

#selfie:

An Investigation into the Attitudes and Opinions of Girls in 5th and 6th Class
on the Selfie

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

Roisín Garry

Date: 3rd May 2018

Abstract

Selfies, shared far and wide across various social media platforms, have changed the way in which we communicate. Young people dominate the statistics when it comes to selfie taking, particularly girls. It appears that there has been very limited research conducted in Ireland on the relationship that girls have with the selfie. Therefore, the primary aim of this research is to explore and examine the attitudes and opinions that girls in a 5th and 6th class have on the selfie. The research design used was a qualitative method. Focus groups were conducted with sixteen participants – four in each group. These participants were girls from 5th and 6th class in a DEIS Band 1 primary school in Galway City, Ireland. By employing a qualitative method of gathering data, the experience, challenges, and opportunities of each of the participants was explored. Overall the participants projected various attitudes towards the selfie often even reflecting that of the opinion of the media – that selfies are narcissistic in nature. Given the rapidly expanding role that technology such as selfies and social media play in our society today, the relationship of our young people, particularly girls, must be explored. This study aims to inform all caregivers of the relationship that young girls aged between ten and twelve have with the selfie.

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This chapter offers an introduction to the background context and motivation for, as well as an overview of the research study, which aims to investigate the attitudes and opinions that girls in 5th and 6th class have on the selfie. The research was conducted using a qualitative method of gathering data. The researcher employed a qualitative approach in order to uncover trends in thought and opinions and to dive deeper into the topic. Focus groups were conducted with sixteen participants from 5th and 6th class in a DEIS Band 1 Primary school in Galway City.

Background to the Study

The internet and technology have transformed our lives, it has changed the way in which we communicate. Everyone both young or old, will find themselves now communicating in a dramatically different way than they did in their childhood. This is hugely down to the influence of technology and the internet on everyday lives. Social media is a continuously growing industry, which has a wide reach and influence worldwide. The selfie gained popularity towards the end of 2012 and was even Oxford dictionary's word of the year in 2013. Together the selfie and social media have changed the way in which people communicate daily. Young people dominate the statistics when it comes to selfie taking, in particular girls (Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim & Andreassen, 2016). This study aims to explore girls and social media, in particular their relationship with the selfie. According to the Irish Independent, research was commissioned by the Huawei Snapys in which Galway was found to be the selfie capital of Ireland. In the article "Revealed: Ireland's selfie capital reveals which county is the vainest" (Irish Independent, 2015) it reports that people in Galway take six times as many selfies as those in Ireland's capital, Dublin.

Rationale for this Study

The researcher identified a paucity of research data relating to the attitudes and opinions of girls on the Selfie. The rationale behind the researcher's choice of research topic is as follows;

- Personal interest in the aforementioned topic
- When initially deciding on a research topic the researcher found that there was a distinct lack of articles and academic journals on the current study and felt researching a fresh, new topic very relevant to the 21st century would be both very interesting and challenging.

Research Question

This study will focus on investigating selfies with girls in 5th and 6th class. Defining clear, specific, and relevant research questions is one of the most important parts of the research study. The following question was arrived at:

- What are the attitudes and opinions of girls in 5th and 6th class on the Selfie?

Organisation of the Study

The remaining sections of this dissertation are structured as follows:

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature for the purpose of this research project. To date there has not been much research conducted on the attitudes and opinions of girls in Ireland on the selfie. Therefore, the literature review presents numerous perspectives on the selfie in Ireland, Europe and across the globe.

Chapter Three provides details of the research methodology that was adopted during the research stage of this study, the reasons for selecting such an approach, and also the reasoning behind many of the aspects of the research that was conducted. A qualitative method of gathering data was employed to gain a deeper understanding from each of the participants' perspectives and experiences of the selfie. Any limitations of the research

design along with the positionality of the researcher and any prevailing ethical issues are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents and explains the research results from both primary and secondary research acquired from books, articles and journals and from focus groups carried out over the duration of this study.

Chapter Five gives a detailed discussion of the research results and the academic literature that was reviewed during the literature review process and how they relate to the research questions proposed at the beginning of the research.

Chapter Six contains the main conclusions that can be drawn from the research undertaken. The summary of findings, closing comments, limitations of the study along with some suggestions for future research is also discussed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Selfies and social media have transformed the lives of this generation, changed the way they communicate, how they learn, how they work and spend free time, in essence – more or less changed every aspect of this generation’s lives one can think of. This literature review aims to provide a critical analysis and interpretation of the current literature that relates to the selfie and social media. Oliver (2012) believes a thorough review of literature guides the reader into understanding how one particular study fits into a broader context and how the research subject is connected to other related areas. Boote & Beile (2005) relate to this by suggesting that reviewing literature should go beyond searching for information and should include identifying relationships between the literature and your research topic. This literature review proposes to show where this research topic fits into the existing body of knowledge while enabling the researcher and reader to learn from previous theories on the topic. It aims to justify the research study and outline gaps in previous research. It begins by discussing the selfie and its relationship with social media. It then goes on to discuss girls’ relationship with the selfie and social media. The selfie and identity, feminism, narcissism, and addiction are then explored. A variety of sources of data are used including academic journals, research papers, books, online sources and published surveys.

The Selfie and Social Media

Selfie taking, together with social media interaction are two prevalent aspects of modern day life. The term Selfie as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is a “photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). Social Media, “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017), has evolved since its origins and has captured the attention of people from different genders, generations and social backgrounds. The hashtag #selfie has been used in over 340

million posts on Instagram and is popular across all social media platforms. It has even spawned other related hashtags like #selfiesunday, #selfienation, #selfiequeen etc. (Instagram, 2018). The related images depict men and women of all ages, races and social backgrounds but the selfie seems to be more associated with one class of people, the young woman.

