Identity and integrity in Social media:
Why I can’t commit suicide online

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Abstract

We are currently in a learning process to understand new social structure of the contemporary society. We have to see ourselves as a social collective, as we together learn about the new medium and its consequences. The new possibilities have provided us with a freedom and at the same time restraints. Freedom of the free word and that we can connect globally, restraints from the urge of always being connected and get acknowledgement to feed our own identity and self. As the need of being acknowledged has increased, our own integrity and holding on to our own set of principles have decreased.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate to what extent social media has come to affect the sense of identity and integrity, and finding out where the limit between what is considered to be private and to be public is, as the virtual world has been integrated with the traditional society.

Keywords:

Interaction design, identity, integrity, private and public, suicide online, social networks, social media, social prototypes, virtual society
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1 Introduction

The idea for this thesis grew out of my big interest of understanding how people today look at their identity and integrity online compared to identity and integrity in the physical world. We can currently see ourselves as a social collective trying to learn a new medium and to understand where the knowledge gaps are at this point. Since we are in the beginning of this new learning process there are significant differences or potential problems to be found. As a social collective or as a society, we have to be sensible and together learn to understand the new medium because we are not there yet, which can be seen by various examples showing how people have strange ideas about their identities online and their online privacy.

I started this research by studying people’s awareness of their need and usage of social media, which made me reflect on my own usage behavior, and the big amount of hours I spend online on daily basis. By a coincidence I came upon a new invention called the Web2.0 suicide machine, which is a free service that deletes people’s online information in an easy and fast way when they decide to end their accounts. When reflecting over my own usage I got convinced that my life might change to the better if I would end my account on Facebook and commit “suicide online” because I do feel I spend too much time online. It is important to acknowledge that the meaning of “suicide online” is not in a sense of a physical suicide. The suicide machine online deletes all the content and traces of people’s existence online within certain social networks and if there are any regrets later there will always be the possibility to create a new account but you’ll have to start over. After having considered this opportunity to delete myself from my virtual world, an enormous sad feeling came over me and I instantly knew that this was something I could not do.

In August 2009, one of my best friends died a very sudden death in a motorbike accident, which was an enormous tragedy for all the people who knew him. His friendship meant the world to me and I was shattered into a thousand pieces the day he was pronounced dead. I was in South Africa at the time of his death and no one could reach me to tell me the sad news. I found out what happened on Facebook, in a message from a mutual friend. In that moment, Facebook became very valuable to me, because it gave me a feeling of closeness to my friend whom I had recently lost. Under the months that followed, I processed my grief by visiting his Facebook page on a daily basis. I wrote him posts and I read what others had been posting. I even got in contact with many of his friends he only had talked to me about and that I had never met in real life, and together his friends and I shared memories of our friend. A common link bound us together; our beloved friend that was now missed by us. In this way, he felt so much closer to me; even if I was
torn apart by having lost a very big link from my past. 13 years of true friendship filled with tons of wonderful memories, of which many have resulted in who I am today.

As the months passed by, I continued to visit his page at occasions, feeling lost by not having him by my side. Now, almost a year afterwards, I still visit his page at times, sharing moments in my life with “him”, looking at the images of him and getting a constant reminder that he has left the physical world for something I can only hope to be better. These visits partly help me to process the loss of my best friend. If I would also lose him in the virtual world he in some ways still attends, it would be even tougher to handle the grief I am dealing with at this moment. With him in the virtual world, it feels like he is still alive to a degree. If I would delete my Facebook account, I might be able to recreate everything I have, except one thing, the most important reason why I know I am doomed to be a Facebook user for all eternity. I will never be able to get my best friend back, which I cared so deeply about. He is dead and he will never be able to accept my friend request ever again, and because no one else has his passwords, no one else will either. This shows in the end, how social media is not only about entertainment; it also deals with existential issues of life and death.

Social media today, has more significance to us than just a fun distraction in our spare time; it has become a lifestyle and valuable to us as a second society in a virtual world. The social life we have online is an extension of our everyday life and has to be remembered as important to our real existence. In the virtual world there is joy, sadness, arguments, misunderstandings, happiness, anger and disappointments, just as in the real world. We are creating a life with sometimes not only one, but also multiple identities in the virtual society, where we find ourselves spending more hours than in the real world. This new medium has come to affect our social behavior to such extent, that a conversation online sometimes is even more fulfilling than talking to a person who is physically sitting beside us.

In this thesis I will in various studies, be conducting experiments over people’s behavior and usage of social media. I want to find out to what extent the social media has come to affect the sense of identity and integrity online. Since this contemporary lifestyle with the virtual world is integrated with the physical world, it has blurred the line between what is private and public, which is why I will research what awareness people have in these matters and how it has changed their core values, perceptions, behavior and actions.
2 An Overview of how Social networks changed the traditional society

In this chapter, I will give a short overview on how the social networks have revolutionized the web and the consequences, and to what extent it has changed the way we look at and use the web today.

2.1 The revolution of social media and Web 2.0

Jan von Dijk (2006) is calling the growth of communicative and informational channels for the “information highway” (Internet), where he makes a parallel with the development of roads and railways to the growth of Internet and social networking. Internet and social networking have taken over the traditional “vehicle” of transporting people and have opened the possibilities of communicating globally. The meaning being that the transport of people or data we find online are much the same.

2.1.1 The growth of Internet divided into three eras

Dijk (2006) divides the development of the Internet into three eras, from 1980 until the beginning of the 21st century. He means that each era had an essential value for the growth and development of the Internet. The first era started in the middle of 1980, when Internet was still unknown for the ones that would become the average users. The group of people that were involved and knew about the process in that era had their opinion of the changes they knew would affect the traditional society. This group is called dystopian. The second era began in the middle of the 1990’s, when Internet made its way into the average user’s life, and the dystopias’ outlook was replaced by the utopians views. Since then, in the 21st century, Internet has spread to the extent that the society today relies on it, and the utopians views have been replaced by the syntopians. (Dijk, 2006, p. 2) The dystopias were skeptical and afraid over the new “information highway” and their view on Internet was a destructive one. They thought it would take over the face-face communication and they had a genuine concern over how it would affect the private sphere. The utopians celebrated the newfound freedom of the “information highway” and they

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1 “Dystopia - an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one.” (From The Oxford Dictionary of English, 2005a)

2 “Utopian - modelled on or aiming for a state in which everything is perfect; idealistic.” (From The Oxford Dictionary of English, 2005b)

3 “Syntopians – “The term syntopia invokes both utopian and dystopian visions of what the Internet does and could mean.” (Katz and Rice, 2002a, p 167)
saw the opportunities and benefits they were given. (Ibid, p.2) James E. Katz and Ronald E. Rice argued that the dystopian and the utopians views where too extreme, so there had to be defined another view, but not as extreme, therefore a new definition arose as the syntopians. (Katz and Rice, 2002b, p. 13) The syntopians are not skeptics and they are not over optimistic since they have more than two decades of experience of the Internet and have empirical data to lean back to. They are not pessimists as the dystopian, neither idealist as the utopian; instead they have balanced views in between the two.

2.2 Web2.0 and its possible impact on society

From being simple bystanders to Internet, things changed in the 21st century. We have been given new possibilities as active participants, to contribute to content we earlier only been consuming. The Web2.0 has become a “[...]”dynamic and interactive experience emphasizing contribution and collaboration”. (Cummings et al., 2009, p. 257) Dijk (2006) argues that one of the consequences of this new social virtual society is; people make leave less room for personal experiences, face-to-face communications and experiences shared with people in the physical world. (Dijk, 2006, p. 197) Katz and Rice (2002b) argued differently three years earlier in their study of the consequences by the use of Internet. They did not believe the physical social interaction between people had been affected by the virtual society. Nor did they think the social interaction had meant isolation for people, or affected their everyday life and routines in the real world. (Katz & Rice, 2002b, p. 326) Norman H. Nie and D. Sunshine Hillygus (2002) did argue the opposite. They stated that isolation would occur as a consequence from the usage of social networking. (Nie & Hillygus, 2002) They meant that online interaction where people sat at alone at home in front of their computer would compete with the face-to-face communication, and should be seen as an asocial activity rather than as a complement to social interaction between people. (Nie & Hillygus, 2002, p.1) They meant the online social communication is replacing the social interaction with friends and family.

Jan von Dijk (2006) means that, “The new media have so much merged in society that they touch every aspect of it.” (Dijk, 2006, p.17) Wamelen and de Kool mean that the virtual world has come to walk side by side with the physical world in today’s society. They give a simile to the public sector, which they mean stand with one leg in the physical world and the other in the virtual world because of all the new government services we are able to use online today. Wamelen et al. mean that since the Web2.0 has been taken the virtual world a step further, the two worlds were combined, and the Web2.0 has become as our second society, the new public sector. (Wamelen & de Kool, 2008)
2.3 The meaning of time and space have changed

One of Anthony Giddens (1991), the British sociologist theories is about how the definition of *time* has been separated from *space*. (Giddens, 1991, p. 26) Since way back in history, people have been relying on time and the knowledge of where they are. *Time* and *space* can be seen as two guidelines, pointed at each other, for people to relate to and be able to locate themselves. This is an essential factor for a society to function, and the question “Where and when?” has to be asked. Giddens (1991) means that these two factors are not of any relevance anymore since the globalization of the virtual society. All content are stored in the online world, and can be passed on to the next generation. In this sense the relevance of knowing when and where is not of the same importance. Nor are we bound to a specific place, when we communicate with others globally. What Giddens, (1991) is pointing out is how the virtual society has changed the fundamental values of the traditional society. Dijk (2006) argues differently, he means that the relevance of time and space has increased, as he points out that the virtual society and Internet has come to be a familiar reality, where people bring their physical reality into the virtual world and when people are discussing it, they refer to Internet and a specific time and space. (Dijk, 2006, p. 166) It is important to acknowledge that what binds people together in the social networks is not time and space, but it is “similarities and differences.” People have the possibility to be selective with the right time and space when using the social networks. (Ibid. p. 173, p. 188)

2.4 Availability and accessibility have increased

The new contemporary society has changed the traditional society structure. The revolution of social media and networking has changed our whole way of life, from our earlier priorities and fundamental values to new ones. Dijk (2006) argues that this change threatens the privacy of the individuals, and it has to be taken in consideration that this might create social conflicts in the future. (Dijk, 2006, p. 161) A decade ago, nobody could have predicted how differently we would define a society today, compared to when we e.g. depended on normal mail-service, and relied on people to have a phone at home so they could be reached before and after work. We depended on the post office to deliver the mail on time all over the world, which could take weeks and sometimes even months depending on the destination. We had the patience to wait because we did not know anything else.

4 *“Globalism involves a new consciousness of the world as a single place. Globalization has been described, therefore, as ‘the concrete structuration of the world as a whole’: that is, a growing awareness at a global level that ‘the world’ is a continuously constructed environment.”* (Oxford Reference Online)
A decade ago, when people had dial up Internet access, using the phone line to get connection; this connection was very slow and at the same time you couldn’t be reached on the phone we still had the patience when we had emailed someone. The response to the email could come after a few days and we accepted that waiting, but today we have much shorter patience, and most people expect an answer the same day, or even after just a few hours. This is not only becoming a health issue as a stressing matter, but also decreasing our private time in always being available, which blurs the lines not only between private and public, but is also between work and leisure time.

Social media today have pushed the boundaries of private and public which have to be questioned where the limit will be. The boundaries of availability have increased, and our expectations of accessibility from the people around us, both professionally and private has become a demand. By having Facebook, Twitter integrated with our mobile phone, is a stressful situation. Not even on a bus or in ones on car do we have recovery time anymore, by the meaning time give ourselves time off from being constantly available and afraid of missing out on something. Not having the phone in our hand and checking it makes us feel old fashioned, boring or outsiders. Like the scout movement has the motto, “Be prepared”, users to social networks seem to have their motto, "Be available".

2.5 The price of acknowledgement

The point is that today, two decades later the social media offers the users the possibility to add their own content. With these opportunities, the need of being heard and seen from others has grown. This acknowledgement from others has its price, where the user has to reveal their identity in various ways. People expose their identity in order to be seen and acknowledged for what they publish, and once they are exposed, the information is out in the virtual world and easy to track. The exposure has up until recently been ignored, and it is just now we can look at the consequences of this new lifestyle. People have not been aware of their actions and behavior online, instead they have believed they were protected by the fact of it not being in real life and also that they were in their homes. The price of being seen and heard is affecting the integrity of a person, when they reveal private information in a social network or in their blog, which can be considered sensitive information and can have consequences.
2.6 The relation has become personalized

Dijk (2006) is discussing three phenomena’s that are observed frequently within the computer-human relations in today’s society:

- “The relationship is personalized. People handle computers as if they were humans--”
- “The relationship becomes binding, fascinating or even addictive to humans, because they have far greater control over these relations than over relationships with other humans--”
- “A partnership develops between humans and computer/media. People consider computers to be partners fulfilling several psychological and social needs--”

With these three behaviors (Dijk, 2009, p. 234), Dijk is pointing out the significance of virtual society on people. It is also strengthening the theories about the consequences social scientist as Nie (2002), and many other sociologists have been worrying about. Like, for instance, will the social interactions online replace the face-to-face communication? The social impact of control that has arisen, since social media became integrated in the everyday life, also affects the usage. As the social need is growing, the usage increases and so does the need of being in control and constantly updated.

