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# Can You Guess Who I Am? Real, Ideal, and False Self-Presentation on Facebook Among Emerging Adults

Minas Michikyan<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Jessica Dennis<sup>1,3</sup>,  
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## Abstract

Emerging adulthood is an important period for self-development, and youth use online contexts for self-exploration and self-presentation. Using a multiple self-presentation framework, the present study examined emerging adults' presentation of their real self, ideal self, and false self on Facebook, and the relation between their identity state, psychosocial well-being, and online self-presentation. Participants ( $N = 261$ ; 66 males, 195 females  $M_{\text{age}} \approx 22$ ) completed self-report measures of identity state, well-being, and self-presentation on Facebook. Respondents reported presenting their real self more than their ideal self and false self on Facebook. A path analysis suggested that emerging adults who reported having more coherent identity states also reported presenting their real self on Facebook to a greater extent. However, those with a less coherent sense of the self and lower self-esteem reported presenting their false self on Facebook to a greater extent. Implications for methodology and future directions are discussed.

## Keywords

emerging adults, self-presentation, identity, well-being, social networking sites

Facebook has over 1 billion unique users (Smith, 2013), and 38% of them are between the ages of 18 and 29 (Facebook, 2013). Social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook are extremely versatile, and allow users to share information about themselves, keep track of, and interact with friends and peers (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Research suggests that youths' SNS use involves exploration and presentation of different facets of the self (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008), and this may be related to the key task of identity construction (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Young people's SNS use is also linked to their psychosocial well-being (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), and researchers have begun to explore how psychosocial well-being relates to online self-presentation (see Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013, for a review). In this article, we examined the extent to which a sample of ethnically diverse emerging adults presented multiple facets of the self on Facebook, and the extent to which their identity state and psychosocial well-being predicted such self-presentation on Facebook.

## *Identity Development and the Emergence of the Real, Ideal, and False Self*

The theoretical framework of this study draws on two related aspects of the self—identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) and self-concept (Harter, 1990; Higgins, 1987)—that have been treated as separate constructs in the developmental literature

(Makros & McCabe, 2001). As proposed by Erikson, formulating a coherent identity or a unified sense of the self is an important developmental task (Erikson, 1968). For Erikson, this meant questioning and trying out different roles, values, and identities in different contexts, and then integrating them into a coherent ego identity. Importantly, this occurs in a social context, and reactions and feedback from others influence the process of identity consolidation. Although identity construction gains importance during adolescence (Erikson, 1968), research suggests that it is not till late adolescence and young adulthood that individuals make meaningful attempts to consolidate their sense of self (Kroger, 2006). According to Arnett and others, emerging adults (ages 18–29), further explore many facets of their identities (e.g., personal identity; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis, 2009), integrate them into a coherent self, and forge meaningful and realistic self-images (Arnett, 2004).

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In contrast to the identity literature, which has focused on psychosocial processes, the literature on self-concept has largely focused on cognitive processes (Makros & McCabe, 2001). Harter and colleagues have pointed out that, as a result of the cognitive advances that occur during adolescence and the socialization pressures to “develop different selves in different social contexts,” multiple role-related selves emerge during this period (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchev, & Whitesell, 1997; Harter & Monsour, 1992, p. 256). For instance, the self with friends versus the self with parents may emerge (Harter et al., 1997). As a result of these changes in the self-system, opposing attributes emerge leaving youth with the question of “which of these selves is the real me?” (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996). Researchers have suggested that these different psychological representations of the self may be evident at various times and may commingle in one’s self-image (Harter et al., 1996; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Selman, 1980). The present study focused on the real self, the ideal self, and the false self.

The real self encompasses authentic/true feelings and appears to be motivated by internal attributes (Harter et al., 1996). The ideal self is understood in terms of ideal attributes (e.g., aspirations, hopes, wishes) and may involve both negative and positive versions of the self (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). For instance, if a person’s real self does not match the ideal state, the person may develop a negative self-image and may experience dejection-related emotions (e.g., depression). However, if no discrepancies exist between the real self and the ideal self, one may experience positive outcomes (Higgins, 1987). Finally, the false self entails feeling and acting in ways that are not true to the self and may occur for different reasons such as deception (presenting information that may not be fully truthful), exploration (trying out different facets of the self), and impressing others (conforming to perceived expectations; Harter et al., 1996). False self-behavior can be a normative part of identity development (Selman, 1980), but can also stem from devaluation of the self (Winnicott, 1965), and a need for social validation (Snyder, 1987). Harter, Marold, Whitesell, and Cobbs (1996) found that false self-behaviors motivated by devaluation of the self were associated with negative outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms), whereas false behaviors motivated by role exploration were associated with positive outcomes. Although the literature on the self has studied identity and self-concept separately, preliminary evidence indicates that identity development may be related to discrepancies between beliefs about multiple facets of the self (e.g., real self vs. ideal self; Harter et al., 1996; Makros & McCabe, 2001).

