

2015

#Becoming: Emergent Identity of College Students in the Digital Age Examined Through Complexivist Epistemologies

Paul William Eaton

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Eaton, Paul William, "#Becoming: Emergent Identity of College Students in the Digital Age Examined Through Complexivist Epistemologies" (2015). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 3604.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3604

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

#BECOMING: EMERGENT IDENTITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE
EXAMINED THROUGH COMPLEXIVIST EPISTEMOLOGIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

Paul William Eaton

B.A., University of Minnesota Twin Cities, 2002
M.Ed, University of Maryland College Park, 2005
May 2015

For my mother – who always gave me the space and love to pursue my dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will inadvertently and unintentionally miss the names of many people who have been so critical in my reaching this personal and academic milestone. Completing a doctorate is not a solo endeavor. I hope all who have assisted, supported, challenged, and mentored me will accept my sincere gratitude. I am truly humbled by your grace and love.

I feel truly blessed my family nurtured my love of learning from a young age. My parents supported my desire to attend college; then graduate school; and my decision to pursue doctoral studies. I could not have done any of this without my Mom – who always listened as I shared what I learned in class, enthusiastically cheered me on when I struggled, and raised me to finish what I start. Mom – you are the most gracious, loving, selfless person I know. I hope I make you proud.

To Patrick – thank you for supporting me and loving me in all ways possible these past three years: giving up countless hours as I read and wrote, relinquishing the home office, and importantly – forcing me to get out and relax on occasion. I would be remiss if I did not mention Conway, our dog, as well – who sat by my side through countless hours of work, sending me positive energy and love.

I want to give special thanks to my University of Louisiana at Lafayette colleagues, who gave me the support and encouragement to begin pursuing my Ph.D. There were many students who I had the honor of working with in the Office of Orientation who supported this endeavor in the earliest days. I would like to personally thank Tyler, Katie, George Anthony, Taylor, Kolby, Leondre, Andre, Cameron, and Chelsea. Your combined abilities to make me laugh, persist, and love of the academic life yourselves inspired me greatly.

I have been supported by a wonderful network of professional colleagues, particularly in ACPA – College Student Educators International. In particular, members of the *Developments* team, the Presidential Task Force on Digital Issues in Student Affairs, and fellow researchers: Josie, Adam, Paul, and Jason.

At Louisiana State University, peer scholars of unparalleled excellence have surrounded me. Danielle and Kevin – I am beyond grateful we met in Foundations and have continued supporting each other these past four years. You are brilliant scholars; I cherish you both greatly. Berlisha – the best advice and the best laughs. Carla and Keeley – my first writing group, who helped me formulate and articulate some of the earliest ideas in this dissertation. There are many others: Shaofei, Reagan, Alex, Benterah, Maria, David, Krystie, Jerry, and Abbey.

My dissertation committee has been beyond supportive. I want to thank you all personally for supporting my nontraditional approach to this project, reading countless drafts, challenging me to become a better writer, and mentoring me, always, through this process.

Finally, to TJ, Alyse, Selene, Alex, Maxine, Miranda, and Abigail: thank you for sharing with me glimpses of your becoming. I am awed by each of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER 1 POINTS OF ENTRY	1
Research Questions	2
Bricolage.....	2
Inquiry on Identity, Complexity, and Social Media.....	6
Bifurcations: Paths Through the Process.....	14
The Regressive Moment	16
Conclusion	19
CHAPTER 2 IDENTITY AND COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY	21
What is Identity?	24
Conclusion	42
CHAPTER 3 TOWARD A COMPLEXIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND IDENTITY EMERGENCE.....	44
Complexivist and Quantum Challenges to Traditional Student Development Theory	45
The Role of Environment	54
Identity Emergence	63
CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSING DIGITAL IDENTITY	66
What is Digital Social Media?.....	67
Digital Social Media as Unique Environmental Contexts	75
What is Digital Identity?	80
Current Research on College Student Digital Identity.....	86
Studies on Youth and Digital Media.....	94
Conclusion	98
CHAPTER 5 DIGITAL IMMERSION AND DAT(A)NALYSIS	100
Digital Immersion and Multi-Sited Study.....	101
Analysis as Emergent Phenomena.....	110
Entangling Dat(A)nalysis	113
Constraints of Study	126
Conclusion	130