2.7 Raising awareness of the virtual society

There can be drawn a conclusion, that today as syntopians, with more experience and knowledge, we have the abilities to reflect over the misuse of the opportunities Internet have been given us. There are anecdotes⁵, printed in the media and in our own awareness, how social media have been misused and misinterpreted by people. It shows the strange ways Internet is used in, which as a result, is affecting the identity and integrity of the users.

People are losing their employments because of their actions in the virtual world as they may have given others access to their private information online either through naivety or peer pressure. As the social networks are growing, the line between work acquaintances and personal networks are not clear. People connect not only with strangers online, but also from work or family and friends. This puts them in a vulnerable position when someone wants to hurt someone else. As people can access other people’s information online, and sensitive information is posted about work, or when a person has published a “un-professional” picture, called in sick

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⁵ “Anecdote - a short amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person.” (The Oxford English Dictionary in English)
and made a remark in the online status that is interpreted in the wrong way, then there is a risk that they may lose their employment.

One Canadian woman lost her disability benefit because of “inappropriate” holiday pictures on Facebook, when she was on sick leave due to a major depression. (neatorama.com, 2009)

A young British girl added her new boss on her Facebook, and then made an inappropriate post about her work in her status. She lost her work. (crenk.com, 2010)

A man in Sweden was wearing a cap with the logo Porn Star, which is an US brand. He got fired from his work at a school, as the principal thought it was a most inappropriate picture when working with children. (aftonbladet.se, 2010)

A story that creates awareness is the one about the young girl from UK that was murdered by a man she only knew from Facebook. The young girl thought she was meeting a young boy in her own age. Instead she lost her life. (mirror.co.uk, 2009)

There are anecdotes told, about meeting strangers on social networks, which have had horrific consequences. Social networks as a communication channel allow meeting new acquaintances, but how can a person tell if the other has revealed his real identity or a fictitious one? These anecdotes are neither from scientific theories nor from empirical data, but are anecdotes of consequences of misuse in the new virtual society. Unfortunately, ignorance is a human factor that we all suffer from, and we all think from time to time “that will not happen to me, only to others”. As in every new movement, there are always pros and cons; we just have to become more aware of our own safety and the safety for the people around us.
3 Purpose and research question

As our life has started to revolve around the virtual world and its reality, it has embraced every part of our existence as it has changed the social structure and become integrated with the physical world. It is hard to remember how life was before the existence of social media, when our social existence depended on the real world interaction. The virtual world today, has become of the same significance as the traditional society. As a new media within communication, it has provided new possibilities, which have been affecting people's behavior, actions, perceptions and core values of what is private and public in today's society.

The problem today is, that there is not enough awareness among people, about the consequences that will follow, by increased usage and sharing of the content. As Dijk (2006) pointed out, the human-computer relationship has provided people with a far greater control over the relationships online, far greater than the relationships they have in real life. This control has decreased the control over their privacy, since it would have meant less acknowledgement from others.

The purpose of this thesis is to find out to what extent the social media has come to affect the sense of identity and integrity online. I want to acknowledge more than the entertaining usage of social media, I want to acknowledge the consequences that occur from the online behavior. The reason for this is to understand where the border goes between what is private and public today, and how to question the need of integrity and privacy can be balanced with other needs of acknowledgements, and it is from these reflections, the two research questions arose.

- *Where does the border between private and public in today's society go?*
- *How can we balance the need of integrity and privacy with other needs of acknowledgement?*
4 Theoretical framing

In this chapter I will clarify the concepts of identity and integrity to get a better understanding of its relevance to my thesis.

4.1 Defining identity

“Identity is about understanding who we are and of who other people are, and reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us).” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 5)

The definition of identity used to be defined as “the soul of people”, in the early 19th century. That definition changed to identity in the 70’s, when the sociologists tried to find “theories that concerned the relationship between individuals and society.” (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, p. 7163, p. 14307) The sociologists’, anthropologists’, psychologists’ and philosophers’ interests have grown around the individual’s behavior and the society because of the new diversity of people’s lifestyle compared to earlier decades. (Korostelina, 2007, p. 16)

4.1.1 Social, personal and collective identity

The concept of identity is to be divided in three distinct types; the social identity, the personal identity and the collective identity. (Encyclopedia of Social Theory, 2004) The social psychologist Henry Tajfel’s (1982) came up with the social identity theories, which focuses on the relationship between groups. (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, p. 14306) Tajfel (1982) argued that the consequences of independency since the globalization in the contemporary world, would affect separate interrelations in groups. (Tajfel, 1982, p. 1)

The first is social identity, which is formed by a person’s interrelations to people and society in the sense of belonging in a mutual relationship or group. (Korostelina, 2007, p. 16) The social identity, which is the base for the other identities, is divided into “role identities” and “categorical identities”. The role identity points to the social role one has in society either as e.g. a mother, a friend, a schoolteacher or a police officer. (Encyclopedia of Social Theory, 2004) The individual can have more than one social role in the society or group, which can be as a mother and as a schoolteacher, and depending on the context and situation required, the individual adapts his social role. (Hinton, 2000) The categorical identity is to categorize the individual in e.g. gender,
race and ethnics, nationality, a friend or not a friend. The groups can, by these categories, differ from other groups rather than to be the same. (Hogg, 1990, p. 15)

Secondly, the personal identity is about the characteristics and the personality and personal relationships to other people. (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, p. 11247, p. 14306) The personal identity is also shaped by the individual's biography and life-experience through which the individual identifies him or herself with. (Encyclopedia of Social Theory, 2004) The social identity can be seen as the outer self, the person, and the personal identity can be seen as the inner self or, the self. To feel unity and coherence within the identity, it is of significance to keep harmony in the relation between the social identity and the personal identity, though we walk all our life through an "ongoing process of identification". (Jenkins, 2004, p. 28)

"The self is the individuals private experience of herself or himself; the person is what appears publicly in and to the outside world." (Jenkins, 2004, p. 28)

The collective identity is about the individual, with strong feelings of belonging (to belong) to a larger group he/she shares the same bias with. The group the individual belongs to is called the ingroup and the groups with different interests are called outgroups. (Ashmore, 2001, p. 17) The collective identity is following the social movements (group actions) as demonstrations or riots where they disagree with the society's structure. (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, p. 14306) The individual is identifying himself through the group as a unity.

4.1.2 Balancing the diversity and the coherence

In the contemporary society, people have become more flexible and diverse compared to before. People move more easily, they virtually meet new acquaintances they never would have met otherwise, changing directions within their professions, divorces are more common, and these matters are changing the perception of the self and thus the identity. Sherry Turkle (1995) has been discussing the perception of social stability and the change within the structured society. She has pointed out how the change of social stability used to have a different meaning not longer than two decades ago, when it was common to have the same work the whole life, living in the same city, having a stable family life etc., which was seen as a sign of health. With this stable healthy life people felt safe in their identity and had a strong sense of belonging, “But these stable social worlds have broken down”, (Turkle, 1995, p. 255). The stable life has become an adaptive, flexible, diverse life, where the individuals have to find the balance within, between being diverse and in harmony within their identity.
4.1.3 Multiple identities

As the individual has become diverse, flexible, belonging to various groups, and having various social roles, the individual also has come to a point when it is possible and acceptable to have multiple identities.

"Within the contemporary social theories today, most of them agree in that it is more rare in today’s society to be the same, have a unity, than to have multiple identities." (Ashmore et al., p. 47)

Sherry Turkle (1995) made a study in the mid 90’s on people who used the Internet to communicate with others globally, presenting himself or herself as another person, experiencing with different identities by using other gender and name. Turkle (1995) meant that as a result of these new communication possibilities of the virtual world; our view on ourselves had become fragmented and the meaning of multiple identities had become something we did not reflect on. She argued that people reconstructed their identities when they were using the Internet as an individual step inside the computer and was a reflection back on one self. (Turkle, 1995) The reflection we meet is many times different from our real life identity. In her book, Life on the screen, Identity in the Age of the Internet (Turkle, 1995), Turkle discussed multiple identities by interviewing various people about them creating multiple identities online and living in the MUD (Multi User Domain). MUD today is not only game related; it should also be seen as any of today’s social communities online. She wrote this book in the 90’s when the computer was impersonal and the content was textual, but her theories are still of value to today’s society.

Sherry Turkle (1995) argued that the needs to be coherence by following the principles; we live to feel unity with the self. We create multiple identities with other principles than our core values and morals, after how we want to be and how we want others to perceive us. This can create a confusion of who we really are, which made Turkle question [...]“How can we be multiple and coherent at the same time?” (Turkle, 1995, p. 258)

4.2 The definition of integrity

A person that is considered to have integrity has a set of principles he/she is committed to, and these principles will not be compromised by any circumstances. (Kasulis, 2002, p. 54) 
“…integrity is frequently connected with the more complicated notion of a wholeness or harmony of the self, associated with a proper conception of oneself as someone whose life would lose its unity, or be violated by doing various things.” (The Oxford Dictionary)
Integrity is naturally integrated with the identity and valued characteristics as morals and desires to the self and its actions. Cheshire Calhoun (1995) divides integrity into three distinct types of views: the integrated-self, identity and the clean hands views. She comes to the conclusion of these three types from earlier philosophers’ theories. (Calhoun, 1995, p. 235)

In the integrated-self, the integrity consists of the principles the person is committed to and a person, who acts against their own principles, is a person who lacks integrity. Calhoun (1995) means that a person with integrity is a person who knows what he/she truly wants and stays true to her own principles, which will always be the “first choice”. If a person with integrity does act against her own principles, it is because he/she thinks it is what he/she wants. Here the person acts on his or her “second choice”, and as a consequence deceives the self. Calhoun (1995) argues that the person will be a self-deceiver or a crowd follower. Crowd follower is when one has been acting against his or her own principles because someone else did, and the person did not think it through by him or herself. (Ibid. p. 236)

The integrity of identity points to the loyalty one has to its own identity values, characteristics and morals. Breaking those values or morals, might only prove a person to have a bad character and not, according to Calhoun’s theory, affect the integrity of the person. With other words, this view of integrity refers to a person that acts with integrity. (Calhoun, 1995, p. 246) Kasulis (2002) means that a person will not violate others, as he would not violate himself, which is a person acting with integrity. (Kasulis, 2002, p. 55)

In the clean hands view, the integrity is about not to negotiate the integrity of one’s self, when the person is set in a situation that can violate the unity of the integrity. Calhoun (1995) means that, when a person acts against his own principles, the outcome will be violating the integrity, and it will be with dirty hands. In this case to be considered having clean hands the act needs to have a reason so it can be justified, which can be a situation, when the person has no other choice than to act against its own principles. Elias Khalil (2004) points out that the self violates the set of principals at occasions, and this is unavoidable. Shame will occur as a consequence from violating the beliefs that one identifies oneself with. He argues that integrity is a non-ordinary commodity but in his comparison he states that we still “sell” or “trade” our integrity if the price is high enough as if it was furniture. When a person sells furniture and gets a high price for it, he will be celebrating. Khalil (2004) questions why we are not celebrating when we are selling our integrity to the highest bidder. Instead shame occurs, as the person feels failure by violating the self and the commitments of the set of principals he stands for. Calhoun (1995) points out that when acting on your own principles, they might not be the right principles, but when shame, guilt or regret occur, this is when the own principles have been violated. (Calhoun, 1995, p. 247) If there
is no justification for the act, the person is considered to be a person without integrity as they acted to gain something and for their own benefits. (Ibid. p. 250)

5 Methodology

The aim of this research has not been to invent a “different flow of twittering”, neither to build a “more safe” social network like e.g. Facebook or similar. The research question to be answered is concerning people’s awareness of the contemporary society they live in, which in this meaning is IRL (in real life) integrated with their life online. Since social media has come to play such an essential part of their everyday life, their own perceptions of identity and integrity have become more or less distorted.

Because of the direction of the research question it has been more essential for me to do experiments, which I will call social prototyping, where I worked with people and communication as the material, rather than traditional materials such as programming code and graphical interfaces. With technology changing at such a rapid pace, the requirement also changes for the interaction designer. It will be more common to work with the media for communication rather than tools for individual use. Within each social prototype throughout this research, qualitative empirical data gathering have been used, influenced by ethnographical approaches as observation, interviews, video-taping and self-report diaries that later have been analyzed and evaluated.

In this research, there have been four different social prototypes, mentioned as experiments, then reflections that have led to the next experiment in an iterative process. Each result from the social prototypes laid the fundamental basis for answering my research question.

5.1 Social prototyping

Prototyping is an invaluable tool for the Interaction designer to use throughout the iterative process. In the traditional interaction design process, prototyping most often leads to a technical solution for a specific digital artifact or system. Within this research, my experiments have to be seen as social prototyping, which is completely without any digital material, as I mentioned earlier, the material I have used is people and communication.
The aim through each social prototype has been to produce a user-experience where the participants have been "forced" into a social position they would not normally be in. They have been "forced" to reflect upon themselves and their lifestyle, which has given me a better insight in the question around their perceptions of identity and integrity and how they are handling it. In these experiments I have generated a "possible future" or an "alternative reality", which has been, from a more critical aspect, the method for getting a strong reaction from the participants. I wanted them to feel a sense of losing their foothold in their otherwise stable everyday life. This would lead them to a reflection over their own needs and to an acknowledgement of the importance social media has on their everyday lives.