While the term selfie is relatively new, images of humans have been around for generations. As humans, we are drawn to making ourselves seen and the combination of the selfie and social media is a great way to be seen. “The way we relate to imagery is changing. Our new relationship is less about witness, evidence and document and much more about experience, sharing and streaming.” (Brook, 2012).

The Selfie and Girls and Social Media

Girls get the message from very early on that what's most important is how they look, that their value, their worth, depends on that. And boys get the message that this is what's important about girls. We get it from advertising. We get it from films. We get it from television shows, video games, everywhere we look. So, no matter what else a woman does, no matter what else her achievements, their value still depends on how they look. (Newsom, 2011).

This quote is from a documentary called Miss Representation which is about women and the media. In this documentary, it is also expressed that social media is shaping our society and most of all shaping our children's brains, lives and emotions. Most of this social media revolves around the act of selfie taking.

According to a survey carried out by the National Women's Council in Ireland social media was mentioned as one of the most negative influences for a young women's body image (NWCI, 2015). These negative influences are also examined in the International Journal of Eating Disorders in an article that investigates selfies and body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls. They found that “higher levels of engagement with

general and social media were associated with greater body-related and eating concerns” (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim & Masters, 2015). However, this is often not reflected by all girls themselves. Often girls view social media as a space of knowledge where they can learn and be positively influenced by bloggers and YouTubers. In a recent survey carried out by Girlguiding UK, 47% of 7-10 year olds and 62% of 11-16 year olds, viewed YouTubers as good role models for young people, with 34% of the 11-16 year olds more likely to get advice from a YouTuber than their parents (Girlguiding, 2017). This demonstrates that the view of the media on girls and the view that girls have on social media doesn't always coincide.

A clinical report by the American Academy of Paediatrics, weighs up both the pros and cons of children using social media indicating that there are many benefits of social media such as enhancing learning opportunities, socialising and communicating and also accessing health information. However, they also discuss the negative influences social media can have on children such as cyber bullying, sexting and Facebook depression (O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Many young girls are under pressure to take the 'perfect' selfie. In a recent survey (BBC Newsround, 2017) that involved 1,000 10 to 12 year-olds in the UK, it was found that more than half (55%) say they share selfies. 83% of these say that it is very important to look good in the selfies that they share and 75% of them say they edit the photos at least sometimes before posting them. However, despite these pressures, it was found that the majority of 10 to 12 year-olds in the UK who use social media enjoy it, with 83% saying they feel happy, sociable or excited when they use it and 39% saying they would feel excluded, sad or lonely if they didn't have it any more. In the same survey it was suggested that more than three-quarters of children ages 10 to 12 in the UK have social media accounts despite the fact that they are below the age limit. Webwise (n.d) advise that social media users should be no younger than 13 years old while the NSPCC (2017) reported that the

majority of parents don't know if their children are old enough to use social media sites, with 1 in 5 parents thinking that there are no age restrictions on social media sites.

The Self(ie) and Identity

“Adolescence is the period where the ‘self’ is found and established for life,” (Stevens, Hunter, Pendergast, Carrington, Bahr, Kapitzke, & Mitchell, 2007, p.101). The self is considered the object of introspection or reflexive action, a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). Baumeister (1999) provides the following *self* definition: “The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the persons attributes and who and what the self is” (p118). According to Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter (2005), many identity researchers believe the *self* and *identity* to be two different yet related constructs. They assume that an individual has many different identities but only one self.

Identity is an elusive concept, with no single clear definition. It can be used in many different contexts. Buckingham (2008), traces the word back to its Latin roots meaning “the same”: It is unique to us all, but it is consistent, hence the same. Jenkins (2004) explores social identity in believing that “all human identities are by definition social identities” (p.4). Buckingham (2008) and Jenkins (2004) both discuss Goffman (1959) who believes that “an individual presents an “idealized” rather than authentic version of herself.” (Hogan, 2010, p.378). This can be linked to Foucault's views on visibility and power within society and Bentham's Panopticon in a prison setting:

Bentham laid down the principal that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he always may be so. (Foucault, 1979)

This notion, that we behave as though we are being watched, can be applied to the taking of selfies and sharing on social media platforms. In adolescence, one of the primary

development tasks is to answer the question “Who am I?” (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). The Selfie as shared on social media “enables identity expression, exploration, and experimentation; something innate to the human experience” (Code, 2012, p. 38). Updating and managing online profile content is seen as a vital aspect of an adolescent’s online identity and “e-personality” (Aboujaoude, 2011). However, what identity or self is being shared on social media – is it one’s true self? In a culture that subjects women to ‘beauty surveillance’ (Elias & Gill, 2016), it can be argued that the selfie doesn’t always enable true identity expression. Boethker-Smith (2015) describes the phenomenon of selfie-taking as “a boundless proliferation of images being made on a daily basis by people who don’t necessarily think that the selfie is a reflection of oneself but do understand that it’s a reflection on the representation of oneself.” (p. 99).

Another way to look at the selfie is one of self-expression; we are capturing an image of ourselves as we see ourselves, as we are the only ones who know our true selves. Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu & Zhu (2015) found that by taking selfies people express their personality differently than they would do in other types of photos. In the words of the artist Frida Kahlo “I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best.” (Kahlo, Lowe & Fuentes, 2005, p. 13). Girls share their images online to present to the world their identity and the person they see themselves at a particular moment in time.

The Selfie and Feminism

In the media the selfie is often portrayed as having a negative impact on young women’s lives, as discussed above. “When it comes to selfies and girls, much of the conversation has been judgey; selfies are narcissistic, humble-braggy, slutty, too sexy, ‘a cry for help’, or yet another way for girls to judge each other (or seek validation for their looks)” (Bennett, 2014). Are selfies a tool of the patriarchy? According to Enloe (2007):

Any patriarchy survives and thrives only if its leaders and members can perpetuate a widely accepted standard of “proper” femininity. A dominant

notion of “proper” femininity is especially potent when it becomes the basis by which women (and girls) judge, or “police,” each other (p.93).

