TAKING GOFFMAN ON A TOUR OF FACEBOOK: COLLEGE STUDENTS AND
THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN A MEDIATED DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2008
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Matt Birnbaum entitled Taking Goffman on a tour of Facebook: College student and the presentation of self in a mediated digital environment and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

This study’s theoretical framework compares the performances each of us makes to those of actors in front of an audience. We all have lines to deliver and failing to do so results in embarrassment. If I falter in this delivery, please know that my front is true and forgive this “expression given off.”

My deepest thanks to:

Dr. Jenny Lee, your guidance, patience, honesty, and ideas led me to this topic. I am fortunate to have you as my adviser.

Dr. Jeff Milem, you have been kind enough not to discuss the dissertation during my backswing.

Dr. Alma Maldonado-Maldonado, your support and encouragement always came at just the right time.

Dr. Gary Rhoades, Dr. Doug Woodard, Dr. John Cheslock, Dr. Shelia Slaughter, and Dr. Larry Leslie; from each of you I have learned so much.

The residence life staff at the U of A, and Sharon Overstreet in particular; you gave me the opportunity to fulfill a dream.

Mary, Greg, and Connie; you provided much needed refuge and support.

The Stadium Hall resident assistants; it is difficult to explain how much I learned from each of you. Your insights and observations helped make this study much more interesting.

The Division of Student Life at Colorado College, Dean Edmonds, and the Career Center staff in particular; you gave me the support to take the first steps.

My friends; I am blessed that you are too numerous to count (though Facebook puts the number at 146). I am a better person for knowing each of you.

My loving girlfriend; our daily conversations kept me motivated to finish.

Finally, my incredible mother and father to whom I dedicate this work. Your love and support made this possible. I love you both. Dad, your suggestions always strengthen my work and served to remind me that good writing requires great editing. I hope to get better at both.
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ABSTRACT

This study explores how college students present themselves on Facebook, a social networking website, and the impressions they want their fellow students to form of them when looking at their profiles. Goffman’s dramaturgical and impression management framework served as a theoretical lens through which Facebook profiles were explored. Employing an ethnographic research design, data for this study were collected during eight-months of participant observation, 30 photo-elicitation interviews, and a photographic content analysis.

Facebook has been rapidly adopted by undergraduate students who use it to maintain existing relationships and also as a medium in which to present themselves, especially through photographs. This study provides college administrators and student affairs professional some information about how undergraduates use Facebook and how Facebook can assist them in better understanding their institution’s own student culture.

Because photographs are instrumental to Facebook use, this study focused on the many images students place on their profiles. The use of photographs in social research is limited and it is hoped that this study will lay the ground work for further use of visual methods.

This study found that college students believe that other college students are the primary audience for their profiles. Also, college students use six general “fronts” that lead audience members to see them as: (1) partier, (2) social, (3) adventurous/risk-taker, (4) humorous/funny/silly, (5) part of larger community, and (6) unique. Taken together, these fronts represent an “idealized” undergraduate. Students use props, settings, and
gesture to provide their audience members visual cues to help them form the desired impressions. Much of the material that students place on Facebook is meant to be humorous or only understood by a small group of friends. Also, students only show a “narrow strip of activity” in their profiles.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Whether as a “forum” or “frontier”, cyberspaces distant land is dangerous yet attractive, and invites colonization” (Crampton, 2003, p. 74).

Introduction to the Study

Throughout the spring and fall of 2004, a new space was being opened to more and more college students—Facebook, a social networking website, was arriving at campuses across the nation. Facebook allowed college students to develop personalized profiles and share them with other Facebook users at the same institution. Developed by a Harvard undergraduate in his residence hall room, it was first introduced to Harvard students in February, 2004. Over the proceeding months, access to Facebook was made available to students at many additional colleges and universities. Today, it is estimated that 90 percent of all undergraduate students have a Facebook account (Der Werf, 2007). According to the Facebook website1, it now has 62 million active users and averages 250,000 additional users each day.

Facebook is a highly visual environment; users upload more than 14 million photographs of themselves and their friends to profiles each day and view over 65 billion Facebook pages per month. Just as impressive is Facebook’s claim that over half of the active users return to the site daily, and the average user spends 20 minutes on the site daily. These numbers suggest that Facebook has touched on a societal sweet spot, one that resonates with, attracts, and engages its original users-- traditional aged college students. This study explores how college students present themselves on Facebook and

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the impressions they want their fellow students to form of them when looking at their profiles.

Background to Facebook

Facebook is a form of computer mediated communication (CMC), a term that refers to the process of using computers and other digital technologies to exchange information. Due to its increased popularity, CMC has been studied in a wide range of socially oriented academic fields including sociology, psychology, gender studies, and even economics (Cassidy, 2006; Dwyer, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2006; Kraut, Brynin, & Kiesler, 2006; Tidwell & Walther, 2002), to learn more about the people who use them and the mediating affects of the technologies that include e-mail, instant messaging, list-serves, and chat rooms.

Two important characteristics of CMC affect the nature of communication using these technologies. First there is a reduction of social cues, particularly those which are nonverbal, that people use in face-to-face interactions to assess the truthfulness and sincerity of each other. Second is the asynchronous nature of information exchange; communication is not spontaneous or informed by the immediate reaction to how messages are received. Of particular interest to researchers has been the ways in which mediated communication affects relationship formation and friendship maintenance, social popularity, political engagement, identity and identity experimentation, and self-esteem (Rosenbloom, 2007).
Social Networking Sites

Social networking websites had been available to college students at least since 1995, when Classmates.com introduced a commercial, fee-based website for individuals seeking to reconnect to with school high school acquaintances (Classmates Media, 2008). Visitors to this site needed to first register, provide credit card information, and were often bombarded with advertisements. For these efforts students could see the names of fellow high school graduates and send them email. Classmates.com may have been a product that interested older people, but college students were not interested in fee based websites and, most had not yet lost track of high school friends. While many individuals signed up with the site, most were not undergraduate college students.

Many of today’s college students’ first experiences with on-line social networks took place on Friendster.com and MySpace.com, two popular sites that pre-date Facebook. These sites were very similar to Facebook except anyone could create a profile. This led to instances of people misrepresenting themselves, usually with nefarious intentions, such as adults claiming to be teenagers (Flanagan, 2007). As the caption to a July 5, 1993 The New Yorker cartoon put it, “On-line nobody knows you’re a dog.”

The Facebook Difference

Facebook was different. In addition to being free, only individuals having e-mail addresses ending with ‘.edu’ could develop profiles and have access to the profiles of
other users. This essentially made Facebook a place for college students. Also, Facebook was institutionally bound: unless a college student obtained the permission of a student at another institution to view his or her profile, users could only see the profiles of other users who were at the same institution. These features gave Facebook users a feeling of intimacy (Cassidy, 2006), location (Ludford, Priedhorsky, Reily, & Terveen, 2007), and security.

Once on Facebook, college students were able to develop a personalized profile by simply entering data into a template and uploading a photograph. In minutes college students could develop a web page that included their photographs, major, favorite movies and types of music, a list of their extracurricular activities, and whatever quotations they wanted to have. After students created a profile they could link them to the profiles of other students to create a list of ‘friends’. This list was displayed on the profile so that anyone who looked at it could see to whom this person was socially connected. Facebook provided a ‘poking’ feature which made it possible for students to signal to other students that they had viewed their profiles. Clicking on this button sent a very simple “you have been poked by________” message to that person and displayed the message on their profile. In addition, Facebook allowed students to form and join groups, and to send both public and private messages to each other. Each profile has a ‘wall’ which displays all the public messages sent to the Facebook user.

Students retain control over their profiles and can modify, delete, and add information at any time. In this manner, students can alter a profile until they feel it

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represents them at a particular moment, or of even greater importance, how they want
others to view them at that moment. Once on Facebook a student could easily and
anonymously wander around while learning about the cute student who sat on the other
side of the lecture hall, the strange kid who lived down the hallway, or simply see who
else attended the college. Students wandering around Facebook might bump into
someone whose profile they had just viewed. Just as importantly, the student may bump
into someone who has just looked at their profile.

Literature on Facebook

Facebook has caught the attention of the popular press as evidenced by the
articles about it that appear with some regularity in newspapers, magazines, television,
and radio. For example, the Associated Press has distributed over 400 articles
referencing Facebook as March 1, 2008, The New Yorker has published a ten-page article
on Facebook (Cassidy, 2006), and 60 Minutes produced a segment on Facebook founder
Mark Zuckerburg. In the higher education news, a January 2008 search of The Chronicle
of Higher Education identified at least 90 articles referencing Facebook, and a search of
the University Wire conducted at the same time found over 4,000 articles related to
Facebook. This type of press has helped raise the awareness of parents as well as the
general publics to social networking sites. It has also provided substantial free marketing
for Facebook.

Though the literature on CMC in general has become quite substantial over the
past decade (Brignall, Van Valey, & Brignall, 2005; Tidwell & Walther, 2002),
research on the effects of social networking sites is sparse. The relatively recent advent
of social networking sites still leaves them largely unexplored. This is especially the case for sites like Facebook, which initially targeted a specific population of individuals who would frequently interact in a CMC environment as well as face-to-face.

There is limited literature about Facebook that explores the various ways students use it and some of the forms of self-presentation they make in their profiles. Much of this literature is quantitative in nature. For example, Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2006), using survey data collected from freshmen at Michigan State University found that many students developed a Facebook profile as soon as they were accepted to the institution and before they matriculated. On a five-point scale concerning how well the students believed their profiles accurately portrayed them (with 5 indicating high agreement), the mean response was 4.2. They concluded that students tend to use Facebook to learn more about people with whom they have already established off-line relationships (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006).

Gosling, Gaddis, and Vazire (2007) explored personality and the impressions students’ form when looking profiles. They conducted a laboratory study on college students that asked them to rate their own profiles and the profiles of four friends along five personality dimensions. Eight months later students were asked to again rate these same profiles. They found that students showed some consensus to how they rated profiles, especially along the extroversion dimension, and that students tended to rate their profiles as generally presenting themselves as “emotionally stable” and “open to new experiences” (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007). In addition, an unpublished study using survey data collected from students at a single institution found that the large
majority of students are very aware of the privacy features that Facebook provides users but most did not take the initiative to activate them (Govani & Pashley, 2005).

The literature on social networking sites also includes a few qualitative studies. Dwyer (2006) explored how the users of social networking sites engage in interpersonal relationships. Using data collected from 19 semi-structured interviews, she found that undergraduate students rely a great deal on CMC to help them maintain their off-line, interpersonal relationships (Dwyer, 2006). Particularly relevant to this study, Dwyer also found that students were aware of their own efforts to ensure that their profiles created good impressions. As one of her participants observed, “you can’t just completely be yourself, you have to play the game, and have some sort of cool factor [so that] people are interested in speaking to you” (p. 4). These qualitative studies are vital to providing researchers and practitioners with new ways of thinking about CMC, college students, and Facebook.

Statement of the Problem

Facebook provides college students the opportunity to develop personalized profiles and place almost any text or image they want on it\(^3\), even if it is in poor taste. It has created some complex situations and raised many questions for college administrators attempting to balance students’ rights to free speech and self-expression with the interests of the academic community and of law enforcement (Lipka, 2008). The existing literature does not provide sufficient information to be of assistance to people who have

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\(^3\) Facebook’s Code of Content does not allow users to post content containing nudity, graphic violence or sexually explicit material, threats, or remarks that it considers derogatory, demeaning, offensive, or hateful. Content Code of Conduct (2008). Retrieved March 1, 2008 from http://www.facebook.com/codeofconduct.php
to deal with these situations. For example, how is a dean of student life to deal with students who have a racially charged, off-campus theme party and then post pictures of their friends in Black face or ‘gansta’ garb on to their Facebook profile (Der Werf, 2007)? How should a hall director deal with a student who has yet to arrive on campus but is already upset because he has seen the Facebook profile of his future roommate and suspects that he is gay (Farrell, 2006; Kim, 2005)? These and other questions would benefit from research that helps college administrators understand how students experience Facebook.

The speed with which Facebook has been adopted by college students and the degree to which it has become part of their daily routines has made it “a Petri dish for the social sciences” (Rosenbloom, 2007, p. 1). However, much of the research that has been produced is quantitatively oriented and very little field-based, sociological work has been conducted. This has left college administrators and faculty members still trying to understand why Facebook is so popular and the impact it may be having on the overall college experience, individual and group behavior, peer pressure, and social interaction (Lipka, 2008). Simultaneously, these same people are being asked to explain Facebook to their colleagues and advise them on whether they should or should not create a profile themselves (Lipka, 2007).

Rose (2001) observed that many scholars believe that visual images are central to understanding contemporary Western societies. The incredible number of photographs that students upload and download on Facebook each day indicates that they are of great interest and importance to students. Analyzing these pictures may provide administrators
with the information necessary for them better understand the images and the context in which they appear, yet very little analysis of these photographs have been published.

Goffman’s Framework

Erving Goffman (1922-1982), one of the most influential sociologists of the later 20th-century, offers a framework for understanding social interaction that can be applied to CMC and illuminate our understanding of Facebook. His theoretical orientation was grounded in the symbolic interactionism of G. H. Mead, whose work provided one of the major theoretical underpinnings of qualitative social research (Holdaway, 2000).

Goffman’s primary interests were in how individuals present themselves when in the presence of others, and the roles people tended to occupy during social interaction (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1963a; Goffman, 1963b; Goffman, 1983).

Goffman’s framework differs from many of the developmentally oriented psychosocial and cognitive-structural with which student affairs professionals are familiar (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Komives, Woodard, & NetLibrary, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). His focus was not on personal development or change, developmental issues or crises, or internal psychological structures. Instead, Goffman’s concern was micro-level social interaction, how individuals present themselves during periods of co-location, and the particular roles people occupy when they are in the presence of others.

According to Goffman’s perspective, individuals perform social roles based upon their understanding of how people in these roles are supposed to act and the immediate feedback they receive from people in their presence. A student’s behavior is therefore
understood in terms of his or her subjective and normative beliefs about how students are supposed to behave in particular social situations and the responses they have to the social cues given off by those present during the interaction. Goffman largely understood social interaction to be a continuous exchange of information based on the individuals’ reflexive understanding of social situations.

An example may help illustrate this framework. A first generation college student may believe that during social interactions with faculty members, the role of a student is to act subordinately. This student will work to give the impression that he knows how a college student is supposed to interact with a professor. He may present himself actively listening to the words of the professor and nodding in agreement even if he does not understand what the professor is talking about. In exchange, the student expects the faculty member to behave as the student believes faculty members are supposed to behave. This particular student may understand the role of the faculty member is to give information that the student is to learn. This student’s understanding of the student role may lead him to believe that if a student was paying attention during class, he should not have any questions. When the professor asks the class if anyone has questions, because the student assumes that good students will have paid attention and not have any questions, he does not raise his hand. In this student’s mind, he is acting like a good college student.

Everything about this social situation goes smoothly from the student’s perspective until the faculty member asks a classmate about a topic raised in an earlier class. The classmate is unable to answer and states that he is very confused by the course
material. The faculty member becomes visibly frustrated; a behavior that makes everyone uncomfortable. The faculty member explains that the subject matter is very complex and that students are expected to ask questions when they do not understand the material. Only after the professor explains that he expects students to ask questions does the student realize that part of the student role is to ask questions. In response to this episode the student begins to ask questions during each class. Goffman’s explanation for this change rests in the student’s new understanding of how students are supposed to behave and in not wanting the professor to become visibly frustrated again.

Goffman developed his dramaturgical framework as an analogy that studied social interactions as though they were theatrical stage productions. As stage actors, individuals have to translate their “desires, feelings, beliefs, and self-images into communicable form, drawing on words, gestures, scripts, props, scenery, and various features of appearance” (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006, p. 105). One of Goffman’s general conclusions was that people work to establish and maintain favorable impressions believable to their audience. Members of the audience can applaud performances or grumble at the actor’s apparent incompetence. Because of this ability to provide feedback Goffman argued that it was usually in an individual’s best interest to present an “idealized” version of their role that fits their “understanding of the audiences’ expectations rather than act as they do when not in public” (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). All the efforts a person makes, either consciously or unconsciously, to influence the audience’s belief in their performance (self-presentation) are defined as “impression management” (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1983; Leary, 1996; Smith, 2006).
Goffman’s framework for understanding self-presentation and impression management provides a valuable tool for understanding CMC by comparing it to face-to-face interaction. In addition, Goffman’s theoretical perspective can offer insight into the way students present themselves, and why they interact as they do, on Facebook. Taking Goffman on a tour of Facebook will help us to understand and make sense of the materials students place on their profiles.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore how college students present themselves in the materials they place on Facebook. Data was collected during an eight month ethnographic study though participant observation, from photo-elicitation interviews, and from a photographic content analysis. A tentative understanding of Facebook profiles is that college students use them to represent themselves to other college students in cyberspace and that the photographs have an important role in these representations. To understand if this is the case, Goffman’s dramaturgical and impression management framework is used to help frame and inform the data. The central research questions of this study are: (1) what impressions do college students want visitors to form of them when seeing their Facebook profiles, and (2) what techniques do students use to ensure that these impressions are formed?

This research fills a gap in the literature created by Facebook, a new form of CMC. Incorporating the literature on CMC and the dramaturgical framework to understand the impressions students want other students to form of them when seeing their Facebook profile will give student affairs professionals a new understanding of the
undergraduate culture and the Facebook phenomenon. The impressions students want formed of them reflect how they want to be seen by others and may provide new insight into the social pressures undergraduates’ experience. Exploring these impressions, and the social pressures which contribute to students wanting to give them, should provide student affairs professionals an increased awareness of the undergraduate experience from the students’ perspective. It may also be the case that Facebook itself is contributing to the social pressures exerted on students, particularly if they are not able to differentiate between the impressions their peers want to give and their actual behavior. This increased knowledge may result in the development of new programming designed to counter these pressures and the reconsideration of existing student development theories.

Overall Approach to Research Design

The site of this study was South Western University (SWU), a Research I university. The study uses an ethnographic research design, and the participant-observation research approach to which it is frequently associated, because they fit well into Goffman’s frameworks. Ethnography, with its strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon, allows for the researcher to use a small number of cases, is ideal for working with unstructured data, and the analysis of data that “involves explicit interpretation(s) of meaning and functions of human actions” (Denzin, 1994, p. 248).

Three separate sets of data were collected for this study. As a participant observer I spent eight months in the field collecting data about how students used Facebook and the types of impressions that wanted formed of them. This data was supplemented by
conducting: (1) photo-elicitation interviews with 30 undergraduate students who had
developed Facebook profiles and (2) a photographic content analysis of the first ten
images that appeared on ten Facebook profiles. Each of these data methods received
validation and credibility from the advice and insight of six undergraduate resident
assistants with whom I worked and who served as key informants. These students also
served the function of member checking.

The three independent data sets developed using these methods were then
analyzed within Goffman’s dramaturgical and impression management framework.
Triangulation permitted me to minimize researcher bias and moderate the differences in
the various assumptions, believes, and biases that might be brought to the study through
each of the research techniques.

Significance of the Study

Facebook has become an integral part of many students’ undergraduate
experience (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007; Govani & Pashley, 2005; Lampe, Ellison,
& Steinfield, 2006; Lipka, 2008). Its widespread use has also created complex issues for
all of those who work with or study college students. Learning more about the
impressions students want formed of them will provide some context to help
professionals understand how these issues may be addressed. While existing literature
suggests that students are aware that self-presentation and impression management play a
role in the development and reading of Facebook profiles, to date no research has
explored what impressions students want formed of them or how they go about ensuring
that the correct impression are formed. This study helps to fill some of the gaps in the
literature and in doing so, provides insight into the audiences for whom college students are making these profiles, and the impressions they want members of this audience to form of them.

Scholars and student affairs practitioners should be interested in Facebook because it, and other forms of CMC, could have significant implications for how student affairs professionals approach their understanding of established practices (Lipka, 2008). One example of how Facebook might affect a programming effort comes to us from the social norming approach to addressing student behavior, particularly the consumption of alcohol. Fundamental to programs structured on social norms is the understanding that behavior is influenced by perceptions of how other members of our social groups think and act. Social norming predicts that when individuals overestimate the number of peers engaged in problematic behavior (for example, the percentage of peers who drink alcohol) and the degree to which these peers occupy themselves with these behaviors (how much the peers drink in one evening), they are more likely to participate in similar behavior (Berkowitz, 2004). This overestimation may result when an individual fails to recognize the differences between the perceived behavior of peers and the actual behavior of his/her peers. How students chose to present themselves on Facebook may create powerful messages about the behaviors in which students are engaged, influencing the perceptions, and possibly the behaviors of fellow students. For example, some Facebook photographs feature students using specially designed apparatus known as beer bongs and funnels that enable them to drink large amounts of alcohol in a few seconds. If enough of
these images appear, will more students believe that using such devices is an accepted, even expected, part of social behavior?

In addition to the information that students place on their Facebook profiles having an effect on social norms and behavior, the development of a Facebook profile and its regular use may itself be a behavior susceptible to social norming. That is, the behavior of using Facebook as a place for self-presentation is being influenced by the perceptions undergraduate’s have regarding the use of Facebook by their peers. If the perception about peer use is over estimated, undergraduate students may come to believe that constantly updating their Facebook profiles is an expected social behavior.
Similarly, the data that students place on their Facebook profiles may lead other undergraduate students to believe that particular pieces of information and types of images are not only accepted, they are expected.

This study is not necessarily concerned with the processes of identity development or the many phase and steps models that describe identity development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Komives & Woodard, 2003). Nor is it an attempt to illuminate the entirety of student culture or even how they use Facebook. Instead, this study explores the intersection of student culture, technology, and the mechanics of impression management. This study’s findings may well help inform and support theories about identity and development, but I believe its real significance comes from providing insight into contemporary undergraduate culture, how college students want to be seen by their peers, and the pressures they experience to appear in idealized fashions. Student affairs professionals need this type of research if they are to stay
abreast of the experiences undergraduates are having and develop new ways to educate and support them.

Summary

This chapter has introduced Facebook, a new form of CMC that has been widely adopted by undergraduate college students. Student use of Facebook has created many new and complex issues for student affairs administrators. Also introduced has been the dramaturgical and self-presentation framework developed by Goffman. This perspective serves as the study’s theoretical framework and helps us to make meaning of the ways students appear in their Facebook profiles. This study’s findings will assist all those who work with or study college students by helping them to understand the Facebook phenomena and to suggest ways in which they can address some of the issues it helps to create.

In the next chapter, a detailed literature review provides information about CMC, and a deeper understanding of how the dramaturgical and self-presentation framework has been previously used to help understand social interactions. Chapter three details the research methodology that was used for this study, the methods for collecting and analyzing the data, and the various protocols used throughout the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter four explains the study’s findings. The study’s final chapter discusses the findings and returns to the literature on CMC and dramaturgy by making recommendations for research and practice.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an orientating framework from which to understand the study. The first part of the chapter gives a detailed overview of Facebook. Because it is of central interest to this study, some information about its initial development, rapid student adoption, and an example of how it can create complex situations for student affairs professionals will be introduced. The second section of this chapter presents computer mediated communication (CMC) as it is understood within the symbolic interactionist perspective. Because the literature about CMC found in higher education journals is surprisingly limited, additional background information is provided.

The third section reviews the literature concerning college students and their use of technology. College students tend to be heavy consumers of digital technology and are in fact, the first generation to grow up with cell phones, DVDs, digital cameras, web cameras, and reliable and cheap high speed Internet. Agger (2004) stated that greater amounts of social capital are required to effectively navigate “the swift and moving currents of everyday life” (p. 19) created by these technologies, and that many components of everyday life are accelerated through the connectivity provided by e-mail, instant messaging, and cell phones. This appears to be the case for Facebook users. However, although their social lives may be accelerated, it does not appear to make a difference to their social relationships. What also seems apparent is that college students are accustomed to the current connectivity and digital technologies.
The third section of this chapter also reviews the literature concerning peer groups and social norming. Leary (1996) stated that “unless explicitly motivated to do otherwise, people try to project images of themselves that are consistent with the norms in a particular social setting” (p. 67). This statement points towards the powerful effects that peer groups and social norms may have on an individual’s behavior. It also suggests that individuals need to continually monitor peer groups and their social norms so that they are able to perform in ways that are consistent with these groups’ expectations.

The fourth section provides a justification for this study’s significant use of photographic materials and of content analysis as a methodology. The use of photographs as materials for study, and not illustration, is infrequent in scholarly research. The several reasons for this are detailed in the section. However, as will also be detailed, images and visual media are of growing importance in contemporary society and should be increasingly incorporated into research methods.

The fifth section presents symbolic interactionism, the theoretical tradition with which Goffman was associated. Symbolic interactionism also informs CMC and visual methods, topics addressed earlier in the chapter.

The sixth section of this chapter provides a detailed introduction to Goffman’s dramaturgical and self-presentation framework. The theoretical perspective he developed and detailed in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) is extensive and only those aspects of his framework which apply to this study are considered.

The final section looks specifically at the research that has been conducted on CMC using Goffman’s framework. This body of literature is beginning to grow as
scholars look for existing theoretical perspectives that may help inform the quickly changing digital environment and CMC. As this chapter will show, Facebook represents a new form of CMC, one in which college students regularly interact both face-to-face and digitally. This presents a gap in the existing literature that this study hopes to help bridge. This section concludes with a brief explanation for using symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, and self-presentation as a theoretical framework over student development theories.

Section One: Facebook

A Conceptual Analogy and Introduction

Because many readers may not be familiar with Facebook, a brief introduction and conceptual analogy is provided. For years many colleges and universities have published paper-based pamphlets containing the names, hometowns, and hobbies of incoming students. Some have even contained photographs taken by the institution or submitted by the individual. Because the institution produced these publications, the college or university retained complete control over what was included or excluded. Hobbies deemed inappropriate, such as smoking pot or collecting pornography might be either omitted or result students being asked to resubmit portions of their profile. Pictures depicting or suggesting inappropriate behavior might result in the same actions. Taken in sum, these snippets of data create profiles that fellow students used to form opinions about each other, though the degree of completeness and accuracy of such profiles is questionable.

At Colorado College, for example, this printed publication was titled New Faces.
Facebook can be understood as being a more sophisticated electronic analog to the *New Faces* publication. Students are able to provide information and images of themselves for others to view. Students can also view the profiles of other students, get to know something about the other people living in their residence hall or meet people with similar interests. This is in fact how Facebook was initially imagined (Baloun, 2007), although over time it has developed into much more. Facebook does away with the static nature of paper publications. Students can change aspects of their Facebook profile at any time and as many times as they want, students can limit who has access to their profiles, and students do not have to seek explicit or implicit approval from the institution regarding what might be considered acceptable or unacceptable information and images.

*The Origins of Facebook*

Facebook was developed by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard sophomore studying computer science and psychology (Read, 2004). Its genesis was literally a joke. One of Mr. Zuckerberg’s earlier efforts, Facemash, asked viewers to vote which of two randomly selected Harvard students living in a particular residence hall was more attractive (Grynbaum, 2004). The idea for Facemash was not exceedingly original as Hotornot.com, already a popular web site, was conceptually the same. However, Zuckerberg’s focus on a specific population, in this case a residence hall, may have unwittingly tapped into a concept that would again be applied in the development of Facebook. The site was visited by 450 people within its first four hours online. Harvard administrators quickly yanked Zuckerberg’s internet connection and brought him before an administrative board for breaching security, violating copyrights and violating
individuals’ privacy by using students’ photos without permission.

In February 2004, Mr. Zuckerberg designed and launched Thefacebook.com, his interpretation of a similar website called Friendster.com. Like Friendster, Thefacebook allowed members to create their own personalized website by providing data for defined, self-explanatory categories such as name, class, and interests. One of the major differences between Mr. Zuckerberg’s concept and Friendster, however, was Thefacebooks focus on college students; usage was limited to individuals with college e-mail accounts, specifically those ending with .edu.

The Growth of Facebook

Within a week of its launch almost 1,000 Harvard students had signed up and created profiles on Thefacebook (Read, 2004). By the end of the month three-quarters of Harvard undergraduates were registered users (Krivak & Krivak, 2008). Within three months, its founders had brought local versions of it to over 30 institutions, including every Ivy League college, Stanford University and the Universities of Chicago and Virginia. The registration surges at these institutions were often similar to what was experienced at Harvard. At the University of Chicago, where the service made its debut in May, about 2,400 students registered to use the site in its first week (Read, 2004). In all, about 120,000 students at the institutions where Thefacebook was available, had created profiles. By November 2004, the number of registered users exceeded one million. The following July, Facebook was available at 835 institutions across the United States and had 2.5 million users.

In the fall of 2005, Thefacebook changed it name to Facebook. That December,
just a year and a half after it was first brought to other campuses, Facebook was available to over 2000 colleges and universities across the country and had over 9.4 million registered users (Cassidy, 2006). It was one of the top-ten sites in terms of overall traffic on the web, having over 300 million of its pages viewed during any given 24-hour period, and having about 65 percent of its users logging in each day. In the fall of 2006, Facebook dropped the requirement that members have .edu addresses to register and, as of March, 2008 Facebook has over 60 million registered members (Krivak & Krivak, 2008).

*How Facebook Works*

Facebook defines itself as:

a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them. People use Facebook to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet.  

Facebook provides users a template in which they develop a profile for others to see. Creating a profile consists of entering data into categorized sections labeled: basic, contact, personal, work, and education. There is also a section for adding photographs. The amount of information a user adds to his or her is determined by the user.

   Within the categories users may identify their hometown and state, high school, relationship status, sexual orientation, political views, gender, residence, contact information, birthday, favorite TV shows, favorite movies, favorite books, favorite

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quotes, and interests. Once students have entered information into their profile, Facebook converts each entry into a hyperlink. Clicking on a link enables users to view the profiles of other students who have entered similar information on their profiles. In this way, a student who lists “Grey’s Anatomy” as a favorite television show can find other students who also have listed this among their favorite shows. Similarly, a student can find fellow students who attended his/her high school, play a particular sport, or enjoy drinking themselves silly on Tuesday nights.

Once users have a profile, they may join any number of existing groups. These groups can be humorous in nature or title. For example, a popular group is “I Tried to Ford the River but My Oxen Drowned.” This name is a cultural reference to an early computer game. Other groups are created around political issues, politicians, or even to memorialize others. For example, after the Virginia Tech shootings, a group that became very large was “Today, We are All Hokies.”

Students may create their own groups and invite their friends to join. Group memberships can range from one person to over a million. It is common for someone in a residence hall to create a group for the specific residence hall. The same is true of social Greek social organizations, community service groups, students in a particular major, or those with a specific religious affiliation. Individuals may belong to any number of groups and it is not uncommon for students to list 50 or more group affiliations.

All Facebook profiles also have a "wall." This feature permits a Facebook users’ friends to leave public messages on their profile. Wall postings contain the friend’s default photo from his or her own profile and a verbal message. Anyone viewing the
profile can see who is posting messages to the person’s profile and what they are saying. Facebook users may also “poke” another user. “Poking” allows a person to send a brief message indicating that they have looked at another person’s profile.

Within and across social networks, users are allowed to search for other registered users and can initiate requests to other individuals to be friends. Adding friends simply requires clicking a mouse and responding to an e-mail sent to verify the friendship. The implicit definition of friends on Facebook ranges from established intimate relationships to simply being acquainted (Boyd, 2006). Once accepted as a friend, the two users’ personal profiles are observable to each other, and new friendships often evolve via the friends of friends. Removing a friend is equally easy and requires just clicking on a link.

Facebook has added numerous features over the past two years that have dramatically changed the overall appearance of profiles and given users the ability to customize them. One of these features is called the “mini news feed.” With this feature turned on, users are notified when changes are made to their friend’s profiles. For example, every time someone writes a message on a friend’s wall, Facebook let’s the person know that this happened. Or, when a friend ends a relationship, a message appears on the mini new feed informing other friends of this fact.

The mini news feed was introduced just as the 2006-2007 academic year was to begin, and it raised the hackles of many users who were suspect that their privacy was being violated. In a sign of how successful Facebook has become, hundreds of Facebook users groups were created protesting this new Facebook feature. The largest of these
groups was called "Students Against Facebook News Feed (Official Petition to Facebook) and had 284,000 members.

Facebook has also started permitting third party software designers to develop widgets, small programs that work on the Facebook platform. Each widget usually has a single function. For example, one widget administers a survey to determine a persons’ political leanings and posts the results on their profile. Another allows students to play a virtual game of beer pong. There are well over 10,000 widgets now available.

How Facebook Can be Problematic

Facebook received a lot of positive press in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech (Jones, 2007) and Northern Illinois University shootings (Bello, 2008) because students used it to communicate with one another in real time while the events were unfolding. However, there are also numerous examples that show how Facebook can make campus life more complex for college administrators. For example, a University of North Carolina student invited his girlfriend to meet him at an outdoor college quad so that he could break up with her in public. Using his Facebook account he invited others to watch the event in person and several hundred students showed up, including an a cappella group that performed the Dixie Chicks “I’m Not Ready to Make Nice.” The couple had a wild verbal exchange and the crowd encouraged them to escalate the confrontation. A video of the incident was uploaded to YouTube.com where it was quickly viewed over a half-a-millions times. Several parodies of the video were made by students around the country which were in turn widely viewed as well.
An assistant vice chancellor for student affairs at the institution learned about the event prior to it occurring and was able to observe it live. He later spoke about the humiliation the event may have caused the woman and that the matter was being taken very seriously by the institution. An administrator at an institution on the other side of the country stated that his colleagues at UNC needed to provide moral leadership in these matters. As information about the incident spread mostly through online blogs and magazines, readers were able to post responses and opinions about the incident as well as respond to these posted opinions. Many points of view were heard and questions of concern were raised to university officials.

As many internet users now know, all is not what it appears. In the end it was discovered that the entire incident had been staged and that the individuals involved had possibly never even met before. They planned it after meeting online.

Section Two: Computer Mediated Communication

Computer mediated communication (CMC) is a term used to cover the process by which computers and other digital technologies are used to communicate. Unlike face-to-face interactions that allow for direct, nearly instantaneous communication to occur, CMC separates communicators through a technology. Well known examples of CMC include email, chat rooms, instant messaging, text messaging, and list-serves. A variety of lesser known examples include Multi-User Domains (MUDs), MUDs Object Oriented (MOOs), and Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). In each of these types of CMC, users do not communicate directly with each and instead use symbols in the form of words, images, and socially negotiated signs such as emoticons.
CMC has been around in one form or another for at least five decades.

Early CMCs were heavily dependent on text-based messaging systems, precursors to email. In its first four decades, research on CMC focused primarily on its technological elements rather than its effects on social interaction. When research began to consider CMC and social interaction, it examined how CMC influenced organizational life (R. E. Kraut, Brynin, & Kiesler, 2006). Most of these studies of CMC concentrate on the “instrumental computer” (Turkle, 1984, p. 13). This resulted in most research into CMC focusing on work distribution, general productivity, and other goal-oriented activities.

As personal computers became more affordable and were brought into homes throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s, new forms of CMC were developed as were new avenues for CMC research. These newer areas of research have focused on how CMC affects interpersonal relationships and relationship formation, communities and organizations, the society at large, and sense of self (Rutter & Smith, 1999; Smith & Kollock, 1999; Wood & Smith, 2001). This led Wood and Smith (2001) to offer a slightly more nuanced understanding of CMC. They defined it as “the study of how human behaviors are maintained or altered by the exchange of information through machines” (p. 29).

This framing of CMC as a subject for social scientists to study is useful because it draws the definition of CMC away from technical issues and focuses it on something much more relevant for this research: how our self-presentation is affected by the use of CMC. The change was partially precipitated by earlier social theorists who made
statements about sea changes in identity and social relationships. For example, Turkle (1984) stated that technology catalyses changes “not only in what we do but in how we think. It changes people’s awareness of themselves, of one another, of their relationship within the world. The new machine that stands behind the flashing digital signal...challenges our notions not only of time and distance, but of mind” (p. 13). These types of statements refocused CMC research so that it no longer simply looked at as a tool. Pauwels (2005) stated that this is a fortunate move in that it refocuses the conversations about CMC away from deterministic notions of technology, “which tend to view technological innovations as an independent factor that subsequently produces social practices and uses” (Pauwels, 2005, p. 604).

Currently, three mainstream theories are used to examine CMC: information richness, social influence, and symbolic interactionism (Lee & Varey, 1998). Each acknowledges the important role communication has to our use of the Internet (as opposed to its technological or commercial roles). Because this study examines a form of CMC using Goffman’s framework, it looks at CMC from the symbolic interaction perspective.