In the previous paragraph I said the participants were "forced" into a social position and now I will explain what I mean by that. I do not mean that I forced them in any controlling way, instead I have instructed, required and desired, and have deliberately left it open to them to circumvent my requests or requirements. In this way I could get the opportunity to see how their reflections and their attitude manifested itself in action, which will be shown in the experiments. It is clearly an important point that I did not enforce this change but suggested the change and that there is a significant difference between the two.

The description I gave of social prototyping is very general and universal and does not say specifically how it is done in concrete practice, but I will not say much more about that now. Instead I will refer to the chapter 6-9 where it will be explained how it has been structured and why.

5.2 Qualitative empirical methodology

Within Interaction design, qualitative research is used as an inquiry to get a deeper understanding of the users’ behavior and needs. The usage of this method goes beyond questions as where and when. Instead, the questions why and how is emphasized to get a wider and deeper understanding into the users’ behavior in context. In relevance to my research questions, qualitative methodology has to be used to answer the why and how in empirical studies. The qualitative research approach used in the experiments is also based on what Paul Ten Have calls "interpretative" approach, where the users’ action and behavior are not obvious. (Have, 2004, p. 4) Instead the users’ actions will be interpreted when the result is analyzed and evaluated.
5.2.1 Observations

Observations can be divided into quick and dirty, observations in usability testing and observation in field studies. I have used observation in field studies in two of my experiments, the Physical wall 1 (see chapter 6) and the Physical wall 2 (see chapter 7), which has an outsider-insider spectrum. (Preece, et al., 2002, p.363) In an outsider-insider spectrum, the observer can have various roles like e.g. an outsider, participant observer, or an ethnographer who will contribute with his knowledge on how to collect data and how to analyze and report it. Preece’s (2002) explanation of the various levels of outside-insider is that, the outsider observes and the only interest is in a certain behavior. The observer that participates on the inside is seen as the participant observer, which wants to learn more about their behavior. (Ibid.) Preece (2002) also refers to Colin Robson (1993) who divides the participation into different levels of participations. He means that the observer can be either the outsider or as the participant observer from the inside, but with the possibility to be wherever he wants to be in between the two. In this research I have been partly an insider on one occasion while I on the other occasions became an observer from the outside and did not at any point participate.

An observation approach can be divided into two ways. Either the observations are happening in a controlled laboratory or in the natural environment where the product or service is currently used or will be later. (Preece et al., 2002) The controlled laboratory was not relevant for my experiments, nor was the natural environment in front of a computer. Instead I integrated the two of them and created a controlled “laboratory” where I took the idea of a “virtual posting wall” out of its context and placed it in a public place in the center of Lund (Sweden). In this way I could observe people’s reactions, behaviors and actions in one place, as they were put into a “social position” they normally would not be in.

5.2.1.1 Self-report diaries

Self-report diaries are for the user to keep record of what they do, when they did it and their thoughts and reflections in the meantime. (Preece et al., 2002 p. 377). This is an approach within the area of observation. The difference is that it is not an active current observation; instead it can last for a longer period of time. The experiment without social media for 14 days (see chapter 8) was running for 14 days with nine participants, which made it impossible for me to be present to observe. It was important that they wrote their inner feelings and reflections so I could analyze their behavior and actions later. That is why they were asked to keep a diary in documenting each reflection and thoughts they had.
5.2.2 Interviews

I used interviews to get a good insight in the participant’s thoughts and reflections under the experiment suicide online (see chapter 9). Interviews were used in this experiment on three occasions because the experiment was running under four weeks. I needed to have a few “checkpoints” to get an insight in their reflections and personal thoughts to be able to see if things changed under time in the behavior and reflections by the participants. By doing interviews, there is various ways to do so. First, the interviewer chose to do it either one to one or in a group for discussions. Secondly, it is time to decide what type of interview that should be suitable e.g. as Preece (2002) divides interviews into four types of interviewing. There are the open-ended or unstructured, structured, semi-structured and group interviews. (Preece et al., 2002, p. 390) As Preece (2002) argues that the three first types is depending on the control the interviewer wants to have, depending on the preparations he done with already pre-written questions. Semi-structured interview is a combination of unstructured and structured, where the interviewer has the guidelines of the topics he wants to cover, but still there is room to ask questions in between.

The type of interviews that was relevant for me was the open-ended unstructured interview combined with the semi-structured type. The purpose of the interview was to have opened discussions as an undisturbed conversation instead of following a pre-written paper with strict questions. I used guidelines with words for support, but the idea was not to have many restraints.

5.2.3 Videotaping and audio recording

Videotaping was used as a complement to the data collection in the first interview session. The purpose was to keep the interview session as undisturbed as possible without any interruptions like for instance taking notes. It can be difficult if the interviewee feels uncomfortable in front of the camera, and the interviewee can hold back and become withdrawn. To prevent that, I placed the camera on the table and tried to make the interviewee forget its existence. In the second and third interviews I did not use the video camera, instead I used a recording audio application with the same purpose as the videotaping, to keep the interview at a relaxed stage, but filming was not necessary for those sessions. Taking notes can interfere with the interview and be a disturbing moment. If there are two people doing the interview one can ask the questions while the other one can stay in the background taking notes.
I chose to use the video camera and audio recording to document my participants because I was alone and in this way we could have a more relaxed conversation without disturbing note taking.

5.2.4 Interpreting the qualitative data

“Qualitative data that is interpreted and used to tell “the story” about what was observed.” (Preece, 2002, p. 379) When interpreting and analyzing qualitative data it is to look for patterns within what the users say or do. When it is a big amount of data the best way is to start to look for key events. I had lots of video and audio, which is very time-consuming to analyze, especially from unstructured or semi structured interviews. It was impossible to go through all the material and I had to find the key events that were relevant for this study. The key events were similarities and differences in their reflections and the situations they told. When I found them and similarities between the participant’s reflections and thoughts, I structured it and analyzed it, in relevance to the questions that has to be answered.

6 Physical wall 1, in a public place (pilot)

All the quotes in this chapter are translated from Swedish to English from the original posts. I corrected the quotes into accurate English.

In the social networks today, especially networks like Facebook, where the social structure is build on friends from both the virtual and physical world, people use their real identity. A person’s virtual identity is representing the real identity in form of the real name, surname and what can be considered sensitive information as birth date, city and phone numbers. As the social networks are used from what we will call a “safe net”, situated from our home, behind closed doors. This also encourages people to write more openly and exploit themselves to a bigger extent. The safe net makes them feel protected and safe, because no one can see them and they cannot be judged face-to-face if posting something inappropriate, as they are hiding behind the screen.

With this experiment, I wanted to explore the participants’ view on what is private and public for them, by placing a physical wall in the center of Lund, which symbolized a wall from any social network on the Internet. I wanted to see how openly people would be, in making posts in public, where others could look at them. I was curious to what extent should they share their opinions or thoughts in public? How did they feel about posting something in public and then leave? Would
they wonder if someone else should comment on their post afterwards? Would the wall attract any attention from people passing by? Would they post sensitive information?

The first goal of this experiment was to let people explore the social position they normally would not be in, to interact with the wall and to communicate in public, as I observed them. I wanted to "coerce" them into exploring their own perceptions of how private or public they are, and create awareness of their own actions. Afterwards I approached them and asked them different questions, pushed them to reflect over their actions, asked them how it felt and how they related to it in comparison to how it is online, and their perceptions over what was public and private for them.

6.1 Setting up the wall

Most people know how to interact with a wall in the virtual world. This fact made it easier for me, when I was setting up the wall, because I did not need to add any instructions. Instead I put a simple note with the text "The Wall", and added empty papers underneath, that resembled the posts. I was interested to let people explore the social position to communicate publicly in the physical world, a position they would not normally be in.

I started by setting up the wall in the center of Lund, where I knew a lot of people would be passing by on a daily basis. The bus central was a perfect spot where people might have the time for writing or reading on the wall while waiting for the bus. There was a freestanding block with four sides that stood just in the center, perfect to use for this experiment. I set up my wall post on two of the four sides, hoping for people to be innovative and not to feel limited to a certain area. I added the first post myself so that the people shouldn’t feel too uncomfortable to start the posting.

6.2 The study

When people passed by, I asked them if they had a moment to spare for some questions, and if they said that they, then I started to ask if they used social networking sites on the Internet and which ones, and if they would like to post something on the public wall. I asked about their habits and routines on the Internet and if they could estimate the amount of time they spent online on a daily basis. The time ranged from one hour to eight per day but they logged in to their social networks sites more than once a day. I wanted this information to see how active they were online and to estimate how familiar they were with social networking.
When I observed where they placed their post I asked them why they placed their post in that specific spot, to which question no one seemed to have an answer for. So I put my focus on other questions like, how they behaved on the Internet, and what the difference it was to post something in a public place compared to the Internet. I considered the weather conditions when I prepared this study. It was in the beginning of February, very cold weather and very wet outside from half melted snow. Even for me who was supposed to be prepared, just to hold a pen without gloves was an effort in itself so it was difficult to note everything they said. I knew that people might be cold and because of that, not that willing to collaborate. I was right about this assumption to some extent, although I did get some interesting input. One observation I made was that it was the younger group of people that took their time in writing something, while it was the older people who took the time to the read the wall posts. This did not surprise me, because this kind of events seems to attract younger people. The biggest crowd of people circling this area were the younger ones estimated to be between the age of 17 - 24, on their way to or from school or pensioners that did not use any social media.

![fig. 1 The wall, the first hour it was up.](image)

By lunchtime there was more traffic around the area, with more diverse age groups, and many of them actually stopped and looked at the wall with interest. Another interesting event happened when I decided to take my lunch break. I prepared the wall with pens and white papers stuck all over, before I headed for a coffee shop nearby where I had a good view over the area and the wall. It took just a few minutes before I could see people gathering around the pole and reading and even writing. Because of that observation, I decided to stay in the coffee shop a bit longer to see what the result would be compared to when I was present earlier. When I returned about an hour later there were lots of new posts and comments made on the wall. After one hour of absence, the wall had received the same amount of posts I received when I was present for four hours earlier.
A few of the participants had asked earlier if the wall would be there the day after because they would like to return to see if they had received answers, and when I told them no, they were disappointed. The wall had created the same curiosity and need as e.g. Facebook, people wanted almost needed to see if any new event has happened since their latest visit. The need of acknowledgement has grown and through social media friends and strangers give us plenty of that. A conclusion I made was that people write more freely when they feel they are not observed or asked to do it on demand.

Many of the participants also said that they did not feel comfortable to share something on the wall because it was in a public place where others could see them. One young man, 19 years old said "It is too personal to post anything in a public place compared to Facebook where I have the control over who I share it with." Another boy at the age of 16 said, "It feels more dangerous to post it in real life, it feels safer on the net." The same boy also admitted he adds everyone on Facebook, even if he doesn’t know them but thinks he might know who they are, "If I see that I don’t know them after all I still keep them as friends." He also said that he can write his name and last name in public, but would not write what part of the city he lives in, nor his phone number and never his email.
Some of the posts were more provocative like (fig. 4 & 5), “I murdered my whole family in my sleep” and “Bring our troupes home from Afghanistan, assistance instead of armor!” and others were casual remarks about the weather or a drawn symbol, but now it was people who wrote posts on their own initiatives, which made it much more personal.

![Image of handwritten note: Jag mördade hela min släkt i somnen.]

fig. 4 “I murdered my whole family in my sleep. 😊”

![Image of handwritten note: Ta hem våra trupper från Afghanistan — bistånd istället för pansar!]

fig. 5 “Bring our troupes home from Afghanistan, assistance instead of armor!”

My own post (fig. 6) had been commented by two strangers, which aroused my curiosity. My post was: “Can’t the spring arrive?” and the comments were, “No! I want winter!” and “It was what your mom said”. The last one was out of context, but that is once again something that often happens in social networks.
A 17 year old girl was adding everyone on Facebook and did not think much of her privacy settings at all. She said she felt uncomfortable to post something in public and had to be drunk to do so. When I asked the participants if they could categorize their friends online into, real friends, people they know or people they added or accepted but never met, the answer most of the participants gave was that; as long as they had met that person once they considered them a friend. If it was a friend of a friend they had never met, those “friends” were included in the group of people they considered “knowing”. This seems to be a common way of viewing your own behavior on the Internet, but I would call it a distorted conception of the definition of privacy and integrity, when people feel more safe to post something on the Internet where millions of people can read it, compared to a public wall in a small town with only a few hundreds of people passing by.

Fig. 7 “Why is everyone so obsessed with PH?”

Fig. 7 shows one of the posts that were misunderstood by the person that made the comment, and his interpretation differs from what the original meaning is, which became pretty funny. The
post read, “Why is everyone so obsessed with PH?” The author meaning with “PH” was an abbreviation for the TV series Paradise Hotel, but the person commenting the post thought PH for pH level and that was why he answered on “Because the acid/base is cool shit. /bro.” Text is a valuable tool, which unfortunately easily can be misunderstood or interpreted differently, both in real life and online. At some point, I moved away to observe peoples behavior and it was fascinating to see people that were reading on one wall continued to the other two sides, which I had not used to see if something was posted there as well. This is a behavior that is similar to the web. People are a curious kind, and will continue to surf to other links and pages once they find something of interest. A man even leaned quite a lot to peek around the corner and seemed obviously disappointed that there wasn’t more to read.