To resolve these opposing attributes and make sense of their different identities and self-images, youth may engage in self-presentation, which has been defined as the use of behavior to present information about the self to others (Baumeister, 1986). Brown (2007) has suggested that individuals engage in different kinds of self-presentation as an attempt to create, as well as modify, self-relevant images before an imagined or real audience (Brown, 2007). External feedback or reactions to such

self-representations influence the extent to which individuals make sense of their self-concept and the extent to which they internalize these self-representations into their theory of self (Brown, 2007; Swann, 1983). The construction of multiple self-representations during emerging adulthood may also be a normative part of self-development, as they reflect multiple facets of young people’s developing sense of the self, and discrepancies in different self-representations may be problematic only when there is an active attempt to conceal the real self out of devaluation (Harter et al., 1997). In this article, we combine these different theoretical and empirical insights (e.g., Arnett, 2004; Brown, 2007; Harter, 1990; Harter et al., 1996, 1997; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Selman, 1980; Snyder, 1987) into a multiple self-presentation framework, which proposes that individuals grappling with their opposing selves to make sense of their self-concept and identity will present multiple facets of the self—including their real self, ideal self, and their false self, which may be motivated by deception, exploration, and comparing to/impressing others.

### Online Self-Presentation

Within offline settings, emerging adults engage in self-presentation whether they are alone or in the company of others (Brown, 2007). Young people’s offline and online worlds are psychologically connected (e.g., Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011), and research shows that they also engage in self-presentation within online settings such as SNSs (see Michikyan & Subrahmanyam, 2012, for a review). On sites such as MySpace and Facebook, college students use photographs, status updates, and wall posts to present different aspects of the self (e.g., gender identity, ethnic identity, physical attractiveness; Michikyan & Subrahmanyam, 2012). Developmental researchers have suggested that online self-presentation may not be stable, but may be malleable (Manago et al., 2008; Salimkhan, Manago, & Greenfield, 2010). For instance, college students in Manago, Graham, Greenfield, and Salimkhan’s (2008) study reported that in order to impress others, MySpace users displayed aesthetically pleasing or enhanced photos on the site. From participants’ responses, the researchers extrapolated that MySpace users’ profiles entailed selected aspects of the self, including their idealized and real selves.

In contrast, treating self-presentation as a trait, researchers in the personality literature have argued that young adults present their real personalities on online sites such as Facebook rather than their idealized self (Back et al., 2010; Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007). However, the researchers also pointed out inconsistencies in accuracy ratings of the SNS profiles belonging to neurotic youth, suggesting that self-presentation on such sites may be malleable and that individuals with different personalities may present multiple facets of the self online (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). Thus, an empirical question is whether emerging adults use SNSs, such as Facebook, to present their real self or whether they use them to experiment with different facets of the self, such as to appear

cool or glamorous (Manago et al., 2008). But given that emerging adulthood is a period of exploration and change, it may not be a matter of presenting either the real self or other facets of the self—instead, there may be differences in the kinds of self-presentation young adults engage in, depending on their identity state and psychosocial well-being.

**Factors related to online self-presentation.** Before the advent of the Internet, researchers had proposed that identity (Harter et al., 1996), self-esteem (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Zuckerman, 1979), and depressive symptoms (Weary & Williams, 1990) may determine the extent of self-presentation. Youth who have already consolidated their identity tended to display deceptive and idealized aspects of their self to a lesser extent (Harter et al., 1996). Researchers have also found a link between high self-esteem and real self-behaviors, and low self-esteem and false self-behaviors (Badanes & Harter, 2007, as cited in Harter, 2012). Individuals with low self-esteem tended to be more cautious and indirect in their self-presentations compared to those with high self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1989). For instance, those with low self-esteem reported presenting their false self to a greater extent (Elliott, 1982). Similarly, those with greater depressive symptoms may be strategic in their self-presentations, so as to avoid further losses in self-esteem (Weary & Williams, 1990), to seek sympathy (Dougher & Hackbert, 1994), and reassurance (Joiner, 1994).

