirical findings showed that there are major differences between the respondents' potential audiences on the two settings.

The potential audience on Facebook exclusively included the respondents Facebook friends that involved a variety of people that they at least had met face-to-face. It included people they met on regularly basis (e.g. close friends, family, fellow workers) and people they met long ago (e.g. old classmates, distant friends and acquaintances). Instead of segregating the audiences, as Goffman (1959) suggested, the respondents invited almost all their different audiences to the same performance. The audience was scattered over the respondents' entire social network, covering a variety of relations, constituting a multilateral and complex composition of teams and team-members. Even if the respondents were cautious whom they accepted as Facebook friends, some of them found it strange that they turned out to be so many. "I don't understand how they could be so many, because I'm so cautious, it's really strange, because I don't know four-hundred people" (Karin) as one of the respondent revealed. However, the main objective with Facebook was to maintain contact with people and interact with, at least, a few of them. Some respondents' revealed that they were Facebook friends with people that they never would socialize with if it wasn't for Facebook. They only kept them there in order to regulate the old impression they once had of them.

The potential audience on the personal blog included all Internet users. All personal blogs in the empirical study were accessible for public gaze, expect two (one of the locked blog had previously been open, and the other was a secondary blog in addition to a public blog). To some extent, having no restrictions in the accessibility to the blog was a part of the whole idea with the blog. Some respondents' reported that they wanted to be a part of the 'blogosphere' and meet new people through their blogs. Conversely, the invited and expected audience was the respondents'

closest friends and family. However, their blogs were indexed on Google, and in online blog-catalogues, so everyone, including outsiders, could stumble upon the blogs. They were allowed to take part of the performance, interrupt and leave comments. In that sense, the respondents had no ambition to segregate the audience of their blogs, which is contradictory to Goffman (1959).

Obviously, the audiences in both settings are, at least potentially, larger than audiences present in Goffmanian social situations occurring face-to-face. The audiences on Facebook and personal blogs are both these forums are complex, multilateral and diffuse. The social situation is a public situation in that sense and differs from face-to-face interaction analyzed by Goffman (e.g. Goffman, 1959). The "given patterns of access to information" (Meyrowitz, 1985) are different when comparing the two forums. Facebook is restricted to Facebook friends only, whereas the personal blog, in general, is open for public scrutiny.

7.1.2. Online expressiveness

Expressions given and given off are essential for individual's online self-presentations and the meanings about the self that emerge out of this process. They are crucial for framing online interaction (c.f. Robinson, 2007).

Expressions given within Facebook and the personal blog are manifested in the published words and sentences (i.e. in blog posts, status updates and comments on Facebook) and photographs. Compared to offline interaction, where individuals give expressions more or less simultaneously in face-to-face interaction, the rehearsal space is potentially larger in online interaction. The performing individual can both mentally and visually (i.e. when they add content before they click send or publish content) rehearse in a more or less relaxed manner before they chose to 'give' a specific expression. Online performers have more time to define the situation before they decide when, and how, they shall express themselves.

Expressions given off in a true Goffmanian sense are manifested in the physical presence and take shape in bodily language, tone of voice and facial expressions. This kind of expressiveness takes other forms online and must be understood differently. Expressions given off can be interpreted as embodied in every single action and activity that each bring about. It can be expressed in, for example; the style and tone in what they write, the activeness of the users (how often they publish content, or how fast they leave replies in conversations), in the privacy settings (regulation of access to the revealed information), and the presence and composition of the users friends (having many friends on Facebook, for example, expressed success) and their activities. Expressions given off are captured in the fact of being, or not being, present on these two forums, and in the privacy regulation. Having the blog open or closed was something that gave off expressions about the individuals. However, it is harder for the performer to recognise the reactions of the audience and how they perceive the exuded expressions. Consequently, it is harder to control the expressions given off. It is also difficult for the audience to know if the expressions given off are intended, or unintended, and what hidden assumptions the performer has.

As online self-presentations are published the performer have the same possibilities of perceiving and interpreting the meanings about his self that emerge out of the act of performing, similarly as his audience does. By other means, the performer is also a part of his audience. In that sense, online self-presentations are a concrete manifestation of Mead's thoughts about the self as an object for the individual (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969).