**fig. 8 Some teenagers stopped and posted a happy post.**

**fig. 9-10 People are interacting with the wall.**
fig. 11 People are interacting with the wall.

fig. 12 People are interacting with the wall.
A 25 year old man from Kosovo asked me to take a photo of him and his post (fig. 13) so he could upload it to his Facebook when he arrived home. He wanted to show all his friends from his country of origin what he had been writing. He said that he felt so proud over his beautiful country and wanted to share that with friends and Sweden. He wrote both his tag and his hometown Kaganik on his post.

A really interesting meeting was with a 17 year old boy that stopped to read the posts. When I asked him if he wanted to contribute, he declined with the words that his religion forbade explicit content on the net. “It can lead to sins and one day you will have to pay for it.” I asked him how he felt about the fact that others might upload photos of him, without his permission. He said that it felt incredibly insulting and it had happened once, and the principal at his school had to step in to get those photos off the Internet. I had not been reflecting about religion and social media in this direction before. We all know that different religions forbid certain things and behavior, but I have never thought about that some religious families actually teach their children that social media leads to sins and that a teenager actually accepts it. To me, this shows a tremendous strength within this young man, to be able to resist peer pressure and to stand up for his religion and still feel so relaxed about it when probably most of his friends are using and talking about
social media daily. This young man also told me that he is using YouTube at least once a day, but he is not contributing to the content.

Then a man in the end of his forties stopped to read the posts and told me that I was looking at a living proof of an outsider. He thought it was interesting to read the other posts, but he had only used social networking on two occasions. Both of the times were to comment in a sport column, but nothing more, he said he had never felt any need to use social media. When he told me that he was the living proof, I got the impression that he had been thinking about this for a long time, and maybe he belonged to the older generation that doesn’t feel comfortable with the new technology and never really learned to use it. Unfortunately I never had a chance to ask, because his bus came.

*fig. 15 Some of the posts, signed with the real names and nicknames.*

*fig. 16 I was present and they did not write anything sincere or of any direct meaning.*
6.3 The result of the experiment

I felt this was an interesting start and that it gave me lots of interesting input. I could have done some things differently which could have led to a stronger result. I believe that if the weather had been better more people would have participated. I should have separated the interviews from the wall, and been observing of the movements around the wall for a full day without interfering.

From 19 documented people writing posts, 17 of them were under the age of 20. The other participants’ ages are unknown because I was not present at the time they made them. I draw the conclusion that people liked the idea of posting on a wall in public, but felt uncomfortable when they were “supervised” by others or me. In the beginning when I asked them if they would like to post something on the wall, the ideas did not come with spontaneity. It took time for them to write something and if they wrote something, it was not really sincere. When I compare the results when I was at lunch to the ones when I was present, I got so much more interesting results by staying out of sight. Suddenly there were some provocative posts and some silly comments, but these were people that had chosen to contribute with something and it made a huge difference.

There was a distorted view between what is private and public, and I believe this is because there is a lack of knowledge. Their thoughts about feeling more private on the Internet surprised me. They told me that they don’t add strangers and only add people they know in some sense. When I asked them about the friends they consider knowing out of their list on e.g. Facebook their answer had a double sense of meaning. According to most of them people they consider knowing was people they have either some common friends with but never met, people they met at maybe one occasion even if it had been many years ago, and then people they know in real life, like friends and people they recognize from e.g. their school. Like I mentioned before, one young boy said he always accepted a friend request. Afterwards he looked at that person's profile, if he saw that he did not actually know this person, he still kept that person among his friends. I could see that they reflected on their own words when they heard their answers. Somehow it became more obvious for them that they were not as private online as they considered themselves to be. The line between private and public is blurry in today’s society and social media has become a natural part of our everyday life. That is why we don’t reflect on our own or others behavior in the same extent as we would have done earlier. Everyday we take a step further away from our old core values and we are adapting those changes around us without thinking about the consequences it can bring.
7 Physical wall 2

All the quotes in this chapter are translated from Swedish to English from the original posts. I corrected the quotes into accurate English.

After analyzing the iterative process from the Physical Wall 1 (see chapter 6), I came up with the idea of this new experiment, subsequently called Physical Wall 2. The first experiment had some shortcomings and weaknesses; therefore I made a second version. In the pilot study of the physical wall, I had approached people when they posted something on the wall. This time, I was determined not to do so, because I had noticed during the pilot study, that people wrote more freely when I left the wall for an hour. While I was gone, the amount of posts doubled and I drew the conclusion that the people preferred not to be supervised when they posted something. That is why I decided to try another approach and not be present at all, to let the participants have a more anonymous experience, as they have when they are online. I would be nearby observing them and their behavior.

7.1 The set up of the wall and its abrupt end

As I had decided to stay in the background and observe people from a distance to see how they interacted with the wall, I sat down in a coffee shop, ten meters away with a good view of the wall. When I saw people interact with the wall, I took photographs, so they would not notice the fact that they were supervised. To protect their integrity, the photographs were taken at a distance so the persons could not be recognized.

What I wanted to observe was how people would interact and make posts on the wall in a public place. I wanted to see what things they would post about, and to observe the eventual curiosity from people passing by. In the Physical wall 1, the posts were "nice" and I was curious if there would be a different content this time, when it was not supervised by me.

The wall was set up in the same place as in the last experiment, in the center of Lund (Sweden), at the bus station, where lots of people pass by on a daily basis. In this sense, the people had time to interact while they are waiting for their bus. The freestanding block I used was the same block, as in Physical wall 1 (see chapter 6), where two sides out of four resembled a wall.

This was a day between a holiday and a weekend, which meant that schools were closed and lots of people had taken the day off, and as a result of this the city was less crowded and there were
fewer young persons than there would have been any other day. I thought it was even better in the sense that I could see if it would differ in age between the people participating.

Since I was not present and could explain the meaning of the wall and it’s resemblance to a virtual wall, I wrote some guidelines to challenge the people to start writing.

- Who are you?
- Post something and see if others will comment it.
- Where are your boundaries between private/public when posting in a public place?

Unfortunately this experiment ended differently from what I had expected. The experiment was supposed to last for a full day but came to an abrupt end, when someone took down all the posts from the wall. At that precise moment I had just turned my back to the wall, and when I turned around again, they were all gone. This incident happened three hours after the experiment started and was very frustrating for me, so I can only draw conclusions from the observations I made during this time.

7.2 The observation

When I was setting up the wall, a man in his 50’s approached me straight away by curiosity. He asked me about the wall, and when I explained, he started to tell me his whole life. He could hardly talk Swedish, and it was hard to understand him. I told him, he was allowed to post something but he declined at first. Then he asked me if he could write down his postcode and he did so before he left. I never had the chance to ask him why he wanted to post his postcode.

fig. 17 The first post with the postcode from the Iraqi man.
During the three hours the wall was in place I noticed that, it was only teenagers that made posts on the wall, while both elderly and younger ones took time to look at it. At one time a young man caught my attention. He hesitantly took out a pen, but put it back on a few occasions before he finally decided to post something. Many younger people came in groups, and seemed to find the wall entertaining, because I could hear their laughter and read their body language.

*fig. 18-20 Interacting with the wall*
fig. 21-23 Interacting with the wall
fig. 24-25 “Who are you” that I posted to get some reactions.

There were some posts that could be interpreted as offending. As I mentioned before, I had put up some “guidelines”, to see if they would be commented on. On one side of the wall (fig. 24), someone had commented the “Who are you?” with “Your mothers ass!” The same question on the other wall (fig. 25) was at first commented with “God”, but someone had erased that and replaced it with “Hitler”. This can be seen as obscene and provocative on a very childish level.

fig. 26 “Give me your number sexy, Call xxxxxx”

Another participant posted a phone number with the text, “Give me your number sexy”. (fig. 26) When I looked up the number on the Internet, I found out the person’s name and her birthday was. This made me question if the number really belonged to that person or if the person posting it were on bad terms with this girl and wanted to provoke her by giving others the possibility to bother her by phoning her. One post was a reaction to the provocative posts, and it read “Does everybody has to write all these ugly words, I get sad.” (fig. 27)

fig. 27 “Does everybody has to write all these ugly words, I get sad.”
On the post with the postcode someone replied with, “I see you!” (fig. 28) which gives a sense of the virtual world, where you are not as anonymous anymore, and more or less under constant observations by others. The other posts were harmless, where the participants wrote their names, or who they were in love with.

7.3 The result of the experiment

The first thought that came to my mind when I saw that someone had torn down the posts from the physical wall was that someone had “deleted” my wall. All the content was gone and I had not had the chance to read all of the posts. It felt like someone had stepped on my integrity and my rights as a person, by to simply just take away all the posts. I had clearly explained on a note on the wall that this was an experiment for a master thesis within Interaction design, and therefore out of respect for me they could or even should have let the wall be. I felt provoked and disrespected from a stranger I never met. I felt intimidated and insulted, as if what I as a student who was working on my master thesis and needed these experiments for my empirical research, was not worth anything. I wanted to go over and look for the posts, but I restrained myself because it felt like everybody would look and point finger at me and laugh.

The second thought was that this behavior resembled online behavior. When people are making posts online, there is always somewhere where you can report the author if the content seems offending. To report a note or a comment is not the same as tearing down a physical wall. This real life action signifies anger and disrespect. Online it is done silently, and not done in front of others. From the safe net, as I mentioned earlier (see chapter 6), the person report others in private. As a silent action, the person that gets reported might notice, but will find another place to post his or her content. I did not go back to set up a second wall, because since I was in a public place where probably people had witnessed the situation and either they would feel sorry for me or I would be today’s laughing stock. This stranger “reported” me in public and he made his statement that this was not ok, in front of others and by doing so he diminished my experiment and me. It is a possibility that it was a person that reacted on the word “Hitler” or the word “asshole”, I will never find out, but I know that something must have triggered the person to
do so. The result I got before someone “deleted” the wall was that some of the participants that made posts had been writing more freely with what can be seen as an offensive language. Words like *horny*, *asshole*, *sexy* and *Hitler* were used, and I can only assume that it was the youngest participants that posted those. This can be seen as a simile to the online walls, where this is the language, that often is used by the younger group of people. There were some interaction and response between the participants, where one participant had posted a reaction to these words where she or he asked why some people had to use such a language and that it made her or him sad. One person had commented the older man’s postcode with “I see you”. As I mentioned earlier (see chapter 7.2), it can refer to the online world, where you are not as private anymore. I got a stronger feeling of provocation this time, which I did not sense in the pilot study (see chapter 6). And I can only draw the conclusion that the participants when not being supervised were more prone to be provocative and offensive.

I could see, that the wall attracted younger people more than elderly, as in Physical wall I (see chapter 6). I could acknowledge a more self-driven behavior towards the wall, when I was not approaching them. A few groups of two to three teenagers interacted with each other at the wall at the same time and seemed to find it entertaining to write something at the same time. Middle aged and elderly people were only interested in reading, and I could sense a curiosity of what it was from all passing people.

As a result from this incident, of all the posts being torn down from the wall, I could not get as much of data as I had been hoping for. Even though I was frustrated from what had happened and I feared that it would have ruined this experiment, during the analysis I understood that I had received some interesting data after all, even though the experiment came to an abrupt end.

This incident points to a limit between what is perceived as public and what is private. It shows that in the physical world, we can give and get a more radical response and show resistance compared to our behavior online.
8 Without social media for 14 days

All the quotes from the diaries in this chapter are translated from Swedish to English from the original posts. I corrected the quotes into accurate English.

Social media has taken a significant role in our daily routines, and changed our behavior, perception of the world and our core values. People are building up their everyday life around the virtual world, and it has come to be of a great significance in our perception of our identity. People think they can manage without social media, but are they aware of the degree of their dependency to new medium of communication and how much they rely on it?

The thought behind this experiment was to expose the participants to awareness of their own needs by “forcing” them to be without social media for 14 days. I wanted to see how the participants “survived” and get an insight into their reflections upon themselves and their social media usage. The idea was to compel the persons taking part of the experiment into a social position they had chosen themselves. With other words, I wanted to get them to be cut off from a big part of their social lives, to make them think about this new situation. Another interesting angle of the experiment was to see if their friends would react by the participant’s absence from the virtual world.

8.1 The devoted participants

When I asked people if they would like to participate, most of them hesitated and came up with lots of excuses why they could not join the experiment. I posted my request in my Facebook status, and out of my 400 “friends” online, I received 9 volunteers, which was more than I expected. I considered each volunteer to be “people with morals and integrity”. With this I mean that these people were determined to manage 14 days without social media to prove to the world and themselves that they did not need it and they denied the thought of being in need of using social media. These were 9 people with strong personalities and with morals and they seemed to be into this experiment.