Two characteristics of CMC that make it fundamentally different than face-to-face communication are the reduction in the ability to use social cues (for example, body language, eye contact, and voice inflection are not observable) and the likelihood of asynchronous communication. This later term refers to the sending of information in packets or blocks without the benefit of receiving real-time feedback (Herrington & Martinson, 2001; Walther, 1996; Ritts et al., 1992; Walther et al., 2005). For example, an
email is sent as a packet of information. Once it is sent, it is difficult to modify it in reaction to how the reader reacts. These differences have a profound affect on social interaction. Because people tend not to be co-located when using these forms of communication, CMC has reduced opportunities to use gestures and expressions to convey expressions. The subtle winks or nods that people might exchanges as signs of acknowledgment when they are in each others physical presence are not possible in CMC. Instead, during CMC, if someone wants to give a wink or nod, he or she must give a much less subtle sign, such as typing the word ‘wink’ or using a emoticon which means ‘winking’. In this way, CMC permits people the means to think about and then consciously construct the impressions they want to give (Pauwels, 2005).

These differences may also have an affect on how we understand ourselves. Mead (1934) observed that individuals come to have a sense of self through the dialogue between the “I” and the “me.” The “I” requires constant feedback in the form of “taking the attitudes of other individuals towards himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved” (p. 138). The asynchronous nature of CMC does not provide individuals the ability to receive this feedback immediately. Once a communication is sent through the mediating technology, the “I” is left to wonder whether the intended receiver understood its arrangement of symbols and its intent. For example, when email was first becoming popular, I remember forwarding a joke to my coworkers. Within seconds of sending it, I began considering how each person might interpret the email. Would everyone understand the humor, or would some people be offended? Without standing besides them when each read the
email, I would possibly never know what they really thought. Even if they replied, telling me they found the joke to be funny, I would not know if they were rolling their eyes as they typed. In this instance, my “I” was left to negotiate with my “Me” without the benefit of external verification. What would have been a momentary afterthought about how appropriate the email was to send turned into a lengthy internal discussion.

Turkle (1984) picked up on this type of problem when she observed that computers affect the way we think about ourselves:

ours has been called a culture of narcissism. The label is apt but can be misleading. It reads colloquially as selfishness and self-absorption. But these images do not capture the anxiety behind our search for mirrors. We are insecure in our understanding of ourselves, and this insecurity breeds a new preoccupation with the question of who we are. We search for ways to see ourselves. (p. 306)

A third feature of many forms of CMC is the possibility for people to communicate with each other, sometimes for long periods of time, and still maintain anonymity. This presents an opportunity for individuals using CMC to experiment with various aspects of identity (Herring & Martinson, 2004; Koch, Mueller, Kruse, & Zumbach, 2005; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). For example, a man initiating communication via e-mail or in a chat room can present himself to others as a woman. In this way he can experience how people (who believe that they are communicating with a woman) may respond differently to his identity. In this sense, CMC can be disembodied; users can construct their gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical
appearance. This led early social theorists to suggest that the Internet would revolutionize social relationships because these attributes would become less and less important (Cater, 2004).

Recent research on CMC has examined its effects on relationships, civic participation, trust, and information sharing. For example, a 1998 longitudinal study of 93 households examined the relationship between Internet use, social involvement, and psychological well being (Kraut et al., 1998). Participants reported high well-being at the start of the study. However, after having access to the Internet in their homes for between 12-18 months, heavy users reported became less socially involved and lonelier than light users. These findings were unanticipated and controversial (Turow & Kavanaugh, 2003). Fellow researchers observed that the study’s opportunity sampling method may have been responsible for the findings. Others developed numerous alternative explanations. A follow-up study conducted two year later of the same participants showed that what ever negative effects Internet use first had were largely dissipated.

A second longitudinal, panel design study by the same researchers having 208 participants found that more use of the Internet was associated with positive outcomes across a range of social and psychological well-being dependant variables (Kraut et al., 2002). The only negative outcome was increased stress among heavy users. The researchers believe that the differences in their findings were largely related to the changing nature of the Internet. Attributing this change to changes in the Internet has an implication for this study. As will be discussed later in the chapter, Facebook has made
many changes to its original platform. These changes, as well as future changes, may well have an affect on how students use Facebook.

Lutters and Ackerman (2003) noted that in addition to early researchers’ promise that the un-embodied and gender neutral communications of CMC would “radically transform social interaction and community formation” (Lutters & Ackerman, 2003, p. 1), it would free users from the confines of geographic locales. In this way, the effects that human attributes contribute to communication would be greatly minimized, because people would also no longer be geographically bound.

Their study of the “Castle,” a pseudonym for a “gathering place for Disney enthusiasts” (p. 3) involved a three-year participant observation, an analysis of message logs, and interviews with regular participants. A unique aspect of the Castle was that it could only be visited using a dial-up connection. This meant that, because of long distance phone costs, nearly all the members were within the Disney area code.

They found that there existed a core group of about 300 Castle members who regularly logged in. The core group, they suspected, were mainly employees of the Disney Company who were interested in sharing their knowledge and learning from other members. For this reason members were very intentional and conscious about the aliases they created and used to represent themselves on this site. These members wanted to demonstrate their interest and knowledge of Disney and Disneyland, share information about the park, and learn even more about it.

Regular members created a social world unto itself with its own signs and symbols, tempo, and hierarchy based on their knowledge of trivial facts about Disney.
Lutters and Ackerman found that even though there were few guidelines and no one to enforce any rules, the Castle remained stable over time and developed its own social norms. They reasoned that the Castle was successful and stable because its members had a mutual interest and desire to become part of the “Disney scene” (i.e. have insider knowledge). These people gained social status by demonstrating their knowledge of the park. They also reasoned that because most members were geographically located near the park, they might interact with them at some time in the future. In these ways, the Castle has some characteristics similar to Facebook.

Another line of research on CMC has looked at the affects gender and other attributes have on how these technologies are used. A 2005 study by Koch, Mueller, Kruse, and Zumback investigated the construction of gender in chat rooms. They had four participants interact in two gender-anonymous chat rooms and a non-anonymous control group. In one of the rooms, gender was introduced as a topic for conversation. The other groups were not given any information about gender. At the completion of chatting, all participants had to guess the gender of the person they communicated with. They found that 66% of the participants were able to correctly identify the gender of the person they chatted with by using gender-stereotypic cues. They also found that women were more comfortable with gender anonymity and that conversational behaviors depended on gender anonymity (Koch et al., 2005).

In addition to conducting research in controlled environments, other researchers have examined differences by collecting existing CMC data and learning more about the people who produced the materials. Pederson and Macafee (2007) asked how CMC
reproduced gender difference in blogs. They surveyed 48 British bloggers about their attitudes towards blogging and collected data from their blogs. Their finding suggest that both men and women blogged mainly as a leisure activity. However, women used blogging as an outlet for creative work while men used it as a forum to make political statements (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007).

Vazire and Gosling (2004) argued that websites are highly controlled environments for self-expression and that “nearly every detail of a personal website is the result of a conscious decision on the part of the author” (p. 124). They go on to observe that a personal website is the result of deliberate and calculated process that limits inadvertent behavioral residue (*expressions given-off*) and unintentional cues.

Each of these forms of CMC also requires that an individual create some form of online identity or representational character through which he/she can interact with others (Kraut et al., 2006). Research has been conducted about self-presentation and in various forms of CMC (Ritts, Patterson, & Tubbs, 1992; Smith & Khollock, 1999; Taylor, 1999; Turkle, 2004; Vazire & Gosling, 2004; Woll & Young, 1989).

One of the earliest examples of Internet socialization was found in multi-user domains (MUDs), where Internet users could participate in a type of role-playing game that usually had a medieval or science-fiction theme. First developed in the late 1970s, MUDs allowed participants to enter a text-based fantasy world through their Internet servers, where they often assumed the personas of druids, witches or elves. Players could type commands to one another, developing on-line relationships that sometimes carried over into the real world. MUDs peaked in popularity during the 1980s, but some still
exist. Many of today's best-selling computer games rely on the basic principles of MUDs--role playing and user interaction over the Internet--only now they tend to have advanced graphical components.

Throughout the 1980s, as the Internet continued to grow in sophistication and popularity, some users become involved in newsgroups and bulletin boards--online discussion boards onto which Internet users could post information or opinions about a given topic. In 1988, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was introduced and suddenly users could communicate with one another instantaneously in a chat room setting. Using ‘screen names’ to identify themselves, chat rooms allowed Internet users "talk" to each other in real time using their keyboards. Each form of CMC requires users to develop strategies in which the presentation of the self on-line is consciously constructed over time. In this way, self-presentation becomes more selective, malleable, and open to self-censorship than in face-to-face interactions (Walther, 1996)

Section Three: The Intersection of College Students, Technology, and Culture

Like cohorts of undergraduates students that have come before them, today’s college students bring a unique set of experiences, characteristics, and technologies with them to campus (Strange, 2004). Millennial students, one of the names given to the current cohort, began arriving on campuses in 2000, to a great amount of publicity and fan fare. They were supposed to be a group “unlike any other youth generation in living memory” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4). Millennial students were rule followers, confident, optimistic, and motivated by conventional values and beliefs, team oriented and cooperative, and accepting of authority (Lowery, 2004). And, as Coomes (2004)
noted, Millennial students perceived themselves to be a group, distinct from previous generational cohorts (Coomes & DeBard, 2004).

These characteristics may be accurate. However, the biggest difference between the Millennials and previous cohorts of college students may be that they are the first generation that has grown up using digital technologies as casually as previous generations have read books. “They are digital natives in a land of digital immigrants” (Rainie, 2006, p.2) and they could toggle before they could toddle. They come to campus technologically sophisticated (Lowery, 2004) and expecting their institutions to be also. Cell-phones, digital cameras, powerful computers, the World Wide Web and high-speed internet access, and MP3 players have changed the daily habits of these students and how the students communicate with each other (Kraut, Brynin, & Kiesler, 2006; Eldridge, 2006).

The Pew Internet & American Life Project (2002) conducted a comprehensive study of internet use of college students and found that they were some of the heaviest users of the internet. College students were more likely to have multiple email addresses, check their email daily, download music, browse for entertainment, and instant message than most other North Americans. Brignall and Valey (2005) observed that the internet has become an integral part of daily communication. In their review of literature of cyber-youth (their term for people who grew up using the web), they find that of the internet users between the ages of 12 and 18, 35 percent spent between 31-60 minutes on-line each day, 44 percent spend more than an hour on-line each day, and that 4 percent spend more than four hours on-line each day (Brignall, Van Valey, & Brignall, 2005).
They also found that 81 percent of teens used e-mail and 70 percent use instant messaging. Citing Goffman, they wondered how this time spent using CMC might affect their normative communication, cultural, and civility skills, and whether these individuals were going to be able to cope as well with the immediate feedback that occurs in face-to-face interactions.

Roberts and Foehr (2004) described the cohort entering college (they use the label Generation M) as being immersed in technology and new media. Many members of Generation M have lived in homes saturated with media such as cable TV, VCR/DVD, radio, CD, video games, high-speed internet access, and cell phones. They are not just fluent with technology; it is their native tongue. They switch between media and tasks in the same way that Microsoft Windows allows for windows to be opened or minimized. A cell phone is not just a technology or device; it is a fashion statement and means of presenting one’s self, like wearing Jordache Jeans in the 1980s (Haddon & Ebrary, 2004; Wei, 2006). Many of the students currently in college expect to receive their information quickly and in packets. Instead of understanding that graphics may enhance text, they believe text enhances graphics (Prensky, 2005).

Non-digital natives (Prensky, 2005) also use these new technologies but think about them in very different terms. For example:

- these new technologies have significantly enlarged the range of options for creating teaching-learning setting. In the minds of many public officials and higher education administrators the new technologies promise both increased responsiveness to higher education’s changing
Along the same lines, Levine and Cureton (1998) hypothesized that these changes may bring about a new relationship between undergraduates and colleges. They suggested that undergraduates may expect the same level of service from their institutions of higher education as they do from their banks. A bit more optimistically, Wilson (2004) stated that “as most students will be comfortable with the Internet, they will naturally use it as an academic resource” (p. 67). According to Prensky (2001), members of this older generation speak with a pre-digital accent.

College students do not think about digital technologies in these ways. Instead, what seems clear about this new cohort is that in addition to using clothing, door decorations, and music for impression management purposes, they have wasted little time incorporating the internet to the list of means for self-expression (Prensky, 2005; Turkle, 1984). Until relatively recently, the presentation of self was closely linked to our embodied selves, that part of us which shapes and facilitates our interactions and experiences with others and the world (Taylor, 1999). CMC permits individuals to create and present themselves in ways in which they want to be perceived and identified (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Turkle, 2004; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). The characteristics of gender, physical attributes, sexual orientation, and social class can be crafted in ways that are divorced from reality and that encourage experimentation. From this perspective, the effects of digital technology go beyond a new mechanism of commerce and communication and actually may be altering how students create identities and
simultaneously their notions of self (Turkle, 1995). Some have even suggested that the use of these digital technologies has led to the development of a new dimension of Mead’s “me” - the Virtual Self (Agger, 2004),)

Mitrano (2006) observed that what is clear about these digital technologies, and social networking sites in particular, is that they create new ways to experiment, new social norms, new means to display them, and more efficient and effective ways for social peers to transmit them. “Just like clothes, they try on a new attribute or someone else’s to see how it fits, to get attention, or to be more outrageous than the last person who posted something …[often] sexually suggestive, although not explicit…most traffic in the psychology of personality (notably, however, not ethnic) stereotypes” (p.20).

This experimentation is natural since late adolescence, “is a confusing time when there is a need to come to terms with a sudden maturing body and new social pressures. It is a time of introspection and of trying to fit oneself into increasingly complex relationships. It is a time of conscious self-creation” (Turkle, 1984, p. 138). Around this experimentation and rites of passage arises what Rice (1999) identifies as adolescent subculture that "emphasizes conformity to the peer group and values that are contrary to adult values. This culture exists primarily in the high school, where it constitutes a small society" (p. 236), forming its own system of class and creating its own status indicators. Most of high school students live at home and are under direct parental supervision. Matriculation into a four-year institution of higher education brings a sudden release from both high school societies and parental constant parental observation. Unlike the ways previous experimentation with social norms occurred, sites like Facebook (where many
of the new norms are cultivated) make it difficult for parents to see these behaviors and react to them, even though these behaviors may be on display for millions to see.

There is a wide range of research that has been conducted on college students and their use of technology. For example, McMillan (2006) used qualitative methods to analyze 72 autobiographical essays written by young college students who “Came of age” with the Internet. The researcher looked at four domains---family, self, real communities, virtual communities---and found a growing dependency on the internet to accomplish social activities in each domain (McMillan & Morrison, 2006).

Baron (2004) examined the linguistic nature of instant messaging and gender divergences, observing that each form of CMC has its “own usage conditions and therefore needs to be analyzed in its own right (p. 398). Using the text messages from 22 college students, the researcher looked at how many turns occurred in each text message. Baron also observed that like in many forms of CMC, there is not yet an established terminology and therefore created one to fit the study’s needs. The study found that the instant messages of females were more reflective of their writing styles than their speech.

In both of these cases, the researcher was interested in studying college students. However, in much the research conducted on college students and technology, the fact that participants were college students was a matter of convenience and incidental to the study. For example, Ling (2007) examined text messaging and instant messaging among college students. Using a convenience sampling, the researcher had participants track all of their messages for a 24 hour period of time. Not surprisingly, it was found that the
instant messages of college students tended to be longer, and contain more sentences, than text messages. Ling concluded that input complexity (p. 296) was likely the cause.

**Peer Groups**

Viewed from a sociological perspective, a peer group is “any group of individuals in which the members identify, affiliate with, and seek acceptance and approval from each other” (Astin, 1993, p. 401). Kuh (1991) observed that much of the time traditional-age students spend outside the classroom is spent with peers and that “once a person identifies himself with a group, that group becomes an anchor and a reference point. The values and behaviors approved by the group provide a background for developing individual attitudes and beliefs” (Chickering, 1974, p. 88 as quoted in Kuh, 1991, p. 12). In this way, peer groups provide individuals with models of acceptable and idealized behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Stangor, 2004), and they provide individuals with both prescriptive and restrictive norms about how people should interact (Leary, 1996). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that peer interaction strongly influenced college experiences and outcomes. Several of the areas that peer interaction were associated with included intellectual development, political, social, and religious values, self-concept, moral development, general maturity, and personal development.

Astin’s (1993) research on undergraduate college students found that peer group characteristics produced strong and widespread effects on student development. He stated “that fellow students should constitute a major source of influence should not come as any great surprise. Even on a commonsense level, most of us see our peers as important sources of influence” (p. 53). Astin further observed that researchers’ lack of
understanding of the undergraduate student’s peer group characteristics was an impediment to better understanding the affects of peer groups.

Astin, Pascarella, Terenzini, Kuh, Schuh, and Witt are all in agreement about the powerful influences peer groups have on behavior. However, conducting empirical studies of actual peer-normed behaviors is difficult due to the many individual interactions that define what it means to be a “peer” (Guryan, Jacob, Klopfer, & Groff, 2008). Instead, researchers seem to largely focus their efforts on understanding how peer groups may affect general developmental outcomes and long term effects. Speculating on why peer groups have such a powerful affect on individual college students, Astin (1993) suggested that it may be related to the norms and expectations peer groups require individuals to demonstrate in order to gain acceptance.

Particularly relevant to this study was Astin’s (1993) observation that “interaction” (p. 403) is a key signifier for affiliation. It is essential that individuals who belong, or want to belong, to a peer group be seen socially interacting with members of the group. This affirms their membership in the group and it also provides a mechanism for sharing and negotiating the group’s norms. Just as importantly it provides those students observing the interaction with knowledge of the social performances required for membership into the group.

Rosen (2007) noted that on-line peer groups are largely composed of a significant number of weak ties- the links people have to minor acquaintances. These weak links are ideal for demonstrating the necessary social interactions that signify group membership. Facebook, and other successful social networking sites, provide an effective mechanism
for demonstrating social interaction. It permits observers to learn the necessarily behaviors and performances required for membership. Putnam (2000), referring to the social capital developed from peer group affiliation, suggested that these types of interactions are ideal for monitoring changes in the value of certain types of social capital.

**Social Norms**

Framed within Astin’s (1993) notion of peer groups, social norms are the accepted beliefs, conduct, and accomplishments required for peer acceptance and continued membership. Information about social norms, which is typically informal and tacit in nature, is often learned by newcomers though observing interaction among members of the existing group (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Social norming is a theory of human behavior that posits that peer influences “have a greater impact on individual behavior than biology, personality, familial, religious, cultural and other influences” (Berkowitz, 2002, p. 5). Research into social norming and peer influence suggests that people often behave based on the way they believe others behave, rather than on their actual actions.

Social norming intervention campaigns, created to provide students with more accurate beliefs about the behaviors of other students, have been introduced on college campuses and used to develop new ways to alter the perceptions and behaviors of college students (Berkowitz, 2002; Berkowitz & Perkins, 1986; Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986). Berkowitz (2004) cited over twenty published studies documenting both this type of behavior as well as the social norming campaigns that many colleges and universities
have engaged in as a means to close the gap between perceived and actual behavior (a social norming campaign was the reason posters about the drinking habits of SWU student started appearing on campus). The success of these campaigns is encouraging. For example, at one institution, a social norming campaign reduced drinking among freshmen by 21 percent and high-risk drinking by 10 percent (Berkowitz, 2004).

The success of social norming campaigns comes from subtly providing students with information (and symbols) about how other students (their peers) actually behave. These campaigns are complex, time consuming, expensive, finicky, and require tacit knowledge about the undergraduate culture at a specific institution. Berkowitz (2004) stated that mistakes can be made at any stage of a campaign. He then documented numerous cases in which social norming campaigns failed because the message and image used on posters was incongruent, because students did not understand the message, or because a campaign started too early in the fall semester. Juxtaposing Mitrano’s (2006) observations with Berkowitz’s should give student affair professionals reason to pause. A substantial amount of the literature about social norms is related to drinking and other risky peer-influenced college student behaviors. Some researchers are also exploring the ways in which the media, which now includes websites such as Facebook, influence, reinforce, and sometimes even produce, a peer group’s social norms. The self-presentations students can make in this new medium can give the feeling of reality. The failure to question the reality presented in the media “as if it is reality rather than a construction of reality seems to be a dangerous thing” (Lederman, Lederman, & Kully, 2004, p. 134). However, these researchers stop short of blaming the media for developing
these misperceptions of the extensiveness of college drinking and instead offer the suggestion that the “answer lies in a co-construction of the meaning of the mediated images—the transference onto the screens of the images that we have of our realities. Sometimes these very images of reality come from previously mediated messages that have become part of our consciousness, albeit unnoticeably” (Lederman, Lederman, & Kully, 2004, p. 133).

Section Four: Photographs

Visual media has been given a special role in contemporary Western societies. Images have become one of the primary means for conveying information, entertainment, and modes of consumption (Manning, 1996; Rose, 2001). One reason the visual has an elevated role is that it permits the use and display of symbols. Dramaturgical studies are largely interested in these symbols, exploring how they come to have meaning, how people make meaning of them, and how people use them. This study gives particular attention to the photographs that students place on their Facebook profiles in the belief that, as heavy consumers of visual media, college students are also likely to be familiar with how they might use visual symbols in the images they use to present themselves.

The study of visual media has a long history in the social sciences. However, for a variety of reasons the use and study of images in scholarly works has been limited. Bogdan (1998) noted that while a few researchers use still and video footage, most do not. One reason for this is the belief that images “do not speak for themselves,” and require a greater amount of interpretation than written words (Goffman, 1979, c1976; Hodder, 1994; Rose, 2001). Practicality and professional socialization also likely have a
role in the limited use of the visual. Images have always been more difficult to reproduce accurately and in a size that makes them publishable in a journal. Photographs of people also tend to require their consent if they are to be used in a publication. While this is also the case with interviews, photographs are often taken without the knowledge of the people in the frame, or they are taken at a distance which makes gaining consent difficult or impractical. With interviews, it is much more likely the researcher and interviewee will meet face-to-face, making it much easier to acquire consent.

The analysis of visual media used in CMC has also been limited. Almost all research conducted on CMC has been of textual discourse. Part of the reason for this was practical: until reliable, high speed Internet access was made widely available, and quality digital cameras became affordable, photographs were not frequently used in CMC (Pauwels, 2005). Even those researchers interested in less-text based forms of CMC ignore, or at least largely neglect, “the complex and culturally rich visual features meticulously constructed websites, arguably a more important, though much less empirically studied ‘face’ of the Internet…it is not the medium that is mainly text-based, it is the researchers’ focus” (Pauwels, 2005, p. 607).

Pauwel identified a significant gap in the existing literature concerning CMC and called for researchers to employ ethnographic research designs and use multiple data collection methods to address it; studies should contextualize the images used in CMC from the perspective of both the producers and the audiences. This data must than be triangulated to reveal the culture, symbols, and richness of websites. I have taken Pauwel’s observations and suggestions seriously.
A Case for Visual Methodologies

This study is interested in how students present themselves in their Facebook profiles. Though the nature of computer mediated communication is a central theme in this research, photographs also have a prominent role. Facebook encourages students to place large numbers of photographs on their profiles. It is common for the profiles of SWU students to contain between 20 and 250 pictures. My participant observation experience and conversations with key informants made it clear that students were using their photographs for impression management purposes. That is, they were selecting specific photographs over others to place on their profiles. It was therefore appropriate that this study employed methodologies that enabled me to explore the content and context of these photographs. Because the use and analysis of visual images is unorthodox, a case will made for their use.

Photographs in Socially Oriented Research

Harper (1994) traced the use of photographs in anthropological studies and determined that they were originally understood as a mechanism for capturing truth-revealing images that could be used to support social theories. Interest in the use of photographs was extremely limited until Bateson and Mead published Balinese Character (1942), an ethnographic work in which they used 759 photographs (selected from the 25,000 they produced over a two-year period) in combination with text to describe the culture of Bali.

Balinese Character was novel (perhaps even revolutionary) in its use of photography. It was the first time that photographs had been used for reasons other than
simple illustration (Kanstrup, 2002). However, sociologists failed to embrace the use of photographs in subsequent research (Harper, 1994; Plummer, 2001). Instead, a crevasse developed between “those who saw photography as description… and those who saw it as art (Harper, 1994, p. 405).

When the use of photographs was again explored by sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s, it was primarily for documenting social problems. Concurrent with this renewed interest was the increasing adoption of feminist and Marxist theories in sociology which bought many new questions about the nature of photographs, the role of the photographer, and the technologies and techniques used to produce photographs. The postmodernist paradigm and rapid development of the digital technologies used to produce and alter images have made these questions even more complex (Davies, 2007; Harper, 2002; Hogben & Waterman, 1997).

As currently understood, the use of photographs for socially oriented research presents several important issues for consideration (Collier, 1957; Knowles & Sweetman, 2004; Low & Sherrard, 1999). The first of these is the act of photography. Photography can be understood as multi-stage endeavor requiring a combination of technical skills and decision making to produce a photograph. Framing subjects, capturing images, editing, and printing are each acts which may be studied for their influence on the final photograph. The second issue concerns how the photographs under study were collected and whether they are representative of the subject being considered (Rose, 2001). Finally, the means that researchers have used to analyze photographs needs to be considered.
I acknowledge the importance of the first considerations but believe that the context, or how these pictures were produced, are not central to this study. That is, how the pictures came to be produced is not central to this study. As I learned while conducting interviews for this study, nearly all students have both staged and spontaneous pictures on their Facebook profiles. What is important for this study is that these pictures contain socially situated symbols that students use to present themselves on Facebook. The second consideration (are the images representational) has been addressed by developing a data collection methodology which required that profiles meet several criteria before I used the photographs that appeared on them.

The final concern is how to analyze Facebook photographs. Many sociologists and anthropologists believe that photographs may be considered a unit for analysis and rich source of data. However, few detail methodologies to extract such data. Akeret (1973, cited in Plummer, 2001) listed a full page of questions that a researcher can ask of a photograph. The questions start with gathering general observations: What is your immediate impression? Who and what do you see? What do you notice about physical intimacy or distance? Is the background against which the photo is taken of any real or symbolic significance? These are followed with questions that focus on increasingly smaller levels of detail: What do you notice about the various parts of each person in the photograph. Look carefully at the general body posture and then the hands, the legs, the arms, the face, the eyes, the mouth. What does each part tell you?

Penn (2000) observed that the analysis of images is difficult because images are always polysemic, or ambiguous. That is, they have many meanings and interpretations.
She suggested using multiple stages of analysis that begin with the cataloging of the literal meaning of material with a denotational inventory. The researcher should then analyze the inventory for higher-order levels of signification and begin to ask of each element a series of questions: what does it connote, what associations are brought to mind, how do the elements relate to each other (internal correspondence), and what cultural knowledge is required in order to read the material?

Goffman (1979) too analyzed visual media in the form of printed advertisements. His focus was on gender messages as constructed and sent through images and text. Concentrating on the arrangement of bodies through positioning and placement, Goffman grouped pictures to illustrate that what “we think of as a natural pose or piece of behavior for one the sexes” (Goffman, 1979, viii, in the Introduction by Vivian Gornick) are actually symbolic depictions of masculinity and femininity that the reader experiences and internalizes. The internalization process results in increased socialization to these symbols as “intentional displays, microecological mapping of social structures, approved typifications, and the gestural externalization” (Goffman, 1979, p. 27). The observer carries these with them for future use in presenting themselves to others.

There are very few contemporary studies that focus on photographs, and even fewer which consider photographs which appear online. One example of a study that does both looked at the photograph web-sharing site Flickr.com and examined the ways in which everyday life is reconfigured in this medium. Through a discourse analysis, Davies (2007) found that photographs are cultural artifacts. Placing them online
recontextualizes them and invests them with new meanings, while at the same time
greatly curtailing the narratives that originally accompanied them.

Section Five: Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionism is a social psychological theory which posits that humans make meaning through social interaction. Drawing largely on the teachings of G. H. Mead (1863-1931), it is a major cornerstone of qualitative research (Holdaway, 2000). It grew out of the Chicago tradition and Dewey’s pragmatism, a paradigm of thought that challenged the positivistic tradition and its dualistic assumptions about classic rationalism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006). Some have even categorized it as the sociological version of pragmatism (Maines, 1997).

The symbolic interaction perspective centers attention “on how individuals interpret and give meanings to the daily interactions” that make up our social worlds (Karp, Yoels, Vann, & Karp, 2004, p. 8). Symbolic interaction focuses on micro-level behaviors and the uniquely human characteristic of using symbols, especially “complex and highly abstract ones,” to communicate (Maines, 1997, p. 1). Symbolic interactionists are concerned with “the meanings that people give to actions and events and with understanding how these meanings are constructed and negotiated” (Sandstrom et al., 2006, p.1).

Within the symbolic interactionist perspective, symbols serve to expand meaning from the present, to link discrete events and objects, to relate different points in time, to creatively anticipate the future, and to harmonize and enrich ideas (Holdaway, 2000). Fine (1993) observed that though symbolic interactionism was once a sociological
paradigm (albeit marginal and oppositional to the dominant positivist, quantitative approach of mainstream sociology) with a clear theoretical focus, it has become much more fragmented and its central premises incorporated and adopted by other traditions.

Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), has been described as the "single most influential book to date, on symbolic interactionism" (Manis & Meltzer, 1967, p. 140). In it Mead developed a system of thought describing how the human mind and conception of self arise out of social processes. The human mind, according to Mead, arises within the social process of communication and cannot be understood apart from that process. The communication process involves two phases: (1) the "conversation of gestures" and (2) language, or the "conversation of significant gestures" (p. 43). Both phases presuppose a social context within which two or more individuals are in interaction with one another.

Mead made a number of important contributions to the field of symbolic interaction. One of the most significant was the idea that the ‘self’ is not an actual substance but instead more accurately thought of as a process, an idea earlier espoused by James (1890). According to Mead (1934), the human brain creates two distinct frames of reference. The first is “I,” an awareness of position in society (p. 174) and our response to others (p. 175). The “I” exists in the present (Wiley, 1994). The second frame of reference is ‘me’, the product, and cumulative nature of “I.” “Me” exists in the past. Much of what we today have come to understand as ‘self’ arises from the ongoing dialogue, or managerial relationship between the “I” and “me” that is negotiated in “constantly changing and sometimes even conflicting demands” (Barglow, 1994, p. 83).
Mead’s second contribution was to describe the important role that external social context has to both the “I” and the “Me.” Each is created and exists only when the mind juxtaposes them in a social context. According to Mead (1934), individuals do not experience themselves directly. They first become an object, “just as other individuals are objects to him or his experiences; and he becomes an object to himself” (p. 138). It is only through the process of “taking the attitudes of other individuals towards himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved” (p. 138) that an individual comprehends him or herself. Thus, identities are “understood within the memberships of a given community” (Lee, 2002, p. 343) and are the product of the conversation, a reflexive phenomenon, that develops from social interactions (Gecas, 1982; Wiley, 1994). Implicit in this thinking is that there is no one, absolute identity. Instead, identity is bound in a cultural discourse of what it means to exist and behave in a particular social or cultural setting (Foucault, 1978).

Mead’s third contribution to the study of self comes from the important role he believed language has to self, social identity, and social relationships. For conversations between the “I,” “me” and the community to occur requires both gestures and language – “the conversation of significant gestures” (Mead, 1934, p. 47). These allow for the process of communication to develop and social processes to occur. It is through this sometimes elaborate and perceptively instantaneous process that “the gesture of one organism and the adjustive response of another organism to that gesture within any given social act bring out the relationship the exists between the gesture as the beginning of the given act and the completion or resultant of the given act, to which the gesture refers”
(Mead, 1934, p. 79). The understanding we have of ourselves and our place in the world are therefore “based on the social character of human language” (Gecas, 1982, p. 3).

These three concepts show that human experience should not be understood in terms of individual psychology. The “self” has a “character which is different from that of the physiological organism…[it] has a development…[and] arises in the process of social experience and activity…[and it] develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals (Mead, 1934, p. 135). In this way, symbolic interactionists are less concerned with large social structures and more interested in the individual and how they come to make meaning in society (Karp et al., 2004). Hence while this is a strength of symbolic interactionism it has also been criticized for only being a micro theory and not taking into consideration any larger societal or organizational, more macro pressures and influences. Cooley (1930), Dewey (1925), and Thomas (1928) also contributed to the development of symbolic interactionist thought, however there is general agreement that the refinement of the theoretical position came from Herbert Blumer.

Blumer (1969), a student of Mead’s, coined the term symbolic interactionism and what today are considered its three foundational premises: “First, human beings act toward the physical objects and other beings in their environment on the basis of the meanings these things have for them. Second, these meanings derive from the social interaction (communication, broadly understood) between and among individuals. Communication is symbolic because we communicate via languages and other symbols” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 124).
The third premise is that humans establish and alter the meanings they have for objects and other humans through a process that “transforms the meaning in light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action…meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action” (Blumer, 1969, p.5, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It is through these processes that we come to understand the negotiated meanings of specific symbols such as a dollar bill, a cat, a hug, words and punctuation, and ourselves. Beyond just the negotiated meanings of these objects and actions, the world of computer mediated communication and the use of computers as a tool for communication alters how humans develop meaning from this type of interaction. None of these objects or actions have an inherent meaning and we can only learn their meanings by interacting with others (Karp et al., 2004) which in a virtual world interacting with others is altered from what the early symbolic interactionists thought.

Within the symbolic interactionist framework, interaction is defined as the reciprocal process that exists when two or more actors are present within a given context. Each actor indicates, interprets, and acts upon the gestures of the other in a reciprocal fashion. Interaction therefore occurs as a response to others’ actions or in relation to others’ actions. Symbolic interactionists understand humans to have the capacity to adjust their behavior to meet the needs and expectations of social situations. They do this by anticipating the responses others are going to have of them and evaluating their own behavior in terms of the anticipated responses (Fine, 1993; Karp et al., 2004; Marcia, 1967; Sandstrom et al., 2006).
Humans do not simply respond to environmental stimuli. Instead we actively engage and interpret the people-filled world we move through (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this way, symbolic interaction examines the ways in which people give meaning to their bodies, their senses, their situations, and the wider social worlds in which their lives exist. As a theoretical perspective, symbolic interaction is naturalistic and requires close observational work and the development of familiarity to develop an understanding of the underlying forms of human interaction. Ethnography and participant observation, both associated with the naturalistic perspective, are generally used in the research work of symbolic interactionists (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1981; Rock, 1979). While having a common interest in symbols and language with semiotic theories, interactionists are more concerned with the ways in which meaning is always emergent, fluid, ambiguous, and contextually bound.

Symbolic interactionism has been used to explore many social behaviors and phenomena. Two are provided to illustrate the range of research that symbolic interactionism has been applied to. A study conducted in 2007 by Armstrong used symbolic interaction to frame the influence of self and situations within the sport consumption experience at a minor league ice hockey game. Armstrong used symbolic interaction to examine the attendance frequency of 49 first time and 72 repeat attendees. The research found that the opportunities for self-expression afforded by the sport consumption experience positively and significantly influenced repeat attendance. While first time spectators were more likely to infer something about consumers based on the types of sport events they attend in general, repeat spectators were more likely to affix a
symbolic meaning to others in attendance at this team's hockey games. The results illustrated the social psychology that under girds sport consumer behavior (Armstrong, 2007).

In another application of symbolic interaction, Jaklic (2004) examined why Slovenia's per capita gross domestic product was already higher than that of Greece or Portugal, and considerably higher than those in other former socialist countries. Rather than viewing “economic actors as atomistic/individualistic, facing games within abstract categories, such as markets and hierarchies,” the researcher chose to focus on individuals as strategically interacting with other agents (p. 109). He found that the reciprocal interactions of managers across specific manufacturing areas resulted in a more competitive environment, resulting in increased productivity. The researcher concluded that symbolic interactionism more accurately explained Slovenia’s prosperity than existing theoretical speculations about transitions from planned socialist to capitalist market economies (Jaklic, 2004).

Closer to my study’s topic is Fernback’s (2007) study of the concept of communities in cyberspace. For this study, the researcher interviewed 30 people with experience in online groups to assess their perceived realities of online social interaction. Using Glaser and Strauss’s comparative method, she reviewed each transcript numerous times to construct a systematic analysis. From the interview transcripts, Fernback identified overall themes and coded the transcripts accordingly. Next, Fernback evaluated the themes using concepts of symbolic interactionism. Finally, she interpreted
the participants words in reference to the constructs developed during the thematic coding (Fernback & Fernback, 2007). This study used a very similar method of analysis.