Furthermore, expressions given and given off are not exclusively expressed by the performer himself. As Goffman argues, "this would be a limited view and can obscure important differences in the function of the performance for the interaction as a whole" (Goffman, 1959, p. 83). Other performers, or team members, and their exuded expressions give off expression of those involved. Those in the audience that write comments and interact with the respondents give off expressions about the respondents in question. The interaction *per se* constitutes a part of the performance and exudes expressions. Online performances are therefore not exclusively one-man-shows and can also be understood as collective actions where different relations and teams are affecting the presentations of the self. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is everything but individualistic and emphasises that other individuals, in various constellations of teams, contributes to the impression of the self that emerges.

7.1.3. Mediated presence and interaction

A constraint for using Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on self-presentations on Facebook and personal blogs is the lack of direct co-presence in time and space between the interactants where they reciprocally influence each other's behaviour's. The presence of the audience on Facebook and personal blogs is delimited to a mediated presence that challenges traditional laws of time, space and visibility. Consequently, it is perhaps more suitable to talk about Facebook and personal blogs as information systems or given patterns of access to information (c.f. Meyrowitz, 1985).

Similar to Tarde's (1901) notion of the public, Facebook and personal blogs bind physically separated individuals together mentally as a purely spiritual collective, even if it is hard for the individuals to know exactly how strong the collective is and who that really are part of it. The presence of the audience on these forums can be interpreted in their activities, i.e. when they leave traces in forms of social response (e.g. comments and feedback on Facebook and personal blogs) or, to some extent, by being tracked in statistics on a personal blog. The rest of the audience, which never or rarely, engages in social response of some kind, has a vague and uncertain presence. In that sense, the audience is obscured and there is an uncertainty of who really takes part of the content (c.f. Tufekci, 2007). As one respondent stated: "You really never have a clue of who really keeps tracks of you and sees what you are doing… there are people online that never write anything, so you can't see that they are online and lurk around" (Emma). The lurking audience is, more or less, invisible and imaginary, but highly assumed as actually being there. The majority of the audience and their presence is diffuse, foremost existing in the performers' imagination. The social situation of Facebook and personal blogs has to therefore more similarities to what Asplund (1987a) defines as abstract sociability. Because, even the most concrete form of social responsivity has an abstract dimension when the rest of the audience is added. Not knowing in front of whom they perform makes the social situation more diffuse and abstract.

7.1.4. Concluding notes

Facebook was restricted to people the respondents knew, even if the relations covers their entire social network, ranging from close friends to distant friends at the borders of their social networks. The personal blog was open for the public eye even if the respondents assumed that their audience foremost consisted of their closest friends and family. Both settings are dissimilar to Goffman's (1959) notion on how performers want to have their front stages and the composition of the audience as separated from each other.

As the respondents never could be certain about who they were in front of it made the social situation diffuse and uncertain. Their presence was visible and concrete in their actions and social responsivity. However, most presence of the audience was vague and better defined as an abstract sociability (Asplund, 1987a).

In general, the respondents also had more Facebook-friends than they had visitors on their blogs and the audience was more active in engaging in social response. It also seemed that Facebook gathered a wider audience in terms of the composition of all the different teams. Therefore, it can be argued that Facebook was perceived as a more public and social environment than the blog. Interestingly enough, it was on the personal blog, which was open for the public eye that the most intimate stories were revealed. This is what we shall discuss in the next sub-chapter.

7.2. Back/front stage in Facebook and personal blogs

Facebook and personal blogs are best defined as front stages where the actors are in front of different sort of audiences. In fact, online front stages are perhaps even more public and intensified compared to front stages as within Goffman's traditional model. To stage a character successfully according to Goffman (1959), the performer must keep the backstage separated from the performance in the front stage. The empirical findings showed constraints regarding the personal blog on this point. How Goffman's back/front model can be interpreted to the social practices on Facebook and personal blogs are now to be discussed. The first section deals with Facebook and the second with the personal blog.

7.2.1. Staging a successful character

Even if the respondents stated that they wrote about everyday experiences and "what they do in the days" (Sara) on Facebook, it was rarely intimate reflections. Their attitudes towards too personal posts on Facebook were negative. They were cautious about revealing intimate backstage-information and they didn't want to know too much of this kind of information about their friends either. Facebook was considered as an illegitimate and unsuitable forum for revealing back stage information. "There are old colleagues and relatives there. I don't think that Facebook is a safe medium" (Saga). Hence, the backstage is actively kept separated from the front stage of Facebook.