All of the participants had been using social media on daily basis since about three years so this experiment should become a very big challenge. The social media they used daily was e.g. Facebook, blogs, YouTube and various forums. I knew that there was a risk that the participants might “cheat” because they were not going to be supervised, but I was never worried because I trusted the participants to challenge themselves in this experiment, and not only participate because they “had to”. After all, they participated of their own free will.
All of the participants are presented with fictitious names, but their age and gender is accurate. Three of the participants were not able to participate through the whole experiment, so I only used the remaining six in my analysis. There were four women between 23 – 34 years of age and two men between 34-39, everyone with different occupations, which made a distinct difference in their usage of social media. A few of the participants did not have Internet available at work, while a few of them used a computer in their daily work. This goes to show a big difference between the availability and therefore also the usage of Internet and social media to people, not just to my group.

8.1.1 A short presentation of the participants

1. Daniel (39) – He uses the computer both at work and at home but he is not an active person in the sense of posting or updating himself about others whereabouts. The network he uses is Facebook and some dating sites where he communicates with friends and women. He travels a lot through his work and adds pictures to keep in contact with people at home when he is away. In his leisure time he practices Taekwondo and spends time with his children. He uses social media mostly in the evenings when he can relax.

2. Johan (34) – He uses the Internet and social media networks constantly, both from work and at home. As a programmer, he is very active at various forums, where he supports people and helps them with the coding. He is also blogging and using Facebook to update himself about what is happening around him.

3. Linda (34) – She is very active on Facebook and is constantly posting her whereabouts or commenting others. She is a member of a motorcycle team and helps to keep their forum up to date. She also follows other people’s blogs. She says she is checking Facebook every 15 minutes when she is at home.

4. Anna (27) – She is extremely active within social media networks, both Facebook, Twitter, various blogs she runs herself, and other networks. She is what we will call a starter, she starts discussions and debates and lots of people always comment her posts. She is working from home and is constantly having herself connected, which means she is most often available, online.

5. Beatrice (23) – She uses Facebook at a daily basis. She was unemployed while this experiment was running, which means that she had lots of spare time. She adds lots of photos and comments on her friend’s posts. She is also blogging on occasions.
6. **Caroline 32** – Working in a pre-school, which means she only uses the computer before and after work, but as soon as she is at home she starts the computer, and she checks Facebook every 15 minutes. She likes to be updated on what her friends are doing and to look at their photos.

### 8.2 The Task

The participants were asked to keep a diary during the 14 days, which I wanted them to e-mail to me a few days after the experiment was over, written as a text document. They were asked to write a digital document because some of the participants were from Stockholm, which is far from Lund. I also had to consider the risks that they might lose a paper written diary, so a word document seemed a much safer solution. A week before the project would actually start I e-mailed an "instruction" with some questions of what I wanted the participants to think about during the next two weeks - as a guideline and a reminder. First I wanted them to think about their current usage of social media. Secondly I wanted them to reflect the actual weeks the experiment was running. Thirdly I needed them to reflect over the their feelings when the experiment was over.

**The week before:**

1. *How do you feel now, the days before you will abstain from social media? What thoughts do you have about it?*
2. *How often do you use social media at the moment?*
3. *What social media are you using?*
4. *What routines do you have for your use, in what situations etc?*

I also pointed out that they should try not to tell anyone about the experiment they participated in, to see if people reacted on their absence and if they called them more often. I also told the participants, if they came to a point when they could not resist social media, I wanted them to write down *why, how* and in *what* situation, to help me get a more accurate result. I also emphasized to the participants that this was not a contest, just a study so I could analyze their behavior and actions.

**The things I wanted them to reflect on during these 14 days:**

1. *Your feelings when you feel the urge (if you even have one)*
2. *What are you doing instead?*
3. *Reflect much on your emotions, and how you feel.*
4. *Your thoughts on social media and how it affected you.*
5. *Write down everything you experience.*
The days after the experiment:

1. Does it feel any different?
2. Do you think your usage of social media has changed?
3. What social media network have you missed, and what network do you feel you can be without?
4. Do you think your routines have changed?
5. Which part was the hardest one?

8.3 The result of the diaries

I received the diaries from the participants a week after the experiment. One of the participants, Johan (34), had diarized his experience in a blog. This was an interesting interpretation of the instructions I had given, which were not to use any social media, even though he did not have any contact with anyone in this case. Even if he had set a password on the blog, it is still categorized as social media, but I accepted it because he said I was the only one that was authorized to view it. I know that it was extra hard for this man to participate because he had just separated from his wife and he was afraid to be isolated from the world without social media. At this time, he felt he needed his friends so this experiment had been a big challenge for him. His reflections over his usage pattern before the experiment was that he used social media both at work and from home and he considered himself connected most of his time. When he did not have a computer nearby, he had Facebook on his phone where he received updates and his email. When the experiment started, he temporarily uninstalled it on the phone, not to be reminded of it or tempted to log in. Linda (34) did the same thing on her mobile phone, to avoid the temptation.

The first common key event I noticed in their diaries was the whole groups reflection on how much more spare time they had by not using Facebook or similar social networks. Johan (34) made a comment on how much more he was able to do both at work and at home, and gave Facebook a nickname "time-stealer". Daniel (39) found himself going to bed earlier than usual during this 14 days experiment. He asked himself how much time he usually actually spends at the computer.

“Sundays were worst, that’s when I tend to relax at home and not do anything special. The other days are pretty full of other things. Can say that I felt more refreshed than usual.” (Daniel, 39)

Beatrice (23) who also is using Facebook at a daily basis called Facebook “addictive”. She felt that even if she received updates of what was happening online by her friends and family these 14 days, she still felt the urge to log into Facebook most of the time. As unemployed she felt that it
was it harder for her because she spent most of the time at home. The tone of her diary was confusing, one day she felt relieved to not have the urge of using Facebook, while another day was more difficult and she felt frustrated by the restriction of not being able to.

"It feels like I get more done. I am applying for work. I am working on my CV. I have even played some pool tonight. I have more time over now when not all time goes to pry on FB 😊" (Beatrice 23)

"I feel like people have forgotten me. In order to pass the time and not get completely crazy, there has been much movie watching. My partner has been an angel and helped me with my abstinence problem. He is not using the Internet or his Facebook when I’m in the room. It feels good! (Beatrice, 23)

Other participants also reflected on how much time they normally spend online. Caroline (32) and Linda (34), both admitted they check out Facebook every 15 minutes when they are at home. Caroline (32), explained that she was daydreaming more often now since she wasn’t using the computer as much as before, and reflecting over her own use of it as a way of avoiding to think too much about her own problems. She found that social media was some sort of escape from reality for her. Her daily routine was to start the computer in the morning before she went to work, then she looked at her Facebook page to see what was new.

“So what did I do instead of using FB? I played Sudoku, which almost resulted in my missing my bus and being late for work. But I just had to finish the game...”
(Caroline, 32)

Linda (34) called herself hysterically active on Facebook. Anna (27) admitted that Facebook constantly was running in the background in her home and it was impossible to ignore the sense of isolation in her thoughts the day before the experiment even started.

“I will be even more isolated. Most of the people I interact with on Facebook don’t have my phone number, and I rarely talk to people on the phone. I will probably sit here and turn into a sad old “dinner for one” woman.” (Anna, 27)

Anna (27) thought she might become more efficient computing at her work during these weeks away from social media. This was not the case, instead she found herself leaving the computer more often to do other things like cooking food, reading a book or just be.
“I thought I would be more effective when I was not surfing the net e.g. checking Facebook while working, but I am not sure. The result was probably the opposite, instead of working more, I left the computer to go and do other things.” (Anna, 27)

Linda (34) went on a cruise the weekend before the experiment and was nervous about whether someone would tag her in embarrassing pictures while she participated in the experiment. She feared that she should not have the time to see the picture, and if it was an offensive one in her opinion, to be able to untag her name before anyone else could see the picture. She felt a need to be in control over the content being uploaded about her. The reason she gave was that her ex-boyfriend might download the picture and save it, and that was a scenario she wanted to avoid. Her ex-boyfriend was actually one of the reasons she wanted to participate in this experiment in the first place. It gave her a chance to decrease her usage on Facebook, and her ex-boyfriend, who was stalking her and constantly looking her up through their common friends profiles, would lose control over her whereabouts.

The feeling of alienation is mentioned in the participants’ diaries and this shows how influenced we are by what is happening around us and what impact social networking has on people. People have the need of belonging to various groups, to feel connected and share things. There is a need of knowing what is going on and to be in control.

“I am a bit curious about what I’m missing out on. I know it’s not much, but it feels like the whole world continues without me.” (Beatrice, 23)

Throughout their reflections, there is a struggle within themselves. One day, they almost pleaded to themselves to log in to Facebook, and you could feel their frustration in the text while the next day they excused their outburst, explaining that it is pathetic to feel such an urge for social media.

“Most likely you visit Facebook just for the sake of it. No goal, no purpose, no fulfillment, no fun. But still you log in. Every day just because!! There is a lot of prying, looking up page after page. Read things you comment on just to appear on their page. It’s like an addiction.” (Beatrice, 23)

Caroline (32) explained that it was not the urge she felt that made her log in, it was the habit, like in the mornings before work, after work, and between that every 15 minutes. When you are a smoker, you say that it is not the nicotine that makes you want to smoke, it is the habit in specific moments, like after you have been eating or when drinking the morning coffee. When you try to break your addiction you have to break the routines and that is when the abstinence sets in.
Caroline (32) did not feel that the hardest part was to stay away from Facebook, but no be allowed to check it because of “pure habit”.

8.4 The failure of their own commitment

When I analyzed the results I saw that it was only three out of the six participants that managed all the 14 days without using any social media. The other three participants had "cheated" at one or several occasions. The common and interesting point I found was that these three all felt regret and shame of failing the experiment. This “forced” the participants to reflect on their own usage and routines, and created awareness of to what extent social media was to them. Even if they had already failed, they tried to continue the experiment all 14 days, which proves their determined will to succeed.

Anna (27) was the participant that failed the most. She found excuses of using social media, even if she knew she was not supposed to and after searching within herself and facing her own motives, she decided that her life was really circling around social media.

“I am reading an online newspaper article about manyhose and H&M male skirt, I don’t know, they were written like an essay, does it count as a blog? Where does the limit between article, causerie and blog go?” (Anna, 27)

Anna (27) managed the first week, but logged in to Facebook on the second week, with the excuse that she needed to find some address information about a party she was invited to. She said she only checked in to get the details of the event and then noticed the new layout of Facebook. Her reaction was strong and she felt like she missed out a lot in just one week.

“They have even changed the design since last time. What is this? Insane!” (Anna, 27)

Another incident was when Anna’s (27) boyfriend was reading aloud to her from some blog he was visiting one night. She knew in her mind that it was as if she was reading it herself and therefore not allowed but as she explained in her diary; “no one had said anything about someone else reading to you?” This action also proves how the social media is constantly lying in the background of our reality, even if we’re not personally using it. It shows a need we might not be aware of, but it is there. We are consuming the Internet and marketing is becoming part of social media. It is mentioned in the newspapers, on the radio, on posters and ads. How can we avoid being a part of this when it is thrown onto us everywhere we go? Anna (27) had one more moment of social media relapse in the second week, when she started to read one blog followed by another, and then a third and so on.
"Fell for one or another blog and then I got agonized and felt dirty and bad. As a true addict, in fact, like when you should not eat, drink or smoke more, then you get just one bite, sip or cigarette, only one, just one orgasmic wave, in my case, like shopping up my last money, pure and simple. Same feeling." (Anna, 27)

Anna (27) excused her action with, that if you use the net as much as she does, then it is difficult to avoid social media, and her habits are constructed around the social part. She also said that she was suffering when Google buzz was launched, and she realized that she was not allowed to try it out since it was by invitation only and she felt it as “painful”.

Anna (27) admitted how she took on the responsibility in a project of getting them a twitter account. She also admits that she could have let someone else do it, and that is was an excuse from her side to get a reason to be updated. She reflects throughout her diary on her need to be confirmed by other people. She is the person that starts discussions and debates online and gets lots of responses from others.

"I use the Internet primarily to seek out and start discussions. It is my playground as "outraged citizen". (Anna, 27)

As Anna (27) explained in her diary, when she was doing things she had to do, e.g. make phone calls or other things that bored her, normally, she always made a status update on Facebook to get approval and a feeling of being liked by people she knows. Now she admitted it felt totally meaningless to do those things, because no one would give her credits afterwards. In her diary she reflected a lot on her need for acknowledgement, how important it is for her to function. She felt alienated from the outside world.

Anna (27) explained how she suddenly started to discover things everywhere that she wanted to write about or comment on, and she admitted to herself that she needed to be confirmed straight away in everything she does. She felt she had an urge to be rewarded and drew a simile to a child who needs a reward from its parents.

"Nothing on the Internet fills a specific function if you can't write about it-what else could I do, call up strangers and talk about it?" (Anna, 27)

Linda (34) was the participant that was right behind Anna (27) in failing herself at more than one occasion. Linda (34) checked her mail already the first day, and could see she was tagged in a picture on Facebook, which made her log in to Facebook, to see how she looked in that picture,
Before she logged out again. She needed to feel in control to see if she wanted other people to see her in that picture.