Research on college students has suggested a link between psychosocial variables such as identity (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), self-esteem (Ellison et al., 2007; Mehdizadeh, 2010), depression (Moreno et al., 2011), and self-presentation on Facebook. For instance, Mehdizadeh (2010) found that college students with low self-esteem engaged in self-promotional behaviors (e.g., enhanced their photos) on Facebook. Moreno et al. (2011) also reported that college students used Facebook to display their depressive symptoms, and those who received reinforcement from friends expressed their depressive symptoms to a greater extent. Whereas the aforementioned studies have examined each predictor in isolation, no study has simultaneously examined the relationships of identity state and psychosocial well-being to online self-presentation within a single theoretical model.

## The Present Study

The present study addressed two primary issues: (a) the extent to which emerging adults presented multiple facets of the self—including the real self, ideal self, and the false self—on Facebook and (b) the relative roles of identity state and psychosocial well-being (self-esteem and depressive symptoms) in predicting such self-presentation on Facebook. Drawing on the multiple self-presentation framework, and on studies describing online self-presentation (e.g., Manago et al., 2008; Salimkhan et al., 2010), we constructed a self-report measure—The Self-Presentation-on-Facebook-Questionnaire (SPFBQ)—to quantify the extent to which participants presented the real self, the ideal self, and

the false self- (deception, exploration, and compare/impress) on Facebook. Next, we used a path analysis framework to understand the complex relationships of identity state and psychosocial well-being to self-presentation on Facebook, above and beyond Facebook time and activity levels. Path analysis makes it possible to test all proposed relationships within the theoretical model (Lleras, 2005). Consistent with Valkenburg and Peter (2011), we take the position that the current psychosocial state of the young person drives online self-presentation; albeit online behaviors can also enhance or reduce psychosocial well-being. Thus, the path analysis model with paths from identity state, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms to presentation of the real self, the ideal self, and the false self- (deception, exploration, and compare/impress) allowed us to examine the direct effects of identity state and psychosocial well-being on such self-presentation on Facebook, while accounting for the nonindependence of the variables; additionally, it allowed us to control for Facebook time and activity levels.

Based on prior research on offline behavior (e.g., Badanes & Harter, 2007; Harter et al., 1996), we expected that greater identity state and psychosocial well-being would positively predict presentation of the real self on Facebook, and negatively predict presentation of the false self on the site. Because the ideal self may involve both negative and positive components and because it may be associated with both negative and positive well-being (Higgins, 1987), we offered no directional hypothesis to test the relationships between psychosocial well-being and presentation of the ideal self on Facebook.

## Method

### Participants

The study sample included 261 emerging adults (66 males, 195 females,  $M = 21.92$ , standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 2.76) from a large, West Coast university in the United States, and was diverse with 18.7% Asian, 4.6% Black, 57.4% Latino/Latina, 10.3% White, and 9.3% other racial/ethnic groups. The data were part of a larger study (Michikyan et al., 2014).

### Measures

#### Demographic Questionnaire

**Facebook Use Questionnaire.** This questionnaire, devised by us, contained open-ended questions about participants' average daily Facebook use, including (a) number of minutes spent on Facebook, (b) number of Facebook logins (“On average, how many times a day do you log on to Facebook?”), status updates (“Approximately, how many times a day do you change the status on your Facebook?”), and wall posts (“Approximately, how many comments a day do you post on Facebook?”), and (c) perceived level of Facebook activity (“How active are you on Facebook?”) on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very active*). For parsimony, the responses for number of logins, status updates, wall posts, and perceived level of activity were converted to  $z$  scores, and then summed, to create a composite variable, Facebook activity level ( $\alpha = .69$ ).

**SPFBQ.** The SPFBQ is a 17-item scale that measures presentation of the multiple facets of the self on Facebook among emerging adults on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; Michikyan et al., 2014). Participants indicated their level of agreement with statements that describe self-presentation related to the real self: “I like myself and am proud of what I stand for and I show it on my Facebook profile” ( $\alpha = .81$ ), the ideal self: “I post things on my Facebook to show aspects of who I want to be” ( $\alpha = .70$ ), and the false self-: deception: “I am a completely different person online than I am offline” ( $\alpha = .79$ ); exploration “On Facebook I can try-out many aspects of who I am much more than I can in real life” ( $\alpha = .72$ ); compare/impress “I compare myself to others on Facebook” and “I try to impress others with the photos I post of myself on my Facebook profile” ( $\alpha = .65$ ). We obtained the raw scores and then computed the mean for each aspect of self-presentation.