Fernback found that traditional notions of community were not manifested within cyberspace. Participants questioned whether virtual communities have enough “vested members to develop their own sacred customs, folk legends, and proud legacies” (Fernback & Fernback, 2007, p. 62). Her conclusion was that because on-line communities lacked many of the communal aspects of real communities, that a new metaphor was needed. In her conclusions, Fernback calls for further exploration of the mediated cultures and social structured developed in cyberspace and states that symbolic interactionism will be instrumental in this process.

Section Six: Goffman, Dramaturgy, and the Presentation of Self

Erving Goffman was a central figure in mid-twentieth century sociology and frequently associated with the dramaturgical perspective (Smith, 2006). Goffman went beyond Mead’s concept regarding how individuals make sense of themselves and the world (Adler & Adler, 1994), the area of interest was of social interaction. He worked to describe the structure of face-to-face interaction and to account for how that structure was involved in the interactive tasks of everyday life.

Goffman was a “master at producing terminology and taxonomic schemes for ordering his observations with respect to particular substantive areas” (Chriss, 1995, p. 178), particularly so when the subject matter concerned social situations in which two or more individuals are physically in one another’s presence. In his first major work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman focused on the ordinary and
mundane social interactions that occur when people are in physical proximity. This work laid out a framework “from which social life can be studied, especially the kind of social life that is organized within the physical confines of a building or plant (Goffman, 1959, p. xi). Central to the framework Goffman developed was the understanding that:

Once individuals - for whatever reason - come into one another’s immediate presence, a fundamental condition of social life becomes enormously pronounced, namely its promissory, evidential nature. It is not only that our appearance and manner provide evidence of our statuses and relationships. It is also that the line of our visual regard, the intensity of our involvement, and the shape of our initial actions, allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose, and all this whether we are engaged in talk with them at the time. Correspondingly, we are constantly in a position to facilitate this revealment, or block it, or even misdirect our viewers. (Goffman, 1983, p. 3)

This quote illustrates why those familiar with his works frequently associate them with “not just a subject matter but also a highly distinctive attitude and analytic stance towards the social world” (Smith, 2006, p. 1). His writing style is dense and can be confusing. However, picking apart these types of passages reveals how Goffman approached social interactions. First, he believed that social interaction is natural, complex, and reflexive. The mechanics of social interactions are best understood, or at least initially considered, by observing simple interactions. Second, Goffman believed that much of the symbolic information people use reflexively in social interactions is
gathered through visual means. Symbols that convey social status and intent, essential for smooth social interactions to occur, are most often visual in nature. One reason for this is that these types of symbols, such as clothing, hair style, and willingness to engage in eye-contact, can be assessed at a distance.

Finally, this quote also observes that all social interact occurs before an audience. That is, when ever people interact, they are performing and giving off information about themselves. And in fact, research reveals that whenever individuals are before an audience (i.e., people are aware that others are able to observe them either directly or indirectly) they are careful about the types of impressions they want to give and actively shape their self-presentation accordingly (Leary, 1996; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992.

Dramaturgy and Self-Presentation

In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) Goffman developed a framework which described all face-to-face interaction as a theatrical performance; individuals are actors engaged in scenes and behavior is the result of the interactions between actors. Goffman did not believe that people actually acted as though they were stage actors. In fact, Goffman introduced his perspective with the statement that “the stage presents things that are make-believe; presumably life presents things that are real and sometimes not well rehearsed” (Goffman, 1959, p. xiii). However he did find it useful to examine the complex human interactions that arise in social situations as being analogous to dramatic performances. By using terms such as "performance," "performer," "audience," "stage," "backstage," and "setting" to categorize particular
aspects of a social scene, he was able to elucidate the intricacies of social interaction (Hare, Blumberg, & Goffman, 1988).

Goffman was not the first person to suggest this metaphor. However he was the first to develop it into a workable model that could be used to explain behavior. Within this theatrical analogy, people are actors who must convey who they are and their intentions to an audience through performances. In this way, people occupy particular roles in a scene of a play. During social interaction, each actor gives a performance that is based on their understanding of the other actor’s roles, the scene, and overall play. While there is no explicit script that actor follow, they do manage their actions in ways that create a desired impression on an audience, a term used to describe any individual who will directly or indirectly observe the interaction. One desired impression that most people work to give is that of “themselves as an acceptable person: one who is entitled to certain kinds of consideration, who has certain kinds of expertise, who is morally relatively unblemished” (Miller, 1995, p. 1). In this sense people present themselves in “accordance with their assessment of the perceptions and expectations of others” (Karp et al., 2004, p. 59). Audience members use the performer’s physical and verbal cues to construct their understanding of the performer’s role so they can provide an appropriate reaction.

The use of this type of analogy may appear artificial. However, Manning (1996) suggested that the drama analogy, along with those of war, and sports, are the dominant metaphors of our times and help us to communicate. Terminology from each helps
people understand and discuss their daily lives and relationships. For example, a student affairs professional might state that she was ‘on the front line’ or ‘in the trenches’ if her work required constant interaction with students. In preparing for a meeting with an angry student and his parents, this same person might say that she was ‘arming herself’ with all the institutions policies and procedures. A student who unexpectedly hooked up (had sex) the previous night might be heard to say that he ‘scored’ or ‘got to home plate’ while a student explaining to others that his girlfriend unexpectedly broke up with him might say that she ‘dropped the bomb’.

Similarly, terms associated with the theater and drama are also frequently used. People might say that a university president is ‘acting presidential’, that a provost ‘enjoys the lime light’, that an assistant director frequently ‘upstages’ the director, or that an office has a ‘supporting role’ in a larger initiative. The use of these words as metaphors greatly enhances our ability to communicate with one-another and they also help us understand the world around us – they permit us to economically describe or relate implicit and explicit attributes and relationships (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006). Denzin (2001) stated that “we inhabit a performance-based, dramaturgical culture…[in which] culture itself becomes a dramatic performance” (p. 26). In this culture, the metaphor of performance, which has come to be known as ‘dramaturgy’, reaches well beyond simple oral communications; it has become an integral part of contemporary society and our understanding of ourselves.

Goffman (1959) believed that people usually want to engage in interactions that run smoothly and are comfortable to all involved (Rutter & Smith, 1999), and that it
therefore in our best interest to control the impressions others have of us. This is seen in the way an actor “presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impressions they form of him, and the kinds of things he may or may not do while sustaining his performance before them” (Goffman, 1959, p. xi). Audience members are made aware of our social status and the role we see ourselves playing, and in this way are able to estimate our behaviors. In this same way, others make themselves known to us and we can then decide how we want to act towards them.

Audience members, the people around the person, use the performer’s physical and verbal cues to construct an understanding of the performer’s role: “the intensity our involvement and the shape of our initial actions allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose” (Goffman, 1983, p. 3). Goffman believed that though we are always in a position to control, block, and even misdirect the image and gestures we send to others, we rarely lie outright. This is because as participants in a scene, people share a mutual responsibility to maintain social interactions that are comfortable and free of embarrassment. In this way, social interaction can be a perilous exercise as actors embarrassment is highly discomforting to everyone in the scene.

*Presenting Ourselves*

Self-presentation describes an understanding that people present a ‘self’ to others. With the symbolic interaction perspective, people do not interact directly, but through the use of symbols which they use convey information about their “self.” According to self-presentation theories, people typically prefer to be perceived in certain desired ways and not be perceived in certain other ways. Leary (1995) wrote:
human beings have a pervasive and ongoing concern with their self-presentations. Sometimes they act in certain ways just to make a particular impression on someone else— as when a job applicant responds in ways that will satisfactorily impress the interviewer…most of the time we are not inclined to do things that will lead other to see us as incompetent, immoral, maladjusted, or otherwise socially undesirable.

(p.xiii)

As noted in literature about symbolic interactionism, people are constantly assessing their environment for changes in socially negotiated definitions and modifying their behavior accordingly. In this way, symbolic interactionists see the "self" as fluid, dynamic, and existing “as a relationship between mind, body, and society” (Turkle, 1995, p. 15). People’s behavior results from their understanding of social situations. People are so used to presenting themselves in particular ways in front of particular audiences that they are usually not even aware of it. This is what Goffman meant by everyday (Goffman, 1951; Sandstrom et al., 2006). It is only when we are placed in a situation were we are scrutinized that we become aware of how we present ourselves.

The general aim of self-presentation as an everyday phenomenon is not to deceive or harm other people but to interact and communicate with them in ways that are beneficial and useful (Brown, 2003; DePaulo, 1992; Leary, 1996; Leary & Tangney, 2003; Vrugt & Van Eechoud, 2002). To produce useful, easily understood impressions, and to avoid detrimental ones, people employ various strategies to help manage the impressions of others.
Fronts

Goffman (1959, 1964, 1983) developed a framework of concepts to help understand how people convey symbolic information about themselves for others to use. One of the means for conveying information is through the use of fronts. Fronts are “that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). They are the sum of an actor’s “expressive equipment” that an audience observes. Fronts provide observers information in the form of recognizable, standardized mannerisms, appearances, and settings. Fronts allow people to fill in information that might not be given during a performance. As Goffman observed, “every culture, and certainly ours, seems to have a vast lore of fact and fantasy regarding embodied indicators of status and character, thus appearing to render persons readable” (Goffman, 1983, p. 8). For example, people may exhibit the front of a tourist if they look at a map while walking in a city. This is not a front they are likely to be intentionally using but one which makes some information clear to audience members. Without interacting in a social manner, people seeing tourists may form impressions of them using information that they developed from the tourist front. In this way, audience members use fronts to help understand the normative role an actor occupies (i.e., professor, student, rich woman, poor man, etc.).

People employ fronts in nearly all social interactions, even those that do not involve direct contact. This is especially the case in public settings and among people who do not know each other. For example, people expect a certain degree of politeness
and decorum from each other. In restaurants, it is expected that people will present the front appropriate for the setting. Part of this front is that there are appropriate levels in which people may speak. If this front is broken, perhaps by a couple having a loud argument, a quick glance from a fellow diner in usually enough to bring the couples’ performance back in line with the excepted restaurant front. In this way, fronts are the stereotypical performances that audience members believe they are about to see.

Fronts function to provide audience members and actors with an understanding of excepted and expected performances. Without these socially negotiated, generally agreed to standards, people would have no idea how to act properly in a new environment. Social life requires that people act differently in different situations and in front of different audiences. If people acted exactly the same in all circumstances, it would be very difficult for audience members to understand the actor. For example, adults who exhibit the same front in the work place (that of a hard working employee) as they do when among social friends may make it difficult for their coworkers to take them seriously. An undergraduate student who arrives on campus without any sense of the ‘college student’ front may have a very difficult time in the residence hall. For example, he or she may do nothing else but study, believing this is what a college student is supposed to do.

Fronts are learned behaviors that once understood, are selected by actors, not created (Goffman, 1959). People learn fronts through social interaction and develop a repertoire of them that they can use across a multitude of settings. Throughout childhood, people are taught to “act” or “not to act” in certain ways in the presence of others. In
kindergarten children learn about the teachers’ front and what behaviors they can expect each day. Throughout adolescence, people learn that certain fronts are more popular with their peers than others. Understood from Mead’s concepts of the “I” and the “me,” fronts are the “I” that we project to the outside world. The “I” is also how people experience and interact with the environment, and how others come to know the “me.”

*Props, Settings and Gesture*

Goffman’s dramaturgical and impression management framework is rooted in symbolic interaction and places great emphasis on situational performance (Smith, 2006). Therefore, once actors have decided, consciously or unconsciously, on a particular front to use before an audience, they will use a variety of techniques to make their performance of the front believable. Within the dramaturgical and self-presentation framework, people use many of the same techniques in their everyday lives. For example, in staged productions of Hamlet, an actor will likely have a reproduction of a skull in Act 5, Scene 1. In this scene, Shakespeare has Hamlet speaking to the skull of Yorick, the deceased court jester. Used in this fashion, the fake skull is a prop used to help convince audience members of the performance. As stage actors, people have to “translate our desires, feelings, beliefs, and self-images into communicable form, drawing on words, gestures, scripts, props, scenery, and various features of appearance” (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006, p. 105). For example, rings are exchanged during the ceremonial performance given at a wedding. People continue to use them as props to indicate that they are in a committed relationship. They have a symbolic, socially negotiated meaning that most understand – “I am not available.”
Goffman identified props, settings, and gestures as being three possible components of a performance. Any object can be a prop if the “user believes that the possession or display of it will affect others” (Leary, 1996, p. 31). Examples may include clothing, body posture, body odor, gait, the possession or absence of car keys, and intensity of eye contact. Organizations can also use props for symbolic purposes. Leary (1996) provided the example of a business which displays numerous clocks in their lobby, each indicating the time in a different city. In this way, the business uses the clocks as props to signal that they are an international company. Like fronts, the meanings of props are socially negotiated and defined through social interactions.

Settings, according to Goffman (1959) involve furniture, décor, and other background items that supply the audience with a sense of place. They tend to consist of items that are immovable to give audiences members a sense of credibility about the performance. Settings are especially useful for the performance of several fronts. For example, if an individual is to perform the front “world traveler,” he or she needs evidence of their travels. One way that this can be done is with showing photographs in which the person appears in a particular setting (i.e., the Eiffel Tower).

Gestures are another tool that actors and people may use to make their performances believable. For example, when two people are involved in a conversation, they exchange a range of subtle non-verbal cues in addition to the verbal material. These non-verbal cues include the gestures of facial expressions, directions of gaze, body-language and physical distance.
Expressions We Give and Expressions We Give Off

Goffman’s framework understands that whenever two or more people are in each other’s presence, a social situation is created. During the time that this situation exists, each person (or actor) gives a performance intended to give particular impressions. At the same time, each person is also assessing the performances given by the others present. They must decide to believe the performance being given or to question its accuracy and truthfulness (Goffman, 1959). The information people use to make this determination is made available in two forms. The first of these is understood as information expressed in “verbal symbols or their substitutes” (Goffman, 1959, p. 4) and is intentionally expressed in the understanding that the receiver will accurately understand the sender’s meaning. Goffman referred to this type of information as the ‘expression a person gives’. Using this type of information, individuals consciously attempt to control the information observers have at their disposal to form their impressions. They may use props, settings, and gestures to assist observers in forming this intended impression.

The second type of information is the expressions that “an individual gives off.” This information is largely non-verbal and presumably unintentional. “Expressions given off” includes all the information that an audience member might use to question a performer. For example, a person may state to others that he is an avid hiker. He even wears a fleece vest and hiking boots as props. However, an observer may notice that his hiking boots do not appear to have been hiked in and question the validity the person’s
claims. This may also lead the observer to not only question this particular claim, but all others made by the person.

In face-to-face interactions, both of these types of information are constantly being “given” and “given off.” An observer forms an initial impression based on the limited information available and then uses both information given and given off to validate or modify the impression. A person may even sense that their performance is not being well received and alter it accordingly. In the environment of asynchronous CMC this ability to greatly reduced.

**Research and Goffman**

Goffman did not offer any testable hypotheses that future researchers might use to confirm or reject his framework. Nor did he provide information about his data collection methods or methods of analysis, leaving readers and researchers to improvise and assume facts not in evidence. This has required that researchers find and use methods that at least appear to fit comfortably within the corpus of Goffman’s work. Psathas (1996) stated that, “his conceptualizations were always based on empirical exemplars, gathered from Lord knows what sources, here, there, and everywhere” (p. 393).

This has not stopped many scholars from applying his framework to existing social situations. These scholars do not use Goffman’s concepts to conduct empirical research. Instead they use them to better understand an existing phenomenon. For example, Gardner and Avolio (1998) developed a model for understanding the self-presentation strategies people use to create and maintain the image of being a charismatic leader. They used dramaturgy and self-presentation to identify the various ways leaders
assess their performances and convey the impression of charisma. They observed that charismatic leaders not only tend to have high self-esteem, but high self monitoring which they use to track those aspects their presentations that garner positive reactions. In this way, charismatic leaders could learn which performances make them appear morally worthy, innovative, and esteemed. The researchers believed that their model might be used to provide leadership training and evaluate the messages conveyed by specific leaders.

In another study, Kolb (1985) observed five state and four federal mediators working on 16 cases over a three year period. Extracting data from case transcripts and applying Goffman’s framework, the researcher identified the core expressive, professional tactics commonly used by mediators. The study’s findings suggest that mediators manage impressions of their expertise to frame settlements and to convey neutrality toward the parties. They also managed impressions about a shared collegial network with fellow negotiators. In this way, Kolb examined the differential ways authority is mobilized in mediation (Kolb, 1985).

Studies have also used Goffman’s dramaturgical and self-presentation framework to explore a variety of social interactions that are not conducted in a face-to-face setting. Miller and Morgan (1993) used many of the concepts Goffman developed for understanding self-presentation and impression management in their examination of curriculum vitae. They observed that Goffman’s performance construct was useful for evaluating the production and evaluation of CVs, though they noted that Goffman’s primary interest with face-to-face interactions. Three aspects of Miller and Morgan’s
article are of particular relevance to this study. First is the setting of CVs as part of a larger story: “actors are not called upon to ‘tell a story’ in the abstract; they do so before a specific audience and upon specific occasions” (p. 133). Just as academics applying for a position need to concern themselves with the purpose of CVs, and who will be evaluating them, students developing profiles also consider who they believe will be looking them.

Second is their observation that CVs are a stylized and idealized. In this way, they demonstrate to the members of the academic community that their authors understand and can perform the necessary fronts expected by the audience. Finally, because CVs are expected to present their authors with a particular front, audience members (i.e., faculty members on a search committee) can examine the document for “expressions given off.” For example, does the document contain typographical errors, is it organized in a coherent fashion, and does it contain extraneous materials. In this way, audience members can form their initial impressions of the person based on an initial observation of the CV.

Another interesting application of Goffman’s framework was Manning’s (1996) exploration of the role the media in politics and interpersonal relations. Manning observed that the early symbolic interactionists’ believed that the media, and television in particular, presented a promising means by which to enhance the knowledge of a democratic citizenry (the close connection to the pragmatists can be seen in this belief). Instead, it created the culture of media, and the ability to make viewers recipients of a political discourse “that weaves together and confounds everyday and symbolic realities” (Manning, 1996, p. 265). He examined the 1991 Rodney King beating as a social
interaction presented repeatedly before an audience. Because the “performance” was videotaped however, the audience and performers were unable to interact. Manning observed that this may have resulted in the LAPD being unable to acquire the feedback it needed to understand the powerful impressions the video gave to a variety of audience members. If it had this feedback, LAPD may have been able to immediately alter its performance and thereby change the impressions of audience members. Instead, the audience created a stylized and “idealized” front for the Los Angles Police Department filled with symbols well understood to a world wide audience.

Goffman died in 1982, but interest in his works remains strong in sociology and in an expanding number of social sciences (Chriss, 1995). Scott (2006) observed that one of the reasons Goffman’s ideas have been adopted by many disciplines outside of sociology has to do with his writing style “which combines meticulous theoretical insights with a dry, witty humour… [and] that readers feel a delighted shock of recognition at the quirks of human behavior that Goffman identifies and explains” (p. 113). Denzin (2002), in critically reviewing Goffman’s framework, provided an additional explanation for this continuing interest. His [Goffman’s] writing style brought a:

literary sensibility to sociology. He drew on literary sources, and his was a gifted prose that was at once nuanced, ironic, and literary. And he offered a timeless naturalistic, taxonomic sociology … that seemed to turn human beings into Kafka-esque insects to be studied under a glass (p. 106).
The combined effects of this writing style and common sense approach to sociology dares readers to apply Goffman’s framework to their own daily interactions; the casual greeting we give a colleague in passing, our manner of participation in a weekly meeting with supervisors and supervisees, or the balancing of multiple audiences at the check-in line of an annual conference provides fertile material for applying and anecdotally validating the dramaturgical perspective.

Goffman prided himself on the belief that sociological observations and research should not be conducted as means to an end, but rather because the researcher was interested in the topic (Goffman, 1983). Goffman did not suggest that the social interactions studied using his perspective were of any greater importance to the human experience than any other form of social organization (political or economic perspectives for example) or that the study of these micro-social events could serve as a foundation for understanding macroscopic phenomena (Smith, 2006).

Goffman’s critics suggest that he was vague, inconsistent (and worse, made no attempt to be consistent), and did not fully consider the effects of gender and class (Denzin, 2002; Gardner & Gardner, 1989; Psathas, 1996; Smith, 2006). This has not kept the dramaturgical framework from being used extensively in a variety of settings and to explore a wide variety of topics. In fact, he has enjoyed a bit of a renaissance as scholars reconsider his works in light of post-modernist thinking (Brown, 2005; Ross, 2007; Warren et al., 2003; West & West, 1996).
First developed in the 1950s and 1960s, Goffman’s (1959) impression management and self-presentations framework have been generally applied to traditional, face-to-face interactions involving the “reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence” (p.15). However, it is worthwhile noting that Goffman did make particular mention of the power of electronic communication when used for mass communication:

Those who work in the field of radio broadcasting and, especially, television keenly appreciate that the momentary impression they give will have an effect on the view a massive audience takes of them, and it is in this part of the communication industry that great care is taken to give the right impression. (p.226)

Several researchers have considered various aspects of impression management that occur when individuals are not in immediate contact. Examples include personal ads (Stassberg and Holty, 2003), television commercials featuring politicians (Brown, 2005; Hall, 1979), and internet chat rooms (Turkle, 1984 & 1995).

Researchers have also begun to apply Goffman’s framework to the internet. Several have explored personal web home pages, which can share many characteristics with Facebook profiles and are therefore of particular interest to this study. Personal home pages are well suited for elaborate, strategic self-presentations (Chandler, 1998; Karlsson, 1998; Miller, 1995; Wynn & Katz, 1997). Home pages allow for self-presentation to occur on the Web and an attractive, information-rich, professional or
humorous personal home page may enhance the impression we make on people who are not yet familiar with us personally. Personal home page can also supplement the face-to-face impressions we make on people who actually are familiar with us personally (e.g. friends, colleagues). Personal home pages can be created to convey an impression of one's own person and personal identity to certain audiences (e.g. potential employers, chat friends, colleagues), and to improve contact opportunities and networking (Erickson, 1996). Vazire and Gosling (2004) argue that personal websites are highly controlled environments for self-expression and that “nearly every detail of a personal website is the result of a conscious decision on the part of the author” (p. 124). They go on to observe that a personal website is the result of deliberate and calculated process that limits inadvertent behavioral residue (expressions given-off) and unintentional cues. In their quantitative research comparing how well individuals predict personality characteristics in face-to-face interaction versus through websites, they found that individuals observing a website form similar, clear, and coherent impressions of the author that are largely correct.

Miller and Mather (1998) analyzed 70 personal home pages for size and content. They observed that women tended to have more links on their home pages, showed “more awareness and responsiveness to the reader” (p.4) as measured by the number of references made to the reader, and were more likely to have guestbooks. Miller and Mather also observed that home pages with pictures showing the author had become the norm and hypothesized that the posting of photographs by women might be problematic due to issues of objectification and potential abuse by men.
Of great interest to this study was Miller and Mather’s approach to categorizing the photographs they observed on the home page. They identified four categories of images: straight, joke, symbolic, and none. Straight images are those that purport to be a straightforward likeness of the individual. Joke pictures present a distorted, caricatured, or unrepresentative image and might include an image of the author in a less than flattering situation, a baby picture, or a caricaturized cartoon of the author. Symbolic images represent an individual other than the author, frequently a piece of clip art. The final category is that the personal page does not contain images of humans. Blurred or pixilated images were categorized as symbolic. Miller and Mather found that men were more likely to have straight images of themselves, only men used images classified as jokes, and only women used symbolic images.

Shapiro and Shapiro (1997) examined personal web-pages to gain an understanding of the breadth and depth of personal information web pages disclosed. They hypothesized that these pages offer an opportunity to explore practical and theoretical issues related to self-presentation and self-disclosure. They concluded that when individuals develop and use web pages for biographical purposes, they often provide enough information about themselves to permit observers to form impressions and make assumptions about the author. Interpreting their results within a framework of self-presentation, they concluded that personal web pages provide individuals an environment to present positive messages about themselves. Further, they propose that research comparing the content of women and men’s web pages might be useful to determining whether significant gender differences exist in web page presentations.
More recent research has explored self-presentation and impression management on social networking sites. (Dwyer, 2006; McKenna et al., 2002; Smith & Kollock, 1999; Taylor, 1999; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). Boyd (2004) suggested that many online social applications, such as Friendster.com, are largely designed for self-presentation. The researcher’s ethnographic field work, focus groups, and surveys suggested that an necessarily level of trust in the presentations made by others was essential for a online network. Dwyer (2006) observed a divide between what occurs in face-to-face social interaction and online. The researcher had undergraduates students conduct 19 semi-structured interviews with other students who had MySpace.com accounts. They found that students were aware of self-impression techniques and utilized them to help others from impressions, that students used their profiles to maintain relationships rather than to develop new ones, and that students used reduced social cues to allow relationships to develop based on interaction rather than personal appearance (Dwyer, 2006).

Goffman’s frameworks have been applied to CMC environments in a number of interesting ways. For example, a 2006 study in the Journal of Computer Mediated Communication used impression management to examine the homepages of 163 colleges and universities for diversity representation on their home pages. They found that colleges and universities actively managed the impressions that their websites give (Boyer, Brunner, & Charles, 2006) through the use of visual representations which they believe to be packaged like fronts. These idealized presentations are effective as a marketing tool but they cite an example of students being disappointed upon arriving at an institution and finding a lack of diversity.
Facebook represents a new iteration of CMC, one that blends elements of face-to-face interaction and the virtual world, and one in which users are likely to live in close proximity and interact with each other frequently. While a student can employ images of social associations and use props to manage how others experience them, because of the possibility for feedback he/she must also consider the fact that someone may publicly question the information. Though it has been well established that college students concern themselves with the impressions others form of them (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998a; Komives et al., 2003; Leary, 1996) to date little research has been conducted on how college students might use CMC to manage impressions.

These previous examples demonstrate the value of Goffman’s framework to understanding CMC. However, these studies tend to view dramaturgy and self-presentation from the perspective of social interaction either being on- or off-line, not both. In this way, the theories used to explain CMC have created a “false dichotomy” by understanding internet users experiences as occurring in one context or the other (Turow & Kavanaugh, 2003) p. 338. This study recognizes that students are using Facebook as a medium through which they can both present themselves and communicate within people they know from face-to-face interactions. In this way, unlike most previous studies, the space that CMC creates is not understood to exist separated from traditional forms of communication. Instead, Facebook is seen as new space on college campuses for social interaction. By acknowledging that this new space is bounded and grounded in the existing community, this study provides a more informed view of CMC as it is used by today’s college student.
Using Symbolic Interactionism and Goffman’s Dramaturgy and Self-Presentation

This study is concerned with social interaction, self-presentation, and impression management of college students. It has historically been the case that student affairs professionals have employed student development theories that focus on the needs and development of undergraduate students (Gansemer-Topf, Ross, & Johnson, 2006). *How College Affects Students* (1991), *Student Services* (2003), and *Student Development in College* (1998), books frequently used in graduate level student affairs programs, primarily focus on theories that explain the processes of how students develop cognitively, psychologically, socially, and culturally. These types of theories are valuable for understanding how students develop over time, especially if such development is linear or occurs in stages, and possibly also for explaining behavioral changes in students. However, in general, these types of theories are less helpful for understanding the underlying reasons for student behaviors, the ways students want to be seen by each other, and the ways in which they socially interact.

In order to understand and explain student behavior, social interaction, and self-presentation strategies a theoretical framework able to deal with these phenomena is required. The symbolic interactionism paradigm provides a much more useful framework understanding the socially negotiated nature of our world than theories that focus on development. Likewise, Goffman’s dramaturgy and self-presentation framework,
developed to describe and explain social interaction and self-presentation, is useful for exploring the symbolic information in students’ Facebook profiles.

This study primarily uses Goffman’s framework to explore student self-presentation and aspects of micro-level social interactions. However, it is also interested in exploring Facebook and social interaction more broadly. Therefore this study’s data are also understood from a peer-group and social norming perspective. This additional perspective serves as a supplemental theoretical lens for framing data collection, developing research questions, and as a means by which to further understand the data.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the research methodology and data collection methods I used for this study. I begin by introducing the research questions and briefly explaining their importance. The chapter then addresses my theoretical orientation, epistemological stance, and provides a subjectivity statement. I then give an overview of my research methodology and justification for using an ethnography framework as a research design. This is followed with individual sections addressing my data collection methods: participant observation, photo-elicitation interviews, and photograph content analysis. Each section provides details about why the particular method was selected and how I collected and analyzed the data. The chapter concludes with the study’s limitations and the ethical issues I have needed to address.

Research Questions

Student affairs professionals, researchers studying college students, and educators interested in the effects of technology are increasingly faced with understanding issues created when student and technology intersect. The following research questions provide some much needed information about how to understand the Facebook profiles that students create to present themselves.

1. How are students using Facebook and how has it become part of the ‘everyday’ undergraduate experience?

2. What impressions do college students want visitors to form of them when seeing their Facebook profiles?

3. Who is the audience that college students believe they are addressing with their profiles?
4. What techniques do college students use to ensure that these impressions are formed?

5. How do Goffman’s notions of ‘information given’ and ‘information given off’ help explain how college students read each others’ Facebook profiles.

This study’s first research question asks ‘how are students using Facebook and how has it become part of the ‘everyday’ undergraduate experience?’ Because Facebook is only four years old there is not much literature exploring how college students are using this form of technology. The few studies that examine the amount of time students spend logged onto Facebook are largely quantitative. While it is important to know how often college students log onto Facebook and how much time they spend when they log on, because this provides some indication of how ‘everyday’ the use of Facebook is, it is also important to better understand what it is they are actually doing while spending this time. This study explores how college students present themselves on Facebook and is more interested in their various social interactions when on the Facebook website.

This study’s second question concerns the impressions college students want visitors to form of them when seeing their Facebook profiles. Because Facebook allows users to endlessly modify their profiles, college students are able keep making changes until they believe that their profile presents them to others as they want to be presented. Are the types of information and images that students use to develop their profiles as unique and individualized as the students who create them? Or are the impressions students want formed of them relatively homogeneous?

The third research question looks at who college students believe is their profiles’ audience. Goffman claimed that our audience has great influence over how we present
ourselves. For example, upon first meeting a girlfriend’s parents, a man may present himself much differently than when he is among his friends. If Facebook profiles are to serve the purpose of presenting the students who develop them, knowing who they believe their audience to be would provide an important context for understanding the material placed on them. Embedded in this question is the assumption that students have multiple audiences in front of whom they present themselves.

The fourth research question considers the techniques students use to help ensure that visitors to their profiles form the intended impressions. For example, if a student wants her Facebook audience to believe that she comes from a wealthy family, regardless of how accurate this may be, there are many ways she could make sure that visitors to her Facebook profile formed this impression. For example, she could have placed a picture of herself standing next to a luxury car, or better yet, driving one. Similarly there are many ways that students can present themselves as being athletic, or adventurous, or amusing, or simply fun to hang out with. This question explores the actual techniques students use to help ensure that others form the impressions that the student wants them to form. Are these methods idiosyncratic, or do student follow socially prescribed patterns? The findings in this section provide student affairs professionals with a better understanding of what they are seeing when looking at a Facebook profile. They also further our dramaturgical understanding of CMC by providing evidence regarding how students manage the impressions their profiles give.

This study’s fifth research question examines how Goffman’s dramaturgical concepts of “expressions given” and “expressions given off” may be used to explore how
students actually read Facebook profiles. These concepts provide a means for understanding what information students seek when looking at a profile and how they go about deciding if they are going to believe the overall impression a profile gives. Findings to this question will also be the focus of a major section in chapter 5.

Site Selection

Data for this study were collected at South West University (SWU), a pseudonym for a public Doctoral/Research University - Extensive in the Southwest. SWU enrolls over 27,000 undergraduate students, of whom 65-70 percent self identify as White. The next largest ethnic population is Hispanic, accounting for about 13 percent of the undergraduate student population. About 75 percent of undergraduate students are state residents, with a neighboring state supplying the next largest percent of students. There are approximately 2,000 more females enrolled at SWU than males.

This institution was selected because of my first hand knowledge of the student culture at SWU, my access to participants, and my ability to look at the Facebook profiles of SWU students. This accessibility was critical to this study and only possible because I served as a hall director, living with the undergraduate students I studied. Since I had an SWU email address I could view the profiles of students who did not have any of Facebook’s security features enabled.

I am not aware of any unique institutional characteristics that might suggest that the students at my research site are systemically different from those at similar types of universities. However, collecting data at a single institution permitted me to “get close to those studied” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 12) and allowed me to utilize key
informants with whom I had developed close relationships and interacted with on a daily basis. These informants provided valuable insights into the many ways college students use Facebook and, more importantly, how students want to be seen by their peers. Without the assistance of these individuals, I would not have been able to develop the tacit knowledge required to understand the symbolic meaning behind many of the images and textual materials I collected for the study.

Theoretical Orientation

The qualitative research paradigm is a philosophy of inquiry ideal for studying complex phenomena that have “relatively confined temporal and physical boundaries” (Lancy, 1992, p. 9). The nature of my research questions, which focus on how students present themselves in the profiles they develop on Facebook, made the qualitative paradigm ideal because it allowed for emergent methodologies, research questions, and themes to develop over the course of the study (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative research paradigm is also appropriate because the data analysis is largely interpretive.

Qualitative research has as one of its central tenets that data should be understood within the context in which the subject experiences it. Holdaway (2000) stated that “the task of the social scientist is to describe and, through systematic methods of research, analyze the meanings of the social world, as it is understood by the members of a group an organization, or some other collectivity” (p. 164). He also observed that this task: implies the description and analysis of social processes that lead to the construction and sustaining of the meanings to which members of collectivities hold as adequate and true…. We have to observe, perhaps participate in the world
of those whom we are researching, to relate the construction and sustaining of meanings through time and across the spatial contexts within which they are discovered. (p.165)

Bogdan (1998) stated that “objects, people, situations, and events do not possess their own meaning” (p. 25). Instead, meaning is conferred through interaction, a process that is situational, contextual, individual, and negotiated. This implies that humans experience themselves and the physical world through interactions, that we assign and revise meanings to people and objects based on interactions, and that we communicate these meanings through symbols or symbolic processes such as language (Schwandt, 1994).

The interpretive nature of this study’s research questions, and the socially situated (i.e. tacit) knowledge that is required to address them, suggested the need for a theoretical orientation for studying complex, subjective cultural issues and phenomena. It also required an orientation that embraced data gathering methods using naturalistic observation techniques (Adler & Adler, 1994). “In the symbolic interaction perspective,” Adler and Adler noted, “researchers usually want to gather data from their subjects while interacting with them” (1994, p. 378).

Additionally, although the topic of impression management in a CMC environment has been previously researched, the fact that Facebook users are also likely to interact with each other in face-to-face settings means that earlier research findings may not apply to profiles. The qualitative framework is ideally suited for this type of interpretive and exploratory research.
Epistemological Stance

Denzin (1994) made two observations about the type of qualitative, socially oriented research to which this study belongs. The first is that in the social sciences, “there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself” (p. 500). The types of interpretations to which Denzin referred are made by a situated researcher who imposes “a particular order on the world studied” (p. 502). The dramaturgical researcher is an interpreter concerned with understanding the meanings of socially constructed and situated roles, performances, interactions, and symbols. Denzin also recognized that the personal experiences and biases of the researcher serve as a lens through which the data is understood. Great care must be taken to minimize the distortion of this lens and to inform the reader of its existence. The inclusion of a subjectivity statement serves to acknowledge that I am aware that these biases exist, and I will help inform the reader of personal experiences that I believe have shaped my perspective.

Subjectivity Statement

This study deals largely with observational data I have collected and interpreted. This creates a “range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative research project” (Creswell, 2003, p. 184). As a researcher, I bring my own personal experiences and biases to the study and see the world through lenses ground and polished by these experiences. In effect I am a subjective filter. It is important for purposes of validity that “I show my hand” (Denzin, 1994, p. 493) to the reader and acknowledge those things that may have influenced various aspects of this research. This demonstration of awareness of
self relates to race, age, gender, socio-economic status, educational attainment, sexual orientation, and professional background.