The third day when Linda (34) checked her mail, she saw there were 4 new posts in her blog and lots of comments, which made her feel frustrated. The fourth day a friend called her with the words: “We haven’t heard from you or seen you Linda”. By this time Linda (34) was really frustrated. The fifth day, her irritation was gone and she felt a calm spread inside of her. She said more people were calling her, and she received lots of text messages on her phone, where they were asking her not to drown in work. At the same time she felt relaxed by not having the urge of checking Facebook every 15 minutes as she was used to. At one occasion, in a motorbike store, Linda (34) made a comment on their blog and she did not reflect on it until afterwards. It was (came by) pure routine that made her do it without thinking about it. Linda (34) said she felt nauseous every time she saw all the unread e-mails in her mailbox, most of them being from Facebook, and knowing she was not allowed to open them.

One day during the second half of the experiment, Caroline (32) found out from her 8 year old son that he had opened a Facebook account in school with help from his older friends. She quickly logged on to Facebook because she feared for her sons safety. Her son’s newly created account was in his own name, but the log in information was in possession of the older friend. She tried to find her sons profile to see what content they had added in there. While searching for his name, she found that there were over 600 people with the same name, making it impossible to find her son since he had not uploaded a profile picture yet. When she gave up looking for her son’s profile, she went into her own profile page for a quick update to see if there was anything new. She could have avoided continuing to her own page, but she probably thought it would do no harm, because she already “sinned”.

“I checked my own profile, but no one else’s...sorry!!! I could not stop myself, when I was already there. It was only for 5 minutes.” (Caroline, 32)

The other three participants never failed themselves but they were feeling the desire or even craving of using social media. None of them felt that it would be possible to continue without social media after completion of the experiment.

Daniel (39) never failed his commitment to himself or the experiment, but he felt a strong need of logging in at some occasions. He felt the strongest urge to log in to Facebook on his eleventh day without social media. Before the experiment he was very active dating, but he had slowed it down for the moment, and it helped him not to feel that he missed out on too much. In the beginning he enjoyed the time without social media, by filling his spare time with training and
spending time with his children. His strongest reflection during this experiment was about the amount of spare time he suddenly had.

Johan (34) nearly logged in to Facebook on his second week when someone at work told him that they had sent him an invitation to a party via Facebook, and they were waiting for his reply. He got curious, and felt a strong desire to log in but he resisted.

Beatrice (23) felt alienated and alone at times. She almost felt anger towards herself when she became aware of her own need of social media. She managed to live without it but had a final countdown the last day. She said she felt “forgotten”.

8.5 The result of the experiment

This experiment proves that people that start to use social networks on daily basis soon have created a need for it, even if it is reluctantly. The people in this experiment were denying that they had a need to use social media and said that they could manage for 14 days. The biggest impression I got when I explained what the experiment was about was that these were people who wanted to challenge themselves in order to prove to them that they did not depend on their virtual world. They were people of morals and commitment to their own beliefs and they were determined to succeed to show themselves and others that the social media did not have them in its grip. Still the experiment proves an extremely need of socializing online, and that it was not as easy as they thought from the beginning to stay away from the virtual world. In all the diaries, key events as emotions of struggle and urges were found. Some of the participants fell for their strong desire, others managed not to fail, but all of them became aware of how much they needed it after all.

Without being aware of it, people that use social media, are building up a world and reality online they come to identify themselves with. All content they add, or that others add about them, are and become memories for them. Images and notes, posts in blogs, videos, friends, it is all content that they can refer back to, either by themselves or with others they want to share it with. At this point, social media being where it is today there is much less anonymity than it used to be. People exploit themselves to get feedback and acknowledgement, through their name, their pictures and personal information. They are building an identity online, which is personalized individually, to present themselves to the world and the people they know. The more often social media is used, the more important it becomes, because of all the effort one has put into it and the content it consists of. It becomes a link between a person and their social networks, and to stay away from it will reluctantly create a sense of abstinence.
This could be shown in the diary of Anna (27). Already before the experiment started, she reflected on how her life would be the 14 days without social media. She would feel isolated, alone, and even more isolated. She admitted herself to be addicted to others acknowledgement and she rewarded herself by posting something when she had done things on her to-do list. During the 14 days without social media, she saw no point in making any checklist since she had no one to share it with. Instead, she asked herself what she would do instead, could she start calling strangers instead, to tell them how good she had been?

In the beginning the participants were indecisive when it came to their own need of social media. One day they were frustrated not to be updated about what was happening online, or not to be “allowed” to log in while other days they expressed gratefulness to have a reason to stay away from social media. The experiment definitely created awareness of their own usage and the meaning social media had on their everyday life. As they realized that their behavior was addictive, their frustration grew bigger some days and was strengthened by their guilt in using social media when they were not “allowed”. Caroline (32) said she was sorry for the time she logged in. Anna (27) explained how she felt dirty and how she felt agony. They became aware of what an amount of important information their Facebook account consisted of, like dates, addresses and phone numbers, which they could not reach from other places. Two of the participants had invitations from friends in events, which also proves that social media has become a medium to use for contact and meetings. To some extent, Facebook has replaced the phonebook, calendar and e-mails.

Many of them had the feeling of being an outsider and alienated from the online society. Some of the participants were in agreement that this awareness had made them change their online routine and that they would try not to be as “addicted” as they were earlier, but most of them are just as active as before the experiment. Linda (34) wrote me a few weeks after the experiment that she does not start her computer every day anymore. She considered herself hysterical and a very active user, which she became more aware of under these weeks. She promised herself never to be like that again. She also said she does not have to log in every day on one site she used to visit daily before, and that this has been a positive experience for her. She feels that she does not have the urge to look at Facebook either, which makes her feel calmer than before.

Johan (34) says a month after, that from having been an active user, and been using Facebook 3-4 times a day, for a number of hours on a daily basis, he only logs in once a day at nights, and for a maximum of 20 minutes which is a big improvement. Caroline (32) said that the first day without restrictions, she forgot to log in as she used to do every morning before the experiment. She reminded herself the next day, and now everything is back to normal and she checks out Facebook every 15 minutes again. Anna (27) is as active as she was earlier, and she explained
how she hated the real life humans when she got back to social media again. Anna (27) created a new blog and a twitter account straight away, as she felt the urge of getting into the game as fast and as much as possible again. She states how much she needs the response, the acknowledgement from others to function and to prove that she is heard. She makes a comparison between social media and drug-use, social media is something she needs as the social media addict she is.

9 Suicide online

All the quotes in this chapter are translated from Swedish to English from the original posts. I corrected the quotes into accurate English.

Today, people are connected globally with their friends and meeting people who they would not ordinarily have met through various social networks. In their social network, they are building their own individual online content by uploading pictures, videos, posting private thoughts, opinions, finding friends, making new acquaintances and sharing of personal information. The individual content represents the individual online, and with time, the content becomes connected, to what they now have started to identify themselves with. Social networking has become more of significance to the individual’s everyday life.

The significance of the social media can be compared to Jonas Löwgren & Erik Stolterman’s (2004) argument on digital artifacts. They argue that the digital artifact has come to the same significance and role as our homes. In other words, we do not say that we use our home, but we live in them and that is the role the digital artifact has come to mean to us. We do not analyze or think about the artifacts we have at home or how we use them. This is an artifact we live with, which has become a part of our environment and our everyday life. (Löwgren & Stolterman, 2004, p. 214) That is how I will draw a parallel between social media and the digital artifact as a part of our everyday life, because we do not reflect anymore on how we use it or why, we simply live with it.

The actions and behavior to constantly be updated about others whereabouts on everyone online becomes a routine over time and creates a certain need. If the individual’s social virtual world should be deleted, sorrow or alienation will most likely occur. This “grieving state” is the social position I want to “force” my participants into, a social position they would not have considered by themselves. I want them to lose something they have come to identify themselves with, which
might sound harsh, but that is the best way for me to observe their behavior and how they will handle the situation they have been positioned into.

In the coming first two chapters, I will explain the relevance the social media has to our lives, which will give a better understanding of what I want to achieve with the experiment. Furthermore, there will be an introduction of the participants before I will explain the whole process of the experiment.

9.1 The greater the attachments, the greater the loss

When a person is dedicated to a sport, e.g. running, he will identify himself with the core values and the lifestyle of an athlete. He might be more aware of what to eat, adapt a healthier lifestyle, exercise every day and be surrounded with people who share the same interest. If the person has an unfortunate accident that renders the athlete incapacitated, everything the person believes in and identifies himself with will be lost. The other athletes might miss the person but they will eventually continue with their lives. Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that the longer you are attached to something, the greater the loss will be. This loss will create a feeling of confusion, mourning and alienation for the person, who has lost the athletic world he/she used to belong to.

In a sense, a parallel can be drawn between the athlete's life and the social network. In the social network, people are building their identity from who they are, how they wish to be and how they want others to perceive them. With time, the social network is expanded by new acquaintances, new memories from e.g. conversations, laughs, shared pictures or private information. By using the same social network among friends from real life, it also creates a new sense of fellowship and a feeling of belonging. If the social network is deleted, the identity will be lost, the person’s entire list of friends will be gone and the bond the person feels with the friends from real life will be disrupted. This can be one reason why it will be difficult for a person to delete their account, as the person may feel alienated from the group.

An issue that may arise, when using the social network on a daily basis, is the routine of the usage of social media and the constant need of knowing what is happening online. If this routine and need is broken, there will be a sense of disruption of the everyday life. Social media has infiltrated the life and oneself and one's identity has become a part of the virtual world.
9.2 Web2.0 suicide machine

The idea for this experiment came to me, when I was doing research on critical views on social media and found the Web2.0 suicide machine. It was interesting to see an invention that reflected on where our world is heading and to what extent social media has been integrated with the real world's concepts.

Fig 29. Suicidemachine.org

The inventors of the web application Web2.0 suicide machine had opinions on how the virtual life is taking over the physical life with all the poking, posting and commenting, and that it has become extremely time-consuming. They also meant that with all the content we add, there must be an easier way to be able to remove it, instead of manually. They believed there should be an automatic application to help people erase their “fingerprints” online (lifehacker.com, 2010). The website of Web2.0suicide machine date provides the data of how many that used it. “4342 people” have deleted their accounts and “1,176,357 friends have been unfriended”, with the use of the suicide machine since they started in December 2009. (suicidemachine.com)
“Tired of your Social Network?
Liberate your newbie friends with a Web2.0 suicide! This machine lets you delete all your energy sucking social-networking profiles, kill your fake virtual friends, and completely do away with your Web2.0 alterego.” (suicidemachine.com)

By submitting the password and login name, the application erases all the content for the person. In the process of deleting an account, it also changes the password of the account so the person cannot restore the old account. Facebook learned about the web application, and blocked the web applications IP address a few days before the experiment would start, which was unfortunate. (March 2010) That resulted in that I had to use the second option, the old and difficult way of deleting a Facebook account, by the means of deactivation through Facebook itself.

It is not possible to delete a Facebook account and all its content with one simple click. First the account has to be deactivated for two weeks, and if the person does not log in to the account in this period, the account will finally be deleted. The downside of the deactivation is, should the person log in before the two weeks period ended, the account will stay as he/she left it, untouched with all content and friends still there. If someone tags them in a picture on Facebook during this period, the participant will receive the updates through e-mail. I had no other choice than to trust my participants to stay away from Facebook.

I will still refer to the phrase “suicide online” even though I am not using the Web2.0 suicide machine, as the experiment still stands with the same objectives.

9.3 The participants

The idea of the suicide experiment was sketched already in February, early on in the study, and in that stage I had one volunteer, Marcuz (25). He was also supposed to participate in the experiment “Without social media for 14 days”, but for various reasons he dropped out. When it was time for the suicide experiment I received three more volunteers out of Marcuz (25) social network. I now had four participants with hundreds of online friends and an active Facebook account, which would improve the result of the experiment.
Marcuz (25), Gina (19), Philip (20) and My (22) were all active users on Facebook. My (22) differed from the other three in one matter; she preferred to read posts and had never added any content to Facebook. Marcuz (25), Gina (19) and Philip (20) were all extremely active users, and with that I want to emphasize that they checked their Facebook accounts constantly, every day, when they had a computer nearby. None of them were aware of the extent of the meaning social media had to them until they volunteered for this experiment.

9.4 The tasks, goals and guidelines

During the experiment three interviews were held, as “checkpoints” to find out about the participants reflections and thoughts over the “alternative reality” they had volunteered to be in.

Goals and guidelines for this experiment:

- “Force” the participants into a social position they would not normally be in
  (How do they feel before the suicide online, two weeks after, a month after? Do they feel alienated, happier etc.)
- Create an awareness of the participants usage of Facebook
  (Are they aware of the amount of time they put in using Facebook? How much of their everyday life is circling around Facebook?)
- Get their ideas of what is private and public content
  (Do they think of their security settings? What is their limit of what they share online?)
- Get them to reflect over who they consider as friends
  (How many of their online friends do they consider as real friends or acquaintances? Do they think about whom they accept as a friend?)
- Can they “survive” without Facebook, and for how long?
  (Will the participants fail? Will they “survive” without it?)
- After their reflections, will they become more aware of their own behavior online?
  (What would they have done differently?)
I told the participants that if they felt they could not manage without Facebook these weeks, they were allowed at any time to create a new account, and to start from the beginning.