The SPFBQ was developed by the first author, who started by creating 21 items based on Harter et al.’s (1996) and Higgins’ (1987) definitions of the multiple facets of the self and descriptions of online self-presentation discussed in Manago et al. (2008). The items were developed keeping in mind that, for the most part, the concept of the real, ideal, and the false selves may be conceptualized and “acted out” differently and uniquely on SNSs due to the public nature of these sites. Additionally, some of the themes from the informal discussions with Facebook users regarding issues of self-presentation were used to further refine the items. The 21 SPFBQ items were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis yielded four factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00. However, as suggested by McCroskey and Young (1979), determining the number of factors adequate to represent the data should go beyond the mathematical criterion. They recommend considering whether (1) at least 2 or 3 items load highly ( $>.50$ ) on the factor, (2) the factor is interpretable and meaningful, (3) the factor is predicted theoretically, and (4) the factor passes Cattell’s (1966) scree test of Eigenvalues.

Taking all of these criteria into consideration, a five-factor solution was accepted. Although a scree plot of the Eigenvalues suggested that there was a break between the first three factors and the rest of the factors, the fourth and fifth factors meet the other criteria and thus were accepted. The five factors that were accepted explained 64.3% of the variance. Of the 21 self-presentation items, 4 items were deleted from the final version of the SPFBQ because they did not meet McCroskey and Young’s (1979) Criteria 1 and 2 (as stated previously). The remaining 17 items were retained for the final version of the measure (see Appendix).

**Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI).** The 12-item identity subscale of the EPSI assesses participants’ clear sense of who they are and what they believe on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 = *hardly ever true* to 5 = *almost always true*; Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981). Higher scores indicate a more coherent sense of self. A sample item is as follows: “I’ve got a clear idea of what I want to be.” The EPSI has been

shown to have internal reliability, cross-ethnic consistency, concurrent validity, and construct validity, and is sensitive to the subtle changes in the self (Schwartz et al., 2009), making it more appropriate for emerging adults who might have an overall sense of direction they are taking in life, but are still exploring and learning about themselves. We obtained the raw scores and then computed the mean ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem scale (RSE).** The 10-item RSE assesses youth self-esteem globally on a 5-point Likert-style scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; Rosenberg, 1965). Higher scores indicate greater levels of self-esteem. A sample item is as follows: “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.” The RSE has shown consistency and reliability across gender and ethnic/racial groups, as well as college students (Dennis, Basañez, & Farahmand, 2010; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). We obtained the raw scores and then computed the mean ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Center for Epidemiological Survey–Depression (CES-D).** The 20-item CES-D assesses levels of depressive symptoms in the general population on a 4-point Likert-style scale (1 = *rarely or none of the time/less than 1 day* to 4 = *most or all of the time/5–7 days*; Radloff, 1977). Higher scores indicate greater levels of depressive symptoms. A sample item is as follows: “I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.” The CES-D has shown consistency and reliability across gender and ethnic/racial groups, as well as college students (Dennis et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2009). We obtained the raw scores and then computed the mean ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

## Procedure

The procedure was approved by the University’s Human Subjects Research Board (Institutional Review Board 09-110). Participants came to the laboratory and completed the surveys online (www.surveymonkey.com) for course credit.

## Results

### Descriptive Analysis: Facebook Use

Participants reported spending an average of over 2 hr and 40 min per day on Facebook. Seventy percent of our sample reported logging into their Facebook profiles at least 6 times a day, 87% reported updating their status at least twice per day, and 78% reported posting at least four wall posts per day on Facebook. Compared to men, women reported greater Facebook time ( $M = 159.61$  vs.  $M = 102.31$  min;  $t(259) = -3.28, p < .001$ ); however, we observed no gender differences in Facebook activities.

### Means Comparisons: Self-Presentation on Facebook

Participants reported presenting the real self ( $M = 3.75, SD = .79$ ) significantly more than their ideal self ( $M = 2.60, SD = 1.03$ ),  $t(259) = 16.69, p < .001$ , on Facebook. They also reported presenting the real self more on Facebook than their false self-: deception ( $M = 1.69, SD = .65$ ),  $t(259) = 29.69$ ,

**Table 1.** Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Self-Presentation Variables, Identity State, and Psychosocial Well-Being.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Real self	—									
2. Ideal self	.29***	—								
3. False self-deception	-.26***	.28***	—							
4. False self-compare/impress	.00	.43***	.47***	—						
5. False self-exploration	.25***	.30***	.26***	.35***	—					
6. Identity state	.16**	-.12*	-.26***	-.22***	-.19**	—				
7. Self-esteem	.13*	-.12*	-.31***	-.25***	-.18**	.59***	—			
8. Depressive symptoms	-.00	.18**	.19**	.23***	.10	-.55***	-.51***	—		
9. FB activity level	.34***	.23***	.02	.01	.30***	-.02	-.04	.14*	—	
10. FB Time	.21***	.14*	-.02	.05	.23***	-.03	-.01	.10	.56***	—
M	3.75	2.60	1.69	2.32	2.79	4.02	4.03	1.51	—	145.06
SD	0.79	1.03	0.65	0.91	0.90	0.65	0.63	0.45	—	123.90
$\alpha$	.81	.70	.79	.65	.72	.85	.87	.91	.69	—