With other words, the respondents actively engaged in *staging a successful character* (instead of "successfully staging a character" as in Goffman's terminology) in front of the audience. Even if the presence of the audience is reduced to a mediated presence the respondents were aware of them and felt they couldn't write about what they wanted. They were on guard and controlled in their behaviour, concerned of exuding the right expressions, selecting the most successful and interesting parts to their presentation of themselves. It was foremost a positive image of themselves that they wanted to express. They strived at showing "the most interesting parts" (Ann) and one respondent even told me that "perhaps it is a more positive image of myself than in reality" (Eva). These aspects highlights that we are dealing with a *hyper-ritualization of the successful character* and their everyday activities.

On Facebook the respondents concealed intimate information and they were instead focusing on coming up with inventive and original posts that attracted the audience to social response. This can also be seen as a part of the performance. Feedback and social response was however

important, and something that respondents highly tried to obtain with their acts. Information in form of status updates was carefully prepared and selective with the motive to get a lot of social response. It was also these types of posts that generated most social response in forms of comments and "thumbs up" that was important for them in this environment which also expressed success.

Conversations on Facebook was in principal connected to nonsense. Interaction foremost included "silly comments" and "funny talk" without any real goals besides interacting and stay connected with their Facebook friends. Communication on Facebook has similarities to Tarde's description of conversation as "*entretiens de luxe*" (nonessential discussions); "any dialogue without direct and immediate utility, in which one talks primarily to talk, for pleasure, for game, out of politeness" (Tarde, 1898, p. 308). It was this kind of talk that binds the interactants together and constitutes the social cohesion.

7.2.2. Staging the front stage as a backstage

The fundamental idea with the blog was to disclose "tasty details" (Karin) about the self and, so to say, take the audience backstage. It was a legitimate setting for disclosure of intimate and personal information. Providing the audience with backstage information was expected to result in a more personal blog that would be perceived as exciting for the audience to read and take part of. The respondents expected that it would attract more readers and increase the popularity of the blog.

The dramaturgical aspect of self-presentations, according to Goffman (1959) is to keep the backstage as separated from the front stage and the performance. However, the presentations of the self on the personal blogs shows the opposite and would according to Goffman be *anti-dramaturgical* or *a cult of confession* (Goffman, 1959, p. 200)[10]. The presentations of the self on the personal blogs are in that sense very contradicting to Goffman's dramaturgical model. Hence, there is a major constraint for applying Goffman's model where backstage information should be concealed in the performance in front of the audience. But, nevertheless we can still speak of dramaturgical performance as selected part from the backstage intentionally is staged.

Presentations of the self on the personal blogs modifies Goffman's dramaturgical model and turns it inside out. Out comes an inverted model of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. Performances on the personal blogs have a back region style, where *the front stage is staged as a backstage*. It is appropriate to speak in terms of *performed intimacy* where the social actors actively 'communicate out of character' and are more than willing to stage selected glimpses of the back region self.

Even the characteristics of the actual performance in regards of expressiveness can be understood in these terms. The style of the 'given' expressions, especially the written words, should be presented spontaneously with a back region feeling, so that the audience will be convinced that the presentation of the self is sincere and natural without restraints and rehearsal space. The idea is, perhaps, to intentionally express that the social activity is far from a performance, where the authentic self from the backstage is presented as separated from any front stage roles.

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[10] *Goffman (1959) mentions group therapy as a deviant example of the dramaturgical and consequently as anti-dramaturgical. "A psychic sinner stands up and talks about himself and invites others to talk about him in a way that would be impossible in ordinary interaction. In-group solidarity tends to result, and this 'social support, as it is called, presumably has therapeutic value... It may be that these shifts from apartness to intimacy occur at times of chronic strain. Or perhaps we can view them as part of an anti-dramaturgical social movement, a cult of confession" (Goffman, 1959, p. 200).*

Intimate information of the backstage, and the revealing of it, is considered as sublime in the eyes of the respondents and we can speak in terms a formalized and *ritualized intimacy*. The intimate can also be hyper-ritualized to that extent that even more intimate information is revealed in the staged backstage on the blog than on the real backstage offline (e.g. when one respondent wrote about her suicide thoughts that she never would reveal in front of any of her closest friends). To some extent the staged backstage is perhaps even more backstage than the real backstage.

However, the respondent also argued that there still were boundaries and that there were some things that they never would write about on their blogs. Some information is still concealed on the personal blog. By other means there still exists a backstage. However, in comparison to the respondents Facebook-performances the boundaries between the private and the public are established at different locations. The question is also how far the boundary can be moved before everything falls apart.

