UTILIZING FACEBOOK TO ARTICULATE SELF AND SUSTAIN COMMUNITY:
EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
ON A MIDWESTERN CAMPUS

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ABSTRACT

UTILIZING FACEBOOK TO ARTICULATE SELF AND SUSTAIN COMMUNITY:
EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
ON A MIDWESTERN CAMPUS

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Facebook is an online social networking site that connects people through intentionally constructed virtual social relationships. It has been an integral component in campus life throughout the world since 2006, extending outside of higher education networks and into mainstream society (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). Facebook has changed the landscape of human social, political and romantic interactions. This research explores the impact this online platform has on college students, by studying the behaviors, experiences, and perspectives of undergraduate students at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

The primary question guiding this research is: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? The methodology used in this qualitative study is a blend of netography (Kozinets, 2010) and face-to-face individual interviews. It examines their
cultures as mediated and articulated online and in person. The data consists of an analysis of transcribed interviews, email communications, and the interactive content of student Facebook users’ Facebook Walls.

The results indicate that students use Facebook for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: fostering and maintaining community; nurturing relationships; making public statements and protecting privacy; establishing a personal identity; building social capital; establishing cultural competency; coping; and critiquing their peers and campus. The data is situated within literature on student development, and recommendations for faculty and campus personnel are offered.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Facebook is an online social networking site that connects people through intentionally constructed virtual social relationships. It has been an integral component in campus life throughout the world since 2006, extending outside of higher education networks and into mainstream society (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). Facebook has changed the landscape of human social, political and romantic interactions. This research explores the impact this online platform has on college students, by studying the behaviors, experiences, and perspectives of undergraduate students at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

Statement of the Problem

This study explores how Facebook shapes students’ experience of community on campus. It examines how community is defined, understood, mediated and influenced by students; and how Facebook influences their social lives as a part of the campus community. Going away to college has always been a time when young adults stepped out of the comfort zone of home and into a new community: both physically and socially. Residential students turn their focus from their parents’ rules and programs, and begin to experience daily life among peers. They invest themselves in the community of the campus and foster new relationships (Tinto, 2006). But we also know that students need
to stay connected to their home communities, as for many students, the connection to friends, family, and church is important for their persistence (Attinasi, 1989; London, 1989; Nora, 2001; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 2006; Torres, 2003; Waterman, 2004). Today, these relationships, new and already established, are fostered both in face-to-face engagement as well as online through social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook.

**How Facebook Works**

Facebook is a social networking website founded by Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University in 2004 (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). Membership was initially limited to Harvard College. In March of 2004, Stanford, Columbia, and Yale joined Harvard as popularity spread throughout the United States and Canada (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). The original version of Facebook had networks within the network. When students joined Facebook, they did so as a member of an institutionally affiliated network and networked both within and external to their local network. In September of 2005, Facebook added high school networks to the site making the user age-group expand to include 14 to 18 year-olds (Moral & Sandhu, 2009).

Facebook is free to users. Users can login on Facebook’s homepage and are directed to their own page (called a *Wall*) or can follow a *newsfeed* of their friends’ recent posts and activities. All profiles can be set to differing degrees of privacy and each user can elect to request someone to be their *friend* or may delete people as friends at liberty. Users can join groups and networks of things, ideas, or geographical areas they “*like.*” Users can upload photos and “*tag*” them to indicate who is in each photo. They can also post links to other Internet applications such as *YouTube* and blog sites. There is an
The instant messaging function called “chat” included in the scrollbar at the bottom of a user’s page. This enables users to see who is online and request that they chat in the instant messaging application. Gaming activities are integrated into Facebook. Users can build farms, run mafias, design homes, establish businesses, or create zoos in a virtual world. Applications for portable devices such as the iPhone and Xbox 360 are available (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). Users can also integrate existing media or imagery into their Facebook postings. Customizable memes enable users to connect images and graphics in a process of making individualized critiques using standardized images.

The Problem

In today’s technological environment, students’ social lives are not limited to face-to-face engagement with peers and faculty (Holeton, 1997; 2008). With online social networking, student communities expand far outside the campus walls. According to Arrington (2005), 85% of all college students use Facebook. It is the most popular website among college students (Schaffhauser, 2008). People credit Facebook, like some other extracurricular involvements, with negative academic outcomes (Grabmeier, 2009). Yet Internet use is known to increase civic engagement and community involvement for about a fifth of Internet users (Kavanaugh, 1999). In her analysis of 38 studies and 166 effects testing the relationship between Internet use and political engagement Boulianne (2009) established that the “effect of Internet use on engagement is positive” (p. 205). With conflicting findings from various studies on the effects online interaction has on lived community (Boulianne, 2009; Grabmeier, 2009; Kavanaugh, 1999), it is unknown exactly how involvement with Facebook affects students’ experience of community on campus.
Because *community* can mean different things to different people, I employ an operational definition of community as a group of people united through a shared set of interests. This study provides data that illustrate how the students in this study understand community, and how they identify it in their lives. It also explores how students use Facebook toward the end of negotiating, fashioning, and enhancing their experience of community on a highly residential, religiously affiliated campus. Adopting an existential or phenomenological epistemological perspective in data collection, rooted in an exploration of the experience of technology by humans, this project permits students to define, explain, and analyze their experience of community on their college campus in relation to their engagement with Facebook (Jackson, 2002).

Phenomenological anthropology acknowledges that philosophy and anthropology ask similar questions. Phenomenology provides data from a first person point of view (Smith, 2008). Yet, anthropology demands that these structures be examined through the empirical data of ethnography (Katz & Csordas, 2003). Drawing upon the theoretical and methodological approaches to anthropology of Jackson (1996; 2002; 2005; 2009), I provide concrete, individual, lived situations as they are perceived and experienced by students, through first person accounts. With ethnography as my primary methodology, I elucidate the lived experience of college students as they foster relationships and a sense of belonging online. This new version of virtual ethnographic methodology is called *netography* (Kozinets, 2010).

Ingold (1997) suggests that technical interactions between humans are grounded in social relations and can only be understood as such. Community has many definitions and there are many places or venues in which community can occur (Vitanza, 1999).
Community is a feeling, an experience, a set of relationships, and frequently a political and governmental entity. Thus, it is possible for community to exist both virtually and within geographic boundaries simultaneously. According to Kozinets (2010), community must be understood on a “continuum of participation” where “boundaries are somewhat indistinct, but must be understood in terms of self-identification as a member, repeat contact, reciprocal familiarity, shared knowledge of some rituals and customs, some sense of obligation, and participation” (p. 10). For example, students may sit in a room with one set of friends, while chatting online with other friends down the hall, or across the country. How does this change the experience of feeling a part of a campus community for students today?

According to Katz and Csordas (2003), ethnographic field research restores “credibility to native perspectives that have already been undermined by professional knowledge and power” (p. 276). Facebook began as a student resource for social engagement in college, and was strictly populated by college and then high school students (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). As such, it is a tool created by students and for students. Thus, at its core, Facebook operates outside of the domain of any single college administration. This study provides a credible account of student understandings and experience of Facebook as a social tool used in the creation and mediation of community both on campus and off.

Research exists on student involvement in online social networking and its effect on human relationships (Martinez Alemán & Wartman, 2009; Ellison, Lampe & Steinfield, 2007). Social network sites are:
Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211)

In their work with students on a number of different campuses, Martínez Alemán and Wartman (2009) conducted surveys, ethnographic interviews and guided explorations of twenty undergraduate students’ Facebook pages. Their study revealed that students use Facebook to articulate identity, communicate on and off of the campus, and to shape and create campus culture. This study expands upon the work of Martínez Alemán and Wartman (2009) and offers a deeper understanding of how community is defined, understood, mediated and influenced by students in their engagement with Facebook.

All human relationships have the capability of satisfying or frustrating (Hampton & Wellman, 2003). Facebook facilitates human engagement through technological means. Students make Facebook what they want it to be and thus use it to mediate their experience of community to whatever degree they desire. As a technological tool, Facebook cannot fulfill nor deny human desires. Rather, it serves as a conduit between humans just as conversation or even dancing. Therefore in this study of students on campus, Facebook becomes another means by which students participate in social relations with others. The primary difference between Facebook and face-to-face conversation is that it can transcend geographic limitations thus expanding the realm of social possibility outside of the geographic limits of the campus. Today’s college students are living in a networked and wired/wireless world that connects them to friends and
colleagues at a geographical distance in a manner unlike ever before (Wellman & Hampton, 1999). This new and expanded collegiate world demands a new understanding of what it is to be a part of the campus community.

In this study, I asked students to define community, as they understand it as an operative term, and to use it to explain aspects of their own lives. I examined the ways in which student understandings and experience of community intersect on campus and through engagement with Facebook. In analyzing the data I compiled, I demonstrated the way in which the establishment and experience of community on Facebook “inform(s) and relate(s) to the wider social phenomenon, behaviour, its participants, their values or beliefs” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 64).

According to the data in this study, community can be understood differently in face-to-face and virtual environments (Song, 2009); can have retentive power for undergraduate students (Berger, 2000); and is central to a satisfying campus life (Boyer, 1990). This study addresses how students live their lives “intersubjectively,” in a “network of reciprocal relationships” (Jackson, 2002, p. 334).

**Research Questions**

The primary question guiding this research is: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? In other words:

- How is the experience of community on campus for students affected by engagement with Facebook?

- How do college students understand Facebook’s influence on their experience of community during their college years?
Assumptions

This qualitative study relies on several assumptions about college students and their engagement with online social networking while at college. It examines a population of college students who use Facebook. According to the TechCrunch website, 85% of college students use Facebook (Arrington, 2005). The population being studied is a selection of students at the University of Dayton. The demographic representation of this school’s population is not representative of the entire nation. The University of Dayton is a highly residential, religiously affiliated campus. Likewise, the student population is predominantly white, middle to upper class, and between the ages of 18 and 22, and thus does not reflect the total population of college students in the United States. The students studied here all possess the necessary technology with which to engage with Facebook on a regular basis. There is a mandatory laptop requirement at the University of Dayton.

Another assumption present in this study is rooted in the nature of phenomenological studies. Phenomenological research focuses on the analysis of individual human experience. The questions phenomenology poses are existential ones. Therefore, this study assumes that understanding of the existential experience of the life of a human aside from oneself is possible. The data presented here is a result of conversations between the participants and myself, and my observations of their online behaviors. The phenomenological approach to research is predicated upon an understanding that collaboration and agreement on facts from such sources as peer review or transferability have no superior ontological status (Katz & Csordas, 2003). That is, the truths presented here are generated by the reflection and contemplation of individual
persons. As with all individuals, the student participants in this study may change their perspectives and their understandings throughout and following their engagement with this project.

Lastly, this study assumes that *community* can be defined, assessed and evaluated by the participants and the researcher. Definitions of community differ from individual to individual and thus make the discussion of the experience of such difficult. When I am examining students’ experience of community, I must entertain a number of definitions simultaneously. First, I must accept whatever criteria and evidence the students proclaim as community to be significant, even if I do not agree with their perspective. Second, I must use symbolic indicators within discourse analysis as evidence of community. These indicators are ones that arise from my own perspective. Lastly, I must account for institutional definitions and claims of community on the part of the University of Dayton and Facebook. Thus, in the act of entertaining both an emic and etic perspective in this project, I must constantly consider and refine my understanding of community and the tools with which I measure and record it.

**Scope and Limitations**

This study spanned a period of eleven months of data collection. It commenced in early May of 2011, and concluded in March of 2012. Students left campus in May of 2011 to return to their homes for the summer. The informants were interviewed initially at the start of the project, and then followed virtually by the researcher throughout the remainder of the study. I interviewed students a second time upon their return to campus. The structure of this project is an attempt to illustrate how community functions on and
off campus. Approximately one half of the study was conducted while students were on campus, while the other half was conducted at a geographic distance.

The scope of this research was limited to the study of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors (students in their first, second, and third year) at the University of Dayton during 2011. This study focused on the experiences of 13 students (4 male; 9 female) as they completed the Spring Semester of 2011, through their summer leave from campus, and into the beginning of the Fall Semester of 2011. The delimitations, or characteristics that limit the scope of this study, include the exclusion of senior or fourth year students from the study, as these students left campus and did not return in the fall.

The student informants in this study were good communicators, and were selected in order to generate rich data. Sheldon (2008) found that individuals who are involved in online relationships are those who are avid communicators in face-to-face social encounters. I chose to invite students to participate who were good communicators in the classroom. Students who are not interested in or enthusiastic about participation may have been less inclined to reflect and articulate their feelings and understandings. As such, the results of this study reflect upon the standards and practices of selection on the part of the researcher and do not indicate the views or experiences of those not chosen to be included in this project.

Creswell (2009) explained limitations as possible weaknesses in a study. This project includes a number of limitations contingent upon the nature of the study:

- Participants were limited to volunteers with whom the researcher has an established relationship. Not all participants engaged in the same manner with the researcher throughout the duration of the study. Some were more
intimate and personally engaged, while others were more cursory and polite. The goal of a purposive sampling strategy, such as the one used in this study, is to foster intimacy in conversation and to prompt more depth of exchange in email and interview contexts. According to Lois (2001), “as intimacy increases between two people, access to each other’s emotions—knowledge about and involvement in each other’s personal feelings—increases as well” (p. 133). In the context of this study, levels of intimacy differed from participant to participant, rendering the results and findings to be not generalizable in any standard manner.

- Research online is highly problematic due to its two-dimensional nature. The researcher can *speak* with the informant via such devices as Skype, but most often, the voice of the informant comes via textual communication in the form of instant message chat, email, or other written expression. As such, it is difficult to call online qualitative research *ethnography*. According to Miller and Slater (2000):

  An ethnographic approach is...one that is based on a long-term and multifaceted engagement with a social setting...[and] a long-term involvement amongst people, through a variety of methods, such that any one aspect of their lives can be properly contextualized in others. (p. 21)

Acknowledging that the design of this study may challenge traditional understandings of the nature of ethnography, I continued to undertake
phenomenological ethnographic research in a hybrid face-to-face and online context.

- The *Hawthorne Effect*, as explained by Mayo in the 1950s may be a significant factor in this study. The Hawthorne Effect refers to the effect of the experience of being studied on the participants in the study. The original context for this effect was in a study of worker behaviors, but later scholars found similar incidents in educational contexts (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1989). In this study, the participants were aware of being observed. This created a degree of self-consciousness on their part, as they knew that a former instructor was looking at their activity on Facebook. Likewise, they were prompted for response to various questions that focused their attention on particular topics that may not have been of interest to them in unobserved Facebook engagement.

- As in all ethnographic or qualitative research studies, the researcher is part of the instrumentation in this study. Participant observation is the hallmark of ethnographic research, and the relationship between the observer and the observed has been problematized by researchers for decades. For example, Clifford and Marcus (1986) explored the relationship between the process of doing participant observation and recording the data in written format. Transparency is of utmost importance, and the process of conducting research, including the written results, must be guided by specific practices to ensure quality. In order to ensure quality in this study,
I followed Baym’s (2009) six interrelated strengths of qualitative Internet studies in my research. These strengths are as follows:

(1) They are grounded in theory and data, (2) they demonstrate rigor in data collection and analysis, (3) they use multiple strategies to obtain data, (4) each takes into account the perspective of participants, (5) each demonstrates awareness of and self-reflexivity regarding the research process, and (6) each takes into consideration interconnections between the internet and the life-world within which it is situated. (p. 179)

**Rationale**

Online social media is a contemporary locus of great conversation surrounding the creation and sustenance of community (Hampton, 2002; Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Herrera, 2011). The role of online social networking such as that which occurs on Facebook is similar to the role of its face-to-face counterpart – “to share information and resources, leverage collective resources and power, and decrease isolation” (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 48). Social network sites are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). For over five years, college students have employed Facebook in the process of connection and community creation (Yadav, 2006). Facebook provides a location for a continuous and ever-evolving presentation of self to the world as well as a location for
the virtual establishment of community both on and offline (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001).

In the spring of 2010, I attended a workshop called TechnoFair on the University of Dayton campus. One of the sessions I attended was a showing of the PBS film, *Digital Nation* (2010) and a discussion by instructors and administrators following the film (Dretzen, 2010). *Digital Nation* is an open source PBS project that involved a website and a documentary broadcast on FRONTLINE on February 2, 2010. The focus of the film and project was on students living a digital life. At the conclusion of the film, I was amazed to hear so many faculty and administrators lament student involvement with online social networking sites and digital community. There were numerous anecdotal accounts of how education is being negatively affected by students’ online lives. This study is an examination of how students understand their experience with living virtually. It provides concrete data that illustrate and document how students understand the effect that a virtual life has on their aggregate lives.

To date, the most extensive research on the role online social networking has had on college campuses can be found in the work of Martínez Alemán and Wartman (2009). In their book, *Online Social Networking on Campus: Understanding What Matters in Student Culture*, Martínez Alemán and Wartman used both ethnographic and other methodologies in an attempt to come to “know how this early 21st century generation of college and university students appreciate, value, construct, and negotiate student culture online” (p. ix). This study builds on the data accumulated by Martínez Alemán and Wartman by offering an exploration of the specific experiences of individual students as they engage with Facebook in the creation and maintenance of their experience of
community on campus. It includes participant observation on the part of the researcher as a Facebook user, and provides detailed, reflective accounts of relationship management online. This study expands upon the cursory understanding of student experience provided by Martínez Alemán and Wartman and provides thick, rich, descriptive data to more fully illuminate how and why students utilize Facebook in their social relationships.

**Justification**

The primary focus of this study is on modes of being and interpersonal relationships as they are understood and experienced by students via an online social networking site. The data provides empirical evidence of concrete, lived, individual situations as experienced by the ethnographic *other*. The other in this context is the residential undergraduate student on the University of Dayton campus. The unit of study is the individual rather than the group. As a group of individuals, the subjects of study provide a collage or pastiche of perspectives on how participation in Facebook has influenced their understanding and experience of community while in college. This intersubjective perspective affords me access to a collective individual understanding of community: its importance, its definition, and its manifestation in a combined virtual and tangible or concrete world (Jackson, 2002).

In a more practical manner, this study provides student support staff and administrators a better understanding of the way that Facebook affects students. Many campuses have student affairs professionals who are trained to guide students as they navigate through the process of development and self-actualization in college (American Council on Education, 1994). Until recently, this task was predominantly focused on the support of campus communities and activities. Understanding of student culture and
community is of utmost importance for administrators and student affairs professionals (Cheng, 2004; Kuh, 1993). Today, student affairs professionals must contend with communities that expand beyond the confines of their campus and which may include sub-cultures or communities about which they know little. Therefore, a study such as this provides administrators, students and faculty with an understanding of the ways in which Facebook affects the experience of community for students attending this highly residential, religiously affiliated college.

Significance of the Problem

Results of this study contribute to the knowledge base of student affairs professionals, deans, residential coordinators and information technology professionals on college campuses who interact with and provide services to students. It also contributes to the academic literature on social networking sites (SNS) and media studies in education. Improved understanding of the usage strategies, perceptions, understandings and feelings of college students who use Facebook allows administrators to better comprehend the student’s perspective on community. Likewise, it enables student support personnel to create campus programs that foster face-to-face community in ways that compliment and blend with online community rather than clash and counter existing online community structures.

Operational Definitions

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their
list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 210)

In most cases, users are able to post personal information, including videos, quotations, photographs, and blog entries.

*Community* is defined by the researcher for the purpose of this study as a part of culture that is made up of interactions between people united through a shared set of interests. Sometimes community is a result of a shared geography. For the purpose of this study, it is referred to as the experience of community rather than be defined and bounded by particular parameters like geography (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Community is further explored through the literature review in Chapter Two.

*Online* is a term that means interactions within social spaces on the internet. The distinction between online and offline is understood as the distinction between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication. The virtual nature of life online and the *real* nature of life lived in the tangible world are often disputed and contested (Slater, 2002).

*Netography* is a term coined by Kozinets (2010) and is defined as an adaptation of “common participant-observation ethnographic procedures to the unique contingencies of computer-mediated social interaction: alteration, accessibility, anonymity, and archiving” (p. 58). The process of doing netography involves planning, execution, gathering data, interpreting data, and an adherence to ethical standards.
Face-to-face is a conventionally used term to describe human interaction that takes place in person where both parties are present in the same geographic location (Goffman, 2005). It is often seen as a contrast to online interactions.

The Ghetto is a student neighborhood surrounding the University of Dayton campus. Students at the University of Dayton often refer to this as the geographic location of their community. According to the University of Dayton Residence Life (2011), the technical name for this geographic area is South Student Neighborhood. The term Ghetto is often used to characterize the experience of student life, i.e. “Living the Ghetto Life!” as seen on student t-shirts around campus. The Ghetto has a Facebook presence with 8,138 “likes” of its page. This page describes the history of the student neighborhood and the community associated with it as well as offers a forum for students to post photos, comments, and announcements. This group was created:

Because its [sic] been brought to the attention of many alums that the University is locking with padlocks and storm doors, the basements to all University owned houses. Further compromising the purpose of the Ghetto, and violating the freedoms and trust of the students. (UD GHETTO, 2011)

The Darkside is a student neighborhood (The North Student Neighborhood) to the north of the campus that borders Miami Valley Hospital. There are many explanations for the name of this neighborhood, but according to Wikipedia, it is called the Darkside because when it was annexed, there were no streetlights and thus it was very dark at night (Wikipedia, 2012).
Cyberspace is a conventional term to describe the social aspect of interaction online. According to Suler (1996) the experience of social engagement via computers and networks can be framed as a psychological domain to be understood via a metaphor of geography. Users move through the Internet the way an explorer moves through mountains, rivers, and deserts.

Network is a term used to describe interconnected systems of things or people (Galloway, 2010). The use of this term is as complicated as the use of the term community. As such, each of these terms are examined in depth and operationalized in Chapter Two.

Meme is a term used to describe “a piece of content or an idea that's passed from person to person, changing and evolving along the way” in an online context (Huh, n.d.). Most memes involve images that text is superimposed over in a comedic or satirical manner.

Red Scare is:

a group of enthusiastic UD students united in a common cause: to do whatever it takes to show UD pride through support of the University of Dayton’s athletics. Our school is known for its community, and each athletic event provides us with an opportunity to display that unity for all to see. (UD Red Scare Facebook page, personal communication)

The Red Scare organization fills sections of sporting event stadiums and arenas in an effort to show support for the institution’s athletics programs in competitive forums.
Bro is an American slang term used to describe male, youth culture in particular socio-economic contexts. Knock (2012) wrote an article on the definition of a bro for College Magazine.com. In this article, a bro is defined as:

A species of male ages 17-24 who can often be seen sporting a lax pinny, oversized Nike Dunks or Sperry’s, and cheap sunglasses from the 90s. They usually travel in packs officially known as fraternities, and use brocabulary like “legit” and “f*** that noise.” At a party, bros can be found icing other bros, eating brotato chips and talking about how drunk they are. (Knock, 2012)

Like is the way you express approval on Facebook. When a user is supportive of a statement or an image on Facebook, he or she “likes” the posting. The more likes a posting has, the more popular it is.

Share is a term to describe the reposting of a link, an image or a status update on Facebook. The more shares an item has, the more popular it is.

LMAO is an acronym for “laughing my ass off” and LOL represents “laughing out loud.” Each of these phrases is employed in text-based communications and is a universally accepted means of communicating humor in contexts when laughter cannot be heard or seen.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the intended research project by discussing the problem, the research questions, and the operational definitions intended for use in the study. The next chapter reviews relevant literature and research upon which this study is constructed. The third chapter is methodological and outlines the research practice of
data collection, analysis, and documentation. The fourth chapter will outline the findings of the research, while the final chapter will consist of a summary, conclusions and implications.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Online social networking is at the heart of contemporary media. The recent revolution in Egypt was called a “Facebook Revolution” (Herrera, 2011). While the political role of such online social networking sites as Facebook is constantly being negotiated and disputed, there is consensus that Facebook is an important communicative tool in today’s world (Cohen, 2011). The site began as a social tool for college students at Harvard University in 2004 (Moral & Sandhu, 2009). It was the subject of a major motion picture, The Social Network, which was nominated for numerous cinematic awards in 2010 (Rudin, Brunetti, De Luca, Chaffin, & Fincher, 2010). Facebook may be the most popular online interactive social media platform in existence possibly surpassing email as an online communicative device (McHugh, 2011).

Facebook is an inherently social activity. As the character of the founder, Mark Zuckerberg, in the film The Social Network (Rudin, Brunetti, De Luca, Chaffin, & Fincher, 2010) said, “People wanna (sic.) go online and check out their friends, so why not build a website that offers that. I'm talking about taking the entire social experience of college and putting it online.” Studies of online social activities span a variety of disciplines. This chapter outlines and illustrates the academic framework in which a study such as this can be situated. It explores the literature that informs an understanding of
college students’ virtual social experience. The literature reviewed in this chapter comes from the disciplines of philosophy, education, anthropology, sociology, media studies, popular culture and communication. The topics examined here include a survey of the concept of community, an exploration of the term network, a review of previous approaches to the study of student use of technology, and the theoretical foundations for this study.

**Community**

We know the rules of community; we know the healing effect of community in terms of individual lives. If we could somehow find a way across the bridge of our knowledge, would not these same rules have a healing effect upon our world? We human beings have often been referred to as social animals. But we are not yet community creatures. We are impelled to relate with each other for our survival. But we do not yet relate with the inclusivity, realism, self-awareness, vulnerability, commitment, openness, freedom, equality, and love of genuine community. It is clearly no longer enough to be simply social animals, babbling together at cocktail parties and brawling with each other in business and over boundaries. It is our task--our essential, central, crucial task--to transform ourselves from mere social creatures into community creatures. It is the only way that human evolution will be able to proceed. (Peck, 1987, p. 165)
General Understandings of Community

Anthropologists understand communities as bounded systems much like cultures. Benedict (1934) wrote:

Anthropology is the study of human beings as creatures of society. It fastens its attention upon those physical characteristics and industrial techniques, those conventions and values, which distinguish one community from all others that belong to a different tradition. (p. 1)

In her text, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), Benedict explored a controversy of her time. In the early part of the 1900s, sociologists and anthropologists were hotly debating the possibility that cultures or societies could be organisms. If cultures and societies are organisms, it stands to reason that the individual could not act purely on his or her own impulses, but rather would be influenced by the surrounding world. Biology and culture come together to establish an order to which humans subject their self-interest if they are to continue to live and thrive within a given community.

A community then is a sum of the parts of individuals who co-exist in some form of unified or connected fashion. It includes shared characteristics like Benedict’s Zuni who are understood by her to be an “organic whole” (1934, p. 231). There are a myriad of definitions of community in existence. Much like many terms in our language, *community* is a term that is used to explain or define experiences, group behaviors, feelings, organizations, and philosophies. As such, it is difficult to define. In this section of the literature review, I will provide a few examples of the diverse ways in which community has been understood in an academic context. For the purpose of this study,
however, I will encourage the term to be defined and operationalized by the participants as is tradition in phenomenological or existential studies.

Beginning from a sociological perspective, McMillan and Chavis (1986) provided a review of research on the experience of community. They concluded that the experience of the sense of community operates as a force in human life and attempted to construct a definition and theory of this force. They drew upon Gusfield’s (1975) two major uses of the term community: geographical and relational, to explain how humans conceive of this force (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). They called attention to the fact that Durkheim (1964) suggested that the modern notion of community is characterized by a populous that organizes itself around interests and skills rather than locality (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The definition that McMillan and Chavis developed has four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The intended use of this definition is for both academic and theoretical discourse as well as public policy as they believe that “a critical examination of community is essential” (McMillan & Chavis, p. 20).

Moving toward a more specific definition of community for university environments, Cheng’s (2004) study of a highly residential college campus in New York City used a factor analysis of an annual enrolled student survey that included questionnaire items that addressed the experience of community. Cheng’s definition of community comes from Boyer’s (1990) book, Campus Life: In Search of Community. He draws upon the six characteristics Boyer claims should define the college student experience of community: purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative (Cheng, 2004). Cheng’s study revealed that students desire to feel that they are cared for
as individuals and not merely cogs in a machine. It also concluded that the most negative influence on the student’s experience of community is a feeling of loneliness, and that quality social life on campus is the most positive (Cheng, 2004). Cheng also provided a set of tools student affairs workers can use to assist faculty and students to create a greater experience of community.

McLuhan (1962) stated, “the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” (p. 31). In our new global context, many believe that neo-Luddites must beware being left behind as our society tumbles into a virtual sphere unlike any other we have seen before. This sphere is technologically mediated and authors such as Vitanza (1999) boast:

For every real city or society, there is, so to speak, a soft(ware) city or soft city. All of the interconnected computers through nodes that are linked to the Internet make up one virtual global city, around which those of us who have computers sit as if at a cafe or around a campfire, swapping stories...

(p. 60)

This type of experience is likened to the experience or feeling of community outlined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) above. Yet something binds these people together; something draws them to gather around the campfire or to meet at the cafe – virtual or face-to-face. In fact, de Waal (2011) claimed that the city, or urban environment, has been mediated and influenced by technology and that much urban media has been intentionally designed to remediate traditional notions of what urban culture is supposed to be. Urban imaginaries, visions and notions of what a city should
and could be, are informed by human engagement with technologies and are reframed by human practice of community in the virtual world (de Waal, 2011).

Rheingold (1991) suggested that community is best analyzed through the concept of collective goods (p. xxviii). Collective goods are the items that humans can only gain by working together (Rheingold, 1991). That is, in a competitive world, humans must use their relational abilities to maximize their experiences. Through analysis of the collective goods of a group of people, researchers can understand the “elements that bind isolated individuals into a community” (Rheingold, 1991, p. xxviii). Rheingold (1991) also cautioned that these collective goods are not always good. He drew upon Foucault’s (1977) Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison to describe the possibility of community organized toward a negative, controlling or oppressive end (Rheingold, 1991). In his journalistic account of the genocide in Rwanda, Gourevitch (1998) likewise accounts for negative aspects of community. He pointed out:

Genocide, after all, is an exercise in community building. A vigorous totalitarian order requires that the people be invested in the leaders’ scheme, and while genocide may be the most perverse and ambitious means to this end, it is also the most comprehensive. (p. 95)

Durkheim (Jones, 1986) suggested that one byproduct to a failure of community is suicide. Durkheim believed that the failure of a society or community to integrate its individual members was the cause for many suicides. The remedy for this, according to Durkheim, was the re-establishment of bonds between the individual and the collective group. The best way to do this in contemporary society, from Durkheim’s perspective, is through an occupational group, much like what we imagine a college campus community
to be. Durkheim saw religion, the state, and the family as failing to perform this task in our contemporary world and charged the occupational context with the role of integrating individuals into successful communities (Jones, 1986).

**Online Community**

In this study, the experience of community is analyzed as experienced in online social networks, in relation to life on campus. Online social networks have a significant history of scholarship (boyd & Ellison, 2008). The cultures that arise or coalesce at SNSs are multifaceted and varied. Sites both support pre-existing communities and connections, while others foster new ones based on politics, interests, or activities (boyd & Ellison, 2008). SNSs are largely understood to be unique in the maintenance of human relationships because they enable the user to “make visible their social networks” (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). This visibility or transparency is a unique aspect of engagement in online community.