I am a 40 year old, heterosexual, Caucasian male about to complete a doctoral degree in Higher Education. I have been fortunate to have been raised in an upper-middle class family that greatly values education and inquiry. After earning a bachelors degree in History I worked with incarcerated teenagers for three years. This experience profoundly influenced my understanding of the world and of people. It taught me that there are an infinite number of realities and that even the simple act of observation is subjective. This experience also ingrained in me a strong belief that signs and symbols are indeed negotiated through social interaction. In academic settings we can jokingly observe that sometimes ‘a cigar is just a cigar,’ but in some neighborhoods even an inadvertent arrangement of fingers perceived as a gesture can have fatal consequences. After earning my masters degree in Higher Education, Student Affairs Administration I worked first as a community college counselor and then as a career center director at a private four-year liberal arts institution.

I believe that the undergraduate college experience should be as unbounded as possible and that students should be encouraged to explore all aspects of their identity, especially those they take-for-granted and those may be uncomfortable with. To fully explore these aspects of identity, undergraduate students benefit from exposure to diverse social and cultural experiences, and from being given the time necessary to reflect on these experiences and their own beliefs. I collected data for this study during my appointment as a residence hall director at the same institution at which the data for this
study were collected. Because of all these experiences I consider myself knowledgeable about contemporary student issues.

Overview of Methodology

This study required a methodology and data collection methods that would provide me the opportunity to observe college students in their natural social environment. Only by spending time with students both on-line and in face-to-face settings would I be able to acquire enough tacit knowledge to understand what undergraduate students “experience as meaningful and important” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 2). In addition, the particular methodology and methods used in this study needed to fit well within the dramaturgical framework. Ethnography, with its heavy reliance on participant observation, and compatibility with dramaturgical framework (Adler & Adler, 1994) was therefore selected as the methodology and first data collection method.

After spending eight months collecting data in the field, I conducted 30 photo-elicitation interviews with students who had developed Facebook profiles to learn how these participants use Facebook, the impressions they want others to form of them, and the impressions they form of other students when they look at their profiles. As a data collection method, this type of interview fits well in ethnographic methodology and dramaturgy.

My final data collection method was to conduct a photograph content analysis of the first ten photographs that appeared on ten purposefully selected Facebook profiles. This method was selected to help provide a more objective view of how students appear
in their Facebook photographs.

_Ethnographic Methodology_

Ethnography is distinctive for its emphasis on participant observation. It is flexible in generating data, iterative in nature, and focuses on aspects of culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It emphasizes exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon by having the researcher observe it and experience it as a participant in the place it is occurring (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), with the purpose of describing and interpreting the culture of a group (Merriam, 2002). Ethnographic methods allow the researcher to use a small number of cases and to work with unstructured data. They also permit an analysis of data that “involves explicit interpretation(s) of meaning and functions of human actions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 248), and they are ideal “for learning about groups and individuals as they go about their daily lives” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 1).

No simple definition of ethnography exists, though there is agreement that it entails each ethnographer entering the field and getting close to, and participating in, the everyday lives of participants over an extended period of time (Atkinson & Hammerseley, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). There is also agreement that ethnographic methods, the data they produce, and the findings the researcher generates are inseparable (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 11) and that the term “ethnography refers to both the research process and the customary product of the effort- the written ethnographic account” (Conrad, Haworth, & Lattuca, 2001, p. 155). Because data, facts, and findings are “products of the methods used, substance cannot be considered independently of method: what the ethnographer finds out is inherently connected to how she finds it out”
Attempts to separate what from how fail to take into account the subjective, interpretive nature of researching social situations, or to realize that culture is largely a system of signs and texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Several additional reasons make ethnographic methods ideal for this study. The exploratory nature of this study required that its research methods not bind the data collection too tightly (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bounding the data early on would have greatly limited the researcher’s ability to explore matters of interest as they arose. In this way, ethnographic research, like much qualitative research, is inductive. Because ethnography is not as prescriptive as other research methods, it allows for a researcher to collect data in numerous ways and incorporate additional data collection methods after the start of data collection. This is important in the study of CMC because it is still an emergent space for research (Wood & Smith, 2001). Wolcott (1988) observed that ethnographic researchers frequently do not know which methods they will use during the study or even what hypotheses they will use to frame their research questions (Jaeger, 1988,). Wolcott (2001), reaffirmed this statement and also stated “the most noteworthy thing about ethnographic research techniques is their lack of noteworthiness” (p. 158). The freedom of this unstructured methodology can be unsettling for both researcher and reader. Researchers must develop trust in their ability to observe locals, collect data, generate hypotheses, and consider what should be “attended to next” (p. 190). In turn, readers must trust that researchers will provide enough information to make their findings understandable and enough detail about how they conducted the research to make it believable. To address this Lancy (1992) noted that transparency is essential to studies.
employing qualitative methods.

Data Collection Methods

Ethnography and dramaturgy do not prescribe specific data collection methods. It is therefore largely left to the researcher to decide on the most appropriate means to gather data. However, it is critical that the methods used to gather data are theoretically linked to, and underpinned by, a social theory (Holdaway, 2000) and to the researcher’s epistemological stance. This means that data collection methods for this study must be compatible with both symbolic interactionism and with dramaturgy.

Three independent sets of data were gathered for this study, each using a unique data collection method. The three data collection methods were participant observation, photo-elicitation interviews, and photographic content analysis. Each of these methods are compatible with symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy, and make many of the same assumptions about the socially mediated nature of data. The first data collection method was participant observation, a field experience that lasted for approximately eight months. For the first five months I was a participant observer, I was also a residence hall director and was immersed in the daily lives of undergraduate students and their culture.

The second data collection method was photo-elicitation interviews, which were all conducted after my participant observation experience. For these data I conducted 30 photo-elicitation interviews with 28 current SWU students and 2 recent graduates, all of whom had Facebook profiles.

The third data collection method was photograph content analysis, which occurred after all the photo-elicitation interviews were completed. This data collection
method involved applying a set of self-developed codes to 100 photographs. These photographs came from the Facebook profiles of five male and five female SWU students who were not involved in the study in any other way.

Each set of data was collected independently from the other so that I could later triangulate them to help minimize researcher bias and to increase reliability of the findings. Using multiple methods to gather data served an additional purpose, one that only became clear after I corresponded with Catherine Dwyer, Ph.D., a fellow researcher who is also examining the nature of CMC relationships. Catherine wrote:

The extreme nature of some of these profiles is an interesting part of these sites. But it is a hard topic to research -- especially defining the unit of analysis. From who's perspective do you approach it from? From the individual's perception of their profile - or how others perceive someone else's profile? You are looking at someone's subjective impression of someone's subjective version of themselves. It starts to go in a circle after a while (personal email correspondence. (October 29, 2006)

This statement articulates one of the great difficulties of conducting research on impression management in a CMC environment: it is very easy to lose sight of what is being studied. Multiple data collection methods can assist the researcher to remember that Facebook is a space of representation and interpretation. No single data collection method can take these two factors into account, likely resulting in research that is biased towards one of these understandings of the CMC environment.
**Participant Observation**

The most basic means for gathering data from a naturalistic social setting is observation (Mason, 1996). Observations of the “everyday world…guide us in forging paths of action and interpreting the actions and reactions of others…. [it is] at the base of all knowledge and theory” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 377). In its purest form, the researcher does not participate in activities at the setting, but “looks at the scene…through a one-way mirror” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 81). This is a difficult, and in many cases impossible, standard to achieve that can lead to issues of validity and reliability; researchers may observe a situation that they have helped create (Adler & Adler, 1994; Emerson et al., 1995; Merriam, 2002).

Adler and Adler (1994) pointed out that observation can produce great rigor when “combined with other methods” (p. 382) (italics theirs). One such method is participant observation, an offshoot of observation which has the researcher actively engaging in the same everyday activities he/she is hoping to study. In many ways observation has been superseded by participant observation in the writings of many qualitative researchers. Wolcott (2001) stated that participant observation has become so integral to fieldwork methods that it is almost forgotten as an explicit technique.

**Collecting Data in the Field**

Participant observation involves entering the field and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people (Emerson et al., 1995; Merriam, 2002). For this study, entering the field involved becoming a hall director (though I did not do so for the purposes of this study, I did serve as a hall director for my graduate
assistantship) and becoming an active Facebook user. In this way, I was able to immerse myself in the ordinary routines of undergraduate students and was able to more deeply appreciate the social lives of college students “as constituted by ongoing, fluid processes” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 4).

Being in the field as a Facebook participant-observer meant creating a profile and spending some time updating it as a student. While a participant-observer I usually logged on to Facebook several times a day. Occasionally these visits would be very brief, especially if I was expecting someone to send something to my Facebook account. Other times I would spend several hours on Facebook simply wandering around, commenting on people’s walls, downloading ‘widgets’, observing random profiles, or trying to find classmates with whom I had attended high school or college (this is an activity many students report they do). I joined a number of Facebook groups, some of which just had funny names, such as “When I was Your Age Pluto was still a Planet,” and others whose members were interested in Facebook research. I tried to participate in several discussion held on these groups but observed that they were not that active. During this time, I jotted down field notes and retained all of the emails and wall postings that had been sent to me, or that I had sent to others. To this day I continue to log on to Facebook daily and to use it to keep track of friends, former co-workers, and several students. In this way, Facebook is not only a research topic, it has become part of my everyday routine.

Key informants. During my eight month participant observation experience I learned a great deal from the six resident assistants who served as key informants. These were students who I worked with and interacted with daily. Resident assistants occupy a
complex and difficult role on campuses. They are both student and university employee, and are expected to behave as both. This makes resident assistants extremely knowledgeable key informants: they are undergraduate students who also are responsible and trained to monitor other students. As such, I relied heavily on my resident assistants to provide me with their feedback, observations, and interpretations throughout the time I collected data for this study.

*Photo-Elicitation Interviews*

Interviewing enables a researcher to learn about people’s interior experiences, what they perceive and how they interpret their perceptions (Weiss, 1994). Interviewing is an established data collection process, “usually occurring between two people, that is directed by one in order to get information from the other,” (Bogden, 1998, p. 93) and is often used in conjunction with participant observation. Semi-structured interviewing is an approach that has the interviewer ask questions derived from theory and previous data collection, but that also encourages the direction of questioning to follow the responses of the interviewee (Wengraf, 2001). All interviews in my study were conducted between March and August 2007.

Photo elicitation interviewing is a methodology that traces its roots back to the earliest days of anthropological research, though its use has waxed and waned since (Hurworth, 2003). It is based on the idea that using photographic materials during the interview process can increase the participant’s feeling of involvement with the interview and research process, assist them with memory recall and help them provide more nuanced responses, and offer them avenues for helping the researcher create
interpretations for their observations (Hurworth, 2003). The term was first used by Collier (1957) who, while working as part of a research team struggling to categorize living environments, suggested that photographs might serve as more than just illustrations and instead could become part of the research itself. The researchers found that using photographs during the interviews led to more detailed, precise, and more comprehensive responses. Though photo-elicitation generated interest among fellow researchers, very few subsequent studies using it as a methodology have been published (Harper, 2002). Used here, the term ‘photo-elicitation interview’ implies that participants were asked to look at either their own Facebook profile, the profiles of other students, or both and either respond to specific questions about the profiles or simply react to them.

**Participant Selection**

The interviewing data collection step involved recruiting 30 undergraduate students or recent graduates from the SWU to participate in photo-elicitation interviews. This study used convenience and snowball sampling to locate participants for the interviews. The only criterion for potential selection was that participants had a Facebook profile that contained at least 20 photographs. In a convenience sampling strategy, researchers try to talk to anyone available who may be able to offer insight to the study. This sampling strategy is ideal for studies in which it is difficult to define a representative population and also find individuals who are representative of the entire range of experiences within a population (Weiss, 1994). It is a “strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88).
Weiss (1994) observed that friends, family members, acquaintances, and colleagues can be used to begin one’s inquiry, especially if they are open to referring you to other potential participants. As its names implies, a convenience sampling “saves time, money, and effort, but at the expense of information and credibility” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). That is, it is not as methodologically reliable because the sample of participants is less likely to be representative, and they may share similar qualitative or characteristics that bias the data. Studies that rely on convenience sampling must take care not to attempt to generalize their findings beyond the actual population studied. For this study a convenience sampling is justified because: (1) other methods to recruit participants were unsuccessful and (2) the interviews were just one source of data for the study.

A complex sampling method was originally devised to recruit participants who had developed Facebook profiles and who were willing to be interviewed. The process involved sending out 4 batches of 50 invitations via Facebook to randomly selected SWU students who had Facebook accounts. The invitation to participate (see APPENDIX A) indicated who I was, the nature of the study, and how much time was involved. Students interested in participating could view my Facebook profile and even respond to the invitation through it. I hoped that this approach would help assure students that the invitation was for a legitimate research project. A five to ten percent response rate was expected to generate between 10 and 20 photo-elicitation interviews, from which snowball sampling would produce the additional participants. However, none of the 200 students responded to my message or to follow-up attempts.
Somewhat stumped, I asked several student affairs professionals for ideas and suggestions. Several offered to put my invitation on student list-servs to which they had access. Others made announcements to their classes. As I waited for responses, I turned to several students who had worked for me as resident assistants to ask them why they believed I was getting no response. The general comments I received were that: (1) students were already overwhelmed and bombarded with requests, surveys, and polls; (2) students considered their profiles to be ‘private’ and really did not want someone to ‘study’ them: and, (3) students were probably surprised by receiving such a request, especially from an adult. With some hesitation I asked each resident assistant whether they would be a participant in the study. Each agreed and even offered to tell their friends about it. I had stumbled upon a method of opportunistic and snowball sampling.

Opportunistic sampling is purposeful sampling that starts after data collection has already begun and that “captures the developing or emerging nature of qualitative research nicely and can lead to novel ideas and surprising finding” (Creswell, 2008, p. 216). These interviews with resident assistants helped me identify ten more participants to interview. One resident assistant then allowed me to stand in the entrance way to a residence hall and ask students walking by if they would be willing to participate in a study. Of the first 20 students to walk by, 15 agreed. The only effort taken to help approximate a representative sample population was to invite equal numbers of males and female to participate.
The Participant Group

Of the 30 photo-elicitation interview participants, 13 were male and 17 were female. In this group, two students identified themselves as freshmen, eight as sophomores, ten as juniors, eight as seniors, and two as recent graduates. The participants included 23 Caucasians, two Hispanics, two Indian Americans, one African American, one Korean American, and one Mexican. The ages of participants ranged from 17 to 26.

Interview Protocols

Participants were asked to meet for a 60-minute interview in a conference room in an administrative building to which I had access. Meetings were confirmed the day before they were to take place to help ensure participation. Once students agree to participate, a copy of their profile was downloaded and printed onto 8x10 paper using a color copier. At least two pages of their photographs were also printed.

When participants arrived for the interview, I provided an overview of the research project and an IRB approved consent form to read and sign (APPENDIX B). I verbally explained the consent forms and repeatedly reminded participants that they could stop participation at any time, that they could opt not to answer any question if they so chose, and that the interview would be audio recorded. The interview then proceeded using the developed protocols (see APPENDIX C).

Once the interview was completed I asked the participants if they had any questions. Each participant was then given a form asking them to give me permission to reproduce the photographs that appear in their profile for use in my dissertation.
Interview Transcription, Coding, and Analysis

After all the interviews were conducted, half of them were transcribed by me using Dragon Speaking, a commercially available voice recognition software package. The other half were transcribed by a professional transcriber as a time saving measure. The transcriptions were loaded into WEFT QDA, a qualitative software platform. This program allowed me to group together and code the responses to 18 specific interview questions and start looking for patterns in the data (APPENDIX E). I then reread the transcripts for additional patterns and developed an additional 48 codes (APPENDIX F) using an inductive, open coding method process of observing patterns which appeared in the transcribed data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this method, a researcher identifies and develops concepts and analytic insights through close examination of and reflection of the data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Using this process, I read three or four transcripts and looked for apparent themes or patterns, and then developed a code to highlight instances of it in the other transcriptions. The nature of qualitative software permits a researcher to experiment with a variety of codes before committing to a standardize set. For example, I initially developed a code for ‘winter sports’ because students seemed to pay particular attention to several Facebook profiles that had pictures of people snowboarding. However, this code was changed to snowboarding when I realized that students did not seem to pay any attention to down hill skiers, only snowboarders. And snowboarding appeared to have some underlying meanings to these
students. I then went through each interview and applied the ‘snowboarding’ code when appropriate. Also, having found that snowboarding was a topic that appeared in several transcripts led me ask additional questions about the symbolic and cultural meaning associated with the sport.

Content Analysis of Photographs

One of the main assumptions of this study is that a student’s Facebook profile is a dramaturgical construction developed to present its creator to observers. A student’s profile is created and modified in a calculated manner, with the intention of expressing specific images from which they expect observers to form various impressions. As Facebook is a very visual environment it was necessary for me to explore the content of photographs in order to better understand the images student place on their profiles. A visual content analysis was therefore conducted on the first ten photographs appearing in the profiles of five systematically selected male and five female students. These photographs did not include any photographs from the profiles of interview participants. The content analysis was conducted after the photo-elicitation interviews were completed.

Content analysis is a technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material (Neuman, 1997). It is has most often been used with textual materials and frequently involves producing numerical measures of how often certain words or themes occur. Unlike more traditional approaches such as interviewing, observations, and document analysis, which tend to produce written words in the forms of transcripts or observational notes that can be read for content, methodologies that rely
on visual oriented materials have been used less often by researchers (Hodder, 1994). Content analysis is appropriate for exploratory and explanatory research but is most often used in descriptive research (Leavy, 2000).

Understood from an interpretive approach grounded in symbolic interaction, codes attempt to capture a socially negotiated construct. Some of these are readily apparent than others. For example, a photograph of a person being hugged by a group of apparent peers may signify that the person is social and has friends. People who are not social would probably not want to be hugged; they would be less likely to have friends to hug them, nor to post a picture of themselves being hugged by others. Similarly, a person in costume surrounded by others dressed up for some Halloween event implies that the person is social and attends parties, or at least wants to present the impression of being social. In both these cases alternative explanations could be advanced to account for the photograph’s content. However, for the purposes of coding photographs for which there is limited context, the more plausible interpretation is used.

The approach to content analysis developed by Rose (2001) was adopted for this study. She stated that “content analysis is methodologically explicit” (p. 54) and indicates the four steps that researchers need to address: finding images, devising categories for coding, coding the images, and analyzing the results. Rose observed that the numbers generated through this process can be examined using quantitative-based statistics to describe a group or compare groups defined by the researcher. Content analysis can also be used to triangulate data that the researcher has gathered from participant observation and interviews. Triangulation sensitized me to the differences in
the various assumptions, beliefs, and biases that might be brought to the study through each of the research techniques.

Three examples may serve to illustrate the range of codes that were developed through the researcher’s observations and how they fit within the dramaturgical framework. Understood from an impression management perspective, social associations present a method for people to non-verbally communicate information about themselves to an audience; we commonly form impressions of people by observing with whom they associate (Karp, Yoels, Vann, & Karp, 2004; Leary, 1996). Images that have the main character appearing with other people may present the impression of someone who is social. Images containing only the main character draw more attention to the character and may present an image of someone who may be self-centered or independent. Therefore the photographs used in this study were coded for whether the main character appeared alone, with one person, or with several people. The coding of these photographs was a relatively objective process in which the number of individuals present in the photograph was counted.

A second coding example involved analyzing pictures for the presence of alcohol. Alcohol can appear in many forms in these photographs. Beer and alcohol bottles might be in the hands or at the lips of the main character. Bottles may also be prominently displayed in the foreground or background of the photograph. From my participant observation experience I learned that alcohol is frequently present in a photograph even if a bottle labeled alcohol is not present. Instead, students use symbols representing alcohol. As will be explained in Chapter 4, red plastic cups are one example of a symbol.
representing alcohol. Unlike counting the number of people in an image, coding for the presence of alcohol and whether it is central to the photograph is both objective and subjective. Initially, I used my professional experiences to make this determination. As the data collection process progressed, the interviews helped to inform the accuracy of my findings.

Coding could also be subjective in nature. For example, in many photographs students had contorted their faces or other parts of their bodies, arranged their hair in unnatural ways, or smiled while placing their bodies in an apparently uncomfortable position. Other images had the main character intensely focusing on an apparent task such riding a bike or making a presentation in front of an audience. This led to developing codes used to identify the intention of the main character. Unlike the previous codes, this required me make a subjective determination about the impression the photograph is intended to make.

Selection of Photographs for Content Analysis

This data collection method required finding 100 photographs in the profiles of 10 students who were not part of my participant-observation experience or the interviews. The purpose of using a new set of photographs was to prevent the selection of photographs that I may have considered ‘interesting’, but that may have resulted in a biased set of images. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative research samples tend to be selected purposively rather then randomly. I used four criteria to increase the likelihood that the types and amount of data required were sufficient for analysis. The selection process for finding these ten profiles started by generating a
random sample of SWU Facebook profiles using Facebook’s search feature, and then applying four criteria to these profiles until ten were identified that met all requirements. Profiles that did not meet the requirements of all conditions were not included.

Class standing criterion. The first criterion was the year of graduation. Only students who indicated that they planned on graduating in 2009 or 2010 were used. This was because those students who indicated that they would graduate after 2010 were likely to be first year students and living in on-campus housing. The policies of SWU’s Department of Residence Life stated that certain behaviors, whether observed directly or in photographs, may result in disciplinary sanctions. This policy may have curtailed the degree to which these students felt able to freely post pictures of themselves. In addition, those students who indicated that they planned to graduate in 2008 or earlier may be in the initial stages of conducting a search for job or post-graduation internship. Recent publicity about how some employers might look the digital presence of prospective employees may have prevented these soon-to-be graduates from freely posting pictures of themselves.

Photograph criterion. The second criterion was that the students’ Facebook profiles contain 20 or more photographs in which the student appears. The purpose of this criterion was to select profiles which were actively used. An assumption was made that students who did not use their profiles often would have significantly fewer photographs than those who did. For example, a student may have created a profile, placed a few pictures on it, and may have stopped using Facebook after a week. These
types of profiles are not representative of profiles overall. Student with fewer than 20 of these photographs were omitted from the pool and the next profile to appear was selected.

Security criterion. The third criterion was that the profiles not have any of their security features enabled so that anyone who performed a Facebook search for SWU students had full access to the profile. This served to ensure that all aspects of each profile were visible to anyone with an e-mail address issued by SWU. These unsecured profiles were viewable to individuals who were connected to this profile through friendships and group affiliations. The general implication of having an unsecured profile is that it is visible to tens-of-thousands, if not millions of other users of Facebook.

Age criterion. The fourth criterion was that no profile of a minor (a person younger than 18 years of age) was used for this study. Including minors, or the profiles of minors, presented a potential ethical dilemma. For example, what should I do if I observe a 17-year old student engaged in dangerous, illegal and/or unhealthy behavior? The simplest way to assure that this type of situation did not arise was to look at the student’s date of birth, which was frequently posted in their profile. If no date of birth was provided, the profile was omitted from the study.

Creating Content Analysis Codes

Codes used for content analysis must be exhaustive (every aspect of an image that the research is concerned with must be covered), exclusive (codes must not overlap), and enlightening (analytically interesting and coherent) (Rose, 2001). Miles and Huberman (1994) agreed with these criteria, and all acknowledge that creating such a list is a difficult task.
Codes are “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56) and are integral to the analysis process. Codes should reflect a “theorized connection between the image and the broader cultural context in which its meaning is made” (Rose, 2001, p. 50). For this study, codes were selected for their dramaturgical value; that is, they provided information about the impressions students wish to give other students and included non-verbal behavior and physical appearance, social associations, the physical environment and use of props, and other tactics (Leary, 1996) (APPENDIX G). The initial process of developing the codes for the content analysis was primarily inductive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and occurred while wandering around Facebook and observing over a thousand photographs. During this period, I attempted to render “the familiar strange” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p.178). That is, I viewed many photographs and sought a variety of explanations for what I observed while attempting to remain open to the possibility of finding unexpected insights and information (Stage, 1992). Employing this approach enabled me to observe small units of data that were then developed into variables that were coded. Most of the codes have been validated to some extent through extended conversations with key informants, primarily the resident assistants I worked with (Denzin, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Coding the Photographs**

Effective coding is enhanced by theoretical sensitivity often developed from disciplinary or professional knowledge, and the researcher’s personal experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Having some tacit knowledge of undergraduate students (i.e.
snowboarding represent idealized, risk taking behaviors, lots of red cups arranged in a triangle signify a drinking game) allowed me to analyze the photographs more deeply. While most of the codes that I developed could be applied objectively, there are several that required subjective interpretation. In these cases, I applied these codes using my informed opinion.

The process of coding the photographs for this study was as follows. First, a photograph was cut from a profile, stored as digital file, and pasted into a program that allowed the image to be enlarged. The codes were then systematically applied to each photograph. Results were entered into an Excel spread sheet. Each profile had its own workbook, each photograph its own sheet, and each code its own cell. The last cell for each photograph provided room for some commentary and general observations that I made if and when the analysis did not fit into the code categories or further explanation was needed. All of the photographs were viewed on a 21” high-definition computer monitor to ensure a high resolution and level of detail.

Data Analysis, Storage, and Destruction

After the coded data were collected through these steps, I returned to the literature addressing self-presentation and impression management and applied it to help address the basic research question of how students present themselves in their Facebook profiles and what impressions they want others to form of them when observing these profiles.

This study required me to print many Facebook profiles. These have been kept in my possession and will be shredded once my dissertation has been approved. I have also maintained notes written during interviews and while a Facebook participant-observer.
Those notes that contain personally identifiable information will also be shredded. This study has also produced many digital files that include audio recordings of transcriptions, copies of Facebook profiles, and numerous pictures that I have copied from the Facebook website. Once this dissertation has been accepted, all these files will be destroyed.

Limitations

Researchers should acknowledge the limitations and weaknesses of their study (Creswell, 2008). These should be enumerated and often relate to sample size and errors in interpretation or measurement. This study has several limitations that may have affected the results. The first limitation to the content analysis data collection was that the study used a sample of only 100 photographs. This was enough to assist me to realize that some of the assumptions I had of Facebook profiles were inaccurate and help me rethink them. However, multiplying this sample by a factor of ten might allow for future researchers to find more complex patterns in the photographs. In addition, this study only used the first ten photographs to appear on the ten profiles. It is not possible to determine if these were the most recent photographs that students had placed on their profiles, the most important photographs, or just how they happened to be arranged. A research design that looked at all the photographs contained on profiles might reveal a much deeper understanding of the more subtle impressions students want others to form of them.

A second limitation to this study is that the data were collected and analyzed by one person. Though the use of triangulation may assist in limiting the biasing affect of a
single researcher, it might be helpful for future researchers to work in teams and frequently discuss their interpretations and findings.

A third limitation to this study is the degree to which Facebook is changing. For example, the “news feed”, an application which provides users minute-by-minute updates regarding activity on their friends profiles was introduced in September, 2006. This occurred before the interviews were conducted and at least several students indicated that this new development was causing them to reconsider how they used Facebook and what information they would place on their profiles in the future. More recently Facebook has launched a classified ads feature and “widgets”. These additions can be interesting and fun to have on a Facebook page, but they dramatically affect the layout of the Facebook template, and can make it much more difficult for students to quickly scan a Facebook page for the information they use to form impressions.

Students are keenly aware of these changes and often seemed proud of the fact that they joined Facebook before particular features were added. For example, a recent SWU alumnus proclaimed that when she first developed her profile “Facebook was a little different then. You couldn’t really add pictures other than your profile.” It was apparent from her tone that she took pride in being an early Facebook user. It might be analogous to adults stating that when they attended college there was no such thing as the internet or cell phones. Therefore, the data collected from these interviews represent a particular snapshot for participants. It is possible that these changes affect how students now use Facebook or appear in their profiles. Additionally, since the start of data collection, the number of Facebook users has grown tremendously. There are now many
more non-students using the site and developing profiles, including faculty and student affairs professionals

A fourth limitation is that interview participants did not look at Facebook profiles as they naturally appear on a computer screen, ready to be explored, scrolled, and clicked on. The reason for this was practical in nature; it was not possible to show them profiles on a monitor large enough so that both participant and researcher could view them at the same time. However, because this research is primarily interested in initial impressions, it was felt that this method minimized this issue and that the profiles participants viewed were somewhat reasonably similar to their on-line counterparts.

And finally, a limitation to this research is in the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample studied. This was largely due to the sampling methods used but may also be related to several other factors. For example, it is unclear if individuals from all ethnic backgrounds use Facebook or other forms of CMC at the same rate as the majority population. Similarly, family income, sexual orientation, and physical ability may affect Facebook use. As an exploratory study however, the intent of this dissertation was to explore students and Facebook and not particular student populations. Hence, several recommendations in Chapter 5 suggest involving a more representative population.

Ethical Considerations

This study received the approval of SWU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, it was clear from the application process that Facebook and other social networking sites are ‘new territories’ for IRBs. This required that the researcher pay particular attention to ethical issues that arose during the collection of data. Creswell
(2003) and Bogden and Biklen (1998) both provided researchers with a number of ethical issues to consider at the earliest stages of researching and well before data is collected. These considerations are particularly important in research involving human participants.

The interviews conducted for this study raised traditional ethical issues. For this study, all interview participants were given materials explaining the study, the reasons they were invited to participate, a range of ways that they could participate, and several means for opting out. These pages had to be read in my presence (a situation rich in material for Goffman) and I answered any questions that were raised. Each document was than initialed, dated, and signed by participants. At the conclusion of the interview I allowed participants to opportunity to change their response concerning how I might use the text and photographs on their profiles for my study.

The participant observation and content analysis portions of data collection were not as straight forward. Two of the rights that research participants have is to be fully informed of all that participation might entail and to voluntarily consent to be part of the study. Observation of an on-line community and the interactions of its members present an ethical dilemma regarding acquiring informed consent for viewing easily accessed and widely available documents (Wood & Smith, 2001). It is not practical from a research perspective to ask each person who has a Facebook profile whether or not it can be looked at for research purposes, especially early on in the project when hundreds of pages are being casually looked at. Also, as a participant-observer and regular Facebook user, it was not possible to always delineate which role I was in. For example, it was often the case that a student would send a message to my Facebook account concerning an issue in
the residence hall. Or students would invite me, their hall director to be their ‘Facebook
friend’. As I looked at their profile, it was not possible for me to differentiate between
myself as a hall director, researcher, or student. To deal with these matters I decided not
to use any personally identifiable data that I have gathered through my experiences as a
participant observer or from the content analysis of photographs.

Another ethical dilemma concerned the photographs used in the content analysis.
The profiles from which these photographs were selected were all available to the many
thousands of people who have SWU email addresses, and possibly millions of Facebook
users. And the students who created these profiles obviously wanted them to be seen,
though perhaps not as objects for research. To balance the public nature of these profiles
with the rights of participants, the following solution was devised: profiles that did not
have any Facebook security features enabled were considered to exist in the public
domain and therefore informed consent was not required. The data I collected from these
profiles were used only for the content analysis and do appear in any fashion in this
report. No other personal information from these profiles was collected.

A final ethical matter for this study is the use of photographs in the final report.
In the informed consent material, information was provided concerning the various ways
participants could be part of this study. However, even with those students who indicated
that I could reproduce their profile in its entirety, I have an ethical obligation to consider
each photograph on a case-by-case basis. Quotes can be examined for accuracy,
interpretation, and context, and there is always room for deniability. Photographs are
different. When a photograph is reproduced, issues of interpretation and context are
marginalized and the focus is on ‘seeing’ what is in the picture. My solution to this has been to not include any photographic reproductions and rely on descriptive narratives instead.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

-William Shakespeare

Introduction

This study is primarily concerned with understanding the impressions undergraduate college students want others who see their Facebook profile to form of them, and the techniques students use to ensure that the intended impressions are formed. Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical and impression management framework is used to explore these two issues. Goffman’s primary interest was the study of face-to-face interactions and in particular, the flow of symbolic information (through the use of physical objects, facial expressions and hand gestures, and language) that occurs when people are in each other’s presence. These constructs have been usefully applied to many types of non-face-to-face interactions that involve people having to “present” themselves to others. Facebook is a new form of mediated interaction that “presents” students to each other through their profiles, though many of these people are likely to also know one another from face-to-face interactions. The findings presented throughout this chapter are based on three separate forms of data collection: participant-observation experiences, 30 photo-elicitation interviews, and the visual content analysis of 100 photographs selected from the profiles of five male and five female students. The data were
supplemented by the information and insights provided by six resident assistants, who served as key informants.

This chapter is divided into five sections, each addressing a research question and considering it with data collected for the study. The first section details how students use Facebook and the degree that it has become “everyday” to them. Facebook, as well as the rest of the internet, is “entangled in the social arrangements of everyday life” (McGerty, 2003, p. 337). Before examining Facebook profiles within the dramaturgical and impression management framework, it is helpful to first know how students are using Facebook and for what purposes. This is helpful because it provides a social context in which students’ Facebook profiles represent these students to others.

The second section of this chapter explores who students believe they are addressing with their profiles. One of the important contributions Goffman made to the study of social interaction was the acknowledgement of the audience (Smith, 2006). An individual’s self-presentation and impression management strategies are inherently tied to who they believe is observing them (either in person or digitally), as well as who they believe is not observing them. Knowing who students consider to be their audience provides an important context for the types of impressions students want others to form.

The third section explores the general types of impressions that students want visitors to form of them when seeing their Facebook profiles. This section’s findings focus on how students I observed and interviewed want to be seen by their intended audience.
The fourth section presents findings about the actual techniques students use to ensure that the intended impressions are formed. Impression management involves controlling, either consciously or unconsciously, the information other people have about us which they use to base their impressions. The process of forming impressions of someone we first meet occurs very quickly and it is therefore usually in our best interest to make that impression as accessible and as clear as possible (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006). On Facebook, the information and images that students place on their profiles may be the only means by which they have to control the impressions others form of them. This requires students to make the information others use to form impressions easily understood to their audience members.

The final section of this chapter considers how well Goffman’s “information given” and “information given off” explains how students read each other’s Facebook profiles. These terms refer to the two types of information people use when they are forming an impression of someone. “Information given” is those things that a person says about him or her self. For example, Peter, a fictional SWU student, could state on his Facebook profile that he is a member of the football team. On Peter’s profile may appear many pictures of him surrounded by football players and of him holding a football. These are both examples of information that the student is “giving the person seeing his Facebook profile. Evan, another fictional person, looks at Peter’s profile and forms the impression that Peter is a member of the SWU football team. However, as Evan looks more closely he notices that Peter seems much smaller than all the other players he is surrounded by. Evan also notices that in none of the pictures is Peter
actually wearing a SWU uniform. These are both example of information given off.”

Evan must now reconsider his first impression in light of these new pieces of information. The findings in this section concern how students gather both types of information how these processes affect impression management on Facebook.

Section 1: Facebook and the Undergraduate Student

Ask a college student how they are and the likely response will include the word “busy.” As a hall director I observed just how busy many college students are. In addition to attending classes, studying, exercising, and socializing, many of the students who lived in my residence hall worked part-time jobs, had challenging internships, and/or were involved with on campus activities. Many students used daily planners or handheld personal digital assistants (PDAs) to help manage their time. Given their many obligations I was surprised to often walk down the hallways of my building and see so many of them sitting in front of their computers, logged on to Facebook. The first set of findings for this study therefore addresses the first research question: how are college students using Facebook and how has it become part of their “everyday” experience? The section discusses how participants use Facebook and how students do not use Facebook. The data for this section was derived from my participant observation experiences and the 30 photo-elicitation interviews.

How Students Use Facebook

To better understand the prevalence of Facebook use it is helpful to understand how students use Facebook is with their actual usage patterns and how much time students really are spending logged on to Facebook.
A Part of Students’ Daily Routines

Of the 30 students who participated in the photo-elicitation interviews, 80 percent of them stated that they logged on to Facebook more than once a day, with 20 percent of these students logging on more than eight times a day. Sixteen percent of the interviewees logged on less than once a day. Eighty percent of the students in this category still logged on between three and five times a week. In fact, of the 30 students interviewed for this study, the student who logged on the least often still did so once a week.

If the regularity with which students log on to their Facebook is thought of as a continuum, at one end was Betty, a junior who stated that she “checks Facebook, and then ten minutes later checks it again.” Betty reported logging on to Facebook the moment she enters her room and keeps logging back in every ten minutes until she leaves or goes to sleep. She constantly monitored the profiles of people she knows and the profiles of several male students in whom she is interested but has never met in person.

At the other end of the continuum was Paul, an accounting major who logs onto Facebook about once a week, or whenever he receives an email message on his SWU account from Facebook telling him that someone has sent him a message or written on his wall. Betty and Paul reflect two ends of a usage continuum.