7.2.3. Concluding notes

Goffman's back/front model seems to work for an understanding of the social practices on Facebook, where the respondents strived at staging a successful character and keep the back region separated from the front region. To some extent the performances also exaggerates Goffman's model. However, the presentations of self on personal blogs are contradicting to Goffman's original back/front model, as the front stage of the blogs intentionally is staged as a backstage. The performance follows a different logic that stands in opposition to Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. Consequently, impression management must follow the reversed dramaturgy of the personal blog.

7.3. Impression management in Facebook and personal blogs

Impression management are techniques adapted by the performer for controlling the impression that the audience gets of him. It is manifested in controlling and regulating the access between the backstage and the front stage, the selection of teams and team-members, and the expressiveness of the performance. With other words, it deals with how individuals preserve different kinds of boundaries between the private and the public in on-going social interaction. How the techniques of impression management are to be understood in these two settings is discussed in the next three subchapters.

7.3.1. Dramaturgical loyalty and dramaturgical disloyalty

The respondents were dramaturgically loyal to the various teams and team-members in the potential audiences on both settings. They never betrayed them by disclosing secrets that they shared with each other. Presumably, this is also what they expected in return. As Goffman (1959) mentions, "each team-mate is forced to rely on the good conduct and behaviour of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him" (Goffman, 1959, p. 88). Writing badly about them would give off expressions about the author behind the statement, and is not to stage a successful character. However, it was reported that they sometimes could make jokes about each other, but only in a friendly manner and to a marginal extent. Being funny in this friendly manner was perhaps also part of staging a successful character.

Performances on personal blog were more of one-man shows, compared to performances on Facebook, which included a more interactive dimension. It was as one-man teams that they could be dramaturgically disloyal, which was the whole idea with the blog. That is, to over-communicate destructive information about themselves, staging secrets and facts connected to the back region in the front region. As one-man teams, they were devoted to the dramaturgically disloyal. As one respondent puts it: "as long as you're not damaging anyone else… then you can be how intimate you want" (Karin). The thing is, however, that it is that this kind of performance can be seen as just as much theatre as being dramaturgical loyal.

However, two respondents reported scenes where they concealed destructive information about their employment on their blogs shows the opposite. In these examples, the respondents' were more attached to their invited audiences than to the specific teams (their employers) whom they never really expected nor invited to take part of the performance.

7.3.2. Dramaturgical discipline and dramaturgical spontaneity

Dramaturgical discipline is exercised in the heat of the moment of in face-to-face interaction and intensifies the demands on the performer to be alert and have a "presence of mind". Additionally, it is the technique for not committing any unmeant gestures, as well as, to handle the situation if unmeant gestures occur. In both settings, the respondents' have an advantage compared to face-to-face interaction, because, there really is no heat of the moment, and the space and time dimensions are stretched out. With other words, they have time for reflections and rehearsal before they actually perform. Individuals, therefore, can more easily practice this technique of impression management here and they were especially good at not committing any unmeant gestures, and being dramaturgically disciplined, on Facebook and personal blogs.

Facebook seemed to be a controlled and disciplined environment where the performers deeply engaged in giving and giving off the right expressions. The respondents were aware of the manifoldness of the audience and reflected upon the possible response to the performance in beforehand. Hence, performances on Facebook are performances true to Goffman, and to some extent exaggerated versions of Goffmanian performances, similar to hyper-ritualization.

Despite the extended rehearsal space, the respondents argued that they wrote their blog posts spontaneously, "straight from the heart" (Sara), and with a spontaneous styles. "You shall not have the impression of it being stilted" (Johan) as one of the respondent stated. The dramaturgical discipline on the blogs is referring to putting a performance that express anything but being dramaturgically disciplined, in a Goffmanian sense. Instead, they were disciplined in being spontaneous; *dramaturgical spontaneity* was used in order to make the staged backstage (e.g. the blog) look like a genuine and authentic backstage. Perhaps it also can be interpreted as a part of being deeply in empathy with the performance, to the extent, that it is seen as an authentic action instead of a performance. Unmeant gestures, in form of reveling back stage information facts, were not unmeant on the personal blog; they were instead highly intended and performed. Being intimate was the idea with the personal blog. However, it can be argued that performances on the blog are just as disciplined as the dramaturgically disciplined performance on Facebook. To reveal intimate information is not an undisciplined act of disorder. Instead, the respondents were deeply engaged and disciplined in staging the front stage of the personal blog as a backstage. Once again, social practices on the blog are just as much performances, if not even more, as performances that are dramaturgically disciplined in a true Goffmanian sense.