9.5 The three checkpoints

The first interview with each participant was documented on video before they committed the suicide online. These four videos are used in conjunction with this thesis and need to be seen for a better understanding of the experiment. The link to the video interviews will be found in the next chapter, see chapter 9.5.1. I deactivated each participant’s Facebook accounts the week after the video interviews without the participants being present, as it was such a simple procedure. If the Web2.0 suicide machine had been available, I would have documented the whole event.

The second interview took place two weeks after they had committed suicide online; the interview was a brief update on their reflections. I used audio recording in the second and third interview to collect accurate data for later analysis. The third interview was four to six weeks after the video interview; it was to see how the participants had managed throughout the experiment and to find out what changes there had been in their everyday life since their suicide online.

9.5.1 The video interviews (before the suicide online)

The video interviews are structured by introducing the participants and their Facebook information to gain a better understanding of the experiment. The participants will reflect about their usage and experiences on Facebook and express their thoughts and feelings about “online suicide”. The videos are between 2 - 5 minutes long and spoken in Swedish, with English subtitles. The videos need to be seen, as they are a complement to this chapter.

[Video interviews: http://suzidus.se/masterthesis/the-interviews]

The participants had not fully understood the meaning of the experiment and that they were about to delete their accounts for this study. Instead, it became real to them during the video interview, where they had a chance to reflect on what they were about to do and why they had volunteered to participate.

Marcuz (25) was the primary volunteer, and he had the time to reflect on his decision since February, which can be seen in the interview, as he is very objective in his reflections. My (22) felt an anxiety about her decision on participating in this experiment, and hesitated for a few weeks before she made her final decision. Her biggest dilemma about deleting her account was to lose all her contacts from abroad; because she did not use any other social tools like msn-
messenger. Gina (19) looked forward to participate because she needed a reason to reflect on her own awareness, because she had a few bad experiences from Facebook. Philip (20) seemed indifferent about deleting his account. He claimed that Facebook was something that he did not need and could definitely manage without it.

Marcuz (25) was the one who has used Facebook for the longest time. He is an incredibly social guy with many friends both in real life and online. He was also the participant with most Facebook friends on his list. He had not thought about changing his privacy settings. When he was asked to look them up, he found out that they were set to "friend's friends", which means that all the friends of his Facebook friends could view his content, but it was something he did not worry about. Gina (19) was not aware of her privacy settings on Facebook before the video interview. I asked her to look it up on Facebook when I was present. She started to reflect on how much content she actually shared with strangers and became very uncomfortable with her lack of knowledge. She also found out that everybody could see her email address and asked herself if that was the reason why so many strangers added her on her msn-messenger. She also mentioned that her father had tried to make her aware of the amount of photos she was sharing, and warned her about that it is saved on the server of Facebook, but that had not bothered her before. My (22) considered herself as a private person, both in real life and on Facebook, and she was aware of her privacy settings, which was set only to friends.

Philip (20) did not consider himself private on Facebook and had not changed his privacy settings; they were on default, which means that everybody on Facebook could view his content. He also mentioned how he often forgot to log out from Facebook at work, and how his friends at work played him pranks, by using his Facebook account to post insensitive comments on a very childish level. It did not bother Philip (20) that they made him look ridiculous to others and called it harmless pranks. He argued that his friends on Facebook knew that it was not comments made by him.

Gina (19) reflected on her own usage on Facebook and claimed that she did not find it interesting to see the posts from the people she did not know personally. When she viewed the news feed, she continued to scroll down until she found a person she actually knew. Gina (19) talked about her feelings about committing suicide online as something she had to do and seemed determined not to create a new Facebook account either. She felt no need for the virtual world. As she was talking about her own experiences, her own words seem to make her aware of things she has not reflected on before. She started to believe that Facebook had her under its spell and that she needed to break that spell and start to live in the physical world again. When she reflected on how this would affect her friendship with friends from the real world, she assumed that she would lose contact with an old friend, which she currently only kept in touch with through
Facebook. She pointed out that she would keep in contact with others through another social network she used occasionally, or through msn-messenger. All the participants have friends abroad, where they receive their updates through Facebook. Marcuz (25), Gina (19) and Philip (20) admit that they are a little anxious, that they will lose contact with some of their friends, but point out that most of them they have on their msn-messenger. What Gina (19) finds difficult about committing suicide online, is that she will not be able to keep herself updated on her three best friends who currently live in Madrid, Australia and Gothenburg. At present they have contact on a daily basis through Facebook, where they chat and shares video links. Gina (19) finds it comforting that her friends are all Swedes and will move back to Sweden after summer. My (22) finds it hard, because her friends abroad are people she met while she was travelling around the world, but she points out that they will use e-mail to keep in contact instead. She has also decided to print out her list of Facebook friends before she commits the suicide online.

9.5.2 Two weeks after the suicide online (interview 2)

Unfortunately, I did not get to do a proper second interview with My (22) and Marcuz (25) due to their time-schedule. We communicated by phone so that I could keep updated on how they managed during these two weeks. Both of them seemed to have forgotten all about Facebook and did not miss it at all. There were no regrets about the decision of deleting their accounts.

Philip (20) and Gina (19) also managed well at this point of the experiment, although, Gina (19) used Facebook through a friend’s account on one occasion. She pointed out that it had not given her anything. Instead, it reminded her how boring and time consuming Facebook is.

“I have not used Facebook in two weeks, it’s gone. One day I was at my friends home and we talked with a common friend, living in Australia, on Skype, and she said “wait I must show you something on Facebook”, which was an email that another friend in Madrid had sent to all of us. Then I remembered I still had to tell the friend in Madrid that I had deleted my Facebook account and had not received the email. It felt pretty weird to look at Facebook after all this time, the site is pretty boring actually.” (Gina, 19)

Philip (20) seemed a little excited when he talked about the two weeks that had passed and still seemed determined not to create a new Facebook account.

“These two weeks without Facebook has gone well. At one point I wanted to go in and just to look at it, but then I remembered that I did not have a Facebook account and I was too lazy to make a new one.” (Philip, 20)
Gina (19) explained her reflections on how she managed this far in the experiment. She said she tried to see the suicide online as a break in her everyday life and with those thoughts, and with the knowledge of being able and allowed to create a new Facebook account; she could carry on without Facebook.

“I think I managed so well without Facebook because I thought deep down that I will make a new Facebook even if I did not want to admit that to myself. I think I had that idea from the beginning. It’s like when I try to quit smoking, I have to think that I may take one now and then and by thinking that I will feel calmer.” (Gina, 19)

Another reason why Gina (19) had not felt the need of Facebook was that she had a full schedule, one of the weeks she was away skiing. She admitted though that she had felt the urge to upload pictures to Facebook from the trip to share with her friends but had resisted that impulse. She also drew the conclusion that it is easier to share pictures with others through Facebook, instead of transferring them with the use of a Usb-drive.

“I was in Sälen for a week and it was difficult because I wanted to upload pictures from there. I had no camera, but the person that had the camera and took all the photos would upload them so I could get them, but now it got much more difficult because I should have brought a USB-stick, otherwise I could just have downloaded the pictures from Facebook.” (Gina, 19)

Gina (19) admitted she had become more active on “bilddagboken” as a substitute for Facebook. She pointed out that it was not the same as using Facebook because of the limitations, e.g. the lack of the direct communicative possibilities that Facebook provides.

“I have actually been on my photo diary (http://bilddagboken.se) a few times when I had nothing to do and at times when I’ve sat by the computer. But I do not sit nearly as long as before at the computer anymore. I actually think it’s pretty good because I am doing so much more things. I call my friends. I have thought about that there are some people I only had contact with through Facebook, like a girl that I have not spoken to since I deleted my Facebook.” (Gina, 19)

Another reflection Gina (19) had was that she started with straight communication by calling her friends.
“It’s really sad not to be able to see all the pictures, you feel a little bit as an outsider, especially since I do not keep updated about my friends abroad and their whereabouts. It’s actually really boring. I’ve called my friend in Gothenburg more these two weeks and that is still a good thing. It is positive because it is a conversation more than just a comment on a picture or a comment like ‘I miss you’. There is more to talk about and we learn more about each other’s lives, so the relationship becomes deeper then also.” (Gina, 19)

Philip (20) felt the need of Facebook when people from work were using Facebook in his presence.

“People at my work are always logged in on Facebook on their break, so I also want to be. It feels like a little itch in my fingers but it’s not possible. No one has directly responded that I do not have Facebook anymore but they have asked me why I deleted myself but then I explained that I participated in this project.” (Philip, 20)

“It feels really good that my Facebook is gone. Now I see how dependent people are of Facebook, something I did not notice before when I was there myself. So now I hear like “Oh I must go into Facebook” from people who says it all the time and I just say “no”. I was sitting on the computer at work and they came and told me, and I just said, “No, go away”. I am watching more movies and other stuff instead. I have much more time for other things.” (Philip. 20)

9.5.3 The last update (interview 3)

Philip (20) had created a new account a week after the second interview, which means that he managed three weeks without Facebook. Gina (19) created her new account a few days after Philip (20) Both My (22) and Marcuz (25) had succeeded to stay away from Facebook.

I was curious about the reasons that made Philip (20) and Gina (19) go back to the social media network they had thought was boring and time consuming. I also wanted to know if they had done things differently this time, for instance if anything had changed their perception of private and public online.

Philip (20) had received 150 friends after just two days, and after the second week he had 165 friends. I wondered if it was his friends that sent him the requests or if he was searching for the people himself. He admitted that he had spent the first day back on Facebook to build up his profile and find most of his friends again. The other 15 were friends that sent requests to him. He had not done anything differently this time. He said his privacy settings were set to default, which
means that everybody can view his content. He explained that he never writes anything that should disrespect his work, so he felt that he did not have the need to set the privacy settings differently, though he pointed out that he is more aware now when it comes to logging out from Facebook at work. He also stated that he decreased his usage on Facebook, even if he still uses it on a daily basis and he does not feel the urge to be logged in constantly when he is at home. The reason why he created a new account was that he missed the virtual world and the fellowship on Facebook.

Gina’s (19) reason for creating a new Facebook account was because Philip (20) had created a new one. She explained that they had helped each other in avoiding Facebook, but since he created a new account she felt alienated and created her account as a result of those feelings. She also pointed out that as working associates and having common friends, it was difficult for her to see him use Facebook at his break at work. She felt a little disappointed with herself, that she had not been stronger, because now she was back in the same routines as before. Gina (19) stated that she had become more aware of the people she added as friends this time. After two weeks back on Facebook, she had only 69 friends compared to the 200 she used to have, a week later she had 77 friends. She had changed her security settings straight away, so no one could view her content except her friends.

I wanted to know the reflections from Marcuz (25) and My (22) who had not created a new account, seemed comfortable in not doing so. Marcuz (25) was the participant that volunteered as soon as he heard about this experiment and his decision of participating came from his own free will. It was something he had had the time to reflect on for a longer period of time compared to the other three participants, which also played a role in why he had managed to not fall back into the old routines. My (22) did not feel any regrets, instead she felt more relieved not feeling the need to log in only to see what other people were up to. Marcuz (25) compared Facebook to any other addiction, which he felt he could live without.

“I know it is easy for me to create an addiction, as Facebook became an addiction for me. Like smoking is one kind of addiction, Facebook is another, online Poker Casino is one thing…but Facebook was incredibly addictive.” (Marcuz, 25)

Marcuz (25) soon realized that he did not use his computer as much as before. Before the experiment he had his computer on all the time, now he could go for days before he started up the computer. My (22) stated that she uses the computer the same amount as before.
“I use the computer in the same amount as before. I look more at news (aftonbladet). I update myself with the world news instead of one’s private acquaintances. I do not use the computer before work as often as before, but otherwise the same.” (My, 22)

My (22) admits that her mother occasionally is updating her with things that happen on Facebook, in their common social network, which does not make her feel alienated from the social networks. Marcuz (25) did not feel any grief or alienation after the suicide online. He also states that he has not been curious or wondered what is happening in Facebook.

“I feel more into my real life now, I don’t feel alienated at all.” (Marcuz, 25)

Marcuz (25) also points out that he is actually using the phone to call his friends more often, which gives him more quality time with his friends.

“I am e-mailing my friend that lives in Thailand now instead of through Facebook.” (Marcuz, 25)

My (22) said she had not e-mailed any of her friends from abroad yet, but she was happy that she had remembered to save the Facebook friend list so she had their names saved on a piece of paper. She holds on to her opinions about the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that can happen on Facebook. She believes that it is better to meet in the real world, where it is easier to perceive a person for the one the person really is.

“By Facebook you get preconceived notions about people, and it is negative, but I’m not there. Rather meeting people in private and have personal contact.” (My, 22)

Both Marcuz (25) and My (22) seemed persuaded about never using a social network like Facebook again.

“I will never get a new Facebook account ever again, I know that for sure” (Marcuz, 25)

They feel that they have received a different quality of living since they broke their need of constant updates about others whereabouts.
9.6 The result of the experiment

Throughout the video interviews, the participants mentioned different situations they have experienced in Facebook, which can arise in any social networks. Gina (19) once found herself in situation when she felt forced to accept a friend request because she had no other choice. She was supposed to go to Italy as an au pair and the mother of the family added her as a friend on Facebook. Gina (19) wanted to ignore the friend request, but then the mother would have known which put Gina (19) in a difficult position. The consequence could have become a misunderstanding between the two, which could have resulted in that the mother would not hire Gina (19) as an au pair. The mother needed to feel reliability in her, so Gina (19) accepted the friend request, after she had deleted all pictures where the mother could have gotten the wrong impression of her, which could have cost her the employment.