Michelle, a sophomore computer science major, is an example of someone who is closer to the center of the continuum. When asked about the number of times a day that she logs on to Facebook, she responded “at least once a day. Usually when I wake up and before I go to bed. And many times in between.” I was curious about what Michelle
meant by” many times in between” and asked her to clarify. She responded, “I don’t know, like, when I am logged into a computer I have to check Facebook.” Richard, a political science major, was also closer to the center of the continuum. When I asked him the same question he stated, “my usual process is I wake up and I'll check my email and I'll check Facebook real quick. Then I'll go to class and then when I come back I'll check my email, check Facebook. I'll probably do that maybe a couple times a night…I always check before I go to bed. It's just like a habit I have. Check my email, then check Facebook.” Michelle and Richard, like many students, have each made logging into Facebook a part of their daily routine. And, like many students that I interviewed and observed, Michelle and Richard have tied this routine to checking their email account.

The fact that many students have made checking their Facebook accounts a part of checking their email is significant because it begins to demonstrate how routine Facebook has become. Today’s college student has been “checking email” now for many years. They have checked it so many times that they are “just doing” (Sandstrom, 2006, p. 108), without needing to think about or manage their activity. In fact, it is not uncommon for college students to have several email accounts that they check regularly. In addition to the email account that SWU issues to them when they accept the university’s offer of admission, students often arrive on campus with email accounts set up with Google, Yahoo, or any number of other web providers. Watching a college student check his or her email can provide an observer with a first hand lesson on multi-tasking: windows are opened, others are minimized, passwords typed and mouse buttons
clicked without thought (Prensky, 2005). It is routine that is just done, with little thinking about what they are doing.

The way many students check their Facebook profiles has become just as routine. Participants reported logging on to Facebook simply to see if they had received a message or if a “Facebook friend” had updated his or her profile. They gave it no more thought than checking their email. As one student phrased it, “if nothing’s happened, like nobody’s updated or anything, I’m out.” In fact, nearly a quarter of the students I interviewed log on to Facebook like this student. Participants were quick to point out however, that the length of time they spent logged on to Facebook depended on whether they were simply checking for messages or updating their own profiles, checking out the profiles of their friends, or wandering around.

One interesting response regarding the amount of time spent logged on to Facebook was given by Mike, who was active in both his fraternity and the university’s official spirit club. When asked how long he stayed logged on to Facebook, he stated”

Constantly, I am always on it…as soon as I wake up I log on [to Facebook] and see what changed over night…it is always open on my web browser. If I am in class it [his Facebook messages] go to my phone as a text message so I can see who is doing what or if anyone messages me or a new post comes up.

Mike said that he is always connected to Facebook, either through his computer or his internet-ready phone. Mike concluded his response by saying that “[there is] just a need to know what is going on.” It was important to Mike that he feel constantly connected to
the various groups to which he belongs and to stay current with the activities of his friends. In this way Mike is less likely to miss out on something happening in his friends’ lives, or be unaware of a fun social event that he could attend. Based on conversations with key informants, it seems that this “need” to know what is going on in the lives of friends is largely based on students’ wanting to feel connected. One of the ways students do this is to log on to Facebook.

From the perspective of undergraduate students, this “need” to know what is going on in the lives of friends in order to feel connected may seem to justify the frequency with which participants logged on to Facebook. However, this explanation may also partially obscure a second explanation for students’ needing to know what is going on. By regularly logging on and observing the changes a student’s friends are making to their profiles, an individual is able to validate two important aspects of their peers. First, they are able to ensure that their friends, especially the ones that they know from regular face-to-face interactions, are performing in an acceptable fashion and, if they are not, offer feedback about their performance. Also, if a friend’s behavior was so embarrassing that they could not easily repair their ‘front’, a person could simply distance themselves from the friend by “un-friending” them.

Logging on to Facebook and observing the changes friends have made to their Facebook profiles may also serve to validate the performances a person makes on their own Facebook profiles. For example, if many of a persons’ friends start to add quotes from a recent movie to their profiles, this may offer feedback to the student about how they are not necessarily performing like the rest of their peers. Similarly, if a student’s
Facebook friends start to provide information on their profiles about their spring-break plans, this may require the student to start to consider his or her plans. If their friends’ plans require spending large sums of money (i.e., a trip to an exotic location) that the students does not have, they must then decide on a course of action that will minimize the possible embarrassment of not being able to join their friends.

Seen from the validation perspective, the value of frequently logging on to Facebook is much more than simply a way to feel connected. It helps ensure that social norms and behaviors are understood by members of a group and are performed appropriately. In this way, group members are constantly validating their performances and the performances of other group members, and limiting their exposure to embarrassment.

*Functional and Social Uses of Facebook*

Students use Facebook’s many features for a variety of overlapping practical purposes and social needs. The main uses of Facebook identified were: (1) sending and receiving messages, (2) tracking, surveillance, and monitoring, (3) alleviating boredom, (4) demonstrating that they are trendy, (5) maintaining existing relationships, and (6) reuniting with friends.

*Sending and Receiving Messages*

All the participants interviewed for this study used Facebook to message with SWU students and students at different institutions. Though students were not asked explicitly why they use Facebook for this purpose, it is clear from my own use and conversations with key informants that Facebook is frequently easier to use than
traditional email. One reason for this is that Facebook provides users with a photograph of each of their friends. To send an email on Facebook simply requires clicking a link on a profile; Facebook eliminates the need for remembering your friends’ email addresses. In addition, when you send a message via Facebook, the receiving party sees a picture of the person who sent it and can easily link to the person’s Facebook profile. This makes receiving a message on Facebook a visual and personalized experience.

**Tracking, Surveillance, and Monitoring**

Every student interviewed for this study used Facebook to track and monitor at least one other student. It is an innate human desire to “like to be in the know” about what other people are doing (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 32), particularly if we interact with them on a regular basis. Facebook provides users with a number of features that make staying informed about other people’s activities relatively easy.

The most popular way for students to keep track of their friends is through the mini-news feed feature. This feature keeps track of all the changes a person’s Facebook friends have made to their profiles. With this feature enabled, each time users log on to their Facebook profile, they are provided information about who has added pictures to their profile, who has sent a message to the wall of another person, and who has either just started or ended a relationship. Sarah, a recent SWU graduate, used this feature to keep track of who her friends are going out with and what they are doing when they go out. She said, “it’s just kind of like a little update on people’s lives…you can just find out so much about what they’ve been doing and who they’re doing, and all that kind of stuff.”
Barbara, another interview participant believed that many students used Facebook to “keep tabs” on the people they are (or have been) in a relationship with. She admitted to looking at her ex-boyfriend’s profile, not because she was interested in him romantically, but just to see how he was doing.

Betty, a sophomore, also kept track of people and enjoyed the voyeurism that Facebook permits. She admitted to keeping track of people with whom she has been involved, partially out of jealousy. Betty also spoke of regularly looking the Facebook profiles of students that she was interested in and monitoring the status of their romantic relationships. By looking at these people’s profiles she was able to see if these people were still dating or whether they were flirting with someone else.

All of my key informants admitted to monitoring and tracking residents on their wing using Facebook. Each had looked at the profile of each student on their wing and explained that they paid particular attention to those students about whom they were worried. For example, one resident assistant told me that he would track of the wall postings of a particular student that did not seem to making friends. The resident assistant made a special effort to interact with this student whenever he saw him in the hallway. Resident assistants also told me of reading profiles to learn when there was going to be a party.

*Peer Group Related Functions of Tracking, Surveillance, and Monitoring*

Goffman (1959) suggested that tracking, surveilling, and monitoring are essential human behaviors necessarily for individuals to learn the about the behaviors and performances required for social acceptance. Facebook would appear to be a very
effective tool for individuals to learn the social norms of a particular group they might want to join, for example a fraternity. Using Facebook for this type of activity is almost certainly occurring, however no study participants mentioned using Facebook in this way. This may be due to participants not wanting to admit that there are social groups that they want to join.

Another aspect of tracking, surveillance, and monitoring that participants did not mention was that they themselves were likely the targets of such activities. Though the thought of being the subject of these activities may make adults uncomfortable, they may have important social functions. The most obvious is that young adults may feel some pride in believing that someone else cares about what they are doing, even if the reasons for tracking is unknown. More importantly, though less obvious, is the possibility that students want to be tracked and monitored by their peers. Being monitored by peers, especially by people with whom the person regularly has face-to-face interactions, may function as a type of social safety net. If the Facebook performance an individual gives changes dramatically, it seems likely that someone monitoring the profile will make an inquiry. For example, if a student’s profile indicates that he is no longer in a relationship, he will likely receive messages of support. Similarly, if a student suddenly stops using Facebook because she is busy with a difficult course or internship, she is likely to receive messages asking her about why she no longer appears to be using Facebook.

In these ways, tracking and monitoring of people by their Facebook profiles helps group members feel supported in difficult times. This also helps ensure that social groups are not losing members whom they want associated with the group.
Alleviating Boredom

Sixty percent of the students interviewed for this study mentioned that one of the primary reasons they logged on to Facebook was because they were bored. This did not seem to match well with my observation about how busy students are, and as I inquired a bit more, it turned out that I was interpreting the word “boredom” differently than these students. To me “boredom” means not having anything to do. For these students however “boredom” refers to not being sufficiently stimulated with the activity in which they are involved. Barnett (2005, 2006) observed that research in boredom has recently started to focus on the perception of the individual and move away from delineating external features that are typically considered “boring.” That appears to be the case with the students I interviewed. Many had school work and jobs that required a lot of attention, but the tasks that these required the student to do were no longer stimulating enough. This seems to be the case with Carol, a sophomore, who stated that she logged into Facebook because “there is nothing else to do on the internet that is productive.” Carol immediately looked sheepishly at me and added, “not that this is productive.”

I initially believed that what Carol meant was that she had grown bored of simply “surfing the internet” and that it no longer stimulated her. At least on Facebook, she could be productive in terms of updating her own profile and looking at her friends’ profiles to learn more about them. However, when Facebook use is understood as a means by which students may learn about social norms and group expectations, spending time surfing Facebook profiles is productive. Spending time on Facebook observing others voyeuristically permits students to learn a great deal about the social norms of the
undergraduate culture without the risk of embarrassing themselves. Because Facebook surfing is anonymous, students can look at the profiles of those in social groups they wish to join and learn a great deal without having to actually admit not knowing the groups’ norms. Carol’s statement that “not that this is productive,” has much greater significance if it is understood in this context. If she had not added it, I could have made the embarrassing assumption that spending time on Facebook was important to her because she was learning from other people’s profiles. This might have suggested that Carol was interested in learning about a social group or “clique” in which she was interested, but to which she did not belong.

*Demonstrating that They Are Trendy*

During my participant observation experience I was not aware of any student living in the residence hall who did not have a Facebook profile. It seemed to have become a socially expected part of being an undergraduate student. In fact 55 percent of the students I interviewed referred to the “trendiness” or “in factor” of Facebook as at least being partially the reason they first joined Facebook and developed a profile. DJ, a junior, stated that he needed “to follow the trend on this one. I didn’t want to be like alone.” The tone in DJ’s voice made Facebook sound like a necessity. This is interesting because Facebook appears to have become an “in” thing without much initial marketing effort. Instead, Facebook has grown virally, predominately by people telling other people. Three of students I interviewed explained that an older brother or sister attending college had given them the “heads up” on Facebook and suggested they join. Also possibly contributing to the aura of Facebook was its tiered release- it was made available to
students at particular schools (the Ivies first) before expanding to other schools. Mike, a junior who grew up on the east coast, and who had many friends attending more selective east coast universities, observed that many friends had it before him. Because of this, although SWU was a “second wave” school, he was already familiar with Facebook and was excited to create a profile. Mike was not upset that he was attending a “second wave” school but he was clearly aware that Facebook reinforced the hierarchical nature of higher education. He was accepting of the fact that many of his friends had Facebook profiles before he did and that he had an account before many other college students.

David, a junior, suggested that Facebook use was one way students demonstrated that they were using the “right” social networking site. He observed that before Facebook was available to SWU students “we were like a Pepsi school as opposed to a Coke school.” Until SWU students had access to Facebook, the school was “branded” as a MySpace school because it was the only major social networking site available. David’s comments suggested a perceived hierarchy of social networking sites. Early access to Facebook demonstrated that a student attended a more prestigious institution—one that the developers of Facebook believed worthy of their technology.

David’s words suggest that he believed SWU students who continue to use MySpace may be using the “wrong” social networking site. Boyd (2007) suggested that preferred use of specific social networking sites may be related to social class. David’s comments do connote an “us” vs. “them” mentality that support Boyd’s observation, though the data collected for this study are too limited to make such a claim. However, David’s “us” vs. “them” mentality does suggest the he identifies closely with a SWU
undergraduate culture that he believes is, or should be, representative of all SWU students. In his mind the affiliations of his peers with the “wrong” social networking site may reflect poorly on the institution’s undergraduate students. Not only are they using a website with less prestige, they are making it appear as though the student body is not unified.

*Maintaining Existing Relationships*

Forty-six percent of interview participants told me that one of the reasons they developed a Facebook profile was to stay connected with friends and to easily communicate with them. About one-quarter of SWU students come from out-of-state, and even many in-state students have hometowns located a considerable distance away from campus. While these students may still have a strong interest in maintaining these friendships, it is not always easy to socialize with their high school friends in person. William, a senior from Wisconsin, thought that Facebook would be “a good way to communicate with people that I don’t see very often, especially from back home.”

Using Facebook to stay connected to these friends makes considerable sense, especially now that Facebook is open to even those people without email address ending with “.edu.” There are over 62 million registered users and it can feel like everyone is on Facebook. If a particular individual is not, students reported being coerced into developing a profile. In fact, nearly a quarter of students stated that peers had applied pressure on them to develop a Facebook profile. Mary, a nursing student who had a fairly typical experience, explained “I wasn’t on Facebook and it was like the new thing that everyone had and I would meet someone and they would ask me if I had Facebook
and I was—I said ‘no, I don’t have Facebook.’ And it would just be like the biggest deal. ‘Like you have to get Facebook. You have to get Facebook’.”

Another reason participants gave for using Facebook to maintain friendships is that whenever students update their profiles, Facebook informs each of their Facebook friends. People who are interested in the update can click on a link and see how their friend’s profile has changed. Students do not need to send individualized messages to each of their Facebook friends telling them about the great weekend they had and emailing dozens of photographs. Instead, students can broadcast this information simultaneously to all their Facebook friends.

Reuniting with Friends

Students reported that they use Facebook to reunite with friends with whom they had lost contact. For example, DJ told me of a “best friend” in elementary school that found him on Facebook and added him as a friend. They had attended different middle and high schools and had not had contact in many years. DJ seemed genuinely glad to reestablished a relationship with this person and was able to “at least talk to somebody I would have never seen ever again under normal circumstances.” Facebook’s design as a social networking program allows users to search for fellow users by high school and graduation year. It also allows users to search through the friend’s of their friends and to see whether you know any of these people, some of who may be “lost friends.”

How Students Not Use Facebook

Early literature on CMC suggested that individuals would use the spaces it helped create to develop new friends and to experiment with identity (McGerty & Lisa-Jane,
This study found that neither of these two activities occurring on Facebook.

**Developing New Friends**

Ten percent of interview participants indicated that they originally developed a Facebook profile because they thought it would be a good way to meet people who have similar interests or academic majors. These students thought that by meeting people on Facebook before they actually matriculated, they would have an existing group of friends when they arrived at SWU. Dwyer (2006) noted in her research into the social networking site MySpace.com that people are often initially excited by the possibility that they will make new friends, but in reality making new friends was the exception. Barbara, a philosophy major, provided some insight as to why this is the case. She met a few people on Facebook before arriving at SWU, “but now that I am established here I don’t feel like that is necessary.”

It seems natural that individuals would want to have membership in an existing peer group prior to arriving at a large institution such as SWU. Participating in such a group might provide valuable insight into the social norms of the institution, or at least offer insight into what others’ believed SWU’s culture might be like. In some ways, this may serve as a means by which incoming students participate in an unofficial social orientation to SWU. The institution does in fact require incoming students to attend an official orientation prior to matriculation. These sessions are primarily intended to provide incoming students with information about the registration process and the overall institution. In an ironic twist, these official orientations may actually serve to make
incoming students more uncertain of how to perform as an undergraduate by making
them more aware of all that they do not know about the undergraduate culture in which
they are about to enter.

Two participants mentioned looking up their future roommates, a practice that has
become popular over the past three years (Chapman, 2007; Farrell, 2006; Read, 2004;
Read & Young, 2006). Only two interview participants were able to provide examples of
intentionally meeting someone in person after first meeting them person on Facebook.
One was Maria, a second year international student from Mexico who met another
international student from Mexico. The other was Betty, a sophomore, who during the
first month she had a profile, “hooked up” with three or four males after briefly
corresponding with them on Facebook.

Experimenting with Identity

The Literature Review chapter of this study noted that computer mediated
communication permits individuals to create and present themselves in ways in which
they want to be perceived and identified (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Turkle, 2004; Vazire
& Gosling, 2004). Early research into CMC focused on how people could craft their
gender, physical attributes, sexual orientation, and social class in digital environments in
ways that were divorced from reality, and that encouraged experimentation (Turkle,
1995). During my participant observation experience I did see student profiles with false
information on them. For example, several students indicated that they were married
when in fact they were not. Also, several students listed their religious beliefs in ways
that were not true. Each interview participant was asked about any experiences they had
with changing the information on their profile to “see what it felt like,” or to “see what type of reaction they might receive.” Each reported that they had not used Facebook to experiment with any aspect of their identity and all were able to provide explanations for the false information they had on their profiles. For example, the students who identified themselves as married explained that this was a way to assure their partners that they were in a committed relationship.

The one possible exception to this lack of experimentation was provided by Michelle, a sophomore and self-proclaimed tom-boy. Nearly all of Michelle’s photographs showed her wearing jeans, shorts, or sweat-pants and without makeup. Her Facebook profile did have a single photo-album containing professionally taken photographs of her posing, wearing a beautiful dress and fully made up. When asked about these pictures, Michelle stated:

I don’t usually wear make-up or anything so it is just another side of me, dressed up and everything. From the [Facebook] comments, people are like ‘WOW’, you don’t look like yourself…I like that…I have low self-esteem…I just want to show people that I can be more than [a tomboy] and you shouldn’t judge me on how I look.

Michelle explained that her mother told her she was ugly and not to leave the house without dressing up. To rebel against her mother Michelle refused to get dressed up or wear make up. With these photographs Michelle may be experimenting with how she appears and how she wants people to perceive her.
Other participants did provide stories about changing their profiles as a joke, or experiences with someone else changing their profile for the same reason. For example Chris, a senior, replaced his main profile photograph with a baby picture because he thought it was funny. A few students mentioned that as a prank, they would change a friends’ profile when the person was not looking. Carter (2004), an ethnographer who spent three years as a participant observer in an on-line community, found much the same and concluded that people in on-line communities do not experiment as much as try to make themselves appear as they believe others want them to appear.

Summary

This section has presented my research findings about how students use Facebook and how it has become part of their everyday experience. While the premise of Facebook is simple, the way college students use it is complex. I have argued that Facebook has become an everyday part of many students’ lives, as ordinary as email. I have also discussed that use Facebook for a variety of purposes, some functional and practical, and some more related to social status. The most important finding presented in this section is that students do not seem to be experimenting with their identity on Facebook.

The findings presented in this section help to place the study’s other findings within a larger context. Facebook is more than just a new technology: it helps students to maintain relationships, rediscover lost friends, and demonstrate to others how “trendy” they are. Students use Facebook to monitor and investigate their friends, and others they have contact with. Instead of performing a Google search, students are going directly to the Facebook profiles and seeing how these people want to be seen. Students are not
using Facebook to make new friends with whom they will have ongoing face-to-face interactions, but instead to maintain and supplement existing social relationships. Students are also not using Facebook as a place to experiment with their identity. Instead, students present themselves in their profiles’ to help ensure that others will form particular impressions.

Section II: Students’ Audiences

Goffman contributed greatly to the study of the effects audiences have on social interaction (Smith, 2006). His dramaturgical framework understood that our performances occur before an active audience which provides immediate feedback on how well we are performing our roles (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1964; Goffman, 1983). Additionally, Goffman observed that we tailor our performances to whom we believe is in our audience. Leary (1996) referred to the members of the audience that we address specifically as “targets”. The second research question of this study explores who college students believe are the audiences for their Facebook profiles?

This section begins with the study’s findings about whom students believe are the “target” audiences for their profiles. It next presents findings about the individuals students do not want to see their profiles, or whom they believe will not see their profiles. The section concludes with findings about the participants’ awareness and use of Facebook’s privacy features. Data for each of these findings came from my participant observation experience and the photo-elicitation interviews.
Target Audiences

Students who develop Facebook profiles are keenly aware, indeed expect, that “others” will look at it. The data collected for this study suggests that students have two intended “target” audiences for their Facebook profiles. The first is their primary audience. This group consists mainly of individuals with whom the students have regular face-to-face interactions and who they intend keep informed of what they are doing. Students expect members of this audience to look at their Facebook profiles. The secondary audience consists mainly of individuals whom the student believes may look at their profiles either because they wanted a particular piece of information, or because they were simply wandering around Facebook. Individuals in this audience might include Facebook friends with whom the student has very limited (if any) face-to-face interactions (i.e. they took a class together, met at a party, or simply have the same last names), friends-of-other-Facebook-friends, and even people who arrived at their page after doing a search for people who liked a particular musical band.

Primary Audience

Ninety percent of the participants interviewed believed that the primary audiences for their Facebook profiles were their “friends”. In nearly all cases, participants defined “friends” as people whom they knew from face-to-face interactions, and were either fellow SWU students or people from high school. These individuals comprised the students’ primary audience. In turn, members of this audience expected that the participant was equally an audience member for their profile.
During my participant observation experience I found that friends were often individuals with whom the student interacted on a regular basis in a face-to-face setting. For example, by watching the postings on students’ Facebook walls, it was possible to see them placing a lot of messages on the profiles of students who lived in close proximity (i.e. a few room down the hall way). Other friends included students who were members of the same fraternity or sorority, students worked out at the gym together, or people who were romantically involved. David, a junior, provided a representative response regarding these individuals in his primary audience:

I would say the primary audience would be fellow students from SWU. Most likely people that know me or that I have met in person…[using Facebook] I can say “hi” to my friends without sending them the text message or making the phone call, or seeing them in person. It’s just another nice medium to keep contact.

However, these were not the types of “friends” that most interview participants discussed. Instead, students focused on those friends that they did not have the opportunity to interact with on a regular basis, usually individuals with whom they attended high school. For example, Dorothy, a junior explained that her primary audience was:

Pretty much my friends…I feel like…I do have people that I don’t talk to regularly [and] that I don’t see regularly that I knew from high school. They’re just like…it’ll be kinda easy to keep in touch and see what’s going on [if I have a Facebook profile]…I don’t
Dorothy’s response illustrates how she maintained relationships with friends, even though these may not be people that she is very close with. To some degree her response indicated that she uses Facebook as a way to meet her social obligations of keeping those people she considers to be in her audience informed.

Paul, a senior, provided a response reflective of many participants’ responses in that it acknowledges who he believes to be the primary audience for his profile. He then added how he believes his friends consider him to be in their audience:

I would say the audience is the people in my network… mainly just my friends. Usually when I have not talked to somebody in a while I will look at their Facebook profile just to see what they've been up to. And I'm sure my friends have done the same thing because I get messages all the time from them asking me about things that they saw.

This is indicative of the reciprocal relationships observed during my participant observation experiences and illustrated by the students’ use of the Facebook wall (one of the few ways that a third party may know if two people are interacting through Facebook). If one student writes on another students’ wall, the student will not often do so again until he/she has received a wall posting from the other person. My key
informants explained that not writing back to someone who has posted on your wall was a social snub and not proper Facebook etiquette.

My resident assistants provided a plausible explanation for the finding that the majority of participants limited their responses about their primary audience to the friends with whom they did not have regular face-to-face interactions. They believed that students do not really think much about the Facebook communications they have with the people they interact with daily. Instead, these Facebook interactions had become the equivalent of using a cell phone. If this is the case, then the daily messaging and updates that students receive on their profiles have already become so “mundane” that students do not actually think about “using” Facebook as a technological tool; certain aspects of Facebook have indeed become just another common way for to students communicate.

One interesting exception to the finding of a primary audience consisting of friends came from Richard, a sophomore. Richard knows that people look at his Facebook profile for many different reasons and see the materials that he has placed on it. However, he considered himself to be the primary audience for at least one part of his profile. He stated that he placed religious quotations on his profile to help keep him focused. I asked him to explain this further and he said:

these quotes up here, I put these up here mostly for my benefit, because I know that I will look at this several times a day. I'll look at these quotes and like in particular these [points to his quotes] like my religious views...I especially like ‘never in good enough shape to quit’. I'm like, that's reminding me that I need to read my
Richard’s observation about “self as audience” is profound in that it was one of the few examples of participants acknowledging themselves as consumers of their own profiles. As a regular Facebook user myself, Richard’s comment made me much more aware of how I look at my own profile. Cooley (1902, as in Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006) described the looking-glass self, a term referring to how people come to see themselves as others see them. Though Richard did not consider how others look at his profile, it would seem that Facebook profiles are an ideal mechanism for experiencing how others see us.

Spending time looking at one’s own Facebook profile may sound vain and smack of narcissism, characteristics that have been attributed to many current undergraduate students (Howe & Strauss, 2000). However, as Cooley and Mead (1934) concluded, efforts made to understand how others experience us are a key component of self-identity and awareness. It seems likely that other students may also look at their Facebook profiles in an effort to learn more about how they are perceived. However, because using Facebook for this purpose may carry negative connotations, it was not mentioned by others.

Secondary Audience

Nearly all interview participants believed that in addition to the primary audience, their Facebook profiles had a secondary audience comprised of individuals who may look
at their profiles. This audience was more difficult for students to define and included friends-of-friends, friends-of-other-Facebook-friends, individuals with whom the student has very limited (if any) face-to-face interactions (i.e., they took a class together, met at a party, or simply have the same last names), or someone looking for a specific piece of information (i.e., their dating status or sexual orientation). This secondary audience also included people that might simply be wandering around Facebook looking at random profiles. Kim, a sophomore, acknowledged having a primary audience and went on to explain who she thought might be in her secondary audience, “my audience, I would say, are my closest friends. And then people who just kind of happen…like people that maybe you don’t know very well but you just met them at school.”

Thirty percent of interview participants believed that they might recognize or meet someone whose profile they had seen on Facebook. Assuming that the experiences of this study’s participants were relatively common, this means that many students believe that they too are recognized merely by their Facebook profile. Helen, a senior stated that “it’s kind of cool to explore [profiles] because people around you are exploring too.” For this reason it was important to participants that people in this secondary audience form a good impression: they might very well meet or be seen by someone who has viewed their profile and already formed an impression of them.

Only one participant indicated that this secondary audience might not be composed strictly of other individuals. Chris, a senior, stated that he knew “for a fact that law schools look at Facebook profiles when making decisions,” because an advisor had told him. The fact that only one participant mentioned groups, other than those composed
of friends, as possibly being in their Facebook audience was surprising. No students discussed the possibility that members of law enforcement or a governmental agency might be occasionally become members of their audience. In addition, participants did not discuss how socially oriented groups might use Facebook profiles to “vet” perspective members. For example, it is not unreasonable to believe that members of social Greek organizations, academic honors societies, or athletic teams look at the Facebook profiles of prospective members before deciding whether or not to offer the person membership. In this way, the very public nature of Facebook may serve to help keep real-life communities closed from individuals considered unwelcomed.

Realizations about the Secondary Audience

Defining who was represented in the second audience was not only more difficult for students, it seemed to make many of them uncomfortable. Students were aware that they did not, and would not, know many of the people who made up this audience. However, they seemed not to have thought about it until responding to this question. Mike, one of the most self-assured students I interviewed, started his response to the question of audience with, “my close friends.” He took a second to pause after identifying his primary audience, shrugged his shoulders, and added, “people that I just meet. Or people that have just added me. Or that heard my name from somewhere.” Mike appeared embarrassed that this secondary audience included people that had “just heard his name from somewhere.” DJ gave a similar response when he started considering the “other,” secondary audience and stated that it “could range from people who are actually friends to people who are associates, to classmates, to people I don’t even like very much I
guess.” As DJ finished his sentence, realizing that his Facebook friends included people he did not like, he raised his eyebrows and chuckled lightly. Mary, a senior, said, “I guess I have 400 Facebook friends at the SWU but honestly some of them are people I have met once or twice. Or never!” All three students started their responses believing that they were comfortable with who might be in this secondary audience. As they began to realize that this secondary audience of Facebook friends could include just about anyone, even people they did not like, each student appeared for the first time to comprehend just how many people could really see their profiles.

The finding that many participants had Facebook friends who they did not know, and some of whom that they did not like, suggests that many Facebook users do not employ a very robust strategy for adding new friends. Instead, it seems likely that many Facebook users will add a person as a friend simply because the person asked. This approach makes sense if users use the number of friends a person has to form impressions of others. This approach to adding friends may also be tied to the networking function of Facebook: adding someone as a friend enables a user to see with whom that person is friends and those individuals who are “friends in common.” In this sense adding people, even those who the users does not like, may serve to make a Facebook users appear more sociable and well connected. However, taking this approach to adding Facebook friends may results in Facebook users having to make decisions about the types of information they place on their profiles.
About 50 percent of the interview participants stated that they did not care who saw their profiles because, from their perspectives, they had not put anything “incriminating” or “compromising” on their profiles. A few participants in this group also mentioned that because they could not control what impressions a person might form of them, they did not care who saw their profile. For example, Edward, a sophomore, did not feel “like I have anything to hide on [Facebook].” His primary photograph pictured himself apparently passed-out at a bar, slumped over a beer tap. When I asked whether he would care if someone he did not know saw his profile and this image, Edward explained that he did not care because he had not been drinking that day but in fact had just been very tired, and that he “could not control the assumptions other people might make.”

The word “incriminating” was used by participants often when they were referring to photographs, particularly those in which alcohol appeared, that they had place on their profiles. When asked what this word meant, David stated that it referred to things that can get you in trouble, “going against the rules, kind of violating like different pc [political correctness] stuff.” He also explained that incriminating images are ones that do not leave much room for interpretation. To provide an example he pointed to the list of activities that he had written on his profile. The first one was “drinking.” With a smirk David said, “it’s not like I’m specifying what I’m drinking. I could enjoy a nice glass of milk everyday and that’s what I consider drinking…if you want get into semantics…which can be fun at times.”
Susan, a junior, responded that she did care who sees her profile and then wavered, “I don't know, because there's not really anything on there that makes me seem, [pause] I know there are some silly pictures on there, but there's nothing on there that is really incriminating or anything. I don't think that there is anything that is totally and completely embarrassing.” Susan appeared to try and convince herself that because she had not placed anything “incriminating” in her profile that maybe she did not need to care.

Forty percent of the participants stated that they did not care that potential employers might look at their profiles. Helen, a senior said, “there is nothing on there that I am ashamed of. I do that deliberately…so, it doesn’t matter if someone [referring to an employer] who doesn’t know me happens to see it. It’s not the end of the world. They usually are not going to care.”

The finding that so many participants stated that they did not care who saw their profiles is suspect. From my experiences as participant observer, and conversations with key informants, I found that “not caring who sees your profile” depended on the reference groups used. Maria, a sophomore, stated that she did not care who saw her profile because she would not put anything “incriminating.” She followed up this remark by quietly adding, “well, they are not as bad as some.” This last remark captured a sentiment that I experienced often as a hall director. Maria understood the concept of “incriminating” to be relative. That is, as long as the materials she placed on her profile were less “incriminating” than the materials other student had on their profiles, she did not have anything to worry about. She operated under the assumption that professors,
hall directors, and future employers would have the same definition and relative standards that she had. Helen’s response is similar to Maria’s in that she believed the nature of the material that she placed on her profile would be interpreted relative to other profiles. Because she was not ashamed of the material on her Facebook profile she assumed that it would be fine if anyone else, including possible employers, saw it.

A possible explanation for why many students said that they do not care who sees the materials they place on Facebook is that their efforts to appear ‘cool’ were part of a front performed during the interviews. Interviewing is a dramaturgical process that requires both participants and interviews to perform particular roles and adopt specific fronts (Berg, 2001; Warren, 2003). It seems likely that during their interviews with me, participants would adopt a front of confidence as I was approaching and treating them as if they were each experts on Facebook. Once in the position of serving as an expert, it is not likely that participants would admit to placing materials on Facebook of which they were ashamed.

Unintended Viewers: Caring Who Sees their Profiles

Twenty percent of participants stated that they did care who saw their Facebook profiles. Of these, most mentioned that they would care if future employers or relatives saw their profiles. This was largely due to the participants’ belief that employers would be less likely to hire them and that relatives would misinterpret the material on their profiles or take them out of context. When asked if he cared who saw his profile, Robert, a sophomore responded:
Not really, no. Unless it was a future employer or something like
that. But my friends –[long pause]- I wouldn’t really want my
parents looking at it but, [pause] so I guess I do kind of care that,
you know, as long as it’s friends and people my age I don’t really
care. But family, future employers—those would be the ones that
I’d be a little worried about.

Robert’s answer is similar to those given when participants began to verbalize who might
actually be in this second audience. He was not concerned about people his own age
looking at his profile, or the impressions they might form. Once he started to
comprehend that this larger audience might include family members or employers,
however, he got worried because he believed that these people may form negative
impressions of him.

Similarly, Richard was worried what his mother would think if she saw his
Facebook profile:

I'm sure she'd probably get worried about it and be like 'oh, you're
drinking too much'. Which I don't think any of my pictures are
actually of me drunk, sorta drunk, but it is not like I actually like
drink that much, so it's nothing bad that I have to worry about…but
I am her little boy.

Richard had never considered the impressions his mother might form of him if she were
to see his Facebook profile. He claimed that he was not intoxicated in the photographs
that appeared on his profile but had made the decision to place them on Facebook.
Richard was aware that people will form a very specific type of impression of him based on these images but he realized that this impression will mean different things to various audiences. After Richard gave this answer, he appeared to contemplate whether she could actually get access to it and wondered if she would actually try to do so.

Jennifer, a junior, actually started to panic slightly when I asked her if she cared who saw her Facebook profile. Jennifer’s profile did not have any “incriminating” photographs of her drinking alcohol. When I asked her about this she said, “I don’t want to make it look like I am some crazy college kid who drinks every night. Because I don’t.” Jennifer was aware that people would form impressions of her based on her profile and she made an effort to make sure that it was not that of a partier. Jennifer turned the page to the next photograph. In it she was wearing a scooped necked, short sleeve, above the knee summer dress similar to the type that many SWU students wear. She paused for a moment and explained that her uncle was very conservative and religious. “It would be weird if they [her cousins] showed...my aunt and uncle my profile and they are like, ‘oh, look, Jennifer wears spaghetti straps.” Unlike Richard, Jennifer considered the meanings of certain impressions but also the impressions themselves.

The reactions many participants had to questions about a wide range of people looking at their profiles suggests that very few students had reflected on who might be able to see the materials they have on their profiles, or how these materials might be interpreted. Instead, it appeared that many participants had added information and photographs to their profiles thinking only about the people they wanted to see it. Facebook provides users robust security features and, as the next section shows, college
students are aware that they exist. However study participants, and the students I interacted with during my participant observation, appear to primarily consider those audience members that they believe will look at their profiles and not the many others who will have access to it.

Privacy

Privacy on Facebook has become an important topic at many institutions as they learn to cope with some of the complexities created by social networking sites. David observed, “you’re a fool to join these things and then think anything is private. Because you wouldn’t have joined it to begin with if you didn’t want people to know these things about you...people need to take personal accountability for their profiles.” This type of thinking indicates that David thought about his privacy and consciously decided to still develop a profile. This was not the case with most participants. While every student I interviewed was aware that Facebook offers privacy settings, only about 20 percent of those interviewed believed that they had them set to their highest levels. Boyd (2007) observed that although the terms public and private can either be seen as binaries or as poles at the opposite ends of a continuum, both are too simplistic and ill-suited to handle the complexities of privacy on Facebook. This seems to be case with many of the students I met during my participant-observation and interviews.

There are several issues that make maintaining privacy difficult for students. The most significant seemed to be that many of the students I interviewed believed that they were using their Facebook privacy settings when in fact they were not, or at least they were not using them the way they thought they were. Some students were certain that
only specific Facebook friends could see their profile when in actuality their settings only prevented non-Facebook friends from seeing a particular piece of information on their profile. For example, Chris, stated emphatically that his privacy settings were “as strict as you can make them.” He was surprised when I showed him the printed copy of his profile that I made the previous day. He explained that he must have changed his settings so that members of a club he was involved with could find him. Chris then spent a moment thinking aloud how this could have happened. Linda provided another example of how students can believe that they are using Facebook’s privacy features only to lose track of what they thought was private. Linda thought that she had limited who could see particular pictures that she had put on her profile. As I showed her copies of the photographs I had made, she realized that she had originally limited access to all of the pictures and had later decided that she wanted everyone to be able to see some of these pictures.