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

$p < .001$ ; compare/impress ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = .91$ ),  $t(260) = 19.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and exploration ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = .90$ ),  $t(259) = 14.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants also reported presenting their false self-exploration on Facebook significantly more than their ideal self,  $t(259) = 2.69$ ,  $p < .01$ , and false self-deception,  $t(260) = 7.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , and compare/impress,  $t(259) = 19.51$ ,  $p < .001$ . We observed no gender differences in online self-presentation.

We conducted a multivariate analysis of variance to examine whether Facebook audience settings influenced self-presentation on Facebook. Facebook audience settings (private [friends see all info on profile], public [everyone on Facebook can see all info on profile]) served as the grouping variable. We found a significant multivariate effect for Facebook audience settings, Wilks's  $\Lambda = 0.913$ ,  $F(1, 260) = 4.83$ ,  $p < .0001$ . To explore this multivariate effect, we conducted univariate follow-up analyses of variance using Bonferroni-adjusted  $\alpha$  of .01. We found that Facebook audience settings had a statistically significant effect on real self-presentation,  $F(1, 260) = 7.52$ ;  $p = .007$ , and a marginally significant effect on ideal self-presentation,  $F(1, 260) = 6.50$ ;  $p = .011$ , suggesting that those emerging adults who had a private Facebook profile reported presenting their real self ( $M = 3.79$  vs.  $M = 3.36$ ) and ideal self (2.66 vs. 2.13) more than those who had a public profile.

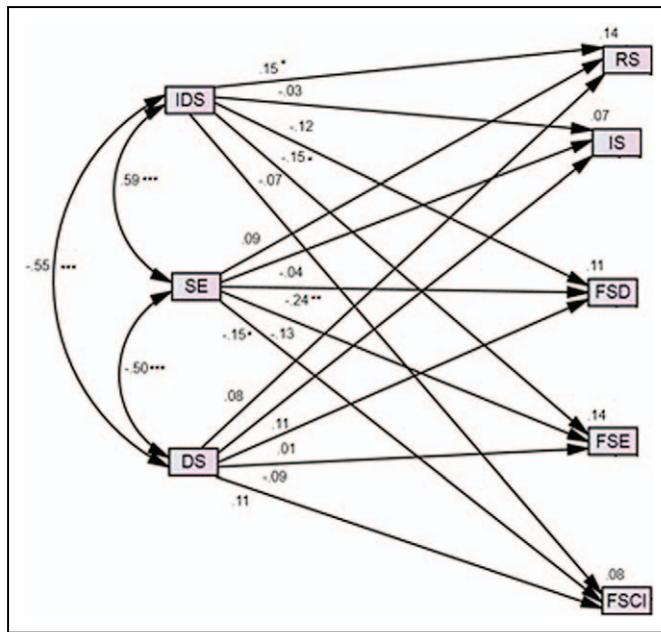
### Identity State, Psychosocial Well-Being, and Self-Presentation on Facebook

First, we examined the correlations between identity state, psychosocial well-being (self-esteem, depressive symptoms), and presentation of the real self, the ideal self, and the false self (deception, exploration, and compare/impress) on Facebook. As expected, we found that identity state and psychosocial well-being were positively associated with real self-presentation on Facebook and negatively associated with false self-presentation on the site. We also found that ideal self-presentation was associated with lower identity state and lower

psychosocial well-being. Table 1 shows the means, SDs,  $\alpha$ s, and correlations for all variables in the study.