7.3.3. Dramaturgical circumspection and dramaturgical openness

Dramaturgical circumspection is about carefully selecting the audience and chose dramaturgically loyal and disciplined team-members. It was only on Facebook that the respondents could select their audiences (if not the blog was password protected or the Facebook-profile was open). The respondents' stated that they were cautious with who they gave access to their Facebook-profiles. In general, the rule was to include people that they at least had met face-to-face, and had some sort of relation to, and knew, or at least assumed "were green" (Johan). If they were insecure they restricted the access to the Facebook-profile and showed them a limited profile where not all information was available. It also happened that respondents sometimes deleted Facebook-friends and restricted their access to their profile-pages. Some of them reasoned that even if they wanted to delete friends they wouldn't, because this part of the audience would probably notice and it could lead to awkward situations.

The respondents were actively inviting their closest friends and family to their personal blogs, in that sense they adapted to dramaturgical circumspection. However, by means of the blogs being indexed on search engines it could be available via Google, it allows strangers and people of all kind stumble upon and take part the performance. In that sense we can speak in terms of a *dramaturgical openness*. Online performances are also constantly available which make them even more open and accessible. They are not temporary performances as within face-to-face interaction occurring there and then. Shutting down the blog, or making it password protected, is similar to closing the door to the performed back stage. The example where this happened is an example on how far the "anti"-dramaturgical performance can be taken before it collapses and the whole stage falls apart.

7.3.4. Tactful and tactless audience

Goffman argued that individuals in the offline world are tactfully protected. Tactfulness is a protective technique of impression management used by the audience. Individuals keep away from regions that they are not invited to (Goffman, 1959). How does this work in the online environment where the spectator can inspect without the performer being aware or certain about it?
As the respondents' restricted the access to their Facebook profiles to people that they, more or less knew, they were protected from uninvited spectators from the outside on Facebook. However, they were cautious about presenting intimate information and, moreover, they didn't want to know too much about most of their Facebook friends either. They didn't want to take part of this kind of formation. If such information would have been revealed on Facebook it would immediately show up in their news feed, forcing them to take part of the information even if they didn't want it. Their Facebook friends were invited to their performances. On the personal blog, on the other hand, it was evident that uninvited strangers, and sometimes even stalkers, took part of the performance. One respondent reported that strangers contacted her on her blog and wanted to know more about this and that and asked her to write more about it. This is an example of a *tactless audience*. Performers cannot really know if the audience is tactful or not, neither can they count on being tactfully protected by the audience in these two forums, and the blogs in particular.

7.3.5. Concluding notes

The arts of impression management in regards of the respondents' self-presentations on Facebook and personal blogs stand very much in opposition to each other. In regards of the performances on

Facebook, on the one hand, the techniques of impression management are used to stage a character successfully in a traditional Goffmanian sense. That is, to separate the backstage from the front stage. In regards of the performances on the blog the same techniques are used in the opposite manner: to stage a character that is deviant to Goffman's notion of what a successful character is, because the idea with the personal blog is to stage what normally is hidden. The respondents' self-presentations on their personal blogs put the logic of impression management in question because it is still no longer the issue to separate the backstage from the front stage. However, the respondents' self-presentations on their blogs are just as dramaturgical as their self-performances on Facebook. The individual can still be seen as a performer in both these environments. The dramaturgy on Facebook is about actively concealing, and the dramaturgy on the personal blogs is about actively revealing information connected to the backstage. Perhaps the theatrical aspects and metaphors are even more evident in regards of online self-presentations. To participate in the social practices on these two applications includes to present a self and to select what parts to be revealed and concealed. Dramaturgically, we can very much speak of a performance, a role that is assumed continuously in the presence of a public.

8. Conclusions

The findings from the discussion are synthesized and discussed in broader terms in this concluding chapter. The chapter begins with a reminder of the research objectives, including what I have studied, and how I conducted the study, followed by the research findings and a discussion on ideas for future research arising from this study.