Or can they be used to battle the patriarchy? The selfie can be used as a tool for empowerment. Arvida Byström, an Instagram sensation, is known for her photography which questions femininity and gender standards. Byström explores self-identity and questions sexualised women’s bodies through the use of selfies. She uses her selfies, often nonconforming, displaying natural body hair, as a device to challenge traditional norms of beauty that are repeatedly presented to us by the media. By utilising the selfie Byström is encouraging young women who do not see themselves represented in main stream media to do the same and so ensuring they are seen and their voice is heard (Instagram, 2018).

In a recent article, Barnard (2016) explored the meaning of selfies by investigating their potential for feminist empowerment. Although his findings are divided, he believes that selfies can be empowering and that “real changes can be made through viral campaigns designed to capture media attention and shape public opinion” (p. 14). The aforementioned Byström, recently took part in such a campaign with Adidas where she was selected as a model for their latest collection. Images of Byström modelling for Adidas, displaying her natural leg hair, soared across all media platforms resulting in an array of opinions. Such campaigns allow women to challenge the social norms of beauty and thus empower them to do the same.

The Selfie, Narcissism and Addiction

Narcissism is defined as "excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one’s physical appearance” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). Found in many people to a degree, narcissism traits include grandiosity, dominance and superiority (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Selfies are usually taken for the purpose of sharing with others by uploading to a social media site. Therefore, an emphasis is placed on self-presentation and selfie-takers tend to focus in on their physical appearance. Consequently, selfie-taking has been associated

with narcissistic personality traits and a self-centred mindset (Weiser, 2015). Much of the research carried out reinforces the general consensus, that selfies are narcissistic in nature (Halpern, Valenzuela & Katz, 2016, Lakshmi, 2015, Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). However, in an article written recently it was found that “women show less of an association between selfie-posting and narcissism, since women tend to be more likely than men to use social media as a way to connect with others” (Seidman, 2015 p.9). This again demonstrates that the general view of girls and selfie taking and the view that girls have on selfie taking doesn’t always coincide.

In an article written in the Irish Times recently, cleverly titled ‘Death by Narcissism’, the rise of selfie fatalities is discussed (O’Connell, 2017). According to O’Connell (2017) twenty-nine people died while taking selfies in the first six months of 2017. A selfie death is defined as “a death of an individual or a group of people that could have been avoided had the individual(s) not been taking a selfie” (Vachler & Kumaraguru, 2016, p. 6). In a short report published in the Irish Medical Journal four people were admitted to University College Hospital, Galway during a one-week period with injuries sustained while taking selfies (Lyons, 2017). Death by narcissism can be associated with addiction to selfie-taking with Kaur & Vig (2016) believing that “the extent of selfie addiction can be well judged from the fact that many deaths have been reported in India due to the increasing obsession of taking selfies in general public” (p. 1149). Therefore, selfies can be seen as a mild form of behavioural addiction, whereby stimulus relating to the act of selfie taking can outweigh other concerns (Grant, Potenza, Weinstein & Gorelick, 2010).

Conclusion

There has been a substantial amount of research carried out on issues surrounding the Selfie. From the literature discussed, a holistic picture of the selfie and social media has been presented. This chapter highlights the selfie and its relationship with social media, together with girls’ relationship with the selfie and social media which is central to the aim

of the study. Literature on the selfie and identity, feminism, narcissism and addiction are also presented in this chapter. From the literature discussed it is evident that the worlds' perception of girls and the selfie doesn't always coincide with the girls' own views on the subject. It is also obvious that there is a clear gap in literature available on the relationship between Irish girls and the selfie. The next chapter deals with the research design and research methodology.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research project's methodology and research design and provides rationales for their suitability in addressing the research question. The definition of the research question plays a vital role in the determination of the research method and research design; it drives all decisions regarding the research project (Brannick, 1997). It is important to realise that the research design evolves from the research question and never the other way around. Data collection and sample selection will be discussed, along with limitations of the research design, researchers' positionality and ethical considerations.

Research Question

This study will focus on highlighting the attitudes and opinions that girls in 5th and 6th class have on the Selfie. Defining a clear, specific, and relevant research question is one of the most important parts of the research study. After reviewing the literature, the following question was arrived at:

- What are the attitudes and opinions of girls in 5th and 6th class on the Selfie?

Research Design

Design is concerned with turning research questions into projects (Robson, 1993). Research is described by Maylor & Blackmon (2005) as a systematic process of defining, designing, doing and describing and turning an investigation into a research problem. In deciding the most appropriate method required to conduct this study both primary and secondary approaches were considered. It is particularly important according to Leedy (1989) to recognise the fact that data and methodology are inextricably interdependent. For this reason, the research methodology to be adopted for a particular problem must always recognise the nature of the data that will be amassed in the resolution of the problem. The research method influences:

- What research questions will be asked.
- What methods are used to collect data.
- What type of data is collected.
- What techniques might be used to analyse data collected.

As a result, the research methods deemed appropriate for this study were comprised of both primary and secondary resources.

Secondary Research

Secondary research is useful in providing a broader understanding or background material on a subject area. It is a cost effective and time effective method of research. Secondary research offers further advantages such as insights into the opinions and perceptions of others, as well as highlighting areas in need of additional research. Moreover, this type of data usually enjoys a greater level of credibility and reliability (Stewart and Kamins, 1993). Thus, the secondary research comprises of an extensive review of literature surrounding the dissertation area. The sources of secondary data include; academic journals, research papers, books, online sources and published surveys. Hence, it was essential that secondary data was reviewed and examined before conducting primary research to establish what knowledge and studies currently exist, this has aided in the research decisions and saved time and money. Principle sources of information were provided from various academic libraries and the internet.