Online community was explored by Hampton and Wellman (2003) in suburban neighborhoods and found to increase community and social capital. On a whole, however, other research suggested that community online is becoming “normalized as it is incorporated into the routine practices of everyday life” (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001, p. 436). That is, there appears to be no greater or lesser development of social capital and experience of community online than in face-to-face encounters. Dourish and Satchell (2011) articulated this by explaining that social media platforms such as Facebook “provide a site for the production of social and cultural reality” and that any engagement with social media is always a part of social construction because social media inform social life just as social life informs social media (p. 22).
According to Wellman and Hampton (1999), “communities are clearly networks and not neatly organized into little neighborhood boxes” (p. 2). The rhetoric against online and technologically facilitated experiences of community is usually rooted in one of two ideas or concepts. The first assumption or idea is that being online is in some way exclusive and not inclusive of face-to-face interactions with others (Wellman & Hampton, 1999). The second assumption is that the Internet is dangerously pulling at people away from “meaningful household and neighborhood conversations when it is more likely pulling people away from sitting by themselves in front of the television watching Seinfeld reruns” (Wellman & Hampton, 1999, p. 5).

Suler (1996) examined human community online in his Internet text, The Psychology of Cyberspace. According to Suler, online community can only be successful if the participants integrate their online and offline lives. Suler explained that the reality testing that occurs when someone discusses, meets, and engages with others in face-to-face relationships regarding online relationships is essential for the creation of healthy communities. As such, the intimacy of face-to-face relationships can be seen as glue that holds a hybrid community of online and offline participants together (Suler, 1996).

In a subsequent study, Suler (2004) maintained that the reason why online engagement with others can so greatly influence human connections is a result of the online disinhibition effect. The disinhibition effect describes the way in which people reveal more of themselves, and virtually behave differently than they would in a face-to-face relationship. Suler categorized the six factors that contribute to this experience as: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of status and authority. He suggested that individual
differences and predispositions influence how much people self-disclose or engage online (Suler, 2004).

On Facebook, unlike other SNSs, people ordinarily look for friends with whom to network that they already know offline (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfeld, 2006). Lampe et al. found that unlike online dating networks or other SNSs, Facebook users employ the site to maintain existing relationships or to solidify offline connections rather than to meet new people. The task of a Facebook user is not to seek out new acquaintances or friendships; rather, according to Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld (2006), it is to find a way to further connect with people one already knows in the face-to-face world.

In her book chapter, “Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life,” boyd (2008) suggested that networked publics function like shopping malls or public parks. Just as the shopping mall was a neutral geographic place where young people who do not possess a home of their own in which to entertain friends could gather and socialize, Facebook and other SNSs become “networked publics” where youth can interact without undue influence of social authorities (boyd, 2008).

Lastly, Song (2009) conducted a cultural study of 30 virtual communities to assess and explore the consequences and possibilities of public life and a social world increasingly mediated by technology. Song examined how online life is structured in her book, Virtual Communities: Bowling Alone, Online Together (2009). The title of Song’s book makes reference to Putnam’s (2000) book Bowling Alone, which addressed a cultural propensity on the part of Americans to socially isolate themselves. Rather than “exploring how individuals subjectively experience group membership and community
participation online” or “how a person’s online participation affects her degree of offline activity,” Song maintained an interest in “how the design and implementation of virtual communities express conceptions of community and membership in the everyday settings of online interaction” (p. 9). Song focused on the way in which the design of online communities supports and legitimizes notions and definitions of community that currently exist.

**Student Culture and Community**

Strange and Banning (2001) conceived of community on college campuses as something that can be intentional and designed. They linked the possibility of learning with “the experience of full membership in the learning setting” by learners (p. 159). For Strange and Banning, community is the vehicle by which students have an emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual experience of membership. Strange and Banning endeavored to understand and articulate a plan for building community. They located community in a particular geographic place and offered steps or qualities that must be followed or manifested in order to create and foster community on college campuses. While this program or plan may be useful for college student personnel and campus administrators, for the purpose of this study, community is explored from a descriptive and existential perspective rather than a normative one.

According to Dalton (2006), “the real power of community comes from the shared emotional experiences of individuals who participate together in common endeavors” (p. 176). Dalton suggested “belonging is important for college students because it not only helps them feel connected in a network of others but also provides important social and psychological constraints that define the limits of acceptable
conduct, attitudes, and beliefs” (p. 175). Dalton cautioned against too much rigor and too many boundaries set on the part of college student personnel, as too much structure may limit the authenticity of the experience of a community for students. Regardless of the efforts of campus personnel, students find diverse ways of meeting their need for community – sanctioned or not. The experience of being a student in a particular time and place is significant, but the process and manifestation of the experience of being in community, particularly a college community, takes place within each individual’s mind, heart, and soul.

The individuals that make up the student body on campuses today maintain common characteristics that bind them together into a collective personality. Howe and Strauss (2000) described the collective personality of these individuals as Millenial. The relative affluence in which they were raised as well as the ubiquitous nature of computer-mediated technology in their lives characterizes The Millenials. Howe and Strauss (2000) described this generation as optimists, cooperative team players, accepting of authority, rule followers, cherished, intelligent, and believers in progress. The Millenials are the most demographically diverse generation in our nation’s history (Howe & Strauss, 2000). This group of students was raised in houses that contained “50 percent more things (measured by the pound) than houses did twenty years ago” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 20).

The experience of growing up as they have affects Millenial student expectations on campus. According to German (2007):

“Millennial students”—cyber-students—are demanding an electronically-charged classroom. Students expect the University to offer the same level
of technology as the home. Anything less than a wireless atmosphere duplicating the homes left behind is considered archaic and a negative quality in University marketing. If students believe the University is behind-the-times technologically, they may believe it is backwards in other ways in the creation of knowledge. (para. 7)

German (2007) suggested that these students want to be entertained. She said “for the millennials, computerization is as basic as water or the air we breathe” (para. 12). These students come to campus with the idea that all relationships can contain a computer-mediated aspect. German said that the Millenial “idea of face-time is meeting online in front of a screen tube and cultivating relationships that way; hence, the proliferation of Match.com and online services” (para. 16).

Millenial students live lives that are bifurcated and multifaceted. They physically come to campus to live, and yet maintain connections with others off of the campus. They want to belong and to fit in without having to detach from their previous environment. As German (2007) suggested, these students are not focused on individuation but rather sameness. In housing students on campus, living-learning communities are a common means by which campuses put like students together. These residence structures enable Millenial students to feel at ease and to bond with those with whom they share interests and ideas.

**Higher Education Learning Communities**

Learning community is touted as a most important aspect of the college learning experience for students. It is said to improve retention (Stassen, 2003; Tinto, 1997; Tinto, 1998; Tinto, 2000; Tinto & Russo, 1994), promote social and academic engagement
(Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998), and foster student appreciation of their college experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto (1998) suggested that if higher education professionals “took the research on [student] persistence seriously, we would, at a minimum, move to forms of academic organization that require students to become actively involved with others in learning…(and) construct educational settings that promote shared, connected learning” (p. 170). Research also demonstrates that students who actively participate in non-classroom based activities are more likely to establish an affinity group of fellow students, which is critical for success (Astin, 1984; Love, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Learning communities in general have the positive effect of “integrating academic and social experiences, (providing) gains in multiple areas of skill, competence, and knowledge, and overall satisfaction with the college experience” (Zhao & Kuh, 2004, p. 131). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) demonstrated that students garner significantly greater gains in their intellectual growth and development by participating in learning communities while on campus.

Learning communities of intentional design have been created on campuses throughout the world to foster involvement on the part of students (Stassen, 2003; Strange & Banning, 2001; Tinto, 2000; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). They have been positively associated with student engagement and self-reported satisfaction with the overall college experience (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). According to Stassen (2003), the development and implementation of intentional learning communities has become a very “popular method for improving the quality of the undergraduate experience” (p. 581). These communities regularly involve thematic clusters of livings spaces with integrated learning spaces. The
aggregate experience of college students includes their academic life, social life, extracurricular life, and now, their virtual life.

Researchers such as Astin (1999) explored the importance of student involvement on campus for retention and overall success. Astin spoke of involvement as a key component in his developmental theory and explains it through the following hypothetical example:

Let me first explain what I mean by involvement, a construct that should not be either mysterious or esoteric. Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students. (p. 518)

In this age of diverse articulations of community, an age where students interact with fellow students and faculty in the classroom, in their residences, and online, it is interesting to revisit and reconsider Astin’s theory of student development. Is the student’s experience of community affected by his or her engagement online? Will this engagement hinder or foster his or her commitment to the campus community?
Networks

A network can be considered a particular kind of community. The etymological roots of the term come from the Old Saxon word net, which is a loosely woven fabric used to catch, confine, or filter something, and the word werk, that can be both a verb that describes an act of doing and the thing that results from this act (Galloway, 2010). Networks “are understood as systems of interconnectivity” (Galloway, 2010, p. 283). In his work on social networks, Christakis (2010) created a visual model for the manner in which humans interact and form networks of social connectivity. He explained that frequently, humans influence not only those in their physical proximity, but also others with whom they have peripheral or geographically distant engagement. Markets, ecosystems, and bodily activities such as the circulatory or nervous system provide models by which members of a network are held in constant relation (Galloway, 2010).

The image of a net is an interesting one to behold. On one hand, a net is a woven set of interconnected fibers that each supports one another. From another perspective, it is a device that ensnares and traps. Online social networking has been portrayed as both benevolent connectors of friends that foster face-to-face involvement (Johnstone, Todd, & Chua, 2009; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001) and snares of entrapment and destruction that detract from community and human investment (Davis, 1999; Glockner, 2009; Grabmeier, 2009; Stroll, 1995).

Technology has been disputed as a common good among society’s thinkers. McLuhan (1969), for example, claimed that tribal peoples could not understand the concept of the individual while technological man is obsessed with it. He uses a net or mesh metaphor to illustrate his utopian view of preliterate man:
By their dependence on the spoken word for information, people were drawn together into a tribal mesh; and since the spoken word is more emotionally laden than the written—conveying by intonation such rich emotions as anger, joy, sorrow, fear—tribal man was more spontaneous and passionately volatile. (para. 29)

McLuhan (1969) cautioned against mankind’s unthinking consumption of media and communicative technologies. He called attention to the ways in which media has influenced human thought and perception by transforming the experience of the individual within the group. McLuhan credited phonetic literacy as a culprit that could “wrench the individual from the tribal web” (para. 43). By becoming more intellectually literate, McLuhan’s tribal man loses some of his “deeply emotional corporate family feeling” (para. 43). This feeling can be understood as the feeling of community. Wellman and Wetherell (1996) suggested that technology has always helped people forge connectivity over long and short distances. They asserted that in contrast to our assumptions that people were historically locally focused, evidence from preindustrial and non-Western societies demonstrate that there was always a degree of long-distance connectivity.

Networks connect people. If community is lost because of networked technology, then the ever-increasing presence of technology on a college campus should have an existential if not spiritual impact on students, especially Facebook, which permeates the daily student experience.
Review of Previous Studies

Perhaps the most significant study that served as a precursor or foundation upon which this research is constructed is Henry’s (2012) study of student use of social media on campus. Henry employed a 200-item survey in an effort to study the impact that technology has had on student’s psychosocial well-being and experience of community. Henry concluded that campuses provide an environment where students can use technology to facilitate loneliness as well as facilitate connectedness.

The second study this research builds upon is the work of Martinez Alemán and Wartman (2009). In their book, *Online Social Networking on Campus: Understanding What Matters in Student Culture*, Martinez Alemán and Wartman explored “the role Facebook plays in the construction of gender and ethnic identity on campus, and how this online platform influences the construction of group identity for campus organizations” (Martínez Alemán and Wartman, 2009, p. x). The third chapter of this text employed the voice of individual students and explored their use and experience of online social networking sites. The methodology employed in this study consisted of a series of two online surveys on student use of Facebook, and individual interviews with students. During these interviews, students were asked to open up their Facebook accounts and describe some of their activities.

Martínez Alemán and Wartman (2009) revealed three themes that governed student use of Facebook: “(1) agency, (2) performance, and (3) relationality” (p. 52). The researchers understood the theme of agency as the “degree to which students felt that they controlled self-presentation” (p. 52). The theme of performance encompassed the means by which students regulated their presentation of self. Relationality served to explain how
the campus community was reconfigured as a result of student use of Facebook. The results of this study demonstrated that students shift between multiple versions of *self*, taking advantage of the agency that they are granted by the architecture of Facebook as a social networking site (Martínez Alemán & Wartman, 2009). That is, according to Martínez Alemán and Wartman, students use Facebook as a platform to articulate their identities and to explore the identities of others.

Identity creation and articulation is seen as a positive phenomenon for college students (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). And yet, some researchers suggest that there is duplicity and a deceptive quality to this manufactured self that is portrayed online. In her exploration of MySpace (an online social networking site that has been replaced in popularity by Facebook) photographs, Sessions (2009) explored ideas of deception and authenticity online. Sessions examined user perceptions of photographic representations and how accurately they are understood to relate to off-line, physical bodies. In Sessions’ research, authentic representations of self came to be understood as fully translatable from the body to the Internet and back again. Sessions suggested that inauthenticity is defined in particular manners and generally seen as negative in social networking contexts, even in a virtual environment. (2009). That is, if you are unattractive in real life, it is expected that you will portray yourself as such online.

Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman and Tom Tong (2008) studied the manner in which the attractiveness of one’s friends and the nature of their posts on one’s wall influence the perception of Facebook friends. The results of their study established that “it behooves one to have good-looking friends in Facebook. One gains no advantage from looking better than one’s friends” (Walther et al., 2008, p. 44).
More general studies of overall student psychosocial development revealed that technology has had both positive and negative effects on student populations (Lloyd, Dean & Cooper, 2009). According to Lloyd et al. (2009), students who engage with technology for the purpose of entertainment tend to be less involved in academic life. Facebook was found to be a distraction from educational involvement because socializing was seen as a distraction from educational activities. Lloyd et al. also found that Facebook had a negative impact on peer social relationships among the students they studied, as it enabled them to avoid direct engagement and to somewhat isolate themselves. Most models of psychosocial development of students include peer relationship development as a key component (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Lloyd et al. suggested that “technology provides an opportunity for students to stay constantly connected with one another, but how that technology impacts their peer relationships has not been fully examined” (2009, p. 699).

In their Web-based survey of and interviews with undergraduate freshmen and seniors, Kvavik and Caruso (2005) found that students use technology “first for educational purposes, second for connectedness, and third for entertainment” (p. 6). They concluded that technology and social networking sites like Facebook do not hinder student experience in college. Similarly, Laird and Kuh (2005) analyzed data produced by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to determine if student engagement was enhanced or deterred by use of information technologies. Their results indicated “engagement in one area often goes hand-in-hand with engagement in other areas” (2005, p. 230). Laird and Kuh claimed that the findings from their study indicated that independent forms of engagement outside of the classroom may in fact lead to
desired educational outcomes, but have as of yet not been assessed and analyzed accurately. Laird and Kuh suggested that “it is important to ask if there are ways students engage [with] information technology that are independent of the established indicators of engagement represented by the NSSE survey” (2005, p. 232).

Kezar and Lester (2009) established that institutional change can be facilitated by online social networking. In their article, “Promoting Grassroots Change in Higher Education: The Promise of Virtual Networks,” Kezar and Lester proposed that grassroots efforts at institutional change will best be served by virtual networks and connections that unite interested parties within and beyond the confines of campus (2009). They believed that establishing virtual networks that connect interested individuals on campus with those who may have an interest in investment or other forms of support will enable change efforts to gain “support, legitimacy, funding and strategies” (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 46). Kezar and Lester pointed out that many colleges have created Facebook pages with information on events and resources campus wide that serve to organize like-minded and inspired people in virtual networks both on and off campus and thus enhance student engagement with learning.

Kezar and Lester’s (2009) interest groups indicated that some faculty elect to interact with students on Facebook on a much more personal level. Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007) conducted an experimental study to determine the effects of teacher self-disclosure on Facebook on anticipated college student motivation, learning and classroom climate. The results indicated that student teacher interaction that is characterized by high levels of teacher self-disclosure, via such indicators as personal photographs on the Facebook Wall and anecdotal information shared with students, leads to “higher levels of
anticipated motivation and affective learning and lend to a more comfortable classroom environment” (Mazer et al., 2007, p. 12). Mazer et al. made an interesting observation that some forms of self-disclosure can have negative effects on teacher credibility in face-to-face contexts and yet can enhance it within the domain of Facebook.

**Theoretical Foundations**

This study of student engagement with Facebook draws upon a number of theoretical frameworks and perspectives. The majority of studies on student use of technologies focus on whether or not these technologies are helpful or harmful to student populations (Grabmeier, 2009; Kavanaugh, 1999; Kvavik & Caruso, 2005; Laird & Kuh, 2005). I intend to bypass this question. I recognize that all technology can be employed by humans for good or for evil at the onset of this study. Any tool in the human repertoire can be used to fix or to harm. Technology can assist students in avoiding their studies or to enhance their studies. It can create feelings of love and affection for classmates as well as ruin established relationships. Technology has no moral compass and is not being evaluated by this study as to its moral worth or relative value or importance on campus (Dourish & Satchell, 2011). Rather, following Jackson (2002) I am interested in the “immediately empirical issue of how we actually experience and interact with technologies” (p. 333). In this study, I explore how students experience community online, and how this community influences or affects their experience of community on campus.

Jackson (2002) suggested, “For anthropologists, being is quintessentially social. We are social before we are anything else” (p. 334). He also points out that social lives are lived “as a network of reciprocal relationships among subjects, that is to say,
intersubjectively” (Jackson, 2002, p. 334). Our engagement with technology is equally as social. Even when we sit alone in a room with a machine, we are engaged with that machine in a manner that mimics social behaviors. Our emotional response to our engagement with machines “depends upon the degree to which we feel in control of these relationships, as well as the degree to which these relationships are felt to augment rather than diminish our own sense of well-being” (Jackson, 2002, p. 336). All of human experience is characterized by coping. We are flooded with an experience of emotion on a moment-to-moment basis, and simultaneously, we cope with these emotions. As social beings, we must channel these emotions into expressions that others can understand and empathize with. Community as a felt experience is a condition when these expressions appear to have been understood and appreciated by others. And yet, this is not the entirety of our lived experience. Jackson suggested, “Lived reality cannot be reliably inferred from the way reality is discursively constructed and cognitively represented,” it exists regardless of our mental constructs and systems to process it (p. 343). However, in order to connect with others and make meaning in our lives, we must find means by which to bridge the gap between the subjective experiences of two individuals.

Humans foster relationships with others based upon relative levels of perceived threat or safety. In forming and fostering community, human populations must increase the level of safe feelings among the group. Technological mediums such as the Internet can both hinder and help this process. As a part of the human condition, humans respond favorably and in an anthropomorphic manner to situations and things that foster feelings of safety. Jackson (2002) explains this by drawing upon a classic Marxian understanding:
When we do not feel existentially threatened by things, relations between things assume the form of relations between persons, but when we feel existentially threatened by other people, relations between people assume the form of relations between things. (p. 344)

Fostering safety in human relations is challenging. This is particularly true when we live in a time and place that is fraught with power struggles, competing interests, limited resources, and a perceived threat to our security at every turn. Graeber (2004) spoke of “liberation in the imaginary” (p. 102). Graeber claims that imagining a different world than the one in which we live, while challenging, has a certain transformative power (2004). He suggested that:

To think about what it would take to live in a world in which everyone really did have the power to decide for themselves, individually and collectively, what sort of communities they wished to belong to and what sort of identities they wanted to take on—that’s really difficult. (Graeber, 2004, p. 102)

In a virtual world, communities can take on whatever form the participants want them to. There is no state limiting and controlling the way the community develops. In essence, the virtual world offers the possibility of an anarchistic reality. Online, there is an “endless variety of communities, associations, networks, projects, [that] on every conceivable scale, overlapping and intersecting in any way we could imagine” (Graeber, 2004, p. 40). Some of these possibilities are local while others are global.

Subjective experience and imagination are possible online. Community, in a virtual context, is not a place one lives but an experience one has. The way in which this
is shared and explained from one person to the next is through stories. Narrative “is one of the ways we apply order to that unimaginable overabundance of information” that makes up our lives (Jackson, 2007, p. 4). In this study, I use every opportunity to permit students to tell me stories of their experience of community and their engagement with others on Facebook. Jackson (2007) reminds us that writing or telling a story is like taking a photograph, “a decision about what a photograph will be is simultaneously a decision about what a photograph will not be” (p. 5). But the sheer evocative and empathetic power of stories is never lost on humanity. A part of the critical aspect of being a thinking being is forming awareness of what is intentionally and subconsciously included and excluded from the tale. I ask my student informants specific questions to provoke their awareness of the compositional aspects of their stories. Much like photographs, I allow these narratives to provide me with a clear documentation of their experiences. As a researcher, I am aware that, as Jackson puts it, “life itself has no narrative. It is serial and multiple: a million things happening at once” (2007, p. 5).

These million things compose the human project. Many scholars and philosophers have argued for centuries about the exact nature of human nature (Beloff, 1975; Kropotkin, 2010; Morland, 1997; O’Hear, 1981; Parekh, 1997). In this project, I will examine the nature of community as experienced by students on campus. Community is a social manifestation of the collaborative or cooperative aspects of human nature. Social anarchists believe that humans are both individual and social by nature (Suissa, 2010). This dual aspect of the human condition is enhanced or constrained by the context in which humans exist. Online social networking via platforms like Facebook offer users the opportunity to craft individual selves, while simultaneously weaving these selves into
webs of networked relationships. Any study of the role individual experience and engagement plays on the construction, enhancement, or rejection of community must consider the nature of the human condition. In this study, I adopt a social anarchist view of human nature and acknowledge that the human project is really a constant dialectic between the struggle for existence or survival, and the need for community and mutual aid (Suissa, 2010). In chapters four and five, I will discuss how community is constructed on the University of Dayton campus and how this construction is informed by this dialectic. That is, I will analyze how students use Facebook to foster their personal goals in college, while simultaneously nurturing the social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) necessary to enable them to feel a part of the campus community.

**Summary**

In the movie, *Catfish* (2010) an elaborate plot unfolds that reveals the true nature of a Facebook based relationship between a 24 year-old man in New York City and what is eventually revealed to be a 40-something woman in Michigan (Jarecki, Smerling, Joost, Schulman, & Ratner, 2010). The plot follows a young man through his online relationship with what he believes to be a 19 year-old woman who has a small farm in Michigan. The film explored ideas of honesty and deception, trust and truthfulness, human frailty and emotion. Reviewers and critics call into question its very authenticity (George, 2010; Longworth, 2010). True or fabricated, the film tells us something very important about human connection and interaction in an online environment. In online contexts, many of the things that limit our attachment and attraction to one another (age, appearance, gender, education, etc.) can be transcended and bypassed. The power of online communication has only just begun to be studied and explored.
This chapter provided an outline of the academic foundation upon which this study is built. It offered an epistemological and ideological framework or lens through which lived experience, as portrayed by student informants, will be conveyed and discussed. Like the film *Catfish* (2010), this project illuminates the nature of how human interactions are conducted and how bonds are formed online (Jarecki, Smerling, Joost, Schulman, & Ratner, 2010). It adds to our understanding of how connection is forged and meaning is made in online relationships, and how they translate into face-to-face ones. It offers a window on the internal and the external aspects of human emotion and relational experience. Lastly, like *Catfish*, it tells a story from the perspective of its participants (Jarecki, Smerling, Joost, Schulman, & Ratner, 2010).
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology for this study. It includes research design, the participants, sampling, data collection and analysis, analysis of trustworthiness, and a discussion of the role of the researcher in the study.

Research Design

Cresswell (2009) wrote that qualitative research is appropriate for understanding meanings and experiences. The goal of this study is to elucidate how college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college. Therefore, qualitative methodologies are useful in this context. The methodology used in this study is a blend of netography and face-to-face individual interviews.

Kozinets (2010) outlined a new approach to researching online environments that he called netography. Netography is ethnographic research conducted in an online research context. Like ethnography, netography involves the researcher immersing him or herself in the research environment, participating and observing, and attempting to perceive, to the greatest degree possible, what it is to be another. However, in netography, the methods by which the researcher does this are virtual and disconnected from an embodied self. Netography is often framed as a younger sibling of ethnography and is seen as less complete in that it involves lived experience in a virtual context.
(Kozinets, 2010). Ethnography takes place in the lived world, where researchers construct validity and truthfulness as resulting from their residence with and participation in the culture of the other. Netography cannot offer these structures of authenticity. But according to Kozinets, “there is no really real ethnography, no de facto perfect ethnography that would satisfy every methodological purist” (2010, p. 62). For Kozinets, ethnography is a valid qualitative methodological approach, even in its incomplete or imperfect manifestation. Kozinets advocated a blend of netographic and ethnographic methodologies, where face-to-face methodologies are paired with netographic ones (2010).

Kozinets (2010) differentiated between studies of “online communities” and studies of “communities online” (p. 63). Studies of online communities are often fully netographic enterprises whereby the researcher is seeking to understand a virtual community. In contrast, studies of communities online are more often blended ethnographic and netographic endeavors where the researcher seeks to understand how individuals with shared interests in the physical world engage with one another online. Kozinets says that in studies where “the focal construct extends beyond the online community context into the larger social world, it would be wrong to assume that we could gain a complete picture through netography” (p. 65). This study is a blended study of a community online.

Following Kozinets (2010) suggestion, I conducted qualitative research using a combination of netographic and ethnographic methodologies. Kozinets argued that as researchers, “we are quickly reaching the point, if we are not already there, at which we need to reference, study, and understand the data in online communities and cultures” (p.
This study provides data on the experiences of both online and face-to-face community on the part of college students. It examines their cultures as mediated and articulated online and in person. The results are an analysis of the ways in which online engagement influences and mediates experiences of community on campus.

**Participants**

The sample for this study was a selection of 13 undergraduate students at the University of Dayton (UD), who were selected using purposeful or theoretical sampling procedures (Krathwohl, 2004; Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Stake, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The benefit of purposive sampling in qualitative studies is that it permits the researcher to select participants that possess qualities and properties that will best inform the topic of investigation. In netography, purposive sampling enables criteria of interest to be the focus of the research and ensures that the resultant data appropriately answers the research questions (Cresswell, 2009; Kozinets, 2010).

Sample size was determined by data saturation. Based upon research guidelines suggested by Kvale (1996), in studies involving interviews, “…the number of interviews tend to around 15 +/- 10” (p. 102). Kvale indicated that this number is influenced by a combination of time, resources, and the “law of diminishing returns” (p. 102). He also suggested that quality should be preferred over quantity, a trend he sees as “a defensive overreaction” to “quantitative presuppositions” that “the more interviews, the more scientific” a study is understood to be (p. 103). Kvale suggested that large samples do not contribute to rigor and do not increase generalizability in qualitative research.

The participants were students with whom I have an established conversant relationship. The majority of informants were former students in my introductory
anthropology courses at the University of Dayton. After knowing these students for a semester, I was able to discern which students possessed certain personality traits such as introspection and reflectivity. Sheldon (2008) found that people who are inclined to communicate in face-to-face environments are also the same people who engage in online relationships. Thus, I chose students who were avid communicators and who were also clear in their written communication, as the netographic portion of this study depends upon the student’s ability to express his or herself textually. The students were all first, second and third year students as graduating seniors did not return to campus in the fall.

Thirteen undergraduate students (4 male; 9 female), ranging in age from 18 to 22, agreed to participate in this study. The sample population includes: two African-American female students, one female International student from Singapore, one female self-identified asexual student, one self-identified homosexual white male student, and one white male commuter student. Patton (1990) discussed accounting for diversity within a sample population. This sample is an example of sampling for maximum variation and intensity. That is, according to Patton’s explanations of various sampling strategies, participant selection in this study was undertaken with an effort toward the generation of rich information on diverse or unique variations in student experience (Table 1). Likewise, all participants did not engage with Facebook in an identical manner. Participant engagement levels are indicated in Table 2 (Table 2).
Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Orientation*</th>
<th>Year in College</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alfred</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dick</td>
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<td>Jack</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Orientation*</th>
<th>Year in College</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Hillary</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Deanna</td>
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<td>Jennifer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
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<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>Lorraine</td>
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<td>Emma</td>
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*Note.* The above criteria for demographic differentiation are based upon standard identifying factors of demographic significance. They are based upon self-reported understandings of the participants.

* The orientation of the participants listed here is based upon the self-identification of the participants at the time of the interview. This is in no way an attempt to suggest that sexual orientation is static and may not change over time. I recognize that sexuality is fluid and that identification of self as a particular orientation can be problematic at this developmental phase of life (Evans & Broido, 1999; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006).
Table 2

*Participant Use Factors*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Males</th>
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<td>Low</td>
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<th>Student</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Use rate</th>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<td>Hillary</td>
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<td>Emma</td>
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*Note.* The above criteria for use of Facebook is based upon subjective observations on the part of the researcher and the speed and rate at which the participants responded to investigator inquiry.
Context

The University of Dayton is a Catholic institution in Dayton, Ohio. It is Marianist and maintains a Marianist charism and mission to “lead others through community to faith in Jesus Christ” (University of Dayton, Office of the Rector, 2010). Marianists believe “education in schools to be a profound opportunity for building communities of faith” (University of Dayton, Office of the Rector, 2010). Community is a very important part of the mission of the institution. The University of Dayton’s mission statement emphasizes community in numerous contexts (University of Dayton Mission Statement, 2010).

According to the University of Dayton Factbook from fall of 2010, the institution has 7,175 full-time undergraduate students. The tuition cost is $29,930 for the 2010-2011 school year. There are slightly fewer female students on campus than male students. 3,753 of the undergraduate student population identify themselves as Catholic and 6,145 identify themselves as white (University of Dayton Fact Book, 2010).

Students live in residence halls during their freshman year. Following this, they can elect to continue to live in residence halls or to rent homes on the campus in the student neighborhoods with groups of other students. There are some alternative housing options such as ArtStreet, a living-learning facility that contains housing, a recording studio, a radio station, art studios, film screening rooms, and a cafe. The University of Dayton has free wireless Internet in every corner of the campus. Students have mandatory laptop requirements and are expected to use these laptops to connect to the Internet from their homes, classrooms, the recreation complex, and dining halls.
Banning (1997) characterized the role of computers on college campuses as the *campus porch*. At the University of Dayton, the campus student portal and online communication hub is called *Porches*. The porch is a symbol on the campus of student life and community. Nearly every student house in campus housing that is not a residence hall has an old-fashioned front porch. Students use these porches to socialize and entertain one another on campus. Strange and Banning (2001) explained the porch as “an architectural feature found between the outside and the inside of dwellings” that “serves a variety of purposes” (p. 198). They explained that a porch shields from the weather while also connecting residents with the outside social world (Strange & Banning, 2001). They describe the activities that take place on a porch thusly:

One can sit and view the social world from a porch (a “lurker” in virtual terms), or one can invite others onto the porch, or perhaps leave the porch to join and participate with others. The porch is a physical structure, but at the same time a sociopetal feature that encourages social interactions. (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 198)

Online networks then can be understood as conduits of connection much like a porch connects the house inhabitants with the outside world. Online community must be understood as experienced by the participant much as it is in the physical face-to-face world. The computer network can be analogized as a porch on which students rest as they converse and interact with the members of their community, both far and near.
Data Collection

Data was collected for a period of eleven months, beginning May of 2011 and concluding in March of 2012. Prior to collecting data, I received the approval of the University of Dayton’s Institutional Review Board for ethical practice in research (Appendix A). Each participant was given an informed consent form to review and sign, and a second copy to keep for their records (Appendix B). A digital copy of the informed consent form was also shared with the participants. Prior to conducting the interviews with each participant, I explained the purpose of the study, outlined the goals for the use of the results, and offered a future copy of the completed study or an abstract of the study (Cresswell, 1998, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant selected a pseudonym to protect their anonymity in the final presentation of the data and all of the Facebook communications between the participants and I were deleted at the completion of the study.