8.1. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on Facebook and personal blogs

The aim with this study has been to discuss Goffman's dramaturgical perspective on social practices and presentations of the self in Facebook and personal blogs, respectively and in comparison. To what extent is Goffman's perspective applicable to social practices on mediated environments like Facebook and personal blogs? What are the constraints? What are the possibilities? How can Goffman's perspective be critically developed to understand social behaviors and self-presentation acts occurring there? What happens to the central concepts in his model? These are the research questions, which can be interpreted as evaluating the use of Goffman for understanding online social practices. As Goffman's model connects to the distinction between the private and the public (which also is an important issue within the web) the focus has also been on this dichotomy.

The discussion draws on an empirical material constituted of ten individual's reflections on their social practices on Facebook and personal blogs. Hence, the empirical data derives from a cognitive level of the users and offers insights on the motivations and negotiations behind social actions and presentations of the self for both applications. As all respondents use both applications, it opens up for a comparison between how they present themselves in each forum. The empirical findings showed that the respondents presented themselves differently on each of these setting. There are constraints for using Goffman's dramaturgical perspective connecting to the prerequisite for social interaction and in the logic of the back/front model and impression management, which connects to the distinction between the private and the public.

The first constraint with Goffman's model for both these applications is the difference between online interaction and face-to-face interaction. Firstly, the performers are not in the immediate presence of each other's and the actor does not perform in the heat of the moment. Additionally, this increases the individuals' rehearsal space and the actual performance is perhaps better prepared and more dramaturgical. Secondly, the social situation has more likeness to public situations and the increased size of the audience makes the engagement and obligations to interact smaller. Whom the actors are in front of is also crucial for the public side of the private/public dichotomy. Thirdly, the multilateral audience makes the social situation diffuse, with the consequence of making it harder for the individuals to define the situation and knowing what definition of the situation that they shall project. This was evident for both forums. Therefore, mediated interaction on these two forums is different from face-to-face interaction, which is the main reason why Goffman's perspective not is fully appropriate to use. There are constraints in regards of the co-presence between the interactants and the constitution of the audience and the expressions given and given off must be understood differently. Nevertheless, it is still an environment where individuals

present themselves in front of an audience, even if it is diffuse. It is especially true as the respondents, in general, used their real names on both Facebook and their personal blogs. Therefore, we can still say that they very much interpret individuals' online social practices as performances where they engage in impression management. However, there are constraints in regards of the actual performance.

To put a performance and engage in impression management in Goffman's perspective is about keeping backstage- and front stage behavior separated in order for social life to flow smoothly and to successfully stage a character. It is in that sense that Goffman's dramaturgical perspective connects to the private/public dichotomy. It is about the selection of what to reveal and conceal, and to constitute boundaries between the private and the public self. However, Goffman's model in regards the back/front model and impression management can only be applied on Facebook, where the performance follows the same logic as in Goffman's model. That is, to keep the things connected to the backstage separated from the front stage and the performance. The respondents strived at staging a successful character on Facebook in a true Goffmanian sense. The whole idea with the blog, on the other hand, was to stage the front stage as a backstage. The intimate was sublimated and we can talk in terms of ritualized intimacy. Ritualized intimacy turns Goffman's model inside out. It sets up an inverted model of Goffman's model where performance is about a selective opening of the backstage. According to Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, this kind of behavior is anti-dramaturgical. However, it is still a performance, just as much as the performances on Facebook, even if they are of different kinds.

Consequently, impression management must be adjusted in order to follow the reversed dramaturgy of the personal blog. As the personal blogs, in general, are open for the public eye we can talk in terms of *dramaturgical openness* (*cf.* dramaturgical circumspection). In order to make the personal blog look like a genuine and authentic backstage they engaged in *dramaturgical spontaneity* (*cf.* dramaturgical discipline). The performers' were dramaturgically disciplined in that sense rather than being dramaturgically disciplined in Goffman's traditional sense. On both environments the performers was dramaturgically loyal to their team-members. However, when it came to performance of themselves as one-man teams they over-communicated selected information from the backstage, which is better of defined as *dramaturgical disloyalty*. It was towards the dramaturgically disloyal that they, as performers, were loyal towards on the blog.

