College Students Self-Presentation and Online Social Networks

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THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
Master of Science in College Student Affairs
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2015
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College Students Self-Presentation and Online Social Networks

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Abstract

College students are active users of social networking sites, and they share a variety of information via their profiles. Employers and graduate schools are one population viewing potential candidate’s social networking profiles. This study aimed to explore graduating college students’ perception of appropriate or inappropriate content on their social networking sites as they went through the job searching process. College students are users of several social networking sites; however, this study focused on users of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews and an online analysis site called Reppler.com with seven graduating college seniors to learn about perceptions of their online profiles and comfort level with potential employers or graduate schools viewing their profiles.

Results showed that participants have learned from a variety of sources about what is appropriate and inappropriate to have online, and are not overly concerned with potential employers or graduate schools viewing their profiles.

Keywords: social networking sites, college students, online profile perceptions, job searching process
Dedication

This study is dedicated to individuals who work in student affairs and college students. Student affairs professionals, continue the conversation about online persona and the influence it plays when conducting the job searching process and in one’s life. Stay educated and interact on social networking sites with your students; this is a medium that surrounds their lifestyle. College students, your social networking profiles say a lot about you. Take time to maintain the image you want to portray.
Acknowledgments

Dr. Dianne Timm, thank you for serving as my thesis advisor. I greatly appreciate the time you invested in me each week as you read my drafts, responded to multiple emails, and met with me. I always looked forward to our meetings because that was my time to have a conversation with you about life or ask for advice. You kept me motivated throughout this process, which is what I needed. I am proud of the study we created, and this experience was enjoyable because of your support and passion for this topic. You have played a significant role in my graduate experience, and I am thankful to have you as a mentor.

I would like to thank my thesis committee for their commitment and assistance with this project: Rachel Fisher and Jeremy Alexander. I appreciate the articles you shared with me and your technology help. You helped make my study the best it could be.

I would like to thank my parents for all their support and encouragement during this process, and believing in me. This chapter has been filled with many ups and downs, but everything happens for a reason and leads us to the person we are meant to be. You both have always been my biggest fans and support system. I hope I never cease to amaze you. You both mean the world to me!
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of college is to prepare students for the world of work. The use of technology changes the career search process for these individuals. Employers use social media in the hiring process, and students need to be aware of what their online persona says about them (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Potential employers are reviewing online social profiles of their candidates during the interview process as an extra step in selecting the right candidate and cross-referencing credentials (Strehlke, 2010). This may affect college students who choose not to clean their online social network profiles while going through the job searching process.

Many sites offer privacy settings to limit information to the public; however, this does not guarantee all information is private. Meredith (2006) stated, “A person who willingly posts information on a social networking site for others to view cannot assume it is private because the intent is to share that information. When an individual shares information on a social networking site, he or she is sharing that information with the rest of the world even if the intent was to share with only a select group of people” (as cited in Timm & Duven, 2008, pg. 90).

A CareerBuilder.com survey in 2009, found 45% of over 2600 hiring managers reported searching social network sites to learn about job candidates (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). That study also found 35% of employers reported not hiring an applicant due to detrimental information on their social network sites. The reasons for not hiring a candidate vary among employers and no set criteria have been established. However, research supports possible reasons include provocative or inappropriate photos, offensive
language, poor communication skills, alcohol or drug use, or criticizing current place of employment or coworkers (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Peluchette and Karl (2008) reported that 20% of the 433 undergraduate students studied said they have items, mostly alcohol-related photos or comments, on their social network profiles that they would not want a prospective employer to see. Given the potential that social networking practices leave on career outcomes, this study will explore what senior college students going through the career searching process find appropriate or inappropriate on their social networking profiles.

**Purpose of Study**

Today's college graduates are unique from any generation before them. They are part of the Millennial generation who are characterized as being special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Because this generation has grown up with constantly changing technology, some call them the 'net generation' (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). They acquired this title to reflect the tremendous impact the Internet and technology has had on their development (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Examples of technology used by these individuals are instant messaging, text messaging, blogs, Myspace, Facebook, and file sharing (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

Today's college students have been establishing an online identity through multiple profiles since they were teenagers. As they enter college, they turn to their trusty social network sites to aid in the transition and develop a new network of "friends." Facebook has "become an important site for the informal, cultural learning of 'being' a student, with online interactions and experiences allowing roles to be learned, values
understood, and identities shaped” (Selwyn, 2007, p.18). Other online social network sites may also be used such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Over the four years of college students upload their lives onto their profiles for others to share, comment, like, or retweet about. All this information creates their online persona. They think protecting themselves behind privacy settings makes them invisible to anyone outside their networks.

In recent years employers have started screening their candidate’s social network accounts before an offer is made. In 2009, the city of Bozeman, Montana required all applicants to provide their usernames and passwords because their defense was this action is like an additional background investigation (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Employers have no set criteria in determining what is appropriate of an online persona when selecting new employees. This can be especially difficult for graduating college students because this may be the first time they are applying for a professional job.

Research has been done about how college students use social network sites when they arrive to college, the affects it has on their academic performance, and how it is used to build their networks, but there is a lack of research about what information a college student is comfortable with or thinks is appropriate when going through the job searching process. The purpose of this study was to explore graduating college students’ perceptions of appropriate or inappropriate content on their social networking sites as they go through the job searching process.
Research Questions

In order to better understand the perceptions college students have about what they find to be appropriate or inappropriate for their online identity, the proposed study sought to answer the following questions. The research questions are:

1. What do college seniors identify as appropriate content on social network profiles?
2. How do college seniors know what is appropriate online content?
3. What do college seniors believe potential employers look at on social network profiles?
4. As college seniors conduct their job search what changes do they make to their profile?

Significance of Study

College students use social networking sites for a variety of reasons, which may or may not affect their career search process. Everything displayed online contributes to their online persona. We know throughout the four to five years of college these individuals are at different developmental stages, which may influence what they post online. Their desires to continue using these outlets may revolve around the desire to stay connected to their peers and help continue to develop their own identity. Wang, Tchernev, and Solloway (2012) conducted a study to find out what drives students to use social network sites and what gratification needs are met by these sites. They found these sites facilitate self-disclosing and social interaction opportunities as well as recognition, cognition, and entertainment. As the generation of Millennials continues to be college students, their actions and assumptions based on online social networking sites will
continue. This is a generation who has grown up with changing technology. As student affairs professionals, understanding the mindset of this generation and staying current with the technology they are using will help us better interact with these students at a level they understand. It will also help us as we prepare them for their career move after graduation. As professionals, we watch our students experiment and commit to new identities. We should be helping our students match the person they want to become and their online identity.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study was conducted at a midsized public university and participants were current undergraduate senior students at this institution. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on specific criteria such as academic program or extracurricular involvement. The researcher determined the criteria for selecting students who fit within the guidelines, and there could have been bias or a better candidate overlooked. The researcher also used personal judgment in selecting the sample, and a candidate may have met the expectations of the researcher at the time of selection but not during the interview. The sample size consisted of seven participants which was a relatively small sample in comparison to the number of graduating seniors at this university. This means this research is not generalized and is presented for the participants perspective.

As the researcher, I may have a natural bias because I am part of the generation I sought to collect information from. I am an active user of the social networking sites I sought to study. In addition, I would have gone through the interviewing process within twelve months of conducting interviews with my participants. This could have created a
bias or influenced my interpretation of the interview questions, however I took precautions to remain non-biased.

I acknowledge there are a variety of social network sites available. For this study I only focused on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. This may have affected the eligibility of participants because I sought college seniors who used all three social networking sites.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be used throughout this study. Understanding what these terms mean and knowing the history of popular social networking sites will aid readers. The following terms are:

**Facebook.** The mission of Facebook is to “give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts, 2013). It is a social network site created in 2004 for college students. In 2005, the site expanded which allowed high school students to sign up for a user profile, and in 2006 membership was opened to the general public (Malesky & Peters, 2012). Currently Facebook has 727 million daily active users and 1.19 billion monthly active users (http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts, 2013).

**LinkedIn.** Out of all the social networking sites, LinkedIn is considered to have the most professional purpose. The mission of LinkedIn is to “connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful” (http://www.linkedin.com/about-us, 2013). The company was created in 2003 and today has 225 million members. Users can endorse others in their network as well as write a letter of recommendation which can be viewed by others. LinkedIn serves the purpose of
(a) reconnect: “find past and present colleagues and classmates quickly,” (b) power your career: “discover inside connections when you are looking for a job or new business opportunity,” and (c) get answers: “your network is full of industry experts willing to share advice” (Osborn & LoFrisco, 2012, pg. 264).

**Millenials.** Individuals born between 1984 and 2004 (Generations in Anglo-American History, 2013). The population of this generation far exceeds any before it. They are the children of the Baby Boomer and Gen X generations. Currently the first half of this generation is either nearing the end of college or has graduated and entered the workforce, while the second half is entering college or has not graduated from high school. Howe and Strauss (2003) classifies the Millennials as a global generation who have grown up with this mindset since childhood (p.38).

**Online Persona.** This is the online image individuals create through social networking sites. The persona is sometimes called the “self” and manages its interactional ventures strategically and performs in a manner calculated to project an image that other interactants will find credible. The self strives to convey an identity consistent with the expectations formed by the audience and with the situation, or state, that frames the interaction. The self internalizes the social world as part of the process of anticipating and interpreting the ‘generalized other’ (Robinson, 2007, page 96).

Social networking sites create a distinct difference between one’s professional persona, addressed mainly to co-workers employees, and one’s self-communication towards ‘friends’ (Van Dijck, 2013).
Social network sites. These are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-private profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with who they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, page 211). People use the terms social networking and social media interchangeably; however there is a difference. The difference is: social media focuses on content such as blogs, wikis, voting, commenting, tagging, photos, and videos; whereas social networking is focused on profiles and connections and the content is a secondary component (Shih, 2011).

Twitter. Twitter, created in 2006, is a microblogging tool. One may “tweet” about anything as long as it is 140 characters or less. In 2012, Twitter had over 140 million active users and over 400 million tweets per day (Osborn & LoFrisco, 2012).

Summary

To further understand the relationship between social network sites of college students and the job searching process, this study will seek the opinions of what current senior university students feel is acceptable and where they came to this conclusion. A variety of social networking sites are available for students to use and many of them serve different purposes. The following chapter will discuss current literature about this issue.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

To further understand the issue of Millennial college student’s usage of social networking sites in relation to their interview process, a study of the literature will examine these students, the content they post, and employers’ thoughts. Facebook is the most popular social networking site worldwide (Osman, Wardle, & Caesar, 2012) and much of the research has been centered on this site; however, this is not the only site employers may look at while reviewing applicants.

Evolution of Social Networking Sites.

Social networking sites have been available to Internet users for over twenty years. Technology advancements such as wireless Internet and smart phones and users desire to openly share personal information have influenced changes in social networking sites. Understanding the rapid evolution of social networking sites to meet the needs of users is beneficial in comprehending the current generation.

SixDegrees.com. Networking sites date back to the 1990’s with Match.com’s release in 1994 and Classmates.com in 1995 (Kirkpatrick, 2010). For a fee, users of both sites could find and connect with other users. The first recognized social networking site was SixDegrees.com which launched in 1997 by Andrew Weinreich and allowed its users to create profiles, list friends, and view other friends lists (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). It was

the first online business that attempted to identify and map a set of real relationships between people. Its name evokes the speculative concept that everyone on earth can be connected through an extended chain of relationships
that begins with your immediate friends, proceeds to the next ‘degree’ - the friends of your friends, and on until the sixth ‘degree’ (Kirkpatrick, 2010, page 68).

This was social networking before the phrase was mainstream. Two important features of SixDegrees.com were ‘connect me’ which allowed users to map relationships, and the other was ‘network me’ which identified other users with certain characteristics (Kirkpatrick, 2010). This allowed users to make connections between people they already knew and digital contacts which were beyond their little world. The site attracted 3.5 million users, but due to lack of a sustainable business and being ahead of its time, the service closed in 2000 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Weinreich credits other issues were slow dial-up internet and the lack of photographs (Kirkpatrick, 2010). It is possible they could not keep up with rapid expansion.