### Identity State and Psychosocial Well-Being Predicting Self-Presentation on Facebook

Next, we investigated the relationships of identity state, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms to presentation of the real self, ideal self, and false self- (deception, exploration, and compare/impress) on Facebook, and tested all proposed relationships within a single theoretical model using a path model in AMOS 20.0. We operationalized all variables as measured variables and used direct paths from identity state, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms to presentation of the real self, the ideal self, and the false self- (deception, exploration, and compare/impress). In the path model, we utilized the mean scores for each aspect of self-presentation and accounted for the nonindependence of identity state, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms. Facebook time and activity levels were included as model covariates (Figure 1). Because multiple facets of the self may be evident at various times and may commingle in one's self-concept (Harter et al., 1996; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), we allowed the error terms for online presentation of the real self, ideal self, and false self to intercorrelate. We evaluated the model fit using the standard model fit criteria: the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA):  $CFI > .95$  and  $RMSEA < .05$  (Kline, 2011). The resulting model had a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(6) = 6.67$ ,  $p = .352$ ;  $CFI = .99$ ;  $RMSEA = .02$ . As expected, identity state positively predicted presentation of the real self ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .044$ ), and negatively predicted presentation of the false self- (exploration;  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .044$ ) on Facebook. Moreover, we found that self-esteem negatively predicted presentation of the false self-deception ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p = .002$ ), and compare/impress ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .048$ ), on Facebook. Interestingly, we found that depressive symptoms did not predict online self-presentation. Also, Facebook activity level predicted presentation of the real self ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p = .001$ ), ideal self ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p = .004$ ), and false self-exploration ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p = .001$ ).



**Figure 1.** Identity state and psychosocial well-being predicting multiple facets of the self on Facebook.

Note. Standardized values. Facebook time (FBT) and activity (FBA) were controlled. IDS = identity state; SE = self-esteem; DS = depressive symptoms; RS = real self; IS = ideal self; FSD = false self-deception; FSE = false self-exploration; FSCI = false self-compare/impress. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Drawing on two somewhat separate literatures on the self (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1990), and the notion of self-presentation (Brown, 2007), we proposed the multiple self-presentation framework, which is the idea that youth present multiple facets of the self—including the real self, the ideal self, and the false self- (deception, exploration, and compare/impress) as they try to make sense of the self. As online settings have become an important context for identity exploration and self-presentation, we also examined the extent to which emerging adults presented the real self, the ideal self, and the false self on Facebook, and the extent to which identity state, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms predicted their presentation of the multiple facets of the self on the site.

### Emerging Adults' Multiple Self-Presentation on Facebook

The first goal of our study was to explore the extent to which emerging adults presented multiple facets of the self on Facebook. Participants' responses on the SPFBQ indicated that they used Facebook to consolidate their opposing selves by presenting their real self, ideal self, and their false self within this online context. Interestingly, they reported presenting their real self more than their ideal self and false self on Facebook. Respondents also reported presenting their false self- (exploration) more than their ideal self and false self- (deception and compare/impress) on Facebook. These findings are consistent with research on the development of the self (Kroger, 2006;

Schaffer, 1996). Greater instances of the real self-presentation on Facebook may suggest a more solidified sense of emerging adults' self-image (Whitty, 2002). Our finding that the ideal and false selves were presented online may reflect an evolving sense of the self and suggest that online self-presentation may be more malleable (Michikyan et al., 2014) than previously argued by personality researchers (e.g., Back et al., 2010).

The intercorrelations among ideal and false self-presentation yielded modest positive correlations. Presentation of the real self on Facebook was weakly and negatively correlated with false self-deception, suggesting that those emerging adults who reported using Facebook to deceive others were less likely to report presenting their real self online. They also suggest that, for some people, presentation of the real self and the false self can occur simultaneously on SNSs. According to Harter (1990), youth are most likely to present their false self to those with whom they are not close. Given that youths' SNS networks include both strong and weak ties, the simultaneous presentation of the real self and the false self is to be expected. Our results also suggest that young people use SNSs to present aspects of who they want to be without the intent to impress others, and for them, the presentation of the ideal self is realistic. These patterns of self-presentation confirm that like offline self-presentation, online self-presentation is complex and dynamic, and young people do not simply adopt one or another aspect of the self to present. In fact, our respondents reported that they simultaneously presented the multiple facets of the self online, and with varying intensities. Therefore, when studying SNS behaviors, it is important to make distinctions between different facets of online self-presentation, and we believe that the SPFBQ is well suited to do this.

At a broader level, our results show that youth online self-exploration is somewhat similar to the kinds of offline self-exploration documented by Harter et al. (1996). Furthermore, they provide additional support for the proposal that youth use the Internet in their self-development (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Despite such connectedness between online and offline behavior, online self-presentations may not always mirror offline self-presentations (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Since users have greater control over their online behaviors, some may be selective in their online self-presentation (Gonzalez & Hancock, 2011), whereas others may exaggerate and even cultivate different identities (Manago et al., 2008). Because we only asked our participants about their online self-presentation, we cannot draw any direct connections to their offline self-presentation. Therefore, this is an area that warrants further research.