Bryman and Bell (2003) identify a number of drawbacks associated with the use of secondary data; they first point to the limitations that may be experienced if the information obtained does not allow the researcher to draw the proper conclusions as a result of the data not being what is required in order to draw the correct inferences. Secondly the quality of data and how accurately it reflects reality cannot be guaranteed by the researcher and as such may be of major concern depending on the source from which the data originates. Far from

questioning the ability of the original source to collect data, it is a question of their ability to collect data without bias. If the data was collected in order to demonstrate a particular point of view, or for a particular body, subconscious subjectivities may influence the appearance of data.

Finally, there are questions concerning how complete the gathered data is, and also how adequately covered the subject area. Often the answer to such issues is in discriminating against data which may come from a dubious source. When gathering secondary data, Greenfield (1996) warns that the use of data from a study, when the study fails to report the methodology and sampling design should be done with caution. When determining the adequacy of secondary data, these issues should be the main concerns of the researcher when they are evaluating the suitability of that data for the purposes of their research. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007) assert that research based on secondary data may constitute the answer to the research question in some cases. However, great care must be taken in selecting the suitability and quality of the sources.

Primary Research

Primary data collection allows the researcher to tailor the methods and content to the specific focus and relevance of the research area. A qualitative approach was adopted. Qualitative research generally refers to findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or others means of quantification. Qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through methods such as focus groups or interviews. It attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants. Dawson (2009) explores how fewer people take part in qualitative research but states that the contact with the few people tends to last longer as their attitudes, behaviours and experiences that are portrayed are of importance. Creswell and Poth (2017) state that qualitative research employs an open and flexible design. By using open ended questions during a focus group, the attitudes and opinions of young people were examined and portrayed.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a form of qualitative research, where data emerges from the researchers' interaction with a group. The researcher collects and interprets data in order to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations. The skill of the moderator is the key to the success of this type of research (Clark, 2009). According to Fiona Holland of University of Derby, focus groups can be "quite vibrant and dynamic if handled well". She states that "a lot of it depends on the skill of the moderator but it is a great skill to learn and practise as part of a master's project" (Holland, 2013). Focus group research provides the opportunity to gain in-depth understanding from several individuals about a research topic. The strength of this type of research rests in the interaction among participants that occurs within the group context to provide a depth of understanding (Krueger & Casey, 2014). For this study, four focus groups were conducted, each consisting of four participants. Smaller groups of participants in a focus group, also called mini focus groups, tend to be used to facilitate conversation (Heary, 2002). As the research was carried out with young adolescent girls, focus groups can provide a more relaxed atmosphere and be less intimidating than an individual interview for adolescents (Liamputtong, 2011). Punch (2002) found teens prefer focus groups more than in-depth interviews because "they were in the supportive company of peers" (p. 46). It is recommended that the time allotted for focus groups with adolescents be similar to the length of a typical class at school, 30 to 45 minutes (Krueger & Casey, 2009) therefore, the focus groups conducted for this study lasted between thirty to forty minutes. Each question that was asked during the focus group session was designed based on the key issues from previous research highlighted in the literature review and to address the central objectives for this study. The aim of the focus groups was to assess the attitudes and opinions of girls in 5th and 6th class on the selfie.

Sample Selection

The identification of potential research participants was framed by the research purpose. According to Morse & Field (1998), appropriateness is derived from the identification and utilization of the participants who can best inform the research. The researcher felt that it would be both advantageous, interesting and appropriate to investigate the topic from the perspectives of girls in 5th and 6th class. Therefore, the focus groups were carried out in a vertical Catholic DEIS Band 1 National School in Galway City. The school is co-educational up to 1st class and then all-girls from 2nd class until 6th class. A convenience sample of a class cohort of sixteen children in 5th and 6th class was used. Convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest and most convenient persons to act as respondents (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The rationale behind using convenience sampling was that it was easier to use students from the school where the researcher was on Advanced School Placement than any other school. Participation was restricted to girls who were in 5th or 6th class; no other pre-requisites were placed on the sample selection.

Qualitative Data Analysis

There are many different types of qualitative data analysis available to the researcher. An element of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used in this study to analyse the focus group results. When data is analysed by theme, it is called thematic analysis, which is when themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon by the researcher (Dawson, 2009). Braun & Clarke (2006) believe that this is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Data was collected until data saturation occurred. The data was then transcribed and printed – each focus group on different coloured paper. Then each sentence was read and re-read by the researcher to look for recurring themes. Categories and the emerging themes were then built upon systematically. The data was coded by creating notes on the transcripts on recurring themes and topics. The audio of the focus

groups was listened to and relistened to in order to find links to each theme. The scissors-and-sort technique was then adopted to analyse the data. This involved cutting up each of the coded transcripts and compiling them by themes which had emerged. These various pieces of transcribed text were then used as supporting materials during the interpretation of the data. According to Stewart & Shamdasani (2014), this technique is an efficient approach to focus group analysis however, he highlights that it tends to “rely very heavily on the judgment of a single analyst” (p. 123). These themes are discussed in detail in chapters four and five.