These were not necessarily instances of students being lackadaisical about their Facebook privacy settings. Instead, these were students who believed that they were using Facebook privacy settings correctly but whose notions and needs for privacy changed so frequently that it was difficult for them to keep track of what they wanted people to be able to see. In addition, the composition of the groups that students wanted to keep from seeing specific material also seemed fluid.

Another finding concerning privacy was identified by comparing two interview responses. DJ, a junior, did not have any of Facebook’s privacy features turned on. He was comfortable knowing that only people with an SWU email account and Facebook
profile could see his profile. Though not asked directly who he thought this might include, I suspect that he was only thinking about people who were currently at SWU.

Jennifer, also a junior, raised an interesting point DJ had not considered. She claimed to be indifferent to anyone seeing her profile. But a second later she questioned whether people who had graduated from SWU several years ago (“like someone who went here 30 years ago) and had kept their SWU email account would be able to see her profile.

Jennifer had suddenly realized that the number of individuals with SWU email accounts could be much larger than she initially considered. She appeared embarrassed and stated that she would immediately start using Facebook’s security features. Jennifer had come to her realization without me providing any her any new information. Instead, it was apparent that Jennifer had simply not given much thought to her privacy. This suggests that simply providing students with information about on-line privacy may not result in them using Facebook’s security features. Instead, students may need to be made aware of how many people can actually see their profiles and how they might use the information they observe.

Summary

This section of the chapter has presenting findings about who students believe is the audience for their Facebook profiles, about who sees their profiles, and about the issue of privacy. It is clear that students believe that their Facebook profiles are addressing multiple audiences. First and foremost, participants identified friends from face-to-face interactions as their primary target audience. These are the people that they use Facebook to communicate with and keep informed about what they are doing.
Participants are also aware that a wider, secondary target audience is likely to view their profiles but are less clear on who is in this audience. Many participants believe that is it simply other SWU students. Others were aware that some of the people who might look at their profiles were not SWU students. Most of these students considered this secondary audience to be innocuous until they actually gave it some thought and then seemed to think otherwise.

Taken together, these two target audiences define whom students believe are looking at their profiles. Students must therefore consider these two audiences when tailoring their profiles to make sure that members of each audience develop the desired impressions. Largely absent in these anticipated audiences, and therefore apparently not considered when deciding what information to place on their profiles are parents, professors, college administrators, and most other adults. Many students have not even considered that adults and people in positions of authority might be interested in looking at their profiles. Even though students are aware that they have the ability to limit who has access to their profiles, in most cases they do not use the security features Facebook provides to do so.

Knowing who students believe will be looking at their profiles provides an important context to understanding the material that students place on their profiles. For the most part, they think that it will be their peers who see their profiles. This is understandable as many students assume that only other college students will have “.edu” email addresses. Participants were not very concerned with the other college students looking at their profiles as they believed that these people would understand the
impressions they were trying to make. However, as the data for this study shows, many college students have not considered who else might be in their audience. As Facebook membership has grown, so to have the number of profiles of non-college students. Many participants were aware that the audience for their profiles included people that they did not know yet they had not given this much thought.

One consideration participants had about the materials they placed on their profiles related to their understanding of what might be “incriminating.” Participant’s responses suggest that they were primarily concerned with whether college officials, and to a lesser extent other adults and employers, would observe them participating in activities or behaviors for which they might be disciplined. This finding indicates that participants were most concerned about the possible short-term consequences for placing materials on their profiles.

The situation in which many undergraduate Facebook users find themselves is therefore somewhat complex: they must consider and balance the different impressions that members of their primary audience and college administrators may form based on the material they place on their profile. Undergraduate college students have always had to balance the needs and expectations of these two audiences when they consider their behaviors. They want to make good impressions with their peers while not getting in trouble for engaging in inappropriate activities. However, the use of Facebook adds at least two new dimensions to their considerations. The first dimension involves the timeframe for being observed doing something “incriminating” being greatly expanded. Students no longer need to be caught in-the-act of engaging in an inappropriate behavior
if they willing place incriminating images of themselves on their profiles. This appeared to be a consideration to which participants were aware. The second dimension relates to the possible long term implications for placing incriminating information on their Facebook profiles. The materials that all Facebook users place on their profiles will never be completely deleted from their servers. Decades from now the information and images that have long been deleted from Facebook profiles will still be accessible to those who have access to Facebook’s servers. This dimension does not seem to be something that many participants have considered.

Section III: Forming Impressions and Fronts

Our perceptions of others is not one of wholly unique individuals, but of patterns of social categories….our first impressions, based on brief observation, determine the basic social categories in which we place the new acquaintance. It can take significant evidence to change this initial categorization. (Smith & Kollock, 1999, p. 49)

Because the impressions we make (or, more accurately, think we make) affect our self-esteem and emotions, we are often motivated to impression-manage even when no direct implications of those impressions exist. (Leary, 1996, p. 43)

Introduction

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical and impression management framework assumed that individuals are purposeful agents, aware of themselves and how they want to be to seen by others. Social interaction requires individuals to perform in front of an audience, and to provide that audience with the symbolic information required to have them form an impression. Some characteristics—such as honesty, competence, and loyalty—are so widely valued that we usually assume others will respond more positively if we convey there kind of images, other characteristics are valued only by certain audiences and must be purposefully tailored (Leary, 1996, p. 92).
Goffman labeled the part of the performance that audience members see as the “front.” Fronts tend to be standardized and idealized so that performances are easily understandable to audience members. This section explores **the fronts that regularly appear in Facebook profiles.** It begins with findings about the number of participants who stated that they formed impressions of other students, or who believed that other students formed impressions of them, based on the Facebook profiles. The section then presents findings about the fronts that students commonly used in their profiles such as (1) partier, (2) social, (3) adventurous/risk-taker, (3) humorous/funny/silly,(4) part of larger community, and (5) random/unique. Photographic examples are provided for illustrative purposes. In some cases, faces have been obscured or images have been pixilated to mask the identity of individuals.

This section ends with findings about student awareness of these performances. Data for this section was collected using participant observation and photo-elicitation interviews. Key informants provided guidance and personal observations that were critical to developing these findings.

**Forming Impressions**

Eighty-three percent of participants stated that they form impressions of other people when looking at their Facebook profiles. These participants formed their initial impressions within seconds of seeing a profile for the first time. Nearly all participants emphasized that their initial impressions were formed largely on the pictures students placed on their profiles and the personal information profiles provided. Only 17 percent of participants indicated that they do not, or at least try not to, form impressions of people
based on their profiles because they did not have information about the context in which the student wanted their profile to be seen. For example, several students observed that much of the material on Facebook was intended to be funny, or was an inside joke among members of the student’s primary audience. Because these students believed that these types of materials were easily misunderstood and might lead them to form incorrect impressions, they attempted not to form any impressions of the person.

Eighty-six percent of participants indicated that they are aware that people form impressions of them from their Facebook profiles. The other 14 percent expressed uncertainty about whether other students formed impressions of them based on their profiles. This latter category included two students who had not considered the possibility that other students might form impressions of them. This suggests that students are aware that their profiles have the ability to give impressions, that these impressions are formed quickly, and that they need to provide audience members the information they are looking for by providing information that is assessable and easily understood.

Fronts

Goffman defined fronts as "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). Fronts convey information to audience members about how a person wants to be seen, and the impressions they want formed of them. Fronts tend to become standardized so that audience members are easily able to understand them.
The number of fronts that an individual may use when interacting with an audience is nearly unlimited. For example, one participant mentioned that a male was trying to “look like a good boyfriend.” Another participant observed that a student’s profile made her “seem nice.” In fact, during data collection for this study, participants attributed many fronts to individual profiles. However, only six fronts established themselves as nearly universal: (1) partier, (2) social, (3) adventurous/risk-taker, (4) humorous/funny/silly, (5) part of larger community, and (6) random/unique. These six were mentioned by all 30 participants in their descriptions of how most students wanted to appear in their profiles.

**Partier**

A front that was mentioned during each interview, and which became very familiar to me during my participant observation experience, was the “partier.” Key informants defined the term partier as referring to someone who frequently attends parties and regularly drinks enough alcohol to become intoxicated. The term also has connotations that the person loses some degree of self control and rational decision making when drunk. Every participant interviewed for this study mentioned that there were many “partier” related images on Facebook, and noted specific photographs on Facebook profiles they believed gave the impression that the student was a partier.

Examples of the partier front are provided in Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Figures 1 and 2 show students doing a “keg stand,” an act that involves drinking directly from a keg while being held inverted above it. Participants are expected to drink for a predetermined amount of time, usually between 15 and 30 seconds. Figure 3 gives the
impression that someone is a partier even though that person does not appear in the
image. An example of a beer bong, which holds between three and five cans of beer, is
provided in Figure 5. Figure 6 is an example of photograph providing evidence that
someone is a partier.

Dorothy, a junior, observed, “it’s college. We’re supposed to party. It’s college
students, it’s what we do. ‘Cause, you know, you put up pictures of what you do and if
you party, you’ve got pictures of it, put ‘em up…tons of pictures.” Barbara, a junior,
echoed Dorothy’s belief:

I think definitely at SWU everyone wants to have this party school
reputation…most of the students would want to portray that image just to
tell everyone else, ‘yeah it’s right and I am getting in on the action’.

Dorothy’s and Barbara’s quotes highlight the very powerful and pervasive belief
many study participants had about the college experience. College is not simply a place
where students drink; it is a place where students are supposed to drink. This appeared to
be closely connected to the two reasons that each participant pointed out these party
images. First, participants believed that SWU’s culture required undergraduates to have
“partying” pictures on their Facebook profiles. If they did not have them, the student ran
the risk of giving the impression that they were not good undergraduates. That is, they
were not participating in the activities that others believed were part of being an
undergraduate student. Second, it also seemed important to them that I was aware that
they understood the symbolic meanings in these images. In this way, participants let it be
known that even if they were not partiers, they were at least conscious of the partier front.
a part. This observation is significant because none of the students interviewed for this study identified themselves to me as partiers, even though most had images of them “partying” on their profiles.

Richard, a junior, provided some insight into this apparent contradiction when he identified two categories: “average partiers” and “real partiers.” When asked how he reconciled the many images of him consuming alcohol on his profile with his statement that he was not a partier, Richard stated that he was really an “average partier.” “By average I mean a guy who goes out and parties on the weekend and drinks a little. I would say I'd probably fit into that [category]…but other people, if they don't have a hard Friday, they'll party on Thursday, sometimes Wednesday.” Key informants affirmed this distinction. “Real partiers” engaged in this type of behavior throughout the week. Paul, a senior, stated while looking at several profiles that had numerous party pictures:

I mean most people who have pictures like that… it looks like they are just drinking to get drunk. They are just drinking to see who can drink the most. They think it's cool. They are just drinking to accomplish a goal. So the other people see it and think that these to be good people to party with. He pointed to a series of photographs in which a student sat in front of a row of shot glasses, each picture showing another empty shot glass. Paul shook his head and said:

I mean, that is the goal. To drink and not remember anything. And seeing some girls do something like that... I would think that they are just drinking the night away and hoping that something good comes out of it.
Susan, a junior, summed up the “real partier” impression many students are trying to cultivate:

People put down things that are extreme, I don't know how to explain it. It doesn't have to be anything exact. I don't know, things that just seem like they make you cool. Like things that make you seem like you party, party, party. Things that would make you seem cool to people in our generation.

Evident in these quotes is that a great deal of social pressure exists for students to present themselves engaging in behaviors that are valued in the undergraduate culture. This type of social pressure is not new. However, as Susan observed in the above quote, engaging in extreme behavior due to social pressures is no longer enough in the digital age. Facebook appears to have modified the meme that college students are “supposed to drink” to now require that they also document their behaviors in order to make themselves seem cool. While this may appear to be a minor modification it does suggest that Facebook makes it more difficult for college students to simply act cool. Simply describing one’s own partying behaviors with stories that can be easily modified no longer seems sufficient. Instead, social pressures now demand that undergraduates who wish to cultivate the partier image have photographic evidence in order to present themselves as partiers.

The power of the “partier” impression extended even to those students who did not identify themselves as partiers and who did not have any of these types of images on their profiles. For example, when asked what impressions someone might form from looking at her profiles responded, Kim stated “that I am not a huge partier because I don’t
have pictures of myself drinking or party type things on my profile.” Instead of
providing an example of an impression that students would form of her based on the
actual material she had placed her profile, she believed that the impressions other
students would form would be based on the absence of any party pictures. This represents
the power the “partier” front has on SWU students.

It is likely that some study participants were hesitant about identifying themselves
to me as partiers. While it was evident that the partier front was a key element of many
profiles, it seems clear that students do not wish to give this impression to an adult. The
partier front creates complex situations for undergraduate students. The partier front is
one that many social norming campaigns have attempted to address. Part of the reason
that it has become so pervasive is likely due to the degree to which it has become
idealized in the undergraduate culture. Adding to its power is that many student sub-
groups have made the partier front an integral component of group membership.
Students feel great pressure to give performances as partiers so that they are accepted as
good SWU undergraduates and into the various sub-groups that to which they want to
belong.

Social

A second front used by 97 percent of SWU students in their Facebook profiles
was social. This front required that students demonstrate to audience members that they
had friends and enjoyed spending time with them. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate how
Facebook users demonstrate that they can be social in both smaller and larger groups.
The importance of the social front was evidenced by each interview participant
mentioning how social (or not social) a student appeared in their profile. Students have several ways to enact the social front. The first is to have many Facebook friends listed on their profiles. This was an important piece of information that participants looked for when seeing a profile. While the number of Facebook friends a person had did not necessarily mean that the person was social, it did give an indication about whether the person was socially active. As Ken, a sophomore observed “just because someone is a [Facebook] friend doesn't mean that you're actually in social contact with them.”

A second way students can enact the social front on Facebook profiles was to include many photographs in which students appeared with one or more other people. If a Facebook profile had many pictures which showed the student with other people, participants often commented on how social the person was. Participants noted that these were the people that they would most likely want to meet in person. Used in this way, friends demonstrated group affiliation and served to represent a person’s social capital. Appearing in a photograph with others is a powerful way to illustrate social capital, even if it does not really exist, because it is not easy for viewers to determine the actual relationship between the individuals pictured.

A third way that students could enact the social front was to have many postings on their Facebook wall. Having many messages on the wall indicated to participants that the person really valued their relationships and made an effort to maintain them. Key informants explained that because students will rarely post more than one message to a wall if they do not receive a wall posting themselves from the person, it was easy to determine if the people posting wall comments actually had an ongoing social
relationship or if it was a one-time posting (which participants associated with not being social).

Sociability is an especially important aspect of peer groups and social norming. Social interactions, as a signifier of sociability, represent an important opportunity for the exchange of symbolic information. As Astin (1993) noted, “interaction” (p. 403) is a key signifier for affiliation and belonging. Social interaction affirms membership in a group and provides a mechanism for sharing and negotiating the group’s norms. In addition, social interaction helps to make public which groups a person identifies with. In this way, the social front provides audience members with information that they can use to make assumptions about person.

Adventurous/Risk-Taker

Participants observed that many SWU student profiles had photographs that they believed showed them as adventurous and risk-takers. Leary (1996) noted that because being daring and adventuresome is admired by some audiences, particularly those composed of young men, risk-taking behaviors are sometimes motivated by self-presentation. This can result in people doing things just to prove they possess such attributes. In fact, over 80 percent of the participants stated that either they, or a friend, had done something just so they could capture an image to place on Facebook.

When shown profiles during the interviews, participants generally spent more time looking at those profiles that contained images of people doing something adventurous or taking risks. In addition to making for interesting images, participants seemed genuinely interested in the photographs involving adventure or risk-taking, and
the people appearing in these photographs. For example, one of the profiles shown to
many participants was of Ann, a SWU student who boxed competitively (Figure 8).
Ann’s interest in boxing is made clear throughout her profile through direct statements,
references in her activities, interests, and quotes, and particularly the pictures she has of
herself either in the act of boxing or in boxing regalia. While some participants believed
that Ann’s adventure/risk-taking front was a cry for attention, most were impressed with
her hobby and spent time examining her pictures in great detail. As one participant
stated, “she is just confident.”

Another example of adventure/risk-taking that caught the attention of most
participants was snowboarding (Figure 9). One profile that showed snowboarding in
many of its photographs caught the attention of every participant to whom it was shown.
Participants looking at the images made statements such as, “he is adventurous,”
“snowboarding, that’s cool,” “Holy COW, he is into fun activities,” “he is hardcore,
[that] is something that I personally would like to do, [it is] fun, exciting, kind of
extreme.” Carol, a sophomore stated, “I just think that it’s cool and it’s something that I
have always wanted to do actually. So he gets a few points for being cute. If I saw him at
a party I might let him know my name.”

The attempt to create an adventurous/risk-taking front can lead to risky
behaviors. For example, Edward, a sophomore, talked about jumping off a cliff into a
river, something that he would not have normally done but thought would be cool on his
Facebook profile. Mike, a freshman, told of a friend who repelled down the front of a
residence hall just to get his picture taken next to the large sign on the building.
The adventurous or risk-taking behaviors that appear on Facebook profiles can actually place students in dangerous situations. However, nearly all the examples of risk taking that appeared on student profiles were of socially acceptable and envied behaviors. For example, while snowboarding and downhill skiing are equally dangerous and there are no taboos about either, snowboarding is currently trendier. And while more people still ski than snowboard, very few Facebook profiles showed people actually skiing. In this way the types of activities that were associated with risk-taking behaviors seemed calculated and measured with some unconsciously normed risk/reward formula. This suggests that snowboarding is at least partially motivated by what individuals believe to be “cool” and socially envied.

*Humor, Funny, Silly*

Humor played a significant role in most Facebook profiles and participants noted when a profile made the student look humorous, funny, or silly. Several participants actually stated that they expected to see humor in every profile they looked at. The humor front showed participants that the person was enjoyable to spend time with and that his or her friends probably really like the person. Participants observed that humor can appear on Facebook profiles in many forms, in both the text and the images. For example, Figure 10 is a photograph of a student being silly and pretending to eat a fish. Participants also mentioned that they enjoyed looking at the many silly faces (Figure 11), nonsensical quotations, and movie references that students put on their profiles.

The humor front served a secondary function for Facebook profiles. In addition to showing that a person was funny, humor was also used to demonstrate that a student
was aware of current cultural references. Students often used quotations from movies to indicate that they had seen the movie and found a particular line funny. Participants believed that they could tell a lot about a person by the types of things he or she found funny.

**Inside Jokes**

In addition to expecting Facebook profiles to contain humor, nearly all study participants believed that each profile also contained “inside jokes.” Forty percent of the interview participants stated that some of the material they put on their profiles were inside jokes, meant to be understood only by specific members of their primary audience. Some “inside jokes” could still be funny to anyone who saw them (a student interviewed for this study created a group called *Aberrant Nurses of SWU*) but much of it would mean little to someone not “in” on the joke. For example, a student had added “ED nerf football, watch the melons” to her list of interests. When asked to explain what this statement meant, she stated that she and a friend had drunk several energy drinks and went to a grocery store. Her friend had brought a nerf football which they tossed back and forth until he backed into a pile of melons and knocked a few on to the floor. The only other person that this statement made sense to was her friend. Many people who saw this statement however, stated that they were aware that this was probably an inside joke. Even if they did not understand the joke, they were aware that someone else likely did.

Inside jokes serve several important functions in the CMC world of Facebook. When participants came across something that they did not understand, they often
attributed it to being an “inside joke.” In other words, participants often believed that material they did not understand, or that they found offensive, was likely a joke which had meaning to someone else. For this reason, participants found very little material on Facebook profiles that they considered offensive. For example, one students wrote in his profile that he was “gonna fuckin rape my genetics final so hard it cries.” Participants who did mention this quote when they saw it found it funny and none mentioned being offended.

Participants seemed to feel that they could tell a lot about a person based on the humorous material that they had on their Facebook profiles. The study’s key informants also believed that humor on a Facebook profile makes the person appear more assessable and interesting. In these ways, adding humorous images or text to a Facebook profile may help keep viewers looking at a particular profile.

Including humor on a profile did not always take the form of a funny picture or joke. Many participants felt that they could gauge a person’s type of humor based on the titles of their favorite movies or television shows. For example, when looking at Facebook profiles that referenced movies such as Anchorman or Dumb and Dumber, many participants chuckled or laughed as if they were remembering the feelings they had when watching them. In this way participants seemed to develop a bond with the person at whose profile they were looking. Participants felt like the other person ‘got’ the same jokes as them.

Humor appeared to be one the most important self-presentation techniques that students use on their Facebook profiles and participants frequently used humor to
imagine what the person might be like in person how. This suggests that humorous, funny, or silly material on a Facebook profile serves as a powerful signifier that a person would understand and engage others in a humorous manner. In this way humor may also serve the secondary purpose of providing a non-threatening way to initiate communication with another Facebook user. For example, several students mentioned sending notes to people that they had never met about the jokes they had on their profiles.

*Part of Larger Community/School Spirit*

Participants observed that it was important for students to demonstrate that they were part of a larger community. In most cases this larger community was SWU, and the front developed to show this connection included either images of the student participating in events connected to the institution or the frequent appearance of well known symbols associated with the university. For example, many participants commented when the school’s mascot appeared in a photograph (Figure 12), or when a photograph showed students rushing the field after a victory (Figure 13), that the student must attend football games. Other students commented on the fact that SWU’s mascot had its own Facebook profile and that students could become Facebook friends with it. Because over 96 percent of the study’s participants were also members of the larger SWU community, they easily identified the campus locations, specific expressions, and institutional traditions in profiles. Kim, a sophomore, stated that she believed people could tell a lot about the institution by what appeared in its students’ Facebook profiles and in turn, that gave people a better sense of what the student might be like. In
presenting this front, participants believed that students were letting observers know that they were a part of this community and its traditions.

*Random*

Nearly every participant used the term “random” during their interview to describe some aspect of a Facebook profile. Several participants commented that they believed some student’s were trying to do “the random thing” in their profiles. Key informants defined the term to mean “quirky.” When used to describe a Facebook profile, the term refers to information or photographs that seem to be unrelated to the rest of the profile. Entire profiles were not random, only particular pieces of information.

Profiles described as “random” might have a series of serious quotations and then one that was funny, or could contain numerous photographs of the person partying and then one photograph of him wearing a suit. Figure 14 is an example of an image that appeared in a profile without any explanation about why the person chose to include it. Participants observed that the randomness of these profiles made them more interesting because they did not know what else they might on a persons’ profile. That the term was so frequently used, and several participants actually referred to is a way people wanted to present themselves, indicated that to give the impression of not wanting to be stereotyped, random materials were included in profiles to remind audience members that they were looking at a unique individual. As Figure 15 demonstrates, students can often convey their individuality by altering an existing image of themselves.

That so many students wanted to have a degree randomness associated with their profiles suggests that randomness itself has become a standardized front. In an ironic
twist, students work at giving standardized and idealized performances that help ensure that viewers will form the impression that these students are individualistic. Students who do not consider adding material that will make them appear on their profile to be random run the risk of being stereotyped. The irony is profound. Facebook users develop stereotyped fronts to make it easier for audience members to understand the impressions they are trying to make. However, Facebook users do not want to be stereotyped to such a degree that audience members believe them to be uninteresting.

Student Awareness of Fronts

Most participants expressed awareness that Facebook profiles are developed to create an impression on audience members. Some even used the term “front” to describe their own profiles. For example Helen observed about her profile:

it's a profile, it’s not a person... I am not saying it’s not accurate. Nothing on here is a lie, but it is definitely just a front. That’s all a profile is. Like the people who think otherwise are nuts… So, whatever, but I wouldn’t say this is a total and complete representation of me....You know the people who know me get it, and the people who don’t know me, like this is probably the impression that they would probably get of me if they met me in person. It’s pretty accurate in that sense.

In Helen’s view, her Facebook profile represented her, though not completely. She was aware that other students, both those she knew and strangers, would form impressions of her based on the front she developed. DJ’s comment also illustrates an understanding of fronts, though he does not use the term specifically. He stated:
you try to provide a basic overview of who you are, how you want people to see you. Like, if you could ideally turn to people and say, ‘this is how I want you to see me’, other than like what they would normally see.

DJ is aware that his profile can give users an impression of the way he wants them to see him. These two examples are representative of how many participants understood Facebook profiles. Students are aware that profiles represent an opportunity to present themselves positively. They are also aware that other students do the same. As Helen’s quote demonstrates, students also know that some of the audience members who see their profiles will know them from face-to-face interaction. Therefore, while students can use fronts to present themselves, they must also tailor them so that they are realistic.

Summary

This section has detailed the fronts that students use in their Facebook profiles to help ensure that audience members understand how they want to be seen. Fronts standardize the ways in which students appear and make it possible for audience members to form intended impressions. Just as the meanings of all social interactions are mediated, so too are fronts. Students are aware of them and their meanings because other students use them to present themselves.

Goffman’s observations about fronts led him to conclude that the performances an individual gives frequently become “idealized.” That is, an individual’s performance is “socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented…[and]… tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole” (Goffman, 1959, p. 35).
Goffman understood that a natural bias creeps into performances; particularly those aspects of the behavior that the performer believes are expected by the audience. In this way, performances before a particular audience become laden with those things that the performer believes form the best impressions. This biased, idealized performance then comes to be accepted as reality by the audience.

The fronts discussed in this section appear to have each become idealized to some degree by college students. That is, the specific ways of showing others that you are a partier, or that you are social, have been socially negotiated and agreed upon. Presenting these fronts on Facebook profiles required students to appear in a way which is easily interpreted by audience members. The fact that each Facebook profile given to participants had evidence that students were trying to present all of the fronts, though some more successfully than others, suggests that not only are the individual fronts becoming idealized, but so to has the over-all image of SWU undergraduates. In other words, the idealized SWU undergraduate is a social partier who is funny and likes adventure and taking risks. And while this “idealized” student views themselves as members of the SWU community who understands and accepts the community’s values, they also demonstrate their independence and uniqueness by including random materials to indicate to viewers that their behaviors are not entirely predictable.

*Interviewing and Student Fronts*

Before moving on to the next section it is important to observe that just as students are aware of fronts on Facebook, I must also acknowledge awareness that students developed fronts when dealing with me. Interviewing is a dramaturgical act filled with its own rolls, props, and gestures. Being an adult, and having served as a hall
director to some of this study’s participants, it seems likely that these students would develop fronts from which they would say things that they believed I would want to hear. The greatest indicator of this was that no participant acknowledged that they were partiers, and that most down-played their own alcohol consumption while referring to drinking habits of their peers. Likewise, as an interviewer I assumed a particular front during the interviews that made me appear interested in their stories and empathic about their emotions. This observation does not change the study’s findings, it simply acknowledges the dramaturgical nature of interviewing.

Section IV: Impression Management Techniques

Previous sections in this chapter discussed who students believe are the audiences for their profiles and the general types of impressions they want to give. This section explores the techniques college students use to ensure that these impressions are formed. These are largely associated with the socially negotiated symbols developed with in peer groups to help identify fellow members. While participants noted that the text appearing on Facebook profiles contained information used to form impressions, they frequently noted that the photographs students placed profiles contained the most significant information. For example, DJ stated about pictures:

   If you just glance over them, then you can see it. You know, are there a lot of pictures with friends or family? Or are their lot pictures of doing stunts or something like that. You’re either trying to boost yourself or promote who you are, or at least how you want people to see you.
This section therefore focuses on impression management in terms of the use of certain images appearing on Facebook profiles and the visual techniques students use to help viewers form impressions.

Collecting information from Facebook photographs seemed to be one of the easiest and most influential means by which study participants formed impressions of students. For example, many participants were able to look at Facebook profile pictures and quickly form an impression, correctly or incorrectly, that the person was a partier. This indicated that the photographs appearing on Facebook profiles contained symbolic information which students understood and associated with partiers. That so many participants formed these impressions also suggested that students developing a Facebook profile were also aware of the specific, socially negotiated symbols (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006, p. 105) that their audiences would recognize and understand similarly.

This section focuses on the symbolic images that students use in the photographs they place on their Facebook profiles to lead the observer to form a specific impression. Data for this section came from participant observation, photo-elicitation interviews, and the photograph content analysis.

**Props, Scenery, and Gestures**

Goffman (1959) was aware that people use visual symbolic images to convey information during face-to-face interactions. His framework categorized these pieces of information into three types: “props, settings, and gestures.” The symbolic information that participants pointed to in Facebook photographs also fit into these three categories.
Props

Any object can be a prop if the “user believes that the possession or display of it will affect others” (Leary, 1996, p. 31). For example, a person may carry car keys in their hand instead of placing them in a pocket if they believe this may affect the impressions people form of them. Similarly, a person may download a particular ring for their cell phone if they believe it will affect the impressions bystanders will form when someone calls (Elferen & Vreis, 2007). Nearly all students in this study identified a number of alcohol and non-alcohol related props that they recognized and which they believed the author intentionally included in their profile’s photographs because it would affect the impressions formed of them.

Alcohol Related Props

The more frequently noted props that participants observed were related to alcohol consumption and the impression of a “partier” it was intended to give. Students largely applied the term “partier” to people they believed drank alcohol regularly to the point of intoxication. Jennifer, a junior, observed, “generally if a person’s profile is like, their pictures are exclusively them drinking, then I will basically just conclude that it’s one of the things they do that’s pretty important to them.” For Jennifer to observe someone drinking required that she see and understand the existence of a drinking related prop in the photograph. Sometime an alcohol related prop might be obvious, such as a can and bottle with a beer manufacture’s label affixed. A person who held one of these props to their lips likely provided the symbolic information needed to form the impression that they were drinking alcohol. This study found that students often used
several less-obvious alcohol-related props such as red cup, ping pong balls, and beer bongs in their photographs. These each had similar symbolic meaning to most participants.

Red Cups. The most frequently mentioned source of symbolic information that participants gathered from Facebook photographs were red plastic “Solo” cups. These were universally understood to symbolize alcohol and could appear prominently displayed in a photograph (Figure 16), or be presented much more subtly (Figure 17). Red plastic cups (also known as “to go cups” because many students empty the contents of their glasses or bottles into them when walking from one place to another) appeared in most of the profiles examined for this study. Paul, resident assistant and key informant, bluntly observed, “red cups have alcohol in them.” Helen, a senior, observed, “the red cup is a symbol...if you are an adult and you see someone with a red cup, you think the person has a red cup. If you are a college student, it’s beer.” William, a senior, recognized the symbolic meaning of red cups and further provided information about the type of impression it was meant to foster:

I don’t want people to ever get the idea that alcohol plays a big part in my life...and they wouldn’t get that impression if they saw my photos. That’s the sort of thing that I think when I see people’s pictures and every single one is them holding a red plastic cup. When it is consistent, the message they are sending is that alcohol plays a big part in their life.

William’s quote points to an important aspect of impression management. He is not really concerned with whether alcohol plays a big part in his life. Instead, his concern is
with the impressions people will have of him. In William’s case, as a senior applying to medical school, he wants to project himself as being very involved in his community and participating in medically related extra-curricular activities. Barbara, a junior, took it one step further stating, “red cups are more than just a sign that a person drinks alcohol, it is what they want to be known for. They want to be known as the one you call if you are looking for a party.” These quotes illustrate the tacit, symbolic meaning of red cups. Red cups are so ubiquitous in SWU Facebook photographs that one student commented on a photograph in which a person was holding a yellow cup.

Red cups, although simple in nature, create some issues for peers and college administrators. Because the contents of a red cup are usually obscured, it is often not possible to tell what is actually in the cup. A Facebook profile that contains numerous images of the person holding red cups, but none of the additional aspects of the partier front, may be looked at suspiciously. To enact the partier front on a Facebook profile therefore requires a variety of “partier” images and the presence of peers who can serve witness to the drinking activity. From a peer group perspective, many of the reliability issues that accompany simple images of a person holding a red cup are solved when the profile include the more social activities of playing beer pong and drinking beer bongs.

There does not appear to be an equally simple solution for college administrators who are trying to determine the contents of a red cup for disciplinary purposes. Whereas student misconduct is usually documented by a resident assistance, hall director, or police officer, images on Facebook are subject to interpretation. David observed that, when it came to what college administrators might think when seeing him holding a red cup, “it’s
not like I’m specifying what I’m drinking. I could enjoy a nice glass of milk… if you want to get into semantics and whatnot. Which can be fun at times.” David felt that because no one could tell what he was drinking, he would not be able to get in trouble. In this way red cups have become symbols for alcohol while at the same time hiding their actual contents. In the minds of students this made them ideal containers from which to drink.

**Beer pong.** Ping pong balls were another prop to appear in Facebook photographs and recognized by participants to symbolize alcohol (Figure 18). Though images of ping pong balls appeared less frequently then red cups, each SWU student interviewed understood they symbolized a popular drinking game called “beer pong.” The one participant who did not recognize the symbolic meaning of them was a student who visited SWU for the summer. Beer pong involves participants attempting to toss a ping pong ball over a net and into an opponent’s beer filled cup (Figures 19 and 20). If the ball lands in the cup, the opponent must drink the beer. Beer pong is often played in teams and matches may last several hours.

A number of participants described beer pong related photographs as being “mandatory” if students wanted his or her Facebook profile to give the impression that they drank and were generally enjoying college life. Mary, a senior, stated that SWU students understood beer-pong related photographs on Facebook profiles as being “really associated with college.” One recent graduate observed sarcastically, that when looking at pictures appearing on Facebook it seemed like “every college student really loves ping pong.” When shown a picture of two young women tossing a ping-pong ball she said,
“That is their ‘I play beer pong’ photo. And they even have a SWU ping pong ball so that is school spirit for you. I wonder if the bookstore sells them!”

Only one interview participant did not fully understand the alcohol related symbolic meaning of ping pong ball; Ruth, a student who was participating in a summer research project at SWU. When shown several photographs of students tossing ping pong balls, she said that it looked like people were playing ping pong except they were not using paddles. Asked if she knew of beer pong, Ruth explained that she had heard of beer pong, but had no idea how it was played. This finding initially suggested that beer pong might be only a local symbol. However, a search of Facebook found over 500 groups devoted to beer pong. In fact, Facebook has added several game-like applications to its site which allows students to challenge each other to on-line games of beer pong. In each of these applications uses red cups. In addition, when this finding was presented at a national conference, audience members suggested that beer pong was a drinking game known on most college campuses.

While all SWU students understood the symbolic meaning of ping pong balls, there was variation in the impressions participants formed of the person. Because beer pong is a game, some participants formed the impression that the person playing it must be fun, or fun to be around. Also, because beer pong is frequently played in teams, many students formed the impression that people playing beer pong were social, outgoing, and had many friends. It is an activity, says Paul, groups of people do, “usually over at somebody’s house or something…it is fun and relaxing.”
For other students, beer pong gave the impression that someone drank too much. For example, Carol stated “pictures of beer pong give the impression that not only does someone drink, they may also get wasted.” For students like Carol, the presence of ping pong balls in Facebook photographs created the impression that the student sometimes drank excessively and that the student wanted to be known as someone who drinks excessively. Kim, a sophomore thought that Facebook profiles with “pictures of them doing things like [beer pong] are trying to put forth the image that they are huge partiers and they think that it makes them seem really cool.” Figure 21 is an example of someone Carol believed was trying to be cool.

Beer pong and red cups sometimes called forth gender stereotypes among participants when they observed images of woman playing the game. When shown an image of two women playing on a beer pong team, DJ, a senior stated that he thought “beer pong is really a male dominated game. Or whatever, assuming they’re playing beer pong…they’re trying to fit in with the boys, trying to be cool. Trying to be hip. ..it’s like kind of, not the right thing for girls to play beer pong.” Two other males and one female participant also commented that beer pong was a male dominated game. These students believed that women who appeared to be playing beer pong were trying to likely prove that they could (even though they probably did not enjoy it), or else that the photograph was staged.

*Beer Bongs.* All but two students identified beer bongs as props that symbolized drinking alcohol. These devices are often simply 3-5 foot sections of flexible tubing wide enough so that individuals can plug one end with their thumb (Figure 22). However,
bongs can also be elaborate engineering contraptions with funnels. When used, people hold the tube up-right and pour between one and five cans of beer into the other end. The objective is for a person to drink all the beer without stopping. Not completing the task may result in the person being ostracized by his or her peers.