Researchers speculate that SNS audiences (friends vs. parents vs. others) may influence online self-presentation (Zhao et al., 2008), and SNS users may use certain features of the site to manage unwanted audiences (Tufekci, 2008). An important question is whether Facebook audience settings (i.e., private [friends see all info on profile] vs. public [everyone on Facebook can see all info on profile]) influenced presentation of the real self, the ideal self, and the false self on Facebook. Our results suggest that emerging adults with a private Facebook

profile may be more likely than those with a public profile to present their real self and their ideal self. Perhaps they recognize that their friends might comment on their false behaviors (e.g., “stop acting fake”) and thus might have felt the need to present the real self more frequently.

### *Identity State, Psychosocial Well-Being, and Self-Presentations on Facebook*

The second goal of our study was to investigate the extent to which identity state and psychosocial well-being were associated with presentation of the real self, the ideal self, and the false self on Facebook. First, the correlational analysis showed that identity state and self-esteem were positively associated with presentation of the real self on Facebook, whereas identity state and psychosocial well-being were negatively associated with presentation of the ideal self and the false self on the site.

Next, we used a path analysis to examine the direct effects of identity state and psychosocial well-being on presentation of the multiple facets of the self on Facebook, and to determine the most important relationships within the theoretical model (Lleras, 2005). Our findings confirmed the relationship between identity state, psychosocial well-being, and presentation of the real self, the ideal self, and the false self on Facebook. Specifically, participants with a more coherent sense of the self-reported presenting their real self on Facebook to a greater extent, whereas those with a less coherent sense of the self-reported engaging in greater self-exploratory behaviors (false self-exploration) on Facebook. As expected, our results suggest that emerging adults who are still somewhat uncertain about themselves and are experiencing feelings of self-doubt may be more likely to spend time on Facebook, and use the site to explore aspects of themselves that they hope to better understand. This is consistent with Valkenburg and Peter (2011) who suggest that feelings of insecurity lead young people to spend more time online, which in turn may account for online self-exploration.

With regard to psychosocial well-being, self-esteem, but not depressive symptoms, predicted online self-presentation. More specifically, emerging adults with lower self-esteem reported presenting the self online so as to deceive, compare, and impress others. Our results are largely consistent with those of Harter et al. (1996), who found that offline deceptive false self-behaviors were associated with negative well-being. It appears that such false self-behaviors on Facebook may reflect emerging adults' insecurities and maybe motivated by the hopes of getting feedback that could enhance their view of themselves. These findings are also consistent with those that suggest that emerging adults often use SNSs for social comparison and social validation (Ellison et al., 2007; Manago et al., 2008). Furthermore, deceptive online self-presentation could also indicate a strategic self-presentation (Weary & Williams, 1990). Although depressive symptoms were linked to false self- (deception and compare/impress) in the correlational analysis, there were nonsignificant direct paths from depressive symptoms to online self-presentation when all other paths were

accounted for statistically. Given that depressive symptoms did little to explain young people's online self-presentation, it may be more appropriate to examine the relationship between other well-being constructs (e.g., social anxiety) and online self-presentation. Future research should also examine how peer feedback moderates online self-presentation.

In contrast to previous studies that have speculated about the role of online self-presentation in identity development (Manago et al., 2008; Salimkhan et al., 2010), we demonstrated a link between identity state (traditionally an offline construct) and online self-presentation. Our results suggest that emerging adults use SNSs to help them consolidate their different self-images into a more coherent sense of the self. As anticipated, one's sense of the self appears to be a critical motivator of real self and false self-exploration presentation online. However, self-esteem seems to be an important motivator of false self- (deception and compare/impress) presentation online. In other words, those emerging adults who experience changes in their self-esteem may not only compare themselves to others in their online networks but may try to impress and even deceive them.

Overall, our findings suggest that disentangling the associations between psychosocial well-being variables and online self-presentation is a complex task. Our study is a first step toward understanding the relation between identity state, psychosocial well-being, and online self-presentation. Longitudinal data are necessary to further tease apart the complex/multidirectional relationships between identity state, psychosocial well-being, and online self-presentation, as well as to assess whether engaging in online self-presentation protects or enhances self-esteem or whether it has less positive consequences. Furthermore, since situational factors can lead to momentary changes in self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) and since such fluctuation in self-evaluation is associated with self-presentation (Baumeister, 1986), it is also important to examine the relationship between young people's daily online self-presentation and well-being. In sum, our study provides preliminary support for the contention that emerging adults' use of online sites such as Facebook may be related to their identity state and psychosocial well-being.