The initial phase of data collection took place in the form of face-to-face interviews with each participant and was recorded using a digital audio recording device (Appendix C). These interviews were conducted in a variety of campus coffee shops as well as off-campus restaurants and cafes. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the interviews and I paid for this service. The transcriptionist destroyed all files following transcription in an effort to ensure anonymity of the participants.

Following the transcription, I coded the files for themes using “theoretically sensitive” criteria (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 46). I used these themes to inform the following stages of the research practice. In May, most of the participants left campus for the summer. I created an anonymous and impersonal user account on Facebook. The
photo identifier of this account was a University of Dayton, “UD,” logo, and I created an imaginary user name and identity. I friend requested each student and used this account to observe their use of Facebook throughout the summer months. During this time, I emailed each student pertinent questions related to their use. Some examples are:

- I see from your pictures that you travelled to another state to visit your roommate in Florida. Did you arrange that visit here on Facebook? Did other students join you?
- Your relationship status has changed from “In a relationship” to “single.” What happened here? Did you and your boyfriend break up?
- I haven’t seen you on Facebook in a few weeks. What have you been doing? Are you using Facebook in a way that I can’t see you, or have you simply not been online?

The student participants and I communicated via Facebook email over the summer months. Each student was asked to engage in reflective, textual conversations regarding their experience of staying connected with fellow students during the months that they were not on campus. Throughout the duration of this study, I did not post on the participants’ Walls. Rather, I sent them private email messages permitting me to be an undetected observer of their online activities.

Students were asked a unique set of questions in our inbox communications as these questions pertained to the contents of their Walls and their individual plans for summer. Some students enjoyed the pen pal type of relationship and took advantage of the opportunity to talk with me in this context about a large variety of subjects. Other students kept their answers to my questions short and concise. Therefore, there was far
greater volume of data on some students than on others. The email contents were saved and subjected to thematic coding similar to the transcribed interviews.

The final phase of this study involved a second face-to-face interview with each participant when they returned to campus sometime between September and October of 2011 (Appendix D). These interviews were again recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic content. A non-disclosure agreement was signed by the professional transcriptionist, and all files were deleted following transcription.

Observation of Facebook continued at this time as I noted changes in the frequency and type of Facebook use following a return to campus. Throughout the summer, students used Facebook in a spotty fashion as many of them had jobs or other engagements that kept them from posting as regularly as they do during the school year. Once they returned to campus, their use increased significantly, perhaps in part due to a return to more scholastic work and time spent on a laptop or other computer. Following the second set of interviews, I continued to observe student practices, but rarely inquired about their practices through inbox email. This was due to a concern on my part that I not interfere with time they were spending on their studies. My observations were also curtailed to a few logins per week as I was beginning the process of analyzing the data I had accumulated to date. In March of 2012, I deleted the dummy user on Facebook and discontinued observations of the participants.

Interviews

Interviews are a standard method of data collection in qualitative studies (Cresswell, 1998, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Simpson, 1995), and are useful for constructing understandings of “persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings,
motivations, claims, concerns and other entities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268). I conducted two sets of semi-structured interviews with each participant. The first interview took place on campus or surrounding areas, and included initial exchanges between the participant and myself setting the stage for the next few months of online interaction. This first interview served the purpose of helping the participants to understand the purpose of intent of the project, as well as establish a base set of understandings for my interpretation of their practices over the summer. In this first interview, the students informed me of their relationships statuses, their scheduled plans for the summer, and their own understandings of how much, how often and why they use Facebook (Appendix B).

The second interview was conducted following the participant’s return to campus in September through October. This second interview followed up on any conversations that took place in email over the summer, and enabled me to further explore themes that emerged from the first set of interviews (Appendix C). The interviews and the inbox email communications provided me with information and details that enabled me to convey the lived experience of each participant.

**Researcher Observation**

Netographic observation techniques limit the type and degree of observation that I can undertake in this study (Kozinets, 2010). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985):

The observer may act in either a participant or a nonparticipant mode; in the former instance, the observer has but one role to play, that of observer, but in the latter he or she must play two roles simultaneously, that of
observer and that of a legitimate and committed member of the group. (p. 274)

For the duration of this study, I maintained two separate identities on Facebook. One was my own personal identity, using an account that I have used regularly for the past three years. This account was not visible to the participants. It was my own account where I interacted with friends, family, and colleagues on Facebook. This account was not used for the purpose of the study but served to provide me with the experience of immersion in online life that the students are experiencing on Facebook. This was intended to permit me to develop a holistic and reflexive practice of data collection as advocated by Geertz (1973) and Clifford and Marcus (1986).

The second account was an anonymous account geared solely to communicating with the study participants – no one other than the participants was able to see the activities or content of this account. The privacy settings on this account were set to “friends only” which permitted only the study’s participants to view this account. I did not write on the Wall of this account and I did not post videos, photos, or links to any other external content. This account was purely for observational purposes.

It is my intended goal as the researcher was to limit my presence in the online lives of the participants. I used Facebook’s private email feature to communicate with each participant about his or her activities on Facebook. The participants were not able to see one another’s Walls, or my communication with the other participants, unless if they were friends prior to the beginning of the study, and were invited to do so. As such, other than being a friend listed in the list of friends for each participant, my active presence in
their Facebook worlds was non-existent. Table 3 provides a list of differences in privacy and visibility between my two accounts (Table 3).
### Table 3

*Privacy Settings and Viewable Aspects of Two Researcher Facebook Accounts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Profile picture: Image of self – visible to everyone (public)</td>
<td>• Profile picture: University of Dayton logo – visible to everyone (public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Photos, videos and wall posts: Visible by friends only</td>
<td>• Photos, videos and wall posts: None visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Friend list: Visible by friends only</td>
<td>• Friend list: None visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal information: Visible by friends only</td>
<td>• Personal information: None visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationship status: Visible by friends only</td>
<td>• Relationship status: None visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability for friends to post on wall: Friends only</td>
<td>• Ability for friends to post on wall: None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commenting permitted on posts: Friends only</td>
<td>• Commenting permitted on posts: None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained the difference between contrived and non-contrived observational settings:

Contrivance of a setting is also contrary to the principle that phenomena take their meanings from their contexts as much as from any individual characteristics they possess; a contrived context is not only artificial (militating against external validity, to put it in conventional terms), but literally alters the phenomenon being studied in fundamental ways. (p. 274)

The observational setting for this study was as uncontrived as possible. It was my goal to permit the participants to continue to engage in their Facebook worlds with as little interference from me as possible. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), it was my desire to have the phenomenon being studied unaltered and as free from observer influence as possible. This is not to claim that my presence was incapable of influencing their practices. Knowing that I was watching their Walls could very well have altered their degree of comfort with posting certain things.

Charmaz (2006) said, “one way of respecting our research participants is through trying to establish rapport with them” (p. 19). Students may not feel comfortable with faculty presence on their Facebook Walls. Given the understanding that faculty have knowledge and thus power that students do not, the power dynamic between faculty and students may stand in the way of full disclosure on the part of some students (Al-Harthi & Ginsburg, 2003; Freire, 1970). Thus, an effort at establishing rapport with students is to respect that the Facebook world they occupy is their own where the power of
knowledge as manifested by faculty is not conducive to fostering full-disclosure on their part. The goal of the observational portion of this study was to generate meaningful and reflective conversation between the researcher and the participants that contributes to the overall understanding of the experience of community. Meaningful and reflective conversation only occurs within contexts perceived and understood to be safe and comfortable by participants (Graeber, 2004).

**Data Analysis**

This study included a large amount of data. The initial interviews totaled 300 pages of transcribed text. Adding to this the inbox communications and the transcription of the concluding interview, made the analysis of this data challenging. Initially, I found a set of eleven ways that Facebook served to fulfill social needs of students in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college. These themes could be broken down into two clusters: community on-campus, and community off-campus. Additional themes emerged such as a concern with privacy and its effects on one’s experience of community, and a concern with navigating romantic relationships in a blended virtual and face-to-face context.

Data was analyzed and coded using Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory coding methodologies. Charmaz broke down grounded theory coding into a number of different approaches and levels: initial, focused, axial and theoretical (2006). In the initial phase of coding, Charmaz explained that the researcher takes textual data and asks what the study is a study of, what the data suggest, and what theoretical category the data indicate (2006). This is done quickly and should focus on action within the data. Charmaz suggested following Glaser (1978) by using gerunds to assist in the coding process.
Similarly, she advocated Glaser and Strauss’s (1999) *constant comparative methods* of initial data analysis whereby the researcher goes back and forth between interviewee responses and between interviews to compare categorical understandings.

During this phase of coding, I discovered that the initial question I posed as my research question was not a primary theme that emerged from the data I collected. Initially, I asked how college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? What I discovered was that students used Facebook for a variety of purposes, and that these purposes extended beyond fulfilling social needs in the creation and maintenance of community. Initial coding indicated that students use Facebook for a variety of purposes including: establishing and maintaining community, nurturing relationships, making public statements and protecting privacy, establishing a personal identity, building social capital, establishing cultural competency, coping, and critiquing.

Following the identification of these themes, the next stage of coding is focused coding. According to Charmaz (2006) “focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (p. 57). Charmaz said that by comparing data to data, and then comparing data to codes, researchers are able to develop the focused code. Following this, Charmaz suggested turning to Strauss’s (1987) concepts of axial coding, the purpose of which, as explained by Cresswell (1998) is “to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60).

I employed the themes that emerged from my initial coding strategy to assist in further sorting the data. For example, when looking for ways students used Facebook to
cope with experiences in their lives, I determined a series of incidents in my interactions with the students where students elicited help through Facebook. I used search terms in Microsoft Word that I understood to be useful in identifying significant portions of the data. One student had experienced sexual assault and told a story of how he reached out to a family member through the inbox chat function for support when struggling with this incident. Another student maintained daily contact in the virtual context of Facebook with his friends from childhood who did not attend the same college as him. This student was clear in his assertion that he did not find fit on the University of Dayton campus, and because of this, Facebook helped him overcome loneliness. There were times when deciding how to code and categorize a particular set of data was a challenge. When memes began to circulate on Facebook and the University of Dayton Meme page was established, and I noticed that students were commenting and reposting images from this page, I had to decide how to analyze this particular part of the Facebook experience. Because memes are generally communicative devices that are used to address social or political conditions, I decided that they were appropriately designated as a form of critique. I used these primary themes to help me categorize and account for bodies of data.

The final phase of data coding according to Charmaz (2006) is theoretical. Theoretical codes, if used appropriately, “may hone your work with a sharp analytic edge” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). The challenging part of this phase of coding is making the effort to not force the data into preconceived or trendy theoretical boxes. Grounded theory is contingent upon the process of the researcher permitting the data to yield and guide the theoretical analysis. As such, theories are expected to arise from the data and
guide the analysis only after the data has been coded appropriately. Approaching data with preconceived theoretical codes destroys the practice of emergent data analysis.

When analyzing the data in this study, I determined that I had accumulated two sets of information. The first set of data included student definitions and identification of community, and their experience of it on campus. In considering this set of data, I determined first how students understood community, and second how they identified community on campus. The second set of data was a series of examples of how students use Facebook. These themes are outlined above. Drawing upon these two thematic sets, I derived a number of theoretical lenses through which to view the data. These lenses include: Viewing Facebook as a virtual porch; Facebook’s role as a mediator of race, class and social capital; Facebook as a tool for student development; Facebook as a technological connector; Facebook as a presentation of self; and Facebook as a tool in emotional need fulfillment.

The theoretical themes in this study are interconnected. How students understand and determine community in their lives determines where they find the experience of community on campus. The experience of community on campus is impacted by their involvement with Facebook. Facebook serves as a tool in the lives of students, and thus impacts a variety of their developmental processes while they are in college. All of these themes are woven together to explain and elucidate the way that Facebook has impacted the experience of residential college students. The direct, first-hand accounts of how the study participants engaged with these theoretical domains facilitate trustworthiness in this research.
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the validity and reliability of a qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described three paths by which a researcher may provide trustworthiness in their qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

According to Glaser and Strauss (1999), “multiple comparison groups make the credibility of [a] theory considerably greater” (p. 231). In this study, I utilized the constant comparative method to analyze and categorize themes from conversations with multiple informants. Detailed, thick description of similarities and differences in perceptions, understandings, and experiences of participants conveys empirical truths (Geertz, 1973). I utilized the interview and email data to inform my understanding of the different perspectives each student brought to their interaction with Facebook.

Markham and Baym (2009) said, “trustworthy research is research that people think is true” (p. 179). They suggested that the epistemological struggle over whether or not truth is relative is “over” and that as researchers, it is time to move toward a project of “constructing and making” rather than “discovery and finding” (Markham & Baym, 2009, p. 178). In an effort to provide readers with truthful accounts, it is often beneficial to set aside the phenomenological problem of whether or not truth can ever be fully obtained, and move toward a project that attempts to present the reading audience with data that meets their standards of judgment.

Because this study is in large part Internet based, I followed Markham and Baym’s (2009) criteria for credible Internet based research. The first criterion of credibility is that the study is historically grounded. The second is that the work is
focused. The third is that it is practical to accomplish. Fourth, the researcher predicts
counter-arguments and makes the arguments for his or her case explicit. Lastly, Markham
and Baym claimed that good qualitative Internet research “makes its case by providing
resonant interpretive frames that help us understand both what is new about new
technologies and how research on new technology connects to other areas of inquiry”

In the process of data analysis in this study, I problematized core concepts and
listened closely to my participants. I constructed contexts of significance led by the
criteria indicated by my participants, taking note of boundaries that emerge and differ
between informants. According to Markham and Baym (2009), the most important aspect
of attending to the research context is “the need to immerse one’s self in a field over time
while seeking to understand its many contexts” (p. 184). I have been a member of
Facebook for three years. As such, I have tended to my own personal account therein and
managed relationships that span diverse geographic, cultural, and institutional contexts. I
have developed new friendships via this SNS and have rekindled old ones. In this
process, it is my belief that I am a mature and seasoned Facebook user. This personal and
practical knowledge facilitated the credibility of my study because it enabled me to feel
like a native Facebook user and offered me the freedom, comfort, and ease that come
with entering a research site that is familiar. That is, I experienced little culture shock
while engaging in this fieldwork.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the ability to transfer or apply findings to audiences other than
the ones studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, I generated thick description
such that future researchers may easily access the data and determine the transferability of findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed that with transferability, the “burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person wishing to make an application elsewhere” (p. 298). Because phenomenology informed this study, and the aim of phenomenology is to provide a description of the lived experience of individuals, the pursuit of transferability is not necessary in this context.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that a reflexive journal, kept by the researcher throughout the study, “has broad-ranging application to all four areas” (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) (p. 327). Along with a clear audit trail documenting how data are collected, coded, and analyzed, I kept a daily journal of my engagements with Facebook and the student participants. In this journal, I meditated and mused on the email correspondences between each informant and myself, and included commentaries that include thoughts, feelings, and observations about the exchanges. For a few topics, I started a blog to invite others outside of the study to converse with me on my musings. In this blog, I did not reveal any pertinent information related to student identities. Rather, I explored the topics of conversations I had online with a number of students with other interested parties. The topics explored in my blog included: privacy, reputations, hierarchical relationships, age set interests, the act of “checking in” on Facebook, making new friends on Facebook, escape or “exit” from society, and the role of pen and paper communication in a digital era. This blog served as an additional journal and a means to explore and deliberate interesting topics that arose during my research. It offered me the opportunity to examine themes that inductive coding had revealed, and to
further develop additional questions for my informants in our inbox email communications and final interview.

**Researcher Role and Bias**

Miller and Slater (2000), in their study of Trinidadian Internet culture and identity, concluded that studies of Internet media must be treated as “continuous and embedded in other social spaces” (p. 5). As with all qualitative research, the researcher in this study is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Therefore, biases, assumptions, perspectives, values, and understandings must be established and acknowledged prior to the onset of the study (Creswell, 1998, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The social and cultural context must be made clear, and the researcher’s role in such contexts must be outlined. In this study, I situate myself socially, emotionally, intellectually and culturally in an effort to make transparent my bias and usefulness as an instrument.

My initial experience as a Facebook researcher resulted from the secondary use of a data set compiled by the University of Dayton Career Services department, headed by Sisson and Wiley (2009). Through a survey administered on Survey Monkey, Sisson and Wiley explored the ways in which students view, use, and understand Facebook as an online social media device, and its subsequent relationship to employment following their graduation from college (2009). By drawing upon five questions in this survey, I employed a statistical analysis to establish the relationship between gender and honesty in presentation of self (Abney Korn, 2010). The results indicated that females, rather than males, were more likely to be dishonest in their presentation of self on Facebook (Abney Korn, 2010).
The data from the survey revealed that students post untrue information, join groups that do not accurately depict who the user is, exaggerate alcohol use, and misrepresent themselves to be funny. Females, according to this study, were more likely than males to misrepresent themselves on Facebook. Gilligan (1982) asserted that relationships are of primary importance to women in a manner that exceeds that of men. I concluded that it is plausible to speculate that the female students in the survey desired to participate in particular kinds of relationships and modified their practices on Facebook to foster their success (Abney Korn, 2010).

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s character Polonius tells his son Laertes, “This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man” (1602, p. 19). The female students in my previous study were able to manipulate the forum in which they presented themselves in order to present a desired or idealized image. These students admitted to being dishonest in their postings, pictures, activities, and involvements. These activities enabled them to think differently about themselves and to articulate a different version of themselves.

Foucault (1990) suggested that all philosophical activity is an effort “to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known” (p. 9). I am a divorced, 40-year-old female, part-time anthropology instructor and part-time doctoral student. I have three children who live with me at home. Throughout my divorce, I used Facebook as a social and emotional outlet to communicate with others outside of my home without affecting my children. Communicating on Facebook did not involve me crying in the telephone or leaving the house to meet up with friends elsewhere. The social networking site enabled me to
establish connections and share feelings with others as well as learn about the world outside of my own. I used Facebook to meet new people, to enrich ties with colleagues and existing friends, and to discuss and debate issues with likeminded and differently thinking people.

I have taught undergraduate students both online and face-to-face at a number of institutions of higher education in the Dayton, Ohio region for nearly 10 years. I have watched as the campus environment became more and more technologically focused, and as wireless Internet activity became ubiquitous. Teaching online offered me years of experience with communicating with undergraduate students in a textual environment. Discussion forum posts, written assignments, and email are the primary form of communication in distance education contexts. Because of this experience, I was competent at communicating effectively online with students regarding their feelings, thoughts, and concerns. As we developed a rapport throughout this study, I facilitated the process of communication by offering bits of my personal self – outside of my initial role as instructor – to the students in order to foster greater intimacy. I shared things I felt were appropriate for students to know and withheld information that I understood to be beyond their developmental ability to comprehend.

Jackson (1995) said, “anthropology is a form of experimentation and critique in which the anthropologist and his or her culture figure as focal subjects” (p. ix). In essence, my impulse to do this project is to understand something of myself. I am a Facebook user and a student, but also a parent and an instructor. I experience a sense of moving back and forth between my home community where I raise my children, and the campus environment where I teach and learn. I seek to establish feelings of belonging in
both places, and I use whatever means I can to understand how to do so. It is my belief that college students do this too. They move from their childhood homes to campus. They negotiate differing identities and seek belonging. College students spend their days discussing and debating with likeminded and differently thinking people (Boyer, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). They are like me, and yet, they are different.

Jackson (1995) claimed, “perhaps at no other time in history has the question of belonging seemed so urgent” (p. 1). He suggested that the idea of home is full of ambiguity. In his study of the experience of feeling at home in the world, Jackson pointed out that while we all long for belonging, “we often feel an equally strong need to uproot ourselves and cross the borders that conventionally divide us” (1995, p. 3). This is the essence of the college student condition. Students leave a place where they have belonged for 18 years, and forge a fresh start among peers. As a woman, I too have experienced a fresh start in the past two years. As a researcher, it is my hope that this experience assists and informs my ability to engage students in meaningful conversations, and to elicit understandings of commonalities in the human condition.

**Conclusion**

Through a combination of in-depth, face-to-face interviews and online correspondences and observations, this study endeavors to present a detailed account of the experience of community for residential college students as they engage with Facebook. This chapter addressed the research methodology for this study, and outlined the research design, participants, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and researcher role and bias.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

In this section, I present the findings from my research. The question guiding this research was: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? In the process of collecting data, it became apparent that students used Facebook to foster and maintain community, but that this was not their primary use. They also used it to nurture relationships, to make public statements and protect privacy, to establish a personal identity, to build social capital, to establish cultural competency, to cope, and to critique.

This led me to reformulate my question to ask how college students use Facebook in college? Likewise, while I attempted to generate a mutually agreed upon definition and characterization of community, I discovered the students prompted an additional line of inquiry. I began to ask: What is the nature of community on the University of Dayton campus, and how do students experience it? The data that resulted from this study did not establish direct causal relationships between student use of Facebook and a creation or modification of community on campus. Facebook appeared to be a tool that students used to facilitate activities that they ordinarily undertake in face-to-face contexts. Facebook was a means by which they organized campus social activities, communicated with
classmates, and critiqued their campus community. It was not unimportant in their lives, yet it did not appear to drastically alter their experience of campus community.

In this chapter, I will present my findings. I will begin by exploring the qualities and characteristics of community on the University of Dayton campus, and how students experience it. Second, I will provide data to illustrate how and to what end students use Facebook while in college. Because my focus while collecting data was on community, there will be linkages between the two questions as I present the data. For example, I will explain how students use Facebook to organize their groups and parties on campus. This act facilitates community, but does not create it, nor maintain it. It is simply a tool employed toward a desired goal.

I organize my findings in alignment with my data collection strategies. The first topic I addressed when conducting research was community. I generated a mutually understood definition or characterization of community between the students and myself. In order to study Facebook and its effects on community, I had to be clear about what students meant when I asked them questions pertaining to their experiences. Following this process, I began to collect information on their experience of community on campus. Throughout the duration of the study, I observed how they used Facebook and inquired about what kinds of concerns and understandings they had about it. Lastly, I gathered information about how it appeared to have affected or impacted their experiences on campus.

Community

When I began my research, I asked each of the student participants how they understood community, and how they would describe it when they experienced it. Most
of the students provided adjectives that illustrated their understanding of community. For example, Alfred, a white, heterosexual, male, third-year student, provided the most basic, geographic definition of community. He said community is, “A group of people…that partake in the same activities and live in the same area.” He went on to explain that community occurs when people help one another out. Alfred believed that this was common at the University of Dayton, and that part of this was a result of the close proximity in which the students reside with one another.

Likewise, Emma, a white, heterosexual, female, second-year student, felt very positive about community and its effect on her life. She likened it to a place where you could be free to be yourself and where harsh judgments are rare:

> I think it’s [community] something that’s extremely necessary and whether it be a group of people or a location that makes you feel like you can be the most who you really are. Yeah, you can say the things you want to say and not worry about being penalized for anything.

Rachel, a white, heterosexual, female, first-year student, and Desmond, a white, heterosexual, male, second-year student, both articulated a relationship between politeness and making others happy within community. Rachel said, “community is working and living together in a way where you try to make everyone happy…and/or just to be really nice.” They each explained that friendliness and openness fostered community any time that they had previously experienced it. Jen, an Asian, heterosexual, female, first-year, International student explained that her idea of community is “support and loyalty” and a form of “solidarity and conformity with others.” She elaborated that a
geographic commitment to place might foster community, but that it was not essential.

She said:

- I think you could experience community with people you only see a few days out of a year, if that happens frequently enough for you to establish a close form of social rapport with them. After a while you'd begin to have shared memories as well as a shared history, and that probably lends itself to the existence of community.

Lorraine, a white, heterosexual, female, second-year student, shared Jen’s belief that community is a shared sense of feeling welcome and like you belong. She agreed with Jen that community is not geographic, but rather based on similarities of interest and attitude:

- I think it means something different to everyone. I can feel welcome without having lots of similarities. But I also have an example where similarities have brought me and another person together. When I worked at that camp for two weeks this summer another girl from UD was doing the internship along with me, but I had never met her before. We instantly became good friends, because we had so many interests and similarities, it was great!

Lauren, a white, heterosexual, female, first-year student explained the inclusiveness of community. She said that community feels like “an all around togetherness type thing” and that it is “open to anybody.” When asked about how she understood small group dynamics in relation to community, she appeared to think this took away from an overall experience of community when “everybody’s very open to
including everyone.” This comment is interesting to consider in relation to the inevitable clashes and conflicts that occur within communities.

Community can unite and comfort those who experience it, but it can also be invasive and somewhat troubling, according to Jack, a white, homosexual, male, first-year student. When articulating how he understood community, Jack recalled the gossipy mechanisms of village life:

I just think of a community as like this really old, feudal village, where it’s people all doing their thing… I guess, you see them every day or they see you almost every day. And, you have constant interactions that are always face-to-face. And then you have the rumor mill that goes with it, all that stuff, it’s all part of the community ‘cause…everyone knows everyone. Everyone’s got finger in everyone else’s pie.

Contrasting Jack’s explanation of community life with Lauren’s perception of unlimited acceptance and inclusion made me think of how communities employ social control to maintain and monitor cohesiveness within their ranks. Lauren described an ideal community, while Jack illustrated his understanding of community in practice.

Another way of differentiating between levels of community attachment and intimacy is to consider the degrees to which one might experience it. Dick, a white, heterosexual, male, second-year, commuter student, differentiated between a “close-knit” community and one that is a little “looser.” When asked for his definition, he replied:

Yeah, I mean, that’s kind of hard ‘cause it’s kind of more of a feeling you have with people rather than looking from the outside and saying, “That’s a community.” I don’t know. Just uh, for me, I guess it would be a group
of people I hang out with, or I’m around pretty consistently, and that I actually like and enjoy. That’s an example of a really close-knit community. For a little looser, I guess you could say like a group of people I’m around a lot; we share, at least loosely, a common goal.

Dick distinguished between levels of intimacy among the people with whom he may consider himself to be in community. His description called attention to the possibility that an individual may be capable of participating in multiple communities at the same time. Deanna, a multi-racial, heterosexual, female, third-year student, professed this exact sentiment. She claimed to have experienced it at the University of Dayton and in Africa:

Community I would say is an inter-twined web of relationships between those that are involved with each other on usual occasions. To describe it more specifically community can be anywhere and in multiple environments. Community can be in the neighborhood you live or it could be in the church that you attend…I would definitely say community could be found almost anywhere, as long as there are people that you care about. Even if you went out of the country you could formulate your own, like I did when I went to Africa. I began to form relationships with people around me, not only the family I stayed with but others around the town. It gave me a sense of community being able to get to know others and form relationships with people that I lived and worked with.

Deanna’s description indicated that human investment in community may not be exclusive to one community at a time. Many of the student participants in this study
suggested that they employed Facebook toward the end of nurturing relationships and communities both on campus and off. They also intimated that they did not view their lives and their investment in others as mutually exclusive and linear, but rather as cyclic and multi-pronged. That is, the student respondents showed that their commitment to community was not exclusive to the University of Dayton, and did not preclude pre-existing communities to which they belonged prior to coming to campus.

Following the identification of characteristics and qualities of community on the part of students, I began to explore the way students understood and saw these characteristics manifested on campus. I wanted to know how students experienced community, and the nature of this community. In order to understand how Facebook is used by students, I needed to determine the exact nature of the community they were maintaining or fostering, and develop cultural competency in understanding the symbols, icons, and values of this community.

Community on Campus

Qualities and Characteristics

Desmond was extremely happy with his experience of community on the University of Dayton campus. He explained what he saw as evidence of community on campus:

I feel like community’s very important to me. It’s a big part of why I love UD so much. When I came here for orientation, I realized how like friendly everybody was. And, you know, I thought that was really cool, and I decided to come here, and then I felt like there’s been a big community within UD because more people I recognize, then the
friendlier it seems to be. When I’m walkin’ to class, I see somebody I know, say “hi,” then I might meet more people. So, I see people I know every day. And, I think the UD community kind of consists of friendship and just being nice to other people. ‘Cause, I mean, I see people holding doors so many times. That’s something you wouldn’t normally see, especially like at Ohio State. Everybody’s in a hurry there, and it’s a big deal. I think UD is a relaxed community. Everybody gets along and everybody’s really polite.

Desmond’s description provided me with an understanding of what he perceived as evidence of community on the University of Dayton campus. Polite behaviors, friendly gestures, and a general disposition of acceptance were all indicators of the possibility for community for Desmond. From his perspective, a civil environment where members treat one another with politeness is the foundation of community on campus. This politeness creates a possibility for belonging, according to Natalie:

I think, for me, at least, that’s kind of what makes the UD community, it’s just not necessarily that you know everyone, but that you feel like if you really wanted to, you could. You don’t feel like, “Oh, I could never talk to that person.” There is a potential for belonging. And you can take that to whatever extent that you want. Like, you can get involved in everything and know all of these people, and do that stuff. For example, there are clubs that I’m not involved in but that, like I said, my friend’s on rescue squad, that or like one of my friends is a ref, I’ve gone and hung out with her and her referee friends, and it hasn’t been uncomfortable…Yeah, they
might have some inside jokes, and that’s something that I don’t understand, or they have that shared experience of doing this stuff together, but that I can still feel like not totally, socially awkward in that situation.

The potential to fit in and the lack of social awkwardness are appealing to Natalie. The shared disposition or understanding of potential for membership even among smaller, more intimate groups within the larger group is a part of the nature of the University of Dayton community. In some environments, Natalie has felt as if she did not have what is required to gain access to a feeling of belonging. This experience was rare for her on campus.

Other students had a harder time accessing the experience of belonging and were dissatisfied with the quality and characteristics of some aspects of the University of Dayton campus community. Dick is a commuter student who is close to his childhood friends. He savors his time with them when they return to town to visit their families. As a commuter student, Dick’s experience of community on the University of Dayton campus is distinctly different from other students partly because he does not reside on campus. While he is involved in some club or student organization activities, he is not immersed in the campus social culture. Over the summer, Dick explained that he was indifferent about returning to the campus in the fall, and that he is not pleased with the culture of the campus:

I'm indifferent to going back to UD. I'd rather be out of school I think. I feel like I can use the time learning more useful things outside of school than I can in it. To answer the other part, the culture of the school only
pushes me away. Everyone seems nice though, it's simply a group character that the community takes on that turns me off. Other than that, I don't feel a strong sense of belonging to any community. Without a doubt, my most frequented negative emotion is loneliness, but it's not horrible, simply a sacrifice for avoiding the other pains caused by self-deceit.

Commuting does make a sense of community more difficult without a doubt. I don't see people as often outside of class as everyone else does. However, I know a number of people who sacrificed character for convention in order to fit in here. Whether that's good or bad, I hope it's good for them.

I asked Dick what he meant by a “sacrifice of character for convention.” He responded that he had a problem with the “collective personality” of the University of Dayton. He explained it thusly:

The collective personality of UD is centered around drinking/partying. UD students are bonded together by The Ghetto. Without The Ghetto, UD would be a very different school. The primary method of fun for the student body as a whole is drinking/partying. It's a *bro* school. When kids come to UD I think that many of them sacrifice quite a bit of themselves to fit in. In a sense they adopt the personality of the school as opposed to creating or developing their own sense of self. I'm not saying if this is a good or bad thing, who am I to know? It used to make me a lot more uncomfortable than it does now, but UD is REALLY lacking in diversity of race and personality. Freshman year especially it felt like everyone was
the exactly same, and I felt very far away from home (even though I came from just a few miles down the road). I think that UD does have a strong sense of community. It's the strongest community I can recall witnessing (at least on this large of a scale). I simply don't feel much a part of it. To be honest, I'm embarrassed when I tell people I go there.