Ryze.com. In 2001, a new kind of social networking site was released called Ryze.com by Adrian Scott (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Ryze.com allowed its users to make connections, grow their networks, search for jobs, or keep in touch with friends. This business focused site allows its users to display their accomplishments at work while networking with other business contacts (Kirkpatrick, 2010). It is similar to today’s LinkedIn. The site planned to “make money by charging employers and others to search its database for prospective employees, consultants, etc.” (Kirkpatrick, 2010, page 70). The concept is similar to college career centers and head hunter companies. This professional site competes against Tribe.net, Friendster, and LinkedIn (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).
**Friendster.com.** Friendster was released in 2002 by Jonathan Abrams to compete with Match.com (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Match.com is an online dating site who’s mission is to give single individuals the opportunity to meet compatible people via online communication and profiles (http://www.match.com/help/aboutus.aspx?lid=4). Unlike Match.com but similar to SixDegrees.com, Friendster focused on developing relationships between friends-of-friends not for dating purposes. Profiles were restricted to the public and could only be viewed by friends less than four degrees away (i.e. friends-of-friends-of-friends-of-friends) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In order to join, individuals needed an invitation from a current user, and the site grew in popularity to 300,000 users, including Myspace founder Tom Anderson and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, by 2003 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). As with any quickly adopted technology, there will be issues to address throughout the process. Phony profiles were created of fake people and ill-equipped servers, the rapid growth caused issues with the site and started to lose followers (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010). According to Angwin (2009), Abrams created Friendster with the intent that users would become connected through mutual friends, and not necessarily because of common interests. The company developed a “no fakester” approach, as they wanted their users to be genuine and provide more verifiable information. This displeased some users because they could not be whoever they wanted to be (Angwin, 2009).

**Myspace.** While Friendster was losing users, Tom Anderson saw an opportunity to create a social networking site where users could create the identity they wanted (Angwin, 2009). Angwin (2009) also reminds us that at this time the wiring of broadband
high-speed Internet was being installed in homes across the United States which allowed people to upload pictures and share music at a faster rate. In 2003 the networking site of Myspace was created which is similar to Friendster and SixDegrees (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). An expelled Friendster group of indie-rock bands caught onto Myspace, recruited fans to join, and membership grew far beyond Friendster (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Myspace was not developed with the intent to target musical groups, but they were a large population who brought users – their fans. Boyd and Ellison (2007) discussed that another aspect of Myspace that appealed to users was the ability to personalize their individual profiles with backgrounds and layouts. This was an unintentional flaw after two Myspace programmers forgot to block the web markup language (Angwin, 2009). This mistake caught the attention of teenage girls who had the freedom to design their backgrounds any way they wanted (Angwin, 2009). The concept was appreciated by users because they had the freedom to express themselves and quickly utilized this feature. Myspace considered removing this glitch, but their ‘user comes first’ mentality made them change their minds (Angwin, 2009).

Myspace was unique because anyone could join without an invitation or valid e-mail address and users could use their real names or a pseudonym. Unlike Friendster’s concept of only adding people who you knew with real identities, Myspace users could add anyone from their friends to ‘fakers’ simply by clicking the ‘Add to Friends’ button (Angwin, 2009). Some of the connections simply shared interest in a musical band and may have been from opposite ends of the world. The site required a minimum age of sixteen; however teenagers could create a profile simply by registering with a different birth year which met the requirement. Myspace appealed to the teenage audience of the
Millennial generation. This was an online place which supported online self-expression (Angwin, 2009). This is the beginning of this generation’s interest and presence on social networks and they have become the driving force of its evolution.

**LinkedIn.** While Ryze.com and Myspace were being introduced to the public, a different type of social networking site was developing itself called LinkedIn. Launching in 2003, LinkedIn was created for professional networking among various groups of people such as CEO’s, senior management, entrepreneurs, and students (http://www.linkedin.com/company/linkedin). Kirkpatrick (2012) reported that founder Reid Hoffman thought social networks would eventually divide into two categories—personal and business. This site resembles Ryze.com in that the intent of LinkedIn was that an individual’s profile is their online résumé (Kirkpatrick, 2010). After ten years, Linkedin has more than 259 million members worldwide and is the largest professional network (http://www.linkedin.com/company/linkedin). It has continued to evolve as its users find new ways to utilize this source for their professional needs.

**Facebook.** In 2003 at Harvard University, sophomore student Mark Zuckerberg developed an online Facemash website from Harvard’s twelve houses ‘facebooks’ of undergraduate residents (Kirkpatrick, 2010). He originally developed a site to rate other students on their appearances and sent the link to other undergraduate students which quickly became an underground hit (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Zuckerberg was called before Harvard’s disciplinary Administrative Board and put him on probation, but this did not stop him from continuing to develop web programs (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Zuckerberg is a member of the millennials and was an user of these various previously mentioned platforms and worked to create a way to combine them all.
In 2004, Zuckerberg started his newest project which was a combination of his earlier projects, Course Match and Facemash, and the web service of Friendster (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Friendster had been well received from Harvard students the year before, but Myspace did not leave much of an impression (Kirkpatrick, 2010). His project was the beginning of what we know today as Facebook. Harvard had wanted to compile the “facebooks” of each residential house on campus and develop them into an online searchable form and their students were pushing the administration for an online directory (Kirkpatrick, 2010). After a suggestion from Zuckerberg’s math class of a ‘universal facebook’ he developed Thefacebook to help students share more at Harvard about what was going on and exchange any information they wanted (Kirkpatrick, 2010). The intention of this site was not to be used like Friendsters or a dating site. On February 4, 2004, Thefacebook went live with this intent:

Thefacebook is an online directory that connects people through social networks at college. We have opened up Thefacebook for popular consumption at Harvard University. You can use TheFacebook to: Search for people at your school; Find out who are in your classes; Look up your friends’ friends; See a visualization of your social network (Kirkpatrick, 2010, page 30).

Taking lessons from what others had tried, Zuckerberg developed a cite and was able to adapt to user needs or uses. According to Kirkpatrick (2010), four days after launching Thefacebook, 650 Harvard students had registered and another 300 the following day.

After registering on Thefacebook students created their profile by personalizing it with a picture of themselves, and personal information. This personal information could include relationship status, phone number, AIM username, email address, classes they
were enrolled in, clubs and other involvement, and political affiliation (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In the beginning, only students who had a Harvard email address could register for Thefacebook which made this social network site different from previous sites and one could set privacy options to current students, only people in a shared class, or students in a residential house (Kirkpatrick, 2010). The power of student connections was appearing online. Within the same month of its launch, Thefacebook was expanded to Columbia, Stanford, Yale, and the following month Dartmouth, MIT, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Brown, and Boston University were added to the list totaling the number of student users to 20,000 (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In 2005, Thefacebook changed its name to Facebook and allowed high school students and companies to join (Jenkins, 2013). The following year the company allowed anyone to join over the age of thirteen with a valid email address and the status update feature was added to allow users to share their thoughts with their friends (Jenkins, 2013). This means students entering have been members for years and todays seniors could have been a member almost a decade. Facebook listens to its users about their social networking needs and has added other features such as instant messaging chat in 2008, the like button in 2009, cover photos in 2011, and the purchase of Instagram for $1 billion in 2012 (Jenkins, 2013). Keeping up with current trends has helped Facebook sustain and dominate the social networking world.

Twitter. In 2006, co-founder Jack Dorsey released Twitter as a messaging system for podcasting company Odeo (Griggs & Kelly, 2013). His vision was to create a service where users could let others know what they are doing at any given moment via phone, instant message, or the web (Levy, 2007). This concept resembled Myspace and
Facebook, but focused on brief status updates of current events or emotions. Twitter's breakthrough moment was at the 2007 South by Southwest conference in Austin, Texas where conference attendees were encouraged to tweet about their experiences (Levy, 2007). According to Heather Green (2007), “Twitter reflects the increasing power of word-of-mouth networks to change how news is made and defined” (http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2007-04-01/twitter-all-trivia-all-the-time, para. 4). Twitter is still very active today, and according to its website, there are 241 million active users worldwide.

The mission of Twitter is “to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers” (https://about.twitter.com/company). This is demonstrated through the brief 140 character message users can tweet which is similar to sending an instant message. The character limit makes tweeters (users are referred to as ‘tweeters’) be succinct and to the point (O’Neill, 2010). Unlike Myspace and Facebook, Twitter does not require an age limit or a university email address; however, all users need is a valid email address. Once a profile is created, users choose who to follow by clicking the ‘follow’ button, retweet other messages, and ‘like’ their followers posts which are similar features of Facebook. Twitter defers from Facebook and LinkedIn because of its asymmetric relations, meaning a person can follow another user without having that user follow in return (Osborn & LoFrisco, 2012). Users have the ability to customize their backgrounds, head photo, and profile picture. A popular feature started by Twitter is hashtags, which allow users to track key words or events (O’Neill, 2010). Users can search hashtags and view posts by other users with the same hashtag. Twitter is still used today to answer the question, “what are you doing?”, but its users are also
utilizing the site personally and professionally to stay up to date on current events, jobs, and current trends.

**Reppler.** Unlike the other social networking sites that focus on developing and maintaining connections, Reppler is a social networking site that was created to analyze profiles for inappropriate content. In 2011, Vlad Gorelik founded Reppler. The intent was to “provide the Facebook generation a complete solution to keep their social reputation clean and safe” (Egusa, 2011, para. 5). Today, Reppler will analyze Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Picasa, Flicker, and YouTube. A Reppler analysis evaluates four areas of a profile: impression, inappropriate content, networks, and privacy and security risks. Along with this information, users will receive a score with their report. This score is called a Reppler image score, and “captures the professionalism and consistency of an online image. This score includes various factors including tone of content, appropriateness of content, and the consistency of a person’s profile information across social networks” (Sinsky, 2011). Reppler shows users how they are perceived on their accounts by,

- analyzing user’s content to provide them unique insights into things like the tone of the language used by them and their connections and the words they use most often; analyzes the connections in the different social networks users participate in to make them aware of the various segments of people they are interacting with; and flags any content that might be considered inappropriate, as well as any privacy and security risk a user might have. Reppler also compares the information in a user’s profiles across different social network to find similarities and differences since recruiters often look for discrepancies in the education and
work histories of prospective employees


**Millennials Use of Social Network Sites**

College students today have been exposed to social networking sites for over a decade which influences their ease in using these sites and these students have technology devices that instantly connect them to their profiles. Millennial students are considered to be the most wired generation in history and use the Internet at increasingly high rates (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). Technology devices college students own that allow them Internet access include: laptop (89.1%), smartphone (75.7%), desktop computer (42.9%), and iPad or other tablet (30.9%) (http://chronicle.com/article/Which-Devices-College-Students/140791/, 2013). A 2012, study found almost 75% of teens and young adults are member of at least one social networking site (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012). The assumption can be made that these students are either entering college with a social networking account or developing one while in college. The Higher Education Research Institute conducted a study in 2012 of nearly 200,000 college students from 283 institution reported that 51% of respondents claimed they spend between one and five hours per week utilizing social media with 21% claiming between six and 20 weekly hours, and 4.4% claimed an average weekly use of over 20 hours. According to the Almanac of Higher Education (2013) college students are using social networking sites to connect to friends both at the college and not at the college, connect to family, meet new people at college, and learn about campus activities. The most common reason both first-year students (81%) and seniors (73%) use social networking sites is to connect to friends
not at the college (http://chronicle.com/article/College-Students-Reasons-for/140397/, 2012). These students are most likely using Facebook and Twitter to share information about themselves with their friends. Another study in the Almanac of Higher Education found 95.5% of students have a Facebook account, 42.5% have a Twitter account, and 27.3% have a LinkedIn account (Young, 2013). These are three prevalent social networking sites in college students’ daily lives.

In an EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) -national study, researchers found that 90% of college students used Facebook with a majority (58%) using the site several times a day (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2011). Using Facebook is related to the college experience in a variety of ways such as, learning, student engagement, multitasking, political activity, life satisfaction, social trust, and civic engagement (Junco, 2013a). College students are using Facebook in a variety of ways from learning about transitioning to college to an information source for organizations they are involved in, connecting with students in their classes to social events that are taking place (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steindfield, & Fiore, 2012). Additionally they use it to document their experiences and receive recognition from their peers. Thompson and Lougheed (2012), noted that Facebook was “a significant element of the undergraduate social culture” (p. 95). Because of its significance, college students daily spend their time on Facebook participating in a variety of activities. Junco (2013b) conducted a study where its participants (N=5414) reported spending an average of 101 minutes per day on Facebook. Out of the 14 listed activities, the most common reasons Junco’s participants used Facebook 100% of the time were checking up (12%), viewing photos (9%), commenting (7%), and chatting (6%) (Junco, 2013b). The participants
reported never using Facebook to play games (72%), tag videos (69%), or check events (52%) (Junco, 2013b).