A weakness with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model is that it characterizes social behavior either as backstage- or front stage behavior. Goffman's model takes minor consideration of nuances. However, as this study shows, it is not obvious that the backstage is connected to what is hidden, and that the front stage is connected to the public. This critique of Goffman might also be true to face-to-face interaction. Meyrowitz (1985) added a nuance to Goffman's model by implementing a middle region. However, middle regions do perhaps still works better on mass media than mass-self communication on the web. Facebook and personal blogs are better defined as more intensified and public front stages than middle regions. Sometimes, performances on the personal blogs include taking the audience even to the deep backstage. In that sense, performances can be exaggerated and understood in terms of hyper-ritualization. This is also true for performances on Facebook, which instead exaggerates Goffman's traditional notion of performance. Here, it is a hyper-ritualization of the successful character,

In sum, Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is not a theoretical framework that, in general, is suitable for a comprehensive understanding social interaction in mediated forms. However, social life in mediated forms on the web includes a presentation of self, especially when individuals are open with their real names (as the respondents for this study). In that sense, the web adds an extra

dimension, or stage, to contemporary social life where individuals can be seen as performers. However, as this study shows, performances can take different forms in different forums and social contexts. Some performances follow the logic from Goffman's dramaturgical model while other performances follows an opposite logic, as they are about staging the front stage as a backstage, which revise Goffman's model. However, the revised and developed model is just as much, if not even more, theatre than Goffman's traditional model.

8.2. Future research

Goffman is an important sociologist whose dramaturgical perspective on social life is classical within sociology. If the classics within sociology can handle the web, or if they must be revised, is an interesting and important question for sociology. Social interaction and self-presentations are intensified on the web through various forums, however, as this study shows Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is insufficient for understanding social interaction and self-presentation on Facebook and personal blogs. So, the main issue is to explore alternatives to Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959) and how they can be used for analysing online social practices and presentations of the self (including the private/public dichotomy) on the web.

As this study shows it is the differences between face-to-face and mediated interaction that is the main constraint for using Goffman. Consequently, the first concern for future research must relate to the social processes, mechanisms and pre-prerequisites for online social interaction and self-presentations. Interaction and situations should be the point of departure for future research dealing with how social interaction on the web is to be understood, how it differs from face-to-face interaction and how and to what extent it is social. These are relevant questions to that are in need of further investigation. Hence, it could be relevant to further explore the social psychology of Asplund and central concepts such as abstract sociability and social responsivity (Asplund, 1987a, 1987b). Moreover, Goffman and the alternative perspectives (outlined below) can perhaps only be understood in relation to studies on technology and society, such as Latour's actor network theory (2005) and the social construction of technology of Beijker et al (1987).

To begin with, the theoretical framework on social life and self-presentations for this thesis is delimited to Goffman's first major work (i.e. Goffman, 1959). However, Goffman's work on social interaction and the self is more extensive and diversified than the dramaturgical perspective from the late fifties. For example, the essay *Role Distance* (Goffman, 1961) might add a nuance to his dramaturgical perspective. Furthermore Goffman analysed deviant social identities (Goffman, 1963), he found inspiration in game theory (Goffman, 1969), and he analysed the ritualized elements in social life (Goffman, 1967). Moreover, Goffman also extended his main interest from face-to-face-interaction; first to public places (Goffman, 1963; Goffman, 1971) and at the end of his career to mass media (Goffman, 1974; Goffman, 1979; Goffman 1981). It would be unreasonable not to include Goffman's other theories and contextualize them to social interaction on different forums on the web. However, Goffman can only be judged in relation to alternative perspectives.

A social world/arena perspective (e.g. Becker, 1982) can be one explanation model for framing online social interaction. It is especially important as different social worlds collide on the web and give a new dynamic to online social interaction and self-presentations which Goffman and the alternatives must deal with.

One alternative can, for example, be found in Collins's theory on interaction rituals chains (Collins, 2004). Collins connects to a Goffmanian tradition with interaction and situations as the point of departure. Another interesting alternative, which also connects to Goffman, is White's

theory on social networks and how identity is created in social interaction (White, 1992). A systematical investigation of these, and other, alternative perspectives is in need to answer if they offer better tools than Goffman.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Bakgrundsfrågor/Inledningsfrågor:

Berätta lite om dig själv…

Ålder…

Sysselsättning…

Användandet av sociala medier:

- Vilka sociala medier använder du? Om du använder fler typer av sociala medier, använder du dem för olika syften?

- Hur länge har du använt dig av sociala medier (anpassa efter vilket/vilka de nu använder)?

- Vad fick dig att börja använda sociala medier?

- Vilken typ av information delar du med dig utav? Vad skriver du om (eller vilken typ av bilder delar du med dig av)?