Dick called the University of Dayton a bro school. The World News Team Media Blog, conducted a survey to determine the top 40 such schools in the nation, however, the University of Dayton was not mentioned on this list. From Dick’s description of the University of Dayton, it could be considered a bro school, however, Dick was an outlier in this study. As a commuter student, he did not share in the weekend celebrations and activities on campus. It is possible that this contributed to his dislike of the school and its culture. Statistically, Dick’s observations about diversity on the campus are accurate as the majority of students are white. Until the fall of 2011, when the University began an even more aggressive campaign to court International students from Asia and Saudi Arabia, it was very homogenous. Dick grew up in a part of Dayton that is very diverse. His best friends from high school were of Vietnamese, Korean, and African decent. As Dick observed, the university’s student population does not mirror the surrounding communities, and as an urban campus, this is very noticeable on the fringes of the campus, where commuter students enter and exit daily to attend classes.

The borders or fringes where commuter students access campus create a limitation of space. Jen described the campus community as “safe” and “sheltered.” As an International student who has traveled extensively, she remarked on how the campus resembled a “bubble”:
I think that the University of Dayton is a safe and sheltered place. It is like a bubble. I think there are many communities within the University. There is not ONE community on this campus. The International community is one of these communities. There is a feeling of community here…but it is separated into many different smaller groups.

Jen’s comments about the campus being a “bubble” prompted me to investigate the physical aspects of the campus. In a survey of the physical campus, it is clear that students inhabit particular spaces with clearly defined boundaries. When asked about the nearby Second Street Market or the Trolley Stop Bar just blocks from campus, many of the students did not know what these popular or long-established Dayton venues were. Their understanding of what Dayton is and of whom it is composed is limited and constrained by the geographic boundaries of the campus. Students have community that is geographically constructed, but only with their fellow students, some faculty, and some staff. The incidents of interaction with people without University of Dayton institutional affiliation within the Dayton area are few and far between.

Sources, Causes, and Manifestations

The institution sets the parameters and perimeters for “on campus” and “off campus” community, but individuals make the experience of community possible, according to Hilary. When asked whether she believed that the institution fostered a feeling of community on campus, Hillary, a multi-racial, asexual, female, third-year student explained:

Structurally UD can’t really do much to create community. The staff, students, professors…they all try to be friendly and helpful. I have found
the staff to be particularly helpful and friendly. Individuals are really responsible for this, not the institution.

From Hillary’s perspective, it is a collection of individuals with a particular disposition of friendliness and helpfulness, not necessarily a structural or institutional quality that makes the University of Dayton community strong and cohesive. Repeatedly, Hillary expressed her joy at being a University of Dayton student. She said she felt that she belonged and that she has the best friends. As an asexual, multi-racial student in a very heterosexual, white world, she managed to maintain this sense of comfort and belonging.

I love UD. I can’t imagine being anywhere else. I have really good friends. This summer it was weird when some of them weren’t here. My friends are great. I love my classes. It is a real community feeling. I have felt like an outsider before, which makes sense. Being multiracial and asexual makes it a little harder to fit in. But I have been fortunate to have a great circle of friends who have been cool with it. This is only occasional though. If it comes up, it is a moment where I acknowledge my status. But then it passes.

Hilary is different from many others on campus because she maintains a status that is unlike the majority of other students. However, she managed to emphasize her shared attributes and dispositions through participation in campus groups and academic activities. In addition, Hilary demonstrated cultural mastery of shared myths, symbols and other artifacts of the campus culture.
Understanding and being able to reference the shared myths explaining the origin of the names of the student neighborhoods, and identification with a neighborhood as your campus home, are a significant part of building cultural capital and establishing membership on campus. There are two main student neighborhoods at the University of Dayton. Students call the first The Ghetto, and it is located on the southern edge of the campus. At one time, these streets were run down and many of the homes were in disrepair. At that time, students inhabited the homes that were owned by private owners. The upper-middle class community to the South that borders the campus refers to this area as the UD Ghetto. This term is used and celebrated by students on campus. If one lives in The Ghetto, one identifies with that subset of the University of Dayton community.

Likewise, students call the student neighborhood to the North and West of the campus, The Darkside. There are a number of origin myths associated with this neighborhood name. One claims that at one time, there were no street lamps on the streets making it dark. Another story ties the name to the nearby graveyard. Other stories align the darkness of that neighborhood to the surrounding non-university neighborhoods, which unlike the one that borders The Ghetto, are inhabited by a large African-American population. Each of these myths binds students together in a collective understanding and a collective language or vocabulary that is unique and special to them as students. Deanna cites The Ghetto as a prime example of physical community:

When I think of community my first instinct is to think of the university’s student neighborhood, better known as The Ghetto. In The Ghetto people can relate very closely because we attend classes together, we live in close
proximity, and on the weekends we attend each other’s parties. I wouldn't say everyone knows everyone, but I would never have a problem with helping one of my fellow community members out.

There are aspects of campus life that extend beyond shared myths and individuals with personal dispositions that foster the feeling of community on campus. Some of these aspects are intentional in their creation. For example, Lorraine is living in a Marianist student house. Being that the University of Dayton is a Catholic institution that was founded by the Marianist order, there are a few optional residences that emphasize and celebrate the religious aspect of campus life. The students who live in this house are required to pray together three times a week and to dine together three times per week. They share a certain amount of household duties and intentionally strive to foster community in their household. Lorraine is attracted to these programs and explained that the University of Dayton offers other programs that are similar for students to participate in off of campus:

UDSAP or University of Dayton Summer Appalachia Program has been going on for like 44 years or something like that. UD owns a house there...that is pretty simple. There is no bathroom so the kids have to use an outhouse and shower using a rainwater shower that the ETHOS kids made this past year. They run 3 programs in the community and learn to live in community and live simply. The 3 days I was there I didn't shower once...ha-ha we went swimming, jumped of this 30-foot cliff into the water, went to a parade and just hung out with all the people there. I feel like one night we had about 80 people at the house for dinner: the 14
members of this year’s group, all the visitors and residents from the neighborhood. It is an amazing program! I feel like I learned so much and I was only there for a few days.

The feeling and experience that Lorraine described above is akin to Turner’s (1969) *communitas*. Turner coined the term to describe the emotions that ritual participants experience when removed from their everyday lives, and placed into special circumstances with others who are sharing the experience. This feeling occurs when in unusual and markedly different circumstances outside of daily life. While Lorraine’s experience of intense community was special in the above-described circumstance, it is not something that she would experience every day on campus. In other words, what Lorraine spoke of is not a typical University of Dayton student experience, but is something that is available at particular times and places if a student chooses to engage or participate. By choosing to live in the Marianist student house that is an intentional experience in communal living, Lorriane is affording more opportunities to experience her desired goal of living in community.

Weekends are somewhat special times on campus. Weekends offer experiences for students that are different than weekdays when studying and other scholastic activities claim a significant part of their time. Organizations and clubs on the campus foster student identification with the institution beyond it simply being their credentialing institution. As Hillary indicated above, her membership in the band has formed a large part of her campus identity. Weekend parties in the residential neighborhoods are central to the University of Dayton social life. Often when students are in their first year in
school, they have to figure out how to engage as newcomers with the party culture on campus. Hillary shared a tale of her experience:

When I first got to UD, I was just into school and didn’t like the party scene at all. I had community still, but I didn’t go to parties. I was involved with the music department. Now my friends and I are really into the weekend party scene. So, I can see that some students would feel like they were less enthusiastic about UD when they are new to campus. After being here a couple of years, I think you become so involved. The weekend activities are a huge part of it. There is a huge difference between my sophomore year and now. When I was new to campus, I could go on Facebook and see if my band friends were having a party. I never had to walk up to a closed party and try to get in. I only went to ones that I was invited to. Actually, I’ve never been to an open party. The band has a lot of closed parties, and there are a lot of us in band, so we HAVE to make the parties closed or else we can’t fit people into our space. It’s really tricky. Freshmen will literally wander the Ghetto and walk up to houses and try to get into parties. I have had been on the duty to work at the entrance before and I ask people if they know someone in the party. If they say they know, say, “Sara” well, that’s a really common name, so then I tell them they need to leave. It is really hard. I don’t know how Freshmen do that. You literally have to be like, “NO. You can’t come into this party.” It’s complicated. I know that band is this way. I don’t know if
all other small groups are like that. But you have to know someone who is in an organization in order to get into their parties.

The exclusive nature of these parties does not limit the number of parties that take place on campus. Likewise, there are rarely reported incidents of altercations over who can and cannot access a party. There are cultural codes that communicate membership beyond knowing someone who is hosting the party. For example, one student told me a story of how he was helping to host a party at his fraternity house. A number of people from his former high school who did not attend the University of Dayton approached the party and attempted to enter. The student saw the guests telling the person at the door that they knew him. Because these former classmates had been unkind to him in high school, he pretended that he didn’t see them and walked away. They did not gain entrance to the party. When asked what it was that gave them away to the student at the door, he replied, “Oh, they had Corona. Everyone at UD knows you NEVER bring Corona to a UD party! It’s strictly Beast or Natty Lite for us!”

The identification with particular brands of beer that are signature drinks of University of Dayton students, as well as identification with student neighborhood culture are means by which students assert their cultural competency in campus community. As in all cultures, there are symbols and artifacts that cement members’ identification with that culture. For example, the Red Scare t-shirt is a cultural icon employed by students at sporting events to show pride in their school. There is a Red Scare Facebook page that promotes the student organization and elicits support for its community and philanthropic endeavors. Students share an understanding of these unique referents and use this understanding to support and augment their experience of community on campus.
According to Rachel, part of being in community is following particular, agreed upon paths to deal with conflict. She has witnessed successful resolutions of conflict at UD:

I’ve seen that here in classrooms and especially where I live because we were constantly trying to make it homey for everyone. So, whenever we had a problem, we’d always talk about it, call either the CA or the RA, and immediately meet about it and discuss the problem, and have it solved.

And, there really wasn’t much of that because everyone was pretty easy to deal with.

The students reported that small groups, like the floor of a residence hall, housemates in The Ghetto, or clubs are easy to navigate when conflict arises. They are also tighter knit than the campus as a whole. Deanna describes her experience of community in a small group on campus as being similar to family:

I guess I would describe it as like a family. Like, I would say within communities there are smaller communities. I’d say my community of basketball friends or whatever, we’re really, really close. So, we’ll see each other every weekend, and we’ll take pictures, and we’ll tag each other or something. And, even in UD, as a community, I feel like I, if I don’t know everybody, then I’ve at least seen everybody. I might say to someone, “You look familiar ‘cause I’ve seen you on campus or something.” But I don’t think I feel like the family aspect is there for all of UD, but like in the smaller communities or smaller branches of UD.

Students differentiate between a global or large-scale campus culture and miniature or small-scale cultures within groups. Small-scale groups facilitate belonging
and a sense of camaraderie more easily than does the campus as a whole. While all of the students in this study had mastered the competency and understanding of the majority of the markers, symbols and characteristics of campus culture, their experiences and manifestations of this culture varied from student to student.

Facebook

Following my investigation into student understanding and definition of community, and what community on campus looked and felt like for students, I began to observe and inquire as to their use of Facebook in relation to their campus lives. As indicated above, it became apparent that students used Facebook to foster and maintain community on campus, but that this was not their primary use. They also used it to nurture relationships, to make public statements and protect privacy, to establish a personal identity, to build social capital, to establish cultural competency, to cope, and to critique. I will now examine the ways that I witnessed students using Facebook during the duration of this study.

Foster and Maintain Community

All of the students in this study valued community and believed its primary locus was in face-to-face relationships. The students felt that Facebook was an artificial or alternative version of reality that couldn’t replace face-to-face engagement with others. Jack explained his understanding of this:

It’s like you, me, and the world are having a discussion. Unless it’s like through private messages or whatever, then it’s just like, I don’t know, if you really have the decency to say something, you say it in person or in a
letter, on the phone, or I don’t, in an email, you don’t say it like to your Facebook. Facebook’s like artificial.

Each student had something similar to say about Facebook in relation to its comparison to real time, face-to-face communication. They did not necessarily credit Facebook with destroying or damaging their experience of community, but they were well aware of the fact that it could never replace what they had in person on their campus. Some students laughed at the obsession that they saw other students manifest related to technology in their lives. Desmond told me about a guy he knew from high school:

I have a buddy back home who’s like a constant Facebook kind of guy. Like, I don’t know, it just makes me laugh because I’m not connected to Facebook whatsoever. And, I think it’s cool, but I don’t know why people get so attached. It’s like people with cell phones, like if they lose their cell phone for like a day, they’re like, “I can’t function. I don’t know what I’m gonna do. I can’t text anybody.” I’m like, “It’s okay. There’re people in the world who actually go without Facebook, believe it or not.”

However disdainful of others’ obsessive behavior toward Facebook he may be, Desmond did not entirely reject it as a communicative device. This is because not being on Facebook is crippling for students who elect not to participate. Lorraine explained this with a story about a missed party invitation:

Well, just like an example, the other day, I went on this Lighthouse retreat here on campus, so there are probably like 40 some of us on that one retreat this spring. And I asked this girl if she was going to this other girl’s party, it was like the last one that we could all to together. And, she was
like, “Oh, I didn’t hear about it,” and kind of got mad. And, then I realized she doesn’t have Facebook. So, that’s why she didn’t hear about it. But, I was like, “Oh,” like I didn’t even realize, you know. But, I guess, so she kind of misses out on some of that stuff.

Lived experience is a priority for the students in this study. The majority of student participants expressed a sense of belonging on campus. As such, rejecting Facebook as a tool for communication and connectivity can be prohibitive to social success. Facebook augments the sense of belonging that students experience. Students identify with the institution and the culture that exists there. Desmond told me how he felt about the University of Dayton in comparison to his hometown:

> I feel that I belong with my UD friends more because I actually live with them and see them all the time. I only see my old friends during the summer and sometimes not even then. My friends at UD share more similarities with me then my old friends did too.

Lorraine shared a similar sentiment:

> A lot of my good friends from home haven't really grown much since high school and are what most would call "high drama" and I am just not like that and it stresses me out to be around them. I feel more like myself and more carefree at Dayton or with Dayton people. I dealt with it in high school, but going away to school made me realize I don't have to have people like that in my life and I get to choose how I spend my time. I love my home friends and they have given me a lot of good memories, but I feel they don't let me just be me without making me feel bad.
This sense of belonging is fostered by intense involvement with campus based activities, group membership, investment in academic and social pursuits, and the weekend parties hosted on porches and in back yards of student residences at the University of Dayton. These factors are neither created nor destroyed by Facebook. Shared experiences are celebrated on Facebook. The University of Dayton Meme page, for example, included a number of memes that referenced one of the student dining halls, homework assignments, statues that were located on campus, and campus-wide celebrations like Saint Patrick’s Day. These cultural elements showcased in meme format became signifiers and symbols that reified community and a sense of belonging to it.

Another way students used Facebook – or perhaps better put – didn’t use Facebook is in exploring controversial issues like race or sexual orientation. In a conversation late in the duration of my research, Deanna explained to me how she chose not to use Facebook to engage in cultural critique of racism because of the negative effects it would have on her own personal community:

Racism exists and I'm sure it won't change until people want it to or at least acknowledge its existence. Anyhow I haven't seen many racist things on Facebook other than people protecting their race. Meaning with the recent uproar from the Trayvon Martin case people feel like they have to take the side of their own race. For instance, my black friends will post pictures of people with their Hoods up on their hoodies and they will even post statuses saying to pray for the justice for Trayvon and the family that lost their son. Then my white friends will post things like "It happens to us too" or pictures depicting a time when blacks did something hateful to
white people. They may go as far to insinuate, "reverse racism". I mostly stay away from posting things on Facebook because I know it’s a sensitive subject, in which my friends of all cultures would feud over.

Deanna valued her friends from all races, ethnicities, and class backgrounds. By choosing to not engage in controversial or touchy conversations or to not post about race related issues, she was attempting to foster community and lessen conflict online. This is a reactive or self-censoring manner in which Facebook is employed as a tool to facilitate pleasant campus based life and community experiences for students. By emphasizing connectedness or similarities, and minimizing differences, students can augment and foster a greater sense of community, camaraderie, and unity on campus, as well as with the other people they connect with through Facebook.

**Nurture Existing Relationships**

Students come to campus with a lived history from their past. Residential campuses like the University of Dayton provide an opportunity for students to live on campus while they are learning, and to invest in the experience of community among their peers, faculty and staff. This provides them with an opportunity to establish a new community and a new sense of belonging. However, this does not mean that students will always leave behind all of their other connections and experiences of community from their past.

**Family and close friends.** Having your parents on Facebook helps students stay connected with them. Emma explained that she chats with her parents nearly every day. However, this sometimes poses challenges as she and her boyfriend also communicate on
Facebook and their presence causes her to censor some of her posts. She said, “Now that both of our parents are on Facebook, they like to tease us anytime we do say anything flirty, so we tend not to say anything now.”

Lauren’s parents were getting a divorce during her first year in college. When asked what use she had for Facebook, she indicated that sometimes it was a place where she and her sister could connect and talk with discretion about their feelings regarding the divorce situation in their household back home. For Lauren, being away at college was a break from some difficult family tensions, but she could maintain and nurture her relationship with her sister via Facebook while she was in school. Close friends from childhood also make up a large contingent of the people that college students communicate with on Facebook. Desmond said he has “about five really good friends from back home that I keep in constant touch with.” Likewise, Natalie and her best friend from childhood, Kyla, communicated frequently on her wall. They did this so much that I was prompted to ask Natalie who Kyla was. I asked, “So I see here that Kyla posts a lot on your wall. At one point, you said, ‘it looks like you are my only friend.’” Natalie responded:

She and I met in kindergarten and have been best friends pretty much ever since. We have lived in the same city as well as apart, now she goes to UC so we talk a lot over Facebook and text. But we have been extremely close since kindergarten, we did all the same things in high school and now we even have very similar majors/minors.

The data in this study revealed that students conceive of their lives as enmeshed and intertwined rather than linear. They see their childhood friendships and family
relations as additions to their current lives on campus. As such, Facebook enables them to maintain connectivity and to continue to refine these relationships at a distance. Many of the students in this study indicated that the nice thing about Facebook was the ease with which they could simply pop onto the wall of a friend or family member and leave a quick note or post a video or photo and then leave and return to the work of learning. Facebook afforded them the opportunity to reduce the time commitment that comes with a telephone call, and permitted them an outlet in which to maintain connectivity with these important relationships from their past, thus maximizing their home community connections without detracting from investing their time in campus activities.

**Romantic relationships.** Among the most pressing and important relationships that students expend effort to sustain and maintain while away at college is the romantic relationship. A number of the participants in this study had romantic relationships prior to coming to campus. Others had recently broken up with their former partners. Facebook played a significant role in these relationships.

Fiske (2009) suggested that Facebook is simply a dating service and that the Facebook status has become the first place that someone goes to notify the world of a change in his or her relationship. The status options Facebook provides to communicate what type of relationship one is in include: Single, In a relationship, Engaged, Married, It’s complicated, In an open relationship, Widowed, and Divorced. The most recently added options are, In a civil union and In a domestic partnership (Bosker, 2011).

**Status: “In a Relationship.”** The relationship status on Facebook communicates whether or not a user is in a relationship. If a user claims to be in a relationship with someone – through the act of linking your profile to his or hers as “In a Relationship
with” – two users are visually connected on Facebook. This can be interpreted as a sign of propriety or connectivity. Deanna had a boyfriend from her hometown that identified himself as “Mrshesallmine Forlife” on Facebook, and linked him to her page. When I asked her about this name, she responded:

Yes. That's his name. My friends make fun of me about it all the time…I never thought of it as being overwhelming. The more I talk about Facebook the more I realize that I use Facebook as something may be not as serious as real life. Like I'm sure I would feel a little uneasy if he told me that I was his for life when we were talking in person, but it seems ok for him to have it on-line.

Deanna differentiated between her life off-line and her boyfriend’s sense of propriety online. This enabled her to detach from any conflicts that occurred, and to lessen her anxiety about their relationship taking place over a geographical distance. For Deanna, Facebook permitted her to communicate her attached status to friends on campus, without having to engage in a long discussion.

The existing relationship status categories pose challenges for some users. Hillary, who self-identified as asexual, pointed out that the categories for relationships on Facebook make a lot of assumptions about how people actually live their lives and how they construct their interpersonal and romantic relationships.

There’s [sic] people who are like in a domestic relationship or whatever, but then you know that they’re not. Or, like people will be roommates and they’ll say they’re in a domestic relationship with their roommates. I’m still navigating that (being asexual on Facebook). And, I think it’s, since it
is such a small population, like I think the population, as a whole, is trying
to figure it out. We ask of ourselves, “How do we do this?”

Coming to understand and feel comfortable articulating one’s own asexuality is a
developmentally appropriate process, and one that most LGBT students also struggle
with during the college years (Evans & Broido, 1999; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006).
However, for Hillary, the public presentation of self and relationships on Facebook poses
a unique problem. If she chooses to put the status “In a domestic partnership,” she is in
essence misrepresenting herself and her roommates as being sexually involved.
Misrepresentation of the nature of a relationship can cause many problems for Facebook
users.

**Distance.** Long distance relationships can be problematic in a number of ways.
Misunderstandings are more likely to occur when partners are separated from each other
(Gershon, 2010). While on internship in Washington, DC, Emma was separated from her
boyfriend who attends a school an hour away from the University of Dayton campus.
They navigate a long-distance relationship throughout the school year, but the distance
was extended due to her relocation to Washington DC:

> I left without seeing my boyfriend for two weeks so it’s now been three
> weeks and it’s getting pretty hard. I'm pretty independent so I thought I
> would do great but it's getting harder. We used to use Facebook to get to
> know each other and ‘flirt’ when we first started dating two years ago.
> Now, we don't communicate with Facebook much, other than using it to
> post pictures of us together or post funny videos on each other's walls. But
> not so much in the manner of keeping in touch. We text a lot during the day
and usually FaceTime or talk on the phone at night if we don't have to work. Sometimes we send each other funny cards because who doesn't love getting mail? :)

For Emma, Facebook represents a much less intimate manner in which to keep up with her boyfriend, and one where privacy is a concern. Emma suggested that when she and her boyfriend started dating, they made more public flirty statements on each other’s walls. But over time, they ceased to do this much. Emma said, “now that both of our parents are on Facebook, they like to tease us anytime we do say anything flirty, so we tend not to say anything now.”

Some students attempt to plan out their relationships and put effort toward selecting potential dating partners who live near to where they reside when they are home, in order to bypass the distance challenge. Rachel, a white female student from New York explained that she and her friends value the idea of moving back to their hometowns and therefore gauge and control whom they are wiling to date because of these considerations. According to Rachel:

I have met only one boy at school that lives near me. All my friends and I put a lot of thought into that when we're interested in a guy. Ideally, we would want one that lives close to home, but being at school for most of the year we seek guys out there.

Lauren, from nearby Indiana, had a boyfriend at home. She indicated that her preferred method of distanced communication with anyone is letters. She loves the feel of paper between her fingers, the act of writing on a page with an ink pen, and the joy of retrieving a letter from the mailbox. Lauren explained that the personal, handwritten
aspect of letters was preferable because it conveyed an intimacy that Facebook, email, and texting do not. She predominantly communicates by letter with her female friends, but on occasion, she and her boyfriend exchange letters:

I do write letters to my boyfriend on occasion. With him my letters are usually about something totally random. His letters are usually along the same lines talking about a variety of random topics or he will draw a picture instead. Since we talk on the phone nothing important is usually discussed through letters its more of just an exchange of random thoughts. We are both extremely busy with school and activities so we don't have a lot of time to talk. It's easier for us to talk in the x amount of time we have each day over the phone or on Skype then it is through Facebook chat or texting. Being busy as well as being two hours away does cause some challenges but you figure out ways to make it work. I do feel like phone conversations are more intimate than talking through Facebook is. Through phone calls you can hear each other so it is more of a personal connection whereas talking over Facebook is just an exchange of words on the screen.

For Lauren and her boyfriend, the telephone was the most intimate and connected way to do this. Their relationship began in a face-to-face and telephone mediated environment and she believes it is best nurtured via this technological interface. Telephone conversations and talking in person help to mitigate unnecessary jealous responses from their partners.
**Jealousy/Commitment.** In long distance relationships, the green-eyed monster of jealousy can rear its ugly head causing strife and difficulties. Jessica, a white female student, explained that the combination of Facebook and a visit to campus caused a rift between her and her boyfriend:

At the beginning of last year I had a boyfriend who didn't go to this school and things on my Facebook concerning my guy friends would make him jealous so that did cause some problems. He got jealous because he was insecure and I have guy friends so that didn't help the matter at all. He only was here once before we broke up and yeah he did seem insecure/uncomfortable/jealous.

Deanna shared a similar story and elaborated by saying that her boyfriend was supportive of her trip to Africa this past summer, but routinely would indicate that he wished he could accompany her. She explained his behavior by saying “I would say sometimes I see the fear and insecurity come out in my boyfriend, but I think I just tell myself that it’s the distance thing…I think if our whole relationship wasn't long distance things might be different.”

Emma and her boyfriend have almost exclusively had a long distance relationship. As such, they have learned ways to ensure that they did not push the jealousy buttons in one another:

I find that he gets jealous easily by Facebook posts and smilies because it is harder for me to defend my relationship or tell the person on Facebook that I think what they are saying is inappropriate because everyone could see your response, and if you sent them a private message, who is to say that
they won't act like they never received it or something. I have never felt that there are men on campus that have made advances toward me. Mostly the men I communicate regularly with are those from home that I was high school friends with. Since Joseph and I didn't know each other in high school, it is hard for him to trust these guys that he has never met. I understand how he feels and we know now what makes each other feel uncomfortable. We have had a minimal number of issues related to Facebook, but there have been some. It is so easy to make something read a different way than it was meant to be read and that causes issues sometimes. Also, when girls post comments with smiley faces on his wall or guys do the same on my wall, it always causes a bit of tension. Without a doubt, face-to-face or video chatting is the best way for us to communicate and get the right message across. We have both debated deleting our Facebooks before. Just because of the tension it can create, especially when we are not together more than the weekends.

In contrast, Lauren, and her boyfriend share friends at home. They went to high school together and their pasts are interconnected. Lauren has “more friends that are guys than girls” but this isn’t a problem for her boyfriend because they share these friends when they are at home. This shared friendship provides a degree of trust for Lauren’s boyfriend as when he sees Lauren interact with shared friends on Facebook, it does not arouse suspicion on his part that she has become enchanted with another man. It also helps, according to Lauren that her boyfriend is “friends with just about everyone he
meets” and therefore “jealousy hasn't really been an issue.” But for some students, Facebook prompts discord and jealous behaviors that can lead to break ups.

**Breaking up.** Dick and his high school girlfriend, Amber, broke up shortly after they started college. They had dated for three years, and the relationship ended during his first few months of college. They both attend the University of Dayton. When they were still dating, he said that texting and talking on the telephone were a part of their daily communication but that they “never acted as a substitute for seeing each other in person.” When asked about how he navigated communicating with Amber when they left home and went to college, he explained that he disliked using any technology to communicate and preferred face-to-face conversation. He said:

I'm a visually and emotionally based person, and electronic communication is void of both. I feel disconnected when not being able to see and hear someone, and as a result I find it difficult to communicate as I normally would. At the end of the relationship (which was about as mutual and lacking in confrontation as one could possibly hope for), Amber was uncomfortable hanging out in person one-on-one. I'm not sure why this was, considering that it was something she initially wanted. The problem with this is that she is not the same person in a group as she is one-on-one. I enjoyed Amber when she was herself, but in groups she is not the person I know. This is a bit of the case for almost everyone I think, but Amber's difference was more dramatic.

Amber was not a participant in this study, or I would have attempted to get her perspective on this break up. From Dick’s perspective, it seemed that Amber employed
Facebook as a distancing device following their break up in order to facilitate a detachment from the intimacy that she and Dick had shared throughout the duration of their relationship.

Sometimes, there is too much information for one party in a break up. Lorraine relayed this experience about her boyfriend who went to college in South Carolina:

The first time we broke up it didn't have much connection with Facebook. We both said we were in a relationship when we started dating and took it off privately when we broke up. He rarely used it and we still talked so Facebook really didn't affect our relationship. The second time we broke up, it was a bit different. I ended up de-friending him. It was more of a rough break up and I was tired of him coming up on my newsfeed. I figured if it made me that upset I should eliminate the issue.

In some ways, users must become self-censors of their own emotions. For Lorraine, it was painful to have her ex-boyfriend's activities paraded in front of her, so she exercised self-protective practices by unfriending him. This was not a decision that she took lightly. For Lorraine, it reflected the seriousness of their relationship at the time:

We eventually became friends again, when we were working on getting back together in the winter (yes, this is a saga). But I soon defriended him when he was yet again a jerk and not being a good friend. Please don't think I am petty...I don't take Facebook this seriously and I have never done this to another person, but with Sam and I it has always been ALL or NOTHING. So when it's nothing, I've had to take him out of the equation...or it just gets to me. Well, we stayed nonfriends on here until
this June, when I finally felt it was time to move past things and handle whatever would come up. We talked a little in the summer, but not too much. We sorted out our problems and all the tension between us. We aren't friends necessarily, but there are no hard feelings and we are both living separate, happy lives.

Interestingly, Lorraine also deactivated her own account for a period of time during her break up with Sam. She explained this as a means of grieving in private.

One time, it was just like really funny, kind of stupid, but last year, I remember, I broke up with my boyfriend from a really long time. I didn’t want anyone to talk to me about it, so I just deleted my Facebook. And, I remember that some of my friends asked my best friend, “Why did Lorraine delete her Facebook?” Like blah, blah, blah. And, I was like, “it’s not a big deal, I just didn’t want it, like I didn’t want to be so accessible,” ‘cause I just don’t, you know?

Lorraine expressed discomfort in sharing her grief with others. Just as someone who is sad may wish to hide their feelings by smiling in public, Lorraine used self-censorship practices on Facebook to avoid exposing herself to conversations she did not wish to have at that time. She preferred to engage with those she was close to, rather than air her feelings to peers she may not have known as well. Facebook afforded Lorraine the opportunity to maintain control of one aspect of public access to her private experiences.

**Publicity and Privacy**

The dichotomy of attempting to be both public in your presentation of self, and simultaneously guard your privacy is a part of the nature of Facebook. Students refer to
Facebook as a place where one can “put him/herself out there” while simultaneously controlling who has access to what they present as public information. There are a number of ways that the students in this study employed Facebook in managing public and private selves. These selves are each understood to be aspects of each user, and yet, they must be maintained and monitored in order for an accurate and desired self to be articulated to the user’s online community.

As suggested above, the public and private spheres or understandings of Facebook can be manipulated by students toward the end of either self-censorship or censorship of others. Lorraine closed down her account in an effort at self-protection or censorship of others, and at other times, she unfriended her boyfriend so that she could continue to participate in Facebook without subjecting herself to information that was unpleasant.

**Instant messaging.** Jessica lived in a dorm with her roommate, and now best friend, her first year of college. Jessica explained that she and her roommate, as well as people down the hall, would use the chat function on Facebook, if they were online, to communicate rather than yelling down a corridor or using a telephone. Similarly, Emma explained how during exam week, everyone in her apartment was feeling silly and doing silly things. She said:

> During exam week, I feel like it’s so different because you’re a totally different person. You are just really silly and we have all these Facebook posts that are just silly, but if someone’s in the living room and I’m in the bedroom and I want something, or if like I need something, sometimes I just Facebook chat them instead of texting.
Likewise, Natalie explained that she uses Facebook chat to communicate in contexts when silence is important. When in the library, she and other students will sit at tables together and employ the chat/instant message function to disguise that they are speaking with each other, and to maintain privacy.