While Facebook is the most popular social networking site among college students, they also use Twitter and LinkedIn. The ECAR national study found 37% of students use Twitter and 25% use LinkedIn (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2011). The study also found juniors and seniors use LinkedIn more frequently to establish a professional online presence and the workforce transition after college.

**Social Networking Site and Hiring Process**

Since social networking sites have become a place where employers can find more information about their candidates. Osborn and LoFrisco (2012) found a study with 35,000 college seniors and of those students, 86% had an account on Facebook, Myspace, or LinkedIn, but these social networking sites were not being used effectively for job searches and employers often examined their applicants’ sites as part of the job search process. Issues that may cause a concern among employers include inappropriate comments, pictures, and alcohol and drug use. According to Pelchette and Karl (2007) of 200 Facebook profiles they found “42% had comments regarding alcohol, 53% had photos involving alcohol use, 20% had comments regarding sexual activities, 25% had seminude or sexually provocative photos, and 50% included the use of profanity” (cited in Pelchette & Karl, 2010, p. 30). Social networking sites do have privacy settings; however, these settings can be manipulated in a number of ways by people who know what they are looking for, such as search engines.

Professionals state this is an issue because first impressions are important, and users have the ability to edit their information ahead of time, however many do not
(Walther, 1996). For many college seniors this transition to the world of work comes with little direction. In a 2006 survey conducted by ExecuNet of 100 executive recruiters found that 77% used search engines as part of their recruitment process and 35% have eliminated job candidates based on the information they found posted online (Karle, Peluchette, & Schlaegel, 2010). Employers and career counselors recommend reviewing your online sites to mirror your professional resume. Strehlke (2010) found employers stated enhancing a profile with career-focused information would benefit candidates. Other suggestions include stating information that supports your professional qualifications (Haefner, 2007), and take measures to protect your image (Lorenz, 2009).

**Appropriate and Inappropriate Content According to Employers**

Potential employers may screen candidate’s profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as conduct a Google search. Reasons employers may not hire a candidate after screening their profiles include,

- Provocative or inappropriate photos or other information (46%).
- Information (or photos) about a candidate’s alcohol and/or illegal drug use (41%).
- Bad-mouthing a previous (or current) employer or even a fellow employee (36%).
- Poor (or even, extremely poor) communication skills demonstrated (32%).
- Making discriminatory comments regarding race, gender, religion, etc. (28%).
- Lying about qualifications (25%).
- Sharing confidential information from previous (or current) employer (24%).
- Revealing a link to criminal behavior (22%).
• Use of an unprofessional “screen name” (21%).
• Lying about an absence from a current or former employer (13%).

(Freeman, 2014, para. 7). Post relating to these examples may make employers question a candidate’s character or professionalism in the workplace. Information employers would want to see on a candidate’s profile include,
• Got a good (or better) feel for the candidate’s personality (46%).
• Candidate’s background supported his/her stated professional qualifications (45%).
• Candidate’s site projected a professional image (43%).
• Candidate apparently well-rounded, obviously had a wide range of interests (40%).
• Great communication skills (40%).
• Candidate obviously creative (36%).
• Number and type of awards and other accolades (31%).
• Great references posted about the candidate (30%).
• Interaction with hiring company’s social media presence (24%).
• Candidate had large number of followers/subscribers (14%).

(Freeman, 2014, para. 9). These examples show an employer you are conscientious of what your profiles say about you, and you are a professional person.

Summary

Millennial students are using various forms of online social networking sites to share information about themselves, pictures, and comment on postings of their peers. This population has been the driving force of these platforms development and
enhancement. All this information is online for anyone to see, and potential employers are specifically interested in viewing this content. And we have all heard the stories of countless employers turning candidates away because of the information they find while looking at these individuals online profiles. Because first impressions are important when going through the interview process, eliminating any inappropriate information is suggested. Internet sites have been created to help users manage their online profiles, such as Reppler.com. This site allows social network users to see how they are perceived across social networks, view their makeup of their connections, and be notified of risks they may have (www.reppler.com). The following chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

To collect data pertaining to college senior’s online persona on social networking sites and the job searching process, a qualitative study was conducted. The foreshadowing problem is college seniors either do not know what is acceptable or appropriate to have on their personal social networking profiles before going into the job searching process or they make no conscious effort to “clean” their profiles to a professional standard. This study benefits most from a research method that allowed the researcher to gather as much feedback from the participants as possible, including looking at their actual social media activity. Qualitative research provides for open-ended questioning which can lead the researcher to insights from participants that are much deeper than simply surveying the participant (Holliday, 2007).

Design of Study

A qualitative research method was selected due to its nature of looking at the quality of a relationship, activities, situations, or materials of the participants (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). Qualitative researchers are more interested in how something occurs, and this method of research allows the interviewer to ask follow up questions and gather more personal opinions, as opposed to a quantitative survey (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). The data that was collected in this study was in the form of words and coded to discover similarities among participants.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was selected for this study, which means the researcher used personal judgment in selecting participants (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). This
method allowed the researcher to develop specific criteria and select individuals who met designated criteria. Because this study focused on the three social networking sites of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, the participants needed to be users of these sites. Participants for this study consisted of seven college seniors enrolled at one state institution, who graduated in May, 2014. Names of participants and their university email address were obtained by contacting the Associate Director of Housing and Dining Services and the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Programs. The researcher compiled the two lists and checked to make sure no students were duplicated. Then the researcher randomly selected individuals and conducted a Google search of these students to see if they had a Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. The researcher sent out emails (Appendix A) via university email to all the students selected who met the criteria, but received no responses. Then the researcher contacted colleagues at the institution asking for a list of students of senior status that they know. From this list, the researcher contacted students via their university email and seven responded. Each participant was in the process of applying or interviewing for jobs, or pursuing their graduate level education.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 is a Caucasian female in her fourth year at the institution. She is a kinesiology and sports studies with a concentration in sports management and a business minor. She is applying to graduate school to pursue a degree in student affairs. She is a resident assistant (RA), has an internship with the football team, a member of National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH), and a member of a service sorority. Participant 1 said she has had Facebook for maybe four to six years, Twitter for three years but really started using it this year, and LinkedIn maybe a year to
year and a half. She collectively spends about two hours a day on Facebook and has Facebook on her phone. Facebook is the site she uses most and stated that she feels she wastes a lot of time on it. She is also active on Twitter. LinkedIn is not a site she uses very often, and feels she does not have a purpose yet to use LinkedIn but after she graduates with her master’s degree she thinks it will be helpful.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 is a Caucasian female in her fourth year at the institution. She is a marketing major and applying for jobs. She is a member of a professional business fraternity, part of residence hall association (RHA), works for new student programs and orientation office as the sponsorship coordinator, and is a member of the American Marketing Association (AMA). She is applying for any kind of job near her hometown, but someday would like to get into event marketing or be a brand manager. Participant 2 got Facebook her freshman year of high school, Twitter for about five or six months, and LinkedIn last year. She is on Facebook for about one hour every day. She does not use Twitter very much and considers herself to be new to the site. She checks LinkedIn every couple of weeks.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 is a Caucasian female in her fourth year at the institution. She is a family consumer science major with a dietetics option, and did not get matched for an internship so will be going to graduate school. Participant 3 is a member of a Greek organization, served on Panhellenic Council (PHC) as executive vice president internal, Greek week overall chair, treasure of her sorority, and vice president of student dietetic association. She has had Facebook since high school, Twitter since her sophomore year of college, and LinkedIn since last year. She said she spends maybe two hours throughout the day on her social networking sites, but it is about an hour on the
average. She is not a fan of Facebook anymore because she feels it turned into more than it really needed to be, and does not do anything on it now. She uses Twitter more often and recently started using LinkedIn more frequently.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 is a Caucasian male in his second year at the institution after receiving his associate’s degree in business administration and transferring from a community college. His major is business management with a minor in entrepreneurship. He has served as secretary of a business fraternity, treasurer of his social fraternity, was on the Homecoming committee, helped plan Greek week, and served on the Interfraternity Council (IFC). He does not have a job. After graduation Participant 4 will stay at the institution to pursue his master’s in business administration. He has had Facebook for six or seven years, Twitter about 18 months, and LinkedIn for maybe nine months. He said he spends about 30 minutes per day on Facebook and Twitter separately. He does not use LinkedIn and considers himself still new to the site.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 is a Caucasian male in his fourth year at the institution. He is studying kinesiology and sports studies with a business minor. He has a summer internship, but he is unsure if he will go to graduate school or apply for jobs. If he receives a graduate assistantship he will go to graduate school. He has applied to graduate schools and entry level jobs in the sports industry. Participant 5 has an internship with marketing and promotions in athletics, is president of his fraternity, Greek week overall chair, and a senior staff assistant (SSA) within residence life. He has had Facebook since his freshman or sophomore year of high school, Twitter about six months, and LinkedIn about two and a half years. He does not use Facebook as much as
he uses Twitter, and is not very active on LinkedIn but is starting to use it more as he job searches.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 is a Caucasian female in her fourth year at the institution. She is a business major, specifically human resources. Her involvements include being president of her sorority, Panhellenic Council (PHC) delegate for her sorority, and society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). She does not have a job and is in the process of applying for entry level recruiting positions. Participant 6 has had Facebook for about 8 years, Twitter about a year and a half, and LinkedIn for two years. She spends a lot of time on Facebook; more time then she would like to. Whenever she is doing homework she gets on Facebook for about 15 minutes as a stress reliever. She does not use Twitter very often because she does not understand how it works.

**Participant 7.** Participant 7 is an African American male in his fourth year at the institution. His major is management information systems. After graduation, he will return back to the institution for his master’s in computer technology. He was president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), secretary and chaplin of his fraternity, and head facilitator for Strong MENtoring. He also works in Java and the ITS Help Desk. Participant 7 has had Facebook since 2009, Twitter since 2010 or 2011, and LinkedIn since 2012. He is seldom on Facebook, uses Twitter every couple of weeks, and became more active on LinkedIn this semester (checks about three or four times a week).

**Site**

This study was conducted at a mid-sized, rural, Midwestern university with an enrollment of 10,417 students. Each interview was held in an on campus observation
room within a graduate department at the university because of the setup of the
observation room and the ability to record each interview with video cameras already
placed in the room. Students were made aware during the description of the interview
process and discussion of the informed consent that they would be both audio and video
recorded.

Instrument

In this qualitative study, I, the researcher, was the instrument and conducted the
interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted (Appendix B). This kind of
interview consists of a series of questions asked by the researcher to elicit open-ended
answers (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). The semi-structured interview process was
selected because this allows the researcher to create a list of questions before the
interviews begin and each participant will be asked the same questions. This helped with
consistency among participants and coding the interviews. After the list of questions was
asked, each participant was asked to use an online social network managing site called
Reppler®. This site allows people to run a test on their social network sites and
determines how they are perceived across social networks, the makeup of social network
connections, and identifies any potential issues and risks (Reppler.com, 2013). This site
has been selected as an instrument because of its validity to specifically measure what
content is inappropriate on social networking sites. The participants ran this test on their
Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. Once Reppler produced the results, the
researcher asked the participant about their reactions to the results. This test was run after
the interview questions were asked to avoid any influences the participant’s Reppler
score may have on them.
Data Collection

Data was collected through a videotaped one on one interview process between the researcher and the seven participants. Participants were videotaped signing a consent form to volunteer in the study, their responses to each question, and participation in using Reppler.com on their social network sites. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher. Transcriptions had all identifying information removed and the participants’ names were removed.

Treatment of Data

All data was stored on the researcher’s personal password protected online Dropbox via Dropbox.com. Only the researcher had access to the information and will keep the transcriptions for three years. Notes will also be saved with this information. The chair of the thesis committee also reviewed a hard copy of each transcript for analysis purposes.

Data Analysis

After this process the researcher manually coded each transcription individually for themes in the interviews. The researcher, utilizing the guiding research questions, looked for words or phrases that were significant quotes or passages from the participants. The six individuals who participate in this study were labeled by numbers or letters (of given and pseudonym) to maintain confidentiality. The researcher’s thesis advisor was utilized throughout the coding process.