Limitations of Research Design

It is important to be aware of any disadvantages or restrictions associated with the research design. One of the obvious limitations of qualitative research is the difficulty, or even impossibility, of applying generalisations to the information and findings. This is mainly due to the great detail that can be extracted from the data collected. Another limitation would be absenteeism on the day the focus groups are scheduled. This was avoided by sending out reminders and by gently encouraging participants to attend by providing light refreshments on the day. A limitation the researcher anticipated was a case where some voices would drown out the voices of others. In that event the researcher had planned to carry out follow up interviews with the quieter participants to ensure that an understanding into their attitudes and opinions was also gained. However, this was prevented through the researcher’s managerial skills, ensuring that each voice was heard. Another limitation was that the participants in the focus groups were a convenience sample, some of whom didn’t regularly take selfies or even own a phone. The demographic of the participants should also be considered; each participant attended the same school and class – a Catholic primary school with a somewhat conservative ethos. One limitation the researcher did not anticipate was the time constraint with each group. It was hoped that the participants would be available

for a full hour however; in most cases they were only available for less than fifty minutes due to various other school commitments.

Researchers Positionality

This researcher's undergraduate degree is in Geography and Sociology. Having opted for many modules of human geography along with studying sociology she has always had a keen interest in patterns of social relationships, social interaction and culture. This interest is combined with the researcher's love of IT. The researcher has worked extensively in various capacities within the IT industry followed by undertaking a Professional Master of Education. For many years the researcher has been intrigued by photography, in particular portraits of people. As a woman, the researcher is aware of her own attitudes, opinions and bias on the selfie and the general opinions the media have on women and the selfie. However, with selfies not being a global phenomenon when she was in primary school, the researcher lacked any understanding of what it was like to live in a world, as an 11 or 12 year-old, which revolves around the selfie and social media. She wanted to learn more about what girls this age experienced and what their relationship was with the selfie.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting any piece of research, the ethical issues must always be dealt with. Good solid ethical standards must underpin all research (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Marino Institute of Education. Signed consents were obtained from the Board of Management, the children, and their parents/guardians, in advance of any research being undertaken. Additionally, all participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw their consent and their input at any time. As with any research project the risks to participants was thought through and measures were taken to ensure that the dignity of each participant was respected. These measurements included the changing of the participant's names in the data collection and the reassurance that there were no right or wrong answers. Written data was stored in a

locked drawer in the researcher's desk and any soft data, word files, transcripts, consent forms were stored on a personal laptop which is password protected and is safeguarded by an up to date anti-virus software. All data collected will be destroyed thirteen months after the study is complete.

Summary

This chapter has described the research methodology for the current study. The methodology is the roadmap that guides the research, and this is an imperative aspect of the study. It explained the rationale behind the choice of research methods to satisfy the identified research objectives and questions. It outlined the research design and covered the research methodology – focus groups. The chapter concludes by explaining the strategies for data analysis and identifying the limitations associated with the research design. The researcher's positionality and ethical considerations were also discussed. The next chapter will present an analysis of the findings of the research.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the main findings obtained from the research conducted from a sample of sixteen 5th and 6th class girls. The results are divided into sections by themes that emerged, and the research evidence compiled and analysed in order to address the research question set out at the beginning of the study:

- What are the attitudes and opinions of girls in 5th and 6th class on the Selfie?

Findings from the process of data analysis revealed a number of significant themes. The findings presented in this chapter will be used to compare and contrast the experiences, attitudes and opinions of the participants involved with regard to selfies, and in the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Themes that emerged from the Focus Groups

As a means of focusing the collection and interpretation of the data, questions were drawn from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The analysis of the data involved the careful examination of each of the transcripts and recordings to identify the key and common themes emerging from all four of the focus groups. These themes were then contrasted and compared with the literature already reviewed. The themes are summarised, and the findings are analysed in this chapter.

The data gathered from the focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis. This enabled the creation of themes to emerge and tested the significance of the data collected. A carefully selected sample can provide data representative of the population from which the sample is drawn. Four focus groups were completed with all participants being girls aged between 10 and 12 years old. This particular sample was perfect for this project as it represented a range of girls whose attitudes and opinions of the selfie were explored. While analysing the data from the focus groups the following themes emerged:

- Safety
- Permission and Screenshotting
- Narcissism
- Filters/Online vs Reality
- Celebrity Pressure
- Space

As previously stated in the limitations section of the methodology, due to the scope of the topic under investigation and because of time constraints in obtaining the data from the participants, it was only possible to set up and conduct four focus groups, each consisting of four participants. This was not ideal, but the information is still extremely relevant and useful for this study. Hopf (2004) explains that while a structured interview has a rigorous set of questions, in which divergence is difficult, a focus group is open. The researcher followed a similar design of questions for each focus group, however due to the nature of the focus groups diverse organic questions emerged from the participants themselves in response to the information they provided. The results of the findings and discussion on these findings are as follows:

Safety. First and foremost, in each of the focus groups the subject of internet safety organically emerged. Much to the researcher's surprise each group spoke intelligibly about the importance of internet safety and the importance of taking safe selfies and posting online with due care. It emerged that Kate from group one decided to delete all her social media apps because she didn't feel safe on them anymore. She discussed how her accounts were all on private, but that people can still send her follower requests which made her feel unsafe. Jessica from the same group agreed but described how she practised safe internet use by telling her older brother or parents when she uses the internet. Grace from group four stated that her parents only allow her to post photos that aren't "personal" while Missy from the same group agreed and offered that "you have to be careful sending your photos especially in private". Maria from group three discussed how she never posted any selfies online because she was afraid that someone might recognise the background in her photos. When asked about age

restrictions on social media sites they were using, all the participants were unaware of the age requirement and discussed how they made up dates of birth in order to access the social media sites. Ciara from group one stated that it didn't matter because "most people just fake their age". This was the general consensus across each of the groups. This coincides with the literature and a survey conducted in the UK suggesting that more than three quarters of children between the ages of 10 to 12 have social media accounts despite the fact that they are below the age limit (BBC, Newsround, 2017). The NSPCC (2017) reported that the majority of parents (one in five) were unaware that there were age restrictions on social media sites. However, it is evident that children in this age group are acutely aware of the dangers that taking selfies and posting them online may present.