Facebook is not a designated communication tool for any particular kind of communication and its quiet is welcome when students feel they would be better served not speaking on the telephone. As such, the discrete and private chat or inbox tool, similar to a combination of instant messaging and email, is useful when discretion and quiet are desired. Privacy is a premium in college residential environments. Most students share a bedroom or a house with one or more roommates. Unlike having your own bedroom at home, this living environment is not conducive to private conversations. The Facebook instant message chat function facilitates privacy for students in this context.

**Photographs and page contents.** All of the students in this study posted photographs or links to articles, music, videos, and other content on their pages. Throughout the duration of the study, I asked students about the intended audience and the meaning of many of the items they posted. The majority of photographs were of events that occurred during the time of observation. That is, students posted images of places they traveled to, parties they attended, and activities they engaged in. Occasionally there were photos from the more distant past uploaded onto their walls. This was evidence of the effort students undertake to continue to foster membership in multiple communities simultaneously. The
images that included friends from campus were often tagged with the names of the people in the photos.

Some photos were posted with the intent of serving as an announcement or a public declaration. For example, Emma was participating in an internship in Washington, DC. While there she shared photos, links, and status updates that detailed her experience in this new city working with relatively well-known governmental employees. At one point, she traveled to New York to visit a friend who was interning there. She went to a posh New York hairstylist and got her long hair cut much shorter.

I used Facebook to tell my family and friends that I cut my hair off :) I posted a picture after I got it cut and people loved it. My parents were a bit surprised that I decided to tell them with a Facebook picture, but Facebook served as a good tool for a surprise like that.

This public announcement was intended for multiple audiences. Emma used the public aspect of her Facebook page to present the “new her” to her world. Similarly, students who traveled abroad over the summer used Facebook to post images of their experiences in an effort to foster connectivity between themselves and their communities at home, and on campus. Jen traveled to Guatemala for half of the summer. Her wall posts were frequently populated with comments and links posted by people with Asian names. I had to ask her, however, which of these people were on campus, and which were friends from home.

International students on the University of Dayton campus tend to spend time almost exclusively with other international students. As such, some of Jen’s friends on campus were from China and other Asian regions. While in Guatemala, Jen posted many
photos she took, and drawings she created while abroad. When asked about these images, she shared details with me of her interactions with travelers from many different parts of the world.

Periodically, there would be a wall post or two from friends at the University of Dayton. Even though she was an International student, Jen well integrated into the campus culture. She appeared to be very social and to have a large set of friends – both fellow Internationals, and US students. In like fashion, she made herself “at home” in Guatemala quite quickly:

No matter where I've gone I've always found something in a place that reminds me of a past memory I've had somewhere else - if that makes sense. I think it might be safe to say that I feel home is more of an internal concept - it's hard to describe, but maybe I feel at home in most places because I'm used to wandering around and discovering new things on my own, and once I know something exists, like how to navigate the streets and which corner to turn or what to say in a conversation, I am "at home" in a way, because I have a sense of what I should do to get a certain result.

By sharing some of her experiences of travel over the summer on Facebook, Jen was able to foster community among various groups of people with whom she had experienced it in the past. The audience for her posts was varied and the relatively public nature of her wall made Facebook a good place for Jen to share and connect with her various communities.
Too much information. Sometimes Facebook users violate unspoken and unwritten social rules regarding the amount of information that should be shared online. Dick observed a public display of interactions on Facebook that he felt should be private:

I have had friends who they, they’re a little, I don’t know, they’re not too mature. The girlfriend will see something on Facebook or something like that, and then they’ll start arguing with each other on Facebook rather than, you know, privately, or just with each other. Instead, they’ve got to post it on each other’s Walls, and will break up over stuff like that. And, uh, everybody can read that stuff.

Dick cited immaturity as the cause of this public display of discord and possible break up. However, the boundaries of appropriateness are constantly being negotiated on Facebook. I witnessed a number of students who responded to others’ posts with the initials “TMI,” which stands for “too much information.” This critique is a means of social control that protects users from misinterpreting the public or private nature of the Facebook wall.

Different communities have different rules for TMI. Many of the students in this study participated in private groups on Facebook where a number of their friends would post in a forum that was only visible to that particular group of friends. Some of these groups are designed so that all users who are already members can invite others to join, and are considered “open.” Others are very strict in their privacy settings and only one or two people are given “administrator” status to determine who can have access to that group. Groups create a different category of public or private. The students in this study
indicated that they would say and post things within groups of friends that they would not post on their personal Facebook wall. The audience within groups is well-known, whereas the audience on the personal wall can be so varied and multifaceted that it poses problems for many users who are attempting to self-monitor their posts.

Students express concern for fellow students who appear to not have properly mastered the skill of self-censorship or the public/private tensions of Facebook. Natalie claimed that her friends often leave photos up that she would choose to take down, and that this troubles her:

It bothers me when other people leave pictures of them like doing beer bongs and stuff like that…I have one friend, in particular, who does it a lot. Who has drinking pictures and pictures of her taking shots and stuff like that. Most of the rest of my friends are kind of like, “Why is she doing that? That’s not okay.” I just don’t think that it even crosses her mind as that being something that would be a problem.

Part of sharing community online is sharing a set of rules and understandings about what is appropriate to post and where. I asked Natalie if she had confronted her friend and recommended that she take the photographs down in an effort at protecting herself. She said that it was not really her business and that she figured that the friend would make her own choices. In many cases, friends watch out for friends and faculty watch out for students in an effort to protect them from the harm of misunderstanding what is TMI and what is appropriate.
Desmond is an education student and has a very minimal Facebook profile. His teachers and advisors had suggested that all education students simply don’t keep a Facebook account. He claimed that he would take it down as soon as he was a senior so as to protect himself from any problems related to finding a job, but that he wanted to participate in this study and would leave it up for the duration of my research.Likewise, other students indicated that their professors and advisors had suggested that they not use their given, legal name on their Facebook account because of potential problems with discrimination in relation to employment.

**Meeting new people: hooking up, creeping, and stalking.** Employers are not the only people who use Facebook to investigate people they do not know. Facebook also facilitates hooking up, or meeting a potential new dating partner. Alfred suggested that his use of Facebook in relation to meeting new girls aided the process of establishing a possible new relationship. He said:

> I do use Facebook to talk to girls that I am interested in. It is an easy way to follow up with people you meet, arrange parties etc. I have used the chat inbox to exchange phone numbers with girls I have met. I don't ask for anyone’s number or tell anybody mine over wall posts because I like to keep them more private.

While Facebook is understood to be a public social domain in many senses, for students like Alfred, privacy can be achieved via the inbox. Just as students might mill around a room at a party or other social gathering, students can virtually mill around Facebook looking for people to chat with, and slip into the quiet corner of the inbox for
more intimate communication if desired. Certain pieces of information are published, such as the relationship status, while others are more difficult to discern at first glance.

Upon initial meeting in person, details of the relationship status of a potential hook up are not readily known. Many students employ Facebook toward an effort to learn things about one another avoiding direct conversations. This can result in creeping that is defined by Urban Dictionary as “following what is going on in someone’s life by following their status messages” (CA34Chris, 2007). Hillary explained how she understood student use of Facebook to this end:

If you’re interested in someone, like if you want to date someone, one of the first things you do is you go on Facebook. You ask, are they single? Or are they in a relationship. And you look to see, and then, I don’t know…then you have to also see if it’s like a serious relationship ‘cause people will post fake relationships. Like, you see if the other person has it, or like if they’re actually even pictured together anywhere, ‘cause that’s one of the big things, like if people are actually in a relationship, they’ll actually have their profile picture will be them, together.

Some creeping is viewed as a reconnaissance mission of sorts. However, there are other levels or practices of creeping that unnerve and offend some students. Jack explained his experience with this:

Facebook creeping, it’s like you’re just, you, you do it to figure out more about them, or if you like them, and you do it to look at their pictures or, see what they’re interested in. Like, I don’t see anyone ever using that as ammunition like for a date. Like, ‘I saw you like JRR Tolkien, or
something like that.’ And, then if they did say that, it would creep me out, 
and I would be like, ‘No, ugh!’ It’s like, ‘Ugh! So creepy.’ Walk away!

According to Jack, indicating that you know details about someone’s life that you 
did not garner from face-to-face exchanges can be offensive and signify a sneaky or 
otherwise potentially predatory use of Facebook to cull information. This suggests that 
there are acceptable uses for creeping on Facebook and ones that resemble stalker 
behavior in face-to-face existence. Stalker behavior is understood to be behavior that is 
overly controlling and demonstrates too great of interest in another person’s life 
(Robertson, 2005). Hence, student use of Facebook to gather information about other 
students for potential dating purposes is artfully and intentionally constructed.

Romantic relationships are important in students’ lives, but so are close friends. 
Perhaps the most important relationship in a student’s life their first year on campus is a 
roommate. Jessica, a white, heterosexual, female, first-year student met her roommate on 
Facebook prior to even coming to campus. She and her roommate both participated in a 
roommate match-up project upperclassmen had put together:

There was a University of Dayton Class of 2014 group, and there are 
roommate surveys, and you just go through and read people’s, and find 
people that you’d be compatible with, and she was one of them. I 
messaged a whole bunch of people, and said, “Do you have a roommate 
yet? Blah, blah, blah. Basically, I met my roommate on Facebook, and my 
being roommates with her is like a huge thing that is why I love UD and 
we’re great friends. And, uh, if I didn’t meet her over Facebook, then I
don’t think UD would have been the same because I wouldn’t be living
with her, and we wouldn’t be such good friends.

In the context of roommate selection, the investigations and inquiries that can be
conducted on Facebook are not viewed as potentially threatening or as violations of
privacy. Jessica was happy to use her Facebook account as a means of having her future
roommate get to know her, while she explored the tastes, ideas, photographs and other
indicators of self her roommate shared on Facebook.

**Establish Personal Identity**

Facebook contributed to student identity formation and expression. Students are
aware that they are all engaged in the process of learning, and yet educational content
does not dominate their Facebook posts. When Emma was working in Washington DC on
her internship, she posted about her role in the Congressman’s office in which she
worked. These posts were references to a career identity she was formulating while on
internship.

In late July, Jack posted a quote with a literary reference to *Valhalla* on his wall. I
was curious and asked about why he posted it. He replied:

The quote about *Valhalla* is from a short story in the *Orpheus* magazine
from UD. I read it a few nights ago and just thought that it was so
fantastically written. It just summed up everything I was thinking about,
and it inspired me to write something.

Jack’s post was interesting to me because it was a reference to a literary
project that originated on campus. Although Jack used Facebook for social
purposes primarily, it is important to note that he also represented his intellectual
self. There appeared to be, for the most part, an intentional absence of academic material on the student’s Facebook walls over the summer. There were references to the latest *Harry Potter* film, and a few other current events, but for the most part, wall postings were not academic or political. Jack appeared to be making a connection between his love of writing and campus activities on his wall while away from campus. By making these connections publicly visible on Facebook, Jack further articulated his identity as a producer of creative writing, along with his identity as a rugby player, for example, that was evidenced through photographs and postings.

By posting his drawings and links to videos that were philosophical in nature, Dick likewise presented himself as an artistic or intellectual being. He posted videos that were critical of the male culture on campus (see Critique below). These videos were shared in an effort at differentiating himself from what he perceived to be the dominant male culture. Dick had an appreciation for graffiti art and beat-based music that are characteristic of urban youth tastes. He shared images and links to these things, alongside his drawings and references to literature and films he has read or watched, frequently on his Facebook wall. Dick intentionally characterized himself through his posts and comments as having tastes, preferences, and ideas that are different from other students on campus. As such, Dick’s wall represented his self-understood image and offered the compiled set of referents for others to view and absorb.

Over the summer, Jen was in Guatemala where she met a couple that she said, “inspire her.” This couple became a topic of conversation for Jen and me. We discussed
their lifestyle and the way they had chosen to live their lives. I asked her if the notion of “exiting” society appealed to her, and she explained her perspective:

I went on a hike with a group of other travelers recently, and I found that nearly all of them were traveling the world, just living life minute by minute and loving it. Maybe what they're doing is an “exit” from our point of view, but maybe to them it's an entrance into another world that's comfortable because it's continuously changing. I told them they inspired me, haha. I love exploring and wandering around myself, and what they did was just something that I'd always heard of but never realized could actually be feasible. I told them that they'd just made me decide what I can actually do when I'm fifty myself, or maybe even younger. They just made me believe even more in taking every opportunity as it comes.

Jen spent her summer travelling and interacting with people from all walks of life. She developed new relationships that she hoped would sustain through the remainder of her undergraduate career and into her post-collegiate life. As indicated above, Jen found inspiration and awakened a new understanding of herself because of her interaction with the traveling couple. Her posts chronicling her experiences abroad, drawings she completed while traveling and other diverse interests helped to articulate who she was for viewers of her wall. Things I saw or read on her wall prompted all of our intimate conversations about her goals, dreams, aspirations, and interests.

Many of the students in this study undertook similar explorations of self on their walls. The nature of the Facebook wall as a semi-public billboard of sorts
that functions as a blank slate upon which individuals can illustrate and express their self-understanding, is conducive to the developmental processes of the college years for the students in this study. As a result of observing their practices and perusing the contents of their Facebook walls, I felt I gained significantly greater understanding of each individual student’s identity and conception of self.

**Build Social Capital**

Cultural reproduction theory, as explained by Bourdieu (1986), outlines the way in which social class is reproduced within societies, institutions and individuals. Bourdieu’s theory states that social class is evidenced by economic (amassed wealth), social (networks of acquaintances) and cultural (comfort and familiarity with the dominant culture) capital. The *habitus* is a shared set of perceptions and understandings that are manifested and held in esteem by class members (Bourdieu, 1986). In order to maximize social capital, individuals must align themselves with the perspectives, attitudes, attributes and priorities of a social group that will provide them with increased access to power.

When observing student practices on Facebook, it became apparent to me that much of what students were doing was attempting to maximize their social capital on campus, and to establish a shared habitus within their community. Some of the ways students did this were to link themselves to campus based groups, to foster new campus-based friendships, and to present themselves in a manner that would be appealing to group sensibility. For example, Hillary explained that there is a Pride of Dayton Marching Band page and she “likes” it so the updates there scroll through her newsfeed. She is able to see if anyone has updated meeting times or posted events. Facebook
facilitates this for her, and it is convenient because it is in the same place as her other social data – in her newsfeed. Similarly, Alfred is involved with the Rescue Squad on campus. He uses Facebook to communicate and keep up with the squad activities. He too subscribes to pages and keeps track of changes in group activities via the newsfeed. Deanna is a member of the women’s club basketball team on campus. She and her close-knit group of friends communicate on Facebook. Sometimes, when she is studying, it is as distracting for her as having them all in the room with her:

My basketball team this year, we’re a club team, a women’s team, and we got really close. Our whole team got really close, so we made a Facebook group. And we can chat as a group. So, sometimes it’s like seven people in the chat or something, and we can all talk to each other. So, when I’m studying and that pops up…I’m like, “I have to close out!”

From band to basketball to rescue squad, a variety of student organizations organize and communicate on Facebook. This lessens the need for bulletin boards or bulk emails and streamlines the manner in which student organizations can communicate the details of their plans within their ranks. It also permits students to maintain connectivity and to stay in the loop of communication while studying, in class, or off campus. Students also use Facebook as a means of getting to know other students they have met on campus. This augments social capital because it extends their lines of connectivity and permits them to penetrate other sub-groups and layers of the campus community.

Desmond explained how students use Facebook as a second step in making someone’s acquaintance:
My friends, sometimes they’re like, “Oh, I met him at a party last night but I don’t remember that much about him, I’m gonna add him and then talk to him.” And, that was more of a guy-guy relationship, and not like a hook-up. It was just like, “Oh, this guy seemed pretty cool last night, of what I remember, and so I talked to him and see.”

Another way students increase social capital is by nurturing relationships that foster group connectivity. One way they do this is by establishing special shared private jokes and intimate references that increase cohesiveness as they celebrate an “in-group” feeling. For example, Natalie and her roommates were posting on her wall about a “Dr. Poop.” They would say things like, “Dr. Poop is staring at me” and “I love Dr. Poop!” I was curious to read the series of comments about this person, who I assumed was a professor. When asked, Natalie said, “LOL. No, he’s our fish. We all went together and picked him out.” These sorts of interactions bond and connect students with one another and foster and enrich friendships. Only Natalie and her roommates, and perhaps other close friends, knew the identity of Dr. Poop, and could share in her humorous references to the fish.

Sometimes, the obscure nature of posts is intentional. Often I would observe students post links to videos or websites on one another’s walls. They would make cryptic comments in tandem with these posts and their purpose was undoubtedly intended for a particular audience. When the intended audience saw the post, he or she would respond with “LMAO” or “LOL” to the provocative post. These practices are efforts to establish connectivity within small group environments, and to foster social cohesiveness within relationships.
Establish Cultural Competency

Being culturally competent is an important aspect to experiencing fit within a community. *Cultural competency* is ordinarily associated with diversity practices in health care (Larsen & Hardin, 2009) or educational institutions (Pantic & Wubbels, 2012). However, in this context I employ the term to represent the level of mastery an individual may achieve in order to successfully navigate and thrive within a given culture or community. Cultural competency can be achieved by establishing solidarity or sameness, as well as tolerance and acceptance of difference. It is achieved by immersion in a culture and the adoption of traits, linguistic terms, practices, dispositions, and attitudes that support the community.

At the University of Dayton, students arrive on campus with varying levels of understanding of what it is to be a part of the campus community. For example, Rachel’s brother attended the University of Dayton and she came here for a visit well before she considered enrolling. Other students, like Dick, have grown up in Dayton and have been aware of the campus and its relationship to the larger community for a long time. Yet until a student comes to campus to begin their role as an undergraduate student, they are unable to fully access or understand the experience of being a part of the University of Dayton campus community, nor are they able to feel mastery of the skill of navigating in that community.

Facebook affords students an opportunity to explore virtual aspects of the campus community prior to attending the university. Students can visit various group and club pages, as well as official institutional ones. Likewise, once they come to campus and begin their life as a University of Dayton student, they can use Facebook to facilitate their
understanding of the meaning of cultural artifacts, indigenous tropes and symbols.

Hilary’s experience with band camp prior to classes the summer before her first year is a good example of how Facebook can facilitate cultural competence and a sense of belonging. After a week of camp, Hilary returned home with a number of new friends, and a better understanding of campus culture and community:

> When I came to band camp, I probably added 30 people just within the week of band camp. ‘Cause, it’s like you meet people and it’s like, “Hey! Let’s be Facebook friends,” and that’s how you get like your first group of friends going.

Hilary used Facebook to augment and accelerate the development of her cultural competence by fostering friendships with her marching band friends prior to coming to campus. Most of the time Facebook assists students in demonstrating and enriching their cultural competence once they are on campus. The *University of Dayton Meme* page provides a good example of how this occurs. This page was started by Maria Lograsso; a music performance major (Whelchel & Rosen, 2012). Memes have grown in popularity as a means of cultural critique. One common meme is the “Sarcastic Wonka” or “Condescending Wonka” (Image 1) that features an image of Willy Wonka as played by Gene Wilder. This particular example pokes fun at the choice of outerwear of many University of Dayton students.

Knowing that students all wear *Northface* jackets and *Ugg* boots is something that you would only be cognizant of if you were a member of the community. When a student created this meme, or when another student shares this meme on their wall, they are establishing a community of solidarity around their mastery of the symbolic references
the meme makes. The memes on the University of Dayton Meme page are shared on students’ walls and celebrate and critique many aspects of campus culture.

Image 1: Condescending Wonka Meme

Another example can be found in the “Scumbag Steve” meme, where we see an image of a white male in his late teens or early twenties wearing clothing and a hat that resembles stereotypical black, urban attire (Image 2). This particular meme targets the name of the student neighborhood (The Ghetto) and pokes fun at the cost of university tuition. While outsiders may know that the University of Dayton is an expensive institution, they may not also know that students who are members of the campus community refer to the student neighborhood as The Ghetto.

There are many other memes that reference such institutionally specific items as newly constructed statues, dining hall practices and rules, problematic Internet service, and specific holiday celebrations like St. Patrick’s Day. Cultural competency is demonstrated by the creator, and by the poster on Facebook. If a meme has a large number of “shares” or “likes,” it indicates that it is well received and speaks or
communicates a shared belief, complaint, observation, or disposition. Being able to understand what a meme references, and having it resonate with you as a student, validates, marks and secures your status as an in-group member.

Image 2: Scumbag Steve Meme

Coping

Some students experience a sense of ill-fit or alienation on campus. For example, as a commuter student, Dick spends his days on the campus, but returns to his home community in the evenings. He is not happy on campus and he maintains a close connection to his group of friends from home while he studies at the University of Dayton. Many of these friends do not live in Dayton year round. They attend school elsewhere or are engaged in other activities that take them out of town. He explained his connection to these friends:

I didn’t start getting to know the older kids ‘til, I’d say, freshman year of high school uh, for me. We started hanging out consistently around my freshman year of high school, which was ‘05 or something like that. And,
then after that it was just like whenever we could. We would just hang out and do something competitive…we tease each other a lot but no one gets their feelings hurt…it’s a tight group.

I observed Dick’s posts on his wall throughout the duration of the study. He posted the most music videos, artistic images, and philosophical quotes of all of the students in this study. His friends from high school would occasionally comment on things on his wall and long discussions about relatively deep topics would erupt there as well. I noticed that the content of Dick’s wall was much different from the content of the other student’s walls. This reflected how his interests could be seen as being vastly different from those of the other students on campus.

Dick explained his feelings about the University of Dayton community and his sense of belonging or lack thereof. He described his understanding of the focus and emphasis of most of the students he had encountered on campus, and contrasted these with his own. Not living on campus and not identifying with the University of Dayton culture appeared to be more of a hindrance to Dick and his happiness on campus than did Facebook.

Jack had a difficult time his first year at college. He explained how Facebook helped him cope and facilitated his continued connection with his extended family that offered consolation at a distance:

One time I used Facebook for comfort or advice. I was talking to my cousin who I haven't seen in a really long time and we are pretty close about some heavy stuff and she was giving me some advice/inspirational quotes. I went through a bad rut at one time in high school and I had
thoughts about killing myself and general teenage angst and stuff. But, I talked to my cousin, and she gave me a ton of quotes to read and feel better. So, I read them again last night…and understood them a lot better since my last semester here at UD had been one from hell for me emotionally and mentally.

Even though Jack lived on campus and claimed to love the university and its community, he had a very rough second semester of his first year. Along with coming out to his rugby teammates, coping with a friend’s attempt at suicide, and struggling with social and academic pressures of his first year in college, Jack was sexually assaulted. Because of this, Jack had a lot to cope with and reached out to his cousin online. He explained why Facebook worked in this situation:

Facebook was easier than calling because you never know if someone's in the middle of something important and just has Facebook open in a tab while they're working, like you do whenever you log onto your computer-it's just chillin’ in the background. So you can just message someone and they can get back to you when they want to.

In this context, Facebook functioned as a medium through which Jack could reach out for help and solace without necessarily directly asking for it in a manner that may have been embarrassing for him. The indirect nature of this variety of social media helped Jack feel more comfortable talking to his cousin who offered needed advice and comfort.

Similarly, Deanna shared bits and pieces of her experience traveling to Africa over the summer via Facebook with me in our inbox email communications:
I think the biggest difference has been the smell. Haha. But everything is
great and I'm having an awesome time. The past couple of days I've been
shadowing a doctor at the local government hospital. When I walked
around the hospital (because the halls are not enclosed) that was the first
time I got culture shock! The floors were dirty and there was so much of
a lack of technology it was crazy. I look at our hospitals and there's no
comparison. It’s actually saddening. But other than that I have running
water and I stay with a family that lives in a mansion. On another note
I'm a little homesick but I usually just keep myself busy when I started
feeling a little depressed. I think about home constantly but I just
continue to remind myself to live it up and don't leave with any regrets!

Deanna had never been to Africa before. This novel experience was enlightening
and exciting for her, but she confided in me that she was concerned that doing something
like this, without someone close to her to share it with, was less fun than it would have
been with a close friend or family member. As you can see from her comments above,
culture shock and homesickness were negative aspects of her experience, and ones she
had to develop strategies to cope with. Facebook facilitated this process by enabling her
periodically to engage with her loved ones back home.

Home was a challenge for Lauren while she was away at school. During her first
year on campus, Lauren’s parents divorced. This left her feeling insecure and
unconnected because her childhood home was sold, and her family dynamic had changed.
For Lauren, school became a refuge and a place to retreat when she was struggling with
all of the tensions and challenges in her family’s life. Over the summer, when Lauren was
home in Indiana, I saw her post on Rachel’s wall that she needed a Skype session. The two women had become friends during their first year on campus, and this friendship provided nurturing and comfort for Lauren when she was struggling with some of the challenges of living at home with the new version of her family, having contracted mononucleosis, and was trying to work full-time and take two summer session courses. Facebook, in this context, was merely a tool these students used to set up a meeting on Skype, however, it served as a conduit of connection in a time when Lauren needed help to cope.

**Critiquing**

Facebook provides an opportunity for students to voice opinions, views, and perspectives that they may not have the opportunity to express in a face-to-face context. Because the audience in Facebook can be manipulated to include and exclude whomever the user desires, there are occasions when students used Facebook to critique one another, society, the government and the campus community. On occasion, it provides an opportunity for students to challenge such offenses as racism or sexism.

Jack was scrolling through some old photos on Facebook from his rugby days in high school. With the contribution of knowledge he had learned, and a disposition he had cultivated since coming to college, Jack revisited the comments on an old photo of his high school rugby team:

> There was one black kid and everyone would be like, “You are our one black kid…you are like our diversity, whatever” and we would say things like, “Your athleticism is so great because you our one black kid.” But, then came here and I started learning about more stuff, and I thought,
“This really doesn’t make any sense why we keep doing this.” So, a discussion came up on uh, the photos like, “You are our Oreo, black on the outside, white on the inside.” And, like someone was like, “What are black people?” And, it was like, “Dried up fruit.” Or, somethin’ like that. So, I started to think it was wrong that we can gang up on someone this way. So, I said, “This is really unnecessary.” And, I just said, “You crossed the line. It’s time that this is over. Really, just, we need to stop this.” And, then I was told I was freaking about nothing and I should just calm down and whatever, but I didn’t respond to that comment ‘cause I’m not about to get into a Facebook battle. It’s just so dumb.

Jack gained distance and a degree of power from removing himself from his original community in high school, and locating himself in his new campus community at the University of Dayton. This distance afforded him the opportunity to reflect on and critique the practices of his high school teammates. Feeling secure in his new environment on campus, and adopting a critical perspective on race relations, Jack used Facebook as an opportunity to critique and correct past racist behaviors and attitudes of his rugby team in high school.

Dick posted a video called “Dom Mazzetti vs. Vacation” and titled it “Dom Mazzetti vs UD” as a critique of some of the personalities on campus (Mazzetti, 2011). He posted this just as his fellow students were headed to Daytona for the annual “Dayton to Daytona” celebration of semester’s end. The video characterizes the bro culture Dick believes is common at the University of Dayton. It also suggests that using Facebook as a stage upon which to perform and share the experience of vacation is a common practice
of the population Dick is poking fun of by posting this video. When I asked Dick about it, he said he was getting used to the campus culture but that Dom Mazzetti really hit home with his characterization of entitled, middle-class, male college students.

The University of Dayton Meme Facebook page provided a similar context for students to critique their own campus community. Many of the memes posted on this page were efforts at solidarity and loci of commiseration over homework assignments, dining hall practices, and campus activities. However, some of the memes addressed more serious subjects such as diversity and sexism. Image 3 is a page from a promotional brochure the University of Dayton distributes advertising its campus community. A student posted this image on the University of Dayton Meme page on Facebook (Image 3).

Image 3: UD Diversity Meme

This meme addresses the differences between the manner in which the university markets itself and the actual demographic composition of the campus. The University of Dayton has increased its admission of International students, and yet they are not integrated fully into the campus culture. Special housing is under construction on the edge of campus for International students. As Rachel indicated, these students tend to
stick together, and providing housing exclusively for them may increase their relative isolation:

It is plain to see on Campus that the black students stick to the black students and the Chinese students stick to the Chinese students, etcetera. The Chinese are here to learn the language and receive a good education. However, they cannot learn the language if they do not interact with those who know it. If we went overseas we'd expect everyone to accommodate us and know English, yet we do not extend the same decency here.

Other memes that addressed diversity on campus provoked a series of controversial posts, and a heated debate about race in early 2012. Most of the posts in question were removed from the page and cannot be pictured here, but one in particular continued to generate controversy. According to Whelchel and Rosen writing in the campus newspaper, *The Flyer News* (2012), senior sociology student George posted a picture of himself as a meme surrounded by the caption, “Commitment to Community…of IGNORANCE AND RACISM.” A long thread of posts following this image included one comment where a student commended another student for urinating on George’s (a black male student) residence hall door.

As a result, the administration intervened in the situation. A teach-in was hosted by the Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work Department to address the racial tensions and issues on campus that the posting of this meme provoked. In their article in the *Flyer News*, Whelchel and Rosen (2012) quoted George saying:
The fact that [the teach in] (sic) happened and it was successful was a positive, but then it felt, I just hate the fact that UD seems to be so reactionary. We always wait for something to happen and then we want to have a forum, then we want to have a meeting and then we want to create politics [sic].

Other students interviewed in the article, such as Greg Boyer, claimed that the forums “focus on making UD an all-inclusive community” and said that “community at Dayton to me means so much, so much” (Whelchel & Rosen, 2012). According to Whelchel and Rosen (2012), The Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work Department Chairperson, Sister Laura Leming, said that the university “should focus on the common good to promote community and challenge students to change injustice as opposed to posting such comments online” (p. 4).

Rachel and I had an extended dialog about the University of Dayton Meme Facebook page. Rachel said something that resonated with me on this subject. She was speaking about the problematic Facebook memes and her experience at the teach-in on campus:

Honestly, it's annoying to constantly hear that we foster "community" when we do not. I know most of the administration is trying to teach the students that we should be accepting of everyone, but these students are eighteen years of age and older. They have made their minds up of who they're going to accept and who they are not. If they are racist or discriminatory, chances are they were taught to be by their parents or people they were around growing up. Many of these students come from
rural areas where there are only white residents. That is a HUGE factor. If they are unfamiliar with interacting with those who are different from themselves, they are going to be hesitant to interact with those "different" from themselves. Not saying that they can never change, people can change at any age, but they have to want to change.

The controversial post and the subsequent teach-in provoked an impassioned response in Rachel. She expressed a belief that there is a racial prejudice problem on the campus. She talked about incidents where she witnessed racism in action. When asked about the Facebook meme controversy, Rachel explained how Facebook served as a platform for exploration of the topic:

I think Facebook aided in the expression of negative feelings, but most of it happens by word of mouth. It was really only the memes that were public about it. If it is used in other ways to express the discontent of the population, it is done privately between those who disapprove.