Summary

A description of the methodology used in this qualitative study has been listed above. Seven student interviews were conducted and recorded at a Midwestern
university. The interviews will be coded by the researcher once all seven have been conducted. This process will allow the researcher to identify common perceptions of appropriate or inappropriate uses of social networking sites through words or phrases of the participants.
Chapter IV

Results

This chapter presents the findings from data collected from seven graduating seniors and their perception of appropriate and inappropriate content on their social network profiles in relation to their online identity. Data was obtained by conducting interviews where participants described how they used Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and the purpose it served in their daily lives. Then each participant logged onto their Facebook and LinkedIn accounts followed by an analysis using Reppler. Throughout the process of coding the one-on-one interviews, many main themes emerged. These themes help to better understand what college seniors preparing to graduate from undergrad have learned and acknowledge as being appropriate or inappropriate content. Several themes for each research question were explored from various experiences that each participant shared during their interview. The research questions that guided this study were (a) What do college seniors identify as appropriate content on social network profiles? (b) How do college seniors know what is appropriate online content? (c) What do college seniors believe potential employers look at on social network profiles? and (d) As college seniors conduct their job search what changes do they make to their profile? This chapter will provide an overview of those themes in an effort to answer the research questions.

Identified Appropriate Content on Social Network Profiles

Participants were asked questions about how they use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and what they post on their profiles. Then they were asked what they think would be appropriate or inappropriate to have on social networking profiles.
How they use and post their profiles. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have evolved since their creation, and allow users to do more with their profiles or provide more information. As mentioned in the participant descriptions, all participants have had a Facebook account the longest out of the three sites used for this study. When asked how she uses her Facebook, Participant 1 said, "reading everyone's posts, keep up with people back home, and look at college peers." Staying up to date with her connections both back at home and at college is important to Participant 1. Catching up with friends back at home and people not in the area was also important to Participants 4, 6, and 7.

Participants said they use Facebook to communicate within their organizations. Participant 5, president of his fraternity said,

The majority of the times I'm in it are for the groups, because we have a lot of groups within my fraternity to relay information and different group projects. For the fraternity I probably have like literally 12 groups on Facebook and different messages. The only reason I use Facebook is to stay updated with information.

Smart phone devises, tablets, and laptop computers have made access to Facebook limitless. Most people have a device that they check frequently and can see when they receive a group message. Being president of the fraternity, Participant 5 needed to know he was getting information out quickly, and using a medium his members would check regularly. Similar to Participants 1 and 4, Facebook played a large role in staying current with information to Participant 5.

Twitter was used similar to Facebook because most participants stated they use Twitter to see information. This information was about other people they follow or articles they are interested in pertaining to their field of study or sports teams. Some
participants such as Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5 like Twitter because they know how to maneuver around Twitter and the short status updates.

LinkedIn was strictly used by participants as a professional networking site. At this stage in their lives, building a network with other users was most important to participants. This was demonstrated by Participant 5 in his comment, “I’m trying to connect with people on that and making sure my profile looks up to date.” Building a good network will help when looking for jobs in the future. Participants were also concerned with making sure their profile was up to date in case an employer would look at them.

**Facebook.** All participants said they have had a Facebook profile longer than the other two social networking sites. Their reasons for using Facebook included looking at friends pictures, communicating in Facebook groups, and staying current with friends. Participant 4, a business management student, stated,

Honestly most of my use for Facebook is with my organizations. For some reason we like to communicate through Facebook more than any other communication device. I also catch up with friends back home and anyone that’s not in the area. Many of the participants shared how they use this to stay in communication with the various groups they are involved with at the institution. Participant 6, a member of a fraternity, said, “When I was president it was really easy to communicate with people and message and get what you wanted out quickly instead of using email because no one really checks email anymore.” His membership in this organization conditioned him to use this platform as a way to stay connected and up to date with the happenings of the
Participants 3 and 5 also commented how they often use Facebook because of the groups they are involved in.

Facebook allows its users to keep in touch with friends and family who are not physically located close by. Participant 5, who continues to maintain contact with family and friends from home, described his Facebook use as, “I go down the timeline and look at pictures or what people are doing. I’ll see what my high school friends are up to, and see what people who have graduated are up to.” This is a way to stay in touch without having to maintain formal relationships with those that are no longer nearby. In addition to checking in on family and friends, participants talked about keeping people informed about their lives. Participant 4 said he posts, “updates through my life so all friends and family can see, acquaintances.” Examples of these updates include, “last day of undergrad classes” or “graduation here in a week.”

Participants had differing opinions of what they choose to post on their Facebook profiles. Users can post informational statuses or share links they find beneficial, or let their friends know what they are up to via pictures or life updates. Participant 1, a resident assistant, who said she posts pictures or quotes she finds in books on her timeline. Participant 6 said she posts “a lot of pictures” and her “albums have 300 pictures now.” Participant 3, a family consumer science major in dietetics, posts articles about nutrition as that relates to her major and interests. Participant 7, a management information systems major, said he does not usually post but if he does it is “probably an accomplishment or gratitude of some sort.” Participants did not use Facebook as a professional social networking site like LinkedIn, but did use it to share information
similar to Twitter. Facebook allows them to communicate information in more ways such as statuses, photo albums, share links, and create/manage public or private groups.

**Twitter.** The participants either really liked using Twitter or have a profile, but do not use it often. Participant 6, president of her sorority, said she created a Twitter account because she was president of her sorority and needed to watch over people, but does not do much on her profile and “sometimes reads what people post.” Participant 5, a member of many different organizations said,

Twitter is where I usually post. I tweet a lot more and relay information on that a lot. That has taken the place of Facebook for me because I use to do a lot on Facebook. Facebook is more of like the information and Twitter is the communication for me. I do use it for information too. I use Twitter for things in my industry like I follow a bunch of different things.

As Participant 5 describes it’s the way to communicate both personally and professionally at various levels. Using Twitter to gain information, especially related to their area of study, was mentioned by other participants. For example, Participant 1, a kinesiology and sports studies major, said,

I use it for information as opposed to tweeting to people and I follow lots of sports teams. Sports are a passion area of mine and I stay updated on that. There are a few people I follow and keep in close contact with.

Two of the participants said they did not post on their Twitter profiles, but the participants who do post on Twitter generalized that their tweets are updates or references to things going on in their life. For example, Participant 4, a member of various student organizations, said his tweets are about “what’s going on in my head, just what’s going
on in the day, throughout the day.” Some tweets may have little purpose and are simply to share whatever the individual chooses. Participant 7, a management information systems major, described his use of tweets as “just post random things like if I feel a type of way about something or I want to talk to myself. If people respond then we start a conversation. It’s really “BS-ing”, just playing around.”

Similar to Facebook, and keeping family and friends updated, Twitter can serve to provide information to a group of people that aren’t necessarily nearby but the individual wants to keep them informed. Participant 3, an active member of Greek life, has a different reason for her posts on Twitter. She uses Twitter to give “general update information because my entire family is on Twitter and they like to know what I have been doing.” Participants felt Twitter allowed them to share personal information similar to Facebook, and follow or stay informed about information and people in their field of study which is similar to LinkedIn.

**LinkedIn.** All the participants said LinkedIn is the most professional social networking site out of the three. Participant 5 said “LinkedIn is definitely geared and strictly to job search and connect professionally. You can connect with people and talk but it is geared to professionals.” Unlike Facebook and Twitter, they do not use LinkedIn for personal unprofessional interactions. They use LinkedIn, but some participants used it more frequently than others, and this was the medium that was newest to all the participants. Participant 1 created a LinkedIn profile about a year to a year and a half ago, and she said she got an account because “one of my kinesiology professors said to find him on LinkedIn and he would share jobs on there, I started to look at it for after graduation.” Participant 7, a management information systems major, created his profile
in 2012, but started getting active on the site during his last semester of college. “I am on there probably 3 or 4 times a week. I look for job opportunities for myself and anyone I know who is looking. I make sure my profile is updated, keeping an updated resume on there.” Having a resume on LinkedIn was common among participants, as five participants said they have a resume online or their information they have on their profile resembles their resume.

**Appropriate.** In this study, participants were asked what they believe is appropriate content to have on their profiles and then what they thought employers or graduate schools would think is appropriate content. It was easier for participants to describe inappropriate content than appropriate. Participant 7 identified appropriate content as being “congratulatory things, spending time with family, or anything that hits home for them that they can relate to and without knowing you they can call you a good person.” Showing what you value on your profiles, such as family, makes you a relatable person and something employers might be interested in knowing. Participants 2 and 6 also agreed that a picture of or post about family is appropriate. Another value, mentioned by Participant 6, was information about community service she has done in her sorority would be good to have on her profiles.

All participants said LinkedIn should only have professional information. Participants could give concrete examples of appropriate content and how LinkedIn is structured differently than Facebook or Twitter. This was demonstrated by participant 5 in his comment,

I think LinkedIn is definitely geared and strictly to job search and connecting professionally. I think it would be hard to get out of that on LinkedIn like get to
the social side. Obviously you can connect with people and talk but that is more geared to professionals.

LinkedIn has designed itself to showcase one’s professional career and image. This was demonstrated in participant 6’s comment, “You want people to perceive you as you are looking good and actually doing good things for your life.” Participant 4 said LinkedIn profiles should “be real clean, neat, whatever you do outside of your work or your school shouldn’t be on there, no opinions whatsoever, life updates should be formatted in a way that is job oriented.”

**Interactions.** Facebook and Twitter were used most commonly by all participants for social interactions among college peers and friends from their hometowns. Some participants use Facebook as their primary site for interacting with others because they are more familiar with the site, while others prefer to use Twitter because it has more limited features. Participant 1 stated appropriate interactions on Facebook would be “clean and people interacting with it, you know you are posting it for a reason to get a response or for people to see what you are doing.” Similarly, participant 3 said appropriate interactions on Twitter would be, “to post your day to day activities if it’s appropriate like you’re going outside to lie out, go ahead and tweet that.” LinkedIn does have an update wall similar to Facebook and Twitter’s news feed; however, most interaction that happens on LinkedIn is through a user’s connections. Participant 4 described appropriate connections as “acquaintances I’ve met here, I have a handful of professors on there, a lot of my fraternity brothers, a lot of the people from Phi Beta Lambda, classmates, but not a lot of people from home.”
**Be yourself.** Facebook and Twitter allow its users to customize their profiles by sharing information in the form of status updates, sharing photos, and embedding links to videos or articles. Participant 1 said it is appropriate to share “things you would normally share with a friend.” An example participant 1 gave is “I liked a movie and I’m going to talk about the movie or something like that. I think it should be genuine it should reflect you.” Participant 7 shared a very similar idea,

I feel like anything you want people to know or anything you would want to share with the world I feel is appropriate. Twitter it’s more of a constant tweet so there is more about what is currently going on or what’s in your thoughts or what are you thinking about. I think you can get away with a little bit more on Twitter because it’s a steady thing.

**Inappropriate.** Participant’s opinions of inappropriate content on their profiles covered a variety of topics. As mentioned above, participants were asked what they believe is inappropriate content to have on their profiles and then what they thought employers or graduate schools would think is inappropriate content. Common responses from participants included personal problems, questioning one’s character, and drugs and alcohol. Participant 4, a member of a fraternity, said, “you shouldn’t post your personal problems. On Twitter you can post that you’re upset or what you’re upset about, but to argue over the social media site is pretty worthless.” Broadcasting your problems or opinions can result in public arguments between you and your friends or followers. This seemed to be a common theme among participants. Participant 7, an African American male, said, “what I feel is inappropriate is your relationship business, like if you are arguing with someone and you are going through a rough patch and then you put that
information on Facebook; I feel like that is totally inappropriate.” Participant 7 has learned that social networking sites are not a place to share problems about a significant other or ask for relationship advice.

Social networking sites do not filter status posts or pictures; questionable content can be reported by other users. Some participants stated any content that would make other users or employers question a person’s character would be inappropriate. Participant 1, a resident assistant, said, “anything that can get you in trouble or is in poor taste to someone looking at it and can make them think do I really want to hire this person?” Participant 5, a fraternity president, had a similar opinion.

Anything that calls in to question your decision making or paints a picture of you drawing on your friend, or you doing something stupid. People don’t know the back story of it or they don’t know you, but they look at the picture. Anything that puts into question your personality or character I think that would be inappropriate.

Both participant 1 and participant 5 identified that what you choose to post can be interpreted differently and affects how others perceive you. They have learned that negative perceptions can be a turn-off for employers.