Images of people with beer bongs symbolized binge drinking, or drinking just to get drunk. Participants formed a range of impressions of students who had Facebook photographs of themselves “doing” a beer bong. For several students, the symbol of the beer bong gave the impression that the person had participated in a rite-of-passage or had overcome an obstacle. Mary stated that an image of someone doing a beer bong would be seen as an accomplishment. Paul observed that it “is not a casual thing that you do to have fun. It is doing something to show that you are cool or something, or the fact that you got it done.”

Even more so than beer pong, participants stated drinking beer bongs, or doing a beer bong, was a male dominated activity. When images of woman doing beer bongs were shown to participants, many suspected that the scene was staged. DJ, the participant who thought that women playing beer pong was ‘not the right thing to do,’” again suspected that women would only drink from a beer bong to try and prove they could. However, he also recognized the physical challenge the task represented. When shown a photograph of two women about to drink from one, he stated that they are “kind of down for anything, even though it’s probably something that’s hard for them to do, cause beer bongs are usually pretty hard for girls to do. Shows you they…want to be
seen as unique or whatever. And they want to be seen as like, ‘Ooo, that girl that does beer bongs at parties like the guys do’.”

The comments made about woman playing beer pong and drinking from beer bongs demonstrates that many of the fronts students present on Facebook are very much tied to the social norms and expectations developed from face-to-face interactions. Students still expect their peers to give what they believe to be acceptable socially normed gender performances. My participant observation experience suggests that men are very comfortable with women watching them play these extreme drinking games and seem to enjoy the notion that they are participating in a masculine activity. In this sense, extreme drinking games take on the elements of a football game. Males participate on the actual field of play while females are expected to appear interested and supportive of the men’s efforts. As DJ’s quotes illustrate, woman are expected to drink alcohol but not engage in drinking activities that will make them appear un-feminine and get them drunk too quickly.

Non-Alcohol Related Props

Participants identified two non-alcohol related props frequently used by students for their symbolic values. The first was school related apparel, which participants believed was used by students in their Facebook profiles to give the impression that they were part of a larger social group. The second prop was the presence of other people.

School Related Apparel. Goffman (1959) observed that clothing and insignia were especially effective props because they could be seen from a distance and their general meaning was easily understood. Study participants pointed out the many times SWU
logos and mascot appeared in Facebook pictures. When pointing out these images, participants observed that these students wanted people to know they were proud of attending SWU and likely attended many SWU athletic events. The symbolic meaning of the logos and mascot were reinforced by the many photographs of students wearing them while attending SWU football games.

While SWU’s logo primarily appeared on clothing there were several instances of it also appearing on the ping pong balls and ping-pong tables being used to play beer pong. Participants shown these images took note of these logos, several mockingly observing that this was a demonstration of true college spirit.

People as Props. Not all props on Facebook were inanimate objects. Participants were very aware of the number of friends a person appeared with in their photographs and noted the symbolic value of these images. The greater the number of photographs showing the student with various people, the more sociable, friendly, and outgoing participants believed the person to be. Key informants provided an additional insight into the symbolic value of images demonstrating that the person had many friends. According to them, images of a person appearing with lots of other people, especially if the image shows them having physical contact, are difficult to stage. Figure 23, a picture taken on a spring break cruise, is such an example. William observed that “one way that you show that you’re social in your pictures is because you have lots of people around. And often times you’re touching them, hugging them.”

This section began with the observation that any object can be a prop as long as the “user believes that the possession or display of it will affect others” (Leary, 1996, p.
People come to understand the meaning of props through shared cultural experiences. While this study has identified the most widely recognized individual props that students use in their Facebook profiles it is important to note that these props most often appear together. They are artifacts of the same undergraduate student culture and are therefore interrelated. For example, the school related props are often seen in conjunction with alcohol related props. In this way the SWU logo becomes further associated with the partier image. Similarly, the use of people as props may help develop the social front, which is often tied to alcohol related props. Within SWU’s undergraduate student culture therefore, alcohol is frequently associated with large groups of people. Props such as red plastic cups allow Facebook users to communicate symbolically and present themselves as individuals who are familiar with the social norms of the SWU undergraduate student culture. While the meaning of the red cups can be explained apart from the other props SWU students use to communicate, all of the props discussed in this section are should be understood to exist with a larger student culture.

**Settings**

Goffman (1959) defined settings as the background a person used in performances. Like props, settings can be used effectively to provide symbolic information to audience members. Unlike props however, settings tend to remain fixed and unmovable. This requires that an individual have the resources and character needed to appear in a particular setting. For example, a photograph of a person zip-lining through a rain forest required that he or she have the money to travel to a rain forest, and
also the sense of adventure and risk-taking to slide down a thin metal cable. Similarly, participants used pieces of information they gathered when seeing people in their residence hall rooms to help them form impressions. In these instances, participants indicated that people with many pictures of them taken in their room indicated that they were not as social and may not be able to take pictures in more exotic locations.

Participants also noted that settings can provide information about the types of social connections a person may have and the types of leisure activities they enjoyed. If a person appeared in the setting of a fraternity house, participants tended to identify the student as being a member of the social Greek system. Participants used these pieces of information when developing an impression about how adventurous the person was, how social they were, and how interested they would be to meet the person and learn more about them.

In general, participants were interested in the symbolic information they could gather from settings if they believed that the student was making a statement with the setting. A photograph in which the setting was assumed to be incidental was not examined as closely for symbolic information as those in which the setting was an important element of the image. In general, there were two types of settings that participants noted for their symbolic information: ordinary settings and exotic settings.

**Ordinary Settings**

Photographs with ordinary settings included images taken in a residence hall room, SWU football game, fraternity or sorority house, or on a non-descript street corner (Figure 24). Participants were only interested in the symbolic information they could
collect from these images if they involved alcohol. For example, in one photograph that many participants commented on, two students appeared to be drinking in a residence hall room. Participants examined the photograph carefully to see if they could determine in which hall it had been taken and the age of the people drinking. The impressions many participants formed of these two students related to their age (not yet 21 years old) and social connections (they did not have friends who lived off-campus who they could drink with). A number of participants also noted that since these students did not appear to be 21, they were either risk-takers or “stupid.”

*Exotic Settings*

Participants noted specific photographs that appear to have been taken in an exotic location. For example, several of the profiles that participants saw had photographs taken on white sandy beaches, on a deep sea fishing boat in a tropical ocean (Figure 25) or cruise ship (Figure 22), in Las Vegas, Paris, London, or New York. Each of these photographs required that the person either have the sense of adventure, material resources, and/or social connections required to appear in these settings.

However, participants were selective about the particular pieces of information they gathered from these photographs. They observed how adventurous the student must be but not the financial requirements needed to get there. For example, several Facebook profiles shown to some participants contained images of students on the deck of a cruise ship surrounded by a bunch of friends. Many participants identified them as “spring break” photographs. The setting in these photographs appeared rich with symbolic information that participants might use to form impressions. For example, participants
could have gathered symbolic information about the affluence of the persons’ family and that of his or her friends. If participants did see this symbolic information, they seemed uncomfortable about discussing them.

Only when pushed during interviews did a few participants discuss the symbolic information in the images with exotic settings. One of the few examples of an image with an exotic setting in which participants mentioned the symbolic information showed a woman on horse back, riding in front of some large stone sculptures. Participants observed the giant statues and understood their symbolic meaning: the woman had been on Easter Island (Figure 26). The impressions that participants formed of the woman varied considerably. These included being a “spoiled brat that could go anywhere she wanted for spring break,” or “being a Laura Croft type adventure seeker.” Some suggested instead that she was a “wiz with Photoshop” and simply placed her image in front of the statues.

The financial resources required for students to travel to these exotic locations were substantial. Yet even participants who did not have these resources did not comment on the financial cost involved. Students who had to work during spring break to pay tuition and rent would look at a picture of another student snowboarding and only comment on how fun it looked. The hesitancy for students to comment on how much money it required to travel to some of these locations or participate in these activities is difficult to understand. It may have to do with students not wanting to sound judgmental of other students in front of an adult. Participants may have also felt that making such observations would make them appear whiny or jealous.
Another explanation for participants’ hesitancy to discuss the financial requirements to travel to exotic location may be due to a financially related social norm. Though I did not pick up on such a social norm during my participant observation experiences, one or more are likely to exist. Such social norms, and the props required to demonstrate fitting into the norm, would have a powerful effect on how students present themselves on Facebook. If the social norm was for affluence, students who do not come from wealthy families would need to find ways to at least appear to be well-off.

**Gestures**

Participants identified two types of gestures in Facebook photographs that they believed had symbolic meaning. These included funny or contorted facial gestures, and hand gestures.

**Faces**

The second most frequently mentioned source of symbolic information that participants gathered from Facebook photographs came from people’s faces (the first being red cups). All participants took notice of the facial expressions students made in Facebook photographs, especially if they were exaggerated. Goffman (1967) understood our faces to be expressive masks which we could alter depending on the audience and the social interaction: they are our primary means to provide an audience with symbolic information about ourselves. In addition to gathering symbolic information from these images, many participants described their own photographs in which they made particular faces.
The facial expressions many students had in some of their Facebook photographs were often funny or silly, and this had a powerful effect on the participants looking at them (Figure 27). In nearly all instances, when participants commented on a person making a silly or funny face, they followed their observations with comments about their impression of the persons’ friendly, social, outgoing nature. For example, Sandra, a senior, observed a photograph in which a student was sticking out his tongue. She stated that he “looks like a silly, fun loving guy.” Other students, looking at the same photograph concurred.

When speaking about their own photographs, participants frequently mentioned the particular type of face they were making. Linda, a recent graduate, stated that when people were taking pictures they would often decide to also take funny faces pictures. This was especially the case if they were thinking that the person taking the pictures might put them on Facebook. James, a junior, had a series of photographs on his profile and as he looked at them identified the types of faces he and his friends were making. “This is us with our funny faces look. That was our strange face. So one was like okay, silly face. I think there’s one where I decided to have a normal face.” This indicates that students are aware of the meanings these facial gestures have and intentionally appear with them in Facebook photographs.

*Hand gestures*

A second type of gesture that several participants stated students used for its symbolic meaning were hand gestures. While only two participants commented on images in which someone was raising their middle finger, six pointed out hand gestures
that they believed were gang related. These types of images were not common and none of the participants believed that any of the people in the images were actually gang members. Instead, these participants believed it was a method for students to show that they were trendy. As Helen stated, “I think it’s something about our pop culture right now. Everybody wants to be a pimp. Everybody sorta wants to like be part of that hip hop culture and I think that’s part of it. Like you see the poses, they do that.” Other participants echoed this belief.

While hand gestures more than facial gestures require specific cultural knowledge to be properly interpreted, the mere presence of particular types of hand gestures suggest social affiliations. Gang related hand gestures were almost exclusively attributed to males. In only one instance was the person participants believed might be showing gang related hand signs a female. In this image (Figure 28) Michele, a sophomore, appeared to be making a gang related hand gesture. When she was asked about this particular photograph she explained that the letters she was forming with her fingers were the initials of her high school.

The use of facial and hand gestures provide undergraduates subtle yet powerful symbols with which to communicate information about themselves. The general types of facial expressions seen in Facebook photographs appear to be recognizable because they are experienced on a daily basis. Some hand gestures, for example giving someone the finger, are similar to facial expressions in this way. Other hand gestures, such as arranging fingers to form letters, are more cryptic and attention grabbing. Because these types of hand gestures are frequently associated with groups, participants became
occupied with trying to decipher the letters and learning with whom this person was affiliated. It seems likely that at least some Facebook users are aware of the effects hand gesture may have on people surfing through profiles and add these types of photographs as an attention getting device.

**The Power of Images**

The participant-observation and interviewing experiences for collecting the study’s data indicated that it was easy for participants and the researcher to form impressions on incorrect assumptions. For example, several participants mentioned that they believed nearly all Facebook profiles appeared to contain alcohol related symbols. The content analysis however revealed that 60 percent of the profiles had images in which with alcohol related props appeared. The content analysis also found that when a profile showed at least one alcohol related prop, these props appeared in about 40 percent of their photographs. This meant that about 24 percent of the photographs examined for this study containing alcohol related props.

Though participants did not make generalizations about the number of photographs that showed people to be socially engaged, they did mention the impressions they believed these images were intended to foster. The content analysis revealed that 24 percent of the photographs showed an individual person and 39 percent showed the Facebook user with one other person. The remaining photographs showed the person with two or more people. This indicates that about 75 percent of the photographs that appear on Facebook show at least two people and therefore do have some social component. The content analysis also found that the environment was central to only
about a third of the photographs examined. This would appear to indicate that in two-thirds of the photographs the impression students wanted the audience to form were related to who were in these images, and not where they were taken.

Photographic content analysis also found that in 63 percent of the images, it appeared that the person/s being photographed were aware that image was about to be taken. This suggests that many images may have been at least partially staged and that the “actors” had time to gather and make use of props. This possibility is made even more likely by the fact that 90 percent of participants stated that they or someone they knew had done something because they were aware their picture was about to be taken. Taken together, these figures begin to suggest that either a great many photographs that appear on Facebook are being taken with the intent of placing on a profile or that students are selective about which photographs they upload.

Summary

This section has presented findings about the symbolic images that students place in their Facebook photographs. The meanings of these symbols were widely understood by nearly all participants, indicating that students intentionally appear with these symbols and place them on their profiles. In this way, students present themselves to others using symbols. In some cases, these symbols may not be obvious to those without tacit knowledge of the culture. For example, parents looking at a photograph of their sons or daughters may only observe a group of young adults standing around while another student sees that everyone is drinking from a keg. Other symbols are more widely understood but still serve an important function. By appearing with friends or while
making a funny face, students send powerful messages about how they want others to see them.

Having knowledge of the symbols students’ use to present themselves in their Facebook photographs is important if college administrators are to understand what these images are truly about and to speak about them in an informed manner. A dean of students who can only see alcohol being consumed if a person is drinking it from a bottle will not grasp the true campus’ culture as it appears on Facebook. Similarly, a dean who sees numerous photographs of students displaying gang signs may see these students as a threat to the campus community when instead they are simply displaying how hip they believe they are.

Goffman’s dramaturgical and self-presentation framework helps to illustrate that students are intentional about how they appear in their Facebook photographs. It also demonstrates that students only give a narrow self-presentation of themselves in these photographs. That is, the photographs appear to also indicate ways in which students do not want to appear in their photographs. This is evidenced by the types of images that do not appear on Facebook profiles. For example, all the photographs used in this study were of SWU students. Yet there were virtually no photographs of students studying, giving a classroom presentation, carrying books, engaged in what appeared to academic conversations, or even a single image of a professor. The only exception to this were pictures taken during high school graduations, which I believe reflect more on the ceremonial nature of these event than anything related to academics. Students obviously did not want to be seen as performing studiously.
Similarly there were very few pictures on Facebook of students with their parents or other family members. There were also very few images of students participating in religious activities, even though many identified themselves as being affiliated to some organized religion. These “missing” images do not indicate that students’ do not take their academics, families, or religious beliefs seriously. Instead, it provides evidence that students avoided placing these types of images on their profiles because this is not how they wanted to present themselves to other students.

Section V: Verifying Impressions

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical and self-presentation framework described two types of information that people use to form impressions of the other people with whom they interact. First, are the “expressions a person gives.” These are the pieces of information, usually verbal in nature that an individual consciously provides to audience members. Second are the “expressions a person gives off.” These pieces of information unintentionally “leak out” during a performance and are largely non-verbal. During face-to-face interactions, audience members are given both types of information by the performer and use each to assess the truthfulness of the actor’s claims.

Facebook profiles are static (at least for the amount of time it take someone to look at them) and require audience members to seek out pieces of information that they believe will assist them to validate or invalidate the claims made by the performer. This study has found that most participants spent time on Facebook looking at the profiles of random students, and that 30 percent of them believed that they might have a face-to-face interaction with someone whose profile they had looked at. This suggests that students
have a vested interest in forming accurate impressions of people when looking at their Facebook profiles.

The final section of this chapter explores the “expressions a person gives off”—the pieces of information that participants believed leaked from Facebook profiles. All participants in this study used this type of information to help them form impressions of a person when seeing their profile. Using these pieces of information enabled participants to gauge the overall performance students made in their profiles and to validate the impressions they formed. Data for this section were collected from photo-elicitation interviews and participant observation.

Reading a Facebook Profile: A Reflexive Process

Whenever we interact with others, “particularly those we know little about, we quickly form an impression, or overall mental picture, of them” (Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine, 2006, p. 39). Goffman (1959) suggested that people begin to form their impressions of others by simply glancing at them and observing easily available pieces of information; a person’s gender, race, and dress are three pieces of information often used to form an impression about them. For example, most people would form different impressions of someone approaching them on a street corner if they are wearing a suit and tie rather than shorts and a tee-shirt. These impressions may be validated or invalidated based on further interaction with the person. If the person in a suit asks for spare change this might lead us to question our first impressions. In this way all social interaction are reflexive.
Face-to-face interaction allows people to form and reform the impressions they have of others. Facebook profiles are not interactive in the same way as face-to-face interactions. A person looking at a Facebook profile, particularly of someone they do not know, must seek out information to validate or invalidate the impressions they formed. Most participants were fairly certain however, that Facebook profiles contained information that they could use to validate or reformulate their impressions about a person. In this way, reading a Facebook profile is a reflexive process.

Most study participants formed quick initial impressions when first seeing a profile and then systematically collected pieces of additional data they considered important. The initial impression was based largely on the profile’s primary photograph and the personal information Facebook placed next to it. From these, participants were usually able to determine the person’s gender, ethnicity, and something about their social values. For example, when Joseph was given a Facebook profile and asked to explain the information he used to form this initial impression, he responded:

Well, if I were looking at this from a third person perspective [he looks at the main photograph and stares at it for a second]… I’d look at this profile and the first thing I’d go for is actually right over here [pointing to the ‘about me section]. Just the general top bar of information with the networks, interested in, birthday, religious views, political views, that kind of stuff. If I were to look and see somebody is a moderate, like myself, if saw somebody was a moderate, I would say oh, well, there’s somebody that actually considers things. They don’t jump in blindly from one side
or the other. But a lot of people see that as just fence sitting and they’re indecisive.

In this example, Joseph identified the pieces of information he collected very quickly and used to form an initial impression. In this way he gathered “enough pieces of expression to be able to ‘fill in’ and manage, more or less, any part that he is likely to be given” (Goffman, 1959, p. 73). That is, with the limited information Joseph had collected, he formed an impression of the person and filled in the missing information with the impression he had formed. Joseph observed that the person’s profile identified them as politically “moderate.” This had a particular meaning to Joseph and he formed an impression of the person as “intellectually curious” based on this information.

Once Joseph, and each of the other participants, had formed this initial impression, they started the process of collecting additional information that would support their impressions or require them to reassess them. Many participants seemed to know what specific pieces of information could be used to help them with this process, and jumped to the specific location on the profile where they knew this information would be. Other participants were less certain, and often flipped back and forth through the printed profiles looking for clues. As quickly as students formed an impression about the person in the profile, they began seeking out inconsistencies and pieces of information that did or did not fit: the expressions Facebook profile’s “give off.”
Expressions Given Off

Participants used the incongruities they found in the “expressions given off” to pick apart a profile. As they articulated the process, they talked about the hypotheses that they formed and the information they sought to help confirm them. These stories and hypothesis did not remain static but would evolve as profiles were examined. This exchange with David, a junior, helps highlight this:

David- I was going to say right away, definitely a sorority girl..

Interviewer- Why were you going to say that?

David- Well, because—(continues looking at the profile)—first, oh, she’s at SWU, or she used to go to Hawaii. I was confused. Well, I got the beach, like you got the girls faces piled together. I don’t know, I will hold off on that one. I don’t know. Just…

Interviewer- Okay.

David- seems like, now she’s—I would almost guarantee at this point that she probably is not a sorority because she doesn’t make any reference to it in her interests.

In large measure, this five second exchange highlights many of Goffman’s concepts. Based on an initial impression, David began to develop a story about the Facebook profile’s owner (that she was in a sorority) based on her primary photograph of the woman and three of her friends on a beach. He continued to gather information (she does not make any reference to being in a sorority in her interests) and this did not seem to fit well within his story. This required him to reform his story (I would almost
guarantee at this point that she probably is not a sorority) and continue searching for more information.

Study participants had a variety of ways to find “expressions given off.” These included learning how many Facebook friends a person had listed on their profile, looking at the person’s Facebook wall postings, and assessing the city they called home.

*Number of Friends*

Most participants noted the number of friends a person had listed on the Facebook profile, as well as other information that the student’s Facebook profile gave. Repeatedly throughout the interviews participants would quickly glance at a person’s class status (i.e., sophomore, junior, etc) and then turn to the number of friends that the person listed as friends on their profile. Based largely on the participants’ own experiences with the rates at which they added Facebook friends to their profiles, they believed that a relationship existed between the student’s class year and how many Facebook friends they should have. Facebook profiles that had too many or too few friends, gave off “expressions” about the person. Joseph provided an example of how this worked:

> It’s real easy to discern whether or not a person is really fake or not by how many friends they have. And also considering how long they’ve been in the network. So if somebody is brand new to the university and they have 300 friends, it’s the first week of school, they’re platinum blond and they’re from Southern California, I can pretty much discern that they are probably in a sorority or fraternity [Joseph was not fond of people who
were in the Greek system]. However, if they get to be a senior, they have 20 friends, and they’ve been on Facebook for the three years that it’s been here at the U, then I can probably discern that they are either anti-social or, you know, they just don’t -- they’re pretty withdrawn within themselves.

In Joseph’s eyes, there is a normal relationship for the number of friends a student should have on their Facebook profile to how long the person as been at the university. A few minutes later Joseph looked at another profile and stated, “so, 129 friends being a sophomore…I would say that is about normal.” Turning his attention to another profile, Joseph observes that she is “an ’09 with 53 friends. O.K., so she is a sophomore with 53 friends. I am not going to say that it’s abnormal, but…”

Michelle also felt that she could use the number of Facebook friends a person had to validate her initial impressions of them. She stated about a profile with several hundred friends, “it sounds kind of weird. I know some freshman like have five hundred friends and I am like ‘that makes no sense’.” For Michelle, the number of friends this person had confirmed her impression that the student was “just trying to be popular and fit in.” William believed that the number of friends a person listed on their profile could tell an observer how popular and how honest a person really was. He said, “I definitely look at that [the number of friends]. I mean if someone has like a hundred friends at like thirty different schools, it’s pretty unreliable that like that person has that many friends. Or if they do it’s like some odd circumstance where they’re like moving around a lot or something.”
DJ described a variation on these “expressions given off.” He explained his belief about the relationship between the number of pictures in which a person was tagged and the number of pictures that the person placed of themselves on their profile. In his mind, the more pictures a person had on their profile, the larger the number of photographs the person should be tagged in other people’s profiles. He said, “anyone can put up a picture of themselves doing something…it’s like, well whatever. But when somebody else puts it up, it’s like, well at least that person put it up for you.” DJ was suspicious of profiles in which many photographs appeared of the person but the person was not tagged in other peoples’ albums. The credibility of the entire profile was damaged.

*Wall Postings*

Several participants mentioned the importance of “expressions given off” on Facebook wall postings. By examining the messages a person had on their Facebook wall, participants believed they could tell whether a person was a “good” friend to others. Linda, a recent graduate observed, “if someone says one thing like, ‘I hate that girl’, but they have a bunch of pictures of them together and it is on their wall and like ‘oh my gosh I love you’ and ‘I will see you this weekend’. That just seems a little dishonest…like how good of a friend are you if you are saying that about somebody but then this is what you are showing them.” Linda believed that the impression she formed about how nice a person was could be validated by observing the exchanges of messages and comparing them to the pictures a person had placed on their profile.

Several participants believed that they could use information from wall postings to validate their impressions about how much attention a person wanted. When Sarah, a
recent graduate, observed a wall exchange between a male and female, she stated that these people wanted all of their friends to notice. In this way, they remained the center of attention.

California

Forty percent of participants believed that when a person’s Facebook profile indicated that their hometown was located in California, they could use this “given” expression to form impressions of the person. For example, of these 40 percent, the majority used the information to help form an impression about the person’s family wealth, their values, and even how they were raised. Michelle stated when she observed that a person whose profiles she was looking at was from California, “that is all I need to know….She was probably raised in one of those rich, upper class California families and she could have everything she wanted and her parents are really conservative and raised her like that.” This is an example of a student forming an impression based on her stereotyping of people from California.

This finding may seem surprising until it is framed within the existing tension that exists between SWU’s in-state undergraduate students and those from nearby California. The causes for this tension are complex but may be largely tied to family income and state level tuition policies. Due to SWU’s relatively low out-of-state tuition rates, it is often significantly cheaper for students from California to attend SWU then an institution in their home state. This difference is often great enough that parents are able to provide significant, sometimes ostentatious, resources to their son or daughter while they are in college. Further compounding this financial gap are the much higher median family
income levels of the students from California. The net effect of these differences tends to result in an ongoing feeling among SWU students that their peers from California are all rich and that their parents are willing to spoil them. Additional explanations for this tension might include sports rivalry or general stereotypes about California from the media.

Participants also used how students identified where in California they were from as a source for gathering “expressions given off.” Nearly 40 percent noted that they believed how students identified theirs hometown provided information they could use to help validate impressions. For example DJ, observed that a person from northern California had used all capital letters to spell out the name of her home town. He stated, that “she wants to emphasize that she’s from San Francisco or whatever...[and that she is] proud of it, yeah. Proud of Nor Cal I guess.” DJ went on to explain that the person was probably “obnoxious” because she made such a big deal out of being from Northern California.

Barbara explained that the people she has met from California have “a little bit of an ego, especially the ones that simply list their hometown as the Bay.” She continued, “I think just because they don’t always say like the actual city they all kind of like make a little clique.” For Barbara, the “expressions given off” by someone indicating that they were from the Bay Area of California enabled her to form an impression about the social relationships the person might have.

Linda, a recent graduate, stated that students from southern California who list their hometown as the “O.C”:
are just a little too proud….it is like O.K., just because you are
from southern California doesn’t mean your life is like the O.C.
(the name of a popular television show). People will tell me they
are from the O.C. and I am like, where in the O.C. Then they will
say somewhere that is as far from the beach as you can be…it is a
little misleading…you have to lie about where you are from just to
make people think certain things about you.

For Linda, the “expression” she believed was “given off” by someone stating they were
from the “O.C.” led her to question how honest the person was and the other information
in their profile. She felt that if a student made it a point to indicate that they were from
the O.C., the person had better live close to the beach and have a lifestyle that emulated
the characters on the television series The O.C. If not, than the student was trying to
present themselves being affiliated with a style of living that their families could not
afford.

Summary

This final section of chapter 4 has presented the study’s findings about how
participants use “expressions given off” to validate the impressions they have formed of a
person. By using “expressions given off,” participants believed that they were able to
more accurately assess the impressions they believed students were trying to have them
form from their Facebook profiles. Without these pieces of information students would
have little else to judge how much they should believe the presentations a person makes
on their profile. That all participants demonstrated the use of expressions given off” suggests that students actively examine their profiles for information leaks.

This section also found that the act of reading a Facebook profile is reflexive and iterative. Students form their initial impression of someone based on their Facebook profile very quickly. Because students are aware of this, it suggests that profiles are developed to maximize their initial impact. The ability to modify a Facebook profile whenever a student wishes may mean that they are tailored to give a desired impression and to minimize information leakage.

Goffman developed the concepts of “expressions given” and “expressions given off” to help explain synchronous, face-to-face social interaction. However, as has been found in this chapter, many aspects of face-to-face interactions are replicated in the mediated environment of Facebook. In the asynchronous environment of Facebook, users have more time to consider information given and given off. However, they do not seem to spend a great deal of time collecting these pieces of information before forming an impression. This indicates that students have become very skilled at seeking the pieces of information on profiles they believe to be important.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the phenomena of impression management on Facebook. It has presented the study’s findings as they relate to how students use Facebook, who students believe the audiences for their profiles are, the types of impressions students want others to form of them, impression management on Facebook, and how student try to verify the impressions they have formed. In sum, by identifying
and discussing the various components of social interaction specified by Goffman, it has taken him on a tour of Facebook.

This study has found that college students regularly use Facebook to maintain existing relationships, learn more about the people they interact with, and to communicate with those around them. Some students have tied their use of Facebook to their use of email, an indication that it has become part of their “everyday” lives. There are two audiences that students believe they are addressing with their profiles. The first audience includes the people that they have existing, face-to-face relationships with. The second audience is much larger and less well defined. Even though student may not know the people in this second audience, it is important for them to make a “good” impression on them because they may eventually engage in a face-to-face social interaction.

This study has also found that SWU students have a limited number of impressions that they want formed of them: the partier, the socializer, the risk-taker, the funny person, the group member, and the individual. These impressions represent the “idealized” SWU undergraduate as seen by SWU students. This is how SWU undergraduates believe they are supposed to behave as SWU undergraduates.

Students have a system of well defined, socially negotiated visual symbols that they use to help ensure that other students form the desired impressions on them. These include alcohol and non-alcohol related props. The power of these symbols is evident in the large number of times that they appear in many Facebook profiles.
Interestingly, students do not simply form the impressions that the students who develop Facebook profile intend. Instead, students pick apart profiles of pieces of information (“expressions given off”) that may provide them reason to doubt the overall profile. Through this process, students learn how to examine their own profiles for the same types of “information leaks.” Because profiles can be modified as often as students wish, profiles can be altered by the student until it presents them the way they want to be seen by other students.

Social norming helps to explain and understand how the particular impressions SWU students want formed of them came to be valued over other impressions, and how specific stylized fronts became associated with these impressions. While not drawn from the data collected for this study, it is likely that the initial starting point for these impressions and fronts originate in existing stereotypes about the undergraduate experience. These stereotypes are drawn from popular culture and embellished stories and traditions. Movies such as Animal House, Revenge of the Nerds, and Old School develop characters and storylines that highlight and reward many of the impressions SWU’s undergraduates want to cultivate. Similarly, when upperclass students and college graduates discuss their college experiences, these stories they relay may focus on these same stereotypes.

However these initial stereotypes were formed, in order for individuals to communicate to audience members that they fit into one of these stereotypes required the use of props, settings, and gestures. Red plastic cups may initially have been used at parties because they were cheap, disposable, and readily available. At some point they
became props associated with the party and then alcohol. While the process of the red
cup becoming a universally recognized prop started long before Facebook was
developed, the highly visual nature of Facebook helps amplify its use as a prop. Its
appearance became the norm and its absence potentially troubling.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Facebook is an on-line social networking site that has been rapidly adopted by undergraduate college students. The premise of Facebook is simply to provide college students the ability to develop web-based profiles containing personal information and photographs, and then allow them to share their profiles with their friends. While Facebook is not legally affiliated with any institution, its network function groups students from the same institution so that the space created by Facebook is experienced as an extension of the institution’s campus.

There is a lot written about Facebook in the popular press but very little published research. The absence of research literature about Facebook leaves college student personnel and faculty to rely on their hunches and assumptions to understand the phenomenon. Therefore, this study provides some initial research that is useful to those people who are seeking to better understand the Facebook.

The ability for students to control the materials they place on their profiles allows them to present themselves to other students in an almost infinite number of ways. This same ability has created some complex issues for college administrators and all those who work with college students. As mentioned earlier pictures have appeared on Facebook showing students in Black-face or dressed as victims of the Virginia Tech shootings. Other pictures have shown underage students drinking alcohol, smoking what appears to be marijuana, or being hazed as a part of group initiation.
This study focused on the impressions that undergraduate college students want formed of them when people see their Facebook profiles, and the techniques students use to help ensure that these impressions are formed. Goffman’s dramaturgical and self-presentation framework served as a lens through which to look at Facebook profiles. Grounded in the symbolic interaction tradition, Goffman believed that humans attach meaning to symbols which they use to communicate with each other. Within this perspective, the meaning of all objects and social roles are symbolic, not instinctive. That is, their meanings are developed, learned, and negotiated through social interaction.

Goffman believed that all social interaction was an exchange of symbolic information intended to give others an understanding of our social status and to convey our awareness of their presence. He developed the concept of dramaturgy to illustrate how we present ourselves to others; in this way social interaction is analogous to an actor giving a performance in front of an audience. An actor typically performs on a stage and has furniture, décor, and other background items that supply the audience with information about scene or setting (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). During a scene, an audience sees the actor’s “front,” the standardized performances which an actor uses to make it easier for others to understand the performance. To make performances believable, actors may use props, facial expressions, costumes, and accents. The goal of actors is to make their performances believable, just as people do in their everyday social interactions.

Goffman observed that it was usually in a person’s best interest to present themselves in a positive manner and in accordance with the expectations of an audience. While the use of fronts makes it easier for actors to give a convincing performance,
audience members expect actors to then produce observable behaviors associated with that front. Behaviors that fall outside these socially negotiated expectations are embarrassing and actively avoided.

Goffman’s ideas, which were intended for face-to-face interactions, are shown by this research to be applicable as well to computer mediated communications. His dramaturgical and impression management framework is helpful for explaining how students use Facebook profiles, how they look at them, and why many Facebook profiles appear so similar to each other.

The site of this study was SWU, a pseudonym for a Research I institution located in the Southwest. This qualitative study employed an ethnographic research design. Data were collected during eight months of participant observation. These data were supplemented with 30 photo-elicitation interviews, and a photograph content analysis on the first ten photographs to appear in the Facebook photographs of five males and five female SWU students. Interview responses were grouped according to topic and codes developed for the emergent patterns. The photographs were analyzed using a set of codes developed from my participant observation experience and the impression management literature.

Summary of Findings

This study found that students are using self-presentation techniques on Facebook to assist audience members in forming particular impressions of them. The act of reading a Facebook profile is reflexive and iterative. Students form their initial impression of someone based on their Facebook profile very quickly.
Facebook profiles have primary and secondary intended audiences, both of which are largely made up of other college students. Students tailor their Facebook profiles with the understanding that other students will look at them. The symbolic materials students place on their profiles, and use to create their fronts, are understood by other undergraduate students and have been socially negotiated to have particular meanings within the context of Facebook.

This study found that the presentations students make in their Facebook profiles only represent a “narrow strip of activity” (Goffman, 1974). This strip is intended to give the impression that undergraduates are “partiers,” “social,” “adventurous,” “humorous,” “part of a community,” and “individuals” (i.e., that do not want their profiles to make them appear predictable). These are not necessarily the way students see themselves. Instead, students present themselves in the ways they believe their audiences expect to see them.

Because students are primarily concerned with ensuring that other undergraduates believe that they are fully participating in the undergraduate experience, they often omit other aspects of themselves on their profiles. Very few Facebook profiles include information or images of family members, work situations, college professors and administrators, religious practices, or students behaving studiously. In this way, college students only work to give specific impressions when they are in front of the audiences that want to see them in these roles. For example, in front of their parents or religious leaders, college students are not as likely to present themselves as a “partier” or “risk-
taker.” In this way, college students separate the various stages on which they perform and the performances they give.

A Facebook profile’s primary intended audience is likely to know undergraduate culture well enough so that they understand the impressions the student wants to give. Many, but not all, members of the student’s secondary intended audience will also understand that parts of the fronts they observe are fashioned to make them appear extreme. Those people who do not have this understanding may accept these extreme performances as reality or normative. For example, a first year student who has just arrived on campus may not recognize that the people in many of these photographs are not constantly out partying or socializing. Students unable to make this distinction may believe that this is how they too are supposed to behave.

This finding is especially important in light of the study’s photographic content analysis. While limited to 100 photographs, this analysis showed that there are many profiles that have no images containing symbols for alcohol. However, participants largely believed that nearly all profiles contain many photographs in which these symbols appear. Making this even more important are the findings of other studies which indicate that many students are spending time on Facebook before they arrive on campus. These students may be very susceptible to forming impressions from Facebook profiles because they have little, if any, experience with the actual college culture. Their ability to find “expressions given off” is limited to their existing conceptions of the undergraduate culture. In this way, these students may form unrealistic impressions about how they are supposed to behave once on campus.
By using “expressions given off,” participants believed that they were able to more accurately assess the impressions they believed students were trying to have them form from their Facebook profiles. These types of information require that the observer know enough about undergraduate culture to spot these “leaks.” Students use the information that “leaks” from a profile to validate the impressions they immediately formed of a person. Without these pieces of information students would not be able to determine how believable the “expression given” on a profile are. In this way, students judge profiles. That all participants specifically mentioned the use of “expressions given off” suggests that students are conscious of them and actively examine their own profiles for “information leaks.” The ability to modify a Facebook profile whenever a student wishes may mean that profiles are tailored to give a desired impression and to minimize information leakage.