Rachel understood the memes to be public, and contrasted the negative expressions and racist comments on the Facebook meme page against the Facebook postings of people she knows. This comparison made me pause and consider how much students censor their Facebook walls. If the memes became a medium through which students could critique and comment on their campus experiences, it is possible that my understandings of their beliefs, dispositions and attitudes were informed by a carefully crafted and cultured virtual persona. In this context, however, the memes were an outlet for marginalized students to express their dissatisfaction, as well as for racist students to express their views and opinions.
Rachel was emphatic that she understood racism on campus to be a problem. Rachel is from New York City, and stressed how this formed her understanding of diversity and racial prejudice making the University of Dayton a shock to her system:

At home people are accepted for the most part, despite what their race may be. Obviously there is still discrimination, but it is nothing like Dayton, Ohio. At home I grew up in a very mixed neighborhood. My best friend is Chinese, but growing up, to me, she was just Meghann. I only realized and distinguished her nationality when I was older and she told me about it. I have been attending school with every nationality imaginable since nursery. This made coming to Dayton very different. The first time I visited I was fourteen years old and my brother was touring campus in hopes of attending. My first thought was this exactly, "Wow. Everyone is white." This shocked me, and when I asked my dad why this was so he simply responded, "This is the mid-west." This may very well have been a stereotype on my father's part, and it also wasn't much of an answer.

Rachel went on to explain how her first day on campus, she moved into a room with two other female students. The first student there was a black student from the Dayton area. She had taken the best bed in the room and she was sleeping when they arrived. Rachel and her other white roommate moved in quietly and when they were alone, the white roommate confided in Rachel that she was happy to have her as her roommate because she felt that the black roommate was too different from her. Rachel explained that throughout the year, she had encounters with the white roommate that made her uncomfortable. She said that this roommate’s suspicions of the black
roommate’s black, male friends that came to study with her even rubbed off on her and she found herself wondering about their motives and her safety.

When asked about the Facebook meme controversy, other students responded less dramatically. A number of the students didn’t seem to believe that the University of Dayton had or has a problem with racial discrimination. For example, Lorraine said:

I would say that I have never noticed a racism problem on campus. I am sure that there is some racism, just because there are people from so many different background and we were all brought up different, but I wouldn't say that I notice to be a major problem...I cannot think of a circumstance where I have witnessed it.

Similarly, Emma said that she didn’t believe that the University of Dayton has a problem with racism that is any more significant than the rest of the country. She said:

Whenever you have a group of 10,000 people together in a centralized area, you are bound to have people of ignorant beliefs like racism. I think that it is easy for minorities to feel even more marginalized because of the general demographic of the university. These students chose to come to this university for a reason and taking these racist memes to be offensive is not understanding the purpose of the memes. They are meant to make fun of stereotypes, not encourage them.

For Desmond, the controversy with George and his Facebook meme was a bit more personal. George was Desmond’s Resident Assistant his first year on campus. Because he had a previous relationship with Fred, Desmond chose to read the posts and the article in the Flyer News. Desmond basically agreed with Emma:
I thought that Fred was just displaying his feelings just like everyone else had on the forums. His post just became heated because racism is usually a topic that creates reactions. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions. Personally, I feel like Fred might have went about expressing himself the wrong way because people could easily misinterpret his message. He should have tried to raise awareness in a different manner. George is a kind-hearted individual that genuinely cares about UD and its community but he always seems to seek out racism, even where racism does not exist. I do not feel that UD has a problem with racism or prejudice, but I believe that there are a few racist individuals on campus. These few individuals do not share the Marianist view of life and should not be considered part of UD’s mindset.

Some of the meme-based critiques were specific in nature and not as broad as the diversity image and George’s photo of himself as a meme. For example, Jessica said she saw a meme on the University of Dayton Meme page that caught her attention. It was a commentary on the food selection during Black History Month:

The racist one I saw was about the Black History Month food they served and I hope this doesn't make me sound terrible but I thought it was funny because as I was standing in line to get food I felt extremely uncomfortable because I couldn't tell if the food was historical, or just racist. So in my eyes, it's not that meme that was being racist but it was the University itself that was. So that would explain why they wouldn't want that picture up. But the meme I saw about it said exactly what I was
thinking so I thought that was funny. Don't get me wrong, I do not think racism is funny...

The memes poke fun at and ridicule things that students notice about campus and campus life but are afraid to speak to in a personal and public manner on their own. Some of the memes are credited with a creator. As such, this makes them not entirely anonymous. Jessica’s analysis that the institution itself was being racist, and that the institution would request a meme about its own racist behavior to be taken down seemed accurate to me. The food selection could have been chosen in order to celebrate a particular cultural heritage just as themed nights or food vendors celebrate Americanized versions of ethnic foods from around the world. Vegetable stir-fry with rice, eggrolls, and sushi are often featured when Asian cuisine is the theme of a meal. But in the case of African-American food, with a history and a legacy of racism in the United States, the thematic meal was problematic for some students. The meme addressed this problem in a humorous context on Facebook.

**Facebook and Campus Experience**

The data from this study illustrate the ways students use Facebook when in college, as well as their views on community and how they experience it on campus. Conducting this research with an intended goal of understanding how students experience campus differently because of the presence of Facebook was an impossible undertaking. All of the students in this study have had social media, including Facebook, in their lives prior to coming to campus. Most of the students who agreed to participate in this project had used Facebook in high school. As such, their experiences included Facebook from
the first moment they came to campus, if not prior to their arrival, as a dimension of their
college experience.

In order to understand how Facebook provides a different experience for students
now, as opposed to when there was no Facebook, or when Facebook was just becoming a
social media tool that was ubiquitous and common, would require the study of a different
population, or the comparison of two separate populations. The students in this study
only knew college with Facebook as a possible lens or platform through which to
facilitate, view or access it. They knew of no other version of campus life that does not
include social media as a form of communication. Their experiences are unique, and
cannot be evaluated for quality or even existential differences because there is no other
version available within the context of this study for me, the researcher, to compare them
to.

As a participant observer, it is possible for me to compare my own Facebook
usage patterns, practices, and experiences with the ones I observed the students in this
study undertaking. And yet, my own experience of college was so long ago, and at such a
different time in terms of technological development, that it is unproductive for me to
compare their experiences to my own. For example, I was a commuter student for part of
my own undergraduate experience. Because of this, there were ways I related to Dick that
I did not to the other participants in this study. But my own experiences were far more
isolated from the peers from my youth. My parents moved to a different state, so while I
commuted, I did not commute from my childhood home to a college campus as Dick has
done. Rather, I commuted to a campus in a new home, in a new community, where I was
equally as unfamiliar with my surroundings as students who come to campus as first-year students.

Similarly, it would be advantageous for me to have included a student who refused to use Facebook while attending the University of Dayton. This would have provided a contrastable context for an exploration of how community is affected by the presence of Facebook in student’s lives. However, due to the nature of netographic research, it is impossible for me to undertake such a study using the methodologies I have employed in this project.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a thematically structured analysis of this study’s data. The question guiding this research was: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? Because the data itself led me in a different direction than the original question indicated, I reformulated the question into two guiding lines of inquiry. I asked: How college students use Facebook in college? The results indicated that students used Facebook to foster and maintain community, but that this was not their primary use. They also used it to nurture relationships, to make public statements and protect privacy, to establish a personal identity, to build social capital, to establish cultural competency, to cope, and to critique. I also asked: What is the nature of community on the University of Dayton campus, and how do students experience it? I answer, I provided data to illustrate how students define and understand community, and how this is evidenced and experienced on campus.
In the following and final chapter, I will provide a short summary, conclusions, and reflections on methodology. I will offer some suggestions for implementation of the results of this study in the practice of faculty and student affairs personnel. I will also outline recommendations for future research on this topic.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary

Statement of the Problem

The primary question guiding this research was: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? As indicated in Chapter IV, during the data collection process, it became apparent that students used Facebook for a number of purposes and objectives including: nurturing relationships, making public statements while simultaneously protecting privacy, establishing a personal identity, building social capital, establishing cultural competency, coping, and critiquing. The discovery that students used Facebook in such a variety of ways led me to reformulate my question to ask: How do students use Facebook in college?

Because I approached this study attempting to understand how Facebook affected and influenced students’ experience of community, I developed a mutually agreed-upon understanding of the way community can be identified and experienced by my co-researchers and me. I also cultivated an image of community on the University of Dayton
campus, from the perspective of the students who attend college therein. As a result, the findings of this study provide an understanding of:

- How students utilize Facebook to maintain continuity in their relationships, manage time, protect privacy while presenting public images of self, build social capital and establish cultural competency, and to cope and critique the world around them.

- The opportunities Facebook provides or needs Facebook serves for students in a different manner than face-to-face relationships.

- How student understanding of community is different based upon their degree of psycho-social development and tenure on campus.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings as they provide these understandings. I will provide theoretical support for my interpretations of the data, as well as expand on explanations I offered in Chapter IV. In addition, I will provide reflections on the methodology, implications and recommendations for practice, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

**Discussion and Conclusions - Student Use of Facebook**

The findings in this study demonstrate how students utilize Facebook to maintain continuity in their relationships, protect privacy while presenting public images of self, build social capital and establish cultural competency, and to cope and critique the world around them. There are six theoretical lenses through which I will analyze and discuss the findings outlined in Chapter IV (Map 1). These lenses are all ways in which Facebook can be understood as affecting students’ lives. I will begin by considering Facebook as a virtual *porch*, expanding on Banning’s (1997) metaphor of the porch discussed in
Chapter II. Second, I will deliberate Facebook as a tool to navigate and mediate issues of class, race, and social capital for college students, adopting a critical lens of examination. Third, I will examine Facebook and its affect on student experience of community from the perspective of student development theory. Fourth, I will explore Facebook as a medium and platform for students’ presentation and exploration of self and personal identity. Fifth, I will discuss Facebook as a technological medium used by students in this particular time and place, situating it within the literature on humans’ relationship to technology. Lastly, I will analyze Facebook’s role in assisting students to meet and fulfill emotional needs while in college.
Map 1: Themes

The “Porch”: Publicity and Privacy

Returning to Banning’s (1997) metaphor that characterized the role of computers on college campuses as the campus porch, the data in this study reveals that Facebook is very much a virtual porch for students. Students use this social media platform to control and limit the amount and type of information they present to their Facebook friends. The University of Dayton campus community is physically composed of a series of neighborhoods with houses that contain front porches. These porches are the site of
public social engagement where students establish their social competencies and physical characteristics and traits of belonging. As indicated by the memes illustrated in Chapter IV that poked fun at the Northface jackets worn by so many students, fashion is one way of establishing belonging. Similarly, Facebook provides an additional porch upon which students can provide evidence – consciously or not – of their social and cultural competency and establish a case for their belonging in the face-to-face University of Dayton community.

Facebook is a platform on which students can determine exactly how much access they will permit others to have into their internal lives, much like a physical porch. Thus, privacy is a challenge posed by Facebook for students. As Jack indicated when he compared a community to a small village, it is possible for some people to see aspects of the self a student wishes to present online that will warp or distort their view of that student. This may be particularly challenging for students who are exploring their sexual orientation and identity while in college. Self-identifying as homosexual, bi-sexual, or asexual is a process that involves an internal understanding followed by an often-gradual public presentation and identification (Evans & Broido, 1999). On Facebook, each “like” and page followed is visible to each Facebook friend. Therefore, if a homosexual male student like Jack follows or likes, “Sports Illustrated 4 Gays” or “GLBT rights,” for example, friends and family can see that the student has interests that align with a homosexual orientation. This may be more information than a student wishes to share with everyone with whom he or she is friends on Facebook. Because of this, privacy management can become a very arduous and difficult task of blocking, censoring, and exerting detailed control over who can see what is on one’s page.
For example, Hillary and Jack self-identified as non-heterosexual, and maintained social and political interests that may differ from those of the majority heterosexual population. Jack went to great lengths to create a neutral Facebook profile, eliminating or censoring his “gay” interests. Eventually, he elected to close down his account as the labor of maintaining his privacy became too great a burden. Jack was aware that many different sets of friends and social acquaintances could view his postings and his interests, and he took precautions to protect himself from potential conflicts with those who were not accepting of his sexual orientation.

Boyd and Heer (2006) spoke of “collapsed contexts” for public sharing online. When users share certain points of information, they believe they have an envisioned audience that is receiving this information. On Facebook, this often includes people the user may have forgotten has access to viewing their profile or their status posts. Concern over privacy and “oversharing” is intense, and yet, it is difficult to achieve consensus on how to define and articulate what actually constitutes appropriate levels of disclosure (Baym, 2010). Often the same technologies used to “publicly” declare the nature of a relationship for example, such as the Facebook relationship status, are the same ones used to “publicly” announce its demise (Pascoe, 2010).

As a porch, Facebook is a holding zone or locus for negotiating levels of trust and intimacy between acquaintances before drawing them more intimately into the user’s life. The students in this study used Facebook to make public declarations and statements, as well as explore the content of others’ walls permitting them to learn more about their peers. They also took great care to ensure that levels of intimacy were not breached by their postings and content on their own Facebook walls. Deactivation of accounts, for
example, was one option students could employ when intimacy management appeared to have been compromised or to have presented too much of a challenge with which to cope within the Facebook platform. In this context, students retreat “inside” and await the moment when they feel comfortable enough to venture back onto the Facebook porch again.

**Implications for practice.** Recognize Facebook for what it is and how it functions in student lives. Adopting the perspective that Facebook is a tool and a platform students use for particular purposes and to fulfill particular needs is beneficial to students, faculty, and administrators on campus (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2006). Lamentations of student distraction by Facebook are best revised to include recognition that student concern with privacy and mediation of intimacy within social situations is developmentally normal and appropriate for college (Boulianne, 2009; Grabmeier, 2009; Kavanaugh, 1999). That is, the behavior associated with identity maintenance and control as manifested on Facebook historically occurred in face-to-face contexts. Non-classroom based activities are noted for providing students with the opportunity to develop an affinity group of fellow students, which is critical for success (Astin, 1984; Love, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Seeing Facebook as a SNS version of the porch on the front of a house may be a useful metaphor for understanding it and transferring its qualities to a virtual educational use. Just as a porch provides the opportunity for checks and balances in the social world because of the visibility possible in that context, Facebook provides a context for students to negotiate intimacy and privacy in a virtual world.
Facebook may harbor the power to create positive as well as negative press, or mobilization on campus, and the administration and faculty may do well to implement ways to encourage positive uses of the virtual porch much the same way the University of Dayton has established policy and long range planning to regulate the type and usage of physical porches. Some suggested examples of institutional use of Facebook include the creation of groups in Facebook where students and faculty of particular majors or with particular sets of interests can meet and share links to pertinent information, deliberate topics, and plan activities. Group membership on Facebook precludes the necessity of faculty and student “friendships” online, and permits users to engage with one another in controlled contexts, limiting access to personal information and protecting privacy.

Similarly, it is possible for institutions to encourage students to create pages that can serve as discussion forums or points of deliberation for campus related challenges. For example, if dating violence, alcohol induced behavior, racism, or forced orientation-outings became of particular concern on campus, it is possible that a page that discusses and addresses each of these subjects would give faculty, staff, and students an opportunity to employ Suler’s (2004) disinhibition effect to their advantage. The once-removed aspect of social media communication can diffuse discomfort and awkwardness, and often encourages people who are shy in face-to-face contexts to express themselves more fully. Of course such pages would require monitoring on the part of student support personnel as the disinhibition effect can also cause people to refrain from self-censorship and post offensive or demeaning things online. In many ways, Facebook could serve as a starting point for discussion of the challenges inherent in the blending of diverse racial, socio-economic, and sexually oriented student populations.
Facebook as a Mediator of Class, Race, and Social Capital

The diversity of student populations poses particular challenges for students, faculty, and administrators (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini, 1996; Sidanius, Levin, vanLaar, & Sears, 2008). In this study, students employed Facebook in the process of mediating and exploring differences in class, race, and the subsequent social capital associated with these differences. For example, Deanna used Facebook to communicate with her working-class friends and family at home, alongside her campus community at the University of Dayton. For Deanna, Facebook was a context where she balanced her multi-racial, working-class background and the people who mattered to her from her place of origin, with her identity as a University of Dayton Club Basketball member and residential student.

On one hand, each student’s class and culture of origin is invisible. When students arrive on campus, they are given a clean slate of sorts, as few know much about their previous social or economic world. If they dress like everyone else, speak like everyone else, and adopt mannerisms similar to their fellow students, they hide (or fail to present) aspects of themselves that are different from the norm (Goffman, 1959). Once friends from campus become friends on Facebook, it is possible for them to view the postings and exchanges between friends and family from home, and the student Facebook user. These visible traces of a student user’s past can enhance or detract from social and cultural capital on campus (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007).

The findings in this study indicate that belonging and feeling a part of the University of Dayton campus community is of primary importance to students. Higher educational institutions require students to shed some of their cultural capital from pre-
college days in order to foster assimilation and conformity (Berger, 2000; Green, 2003; Mullen, 2010). The social norm of the University of Dayton campus community is heterosexual, white, and middle to upper-middle socio-economic class. Because of this, working-class, non-heterosexual, and ethnic or racially different student populations must employ artful strategies to enhance social capital and establish their competency as citizens or members of the same campus culture.

At the University of Dayton, where tuition, room and board is close to $45,000 a year, socio-economic class becomes a significant factor, even if students, faculty and administrators do not openly discuss it. All but one of the students in this study desired to fit in the campus community. Therefore, it was common for these students to construct a Facebook presence that enhanced, rather than detracted from their competence or mastery of campus culture and society. Chickering and Reisser (1993) discuss the development of competence as one of the seven vectors of psychosocial development in college student populations. They describe competence as a three-tined pitchfork, with intellectual competence, physical competence, and interpersonal competence as the tines.

The data from this study suggests that the pitchfork should be a four, rather than three-tined one, and should include social and cultural competence, drawing upon Bourdieu’s (1986) theories of social, cultural and economic capital. Chickering and Reisser’s interpersonal tine could be understood to include the theme of social competence that emerged from the data; however, there is a difference between the context of individual and collective competencies. Students may be competent in their interpersonal relationships, while simultaneously not feeling as if they fit and are a part of a campus community.
To illustrate this, consider the commuter student, Dick. In this study, Dick provided an example of a student who was very successful at friendship, interaction and engagement with his off-campus peers and his professors on campus. However, he did not feel entirely socially competent, or accepted and comfortable, within the campus social environment, and did not identify himself as a part of the community. Dick actively rejected the campus community and critiqued it both in person, and on Facebook. Adopting Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) pitchfork model, we can view Dick as having achieved intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence successfully, while not having fully mastered social or cultural competence within the campus community. Dick expressed dissatisfaction with his experience on campus. Using Chickering and Reisser’s original model, Dick would be understood as having fully achieved competence, and yet, the findings reveal that he continued to struggle with a feeling of having a lack of social or cultural competence on campus.

When a student does not feel as if he/she is socially or culturally competent on campus, it is possible that the student will adopt an attitude of critique. As evidenced in the data from this study, students often critique their peers or the campus community on Facebook. The University of Dayton Meme page provided ample evidence of the practice of critiquing the campus based upon race and gender relations. Memes are used to elicit camaraderie via humor, while simultaneously employing irony and sarcasm in an effort to sometimes gently, and sometimes more aggressively, critique the campus community. These critiques are acts of resistance and a challenge to existing hegemonic structures (Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1971).
According to Humphreys and Brown (2002), “large and complex organizations are characterized by multiple embedded, and sometimes conflicting, narrative identities derived from, and manifested in simultaneously and sequentially occurring dialogues” (p. 437). Some of these narratives are intentionally constructed for the benefit of articulating and fostering an institutional identity that is expected to be adopted by all members of that institution (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Foucault (1984) reminded us that social actors within any institutional environment that offers a given institutional narrative are “constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations” (p. 49).

The data in this study indicate that the creators of the Facebook memes, as well as students like Dick who openly critique the University of Dayton on their Facebook pages, are enacting resistance strategies against the official narratives of the institution. This does not mean that the students in this study did not desire for the prescribed institutional narrative and identity to be valid and true and capable of being witnessed and experienced in daily life. Rather, these acts of resistance are as Foucault (1971) suggested, urgent tasks. Foucault said:

…one of the tasks that seems immediate and urgent to me, over and above anything else, is this: that we should indicate and show up, even where they are hidden, all the relationships of political power which actually control the social body and oppress or repress it. (Web)

For the students in this study, these acts of resistance are part of an adoption of a critical paradigm. Guido Di-Brito, Chavéz, and Lincoln (2003) argued that a critical paradigm reflects “theoretical foundations that promote the deconstruction and critique of institutions, laws, organizations, definitions and practices to screen for power inequities”
One might believe that institutional narratives are not really oppressive as they foster a myriad of positive outcomes such as a clearly articulated mission and a mutually understood standard of conduct. However, when the student participants in this study did not believe that what they witnessed in their daily lives coalesced with and manifested the given institutional narrative, they experienced dissonance in their understanding, or a sense of disconnect, discomfort, and distrust. Some of the students in this study adopted a critical paradigm in their understanding of campus community. They employed methods of critique as simple as posting memes or videos that addressed their concerns. Posting is an act of bearing witness. Bearing witness is an effort at solidarity, as it is a part of “showing up” and exposing hidden power dynamics as advocated by Foucault (1971, Web).

Altbach and Cohen (1990) discuss the transformation of student activism over time. The 1980s were characterized as a “me” generation of students, and prompted an increase in self-help groups and more private forms of activism. In the 1960s, there were particular student subcultures that promoted interest in activism that has not since been repeated (Van Dyke, 1998). When oppression was felt and provoked concern on the part of students in the 1960s, students showed up en masse, signs in hand, to march and sit in as an act of defiance. It is possible to characterize today’s students as “virtual activists” in many ways. Just as the revolution in Egypt was considered to be a “Facebook revolution” (Herrera, 2011), the students in this study used Facebook to critique the institutional and cultural conditions of campus life.

The data do not indicate that all student acts of critique on Facebook are universally connected to an activist sensibility and a desire for communal engagement in
Many of the students in this study were doubtful that any critique they leveled or challenges they made to existing power structures would be met with a self-reflective attitude or a willingness to change. Actually, some of their critiques were acts of catharsis or venting of feelings. Other students found tangible ways to serve as activists fostering change on campus. For example, in an interview conversation outside of Facebook, Jack explained that he was involved in some sensitivity training on campus to foster tolerance and acceptance of diversity in sexual orientation. At that time, Jack had closed down his Facebook account entirely because he was concerned about his peers and potential employers investigating his orientation and his interests related to gay life. Jack explained that the white, heterosexual, upper-middle class norm on campus was oppressive and invisible, and that even though he qualified for two of these criteria (he is white and from an upper-middle class family), he struggled to find fit on campus.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that students desire to feel socially and culturally competent on campus and this feeling fosters and enhances the experience of community and belonging for them. Feeling a sense of mastery, and a sense of acceptance are important criteria in the experience of community for the students in this study. Facebook can both enhance and detract from the process of building social capital on campus. But most importantly, it offers students a virtual social context in which to level critiques and to articulate multivalent or multifaceted social constructions of themselves in an effort to resist both informal and formal institutional hegemonic structures.

Implications for practice. Social Media programming or tools. Faculty and administrators should use Facebook with intent to foster community. The students in this
The study provided specific examples of how Facebook directly corresponded with their increased experience of community at the University of Dayton. For example, Jessica spoke of a pre-campus survey designed by upper-classmen to enhance success in roommate selection. Likewise, Hillary and Alfred clearly indicated that they used Facebook to enhance their participation in rescue squad and band. If faculty and administrators become adept and conversant with Facebook and other social media platforms, they will begin to think in a manner similar to students. Engagement with the intent to foster community via social media will result in students feeling more integrated into the campus community and more connected to faculty and the administration.

The overall perspective of the campus community on the University of Dayton Meme page and the controversial memes found there was one of discomfort. The students who posted memes deemed to be racist were instructed to take the memes down from the Facebook page. Likewise, George’s meme with an image of himself that addressed racism on campus was said to be an inappropriate context for a discussion of this sort (Whelchel & Rosen, 2012). The data from this study suggest that students feel comfortable leveling critiques of this nature in an online environment, and that this context is one where conflict is minimized. This is in part due to the fact that Facebook is viewed as a student domain, and is seen as a context that is outside of the purview of the institutions’ faculty and staff. Facebook began as a student generated social media platform for use by students, and was historically understood as a part of the student domain (Moral & Sandu, 2009).

If the institution chooses to adopt a program of action whereby well-trained staff participate in online student forums such as Facebook, it is possible that the critiques
leveled therein can be addressed and contended with by these professionals. This recommendation does, however, come with a caveat. Evidence suggests that students do not necessarily feel comfortable maintaining intimate friendships with faculty on Facebook (Holeton, 1997; 2008) and popular understandings of Facebook etiquette suggest that it is ill-advised to permit those you perceive as having potential power or leverage over you access to your personal Facebook page (Al-Harthi & Ginsburg, 2003; Freire, 1970). Students are aware of these ideas and will continue to police and monitor their own vulnerability if the need arises.

This study provides data to support a suggested enhanced involvement by student development professionals in the public Facebook domain inhabited by students. This increased involvement must be tempered by a respect for student privacy and student mediated domains. No one likes to imagine “Big Brother” watching him or her, as they inhabit an online communal space. Therefore, it is essential that institutional professionals do not attempt to alter, limit, control or regulate student activities on Facebook. Rather, involvement in conversations in a style similar to student-to-student engagement would be most successful, and provide unprecedented learning opportunities for student development professionals and students alike.

**Facebook as a Tool for Student Development**

Throughout the duration of this study, I took note of practices and behaviors of the student participants on Facebook. For example, I looked for gender-themed practices, and trends of engagement among my 13 co-researchers. What emerged from the data, however, was not gendered in nature. Both male and female participants were frequent as well as infrequent posters. Both males and females posted emotional or personal
information and private jokes on one another’s walls. Likewise, there were both males and females who posted about music, art, politics, and campus life, and who responded in depth to each of my Facebook inbox inquiries.

The data revealed, however, a developmentally oriented perception and understanding of social relations and community. The participants who were completing their first year on campus had very different, and less developed understandings of community and the experience of community on campus than did those who had just completed their third year. For example, both male and female participants who were in their second and third year on campus indicated they were pleased by and enjoyed participating in the party culture on campus. These students identified themselves with small subsets of campus culture, and experienced greater mastery and competency within the campus social and cultural domains. These students identified themselves as “Flyers” more often, and believed that community was perhaps the greatest reason to attend the University of Dayton.

What explains this phenomenon? That is, why were students who had been on campus longer, and who had invested themselves in the campus culture for a greater duration of time inclined to have more developed understandings of community and a more complex understanding of the campus social and cultural domains? Moreover, how did Facebook contribute to this phenomenon? Student development theory, as explored in depth by Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) offers insight and answers to these questions.

**Residence.** Beginning with residence as a factor, we can look to Astin (1984), who claimed that students who live on campus have a much greater experience of
engagement than do those who commute to campus. As such, it is sensible advice for students to cleave to their campus communities and distance themselves from home in order to increase their engagement and collegiate success (Komarovsky, 1985). Many student development strategies advocate full-immersion in campus life. Astin postulated that the “effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (1984, p. 298). The data in this study indicate that Facebook provides an opportunity for prolonged attachment to the home and the people associated with students’ pre-college life. The addition of this tool or platform adds a new dimension to college life that far supersedes the connective abilities of the telephone or the posted letter in past eras of residential college experience. The data suggest the emotional experience of severing ties with one’s family and going off to college has been altered by Facebook because it is possible to keep up with daily happenings in the lives of loved ones off campus in a very complete and detailed manner if desired by the user. As such, it is understandable that Facebook could contribute to a lessening of student engagement with college peers, yet that did not appear to be the case with this population.

The data in this study did not support an assertion that Facebook detracts from student engagement on campus contrary to Komarovsky’s conclusions (1985). In fact, the students viewed the ability to maintain connectivity with people from their pasts as an advantage. It was clear from my interactions with each of the students who participated in this study that they do not view their lives as linear, but rather, they see them as more of a web or a constellation of relationships that are interconnected and recurrently valuable and accessible. Many higher educational institutions require students to shed some of
their habits, practices, and cultural capital from their pre-college residential contexts in order to foster assimilation and conformity (Berger, 2000; Green, 2003; Mullen, 2010). Facebook deters this process and permits them to access familiar and comfortable people and ways of interacting or speaking that they do not encounter on campus. This does not necessarily mean that they will drop out or be unsuccessful in college. On the contrary, in this study, Facebook offered students a context in which to channel practices, linguistic habits, and ideas that have been left behind as they transitioned to the university. As such, the students in this study used Facebook to maintain continuity and connection in their lives fostering community with friends and family off campus. It is safe to conclude that Facebook contributed to a prolonged connection to home and off campus friends, and subsequently enabled first-year students to gradually, and comfortably immerse themselves in the campus community, without entirely shedding their historical identities.

**Time management.** Moving to an investigation of Facebook as an issue of time management, many of the participants in this study claimed to view Facebook as addictive and potentially a tool for procrastination. As a response to this awareness, students often elected to deactivate or simply refuse to log on to Facebook during times of extreme academic significance such as examination periods. Astin (1984) postulated, “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportionate to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (p. 298). The students in this study were aware of this and refused to permit Facebook to intrude in their lives in such a manner as to damage their educational experiences. Otherwise, they employed Facebook toward connecting themselves further with the campus community and used it to enhance their engagement
with peer-based and institutionally organized activities. This finding supports Park, Kee and Valenzuela’s (2009) research which revealed that, “individuals who participate in Facebook Groups to satisfy socializing needs are generally interested in meeting and talking with others as well as getting peer support and a sense of community” (p. 731). Park et. al’s study portrayed Facebook as positively correlated with social success on campus.

However, the students in this study did not view campus-based peer connection as mutually exclusive of their connection to their friends and family from home. It was simultaneous and parallel rather than conflicting. During late adolescence, there are tensions between pursuing one’s own development and growth while simultaneously nurturing connections and attachments to others, transferring attachment from parents, to peers (Fraley & Davis, 1997). Dating relationships, for example, become significantly more important as adolescents mature. As such, this data supports the findings of Knox, Zusman, Daniels, and Brantley (2002), who assert that many college students attempt to continue existing dating relationships at a distance even if this poses particular challenges.

These challenges are a result of parallel worlds operating simultaneously, and must be navigated carefully. Two of the most pressing challenges for the students in this study were time and privacy. Students are ordinarily taxed with meeting the academic, social and sometimes wage work requirements of life on campus. The addition of other relationships in other contexts or realms demands greater time commitments on students’ daily schedules. Maintaining relationships with a larger set of people, as is facilitated by Facebook, creates a greater demand for student use of time in relationship management.
Using romantic relationships as an example, Guldner (2004) found that those in geographically close proximity experienced greater difficulty with their education in comparison with those in distanced relationships. Likewise, according to Gershon (2010), romantic relationships for college students can become overwhelming and very time consuming, and many students find that they have difficulty balancing all of their obligations. Guldner and Gershon’s research studies are supported by the data from this study as it indicates that students with long-distance relationships appeared to have few challenges managing their time spent on campus activities and academic pursuits. This is because local intimate relationships often eat into the time students allot for campus-based academic and social engagement.

This is not to say that long-distance intimate relationships are easy to manage. The data in this study indicates that factors such as distance and break ups contribute to distraction and modification of Facebook use habits. Long distance relationships require intimacy maintenance (Guldner, 2004). This is supported by research on long distance email communication between lovers (Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig & Wigley, 2008). Johnson et al. (2008) reported that romantic partners endeavor to communicate messages of relational importance as a means of preventing jealousy. This can potentially lead to students stealing time from sleep, exercise, and academics in an effort to maintain and nurture the relationships that are housed on Facebook, or other technological communicative platforms.