Posts associated with alcohol, partying, and drugs are inappropriate according to some participants. Participants 1 and 6 noted anything involving drinking and drugs would be inappropriate and should not appear on profiles. Participant 6, president of her sorority, said “last week someone was writing about beer on my wall which I will be deleting soon.” Both were not comfortable with being associated with alcohol related content on their profiles. Indication of partying was also identified as being inappropriate.
Participant 2, new student programs and orientation office sponsorship coordinator, stated “photos of what you did last night that you might regret or maybe with beer in the hand.” Similarly, participant 6 said, Pictures of girls when they are doing weird things you don’t want that on there, like dancing or at a bar people will post videos and I think that is inappropriate.” Both participants have learned that pictures from a night at a party or the bar would be something they would regret later. Many college students have chosen to post party pictures and when they apply for jobs or graduate schools they delete these photos or make them private because they do not want to portray a negative image.

A few other comments were made by participants about inappropriate content. Participant 5 said, “anything egregious or like it’s still broadcasting yourself so anything that’s obscene or absurd or derogatory. I think that would be crossing the line.” Participants 2 and 4 also said vulgar or content directed towards a race is inappropriate. Participants 7 and 2 discussed how content related to nudity would be inappropriate.

**Alcohol related content.** Throughout the interviews, participants often referenced alcohol and their opinions about if it is inappropriate. Facebook was the site most mentioned in relation to alcohol related content because of the ease to post or be tagged in photos. Most participants expressed being okay with posting pictures if they were over the legal drinking age of twenty-one. A couple felt strongly that posting alcohol related content is inappropriate, regardless of age because it led to a negative portrayal of a person. Participant 4, a resident assistant, chooses to not post any alcohol related content on her page. She stated, “There are not pictures of me drinking, I am of age but I just choose not to do any of that on Facebook. I think even if you are of age I think it has to be classy.” Participant 6, a previous president of her sorority, had a similar opinion about
keeping photos appropriate. She is more comfortable posting pictures of when she is around alcohol, but tries to use precautionary measures to eliminate alcohol being visible. She said,

I make everyone put their alcohol down before they take a picture with me but there are some that you can see alcohol in the background. I feel like that is inappropriate. I mean yeah we’re 21 and we can drink but no one else really needs to see that or know that. And I think pictures at bars are kind of obnoxious because clearly you’re out so probably you should be deleting those as well.

Participant 6 was concerned with what the picture said about her based on what other people are doing and what is in the background. Similarly, Participant 3, the Greek week chair, said, “If you are going to drink in your photos, be nonchalant about it and don’t publicize that you’re drinking and partying.” When asked if she felt it was appropriate or inappropriate for minors to have pictures online, Participant 3 was unsure and talked about how if you represent yourself responsibly around alcohol and are of age, then alcohol content is less inappropriate.

Other participants talked about being smart about what was seen in their pictures and as long as they were of age, alcohol was less of an issue. Participant 5, president of his fraternity, said,

There is nothing wrong with being in a social setting and you know they are over 21. A picture with alcohol in it, I mean I personally think that would be fine because you know they can, but if you know a candidate is under 21 and you know they can’t then that puts the employer in a weird area.
Participant 5 shared that having alcohol content is acceptable as long as you are of age. They went on to say that if you are a minor, it is inappropriate to have alcohol pictures on your profile, and employers may disapprove of you based on what they see in the picture. An example participant 5 provided was:

If it shows that this person is doing things like they’re 21 but they are upside down like half naked doing a keg stand that’s where the fine line is. There is a difference between being social and being fun and having pictures to document it and then being crazy with pictures and stuff like that. I think being social is okay.

Being social to Participant 5 is different than being intoxicated and represents you differently to employers. Participant 3 had a similar opinion in her comment, “there is a difference between you being blacked out in pictures as opposed to a glass of wine at Thanksgiving with family.”

**Reactions to Reppler.** As part of the interview, participants were asked to use Reppler.com to analyze their Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. Questions were asked about what participants thought was appropriate or inappropriate to have on their profiles, then Reppler was utilized to identify further what content was considered appropriate by Reppler. It was also used to gauge the participants’ reaction to a platform that could see all of their online content. The score is determined by any inappropriate content identified, how often users post on their profiles, and personal information on the profile. Participant 1, a future graduate student, was comfortable with her Reppler report that did not identify any inappropriate content. She said,

I’m not surprised about the inappropriate content. I feel like I monitor that pretty well so that there is no questionable content alert. My wall it partly positive, I
don’t know if I could be rated better or worse on that but I think that’s good. I’m not bashing people or talking negatively about things. I would have to say my networks are pretty accurate because I see a lot of student affairs people. I don’t have any privacy or security risks. I feel like that is pretty accurate.

Having high privacy settings and being responsible about what she posts has portrayed Participant 1 positively on Facebook and LinkedIn.

Participant 2, a member of a professional business organization, had content appear on her Reppler report that was identified as inappropriate. She was very eager to see what was reported because she did not know what it was. Two statuses were flagged because of the word beer and the use of strong language. Participant 2 said,

It makes sense that I need to watch what I say, especially any time someone says 21st birthday. I think a lot of people are like hey that’s going to be a crazy time. If people knew me they would know I’m not too crazy of a person.

What is posted can be interpreted differently and cause judgments from others. Participant 2 feels that she is a responsible person in the presence of alcohol, but using words associated with it may make others think she is not. Participant 2 received an overall Reppler impression score of 82 which means these flagged comments are affecting how others perceive her. Reppler suggested she delete the inappropriate content and post more often to Facebook.

Participant 4, a member of a fraternity, also had strong language and alcohol flagged on his Reppler analysis. He said,

Well I don’t see my name up there it’s all my friends dirtying up my [profile]. One of them is my mom (laughs). I don’t know how to take that. The way I see it
is its okay as long as it’s not me, I mean I guess I’m associated with it. I’m not the
one making the comments so I guess its okay.

Participant 4 identified that these posts are a reflection of his friend’s choices, not his. His
mother, who may be an influential person to him, made an inappropriate comment on his
page, and this may help him validate that this is okay. During his interview, Participant 4 said he had pictures from his previous college that he was not proud of and deleted
because he transferred. It is possible he does not monitor his profiles as closely as other
participants. His Reppler score was a 79. He stated, “it was pretty clean but I have a few
alerts and 79% is a C so I’ll probably use that to clean it up a little bit more.”

Participant 6 learned about Reppler through Greek Life and ran the analysis on
her accounts before. Her Facebook was flagged for a recent alcohol comment a friend
posted on her wall. There were two alcohol statuses that were deleted also. She was
surprised how little information she had on her LinkedIn account and said she needed to
update it. Her overall opinion of Reppler was,

I feel like mostly I’ve been conscious of my LinkedIn but I didn’t want to go
overboard. So I probably need to update it based on that. I already kind of knew
some of the things on Facebook are inappropriate. It helps to see those things,
especially posts I had when I first did this analysis. It pulled up statuses and they
were gone, but you don’t realize you have them on there. That’s what I liked most
about Reppler when I first used it.

She identified using Reppler was beneficial the first time she used it and again during the
interview. It can be difficult to remember what is on your profile, especially if you have
been a user for many years.
College Seniors Knowledge of Appropriate Online Content

Various influences inform, educate, and impact what we post on our social networking sites. Participants were asked about where they learned what is appropriate content to have on their network profiles.

Educational departments. Today’s college students have been using social networking sites for almost a decade and have shared a lot of information about themselves online. College students may not remember what information they have on their profiles from previous years. Through the interviews it was identified that some faculty educate students about what they should have on their profiles as they prepare to apply for jobs. Participant 1, a kinesiology and sports studies major, said,

I was originally a teaching major when I started out here and that was “the big scare.” If you have anything on there you will not get a job and I think that is transparent through any job that you go into.

The education department has raised a high concern among their students and informed them that they could jeopardize a position due to what content they have online. This may be related to the competitive market in the education field.

Participants said the college of business also educates their students about online content. Participant 7, a management information systems major, stated,

Once I came to college and took a business 1000 class, my professor was talking about social media and how businesses look at your profiles. He was saying how now businesses would ask for your credentials and they say they won’t judge you on there but at the end of the day we’re all humans and judgments happen.
Participant 7 believes that employers will judge a candidate by what they see on their profiles. He was informed about businesses looking at profiles early in his college career. The school of business also taught Participant 4, a business management major, about appropriate content. He said,

The school of business here pounds it in your head about networking and a lot of that has to do with social media- LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. I just kind of went through my history and timeline and deleted whatever I thought was inappropriate. The school of business kind of shaped me up.

His professors said a clean profile includes, “no red solo cups, no cuss words, try to stay neutral on politics and anything going on like that. Pretty much anything you wouldn’t want your boss to see. So that’s kind of the basis I use.” The business department has taught him the importance of a clean profile and what employers would not want to see.

**Parents, family, and friends.** We spend most of our time with parents, family, and friends; therefore they play on influential role in telling us their opinion of what is appropriate online. Participant 1, a member of a service sorority, said her friends influenced what she puts on her profiles. She stated,

Seeing other peoples profiles, whether that was my friend group, someone saying oh did you see what she posted? What did you think of that? Your friends on Facebook should be the ones that are helping you out or saying should you be posting that or giving you feedback on it.

Participant 1 appreciated the feedback from her friends and trusted that they would tell her if she had something inappropriate on her profiles. During her interview, Participant 1 shared a story with me about the president of her service sorority who succeeded her, and
how she would post pictures of herself at parties. Participant 1 told the president she should be mindful of what she posts because the director of their national organization is friends with them on Facebook. Not only is Participant 1 comfortable with others critiquing her profile, but she also lets others know when they have posted what might be inappropriate.

Many participants said their parents influenced what is inappropriate to have on their profiles. Participant 7 said, “When I created them and before I came to college, I always felt like I should tailor my profiles as to if my mother was able to see it.” Two participants commented about how their parents googled them on the internet to see what information was available to the public. Participant 2 said,

My dad liked to Google search us when “googleing” was as far as you could go for a personal search. He really liked to google us and he would always show us what was out there so that anything you put on Facebook you can Google search your image. When I googled my name and I saw my profile picture I was like okay I need to change that and I need to make everything private. Just knowing that people can see, and I know it is easy for me to go view other people’s profiles and I have no connection with them or I’m not friends with them on Facebook or anything like that. If I can do it that easily and I can make judgments about them I know people can do it just as easy.

Learning that information about her was open to the public made Participant 2 uncomfortable. This experience showed her that she has a digital footprint on the internet and anyone can find out information about her that she may not want everyone to see.

Participant 6 had a similar reaction,
I learned what is appropriate once my mom got a Facebook [account]. I realized that more people were going to be looking at it because before I didn’t realize how much people can see because if they google your name they can see everything you post. So when my mom became my friend she was like some of these things you need to get down and that was in high school and I shouldn’t have been doing those things anyway.

For Participant 6, her mother monitored her profile and told her what she needed to remove. Participants 2 and 6 both realized that the internet allows information about them to be shared publicly.

Some people are comfortable receiving feedback from their family, and others prefer not to have their family see their online content. During her interview, Participant 3 talked about how her grandparents have a Facebook account and it ruined her desire to use Facebook. Her family got Facebook and Twitter at the same time but they found her on Twitter because she did not have privacy settings. They had a hard time finding her on Facebook until her cousin tagged her in a picture. Then they all added her, which she was not excited about. Participant 3 is not a big fan of Facebook anymore but she does like Twitter. She said she tailors her Twitter posts to her family because,

I put general update information because my entire family is on Twitter and they like to know what I have been doing. Ever since my family has been on Twitter I have been tweeting less because I know that they are following me and they will text me about it and I’m over it.
Participant 3 does not like that her family monitors her Twitter posts. This probably relates to why she did not want them to find her on Facebook and why her privacy settings on Facebook are set so high.

Family can be helpful at giving advice about online image when going through the job searching process. Participant 3 shared how her older cousin’s job searching experience taught her to clean up her profile. She said,

My oldest cousin who is 6 years older than I am went through her job searching process and said she knew employers were looking at Facebook. I decided to block all my photos from anyone. It was an eye opener for me that they would look at that stuff.

Participant 3 shared in her interview that she has set her Facebook privacy settings to where people can only see the bare minimum. No one can see her pictures that she was tagged in. People can only see pictures she has uploaded, but even some of those have privacy settings on them like her photos from high school. Participant 3 said she has nothing to hide; she just does not think people need to see her pictures from high school.

**Student organizations and professional networks.** Programming or professional development is a common initiative within student groups. Networking and how to portray one’s self online are topics groups will cover. Participants talked about many groups and networks they belong to that have informed them of what they should have on their profiles. Participant 4, a member of an educational business fraternity, learned by bringing in guest speakers who presented at meetings,

For Phi Beta Lambda my business fraternity we always have speakers once or twice a month and usually we have one or two on social media sites. I’m a human
resource concentrate so we always talk about employee behavior and staffing and hiring. Yeah we talk a lot about using social media to use it as a tool to potential applicants and stuff like that.