Facebook communication does reduce the social cues available to students; however, they compensate for this by using those aspects of Facebook in which social cues are very apparent. For example, students use a great many photographs on their profiles to “give off” the social cues they believe to be important. One way in which college students compensate for the reduction in social cues is to focus their impression management efforts on six general “fronts” that lead audience members to see them as: (1) partier, (2) social, (3) adventurous/risk-taker, (4) humorous/funny/silly, (5) part of larger community, and (6) unique. These fronts are quickly recognized by most students and give the impression that the student is a “good undergraduate.”
There are two keys to fronts being easily identifiable. The first is the inclusion of symbols that students associate with the particular fronts. Many of these symbols, such as appearing with many other people in numerous photographs, might be recognized by anyone. However, several symbols required that the observer have tacit knowledge of undergraduate culture. Use of these types of symbols provided fellow undergraduates with important pieces of information that they could then use when forming impressions. The second key to fronts being identifiable is their often extreme nature. For example, a risk-taker may have an image of themselves skiing past an “out of bounds” sign or appearing in a boxing ring, a “partier” may appear holding a gallon bottle of vodka, or a person who is trying to give the impression that they are “unique” may have an abstract image as their profile picture.

Humor is one of major fronts undergraduates use to present themselves. As with the other fronts, humor can be presented in an extreme fashion. This results in students placing materials on their profiles that they believe to be funny, but that are in fact offensive to the community. The student may not have meant the materials to be offensive and may be confused about why others are taking it so seriously.

While students expect that much of the material they place on their Facebook profiles is seen by a large audience, many profiles also contain material that is only intended to be understood by a very small group of friends. Without understanding the context for the material, it is ambiguous and may be interpreted in numerous ways. Many students are aware that Facebook profiles contain these “inside jokes” and cultural references, and are willing to accept them as such. However, someone who does not
understand that these pieces of material are meant to be taken as humor could find them troubling.

In addition to impression management, this study also considered how Facebook use has become routine for college students. It found that college students log on to Facebook with considerable regularity and that many students log on several times a day. When these students log on, many simply check for any updates their “Facebook friends” have made since the last time they logged on, or send and receive messages, just as they would with email. In fact, many students check their Facebook profiles as often as their email accounts.

This behavior indicates that Facebook use has become, or is becoming, routine and “everyday.” The implication of this is that students no longer view Facebook as a technology that they must think about using. Instead they simply experience it as a new campus space in which to spend time and to be seen by other students. Being a campus space, students are primarily concerned with how members of the student community see them and are less interested in how the materials they place on their profiles might be understood by the extended community-- particularly how someone who does not understand the reasons students appear the way they do in their profiles.

Students are using Facebook to maintain existing relationships with friends they already know from face-to-face interaction, rediscover friends with whom they have lost contact, and monitor and investigate their friends or people with whom they have contact. In this way, Facebook provides undergraduates with information they believe is
important to their social lives. In addition, the use of Facebook is an effective way for undergraduates to demonstrate how “trendy” they are—it is a place to see and to be seen.

Surprisingly, students are not using Facebook to develop new relationships that result in face-to-face interactions. Some students believed that they would develop new face-to-face relationships from Facebook friends. However, the type of communication that Facebook enables benefits existing relationships over creating new ones. This finding mirrors previous studies of CMC in general (Carter, 2004), and of Facebook in particular (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006).

Neither are students using Facebook to experiment with identity. Early research on the mediating effects of CMC suggested that the reduction in social cues it produces, combined with the anonymity that Internet communication is thought to provide, would foster un-embodied, non-engendered social interaction (McGerty & Lisa-Jane, 2003; Smith & Kollock, 1999; Wynn, Katz, & Wynn, 1997). In this way, people would feel free to experiment with identity and new egalitarian relationships might be created. This has not been the case with Facebook. Students are not using the various features Facebook provides to experiment with identity.

Finally, students are aware that Facebook provides users with security features that they can use to make their communications private. However, only a small percentage of students actually take the time to enable these features. Even those students that do enable these features often do not use them in the way they intended. This results in most Facebook profiles being viewable by a great many people, companies, government agencies, and potential employers. Students are literally placing
information about themselves, and images of their behaviors, into the public domain. As with many things digital, even if this information is deleted from Facebook, it is never truly erased.

Before presenting implications for practice and theory it is important to mention again that almost everything about Facebook is fluid. New features and changes to existing ones occur with some frequency. One example of this was Facebook’s September, 2006 modification of its “.edu” user policy. This change effectively made it possible for anyone to join Facebook, and in less than 18 months the number of Facebook users grew from about 10 million to over 65 million. This enormous growth might lead to speculation about students making changes in the ways they present themselves on Facebook. While I only have my personal experiences from which to consider the implications of such growth, my judgment is that little has changed about student self-presentations on Facebook. This makes sense once it is understood that Facebook still limits access to profiles based on the social networks to which a student belongs. These millions of new users are members of the Facebook community, but do not have automatic access to the profiles of SWU student.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

This study began with the observation that there was little existing research literature that student affairs professionals could turn to for understanding the Facebook phenomenon, explaining it colleagues, and to turn to when dealing with situations it helped create. In addition to adding to the research about Facebook, this study’s findings offer college administrators, and student affairs professionals in particular, some context for understanding the materials students
place on their profiles. Practitioners who are not aware of the performance aspects of the presentation of self may come to believe the impressions students’ profiles give as being a full representation of their activities. This may affect their perceptions of the students they interact with and possibly even alarm them.

The first implication for student affairs professionals, and anyone who works or studies college students, is that Facebook profiles should be understood to be intentionally selected representations of students’ social lives. Students affairs professionals, and hall directors in particular, who see Facebook profiles and observe students “partying,” constantly socializing, or making particular hand gestures should not necessarily focus on the red flags that might be raised, or turn to student development theories to understand these behaviors. Instead, they might first consider that these images reflect how students believe others expect them to appear. As Lisa, a senior stated, “I’m sure that a lot of adults would be quick to judge these students. They see the red cups and the partying, and the drinking, and then try to match that with their academic success. I know a lot of adults don’t think that students should be producing these pictures and placing them online. But they [students] look at it as social.”

Student affairs professionals should understand Facebook profiles as a representation of what undergraduate students believe about the culture of the institution, the performances they believe other students expect to see, and what it means to be a good undergraduate. Undergraduates appear in their profiles the way they believe the “idealized” undergraduate should appear. These “ways of appearing,” and the impressions they are meant to give, are the “idealized” social norms as performed by undergraduate students. Several of these social norms might be relatively easy to capture being performed and presented on Facebook. For example,
students who want to appear unique may do so by simply adding material to their profiles that they found on the Internet. In this way, even if students are not very unique, they could make an inaccurate presentation for others to view. If there are few “expressions given off” that might discredit the performance, it will likely be believed.

Other social norms are more difficult to capture, since they require performances that may be more difficult to fake. For example, the “partier” front requires the performer to use props, settings, and gestures that involve the assistance of others. Images of a person sitting in front a case of beer are not enough to make this performance believable. Instead, there need to be images of the person drinking with others in a variety of environments. These types of images require the student actually be in these situations in order to capture the needed images. They also need to be drinking in these situations; otherwise they risk being embarrassed by fellow partiers who publicly state (on their wall) that the person was not drinking. Faking such a Facebook performance could lead to a person’s entire profile being discredited.

Facebook offers an opportunity for student affairs professionals to learn about the social norms of an institutions’ undergraduate culture. In this way, administrators can better understand the pressures students experience as undergraduates. These pressures to give particular performances should not be understood as experimentation, phases, or poor decision making on the part of the student. Instead, many students are proactively working on creating the profiles of the “idealized” undergraduates. In this sense, their performances are calculated, intentional, and somewhat formulaic. What is important for student affairs professionals to remember is that they are performances.
Of course inappropriate, dangerous, or illegal behavior of individual students should be addressed according to an institution’s policies and procedures. However, when dealing with individual students who have posted inappropriate material on their Facebook profiles, student affairs professionals may want to consider why these particular materials have been placed on Facebook. Understanding (or at least acknowledging a lack of understanding) a student’s intention for placing offensive material on Facebook may help keep professionals from forming incorrect impressions of the student based on their Facebook profile. In this way, even if a college administrator or faculty member is personally offended by the materials he or she may see on a student’s profile, the person can still remain open-minded about the student with whom they are dealing.

A second implication of this study is that student affairs professionals need to consider that what they see on Facebook is likely to be meant humorously, sarcastically, or light-heartedly. Students place materials on their profiles with the intention that they will be taken this way and not with a political agenda. Students who are confronted about offensive material on their profiles may be confused by the reaction. They may see the material as being funny and believe their friends do also. Students who have pictures of people in Black face, or ‘gansta’ garb, on a Facebook profile may honestly see them as funny, or as an “inside joke,” not meant to be understood by others.

If students are confronted by college administrators who believe these images are racist, sexist, or threatening, they may believe that the adult does not understand the image or text in the appropriate context. These students may even be likely to point to other profiles and instances of material that they find offensive but which they choose to understand instead as funny. In such
instances, it would be useful for college administrators and faculty members to first learn about the student’s intention of posting these materials before judging the student. They may find that this presents a powerful educational moment for the student.

Because Facebook profiles only represent an idealized “narrow strip of activity,” they may appear to show students in ways that give those outside the undergraduate student culture the impressions that they are irresponsible or behaving poorly. A parent, or even a student affairs professional, might look at a profile and become very concerned. Understanding that profiles tend to only show this “narrow strip” may be useful to college administrators who are asked to explain Facebook to faculty members, alumni, or members of the general public. Being able to place the many photographs and textual information undergraduates put on their profiles into an appropriate context, may help reduce the concerns these people have about the lack of academic work apparently being done by college students. My findings do not suggest any necessary correlation between students’ seriousness of academic purpose and the way they appear in their Facebook profiles.

This research suggests that simple programmatic efforts may help address some of the issues that Facebook creates. For example, educating parents about the symbols that appear in their sons or daughters photographs may provide them with information they can use during conversations with their son or daughter. If a parent sees a large number of pictures containing red cups, ping pong balls, and beer bongs, they will recognize the types of behaviors in which their son or daughter is possible engaged, and more importantly the impressions they are wanting others to form of them. Having this information may give parents the ability to discuss the actual
peer pressures their son or daughter experiences. Another programmatic effort, this one directed at both parents and undergraduates, could involve a campaign to educate both about the security and privacy issues that Facebook presents; the material students place on Facebook can be seen by many people unknown to the students and it “is forever.” That is, the materials Facebook users place on to their profiles becomes the property of Facebook and even deleting it from a profile does not remove it from their servers. The photographs that people place on their profiles will still exist ten and twenty years from now. If parents were to demonstrate knowledge and show concern about Facebook privacy, it may result in the increased use of privacy settings by students, or possibly even a reduction in the number of inappropriate pictures that appear in profiles.

This study’s findings also suggest that student affairs professionals may use the information they learn about undergraduate student culture to open numerous channels for dialogue with students, student leaders, and student groups. One-on-one conversations between an administrator and student who have an existing relationship may present an ideal time for them to pose specific questions to the student about their experiences. For example, an assistant dean of students or director of student programming may have many opportunities to start discussions about the material they have seen on Facebook. In this way, they can offer the student a different perspective about how these materials might be seen by an adult or employer.

Knowledge of Facebook may also offer administrators the opportunity to engage in conversations on a larger scale. For example, a dean of students could ask the student government to discuss rules regarding the funding of student groups that have certain types of
materials posted on a Facebook group. In this way, campus wide conversations about Facebook and the material students place on their profiles may occur.

While student affairs professionals might believe that developing their own Facebook profiles is a good way to connect or communicate with students, all college administrators should first consider the possible ways in which having a profile might cause problems. For example the photographs a college employee places on his or her Facebook profile may contain symbolic information that sends mixed messages to students. A college employee appearing in a photograph with students holding red cups in their hands may indicate to other students that it is acceptable to drink alcohol in this person’s presence. Also, a college employee whose Facebook friends include students who are engaged in inappropriate behavior on their own profiles may appear to be condoning such activities. Just as students should be educated about the ways in which potential employers may view the materials on their profiles, college employees should be provided information about how the materials they place on their profiles might affect their employment status.

Student affairs professionals have a unique opportunity as educators to take a proactive role in helping faculty members, peers, and the general public understand what they see when looking at Facebook profiles. Understanding Facebook and other forms of computer communication systems could be a major focus of professional development meetings. Senior student affairs leaders could provide background information to news reporters about how students use Facebook. The next time Facebook makes the national news, the reporter will already have a context in which to place the story. Perhaps the group that student affairs professionals need to spend the most time educating however, are the parents of college students.
This could occur during freshmen orientation, when parents enter the residence halls, or through a listserv developed specifically for them.

Implications for Theory

Goffman’s dramaturgical and impression management framework provides a theoretical perspective for understanding the impressions undergraduates want formed of them and why they appear as they do in their profiles. His framework provides a useful lens through which to see Facebook profiles. This lens was also useful in my attempts to understand student behavior in the residence hall. For example, in disciplinary hearings, it was helpful to express my awareness that impression management was often a factor in the activity for which the student was being disciplined. Once students were made aware that I understood the powerful effects an audience can have on performances, they were much more willing to accept responsibility for their behavior. This did not change the consequences for the student but it did make them aware that the people they spent time with had an effect on their behavior.

The use of Goffman’s dramaturgical and self-presentation framework is not prevalent in student affairs literature. This is unfortunate because his theories help to explain why students often appear and behave as they do. Impression management theory provides an understanding of how social interaction occurs and the performative nature of ourselves. In this way, it offers a perspective about how people work to give a particular impression to others. This theory also informs us that people tailor their self-presentations to specific audiences. When applied to undergraduates, impression management theory offers insight into the ways in which college students want to be seen by particular audiences. Examining Facebook profiles provides insight
into the performances students believe they must make in order to give a good impression to other undergraduates.

Impression management theory has some similarities to social norming theories. For example, both posit that students form inaccurate beliefs about the behaviors of their peers and that this may lead to changes in their own behaviors. Social norming theories have been widely adopted by institutions of higher education, partially because their proponents have developed a literature base to substantiate its effects and because it seems logical that if students have accurate information about the behaviors of their peers, they may change their behaviors so that they are more closely aligned with the norm (Johannessen & Glider, 2003). To date impression management theory has no equivalent theoretical strategies for altering behavior.

Impression management theory also has implications for many of the developmental and identity theories taught in graduate level student affairs programs. Developmental and identity theories are useful for their ability to place students into a particular stage or phase. I, along with many of my co-workers have believed in our ability to determine the particular developmental stage a student is in by considering their behavior, affect, or cognitive abilities. What we have really been doing is making a judgment based on the impressions the student has given. This may not be problematic if a student knows the proper performance to make. However, if the student has not judged his or her audience, or is not aware of the social cues someone is giving in a particular setting, it is likely that the people in the audience will form an incorrect impression of the student. This may result in the student being seen as a trouble maker, immature, or presumptuous. These theories either need to more fully incorporate impression management
theory to help explain student behaviors and appearances, or self-presentation theories should be taught along side of them.

For example, a student speaking to a college professor may give the impression that whatever the professor says must be the “truth.” If the professor has read Perry’s (1970) scheme of intellectual and ethical development, he may suspect the student still thinks dualistically. However, it is also possible that the student simply believes that this is the impression he is supposed to give the professor. Similarly, we may believe that students who fail to turn off their cell phones in class may just be inconsiderate. But they also may not be aware of what it means to perform as college students in a classroom setting. These students may not be familiar with the fronts they are supposed to have when interacting with their professors. The same hold true in residence halls, dining rooms, the library, or even on the mall.

This study, while not examining Facebook from a student involvement, participation, or departure perspective does raise questions about Facebook and how its use should be understood within these theories. Does spending a lot of time wandering around Facebook, looking at people’s wall postings, sending messages, and adding friends count as a form of social engagement? Could Facebook provide a new avenue for student integration? The theoretical constructs used by these types of theories have not yet been applied to theories of CMC and digital social networking. It is possible that Facebook may have a positive effect on involvement because it keeps people informed of social events. However, it is also possible that most of this effect would be seen among students who are already actively involved on campus.
This study also has implications for theories regarding computer mediated communication. Facebook is no longer being considered a technology by the students who use it. Theories that understand technology as something special, something that must be thought about when used, are no longer applicable. Instead, CMC theories need to find ways to understand digital communications as everyday. In addition, existing theories of CMC largely do not consider it occurring within the context of existing, face-to-face interactions and as a supplement to the daily communication that occurs between people. If these theories are going to accurately describe CMC as it is occurring, or at least as it will likely to occur more frequently, our theories will need to become more robust and consider multiple modes of communication.

My participant observation experience and analysis of interview transcriptions indicated that students view Facebook as a tool or resource that they use. Many participants were aware that using Facebook required an investment of time and energy to develop and maintain their profile and some were even aware that their use of Facebook affected routines. However, it is not clear from the data whether any participants considered the possible effects Facebook use had on them. For example, no participants seemed to have considered whether Facebook use affected how they viewed themselves. Existing models of mediated communication have only begun to consider how technologies that supplement face-to-face interactions may influence end users. However, as college students spend more time communicating using digital technologies, more robust models of CMC will be needed to understand how this may affect both individual students and the larger community.
Implications for Future Research

It was noted in Chapter 1 that Facebook is “a Petri dish for the social sciences” (Rosenbloom, 2007, p. 1). The large amounts of data that Facebook produces provide researchers with new ways to see social interactions, friendships, networks, and identity. Much of the research that has been produced is quantitatively oriented and very little field-based, sociological work has been conducted. Future research efforts should focus on several specific areas which could provide student affairs professionals a more contemporary understanding of the computer medicated college culture.

Specifically, future studies should examine the effects of peer groups, gender, ethnicity, privilege and whiteness on Facebook profiles. The fact that this study did not examine them is a limitation. I assume that these studies would find that men and women emphasize different fronts, and that the social cues and symbols they use are reflective of the social pressures that come from print and electronic media advertisements. Facebook is embedded in the off-line culture of undergraduate students and appears to reproduce many of the same issues of power, sexuality, and consumerism that exist in contemporary society.

Similarly, future studies should explore the effects ethnicity has on the impressions undergraduate want to give. These studies are likely to find that members of specific minority groups represent themselves differently than majority students; ethnic groups may even have a unique set of fronts they use to “give off” expressions. In addition to the effects ethnicity has on how students present themselves, the ethnic
composition of the audience may also affect what performances are expected and how these performances are judged.

Based on the role humor and “inside jokes” have on Facebook, future research should pay particular attention to privilege and whiteness. Though students may explain or justify the material they place on Facebook as humor or an “inside joke,” additional studies using theories of whiteness could examine how privilege and power affect the presentations that students make of themselves and expect from others.

Faculty in gender and ethnic studies programs, as well as in psychology and sociology departments might find these types of studies very helpful for illustrating the powerful effects of the social construction of gender and ethnicity that get recreated in CMC forums. These studies may also be useful for examining the types of performances audience members expect to find on particular profiles. For example, it may be found that majority students expect that the profiles of African-Americans, or Native-Americans will appear in a certain way.

Another area for future research is to examine how patterns of Facebook use change over time I suspect that there may be several patterns in usage and that these might be developed into a student typology model. Such a model may be valuable for helping make undergraduate students aware of how much time they are actually spending on-line. And just as the effects of other behaviors have been shown to affect academic success, research on Facebook use might find that varying amounts of time spent on-line are also associated with some academic measures.
Conclusion

How should a dean of students or a hall director deal with the complex situations that Facebook can help create? This study’s findings suggest that much of what students place on their Facebook profiles is meant to be humorous, or understood by a small circle of friends. This does not mean that deans and hall directors will find the material funny, or that it should only be considered within the intended context. What it does suggest is that college administrators, and student affairs professionals in particular, should consider this when addressing Facebook related issues. The student involved may not have meant any harm, or even been aware that the materials placed on his or her profile are offensive.

This study’s findings also suggest that student affairs administrators should proactively develop policies that address offensive, inappropriate, or threatening materials placed on Facebook profiles. These policies should clearly state, when applicable, that colleges and universities are able to take disciplinary action against a student based on how members of the community interpret the material on a profile. Additionally, student codes of conduct should be evaluated and modified to ensure that they specifically address the digital spaces created by Facebook and other on-line sites. In this way, students could be held accountable for their actions, even if it is not possible to prove that they participated in inappropriate or illegal activities. However, as is the case in most codes of conduct, violations that occur on Facebook should be considered a learning opportunity for the student and the larger community- one in which the educational mission of student affairs divisions matters the most.
This study ends with two observations about Facebook. Goffman observed that humans are first and foremost social; we know ourselves and the world through social interaction, and we have developed elaborate ways to conduct these interactions. Facebook does not fundamentally change any of these; it represents a change in degree, not a change in kind. College students, like all humans, want to present themselves in a convincing manner to an audience. They have always searched for ways to maintain their relationships, communicate with their friends, and learn about their fellow students. In the past students have used telephones, letters, casual meetings, and gossip for these purposes. Facebook simply provides them new ways to carry out these actions and allows for ease of image transfer and greater individualized control of impressions through profile management.

Similarly, many college students have always wanted to be seen by others as being good “undergraduates” as defined by the student culture. In today’s collegiate environment, at least at SWU, this means that they wish to give the impression of “partiers,” “social,” “risk-takers,” “members of a larger community,” and as “different.” This need to belong, as well as the need to be seen as an individual, is not new. However, Facebook gives a space for college students to broadcast themselves to a larger audience than ever before while at the same time making it easier for them to develop more extreme and calculated presentations of self. Facebook provides a distorted look at undergraduate students.

Finally, is there a way to classify Facebook? Is it analogous to some existing medium? Based on my experiences I believe it is. Facebook is the new college yearbook,
only vastly better than the previous. Instead of a handful of student volunteers who write the text and determine which photographs will appear, people serve as their own editor, tailoring their yearbook to what they consider to be important—no more having to look through pages and pages of pictures you have no interest in. Instead, students get to decide whose picture appears five times and whose does not appear at all. Students also get to decide on the text that appears in their yearbook; no college administrator needs to approve anything. This can result in students placing materials on their profiles which they later regret. However, just as they can delete Facebook friends and add new ones, students can also simply delete this material. Well, at least they can imagine that it is deleted.
APPENDIX A: Initial Invitation to Participate

Dear Fellow Facebook user,

I am a doctoral student at SWU doing research on how students use computers to communicate with each other. I would like to invite you to participate in a study examining how students use Facebook and how they appear in the photographs that they place on their profiles. All that is required to participate is your permission to copy your profile and your willingness to participate in a 60-minute tape-recorded interview that we can do whenever it is convenient for you. During the interview, I will ask you many of questions about Facebook and particularly the pictures you have on your Facebook account.

At all times I will treat the information on your Facebook account as if it were confidential. No personally identifiable information about you will be used in the study’s final report unless you provide written permission. The only people who will know that you have participated in this study are the three faculty members on my dissertation committee. In other words, whatever is on your Facebook account will be considered private and will not be shared with anyone else at the university 1) unless there is a judgment that you may harm yourself or others, or 2) you provide permission form me to use the information on your Facebook profile for this study or my final report.

If you agree to participate, I will download your entire Facebook profile, including the pictures. Because I am interested in how your profile looks normally, I ask that you do not add or delete parts of your profile just because you are part of a study. Once the study is completed, I will destroy all the data I have collected from the interview and your Facebook profile, unless you have given me permission to use images and/or text from your profile.

This should be a fun and educational experience that will provide you an opportunity to learn more about yourself and Facebook.

If you are interested in participating, or just want to learn more about the interview, please send me a message to my Facebook account and I we can arrange to meet. Ideally these interviews will take place on campus in the Education building.

Matt Birnbaum, Ph.D. candidate
APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

Self Presentation and Impression Management on Facebook

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. Study personnel will be available to answer your questions and provide additional information. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to you.

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how students present themselves to other students through the photographs they place of themselves on the web-based social networking directory Facebook. To do this, I will compare and contrast how male and female students appear in the photographs they place on their profiles. This will involve using a set of codes I have developed and am happy to share at the conclusion of this interview.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being invited because you have a Facebook account and meet the following criteria: you are 18 years-old, have at least 20 photographs on your Facebook account in which you appear, and have not enabled any of the security features that Facebook provides.

How many people will be asked to participate in this study?

Approximately 40 students will be asked to participate in this study.

What will happen during this study?

This study will look at the Facebook accounts of 20 male and 20 female students with particular attention paid to the photographs in which the students appear. In addition, 10 male and 10 female students will be interviewed to discuss their profiles, how they use Facebook, the pictures they have placed on their accounts, and their impressions of other students profiles.

How long will I be in this study?

Your participation in this study will last approximately 60 minutes (the time of the interview). I will use the data I collect for this study for approximately 5 months. Once my dissertation
has been approved, all the information I have gathered for this study will be destroyed unless you have granted permission to use some of the images/data on your Facebook profile.

**Are there any risks to me?** There are very few risks to participants. I will maintain tight control over the data I have gathered and destroy it when the study is completed. There is some risk that your confidentiality will be breached though I will work to minimize this risk. I will try to avoid asking you questions that may make you feel uncomfortable or that are upsetting. If you do feel uncomfortable you can stop participating immediately.

**Are there any benefits to me?**

You will not receive any compensation or direct benefits from taking part in this study.

**Will there be any costs to me?**

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**Will video or audio recordings be made of me during the study?**

I will make audio recordings of these interviews so that your responses are recorded accurately. These recordings will then be later transcribed. Both will be destroyed at the completion of this study.

I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**Will the information that is obtained from me be kept confidential?**

At all times I will respect the privacy wishes of participants. If you grant me permission to use images or text from your profile, I will black out personally identifiable information (name, telephone numbers, email addresses) and assign your profile a unique code. Unless you grant me permission to use the information you have placed on your Facebook account, the only other person who might see your profile is the chair of my dissertation committee. This faculty member teaches graduate courses in the Department of Higher Education and it is very unlikely that you will ever have them as professors.

Representatives of federal regulatory agencies and the Human Subjects Protection Program may review my records for proper study conduct and quality.

**May I change my mind about participating?**
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not begin or to stop the study at any time.

**Whom can I contact for additional information?**

You can obtain further information about the research or voice concerns or complaints about the research by calling Jenny Lee, Ph.D. at (520) 621-0954. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or would like to give input about the research and can’t reach the research team, or want to talk to someone other than the research team, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. (If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.) If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program by email, please use the following email address http://www.irb.arizona.edu/suggestions.php.

**Your Signature**

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I agree to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

________________________
Name (Printed)

________________________   ______________
Participant’s Signature      Date signed

**Statement by person obtaining consent**

I certify that I have explained the research study to the person who has agreed to participate, and that he or she has been informed of the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks and potential benefits associated with participation in this study. Any questions raised have been answered to the participant’s satisfaction.

________________________
Name of study personnel

________________________   ______________
Study personnel Signature      Date signed
APPENDIX C: Facebook Interview Protocols

Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you do not want to answer any question, just tell the interviewer. Similarly, you may stop the interview at any time. No personally identifiable data gathered from this interview or from your Facebook profile will be used in the final version of this study unless you grant me permission. The interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes. I am recording the interview and will transcribe them to ensure that I have an accurate record of your responses. The recording will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study. I cannot offer you any financial incentive for participating but I believe you may benefit from participating in this study by becoming more self-aware about the information you have placed on Facebook. Turn on tape recorder.

The primary purpose of this study is to look at how student appear on Facebook. To help answer this question, I am also seeking information about how you use and think about Facebook.

1. How often do you log onto the Facebook website?
2. How much time do you usually spend on Facebook (daily/weekly)?
3. What types of things do you usually do when logged on (check messages, look at other people’s profiles)?
4. What types of other activities do you do when you are logged on to Facebook?
5. Why you decided to create a profile? (Probe with: What is the purpose of having a Facebook profile? What was your experience creating a profile? How much thought did you give it? How did you decide what information you would put on it and not put on it? How much time did you spend looking at other people’s profiles before creating your own?)
6. Who do you consider the audience for your profile? (probe with: Who do you think looks at it, people you know? Do you care who sees what you have on Facebook?)
7. How well does your profile reflect who you are? What does it say about you? (Probe with: is this just a virtual or digital identity, or is it well connected to how you actually see yourself?).
8. Have you used Facebook to experiment with aspects of your identity? (Probe with: For example, have you ever indicated that you are conservative even if you are liberal, or the type of person you are interested in, or that you are in a relationship even if you are not?)

9. Do you think other students form opinions about you from looking at the information you have on your profile? If so, what information do students use to form these opinions?

10. Do you form opinions of other students by what they place on their profile? Can you provide an example?

11. Can you think of any examples of when you or someone you know did something just so a picture could be taken?

Photo-elicitation portion of the Interview.

One of the aspects of Facebook that I am most interested in are the pictures students have on their profiles. Could we spend some time talking about the pictures you have on your profile? I am really interested in learning what these pictures mean to you and what you think other students might learn about you from these pictures. Please know that it is not my intention to make any judgments about you.

1. How do you decide which pictures to upload onto Facebook?

2. How do you decide which pictures not to upload? Can you describe an example of a photograph you decided not to upload?

3. What do you think your pictures say about you?

4. Which pictures are your personal favorites? Why?

5. Discussion about specific photographs. Probe for social associations, alcohol, gender, and parents.

I have some pictures taken from a few Facebook profiles that I would like to show you.

1. What impression do you think this person is trying to make?

2. Why do you believe this to be the case? Are there specific things about his/her body language? Are there specific things in this photograph that lead you to this conclusion?
APPENDIX D: Permission to Use Your Facebook Profile

Fellow Facebook user,

An important aspect of this study includes the observations that students have of their fellow Facebook users. I am therefore asking your permission to use your profile for this study. Personally identifiable information will be blacked out on the printed version of your profile (your name, email address, telephone number, address, and friends, etc.). All printed material will remain under my control throughout the study and will be destroyed at the completion of this study.

You are under no obligation to check any of the following.

- I do not give Matt Birnbaum permission to use any aspect of my profile for his study.
- I give Matt Birnbaum permission to use the information located on my profile for his study. I understand that no personally identifiable information will be used and that none of the photographs will be reproduced for use in this study and will not be used in the final report.
- I give Matt Birnbaum permission to use my profile for his study. I understand that he may share the photographs that appear on my Facebook profile with other University of Arizona students. I understand that no personally identifiable information, including photographs, will be used in the final report.
- I give Matt Birnbaum permission to use my profile for his study. I understand that he may share the photographs that appear on my Facebook profile with other University of Arizona students. I understand that he may use a limited number (1-3) of the photographs in his final report.
- I give Matt Birnbaum permission to reproduce my profile, in parts or in its entirety, for inclusion in his final dissertation. By granting this permission, I understand that the researcher may include the photographs and written information that appear on my profile in his dissertation. I also understand that the researcher will edit/delete personally identifiable information (names, email addresses, telephone numbers).

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I am granting the permission/s I indicated above.

__________________________________
Name (Printed)

__________________________________   ______________
Participant’s Signature      Date signed
APPENDIX E: Initial Codes for Transcribed Interviews

1. Gender
2. Frequency of logging in
3. Length of time logged in
4. Prompts to log in
5. Activities when logged in
6. Are these different from last year
7. Intended Audience
8. Unintended Audience
9. Experiences while creating profile
10. Did the student look at other profiles before creating their own
11. Deciding what information to include in the profile
12. Deciding what information to not include in the profile
13. Does the profile reflect who you are
14. Have you ever experimented with your identity on Facebook
15. Do you form opinions of other students based on their profile
16. Do other students form opinions about you based on your profile
17. Have you ever done something just to get a picture of yourself doing it (i.e. doing something for the camera)
18. What do you think your pictures say about you?
APPENDIX F. Additional Codes For Transcribed Interviews

1. The wall
2. Geography
3. First profile
4. Second profile
5. Third profile
6. Fourth profile
7. Humor
8. Friends/Friending
9. Taking Pictures
10. Begin Different/Random
11. Relationship Status
12. Poking
13. Care who sees your profile
14. Gay Identity
15. What Pictures say about you
16. Alcohol
17. Kissing
18. Sorority
19. Fraternity
20. Faces and Eyes
21. Guy and Girls
22. Boredom
23. Online/offline
24. Tagging
25. Family
26. First things looked at
27. Gifts
28. Main picture
29. Important pictures
30. Thoughts about Facebook
31. Getting a job
32. Using Facebook
33. Teamwork
34. Mini-feeds
35. Interests
36. Music/movies
37. California
38. Fake
39. Staged
40. Red cup
41. Ping pong
42. Inside jokes
43. Party school
44. Adults
45. Routine
46. Everyday
47. Snow
48. Number of friends
APPENDIX G: Codes Developed for Content Analysis of Photographs

Main Character
Spontaneity: Posed = 1, not posed = 2
Position of eyes: looking at the camera =1, eye-aversion =2
Body: Full body =1, partial body=2, head shot=3
  1. Body covering: Showing off body =1, hiding/covering=2, N/A=3
  2. Expression of main character: Not applicable=0, smiling=1, unhappy=2, licensed withdrawal=3, exaggerated=4, proud=5, compliant=6, suffering=7, curious=8, sexy=9, crying=10, angry=11, distant=12, shy=13, happy=14, focused=15, laughing=16
  3. Nature of the image: serious=1, unserious, comical, light-hearted=2, not relevant=3, artistic=4, group photo=5, couple photo=6
  4. Is the individual using stylized poses or gestures =1, not =0
  5. Clothing: Fully clothed=1, semi clothed (partially undressed)=2, costumed=3

Main Character Social Associations- Is the Main Character:
  1. Status: Alone=1, with one other person=2, with 2 or more people=3
  2. Gender, if with one other person: male=1, female=2
  3. Genders, if with 2 or more people: more males=1, even=2, more females=3
  4. Obvious age difference if with one other person: yes=1, no=2
  5. Obvious age differences if with 2 or more people: yes=1, no=2
  6. Family members present: yes=1, no=2
  7. Physical contact between main character and others, yes=1, no =2.
  8. If yes, social=1, intimate=2, mock assault=3

If others are present and are central to the photograph
  1. Spontaneity: Posed=1 or not posed=2
  2. Body: Full body=1, partial body=2, head shot=3
  3. Showing off=1, hiding/covering=2, N/A=0
  4. Position of eyes: Are others looking at the camera=1 or eye-aversion=2
  5. Expression of others: smiling=1, unhappy=2, licensed withdrawal=3, exaggerated=4, proud=5, compliant=6, suffering=7, curious=8, sexy=9, crying=10, angry=11, distant=12, shy=13, happy=14, focused =15, laughing =16
  6. Are these individuals using stylized poses or gestures: yes=1, no=2

Physical Environment and Props
Environment:
  1. Is the environment central to the picture: yes=1, no=2 (if yes, see comments).
2. Is it institutional related: yes=1, no=2 (i.e., attending a football game)

Alcohol and other substances:
1. Is alcohol evident: yes=1, no=2
2. Is alcohol use central to the image: yes=1, no=2
3. Are other substances or paraphernalia central to image: yes=1, no=2

Activity:
1. Risk taking behavior evident: yes=1, no=2 (if yes, see comments)
2. Sporting activity as participant: yes=1, no=2
3. Sporting activity as observer: yes=1, no=2

Gender and Body:
1. Is overt Masculinity central to image: yes=1, no=2 (see comments)
2. Is overt Femininity central to image: yes=1, no=2 (see comments)
Figure 1

The partiers doing a keg stand #1.
Figure 2
The partiers doing a keg stand #2
Figure 3
The partiers tools of the trade
Figure 4
The partier about to drink a beer bong
Figure 5
The partiers’ rite of passage
Figure 6
Social, small group
Figure 7

Social, larger group
Figure 8
The adventurous risk-taker, boxing
Figure 9
The adventurous risk-taker, snow boarder
Figure 10
The silly front
Figure 11
Silly faces
Figure 12
Part of a larger community, the mascot
Figure 13
Part of a larger community, rushing the field
Figure 14
Random, no explanation for why this picture appeared in the profile
Figure 15
Random, an artistic self image
Figure 16
The prominent red cup
Figure 17

The subtle red cup
Figure 18

Ping pong ball
Figure 19
Beer pong and red plastic cups
Figure 20
Beerpong
Figure 21
Beer pong champion
Figure 22
Beer bong, just a few more sips
Figure 23
People as props, Sammy Hagar on a spring break cruise
Figure 24

Ordinary setting, outside a residence hall
Figure 25

Exotic location, deep sea fishing
Figure 26
Horse back riding on Easter Island
Figure 27

Gestures, using the face as a prop
Figure 28
Hand Gestures
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