Therefore according to the data reported in Chapter IV, it appears that relationship management, both on campus and off campus, is a time-consuming activity that is facilitated by Facebook. It would be prudent to ask if this facilitation is not also a
distraction, as prior to the advent of Facebook as a social tool, expectations of availability may have been less great. That is, it is possible to view Facebook much like technologies in women’s work throughout history, where the increase in “helpful” technologies has actually begotten higher demands for levels of cleanliness or perfection (Cowan, 1983). Facebook enables the creation of greater demands on users to engage socially and be more socially accessible than ever before (Markussen, 1995). Therefore, Facebook has contributed to greater demands on student time, and subsequently contributes to students feeling pulled in many directions at once.

**Duration on campus.** The data indicated that over time, students begin to disassociate themselves from their homes and previous friendships in favor of their friendships on campus, making second, third and fourth-year students sense of belonging stronger and their online engagement with campus-based peers stronger and more frequent. Holland’s (1997) theories on person-environment fit posit four assumptions about human behaviors: 1. There are six major personality types manifested by human beings, 2. There are six model environment types that can be matched with each personality, 3. People seek out environments that permit them to nurture themselves and utilize their skills and gifts, 4. Behavior is a result of a relationship between the person and their environment.

Many of the second and third-year participants in this study – Hillary, Alfred, Deanna, Desmond, Lorraine and Emma – professed a sense of belonging that surpassed that expressed by the first-year student participants. For example, Hillary emphasized how she felt awkward when attempting to attend parties during her first year, but by her third year on campus, she had altered her interests to include partying. This indicates a
change in Hillary’s interests and possibly her personality over time. From this vantage point, it appears that the campus culture molds and shapes students to fit the existing culture the longer they reside on campus. At the conclusion of her first year, Natalie shared that she was unhappy with the weekend party culture on campus. When I interviewed her, she rolled her eyes about the activities many of her peers chose to engage in on the weekends. This response is similar to the attitude Hillary had about partying when she was a freshman. It would be valuable to revisit this conversation with Natalie at the conclusion of her third year on campus and determine if her own interests had changed to include partying in the student neighborhoods, or if she still maintained an aversion to these activities. All of the above examples illustrate the intersection of person-environment fit (Holland, 1997), and the phases of identity and self-authorship development (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

This process of internalizing and adopting values, ideas, and perspectives of those with whom you share an environment is an example of Kegan’s (1994) third order of consciousness. In this developmental phase, other people are the source of internal validation, and often represent the perceived authority in one’s life. As the students in this study developed a critical perspective on the campus culture, and the actual community as experienced by their peers, they move into phase 4 of Kegan’s orders of consciousness. This phase is characterized by self-authorship and the authority in a student’s life is internally constructed rather than external in nature. The students in this study had not yet finished their tenure in college and therefore, many had not achieved or realized Kegan’s fourth order of consciousness, making peer and institutional acceptance a primary component in their decision-making process.
Another way of understanding this is to consider Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) seven vectors of development that contribute to the creation of identity. In the “Developing Integrity” vector, Chickering and Reisser outline “three sequential but overlapping stages” including: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence (p. 51). As students move through this vector, they draw upon their upbringing, the views of their peers, and their personal experiences to develop a personal value system. This value system is continually refined as students affirm personal beliefs and balance these against social responsibility. As a result, a conscious, critical and comfortable self emerges.

**Implications for practice. Seminars or programming for students.** Given this understanding of student development and the needs of students ages 18 to 24, it is advisable for campus career services and student success departments to provide incoming students with “time management” or “reputation protection” programs or seminars that prepare them to move into the next developmental phase of their lives. As students begin college, they may still continue strong connections with pre-college friends. The further along they move in their educational career, the more care must be given to management of social time and presentation of self to the world outside of campus. Procrastination and misrepresentation of self are two of the qualities of social media much maligned in the past (Grabmeier, 2009; Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Sessions, 2009). Likewise, renewed attention has been given to the importance of maintaining a Facebook page that ensures success in the job hunt and manifests particular traits and characteristics (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009).
Often, student understandings of what will enhance their social capital and their cultural competencies on campus differ from what future employers or even faculty on campus would view as beneficial activity on Facebook. The student view is not entirely incomplete, nor is the view of institutional administrators who caution students to be discriminating in their Facebook use. Using Jack and Desmond’s cases as examples, we can see that students do self-censor for their own reasons, and are quite aware of the potential repercussions for not closely monitoring their Facebook accounts. While Desmond’s concerns were in line with what the administration foresees as a possible conflict (Facebook as a threat to potential future employment), Jack’s concerns may be ones that most administrators overlook.

Campus personnel may consider designing programming to assist students in comprehending the various audiences and privacy control mechanisms on Facebook. This may only be necessary in the first year of college as the data in this study indicates that over time, students become socialized by peers and faculty to be self-protective and to self-censor or monitor their Facebook pages. For students like Jack, student support groups for non-heterosexual students or students in the process of “coming out” may be more effective. Within these contexts, peer-to-peer advice on managing social media with diverse audiences may be more helpful than administrative programming.

**Facebook as Highlighting Identity and Self**

In college, students are individuating and establishing personal identities, while simultaneously figuring out how they will fit into a greater social world (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999, 2001). Add to this a preoccupation with vocational training that also determines an aspect of fit or belonging to a professional landscape or culture, and it
becomes apparent that students experience a sense of having multiple selves (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). For the students in this study, this is in part acted out through the process of having a virtual self on Facebook, and a concrete, literal self in face-to-face engagement. The Internet, and Facebook in particular, offer a new opportunity for defining and presenting self (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons, 2002).

The findings from this study reveal that individual students utilize Facebook toward an end of promoting and presenting an individual self, while simultaneously tending to, placing themselves in context with, and nurturing their collective or social worlds. In a way, this practice is a mirror on the developmental process in the college years as students go through a series of developmental periods, phases, or stages in which they focus on the development of the self, and positioning of that self within a greater social community (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993, Erikson, 1994; Kegan, 1982). Baxter Magolda (1992) demonstrated in her research that students moved toward self-authorship when they are validated as competent knowers. The students in this study received validation through Facebook as peers, family, and other Facebook friends commented and posted on their walls. According to Rendón (1994), “the more students get validated, the richer the academic and interpersonal experience” (p. 44). Thus, Facebook contributed to the process of developing self-authorship for many of the students in this study despite that the social medium is virtual and illusive rather than tangible (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2007).

The study participants viewed Facebook as a platform for self-expression and identity formation. Just as the clothes one wears and the music one listens to are often indicators of identity and individual expression, one’s Facebook wall can be seen as a
context for presentation of self. Goffman’s (1959) seminal work on self examined how people create and publicly promote their self in social contexts. Goffman explained the way in which human actors construct themselves in the social context of an encounter. He suggested, “when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey” (1959, p. 4). Thus, Goffman’s theories can be used to explain the way in which the students in this study maintained agency in the process of engaging with Facebook through their presentation of self to their personal audience without presenting their tangible selves.

If one’s Facebook profile is understood as a representation of oneself, then users must decide what version of that self is to be presented in that context (Goffman, 1959; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tom Tong, 2008). For the students in this study, there were often multiple versions or representations of the self being managed by a student rendering privacy management problematic and important. This speaks to the importance of identity management by the students in this study, and such important qualifiers of belonging on the University of Dayton campus as class, race, and sexual orientation. Blunders or mistakes in identity management on a Facebook page can have dire consequences (McKeon, 2010). There are numerous incidents in popular media that provide illustration of the problems that can arise when a user does not adequately manage his or her Facebook page (Mello, 2011; Skinner, 2008). The students in this study expressed that they were aware of such blunders, and made conscious choices in the management of their Facebook profiles.
Individuality is often defined and articulated in relation to group identity (Wilson, 2006). The majority of the students in this study identify with the University of Dayton as an attribute of their individual selves. They see their membership in the community as somewhat of a tribal identity, much like a sports fan understands themselves in relation to the team they champion (Jacobson, 2003). Jacobson (2003) wrote about identity formation among sports fans and claimed that socialization is a primary factor in the development of a fan identity on the part of a viewer. Over the course of their tenure on the University of Dayton campus, the student participants in this study were socialized to identify with the campus culture, and to absorb the model of community presented there into their own personal identity construction. Jacobson’s research supports this as she asserted, in addition to socialization, fan identity is developed in an effort to achieve group membership or be a part of a collective unit (2003).

Facebook fosters this identity by permitting students to maintain a virtual connection with their peers, and to virtually maintain and enhance their campus based involvements. For example, events like “Dayton to Daytona,” an informally organized spring trip where groups of University of Dayton students make a visit to the beach, is celebrated on Facebook walls. It is inevitable that there are other people who live in Dayton that visit Daytona Beach. Yet the University of Dayton students claim this experience as exceptional and view it as their own tribal ritual. Some students participate in this while others choose not to. This enables students to self-select which aspects of the group or tribal “UD” identity they wish to adopt and promote as components of their own individual constructed identities. In this study, Facebook became a platform for articulation of this identity and a performative space in which students acted this out.
Goffman (1959) outlined the front-stage, back-stage split in the way human relationships are enacted on the social stage. The findings in this study indicate that Facebook functions somewhat like a theatrical stage in which users act out their social lives. There is a front stage – the wall and public postings – and a back stage – the inbox and chat. Students use both to alternately privatize and publicize aspects of their interactions. The stagelike atmosphere that Facebook provides is unique and cannot be repeated on campus in a face-to-face context. This satirical film trailer for a mock film entitled, *The Social Network II*, illustrates how people who have become accustomed to life with Facebook would function without it (Nicepieceproductions, 2011). The people pictured in this video have developed needs based upon their dependence on the social media platform of Facebook to be themselves in the world. Of course this is satire, and not an accurate reflection of how people actually function in everyday life, but the important thing to consider in relation to this video is that students have had this structure and platform of presentation of self available throughout their adolescent lives, and it has become a part of their understanding of how to present oneself in the world.

**Implications for practice.** *Problematic the “UD” identity.* In order to develop what Baxter Magolda (2001) calls *self-authorship*, students must ask the important question, “Who am I.” By providing a ready-made “We are UD” identity, many students don’t come to “own” this identity and do not do the work of articulating said identity on their own terms. Understanding how students engage in the journey to self-authorship will assist student development personnel in assisting students to develop the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal characteristics and qualities necessary. According to Baxter Magolda, students begin by following formulas. The University of Dayton
provides a model for what a graduate of their institution would ideally look like, think like, and behave like in the world outside of campus. However, the “Crossroads” phase of the journey requires students to establish their own beliefs rather than adopting those of a pre-existing formula.

Facebook can be utilized toward this end. On Facebook, it is possible for students to read about, watch, and engage with other models of identity formation in addition to the limited variety on campus. While Facebook is not an ideal context in which this can occur given that the students in this study professed a preference for face-to-face engagement over virtual engagement, it can successfully be used toward this end. The Meme page discussed at length in this study is one example where students had an opportunity to engage with other students in debates over their perceptions of racism on campus. Through this process, students cement and realize their own understandings of race and prejudice and more thoroughly examine their assumptions, ideologies, and personal experiences.

By problematizing and challenging the institutional model or formula for how to behave in the world and the appropriate attitudes and dispositions to take on one’s journey through life, the institution will further the developmental process for students. Permitting productive, non-violent, constructive debate over such topics as the presence of racism, the presence of sexism, and the invisibility of class on campus is beneficial to students as it offers them the opportunity to own their identities as UD graduates or believers in social justice as is proffered by the institution. Facebook and other technologies can be employed toward this end. Coupled with events like the teach-in mentioned in Chapter IV, virtual contexts can provide environments in which
uncomfortable topics can be explored and discussed with a lessened or diminished fear of immediate retribution by those in power.

One suggestion on how to do this is to establish weekend retreats that are followed up on Facebook. Students could participate in a planned weekend “lock in” or institutionally organized event that problematizes and deconstructs the institutional ideals and identity. The conversations that occur on this retreat could then be continued in a small group context on Facebook. Discussions about racism, prejudice, privilege, notions of collective versus individual good, and/or the relationship between social and economic justice are some examples of topics that would provoke conversations that may provide students with the opportunity to develop authentic self understanding, and to better internalize institutional models.

**Facebook as Technology**

In a netographic study, the tools used to undertake the study can also be the topic of inquiry. This is the case with this project as Facebook was the vehicle used to access the ideas, thoughts, perspectives, and virtual lives of student co-researchers, I simultaneously endeavored to understand how this tool worked, and what effects it had on its users. Turkle (2011) claimed we have permitted technology to become the “architect of our intimacies” and that our lives have become more lonely and isolated as a result of our constant connectivity (p. jacket). The results of this study indicate somewhat of a contradiction.

A large portion of the data from this project was accumulated over the summer months when the majority of students had left campus and traveled to places as far away as Singapore and Ghana. During this time, I seized the opportunity to discuss the
experience of living abroad for the first time, the end of romantic relationships, and aspirations and dreams for the future with some of my student co-researchers. In another time and place, where the ubiquitous nature of Facebook was not possible, it is likely that I would not have had the opportunity to have such conversations. Even if we were to have sent letters via the postal service, the time these letters would have taken to get from person to person would have rendered the intensity and impromptu nature of the conversation pointless. That is, the spontaneity of our deep and intimate conversations would surely have been different.

Facebook offered me the opportunity to engage in deep and meaningful conversations with others who were living on the opposite side of the planet at the time of exchange. While this same dynamic is possible with email, texting, and by telephone, Facebook offered a unique context in which I could view evidence and artifacts of each student’s activities and engagements. Turkle’s (2011) critique of technology and Henry’s (2012) caution toward online engagement facilitating loneliness are valid assessments of the possibility for our current technological platforms to foster maladaptive traits within student populations. Veteran faculty frequently discuss the changes in student behaviors surrounding technology. My faculty colleagues lament an observed lack of attentiveness in class, lack of eye contact when speaking face-to-face, and overall distraction by screens and cell-phones in the classroom. The data in this study do not refute these claims and stories. Rather, the data offer insight into the ways that Facebook expands student experiences when in college.

Earlier in this chapter and in Chapter II, I discussed Suler’s (2004) disinhibition effect and how it is understood to be responsible for negative outcomes of communication
online. The Facebook memes that were controversial and subsequently taken down on the University of Dayton Meme page elicited dramatic responses from students, faculty and the administration. Many of these posts were determined to be offensive to members of the campus community. This is not unique to the University of Dayton. In the popular media, it is not unheard of for violence in a face-to-face context to be caused by postings and conversations online (Editor, 2012). However, there are contexts in which the lowering of inhibitions in the cloaked or veiled context of communication online has benefits.

When I ran into Jack this spring on campus, he and I discussed my project. I reminded him of some of the things he told me about his experience during his first year. He cringed a bit as we discussed it. He appeared to be shocked that he had so freely shared so many of his feelings with me. It did not make him unhappy, but he was surprised that he was so forthcoming with some very difficult emotions in an online context. The relief from inhibition that comes from being online permits a freedom of expression that may be near impossible in a face-to-face context. It also permits the user to begin conversations with people who are not available at that time. That is, it allows a user to start a chat on Facebook with someone who is busy at the time but that they can become engaged when they are available. This type of communication saves time, and transcends geographic challenges.

In her dissertation research, Henry (2012) claimed that faculty and staff comment regularly that today’s students “are less able to interact effectively in face-to-face social encounters” (p. 18). I did not encounter this in my research as I selected students who were adept at communication in the classroom so as to facilitate successful engagement
throughout the duration of the study. Henry also explored “the intersection between students’ use of technology and social media, indictors of their social and psychological well-being, and aspects of their sense of community during the college years” (2012, p. 20). Interestingly, Henry’s research revealed that an increase in time spent using social media – such as Facebook – facilitated greater psychosocial well-being and experience of community. This is well-supported by my findings as the students in this study all shared stories of how Facebook helped them at various times in their lives. However, the students in this study also criticized users who appear to be “addicted” to Facebook. This suggests that the University of Dayton students preference their face-to-face friendships over online ones, and see online socializing as a simple augmentation of lived relationships rather than a suitable substitute.

Baym (2010) suggested, “the social concerns we voice when we discuss technology would be concerns even if there were no technology around” (p. 48). There are differing views on whether or not a particular technology can be moral or immoral. In this project, I adopt Baym’s view that technology can serve as a conduit for social behaviors, but that in and of itself, it is not able to be a moral actor. Light and McGrath (2010) adopt a view that Facebook and other technologies have a mediating rather than an intermediary role in human’s lives. That is, they see the role of such social media platforms as having their own ethics, and thus influencing the behaviors of actors who engage with these sites. It would be possible to examine the behaviors and practices of my student co-researchers through a lens of the ethical framework of Facebook. In doing so, I could explore the limits, charges, and possibilities that users of this SNS face when they engage with it. However, this was not my goal when undertaking this research.
Treating Facebook as a value neutral locus for study, I return to McLuhan’s (1969) caution about mankind’s unthinking consumption of media and communicative technologies. McLuhan’s warning does not fall on deaf ears. The students in this study are aware of the potential dangers and pitfalls that they may face if they mismanage their engagement with Facebook. Technology on the University of Dayton campus is ubiquitous, and this is an important factor to consider when constructing models for student development for this particular campus.

**Implications for practice.** Conduct an institutional technology audit. Pascarella (2006) outlined directions for future research in higher education and included the investigation of social media technology and its impact on college student populations in his list of ten important topics for research. Past research on social media use has commonly come from disciplines other than higher education (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Suler, 1996, 2004). A new collection of research on college student use of social media (Martínez Alemán & Wartman, 2009; Henry, 2012) has emerged and offered empirical data to inform the practice of working with college students on and off campus.

An institutional audit of the practices, habits, and loci of engagement with social media would benefit administrators and students alike. Understanding when, where, and how students and faculty go online and interact on social media platforms is akin to understanding when people tend to congregate in a dining hall in meeting food service needs. In this way, student development professionals and faculty can design programming that incorporates the virtual practices and habits of the campus community. It may also give student affairs administrators an insight into student behavior that have
confounded them for centuries including alcohol use, raucous behavior, retention/attrition, etc.

**Facebook Use as Emotional Need Fulfillment**

**Community.** In my findings in Chapter IV, I reported student understandings of community, and their examples of how it is experienced and evidenced on campus. Community was understood by the participants in this study as something necessary in their lives. It was viewed as essential for experiencing true contentment and happiness. However, what makes community effective and the particular circumstances that foster it differed somewhat from student to student.

In analyzing the language students used to discuss the experience of community, there were some similarities. “Think,” “feel,” “sense” and “know” were verbs used to describe how students experienced community. Terms such as “everyone,” “party/parties,” “involved,” “together,” “shared,” “many,” “belonging,” “similarities,” “fit,” and “group” were all commonly used to describe community. These recurring terms demonstrate that there are shared methods of expression or linguistic metaphors for describing the experience.

However, shared metaphors or descriptors do not necessarily indicate that all students share the understanding that the University of Dayton provides a satisfactory community environment. Dick’s comments about how the University of Dayton students “sacrifice character for convention” made me pause and consider how students come to understand and define community. It is possible that conformity is of great importance to students who choose to attend the University of Dayton. If this is the case, then the community that is sought after and savored by students may simply be a reification of
sameness. That is, it is possible that students who feel like they belong on the campus changed themselves upon arrival in an effort to fit in. Feeling marginal is understood to be a negative experience, and as Schlossberg (1989) suggested, individuals who feel marginal often worry and feel concern about whether they matter to anyone else. Dick’s observation of willingness and a propensity on the part of many University of Dayton students to “sacrifice character for convention” may be a result of their efforts to limit their own marginality and find fit on campus. Likewise, Dick’s feelings that others were doing this may have contributed to his own attitude of rejection of campus culture and his sense of not belonging on campus.

At the University of Dayton, community is intentional as is evidenced by the campus statement on community (Image 4). This statement illustrates the goals and aspirations of the institution in its efforts to create community among its students, faculty, and staff. However, the intentional creation of community can be problematic. It is possible to look at a community as an institution rather than a relationship, and this is a mistake. If we view community as a relationship rather than an institution, we understand that it is constantly in flux and open and amenable to modification and refinement. It is possible that Facebook can facilitate this process as social media offers degrees of connectivity and interaction that were never before possible on campus. In other words, it is possible to imagine Facebook as a tool to be employed by students, faculty and staff in their efforts at creating and maintaining community on campus.
COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY
Catholic and Marianist Learning and Living

The University of Dayton's Catholic and Marianist mission calls us to develop our character and integrity as leaders committed to building community in our world. We accept this challenge and make the following pledge:

We commit ourselves to learn in and through community.
We commit ourselves to respect the dignity of every person in thought, word and action.
We commit ourselves to promote the common good.

As a contributing member of this educational community:
I will treat myself and others with respect and compassion.
I will be honest, truthful and live with integrity.
I will develop a life of faith and/or reflection, and will respect the religious traditions of others.
I will integrate what I learn with how I live.
I will take responsibility for myself and for my community.
I will practice servant leadership.
Together, we promise to strengthen our role in building communities of hope and respect, peace and reconciliation in our world.

UNIVERSITY of DAYTON

commitment2community.udayton.edu
**Geography.** It is interesting to consider how the physical campus affected student experience of community on campus. Jen referred to the campus community as a sheltered “bubble.” In a survey of the physical campus, it is clear that students inhabit particular spaces with clearly defined boundaries. When asked about the nearby Second Street Market or the Trolley Stop Bar just blocks from campus, many of the students did not know what these popular or long-established Dayton venues were. Their understanding of what Dayton is and of whom it is composed is limited and constrained by the geographic boundaries of the campus. Students have community that is geographically constructed, but only with their fellow students, some faculty, and some staff. The incidents of interaction with people without University of Dayton institutional affiliation within the Dayton area are few and far between.

Fostering community on campus requires campus officials to take seriously the threats to the relationships that compose a community among faculty, students and staff. One method of doing this on the part of student support personnel is to restrict student access to surrounding areas in an attempt to control the environment in which students interact and create their communities. Geographically, the University of Dayton has been successful in limiting student engagement with the surrounding populations. Invisible barriers delineate areas that are designated as campus and those that are considered to be off-limits to students. For example, when looking for drunk drivers, the University of Dayton Police often patrol bars and restaurants located on the border of the campus. This use of official campus law enforcement to patrol borders is a distinct and concrete effort at maintaining the “bubble” to which Jen refers above.
Facebook adds a new dimension to border protection practices because it permits a permeation of these boundaries on a virtual level, as students are able to engage with people outside of the geographic boundaries of the campus. Because of this, Facebook could be considered dangerous by those who are assigned the task of protecting students and ensuring that they remain within the care of the institutional system. Facebook provokes new considerations of *in loco parentis*, which is Latin for “in place of the parent” on campuses (Garner, 2009, p. 858). The legal situation where an institution becomes the temporary guardian or caretaker of a child, assuming some or all of the responsibilities of a parent, is important to in this context as the institution is charged with keeping students physically and emotionally safe while on campus.

For the most part, however, according to the data in this study, Facebook functions primarily as a campus community enhancement tool rather than a danger or a detractor from student engagement and investment in the community. Yet, its presence may cause some students to seek comfort, solace, and acceptance within populations outside of the carefully monitored geographic domain of campus.

**Coping.** One of the themes outlined in the findings in Chapter IV was “Coping.” Students’ ability to cope with the myriad of emotional ups and downs they encounter during college is often a factor that determines their success (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Erikson, 1994; Kegan, 1982). In his study of the demands of modern society, Kegan (1994) suggested that most adolescents in college have not achieved the levels of consciousness (*orders* in Kegan’s words) necessary to succeed in a university environment. Kegan advocated for evolutionary bridges to be constructed between
students and faculty in order to enable students to feel successful and to accomplish what instructors believe they should be capable of accomplishing while in college.

Some of the distractions that students encounter while in undergraduate school have little to do with the coursework they are undertaking. The students in this study were coping with break ups (both their own and their parents’), racial identity, sexual orientation and identity, and issues of environmental fit. These struggles were distractions from classroom learning and the subject of the curriculum. Facebook permitted the students an opportunity to explore subjects of interest to them that were not contained in their classroom environments. Some of this exploration occurred by the social media platform enabling consistent contact with friends and family that were not on campus, yet who offered advice, consolation, and encouragement during times of struggle.

A surprising result of this research process was the intimacy that developed between some of my student co-researchers and myself in our inbox communications throughout the duration of the study. One student and I discussed his experience of being sexually assaulted. Another engaged me in a critical reading of a piece of literature and a discussion of the characters in relation to his sense of personal identity. A third shared her innermost concerns about maintaining her personal identity as a woman, and a professional, while simultaneously meeting the needs of a man in her life. These conversations were facilitated by the relatively anonymous context of the Facebook inbox forum. This detachment or anonymity could occur in email, in other instant messaging forums, or in texting, perhaps. However, the ubiquitous nature of Facebook (many students claimed to almost always have it open on their desktop of their laptops) made it
very convenient to share deep reflective thoughts with one another at what otherwise may have been inopportune times.

**Implications for practice.** *Faculty, administrator, and institutional survey.*

Considering the fact that students are often preoccupied by many of these other developmental aspects of life other than their curricular tasks, the data suggest conducting a survey of faculty and administrator’s understandings of how, when, and where students socialize, make meaning, and cope with their lives. It is possible that many faculty and student development personnel are not aware of the fact that students use Facebook toward a number of purposes that are not all superficial and cursory to the learning environment. If we define *learning* in broader terms and use it to explain activities of self-discovery, political engagement, and social exploration, it would seem that much learning takes place or has the potential to take place on Facebook. It is likely that many faculty and administrators are unaware of exactly how students use Facebook to cope and to organize their social lives. Because they may have the wrong perceptions of how students use Facebook, they may be unable to translate the medium into a meaningful, student-centered context that may enhance rather than detract from formal and informal learning.

The creation of faculty and administrative educational programming to enhance their understanding of the nature of the current student populations with whom they are working would be beneficial to all parties. Many of these students have been “wired” from an early age and utilize social media to meet their social, and sometimes academic needs in a manner that has never before been common among college populations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Students’ understandings of what it is to be social and to experience
community may differ substantially from what faculty and administrators expect them to be. That is, some current programming and practices on campus may be less effective than faculty and administrators believe them to be.

For example, the teach-in described in Chapter IV was a result of conversations that took place on a Facebook wall. While Facebook may not be the desired locus for challenges to existing hegemonic structures that prohibit and limit community on campus, it is a platform that is frequently employed by students for self-expression. In past generations of college students, letters to the editor of the campus newspaper or physical campus protests were common ways that students questioned established social norms and practices (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Boren, 2001; Van Dyke, 1998). Contemporary social activism is largely organized online as was evidenced by the recent revolution in Egypt (Herrera, 2011). If faculty and administrators are to encourage and honor student critiques and challenges to existing power structures, they must contend with the virtual context in which many of these conversations take place. As indicated in the findings from this research, Facebook has often come to replace formally designed campus-based platforms for undertaking this same task.

In the following section, I will reflect on the process of doing this research, and examine and critique netographic research methodologies. Following this, I will outline some limitations of this research, and directions for future research.

Reflections on Methodology

Netography (Kozinets, 2010) is a new research methodology. It is characterized by the context of the research being conducted. Because the entirety of the research participants’ lives are not housed on-line, I did not have access to as many aspects of the
feelings, practices, behaviors, and “lived experience” that is customary for a phenomenologically oriented ethnographic study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Obtaining information that connotes the “lived experience” of the participants’ lives was often single-dimensional as our interactions and my observations of their activities were virtual and largely textually based (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In his concluding chapter of Netography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online (2010), Kozinets calls netographic researchers “wired anthropologists” (p. 182). In this project, my skills as an anthropologist were hampered slightly by the limits I placed upon myself in my interaction with students on Facebook. Traditionally, in the field, anthropologists have to spend countless hours finding fit with their research subjects. They must learn the skills and the subtle nuances of inner-community interaction. Urban anthropological works such as Slim’s Table by Mitchell Duneier (1992) or Tally’s Corner by Elliot Liebow (1967) illustrate well the methodology of ethnographic research conducted within one’s own culture. Ethnographic research is often a process of passing or mastering the criteria and skills to manage socially within a subculture different from one’s own.

Throughout the duration of my use of Facebook, I have developed a keen understanding of the various ways one can communicate with others within this platform. I understand how to tag people in posts, make funny comments on the photos of friends, and how to keep things private that I wish not to be seen by everyone in my friends list. I am an adept user in my personal account, and yet, I never had occasion to learn the rules and practices of posting, “liking,” and commenting on the student’s Facebook walls. That is, because I restricted my own interaction with my research participants to a private inbox context, I never had the opportunity to make the mistake of “liking” something that
was intended to be sarcastic, or critiquing a favorite band, or posting a political cartoon that offended many of my student participants. Trials and tribulations of this sort assist ethnographic researchers in establishing their position within the social context of the research site, and to learn the customs and practices of their population of interest. In essence, the parameters that I used to protect my co-researchers from any social fallout for being friends with a faculty member kept me from gaining access to the deepest levels of their experiences. However they did engage in private conversations of a more personal where they revealed aspects of themselves that they might not have revealed.

I struggled with keeping this project on track. Because I adopted a qualitative methodology with a grounded theoretical approach to understanding data, I wanted the themes of this study to emerge from the data. The ubiquitous nature of Facebook, and the ease with which one can engage in a conversation about a variety of topics kept me constantly battling an urge to engage students in conversations that had nothing to do with this project. For example, at one point, Jen communicated that she was greatly enjoying traveling during the summer. This sidetracked us into a conversation about “drop out” cultures and people who decided that they were dissatisfied with our society, as it exists in its contemporary incarnation, and remedied this by traveling and calling no place “home.” I realized then that Facebook is a virtual platform upon which people from the most marginalized corners of the world can engage in community with other like-minded individuals. It was a challenge not to begin to investigate this practice, and to keep my focus on the intended focus of this study.

Similarly, because netographic research is so comprehensive, and because nearly every utterance in an online context has a tangible record that can be textually analyzed
and considered to be data, coding and identifying themes within the data was an arduous task. Every post, every photo, every link to a song, and all inbox communications could essentially be considered useful data in this project. Deciding how to limit what I would analyze, what was of peripheral significance, and what would lead me to go beyond my data was difficult. The research topic was community, and community is a very broad term. Coupling this with a plethora of data created a daunting process of limitation and categorization the likes of which I have never encountered in my face-to-face ethnographic research as an anthropologist.

Other scholars have explored the challenges of ethnographic research conducted in unconventional contexts. Drawing upon Marcus (1995), Fernandez (2009) suggested that multi-sited ethnography is here to stay, as there are multiple locales in which people conduct their lives – both geographically and virtually. Multi-site ethnography “differs in that it recognizes the increasingly complicated relationship between time and space as experienced by contemporary subjectivities, leaving behind the notion that ethnography is only produced in a single site of intensive investigation” (Fernandez, 2009, p. 98). I could have achieved greater understanding of student experience of community had I spent concentrated time with students in their daily lives, outside of Facebook. It would have been an opportunity to determine how their tangible presentation of self paralleled with their virtual depiction of self.