Business student groups are educating their members regularly about how social networking sites are helpful in the profession, and how the need to prepare them when they search for jobs. Similarly, Participant 2, a member of a professional business fraternity, learned about networking through her student organization. She said, “I took a mini course through LinkedIn for Delta Sigma Pi, we had a professional night.” This organization is promoting how to use LinkedIn effectively and what displaying professionalism looks like online.

Being members of Greek organizations educated some participants. Participant 3, an active member in Greek life, said she “learned how you should keep your social media appropriate through Greek life.” Participants 1 and 6 had the experience where they were in leadership roles and had to educate their members. This is demonstrated in Participant 6’s, story of how her sorority went on probation by their national headquarters for pictures posted online and it was up to her to educate her chapter. She said,

It was my role to emphasize what’s important and what are we putting on here [social media]. It was hard to relate to people that were freshmen because I understood they didn’t really get it because you don’t think in four years you need to find a job so you’re just like it doesn’t really matter right now. I had to explain that to them and show that it is important and you shouldn’t be posting all these things. You’re having a great time and your other friends can see it, but when you really think long term, should you be putting those up there? That was really my
stress in educating them and the long term focus, but they kind of don’t grasp that idea as freshmen. It was hard to educate them.

Developmentally, freshmen students are not at the same point as college seniors.

Participant 6 tried to create awareness in these younger classmen for their own benefit, as well as for the sorority chapter. These younger classmen were not aware of what they posted and what they posted could get the chapter in trouble again. The chapter was on supervision and anything out of line could raise concern. Participant 6 learned about what is inappropriate to have online from this experience and needed to be a role model for her chapter. She needed to make sure her image was clean before she could have these conversations with her chapter. She reflected on the experience and said,

That was around the time when I started being conscious of what they can see even if it is on private. They are able to go through your albums and I didn’t realize that some of these things from when I was a freshmen were still up there and you don’t remember when you post something if you are not looking at it every day. So once we went under supervision [by the national sorority] I was really conscious of what they could see, even if I wasn’t doing something wrong.

But there were a lot of things that I felt I shouldn’t have on there at all.

A negative experience for her student organization made Participant 6 remove posts that she does not want others to see. This message was shared in conversations with her chapter.

A sorority life experience confirmed for Participant 1 that professional networks are watching her profile. As mentioned earlier, Participant 1, previous president of her service sorority, told the next president that “the director of international will add you as
a friend on Facebook so be aware.” The new president was tagged “in pictures of her playing tippy cup or some form of a drinking game” said Participant 1. It was important to Participant 1 to watch out for her sister.

**Knowing right from wrong and perceptions.** College students develop and mature throughout their four years of college. They develop networks who share with them how they are being perceived. These networks may have positive or negative influences on an individual. Students learn from experiences and observation of others about what is acceptable and unacceptable to post online. This could be considered a social norm. Participant 1 defined social norms as, “I think the social norm of what college students post is knowing what that is [appropriate posts] and what’s okay.” Students know what is okay by seeing what their friends or followers are posting then comparing themselves. Participant 1 demonstrated this by saying,

Do I have something similar on my wall or on my Twitter? Being aware of how it is perceived by others whether it was mine or someone else’s but thinking okay if that was on my wall what am I thinking about this person who’s posted it and is someone having that feeling about me if I have something similar.

Participant 6 had a similar reaction to how you are perceived by others. She said,

When you’re younger you don’t really think about anything other than yourself. So once I became 18 and started realizing I am going to college and other people will be seeing these things you probably want to narrow it down to what you’re actually putting out there.

College exposes you to a variety of people, who may or may not be the same age as you, which is different from a high school experience. Your perception is being evaluated by
more people. Participant 6 learned if she wanted to portray the person she thinks she is, then she needed to be mindful of what she posts online. Modeling yourself after a person you respect can help you be successful. Participant 5 shared how he “looks at other people’s profiles and realized these people are successful. They are people I look up to.” Participant 5 is a leader on campus, and he probably had fraternity brothers and peers shape him in many aspects of his life, including his online identity.

Many participants reflected on how they might have been perceived throughout their four years of college and how they learned from these experiences. Participant 4, a transfer student, said, “A few years ago I had some pretty ridiculous things on there but I grew up and cleaned it up. Everything I post is pretty neutral and family friendly.” His posts were from his previous institution where he had pictures of underage drinking or limited clothing. Knowing he should clean up his profile, his academic program, and student organizations taught him to remove content from his profile. Participant 2 was tagged in a picture and her cousin perceived it very differently. She said,

I was lying on the floor one time and there was a picture of it. My friend posted “this is what I have to deal with every day” and my cousin thought I was drunk. I was like nope completely sober that’s just how I am. It made me feel actually really nervous because I was like if my cousin thinks I’m like this and she knows me then I wonder what the rest of my Facebook friends think.

This really concerned Participant 2 and made her think differently about how pictures or posts can be judged. A picture is a snapshot of you in a moment, and you do not have the opportunity to give an explanation, unless you write a caption to the picture.
Alcohol related content was mentioned multiple times throughout each interview and applied to various themes. Participants were concerned with how they would be perceived by having alcohol related content on their profiles. More information about their opinions can be found at the beginning of this chapter. In relation to perceptions, Participant 3 shared when she was told about alcohol on Facebook. She said, "I think I was a freshman in college when I was told to block things. That's when it really started to affect you with the drinking and different atmospheres." For some college students, this new experience allows them the freedom to experiment with alcohol and new friend groups. Their friends might want to document every social weekend outing and post that online. Facebook and Twitter allow users to hide information from their timeline or untag themselves in pictures.

Participants were concerned with what their hundreds of Facebook or Twitter friends would think of them, but they were also concerned about future employer’s perceptions. Even though Participant 5, president of his fraternity, is over 21 years old, he still worried about how employers will perceive him when alcohol is mentioned on his profile. He said,

Even on mine we will probably find that there will be times where I have stuff [alcohol] on there too. There is a fine line and I know that some employers have said this and I’ve heard it sometimes that if nothing pops up people think you are lying and you’re hiding things. I mean everyone is human and has stuff like that but I think that’s the control and fine line of how you broadcast yourself.

Participant 5 struggled with the balance of putting information out there about himself that may be related to alcohol and being accepted by employers. He felt confident in
himself that he could make good judgments and learned through observations about how he wanted to be perceived.

**Beliefs Seniors Have About What Employers Look at on Social Network Profiles**

Participants were asked about how comfortable they were with a future employer or graduate school viewing their Facebook and Twitter profiles. These two sites allow users to post information about their personal lives; whereas, LinkedIn’s purpose is professional networking. Participants reported their level of comfort along with what they think is being viewed.

**Comfort with potential employers or graduate schools viewing Facebook.**

Facebook is the social networking site used by participants the longest in this study. Because of this reason, a lot of information can be found. Responses ranged from participants being comfortable to comfortable but with restrictions, and not at all.

Participants 1, 4, and 5 were comfortable with employers or graduate schools viewing their Facebook profiles. Participant 1, a future graduate student, said “They can view the whole thing. I feel that I am very conscious of what is on there and comfortable with anyone reading it.” She was the most confident out of any other participant in her profile.

Participants 2 and 3 were comfortable because of their privacy settings. Participant 2 said, “I’m pretty comfortable with it, I don’t think I put too inappropriate things on there. I always filter everything that I see that goes on my Facebook.” To make Participant 3 comfortable, she would not want a future employer to see any of her pictures. She said, “I don’t care if they look at it because I have nothing to hide other than my photos.”
Participants 6 and 7 were not comfortable with employers or graduate schools viewing their Facebook profiles. Participant 6 enjoys her social life and feels that this is part of her college experience. She feels that this is okay but is not sure if an employer would feel the same way. She said,

It’s obvious we’re probably going out but I try to eliminate alcohol in most of my pictures or my posts. They probably know I’m going out anyways, I’m a college senior. I’m okay with it. They probably wouldn’t like everything they see but… (shoulder shrugs). I wish it wasn’t always out in the open, but that’s okay.

People have control over what is posted online or what tagged pictures show up on Facebook profiles. That is a personal choice and Participant 6 is aware of this. Participant 7 was the only participant to say he is not comfortable having his profile viewed. His reasoning was, “I’m not too comfortable with it because I’ve had it forever and I’m not really sure what’s on there. I know companies are very judgmental about what they see on there.” He realizes he is unsure of what information is on his profile from previous years. If an employer were to look at previous years, they may find information they do not agree with.

Comfort with potential employers or graduate schools viewing Twitter.

Participants varied on when they created their Twitter account. Some have been users of Twitter for many years, while others are relatively new. Like Facebook, participants were either comfortable or uncomfortable with employers of graduate schools viewing their Twitter profile. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 were comfortable having their profile viewed. As mentioned earlier, Participant 6 was not as comfortable having her Facebook profile viewed; however, she was very willing to show her Twitter profile. She is not
very active on Twitter and said, “I’m totally fine because I’ve probably made 10 tweets my whole life and they are irrelevant to anything. They would be like you don’t use this at all so perfect. I probably should give them that instead of my Facebook.” Participant 6 has nothing to hide because this is not a platform she uses regularly.

Participant 5 uses his Twitter on a regular basis and particularly enjoys it because of its focus on quick updates. He said he is comfortable sharing Twitter more so than Facebook because, “there are still pictures on Twitter but I use Twitter for more professional things then Facebook. I look at Facebook as more of my social thing and Twitter is more of my professional thing even though I have social things on my Twitter.” Participant 5 feels that his professionalism on Twitter would be better received than his social side on Facebook.

Participant 4 would prefer his Twitter not to be viewed because this is an online space where he is comfortable being very open about himself. He described his tweets as “free thoughts” and he feels employers “might take some things out of context.” Participant 7 is not comfortable sharing his Twitter profile either. He feels that “people are judgmental.”

**Personal identity.** Employers look at social network profiles for a better idea of who the person is or to check their credentials. All but two participants mentioned in their interview that they believe employers or graduate schools are looking at their online profiles. Participant 2, who is searching for employment, said she thinks employers “try to get more information about who this person is. If I were a potential employer looking at peoples pages I would look at whatever I could possibly look at to get as much information.” Participant 2 thinks employers should look for as much information as they
can about candidates. Participant 3 shared examples of what she thinks employers or graduate schools look at. Her examples were, “I think they would look at your photos, interests, what photos are you favoring, or what hash-tags you are using. I think it’s important that they look at that.” These examples would show an employer what the candidate is like outside of being a student and their hobbies. Participant 7, a future graduate student, said he thinks employers “would like to know the person outside of their resume;” however, this could lead to an employer “passing judgment if they see anything inappropriate.” Employers do not know what they are going to find on profiles, and if they see something they do not like, they could have a difficult time looking past that judgment. They are going into this situation knowing they could be putting themselves in a difficult position.

Social networking profiles would show employers or graduate schools how a candidate interacts with others online. Participant 5, a student searching for jobs and graduate schools, shared how being a user of these sites shows your “social media, communication, and interpersonal skills.” Similarly, Participant 6, a student searching for employment, said,

The communication back and forth between people, such as the posts on their wall. Then your pictures or people you are associated with or the groups you are associated with is probably what I feel like they would look at.

Good communication skills were said to be important to employers or graduate schools. This could be because they want to hire or accept individuals who can communicate with one another and represent the company or institution well. They might be concerned with a person who has poor grammar or talks negatively online.
Pictures and tagged photos. As mentioned above, participants shared that they believe employers and graduate schools look at candidate’s photos. Participant 1 said “a picture says a thousand words” and Participant 2 shared “I think pictures are a pretty good depiction of who someone is.” The intent of looking at pictures is to get a better idea of what the candidate is like. To avoid being judged, participants would set privacy setting or monitor their pictures. They had more control over who could see these images and what they were portraying of themselves. Facebook has a privacy setting called manage tagged photos. Users must review pictures they are tagged in before they will appear on the timeline. Participant 1 uses this privacy setting and explained why, “I feel that I have set my privacy settings very high so even if people tag me in pictures from a party or something I have to allow it before it will show up.” This setting allows her to see what the tagged picture is, allow it to be put on her timeline, or untag herself from the picture. Any picture that Participant 1 is not comfortable with will not show up on her timeline; therefore, no one can see it.

Participant 3 also uses this privacy setting. She described her strict privacy settings.