Permission. One of the main concerns highlighted by all groups was the issue of posting selfies without permission. Laura from group three shared her experience of when someone posted a group selfie with her in it without her permission. When Laura asked for the selfie to be taken down the person refused as they liked how they themselves looked in the selfie. BBC Newsround (2017) found that 83% of 10 to 12-year olds in the UK say that it is very important to look good in the selfies that they share. Karen from the same group discussed how when her friends take a group photo; "they all just look at themselves to see if they look pretty enough to post it". This coincides with the scenario that Laura found herself in. Aoife from the same group added that "people get kind of obsessed with how they look in selfies and then end up fighting". This links in with the narcissistic view on selfies and addiction to taking selfies. Ivy from group four described posting selfies without permission as "a complete invasion of [my] personal privacy". Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton (2005) discuss how ones concerns about self-presentation and physical appearance can sometimes drown out concerns for others and trigger behaviour that seeks benefits for the self at a cost to others. This can be linked to the BBC Newsround's findings. It is also further backed up by literature with

Grant et al. (2010) believing that stimulus to the act of selfie taking can outweigh other concerns.

Along with the topic of permission the issue of screenshotting came to light in each of the focus groups. It appeared that it was a common occurrence that girls often screenshotted selfies of their friends and often used filters to alter their appearances. This was something that all of the participants felt very strongly about. Shauna from group one shared that she “probably wouldn’t want to post again” if one of her selfies had been altered. Jessica from group one believes that screenshots “are dangerous, they should be banned!”. She once had a negative experience with selfies where a friend took a screenshot of her selfie without her permission.

Narcissism. Selfie takers tend to focus on their own physical appearance and self-presentation. An emphasis on self-presentation drives individuals to focus on their own physical appearance. Consequently, as Weiser (2015) points out, selfie taking has been associated with narcissistic personality traits and a self-centred mindset. Aisling from group one believes that people only take selfies and post them because “they think they are pretty”. Laura from group three agrees that people tend to post selfies to get attention and show off how pretty they think they are. Ivy, Grace and Missy from group four discussed how girls care more about their appearance than boys when taking selfies and agreed that this was because people would see the selfies they are posting and “might judge them”. Grace believed that this had to do with celebrities and the influence of the selfies they post. However, Grace did agree that taking selfies made her feel beautiful. Katie from group two also expressed how she believed girls like “showing off their looks” through the selfies they take, whilst Andrea from the same group articulated that “girls care more about how they look and how others think they look”. However, Leah from the same group disagreed and said that she takes lots of selfies not for vanity purposes but for her love of creativity and photography and as a means of communication. This is also perceived in the literature where Seidman (2015) discusses

women's detachment with the views of selfies and narcissism stating women use them as a way to connect with others.

Online vs reality. A key theme highlighted across the board was manner in which individuals presented themselves in the selfies they posted online. Shauna from group two proclaimed that "what we see online isn't always real!" when examining a stimulus photograph (see Figure 3) and then went on to describe it as "deceitful". Examining the same photograph all participants in group four add further to Shauna's idea of online vs reality not always coinciding. Missy from this group believes that people often "fake it" online and try to be someone that they are not. Grace agrees and discusses how this is in order to be seen as popular. Laura from group three divulged that once she did something similar to Figure 3 but as a joke and not to be deceitful. All participants in group one agreed that people often act or look differently in selfies that are being posted online than they would in reality. This can be tied in with Goffman's (1959) idea that individuals present an idealised version of themselves rather than an authentic version which can also be linked to Foucault's views on visibility and power and the notion that our behaviour changes if we know we are being watched (Foucault, 1979).

The use of filters on selfies was another theme that was discussed by all participants in each of the groups. Opinions on filters were divided amongst participants. Ciara in group one believed that filters made her look better with Aisling from the same group alleging that some people use filters "to make them look more attractive" but her use of filters on selfies is "just a bit of fun". Ivy and Grace from group four agree that filters are fun and shouldn't be taken too seriously. Laura from group three admitted to using beauty filters to cover up imperfections because she didn't "want to look ugly" when posting or sending selfies. She continued by saying that she wanted to look like a celebrity in the stimulus pictures (see Figure 4) displayed and that is her reason for using the beauty filters. Maria added to this by saying that celebrity selfies put pressure on girls to look perfect in their selfies and use beauty filters as a

consequence of this. She told the group about a friend who used a beauty filter to alter the way she looked in a selfie she posted online but argued that it was deceitful “because it doesn’t portray how she really looks”. This can be seen as pressure from a culture that subjects girls to what Elias & Gill, (2016) describe as ‘beauty surveillance’. Do these girls feel that their altered selfie is a representation of their true selves? Boethker-Smith (2015) believes that selfie-takers, like Maria’s friend, don’t necessarily think that their selfie is a reflection of themselves but that it is a reflection of the representation of themselves. Meaning that Maria’s assessment of her friend being deceitful in her presentation of herself is inadequate, but that her friend’s selfie is merely a reflection of the representation of herself in that given moment. Maria continued by discussing people using filters on their selfies without their permission saying that she was happy with how she looks so someone else should not have the right to change that. The use of filters on selfies could well be linked to the narcissistic traits mentioned above, however they can also be seen as an art of self-expression, giving girls the power to share their selfies with the world to present their own identity at that given time. It must also be taken into account that often the ‘you’ that these girls want people to see is informed by the visual culture that they grow up with. Therefore, celebrity culture and selfies must be discussed.