Nathan (2005) enrolled in college as an adult woman in an attempt to experience residential college student life. Her study demonstrated that such barriers as age are problematic in contexts such as my research project. My age, and status as a known adjunct faculty member, prohibited me from gaining access to the students’ intimate
experiences of community. Other than the face-to-face interviews, it was impossible for me to access more of student “lived experience” than was available on their Facebook walls (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Markham and Baym (2009) claimed that relying on online methodologies in research limits the access to information to the participants who agree to participate, and their relative activity in participation. In this study, there were a number of participants who did not engage actively on Facebook but a few times while they were being observed. These students confessed to having been on Facebook throughout the duration of the study, but they were “lurkers” rather than active posters (Markham & Baym, 2009). Markham and Baym suggested that lurkers are silent, but their silence is still “highly consequential for understanding an internet-related context” (2009, p. 43). I had to provoke exchange with these students and this exchange was sometimes unconnected to anything I had observed on Facebook. The majority of the findings in this study are based upon active participation on Facebook, not passive lurking. Face-to-face interviews offered me greater insight into the practices and understandings of these students, but the observational component of research was minimally instructive.

Lastly, studying Facebook in the context of a college campus environment is an odd enterprise. Facebook, while a social media platform that originated on a college campus, and was initially designed by students for student use, has morphed into a large-scale, commercial social media device. According to Hirsch (2011), “innovation is often a process of appropriating features developed by one social group for use by another” (p. 147). Throughout this study, I continually asked myself to “whom” Facebook belong. Adopting an attitude or a disposition of inquiry that questioned how students use
Facebook and how campuses respond, or actively use it alongside student initiated employment, caused me to reflect on the propriety of the social media platform. At this time, Facebook has been pushed to become a publicly traded company (Salmon, 2012). It is a business, with business-related concerns. It is no longer the simple tool of a set of college students, and it is not controllable by any educational institution. As such, it is important for any researcher investigating its impact on the experience of students on a particular campus to acknowledge and account for its commercial and global nature.

Students choose to use it because it is popular and ubiquitous, at the same time, they construct a critical relationship with it because they are aware of its nature. This constantly changing and continuously renegotiated relationship and set of understandings impacts the process of doing research.

**Limitations and Directions for the Future**

**Limitations**

This qualitative study is a snapshot of a small group of students on a highly residential, religiously affiliated, urban college campus. As such, the image it presents is by far not comprehensive and the results cannot be generalized to any college populations. It begs for further qualitative research on Facebook use by commuter student populations, returning adult student populations, graduate student populations and even faculty. It calls for quantitative surveys on usage perceptions by students and faculty as well. The results of this study do not suggest that Facebook will serve the same community enhancing functions for all students on all campuses, nor does it suggest that campus community would suffer if Facebook were to disappear or change as a result of it being a publically traded enterprise. This study should be taken as an example of the
“how” and “why” of student engagement with social media and should serve as an invitation for further conversations. As a student used communication it may possess implications for a campus push for student centeredness and student centered learning (Christensen & Eyring, 2012)

There was one International student participant in this study (Jen). With the recent influx of International students on the University of Dayton campus from China and the Middle East, it would have been valuable to obtain more data on the Facebook use of these international students. As I observed in this research, students who travel and study or live abroad use Facebook in a different manner than students who live on campus. Facebook becomes a connector and a conduit for continuity of relationships and subsequently fosters engagement with the web-like network of relationships students envision their lives to be. As Jen indicated, her understanding of her connections and sense of “home” in various geographic contexts is not linear, but rather, enmeshed and intertwined. Whether she is living in Ohio, Singapore, Guatemala or another locale, Jen desires to continue to foster intimacy in her relationships with people with whom she has developed a closeness in each of these places. Capturing a snapshot of this process via Facebook, for more International students on the University of Dayton campus, would offer a better understanding of the experience of community for these students.

The same could be said of commuter students and returning adult student populations. These groups are underrepresented at the University of Dayton, as it is a traditional, residential, predominantly undergraduate campus. Dick’s experience on campus was vastly different from his residential peers. But in other institutional contexts, commuting to campus is the norm and the experience of community on campus for these
students is structurally and qualitatively different from residential students in most cases (Jacoby, 2000; Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Another limitation to this study is the duration of time in which it took place. Had the observation and interviews been undertaken over a two-year period, the results would be more comprehensive and conclusive. A longitudinal study of the Facebook use of the student participants would permit me to report on the process of community development for first-year students, and to account for Facebook’s role in this. Additionally, data of this nature would afford a researcher the opportunity to document students’ collegiate and post-collegiate perspectives on community. The need for a longitudinal assessment was well-illustrated by Rachel when she said, “I know I told you earlier this year that I thought the campus was diverse… but I now realize I was only immersing myself with the small population that was diverse on campus.” This statement alludes to the fact that college students’ understandings and perspectives are constantly evolving and changing, making long-term studies valuable.

Directions for the Future

This project examined the effects of student use of Facebook on their experience of community on campus. The data here reveal that many of the students experience community on the University of Dayton. It also indicates that Facebook does not detract from this, and in many cases, enhances it. But what is the actual locus of this community? How do students manage to overcome the differences that prohibit the development and maintenance of equality that fosters community?

I speculate above that the differences in race, class, and orientation that may seem apparent prior to students’ arrival on campus are tempered as students immerse
themselves in the campus climate and culture. I recommend future research into the exact nature of community on the University of Dayton campus, and how this is affected and informed by class, race, orientation and ethnicity. Additionally, an exploration of the campus borders and the ways in which the institution maintains its “bubble” condition would yield important data to further illustrate the nature of community on campus. Qualitative investigation on the process of assimilation students undergo when they arrive on campus would also be helpful, as changing campus culture requires an understanding of such processes.

Balanced against this qualitative investigation of the student assimilation process, another interesting topic of investigation for future research is the role of the institution in student’s lives in the era of online social networking. Lipka (2008) explored the legal obligations and conditions of in loco parentis for educational institutions in regard to Facebook and other social networking sites. Lipka’s work is purely journalistic, however, a qualitative investigation of the institutional perspective on Facebook and their role as guardians of student well-being while on campus would augment her cursory investigation. Knowing exactly how institutions are expected to respond from a legal perspective is only one aspect of the current manifestation of in loco parentis. Schools like the University of Dayton that are almost entirely residential have a strong tradition of serving as guardians of their undergraduate students. Research on the ways in which institutions like the University of Dayton have handled student conduct online would offer a more complete picture of the impact this social media site has had on colleges.

The final topic I propose for future research is one of process. This research determines that students employ Facebook in their quest to establish and maintain
community on campus, and explains how they use Facebook in their social lives. But what else can be done? How do colleges that successfully create campus communities that are enhanced by social media, and that satisfactorily meet the needs of their student, faculty, and staff populations do it? A study of how social media is employed to create contexts that generate favorable outcomes of community on campus would be of great benefit for those who are facilitating this process as campus professionals. Likewise, an analysis of the institutional theoretical goals or dispositions (missions perhaps?) that foster these successful environments would provide campus community architects with models to imitate. These models may prove to be less hierarchical than most, and based on collective imaginings and cooperative efforts. But this is an unknown, and one that future research will help to illuminate.

The discussions with Jack where he cringed at how much he revealed in retrospect indicate the need to follow up with students in a specified period of time following a study. Increasing the length of time for the study as indicated above might reveal some insight, but in lieu of that, a follow-up one year out may also be revealing. It would be possible then to examine the behaviors and practices of my student co-researchers through a lens of the ethical framework of Facebook. In doing so, I could explore the limits, charges, and possibilities that users of this SNS face when they engage with it.
Summary

This chapter has been an examination of data on Facebook use through several different lenses. These lenses include: Facebook as a virtual porch; Facebook as a tool to navigate and mediate issues of class, race, and social capital for college students, adopting a critical lens of examination; Facebook and its affect on student experience of community from the perspective of student development theory; Facebook as a medium and platform for students’ presentation and exploration of self and personal identity; Facebook as a technological medium used by students in this particular time and place; and Facebook’s role in assisting students to meet and fulfill emotional needs while in college.

The findings indicate that students are creative and savvy, utilizing this social networking site toward a number of ends in serving their social and emotional needs. Likewise, the data suggest that community is important to college students, and that they have specific tools and mechanisms at their employ to enhance their experience of community on campus. The participants in this study demonstrate that critique is alive and well in the minds of college students, and that even the most assimilating and accommodating of students maintain an interest in using technology to change the world. As we move into new dimensions of technological mediation in students’ lives, this study can serve as a benchmark or a reference point for one of the first and most widespread social technological interfaces, and its affect and impact on residential student populations. Facebook may be the first virtual social platform so universally accepted and utilized by college students, but I am certain it will not be the last. Technology, as indicated in McLuhan’s (1962) idea of a “global village,” will continue to link learners to
one another with greater frequency than ever before, making this seemingly timely research appear to be timeless in understanding the relationship between student development and technological interaction (p. 31).

Abney Korn, K. (2010, October). *Authenticity of self on Facebook: A study of undergraduate student self reported behaviors*. Poster presentation at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Educational Researchers Association, Columbus, OH.


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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

The federal government and University policy require that the involvement of human participants in research be monitored by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The University of Dayton’s IRB works to ensure that appropriate ethical standards and statutory requirements governing the protection of human participants are followed by all researchers affiliated with the University of Dayton and/or those researchers who wish to conduct research on the University of Dayton campus or among University of Dayton students.

ALL SUBMISSIONS SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO IRB@NOTES.UDAYTON.EDU.

Please answer all questions on pages 3-5 of this application form. A complete application will include descriptions of ALL of the following:

1. A research question or hypothesis.
2. A review of the relevant literature. The literature review should include coverage of the problem to be addressed, should provide support for the methods and instruments used in the research, and should demonstrate the project's potential impact on the knowledge base.
3. An experimental or research design which will answer the research question or hypothesis.
4. The method for determining sample size, for selecting participants, and for communicating with participants. How will data be collected?
5. How the data will be used to answer the research question or hypothesis. This should include a description of data analysis procedures to be used.
6. Statement of anticipated risks to the physical and mental health, comfort, and privacy of experimental subjects.
7. A description of measures that will be taken to minimize risks and to ensure confidentiality of sensitive personal data during and after the research.
8. The text of any questionnaire, evaluative or diagnostic instrument, or debriefing protocol designed specifically for this research.
9. The text of an informed consent form to be signed by each subject before participation.

If your proposal involves data collection at another site, you must include documentation of approval to conduct research there. For example, if you are collecting data at a public school, you should include a letter of approval from the building principal. If your proposal involves collection of data at other universities, you must submit to those IRBs as well.

ALL SUBMISSIONS SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO IRB@NOTES.UDAYTON.EDU. Research projects on which data collection has already begun cannot be reviewed or approved by the IRB. All student submissions (papers, dissertations, theses) must have faculty sponsorship.

All questions about policy, specific reviews, advisory opinions, and other technical matters should be directed to:

Mary Connolly, PhD
Chair, IRB
Kettering Labs Room 542
Dayton, OH 45469-0104
mary.connolly@notes.udayton.edu
Phone: (937) 229-3493
Fax: (937) 229-2291

ALL SUBMISSIONS SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO IRB@NOTES.UDAYTON.EDU.
Researcher(s): Karen Abney Korn

Date of Submission: April 20, 2011

Project Title: Utilizing Facebook to Articulate Self and Sustain Community: Experiences of Undergraduate Students on a Midwestern College Campus.

Department: Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Telephone: 937.684.0464
Email address: kabneykorn@yahoo.com
Mailing address: 450 Volusia Ave. Dayton, Ohio 45409

Position in the University (faculty, student, etc.). If student, please indicate faculty sponsor:
Doctoral Student/Part Time Faculty Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work

Project is for (please check all that apply): scholarly research _____ dissertation _____ x Thesi s _____ class project _____ funded project _____ other (specify):

________________________________________

Project is: _____ x_____ unfunded _______ funded (if funded, please complete the following)

Funding agency (actual/potential):
Contract/Grant No. (if applicable):

For evaluation of your project, please check any of the following that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x Mentally or physically challenged participants</td>
<td>Participants studied at UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Children or minor participants (under 18)</td>
<td>Subjects at non-UD locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Prisoners, parolees, or incarcerated subjects</td>
<td>Students as subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Filming, video or audio recording of subjects</td>
<td>Employees as subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x Questionnaires or surveys to be administered</td>
<td>Pregnant subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Use of data banks, archives or other records</td>
<td>Involves blood samples</td>
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<tr>
<td>__ Subjects major language is not English</td>
<td>Subjects to be paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Exclusion of women or children subjects</td>
<td>Oral history project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Involves deception</td>
<td>Sexual content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check the applicable category.

___ Research on normal educational practices in commonly accepted educational settings
(if yes, please justify below*)

___ Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement)

___ Research involving survey or interview procedures (if yes, please see below**)

___ Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, or records.

___ None of the above are applicable to my project.

*If you think your research employs “normal education practices” occurring in common educational settings, please justify below or on another clearly labeled sheet of paper.

**If your research involves use of survey or interview procedures, please indicate:

1. Response will be records in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified (by anyone other than the researcher) either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject ___ x ___ yes ____ no. If yes, please specify your method (e.g., pseudonym, code numbers, etc.)

Students will be given pseudonyms and no photos will be used in this study.

2. Would subjects’ responses, if they became known outside the research, reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject’s financial standing or employability?

   ____ yes ______ x ___ no.

3. The research deals with sensitive aspects of the subject’s own behavior, including but not limited to illegal drug use, sexual behavior, or use of alcohol ___ x ___ yes ____ no.

In this study, students’ use of Facebook will be analyzed. The students will not be asked to post anything on their Facebook wall by the researcher. All communication between subject and researcher will be private.
Additional Questions
For Research involving Human Subjects

Use additional sheets for answering the following questions. Please submit your answers in typewritten form.

1. A research question or hypothesis

2. An experimental or research design which will answer the research question or hypothesis. Because all research potentially places subjects at some level of risk, no improperly designed research can be ethically acceptable. If the design cannot answer the research question or hypothesis, either because of confounds or other design errors, then the potential gain in knowledge cannot outweigh the potential risk to the participant.
   a. The method for determining sample size and for using the target group
   b. How the data will be used to answer the research question or hypothesis

3. A statement addressing potential risks of the research versus the anticipated benefits
4. A description of measures that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of participants before and after the research
5. Explicit information about the recruiting, selection, and compensation of subjects.
6. The text of any questionnaire, evaluative or diagnostic instrument, or debriefing protocol designed specifically for this research.
7. The text of an informed consent form to be signed by each subject before participation.
1. A research question or hypothesis:

The purpose of this study is to explore how Facebook shapes students’ experience of community on campus. This study will examine how community is defined, understood, mediated and influenced by students; and how Facebook influences their social lives as a part of the campus community. Going away to college has always been a time when young adults stepped out of the comfort zone of home and into a new community: both physically and socially. Students turn their focus from their parents’ rules and programs, and begin to experience daily life among peers. They invest themselves in the community of the campus and foster new relationships.

The primary question guiding this research is: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and sustentation of community while attending college? In other words:

- How is the experience of community on campus for students affected by engagement with Facebook?
- How do college students understand Facebook’s influence on their experience of community during their college years?

2. Methodology:

The project undertaken here will span a period of up to seven months of data collection. The proposed timeline for the online component of this study is to commence in April of 2011 and conclude in November of 2011. Students leave campus in May of 2011 to return to their homes, or other locations, for the summer. The informants will be interviewed initially at the start of the project, and then followed virtually by the researcher throughout the remainder of the study. Students will be asked to conduct a second interview upon their return to campus in August. The project will be concluded in the fall of 2011.

This study will combine face-to-face or Skype interviews and longitudinal online conversations and observations, including some content analysis. The face-to-face or Skype interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The methodology employed in this study is called netography (Kozinets, 2010). Netography, according to Kozinets, “is participant-observational research based in online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding of representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon” (p. 60). As such, this qualitative study will include traditional ethnographic methodologies such as participant-observation, coupled with online textual communication via chat and email, and online anthropological voyeurism.

3. A statement addressing potential risks of the research versus the anticipated benefits:

The risks for participants in this study include the exposure of their personal Facebook profiles to the observation of the researcher. The students who participate in this study will permit the researcher access to all of the photos, links, comments, and postings that any other Facebook “friend” can see. It excludes the researcher from viewing private emails or messages and/or private IM messages. As such, it is possible
for the student participant to continue to utilize Facebook in a private manner for communication with particular friends without the researcher seeing these communications.

The student participants will not be required to be Facebook “friends” with each other. They will only be friends with the researcher’s anonymous account. The researcher will have a pseudonym and an image to disguise her identity to any others who examine the subject’s list of friends. If one of the student subjects visits the wall of the researcher, the researcher’s wall will be empty and her page will be closed to access for anyone but her own Facebook friends. The researcher will never write on the participant’s Facebook wall, but will rather communicate about her observations via private message or IM chat. None of these correspondences will be shared with other student participants. As such, the researcher’s presence on Facebook will be minimal. The researcher plans to act as a nearly invisible observer. This is intended to preclude the possibility of the researcher making any comments, postings, or other engagements with the student subject’s friends that could cause potential social or relational problems.

The student subjects will be invited to participate in a reflective pen pal method of textual exchange. The researcher will ask the students each personalized questions pertaining to their own Facebook usage in a private message. The student participant will be invited to reflect and respond to the researcher’s questions and observations. This process is intended to offer the student participant the opportunity to engage and reflect on their own behaviors, practices, inclinations, understandings, perceptions, and relationships. The researcher believes that this process will be an enlightening one for the student participants and will enable them to gain some personal insight into their own motivations, desires, impulses, self-image, and understandings. This is an intrinsic and internal benefit.

4. A description of measures that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of participants before and after the research:

Each participant will be given a pseudonym for use in data analysis and presentation. While all of the participants will be aware of the existence of other participants, there will be no contact between them. If they wish to know the identity of the other participants, they may visit the Wall of the researcher and view the researcher’s list of friends. If they choose to contact one another and discuss each other’s participation in the study, this will be possible. If they wish to not discuss their involvement with other participants, they will be able to decline to engage with the other participants. There is no perceivable threat to the trustworthiness of the research or to the student participants by other student participants knowing their identities throughout the duration of the study. All of the student participants attend the same institution and have most likely been in classes with one another. The effect of being mutual friends with an invisible researcher online is akin to attending class or dining together in the dining hall.

At the conclusion of the study, the researcher will deactivate her account on Facebook. She will delete all conversations that took place within the Facebook platform between the participants and her. All data will be stored in Microsoft Word format on the hard drive of the researcher. All digital audio files of face-to-face interviews will also be destroyed. The final presentation of the data will employ the pseudonyms generated at the onset of the research. This will permit the student participants to maintain their anonymity.
5. Explicit information about the recruiting, selection, and compensation of subjects.

The scope of this research will be limited to the study of approximately 10 students who are in their first, second, or third year at the University of Dayton during 2011. Students will be selected to be invited to participate on the basis of the researcher’s understanding that they will be willing and active participants. Initial recruits will be selected from a convenience sample of former students of the researcher. These students will not have the occasion of having the researcher as a faculty member in future semesters because the researcher teaches introductory anthropology courses as a contractual faculty member on the University of Dayton campus. Additional subjects will be purposively sampled using “conceptually-driven sequential sampling” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). That is, the researcher may seek out additional participants who have already taken introductory anthropology should attrition occur or for the purpose of fulfilling the researcher’s desire to observe a stratified population, i.e. to get a broader representation of gender, race, international, sexual orientation.

The nature of this research is similar to a pen pal relationship. It will begin with an initial face-to-face or Skype interview and conclude with a second face-to-face interview, both of which will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. Other than these interviews, the bulk of the research will be conducted online within Facebook. The delimitations, or characteristics that limit the scope of this study, include the exclusion of senior or fourth year students from the study. As these students will be leaving campus and not returning in the fall, their use of Facebook to sustain community on campus will not be as significant. The plan is to select student informants who are interested in participating in this study, and who are good communicators, in order to generate rich data. Sheldon (2008) found that individuals who are involved in online relationships are those who are avid communicators in face-to-face social encounters. As such, the initial selection process will include casual social engagement in conversation with potential participants in order to ascertain whether or not they appear to be informants who can provide useful data. Students who are not interested in or enthusiastic about participation may be less inclined to reflect and articulate their feelings and understandings and will therefore be excluded from the study, through a process of natural attrition. That is, as the study progresses, it is possible that students who have little to contribute or who engage minimally on Facebook will cease to continue to participate.

Student participants will not be financially compensated for their involvement in this study. The primary compensation will be the opportunity to engage, in a one-on-one, pen-pal relationship with the researcher. The relationship should be beneficial to the student in a manner that a friendship with a professor or other student affairs professional would be in a campus environment.

6. The text of any questionnaire, evaluative or diagnostic instrument, or debriefing protocol designed specifically for this research.

The primary tool for data collection in this project is the intensive interview. Charmaz (2006) explained that an intensive interview allows “an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry” (p.
Following Charmaz, the researcher intends to use her questions to prompt “the participants to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life” (p. 25). Each email interview will be custom tailored to the participant’s activities on Facebook. However, there are some general questions that will be asked of all participants. Following is a sample list of questions:

- With what devices do you access Facebook?
- How many times per day do you access Facebook?
- Do you only have one Facebook account or multiple ones?
- When do you primarily go on Facebook?
- Do you communicate primarily with people on campus or people who are located elsewhere?
- Do you use the chat or IM on Facebook? If so, how often do you use it? With whom do you communicate?
- Have you ever accessed Facebook during class?
- Do you belong to any campus based groups that have Facebook pages? Do you engage with friends on these pages?
- Are you friends with all of the people you live with on Facebook? For example, are you Facebook friends with your roommates or apartment-mates?
- Have you made new friends on Facebook? If so, how many? Are these friends on campus or in other locations?
- Are your parents on Facebook? If so, are you friends with them?
- Do you find that any of your friends on campus have become friends with others you know off-campus via Facebook?
- Do you ever seek solace on Facebook?
- Have you ever had any conflicts on Facebook?
- Have you ever considered shutting your account down? If so, why?
- Are you friends with any of your professors on Facebook? If so, does this cause you to change the things that you post?
- Have you ever had to remove a post or a picture because someone you are friends with requested you do so? If so, why and what were the circumstances?
- Are there people you are friends with on Facebook that you have never met in person? If so, do you plan to meet them in person?
- Has Facebook affected your experience of living away from home? Do you feel more or less connected to your family than you expected?
- Has Facebook positively affected your experience on campus? If so, why and how? Has Facebook negatively affected your experience on campus? If so, why and how?
- How would you define the word “community”? Do you identify a feeling or an experience of “community”? If so, can you please explain it or describe it to me?
- Do you know of anyone who has had any “drama” on Facebook? For example, roommates who broke up with a boyfriend or girlfriend because of something posted on Facebook? If so, how did this affect your understanding of how you wish or plan to use it?
• Do you use your phone to access Facebook when you are with friends or colleagues here on campus? If so, can you describe a circumstance in which you did this?

• If you have used your phone to access Facebook while with friends or colleagues on campus, how long did you continue to do this? Were you communicating with someone else on campus that was not with you? Were you communicating with someone that was off campus?

• Have you ever awoken during the night to check Facebook? Have you ever left class because of a notification about something that happened on Facebook (i.e. a notification on your phone that indicated someone posted something or responded to something).

• Do you feel like Facebook has distracted you from your face-to-face friendships? If so, how? Do you feel like Facebook has added to your face-to-face friendships? If so, how?
APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

• **TITLE of STUDY**: Utilizing *Facebook* to Articulate Self and Sustain Community: Experiences of Undergraduate Students on a Midwestern College Campus.

  You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Karen Abney Korn, MA from the Department of Educational Leadership, School of Education and Allied Professions, the University of Dayton. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

• **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

  The purpose of this study is to explore how Facebook shapes students’ experience of community on campus. This study will examine how community is defined, understood, mediated and influenced by students; and how Facebook influences their social lives as a part of the campus community.

  The primary question guiding this research is: How do college students use Facebook to fulfill social needs in the creation and maintenance of community while attending college? In other words:

  • How is the experience of community on campus for students affected by engagement with Facebook?
  • How do college students understand Facebook’s influence on their experience of community during their college years?

• **PROCEDURES**

  If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

  • Honestly respond to questions asked by the researcher – both in person and in email or chat on Facebook. This project will include two face-to-face or Skype interviews which will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. The first will be at the onset of the study and the second interview will be at the conclusion of the study.
  • Email interviews will take place in the form of a question/answer or pen pal format. The researcher will question you about your activity on Facebook via Facebook message, email, or IM chat. Your role will be to answer the researcher’s inquiries. Timely response is appreciated.
  • Estimated time commitment per week is approximately 3 hours. This includes the
time to read the emails/inbox messages from the researcher and the time it takes
to respond to these emails/messages.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks for you in this study include the exposure of your personal Facebook
profiles to the observation of the researcher. You will be asked to permit the researcher
access to all of the photos, links, comments, and postings that any other Facebook
“friend” can see. It excludes the researcher from viewing private emails or messages
and/or private IM messages. As such, it is possible for you to continue to utilize
Facebook in a private manner for communication with particular friends without the
researcher seeing these communications.

You will not be required to be Facebook “friends” with other student participants.
You will only be friends with the researcher’s anonymous account. The researcher will
have a pseudonym and an image to disguise her identity to any others who examine your
list of friends. If you visit the wall of the researcher, the researcher’s wall will be empty
and her page will be closed to access for anyone but her own Facebook friends. The
researcher will never write on your Facebook wall, but will rather communicate about her
observations via private message or IM chat. None of these correspondences will be
shared with other student participants. As such, the researcher’s presence on Facebook
will be minimal. The researcher plans to act as a nearly invisible observer. This is
intended to preclude the possibility of the researcher making any comments, postings, or
other engagements with your friends that could cause potential social or relational
problems.

• ANTICIPATED BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to participate in a reflective pen pal method of textual exchange.
The researcher will ask you personalized questions pertaining to your Facebook usage in
private messages. You will be invited to reflect and respond to the researcher’s questions
and observations. This process is intended to offer you the opportunity to engage with the
researcher in a meaningful and respectful manner, and to reflect on your own behaviors,
practices, inclinations, understandings, perceptions, and relationships. It is believed that
this process may be an enlightening one for you and may enable you to gain some
personal insight into your own motivations, desires, impulses, self-image, and
understandings. This research provides an opportunity for you to engage with an
instructor in a one-on-one, intimate manner that is not often reproduced in a classroom
environment. Reflection is a key component in learning and this project offers you the
opportunity to benefit from self-reflection. This is an intrinsic and internal benefit.

• PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
You will not be financially compensated for your participation in this study.

• IN CASE OF RESEARCH RELATED ADVERSE EFFECTS
If you are experiencing any kind of discomfort as a result of your participation in
this study, you may contact the University of Dayton Counseling Center at (937) 229-3141.
The Counseling Center is available free of charge to undergraduate students. If
you find yourself experiencing distress after the Counseling Center is closed for the day,
you may call the number and you will be connected to an answering service, and a counselor will return your call.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

If audio-tape recordings of you will be used, your identity will be protected or disguised. All audio tapes will be used solely for transcription purposes. All audio tapes will be destroyed following the conclusion of the study. Likewise, the dummy Facebook account will be closed and all material will be deleted.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, that will not affect your relationship with the University of Dayton or other services to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice or penalty. The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

**NEW FINDINGS**

During the course of the study, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either good or bad), such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participation in the research or new alternatives to participation, that might cause you to change your mind about continuing in the study. If new information is provided to you, your consent to continue participating in this study will be re-obtained.

**IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions about this research, please contact one of the investigators listed below.

Karen Abney Korn, MA  
email: kabneykorn@yahoo.com  
407 St. Joseph Hall  
University of Dayton  
300 College Park  
Dayton, Ohio 45469-1442

Karen Abney Korn, MA  
407 St. Joseph Hall  
University of Dayton  
300 College Park  
Dayton, Ohio 45469-1442  
email: kabneykorn@yahoo.com  
cell: 937.684.0464  
office phone: 937.229.2428

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Dayton Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Mary Connolly, PhD, (937) 229-3493, Mary.Connolly@notes.udayton.edu, Kettering Laboratories Room 542, 300 College Park Dr., Dayton, OH 45469-0104

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT (or legal guardian)**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print)

Address

Signature of Participant
My signature as witness certifies that the Participant signed this consent form in my presence.
Name of Witness (please print)

Signature of Witness

Date___________

(must be same as participant signature date)
APPENDIX C

INITIAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

• With what devices do you access Facebook?
• How many times per day do you access Facebook?
• Do you only have one Facebook account or multiple ones?
• When do you primarily go on Facebook?
• Do you communicate primarily with people on campus or people who are located elsewhere?
• Do you use the chat or IM on Facebook? If so, how often do you use it? With whom do you communicate?
• Have you ever accessed Facebook during class?
• Do you belong to any campus based groups that have Facebook pages? Do you engage with friends on these pages?
• Are you friends with all of the people you live with on Facebook? For example, are you Facebook friends with your roommates or apartment-mates?
• Have you made new friends on Facebook? If so, how many? Are these friends on campus or in other locations?
• Are your parents on Facebook? If so, are you friends with them?
• Do you find that any of your friends on campus have become friends with others you know off-campus via Facebook?
• Do you ever seek solace on Facebook?
• Have you ever had any conflicts on Facebook?
• Have you ever considered shutting your account down? If so, why?
• Are you friends with any of your professors on Facebook? If so, does this cause you to change the things that you post?
• Have you ever had to remove a post or a picture because someone you are friends with requested you do so? If so, why and what were the circumstances?
• Are there people you are friends with on Facebook that you have never met in person? If so, do you plan to meet them in person?
• Has Facebook affected your experience of living away from home? Do you feel more or less connected to your family than you expected?
• Has Facebook positively affected your experience on campus? If so, why and how? Has Facebook negatively affected your experience on campus? If so, why and how?
• How would you define the word “community”? Do you identify a feeling or an experience of “community”? If so, can you please explain it or describe it to me?

• Do you know of anyone who has had any “drama” on Facebook? For example, roommates who broke up with a boyfriend or girlfriend because of something posted on Facebook? If so, how did this affect your understanding of how you wish or plan to use it?

• Do you use your phone to access Facebook when you are with friends or colleagues here on campus? If so, can you describe a circumstance in which you did this?

• If you have used your phone to access Facebook while with friends or colleagues on campus, how long did you continue to do this? Were you communicating with someone else on campus that was not with you? Were you communicating with someone that was off campus?

• Have you ever awoken during the night to check Facebook? Have you ever left class because of a notification about something that happened on Facebook (i.e. a notification on your phone that indicated someone posted something or responded to something).

• Do you feel like Facebook has distracted you from your face-to-face friendships? If so, how? Do you feel like Facebook has added to your face-to-face friendships? If so, how?
APPENDIX D

SECOND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

• Over the summer, did you communicate much with your friends from UD?
• About how often would you say that you had contact with them?
• Did your sense of whose lives you wanted to keep up on or people you wanted to stay in relatively close contact with change over the summer?
• Was there anyone special you spent time with over the summer that you did not see much during the school year?
• Was there anyone in particular you were anxious to get back and see or talk to when you returned to campus?
• Here is a “what if” question: If there was no Facebook, how do you think you would have communicated with friends from campus over the summer?
• Was there anything interesting that you experienced over the summer involving Facebook? For example, did you post photos of a trip there that others commented on? Did you stay in contact with loved ones while you travelled?
• Do you find you use Facebook more now that you are back on campus? If so, why? If not, why not?
• How would you describe your return to campus?
• Do you feel like you “belong” here at UD? If so, when you came back, what feelings did you experience?
• If you don’t feel like you belong here, what makes you feel this way?
• Are any of your friends beginning to choose other social media platforms to use to communicate rather than Facebook?
• Now that you have been away from the UD campus and returned…how would you characterize the campus climate and the campus community?
• Do you believe that UD is succeeding with their goals of community commitment?
• What do you do on weekends?