No one can see my photos that I was tagged in, you can only see photos I uploaded. Even when I upload those I will put privacy setting on those mainly because I don’t think people need to see my photos from high school. There are only like two people who can see my photos just in general, everyone else has been blocked.
Participant 3 chooses to be very private with her pictures. This may be in relation to how she wants to portray herself online or wanting to limit what information her family can see. She did not like her family finding her on Facebook.

Facebook users can have multiple albums of pictures if they choose. With the current settings on Facebook, cover photos and profile pictures are open to the public unless users make these private. Participant 5 shared his opinion of how in depth he thinks employers or graduate schools look at pictures. He said,

They see what pops up first. They probably don’t go too in depth because they have a lot, but I’m sure they do a couple clicks and within a couple clicks if you can find something that’s bad then I’m sure your resume will get tossed out.

This might explain why participants choose to use the manage photos setting on Facebook and hide pictures. If pictures are influential in an employer or graduate school’s decision, then users might be more inclined to limit what pictures are available to be seen.

**Friends and social connections.** Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn were designed to be social networks. It would make sense for employers or graduate schools to view a candidate’s network. Participant 1 thought they might look at who a candidate is friends with because “it’s a small world out there. Knowing someone or having a bad interaction knowing that you’re connected to that person if you’re friends could be bad for you.”

This is an example of the saying never burn a bridge. People are well connected, and having sites like Facebook and Twitter make networks larger.

Out of the three sites, LinkedIn is designed the best for building connections and networks. Participant 2 expressed how building a network is important in her field. She
said, “as far as work wise, Caterpillar is huge in Peoria. If anyone were to look at my profile it says that I worked at Caterpillar just because that was a bigger company that I worked for.” She is proud of the network and recognition of her previous company, and hopes this will lead to a connection when she applies for jobs.

**Changes Made to Profiles While Job Searching**

All participants were in the process of applying for jobs or applying to graduate schools. Participants were asked questions about if they changed anything on their Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts, and what was changed.

**Professional look.** During interviews, participants said they did think employers or graduate schools looked at candidates profiles. Participants 1 and 2 shared that they made changes to their profiles to make them look more professional. Participant 2 made changes to her LinkedIn account to make her look more professional. She said updating her LinkedIn to be more professional consisted of,

Adding any type of work I do, I always try to update that consistently, and I think on my LinkedIn I just added a picture. I feel like if they have a picture they can kind of see who I am and not just some blank face.

Making sure an up to date record of positions held was important to Participant 2. This is important on LinkedIn because the profile information on this social networking site mostly consists of current and previous work experiences. Participant 2 also felt having a profile picture was necessary in making a user look professional. A LinkedIn profile picture should be a professional headshot. Participants Facebook and Twitter profile pictures would not be appropriate for a LinkedIn picture.
Clean profiles. Two participants said once they started searching, they went through their profiles and cleaned them. Participant 4, a graduate school candidate, said, “one of my biggest reasons I cleaned my profiles up was because the possibility that people do look at them.” He was concerned about how graduate schools and employers might view him if they found anything they did not agree with.

Participants may want to clean their walls, photos, and biography sections.

Participant 6, previous sorority president, shared what she cleaned up on her profile,

I made sure that things that I didn’t want to be seen were put on private. I went through and looked at all my wall posts from way back when because you don’t remember what people said or what you said to someone. I made sure there wasn’t anything with swearing or doing anything inappropriate. I deleted those. I don’t think I was able to see all of those because Facebook kind of links them all together now and I didn’t want to spend three hours doing it because it probably would have taken a long time to delete all those. So I went through and deleted a lot of things I don’t ever need to see again and they don’t either.

People have had profiles, such as Facebook, for many years and there is a lot of information on them. It may take a long time to go through all the content and delete information.

Pictures. Pictures were frequently mentioned during interviews. Many participants said they use their Facebook to look at their friends pictures. Pictures can be uploaded to Twitter, but participants said they do not look at as many pictures on Twitter as they do on Facebook. After four years of college, their pictures were of friends, involvement in organizations, or related to social activities. Most of the female
participants said they manage their photos on Facebook using the manage tagged photos security setting which allows them to control who can see their pictures and hide the ones they do not want others to see. Participant 2 said she uses this setting. She uses this setting because,

if they tag me in a picture it comes through me to see if I can put it on my wall. I think that’s a little safer way to view that. I mean they can still probably find it somehow, just as long as it’s not on my wall.

Participant 2 also said she has to approve statuses her Facebook friends tag her in. Using this setting protects her from others judgments on her wall.

As mentioned earlier, when job searching or applying to graduate schools, it is recommended to have a professional looking profile picture. Participant 1 said she went and “deleted pictures just so there were certain profile pictures but not for any reason that they were inappropriate.” Unless users change the setting, profile pictures are visible to the public, which means employers could view these. Participant 1 wanted to make sure she was limiting what pictures could be viewed.

None. Some participants had reasons to change their profiles while applying for positions and others did not. Instead of changing anything on his profiles, Participant 7 said “I just made myself more aware of what was going on. I didn’t change profile pictures or configure settings.” He felt confident in his online presence that he did not need to change anything.

Participant 3 did not change anything on her profiles because of her busy semester and little involvement online. She said,
This past semester I really haven’t been on social media because I was doing Greek Week and it was harder to keep up with everything. I would go on and look through my news feed but I wasn’t posting things. I wasn’t tweeting or sharing things either.

Not actively posting information to be concerned about was why Participant 3 was not worried about cleaning up her profile.

Another reason a student may choose not to clean their profile is because they have cleaned it once before. Participant 4 transferred from a community college, and this transition made him decide to clean his Facebook profile. He said,

I did it earlier in my collegiate career. It was a pretty big topic so I changed it pretty early. When I applied to graduate school I think it was all pretty well updated and ready to go. I didn’t make any changes specifically for grad school, but I did change it when I transferred. I scrolled back through my timeline to see if there were any posts that I should delete and there were a handful. I think other than I might have updated some of my interests or my summary or bio.

After reviewing his profile, Participant 4 learned that he had content that he did not want others to see. He cleaned his profile and maintained it, which is why he did not go through it again while applying to graduate school.

Summary

Themes found during individual one-on-one interviews with graduating seniors pertaining to appropriate online content while going through the job searching process were explored in this chapter. Participants said appropriate information to have online would be anything that would make you a person an employer could relate to or portray
you in a positive manner. Be yourself, because employers want to know who you are.

Inappropriate content would be underage drinking, profanity, and information about personal relationships. Having pictures of alcohol and being of age was a challenging decision for participants to decide where that is appropriate or inappropriate. Participants learned about what to have on their profiles from major influences such as family and friends, professors, and student organizations. Participants did make some changes to their profiles such as updating their LinkedIn profile, or changing their security settings.
Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the thesis research and suggest recommendations for student affairs professionals. A discussion of the results will be described, along with the objectives of the research. Then recommendations for further research will be listed. The current study utilized a qualitative approach to gain information regarding opinions of appropriate and inappropriate information on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn from college seniors. The purpose of this study was to explore graduating college students' perceptions of appropriate or inappropriate content on their social networking sites as they went through the job searching process. The following research questions were asked: (a) What do college seniors identify as appropriate content on social network profiles? (b) How do college seniors know what is appropriate online content? (c) What do college seniors believe potential employers look at on social network profiles? (d) As college seniors conduct their job search what changes do they make to their profile? Discussion of the meaning of this research follows.

Discussion

Social networking sites have been around for many years, and college students are active users of these sites (Junco & Mastrodiacasa, 2007). All participants in the present study said they have been a user of Facebook since they were in high school, which means they have been on the medium for five or more years. Most participants said they created a profile on Twitter early in college, except for Participants 2 and 5 who have
been users for less than a year. LinkedIn varied among participants from two and a half years to 9 months. College students have opinions of what is appropriate and inappropriate to have on their profiles, as well as learning from various sources. In a survey of 100 executive recruiters conducted by ExecuNet, it was discovered that 35% have eliminated job candidates based on the information they found posted online (Karle, Peluchette, & Schlaegel, 2010), and participants in this present study also identified that they believe future employers or graduate schools would not consider their candidacy if they found something inappropriate. Participants in this study placed strict privacy settings on their accounts so they could manage what others saw on their profiles earlier in their college career. Even though participants knew potential employers or graduate schools would look at their profiles, many of them did not make any significant changes to their profiles during the job or graduate school searching period. Preparing profiles would have included deleting any inappropriate content or pictures, or updating personal information to be current.

**Appropriate social network content as identified by college seniors.** When participants were asked to describe appropriate social network content they had a harder time, and this might be because they are educated on what is inappropriate. They were able to very quickly describe what might be considered inappropriate. They learned what is inappropriate from family members, class discussions from professors, and student organizations. Participants thought posts about their family, community service involvement, or day-to-day activities would be appropriate for employers to see. Not one of the participants mentioned posts relating to their personality, interests, good communication skills, or awards which are all areas employers would want to see.
They did know to have a professional profile on LinkedIn and post information that is only business related because it would help with the job search process. Many participants said their LinkedIn profile resembles their resume and has information about their involvement and previously held jobs. Participants who chose not to go to graduate school after graduation tended to be more active on LinkedIn. They were looking at their connections or potential employers in their field. They were also building professional connections with previous professors and employers.

All participants were able to identify what content is inappropriate to have on their profiles. During each interview, the questions, “what do you think is appropriate to have on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn?” was asked first. Most participants would give a couple examples, then started to give examples of what they thought would be inappropriate. The following question asked what was inappropriate. Participants would either give more examples, or elaborate on the answers they gave when they answered the question about appropriate content. Possibly, it is easier for participants to give examples of what is inappropriate because they are educated by various sources (family/friends, professors, student organizations) about what is negative to have on their profiles.

Influences on participants helped shape what they believe is appropriate or inappropriate to have on their profiles. Family and friends were identified by the participants to be very influential. Some participants said they decide what to post online based on what their parents or grandparents would say if they saw the post. Their friends were influential because of how the post would be perceived by a friend and what they would think or say. Participants also observed what their friends are posting online, and
this helped shape their decisions. Participant 5 shared how he looked at his peers who were older and saw their success. He based what was appropriate to have on his profile from observing their profiles.

Based on students' responses, it appears that the institution of this study did a good job of educating students about appropriate content, especially the school of business. Four of the participants were students in the school of business. One participant was an education major and she said that department educated her on what is inappropriate to have on her profiles. Career fields that tend to be more competitive might educate and emphasize what not to have on your profile.

Student organizations were also a place where participants were educated on inappropriate content. In some cases, organizations brought in speakers to discuss the topic, and other times there was a push from a national fraternal headquarters. Participants 1 and 6 mentioned that their fraternal headquarters staff were very influential in their education process for them individually. The national president of Participant 1’s service sorority added her on Facebook, and Participant 6’s sorority was on probation for alcohol on members’ profiles.

**Reppler reactions.** For most participants, the inappropriate content that was flagged on Reppler was related to alcohol or strong language. Both of these criteria came across on Participant 2’s analysis, yet during her interview she said she “tries not to swear on Facebook or Twitter because she knows family is out there watching.” She also said in her interview that pictures with a beer in your hand would be inappropriate; however, her Reppler analysis flagged the word beer on her profile. Participant 2 said she was nervous to see what the report found on her Facebook profile. After reviewing the analysis, she
said she “needed to watch what she said” but felt the report was not too bad. Compared to her statement earlier in the interview, Participant 2 has contradictory statements.

Participant 4 thought that he completely cleaned his profiles when he transferred schools, and felt pretty knowledgeable about what should not be on his profile: however he had a difficult time describing what is appropriate and inappropriate on profiles. On his Reppler analysis it was identified that he had profanity usage and alcohol on his account. When asked about his reaction to the use of strong language and alcohol related content, he felt having these statuses was acceptable because he did not post them, his friends and parent did. He felt users have the freedom of speech to post whatever they want, but it would be appropriate to post any kind of life updates that family and friends would want to know or tweet personal thoughts.

**Change in use.** All participants have been users of Facebook the longest. This might be because of Facebook’s popularity among college and high school students in the mid 2000’s and they are knowledgeable about using this site. Participants signed up for Twitter accounts during their time in college. Out of the three sites, Facebook and Twitter are the most used sites for participants in this study. These two sites share personal or social information, whereas LinkedIn is professional-only information. Participant 3 said she is not a fan of Facebook anymore because her family is friends with her and this ruined her experience. They monitor her account and she does not like this. Facebook originated at Harvard for college students and in the beginning years was used by that generation or high school students. In the following years, older generations started becoming Facebook users. “Today, 70% of Baby Boomers, 81% of Generation X, and 88% of Millennials have a Facebook account” (Bennett, 2014, para. 4). Some participants
talked about their grandparents being active Facebook users. The appeal of Facebook not being exclusive to their particular age group may be why some participants do not use Facebook as much anymore.