Frågor för de specifika forumen:

Facebook

- Beskriv en vecka/en dag på Facebook, vilka tider brukar vara on-line (hur länge)? Vad brukar du göra på Facebook (aktiviteter)? Hur brukar det kännas när du är på Facebook? Vad är det som får dig att logga in på Facebook?

- Beskriv ditt kontaktnätverk på Facebook? Vilka är du vänner med? Kompisar, kollegor, familj, släkt, bekanta etc.? Hur pass bra känner du alla som du är vänner med? Delar du med dig samma information till alla dina kontakter på Facebook?

- Hur pass öppen har du din profil? Vet du om andra kan gå in och kolla på dina bilder? Gör det dig något? Brukar du kolla på andras bilder, personer som du inte känner?

Bloggar

- Beskriv en typisk blogg-vecka/dag? Vad får dig att skriva ett blogg-inlägg? Vilka känslor har du när skriver på bloggen? Vilken typ av ämnen tycker du om att blogga om?

- Har du koll på hur många besökare du har? Är det viktigt att få många besökare?

- Brukar du få kommentarer på inlägg, vilket typ kommentarer brukar det röra sig om? Hur viktigt är det att få kommentarer på ett inlägg? Brukar du själv kommentera andras inlägg? Varför?

Bilder

- Hur ofta delar du med dig av bilder i social media (Facebook, bloggen Flickr, etc)?

- Vilken typ av bilder delar du med dig av?

- Kan alla se dina bilder?

- Varför delar du med dig av bilder?

Identitetspresentationen / Impression Management

- Hur tror du besökarna uppfattar dig som person i och med ditt användande av social media (anpassa efter vilka forum de använder)? Skiljer det mellan folk som känner dig på riktigt och främlingar, de du känner väl och de du känner mindre bra? Hur vill du att folk ska uppfatta dig? Bryr du dig om hur folk uppfattar dig via ditt användande av sociala medier?

- Hur brukar du skriva om dig själv på Facebook och i bloggar? Skriver du enbart positivt om dig själv eller tar du även upp brister? Är det vanligt att du ändrar på inlägg? Raderar eller ändrar du text, tar bort bilder etc.? När gör du det, vad har i så fall anledningen varit?

- Vilken publik har du i åtanke? Vem tror du läser din blogg? Har du koll på vilka som gör det? Bryr du dig om vem som läser din blogg?

- Hur viktigt är det att få feedback? Kan det påverka hur du skriver?

- När du skriver ett inlägg eller gör en aktivitet på ett socialt medium hur brukar du tänka innan du gör det offentligt? Vilka har du i åtanke? Brukar du fundera över hur det kan påverka bilden av dig?

- Är allt du skriver sant?

Privat/personligt

- Hur skulle du vilja definiera vad som anses vara privat? personligt?
Är det någon skillnad mellan det personliga och det privata?

- Hur privat kan man vara i sociala medier? Vart går din gräns? Är det någon typ av information som man inte delar med sig av? Tror du att den är samma för alla? Vad är det mest personliga du har skrivit om eller delat med dig av på annat vis i sociala medier?

- Har du några exempel på situationer där det uppfattar som att denna gräns har trätts över? Få ut mycket info om den… Kan man dela med sig av för privat/personlig information?

- Vad tycker du att du tjänar på att dela med dig av information om dig själv med andra? Vad är fördelarna? Finns det några nackdelar med att dela med sig av privat information?

- Tror du gränsen mellan det privata och det offentliga har förändrats över tid? Är folk mer öppna idag?

- Tror du att det skiljer sig mellan det privata i sociala medier och "IRL"?

Social interaktion

- Hur ser kommunikationen ut mellan dig och dina vänner på Facebook, på bloggen, annan social media? Finns det någon typ av jargong som man använder sig av?

- Hur pass aktiv är du i kommunikationen? Hur kommunicerar du t ex på Facebook, sker det öppet eller dolt? Brukar du skriva på andras "vägg" på Facebook? Brukar andra skriva på din vägg? Vilken typ Feedback brukar du ge? Vilken typ av Feedback får du?

- Brukar du tänka mycket på vad du säger i kommunikationen med andra på Facebook, bloggar, i social media överlag?

- Finns det någon typ av kommunikation (ord, etc.) som man undviker på t ex Facebook och i bloggar? Är det någon skillnad mot när du t ex kommunicerar off-line eller dolt via privata meddelanden eller chatt)?