Celebrity pressure. Three out of four of the focus groups discussed the impact that celebrity’s selfies have on them and their own selfies. Laura from group three, used a filter to cover an imperfection because she stated “you want to look like these, they never have spots” pointing at the stimulus pictures (see Figure 4 & Figure 6). Maria from the same group added that it is often a case of copycat when it comes to these filters, celebrities are using them, so they must too. All participants in group four agreed that celebrities are not good role models for young people but can still feel pressured by them even though they know it is unrealistic to believe they can look how celebrities do in their selfies. Ivy believes that comparing yourself to celebrities could “affect [her] health physically and mentally” leading to feelings of not

appreciating yourself. This opinion that selfies affected one's health overlaps with the results of a survey carried out by the National Women's Council in Ireland which mentioned social media as one of the most negative influences for a young women's body image. Grace from the same group stated that "celebs selfies make girls judgey" while Ciara from group one believes that looking at celebrity's selfies might make you feel sad and self-conscious.

There was an overall negative consensus from the majority of participants on the topic of celebrities and their selfies with the majority feeling that celebrities put unnecessary pressure on young people. Grace's opinion that celebrity's selfies make girls judge each other is further backed up by Bennett (2014) who describes selfies as another way for girls to judge each other. The idea of the selfie as a tool of the patriarchy is reinforced across the board of participants with none of them viewing the selfie as a potential for feminist empowerment as Bernard (2016) discusses. According to Girlguiding (2017) many young girls see celebrity you-tubers as good role models and figures of advice for young people, however this was not the opinion of any of the participants in group two and group four. They thought that celebrities and you-tubers were more concerned about the money they made and the material items they had rather than giving good advice to young people.

Space. A common concern and somewhat disadvantage of taking selfies that emerged from each of the focus groups was the issue of selfies taking up much of the phones memory. Kate from group one discussed how she is an avid selfie taker however she has had to cut back recently as they were taking up too much "space" on her phone. Ivy from group four was of the same opinion by sharing that she usually saves her selfies to her camera roll but ends up deleting them because they take up too much space. With Missy from the same group wondering "why don't I have space – oh yeah, because of all my selfies!". Space appeared to be one of the main negatives or challenges that these girls faced with selfies.

Summary

In this chapter the research findings which were constructed through the focus groups were presented. This chapter aimed to summarise these findings as a whole under the six key themes identified above: safety, permission and screenshots, narcissism, online vs reality/filters, celebrity pressure and space. Differences and similarities emerged in the findings and these were emphasised. The findings from this chapter outline that gaining permission or not to post selfies is an area of huge conflict in primary schools. Data from this study also highlighted significant differences in the selfies that appear online versus what people looked like in reality, with the use of filters being a worldwide phenomenon. The study found that the factors that affected the types of selfies these participants took and posted were influenced by celebrities' selfies and surprisingly the amount of space they had in their phones. They felt that celebrities had a huge impact on the types of selfies they took and the filters they used. In addition, it was discovered that across the board these participants were very safe in the way they used social media and took selfies. They were aware of the negative consequences that came with posting unsafe selfies and all appeared to practice safe internet procedures. However, the advantages clearly outweighed the disadvantages with all sixteen participants stating that they took selfies regularly. Three participants said that they take selfies mostly out of boredom. One participant took selfies out of her love for photography and being creative. Overall the findings revealed that the majority of the participants viewed selfies as fun but there was an underlying consensus among the participants that a lot of girls who post their selfies are doing it for attention or because they "love themselves".

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter will serve to give an overview of the analysis of the research results and findings. It will conclude with a brief outline of the limitations faced while conducting the research and point to possible areas of future research before finishing with some closing comments.

Summary of Findings and Analysis

The data generated in this study highlighted the attitudes and opinions of girls in 5th and 6th on the selfie. There were both positive and negative opinions on the selfie. The negative seemed to outweigh the positive for many of the participants which was something the researcher had not anticipated. The general consensus amongst the participants also surprisingly reflected that of the media – that selfies were narcissistic in nature. Many of the participants shared their opinions that when girls posted selfies online it reflected badly on them, making them appear narcissistic. The participants in this study were very aware of the importance of using the internet safely with the majority of them discussing posting online safely and taking selfies safely. Permission was an over-arching theme across the board with all four focus groups discussing the problems that come with friends posting selfies without permission. The data generated in this study also highlighted the participant's awareness of the use of filters on selfies and the difference between online versus reality. Even though the participants were confident that what they see online is rarely a reality they still felt pressure from celebrities to match how they look and sometimes act accordingly. The participants also highlighted that phone space was another big issue when it came to taking selfies, often dictating how many selfies they could take.

Limitations of Study

Throughout the course of conducting this study a number of limitations became evident. Each one has been identified accordingly. The external validity of the study was threatened as

the sample size was limited to girls in a DEIS Band 1 Primary School in Galway city. Therefore, the scale on which the research is set is quite small. Caution needs to be exercised in any attempt to generalise these findings. Future research with randomly selected participants and in different geographical areas and schools could help shed some light on a holistic view of the research topic and more objective results. The lack of up-to date literature on girls and the selfie in Ireland could also be considered a limitation. Therefore, this study can contribute an important and much needed layer of research into the attitudes and opinions of 5th and 6th class girls on the selfie. Another limitation is researcher bias (the researcher being a female), as Ball (1990) asserts that the researcher's identity, values, and beliefs become part of the equation, so it was vital that the researcher sets aside her own experiences to gain a true and meaningful understanding of the attitudes and opinions of each of the participants involved in this research project.

Recommendations for Further Research

While researching this particular topic it became quite apparent that there was little information on the attitudes and opinions of girls on the Selfie. The further research possibilities presented by both the Selfie and Social Media in a primary school setting are vast. For example, a comparative study should be completed with children from the opposite sex (males) and perhaps their views on female selfies. This would be an interesting area for further research. Also, a study could be completed for a longer period of time, to observe whether the attitudes and opinions change with interventions taking place in the classroom such as internet safety. Additionally, different school types should be considered for comparison purposes for example non-DEIS school or co-educational school.