Marcuz (25) got himself into a situation where he became a victim of a personal attack on Facebook by a friend he had an argument with. The friend posted the whole story openly on Facebook, which resulted in that 50-100 people were involved, both their mutual friends and the friend's own friends, whom Marcuz did not have any contact with. He felt exposed and humiliated by this incident, where he became aware of how vulnerable you are if one in your social network wants to hurt you, with no control over what is said or what should stay private.

Gina (19) also experienced a situation where she felt exposed, humiliated and betrayed on Facebook. Her ex boyfriend flirted openly on Facebook, where all their mutual friends witnessed the whole incident, and later questioned her about what was going on. If something is posted on Facebook, there will always be a friend of a friend that will be updated. The bigger our social network becomes, the more we lose the right to be private. With the loss of right to be private, I mean that you have no control over what friends and acquaintances are reading about you, in matters that only concern yourself but posted by others.

Another situation is when Gina (19) changed her Facebook relationship status before she had told her family and friends about having a boyfriend. This resulted in some disappointment that she had not told them herself and that they had to find out through Facebook. The social media is in a way replacing the face-face communication, and can create misunderstandings or conflicts when people that are close feel excluded.

My (22) mentioned how her mother thanked her for letting her be My’s mom when she accepted the mom’s friend request on Facebook. The mother showed gratefulness that her daughter let
her in to her daughter’s private social network circuit, and included her among her friends. That shows how important it has become to feel included into a group.

Philip (20) mentioned a situation at work, when he forgot to log off from Facebook after his break and his work colleagues took advantage of the situation by posting insensitive comments on his Facebook. These comments can be interpreted in the wrong way, as Facebook accounts are very private and represent your online presence and people take this online presence very seriously. The consequences of his actions of not logging off properly, could have led him to serious repercussions, by getting the wrong impression and drawing conclusions of his online behavior.

Gina (19) thought about how managers that she worked for can view her holiday pictures or pictures of her being on parties drinking and how she by that can be perceived in a different way. Up until know, when questioned about privacy settings, she had not thought about how many strangers that actually had access to her private pictures and how they could sit in their living room and look at her in her bikini, which made her feel uncomfortable. This opened awareness for her, and affected her decisions when she created a new Facebook account three weeks later. She said that she lost contact with friends, since the suicide online, and the feeling of alienation when she heard her friends talk about Facebook. She felt released from the urge that “she have to log in” but she also felt as an outsider of the fellowship.

Gina’s (19) decided to create a new Facebook account when Philip (20) told her that he had created one. She argued that they had been supportive to each other under the experiment, but when he gave in to Facebook, she felt no point in resisting anymore. Both Philip (20) and Gina (19) were not ready to end their virtual life on Facebook, though they were living right in it at this point of their life. It also has to be taken into consideration that both of them are younger than Marcuz (25) and My (22). Philip (20) had not experienced the downsides from Facebook, which can have contributed why he could not relate to the consequences. This can be shown from his privacy settings in the new account where he still uses the default mode. Gina (19) had experienced situations that forced her to reflect about the consequences, which can be seen in her new account, where she has set all her settings to “only friends”. My (22) and Marcuz (25) have decided not to fall back to their old routines again, which they have kept. They have become more aware of to what extent Facebook had been controlling their everyday life; instead they feel they have received more quality time.

These situations the participants have mentioned are consequences of how the social network have got more into our reality and changed the way we communicate with others. The participants have shown the significance the social media networks have on them. The constant
urge to log into Facebook can be likened to a compulsive behavior when the need reluctantly is taking over their everyday life. Gina (19) and Philip (20) fell back into their old routines again, because they felt alienated from the group. Gina (19) would have managed for a longer time, if it were not for the peer-pressure she felt, when her support-person in the experiment failed it. This can also show how depended people are from each other.

10 Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis is based on two vital questions to be answered;

- *Where does the border between private and public in today's society go?*
- *How can we balance the need of integrity and privacy with other needs of acknowledgement?*

10.1 Conclusion

Through my experiments I could see the significance the virtual world and the social networks had on the participants. The results I received from the experiment 8 and 9 were a constant urge to log in, have as many friends as possible, a constant need of being updated, being in control, feel the drama, consequences, a feeling of belonging, need of attention, be accepted and acknowledged and unawareness of their own privacy online. The participants found it difficult to confront their own reflections in the experiments, which forced them to an awareness of how vulnerable they actually are. The results I received from the experiments 6 and 7 were a distorted view of what the participants consider private and public, and that it was an age difference between the people who participated. The older generations have different views of what is public and private, compared to the younger generations who have been growing up with the contemporary, flexible and diverse society. The older generations grew up in the stable traditional society Turkle (1995) claimed has broken down. It can be shown through my experiments that the stable society then, has found a stable ground for the younger generations, in the social networks. The participants in my experiment 8 and 9 talked about Facebook with a familiar tone as if it was a city a few miles away. The tasks the participants received in the two experiments can be compared to forbid the participants to visit a city nearby where they have an extremely big social network of close friends. The only difference from the social structure in the physical world compared to the social structure in the virtual world is according to Giddens
theory (1991) that in the virtual world, time and space is without relevance, as people travel without borders.

Travelling without borders was shown through the interviews in experiment 9, where the participants enjoyed the travelling, but did not consider the risks of travelling unprotected. Only one of the participants was aware of her privacy settings, the others participants had not thought about them. It could be shown in the experiment 9, where one participant explained that, when Facebook changed the privacy settings, she just clicked away from the announcement, as she did not understand it. The one participant that had privacy settings was a very private person, but admitted she had not set her privacy settings on purpose. It was something she did when Facebook made an announcement about the changes without even reflecting on why she did it. Through the participants’ reflections over their own usage it was shown that the need of belonging was of a much bigger significance for them, than their own safety. With other words, the participants were either extremely public in their social networks without any reflections of any consequences, or they were aware about them, but did not care.

The participants in all the experiment 8 and 9 showed an enormous need of belonging into an ingroup, the larger group, where they received their daily attention from their friends and acquaintances. They did not consider the people in their social network to be a threat to them, and did not reflect on who could see their content or all their whereabouts through their Facebook statuses. When I confronted the participants with the question to define the friends out of the hundreds of friends they had online, there were distorted views on what they considered to be a friend. They considered everybody on their list to be friends, even if it was people they had never met or met at one occasion several years earlier. It is obvious that the meaning of “knowing someone” has changed its meaning as well as the meaning of “trust”, compared to how it was not more than a decade ago. Each participant in experiment 9 had 200-600 friends online, of whom 10 to 50 were considered friends they spent time with. Then it has to be questioned, of what importance are the other 200-500 friends? What need do they fill, for the participants to share themselves unlimited to people they do not consider friends? You can from this conclude that the more friends you have, the more others will perceive you as a popular person. The bigger social networks, the better.

In the experiments 6 and 7, it was shown that as soon as the participants were alone, in this case, with the physical wall, they dared to post more personal or provocative posts, which could seem offensive to others, but the participants were still anonymous. The participants argued that when they posted something online, they could hide in their “safe net” as no one could see them. If they would have written the post “Hitler” when a Jew was present, it may have resulted a conflict. On the Internet the participants can hide behind the screen, and the possibility to be more
outspoken is much bigger. In the interviews I did with people in experiment 6, the people felt more at ease to make posts online containing sensitive information about themselves rather than to post everything in public. A few participants argued they felt more private online, even if they revealed their real identity. This indicates a distorted view on what is private and public in today’s society.

There is no definite answer to the question where the border goes between private and public that is consistent for everybody. The border has to be set individually, as the person will feel when he/she has violated his or her own integrity. The border is dependent on the person’s perception of right and wrong, which is grounded in the inner self, the personal identity. The border is in relation to the “set of principles” a person’s value of the self depends on, the feeling of unity within the self. It is important to acknowledge Calhoun’s theory, (1995) that the own set of principles is not always the right set of principles for someone else.

It can be pointed out that the more integrity a person has, the bigger need they have of privacy. This does not mean that a person that is public online doesn’t have any integrity, but the person have less need of protecting it. Calhoun (1995) points out that if a person cannot justify his or her act, the person is a person without integrity as they acted to gain something for their own benefits. One participant told a situation when he was sold out by a friend he had a dispute with. The friend needed to “gain” their common friends, to get them on his side, so he posted criticism in their common network, pointed to the participant, so everybody could read it. The participant felt humiliated and exposed, as the other person had sold out his integrity for his own benefits. The question is whether the “friend” has less integrity or if he is a person without integrity, which depends on if he felt guilt and shame over his act.

The amount of integrity a person has is decisive for the person’s behavior. In experiment 7, a person thought the physical wall was offending, so he took the wall down in front of everybody that was present. The reason why he did it might be because he found it offending. The other reason might have been, because he wanted to provoke and do something without any reason. If he acted out, and torn down the paper posts because he found it offending, then he can as seen in Calhoun’s (1995) theory, justify his act and walk out with the integrity view clean hands. The other scenario is that he wanted to provoke, in that case he acted with the integrity view of dirty hands.

The need of acknowledgement has grown with the provided possibilities to feed the self by either your own or others “approval” of the own actions by exploiting the self. This results in “selling” the own integrity and others integrity, when a person is posting something very private online, which many times also includes others, just for the purpose of being seen. This puts one’s own
integrity at stake, as well as the lack of control of what information others post about you or in the physical world, do to you. This was particularly clear in not only the violated integrity of the participant whose integrity was sold out, but in several other situations where the participants felt they had been violated, which resulted in a strong feeling of humiliation and exposure, which they did not chose for themselves. All of the participants did at some point reflect over the matter that they had no control over what was posted online about them.

Balancing the need of integrity and privacy can only be done by, decreasing the need of being acknowledged, seeking for attention or others approval. People need to start to be more aware of the consequences of the need of acknowledgement, and protect their integrity, though once it is posted online, and shame and regret occurs, when it is finally deleted, there is always a friend of a friend that already has seen it. It cannot be undone or erased that easily.

10.2 Discussion

The types of studies I have done are more or less long-term, by which I mean that they can go on for a longer time frame. You always want to do more with the studies, go back later, study the participants for longer periods of time and do follow-ups. The more you can do, the better data will be gathered, but unfortunately, my timeframe was tight, so I had no possibility to take it further.

Since 2002 and 2006 when most of the books I refer to in the text were written, social media have undergone a huge development and expansion. Facebook’s introduction to the public was first in September 2006, and it was first by then it become so accepted to reveal the name, surname and picture and expose one’s own identity. It became a peer-pressure, the more people that exposed their real identity the more trustworthy did it feel, and the cautiousness blurred into the feeling of being safe among others. As we have seen there are lots of bad sides to social networks. As the social collective we have become, we are trying to understand where the gaps are at this point, and we find potential problems but do not really know how to approach them properly. An example is Facebook and all ongoing debates about their approach to protect their users. It has to be questioned, if time will change our views and we will go back to the dystopias view again, or if we will increase our safety settings and become more private and aware of whom we let into our social network. Will we decrease the need we have of acknowledgement and acceptance and find another way around it?

My experiments seemed to show that we are still too open and easily manipulated. Peer pressure makes us add people into our private space, whom we would never have invited into our homes
if they rang our doorbell. If we did invite them, would we show them our diaries and photo album as the first thing we do? No matter what privacy settings we have, when we let people into our social networks, everything is public.

11 Future research

There has been a very strong element of addiction and addictive behavior shown from the results of my empirical experiments, and I’m sure a study into this would make this thesis and research even better. A second study could take a renewed look at my data and analyze it from the addictive perspective. To what extent is the addictive behavior online affecting people’s everyday life in the physical world? Will people’s urge of constantly being in control in the end take control over their everyday life? Another question is, how is it that some people seem to find it easier to leave social media instead of increasing their privacy settings and decrease the amount of friends to just have real friends on their list instead?

There has not been enough research made about the individual and the consequences of the constant need of being connected to the virtual world. Internet is becoming a channel used not only to do well but also to offend others as a consequence of the free word they have been provided with. Through my interviews, the participants shared situations where others had exposed them for their own benefits or because they did not consider it to be sensitive to expose private matters and involve hundreds of people in something that should be private. This is an aspect of losing control in what should be public or should stay private. A person can only control oneself and not others. And each person has its own set of principles and acts after those. Therefore it has to be questioned; what of the need of integrity will decrease, as the need of acknowledgement will increase, where will human kind stand in that regard to each other in the physical world? If people sell out each other for their own benefits in order to get more social acknowledgment in the virtual world, will people end up more isolated?

The integrity in relations to the personal behavior is definitely worth being further researched as the act of integrity is in relation to people’s actions. People are blogging and exposing so much about themselves that they do not reflect about their actions when exposing others, which can create social conflicts. How will we prevent the social interrelations in groups to be damaged by the individual in future, when the urge to be seen has been taken this far at this point in today’s society?
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