Participant 5 also prefers Twitter over Facebook. He said,

Twitter is where I usually post. I tweet a lot more and relay information. That has taken the place of Facebook for me. Facebook is more of like the information and Twitter is the communication for me. I do use it for information too. I use Twitter for things in my industry.

A tweet can only be 140 characters, which makes it easy for users to read messages quickly. When Facebook originated, the status updates were about what people were doing, which is similar to tweets. Now Facebook statuses can be about links, videos, comments, etc. Facebook statuses have changed as Facebook has evolved in the past decade. Twitter's status updates have stayed fairly similar, and resemble an instant messaging format. This might be why Participant 5 feels it is easier to communicate on Twitter with his followers.

Connecting with people. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn were all created to help people connect and stay in touch with people in their lives. Each social network platform has evolved since their creation and allows users to share much more information with their followers, but users still use them for their basic function—-to stay connected (http://chronicle.com/article/College-Students-Reasons-for/140397/, 2012). Participants identified that Facebook is a way to stay connected with family and friends. In recent years they have learned to use it as a tool to communicate with members of groups they participate in. For example, Participant 5 uses Facebook to communicate
with members of his fraternity. Most college students own a device that allows them internet access such as a laptop, smartphone, or iPad or other tablet (http://chronicle.com/article/Which-Devices-College-Students/140791/, 2013), and they can instantly access information posted in groups or online.

Twitter has taken the place of a traditional Facebook status update for college students. Twitter was created to let users share short messages for their followers to know what they are doing at any given moment (Levy, 2007). Participant 3 uses Twitter to post general update information. Her family is on Twitter and they like to know what she is up to. She also said she “read an article a couple years ago that said Twitter was the new networking site” and she uses it for that.

LinkedIn has been around for over a decade; however, participants stated they created an account around the time they came to college or during college. They started using LinkedIn because professors were sharing positions, or they wanted their profile to look professional in case an employer would view it. LinkedIn was created for professional networking among various groups of people such as CEO’s, senior management, entrepreneurs, etc. (http://www.linkedin.com/company/linkedin). College students may not interact with individuals in these roles during their time in college. Participants said their professional network consisted of peers, professors, and previous employers. LinkedIn is a newer social networking site for them because it is geared for professional networking and seeking employment. LinkedIn’s purpose meets a need for students who are graduating and seeking employment.

**College seniors believe potential employers look at social network profiles.** We know that employers are viewing candidate’s profiles as part of the job search
process (Osborn & LoFrisco, 2012). Participants in this study stated that they believe employers or graduate schools are looking for information to find out more about the person. This includes looking at pictures, status updates to find out how good of a communicator they are, and connections—both personal and professional. Participant 2 felt that the pictures you have online are a good depiction of who you are. Some of the participants have set high security measures such as managing their tagged pictures so they can monitor what their pictures portray of themselves. Participants agreed that employers and graduate schools are looking at their profiles and for the most part were comfortable with them viewing their profiles. They learned to monitor what they post and what others post on their profiles.

**Changes made to profiles when searching.** In the beginning of this study it was believed that the participants would identify being long-term users of these platforms and that because of this they would be actively changing their profiles in anticipation of the job search. However, not many changes were made to any of the participants' profiles. Participants 2 and 5 updated their LinkedIn accounts, and Participant 1 changed her profile picture to be more professional. Participant 6 was the only one who said she went through her profile and deleted or made posts private she did not want others to see. She was in charge of educating her chapter on what is appropriate to have on their profiles.

The participants who said they did not make any changes said they made this decision because they have not been active on their profiles during their senior year or they have high security settings set and were not worried because of this reason. Or they made changes earlier in their college career because they were told to by faculty or friends.
Participant 1 was very aware of her image on all her profiles, had a clean Reppler analysis, and was willing to show anything on her profiles. She made an interesting comment during her interview that describes her generation,

My generation, we don’t see the full effect of whatever we post. They say once you post it, it’s always out there forever and I think that is why I am so conscious of what I post and knowing that it’s the Internet it can go anywhere.

College seniors may have a few bad choices online, but they are aware of the consequences of their online actions and persona.

**Implications for Student Affairs Practice**

Student affairs professionals are working with students who have been users of multiple social networking sites since an early age and are very connected to these platforms. College students are spending hours gathering information or keeping in touch with their peers. These sites continue to evolve and develop and are not going away, and future students will have had these profiles longer than current college students. Professionals have a responsibility to educate their students while in college about what is appropriate and inappropriate to have on their profiles. This study shows that the students are listening to this message and want to learn. Student affairs professionals have a duty to help students be successful while they are in college and prepare them for life after they graduate. Managing their online social network persona is an issue that will impact them as they prepare to end their college career.

Academic departments are having these conversations with students in the classroom, but the message appears to end there, unless it becomes a major issue. This study indicated that student affairs professionals, for the most part, are not having these
conversations. This is something that should be discussed in the residence halls, career services centers, and with student organizations. Fraternity/sorority life and some business honorary organizations are starting the conversation with their members. Specifically for fraternity/sorority life, these conversations either stem from a negative incident and a chapter's headquarters monitoring them, or chapter executive boards tell members what not to post online. Student affairs professionals can be a greater influence because of the close interactions they have with students on a regular basis. It is not uncommon for students to become friends with administrators or for them to follow professionals online. This is also a way for student affairs professionals to stay connected with this generation and see what choices they are making and how they display themselves online. This also creates an opportunity to be role models for them because they are looking at the profiles. Student affairs professionals need to continue the conversations outside the classroom.

In order to help students, university professionals need to stay educated on these platforms. Being active participants in all mediums helps to be more familiar with them and observe how students are using them. Students are gravitating towards using group features on social networking sites to communicate instead of using email. This might be one of the many ways student affairs professionals have to start meeting students in the middle and interacting with them on mediums they are comfortable with. New social networking sites become available frequently and this trend is likely to continue in the future. Professionals may choose not to be users of all sites, but being aware of what these sites are, how they are used, and what they can do will help professionals when interacting with students.
Recommendations For Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore graduating college students’ perceptions of appropriate or inappropriate content on their social networking sites as they went through the job searching process. After conducting this study, there are recommendations for future research. A limited number of participants were selected for this study. Future researchers could conduct the study on a larger scale and at different types of institutions. This would enhance information coming from all departments on a college campus and more student organizations. One would also receive more information about what students think is appropriate or inappropriate. By conducting the study on a larger scale, more diversity may be present.

This study was conducted at one college university. Replicating this study at other universities might generate different opinions from college seniors. There might be other institutions that are educating their students both inside and out of the classroom. It would also be helpful to do this study in other parts of the United States because regional differences might also be present.

This study only focused on responses from college seniors. After analyzing the seven participant’s interviews, they all use Facebook differently as seniors than they probably did when they were freshmen. How they communicate, what they choose to post, and what information they seek out is different between a freshmen and senior. The recommendation would be to interview freshmen and seniors about how they use their social networking platforms and what they think is appropriate or inappropriate. It would also be worthwhile to conduct a review over the course of the four years to see how
students use changed from year to year and what impact the decisions they made regarding online content.

The final recommendation is to look at students in specific academic departments. It appeared that students in some majors had been provided with more information than students in other areas. This will allow researchers to know if departments such as a music, English, or a geography department are having conversations about online presence on social networking sites.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research questions of this study, provided implications for student affairs practice, and suggestions for future research. The participants in this study were able to provide examples of what is appropriate and inappropriate to have on their Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn profiles as they went through the job searching process. They learned what is appropriate from observations and influences by family, friends, and academic departments.

They agreed that their potential employers or graduate schools probably would look at their profiles, and all but one were comfortable with this. As they conducted their job or graduate school search, not many changes were made. Incoming college students will continue to have a presence on social networking sites. Student affairs professionals have the ability to educate the students they work with about appropriate and inappropriate online content. Students are listening to the message being shared by their professors and student organizations. Increasing the message and education will impact college students understanding of their online person and choices made when posting online.
References


Appendix A

Initial Email to Students

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in EIU Student Interview

Dear (student name),

You have been randomly selected to participate in a study about May 2014 graduating seniors use of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

This study is being conducted as part of an assignment for the course CSD 5950, Thesis and Research, as a requirement for the Master’s of Science program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University.

Dr. Dianne Timm serves as the course instructor with myself, Lauren Stehlik, as the Principle Investigator on the project.

Should you volunteer to continue participation in this study, you will be asked to partake in a 30 minute to 60 minute face-to-face interview with myself. You must be graduating from Eastern Illinois University in May and have user accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. You have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

Your participation in this research will be kept confidential. All documents will be identified through a participant number.

Information from this research project will be shared with student affairs practitioners on EIU’s campus as well as other student affairs practitioners based on further presentation and publication of this study.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact the course instructor, Dr. Dianne Timm at (217) 581-5327 or at dtimm@eiu.edu.

Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relations with Eastern Illinois University.

If you are willing to participate, please respond to Lauren Stehlik at lstehlik@eiu.edu stating you will be a participant of this study by Friday, April 25, 2014.

Thank you in advance,

Lauren Stehlik
 Appendices

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

College Students Self-Perception and Online Social Networks

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Lauren Stehlik, a master’s student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. Lauren Stehlik is working under the supervision of Dr. Dianne Timm, a professor in the Counseling and Student Development Department at EIU. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you before deciding whether or not to participate. You will be one of six participants in the study.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study will be to explore graduating college students’ perceptions of appropriate or inappropriate content on their social networking sites as they go through the job searching process.

Procedures
If you choose to continue volunteering in this study, the final method of research is a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher, Lauren Stehlik. In the interview, you will be asked about your uses of Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn in relation to your job search process. You will also be asked to log into your personal Facebook account and review profile picture and Reppler.com. You will be asked to talk about content on your profile. This interview will be video recorded to aid the researcher in the transcription process of this study. Each recording will be stored on its own DVD which will be kept in the possession of the researcher for three years. After three years, the DVDs will be destroyed in compliance with EIU IRB requirements. The researcher will not ask for or record any of your log in information to your social network profiles.

Potential Risks
The risks associated with this study are no greater than those associated with daily life.

Confidentiality
The face-to-face interview and content analysis are all linked to you through your participant number. The records that connect this number to your personal identity will be kept in a Microsoft Word document on a password protected computer. Any information obtained associated with this study that identifies you as a participant will remain confidential while being disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The Principal Investigator and Dr. Timm will have access to information that could be used to identify you. All participant numbers will be converted and reported as pseudonyms in the final study.

Participation and Withdrawal
Participation in this study is completely voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without...
consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to provide any information that you do not wish to provide.

Identification of Investigators
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact any of the following individuals:

Lauren Stehlik
(217) 581-6886 (Phone)
lstehlik@eiu.edu (Email)

Dr. Dianne Timm
217-581-5327 (Phone)
dtimm@eiu.edu (Email)

Rights of Research Subjects
If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

E-Number

Signature of Participant

Date
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself?
   a. What is your major?
   b. What are you involved in?
   c. Do you have a current job?
2. What is your plan after graduation?
   a. What kinds of positions are you applying for?
3. Do you have Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn?
   a. How long have you been a user of these sites?
4. How do you spend your time on Facebook?
   a. What do you look at on Facebook?
   b. What do you post on Facebook?
   c. How comfortable are you with potential employers viewing your Facebook profile?
5. How do you spend your time on Twitter?
   a. What do you look at on Twitter?
   b. What do you post on Twitter?
   c. How comfortable are you with potential employers viewing your Twitter page?
6. How do you spend your time on LinkedIn?
   a. What information do you have on LinkedIn?
7. What do you think is appropriate to have on Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn?
8. What do you think is inappropriate to have on Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn?
9. How did you learn what is appropriate to have on your profiles?
10. How did you learn what is inappropriate?
11. Have you ever been told you have inappropriate content on your profiles?
   a. Did you agree?
   b. Did you disagree?
12. Do you think a potential employer would look at candidate’s profiles?
13. What do you think an employer would look at?
14. What would an employer find on profiles that would be appropriate?
15. What would an employer find on profile that would be inappropriate?
16. Have you changed anything on your profiles once you began job searching?
   a. What did you change?
17. What did you think we were going to talk about today?
   a. Did we talk about what you thought we were going to cover?
18. Do you have anything else you would like to add?