Closing Comments

The selfie is a unique phenomenon that our generation and previous generations have never experienced. Up until now you could look at your reflection in the mirror, but the self

has never been captured or excavated to the degree that is evident now with the selfie. As human beings, we have always been driven to make ourselves seen, we have an innate need to be seen. This is evident when examining historic portraits of important historical figures. Is this much different than what the girls of today are doing when they take a selfie? The lack of research undertaken in an Irish context on the selfie formed the basis for this study. While the researcher set out to discuss the attitudes and opinions of girls in 5th and 6th class on the selfie, expecting them to be positive, a surprising finding was the challenges these girls face every day because of the selfie and permission to post selfies online. Selfies were an almost daily cause of upset and arguments among the participants and their peers. Another surprising yet encouraging finding was of the high level of awareness the participants had about internet safety and the safe posting of selfies. It is imperative that girls (and boys) in primary schools are made aware of the dangers of posting selfies online and are given adequate guidance in the safe use of selfies. This study has contributed to the gap in literature on selfies, it has identified some key themes and future areas that could be researched to assist in our understanding of the possible negative and positive affects selfies have on girls.

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Appendix A



Figure 1. Ellen DeGeneres Oscar Selfie. Retrieved from *Google Images*, 2018, Retrieved 2018, Jan. 28, from <https://www.google.ie>



Figure 2. Ariana Grande Selfie. Retrieved from *Google Images*, 2018, Retrieved 2018, Jan. 28, from <https://www.google.ie>



Figure 3. 'Ultimate Fail' Selfie. Retrieved from *Google Images*, 2018, Retrieved 2018, Jan. 28, from <https://www.google.ie>



Figure 4. Kim Kardashian Selfie. Retrieved from *Google Images*, 2018, Retrieved 2018, Jan. 28, from <https://www.google.ie>

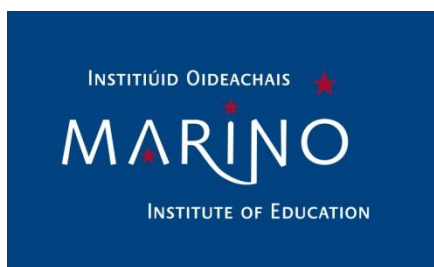


Figure 4. Niall Horan Selfie. Retrieved from *Google Images*, 2018, Retrieved 2018, Jan. 28, from <https://www.google.ie>



Figure 4. Kylie Jenner Selfie. Retrieved from *Google Images*, 2018, Retrieved 2018, Jan. 28, from <https://www.google.ie>

Appendix B



Roisín Garry

Dear Board of Management,

My name is Roisín Garry. I am a Professional Master of Education Student at Marino Institute of Education. I am completing my Advanced School Placement in your school from January to March. As part of my course I am required to complete a research project. I would like to invite the children in 5th and 6th class to take part in my research study, which primarily aims *to investigate the attitudes and opinions girls in 5th and 6th class have about the Selfie*. This study has received ethical approval from Marino Institute of Education.

I hope to gain a deeper insight into the opinions and attitudes these girls have about the selfie by carrying out small group talks, which will be voice recorded. I am hoping to carry out four separate group talks, each consisting of four students. The group talks should last between 30 to 45 minutes and will take place during the school week. All information collected, the school's name and the child's name will remain anonymous throughout the entire project. The information gathered will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor. This information will be stored on my personal home computer which is password protected and will be destroyed 13 months after the study is complete. The children will be reassured that they may opt in or out of the group talk at any time if they so wish. If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at [085 [REDACTED]] or [REDACTED]@momail.mie.ie].

Yours faithfully,

Roisín Garry

Appendix C



Roisín Garry

Information Sheet

Dear Parent,

My name is Roisín Garry. I am studying in Marino Institute of Education to become a Primary School Teacher. I am currently on work experience in The [REDACTED] Primary School. As part of my course I am required to complete a research project. I would like to invite your child(ren) to take part in my research study, which primarily aims *to investigate the attitudes and opinions girls in 5th and 6th class have about the Selfie*. This study has received ethical approval from Marino Institute of Education.

I hope to gain a deeper insight into the opinions and attitudes these girls have about the selfie by carrying out small group talks, which will be voice recorded. I am hoping to carry out four separate group talks, each consisting of four students. The group talks should last between 30 to 45 minutes and will take place during the school week. All information collected, the school's name and your child's name will remain anonymous throughout the entire project. The information gathered will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor. This information will be stored on my personal home computer which is password protected and will be destroyed 13 months after the study is complete. Your child will be reassured that she may opt in or out of the group talk at any time if she so wishes.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at [085 [REDACTED]] or [REDACTED]@momail.mie.ie].



Roisín Garry



Letter of Consent

Please answer all of the following: (tick the box)

YES

NO

I have read and understood the information sheet.

I understand what the study is about and what the results will be used for.

I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that she can withdraw at any time.

I know that my child’s name will not be used because the results will be kept confidential.

I agree to allow my child to take part in the above study:

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Appendix D



Roisín Garry



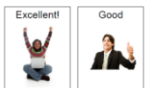
Roisín has explained to me that she wants to know what I think about selfies. All my questions were answered, and I agree to be part of this study. I know that I can stop being part of this study at any time.



I know what this study is about.



I know that I will not be named in any reports or talks about this study.



I agree to be part a group talk with Roisín.



I agree that my opinions can be recorded by Roisín.



I agree that Roisín can include things I say in the group talks in her project. I know that I can change my mind about this after the group talk if I feel like it.

You Sign Here

Date