### *Study Strengths and Limitations*

Our study quantitatively assessed different aspects of online self-presentation using the SPFBQ (Michikyan et al., 2014), which was based on the multiple self-presentation framework, as well as theoretical and empirical work about the self and youth online self-presentation. The SPFBQ taps into the presentation of the multiple facets of the self—including the real self, the ideal self, and the false self on Facebook, and our results demonstrate the importance of measuring presentation of the multiple facets of the self online. Our findings provide preliminary evidence for the usefulness of the SPFBQ; the negative correlation between real self and false self-presentation provides construct validity for the SPFBQ because real and false self-presentation are conceptually opposite behaviors and

because the 17 items load highly on each self-factor. More nuanced measures are needed to study online behavior, and the SPFBQ is a first step in this direction.

Using self-report measures to assess Facebook use, including self-presentation, raises concerns over reliability (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011) and shared method variance. Possible ways in which shared variance could be reduced include using variety of methods (e.g., observer ratings of online self-presentation along with subjects' self-reports of the behavior) to rule in or rule out potential biases. One potential bias could have been the social desirability bias. A social desirability bias for self-presentation on Facebook might have made participants reluctant to disclose presentations of the false self and ideal self on Facebook, while at the same time led them to report on their real self-presentation. Again, future research must examine the relation between the SPFBQ and social desirability to assess the likelihood of this possibility.

Our findings may also be limited in terms of generalizability. For instance, emerging adults in college have different experiences and undergo developmental issues differently compared to their noncollege peers. Also, we cannot presume that our findings are unique to online self-presentation, as we did not collect data from offline contexts. Future studies should include data from both online and offline contexts to directly

explore the relationship between online and offline self-presentation. Moreover, although our results indicate that emerging adults' insecurities or other psychosocial needs may predict their online self-presentation, it is also possible that online self-presentation may instead influence their identity state and psychosocial well-being (Gonzalez & Hancock, 2011). Indeed, path analysis allowed us to understand the complex relationships and determine the most important relationships; however, the path analysis model was based on correlation, and so it did not show causality (Lleras, 2005). Therefore, experimental studies are needed to examine whether identity state and psychosocial well-being cause young people to present multiple facets of the self online or vice versa. Also, the relatively small number of males in the sample may have accounted for the lack of gender differences. Finally, future studies should also examine whether or not ethnic differences exist in online self-presentation.

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## Appendix A

### Principal Components Based on the Correlation Matrix for Self-Presentation on Facebook.

Item number	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
13	I sometimes try to be someone other than my true self on Facebook	<b>.65</b>	-.16	.16	.24	.17
14	I am a completely different person online than I am offline	<b>.74</b>	-.30	.21	.00	.04
19	I post information about myself on my Facebook profile that is not true	<b>.77</b>	-.09	.02	.07	.02
21	Sometimes I feel like I keep up a front on Facebook	<b>.61</b>	-.13	.02	.35	.22
5	I have a good sense of who I am and many of the things I do on my Facebook profile is a way of showing that	-.09	<b>.57</b>	.31	.12	.26
6	Who I am online is similar to who I am offline	-.26	<b>.77</b>	-.01	.03	-.17
7	I have a good sense of what I want in life and using Facebook is a way to express my views and beliefs	.05	<b>.65</b>	.35	-.09	.27
8	The way I present myself on Facebook is how I am in real life	-.17	<b>.86</b>	-.08	.01	-.02
9	I like myself and am proud of what I stand for and I show it on my Facebook profile	-.09	<b>.76</b>	.07	-.09	.20
1	On Facebook I can tryout many aspects of who I am much more than I can in real life	.22	.02	<b>.73</b>	-.01	.10
2	I change my photos on my Facebook profile to show people the different aspects of who I am	.10	.14	<b>.78</b>	.21	-.06
3	I feel like I have many sides to myself and I show it on my Facebook profile	.03	.16	<b>.72</b>	.23	.11
4	I compare myself to others on Facebook	.11	.10	.15	<b>.80</b>	.01
12	I try to impress others with the photos I post of myself on my Facebook profile	.15	-.01	.30	<b>.65</b>	.34
20	I only show the aspects of myself on Facebook that I know people would like	.33	-.25	.01	<b>.56</b>	.26
11	I post things on my Facebook to show aspects of who I want to be	.11	.13	.23	.21	<b>.77</b>
16	Who I want to be is often reflected in the things I do on my Facebook profile (e.g., status posts, comments, photos, etc.)	.21	.29	-.07	.22	<b>.72</b>

Note. Factor loadings in boldface are  $>.50$ . Percentage variance explained: 28.14%, 17.64%, 7.37%, 6.66%, 4.50%. Fit indexes:  $\chi^2(210, N = 261) = 2,399.71$ . Eigenvalues: 5.91, 3.71, 1.55, 1.40, .95.  $p < .001$ .

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