CHAPTER 6 INTERLUDE – LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES	132
Lack of Preparatory Feedback.....	133
Concerns of the Full Board	133
Highlighting Some Ethical Considerations	137
Conclusion	140
 CHAPTER 7 BEAUTIFUL ENTANGLEMENTS	141
Clouds	141
Human Becomings’ Demographic Overviews.....	148
Describing Space.....	151
Chat with Me.....	154
Conclusion	183
 CHAPTER 8 IMMERSIVE MATERIALITY.....	185
Why Materiality?.....	185
Immersion	192
Conclusion	244
 CHAPTER 9 MANGLED-THEORY-ANALYSIS-ENTANGLED-BECOMINGS	246
Introduction.....	246
Virtual Intra-Actions 2.0.....	248
Conclusion	274
 CHAPTER 10 FRACTALS	276
Fractal Pathways	276
My Progressive Moment.....	282
 REFERENCES	288
 APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	302
 APPENDIX B PROMOTIONAL GRAPHIC.....	303
 APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT	304
 APPENDIX D INTEREST SURVEY	306
 APPENDIX E LETTERS OF PERMISSION.....	309
 VITA	312

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity	53
2. Social Media Platforms Envisioned in Bronfenbrenner's Theory	76
3. Barad's Visual Imagery of Entangled Genealogies.....	113
4. Word Cloud from Dissertation Proposals	141
5. Adaptation of Word Cloud from Alyse's Blog	142
6. Wordle Clouds of Pinterest Headings for Selene and Alex	144
7. Partial Representations of Miranda and Maxine's LinkedIn Endorsements.....	145
8. Partial Representation of Abigail's Like Pages Through Facebook.....	146
9. Reader's Guide.....	152
10. TJ's Material Visualization	193
11. Abigail's Material Visualization.....	200
12. Miranda's Material Visualization.....	206
13. Maxine's Material Visualization	211
14. Alex's Material Visualization	220
15. Selene's Material Visualization.....	230
16. Alyse's Material Visualization	237

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the possibilities and limitations of conducting research on college student identity in the digital age. Utilizing philosophical theories from complexity theory, post-qualitative research, and new materialisms, I interrogate, question, disrupt, and challenge current theories and models of college student identity, largely developed from a positivist, modernist, empiricist perspective.

Conducting research on college student identity in the twenty-first century may benefit from discarding the old 'developmental' language of the twentieth century, replacing this discourse and understanding with a language drawn from complexity theory. In this regard, I believe educators, researchers, and practitioners should begin talking about identity emergence and becoming.

I explore how to embrace more complexivist epistemologies, moving educators, practitioners, and researchers away from traditional research methodologies. Drawing on emerging theoretical work of post-qualitative researchers, particularly Karen Barad (2008a), Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2012), my post-qualitative research agenda explored in this study used processes of digital immersion, interviewing, theoretical reading, and online blogging tools to create a research process viewed as a living system, exploring college student identities in the digital age as an emergent phenomena.

This research highlights seven college students actively engaged in multiple distributed social media spaces. I refer to these seven college students as human becomings. In addition to following and intra-acting with these students in distributed social media spaces, I also conducted two interviews: issues of identity, digital practice(s), digital presentation(s), meaning-making, digital materiality, agency, and discourse were discussed. I conducted a process of dat(a)nalys, highlighting dialogue, conversation, and observations on each human becoming. Further, I begin a

process of entangling with theoretical, philosophical, and discursive research, creating the complexivist epistemologies so critical to understanding research on identity in the digital age.

I end this dissertation discussing cyber-currere: viewing digital social media spaces as educational spaces where the processes of human becoming and subjectification occur as emergent phenomena: nonlinearly, non-hierarchically, and synchronously. In my closing remarks, I articulate how educators, particularly college student educators and curriculum theorists, might view digital spaces as always authentic, partial, and ontological – and what such an approach means for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 1

POINTS OF ENTRY

This research explores college student identity in an age of digital social media. Examining this broad topic requires interrogating, problematizing, and expanding discourse around issues of college student identity, the role of a college or university in formation and articulation of identity, and dissecting what researchers, philosophers, and theorists believe to be potential shifts in understanding and researching identity as digital technologies proliferate, increasingly intra-acting with the lived experience. I articulate the necessity of embracing a complexivist epistemological position rooted in theories of complexity science as foundational to the study of identity issues in the digital age. As a complexivist researcher I also engage and utilize the work of post-qualitative researchers who aim to challenge strict methodological and analytical procedures while issuing an ethical call to researchers to move beyond representation, thematic interpretation, generalizability, and tidy conclusions. Viewing research as process, as being, post-qualitative complexivist researchers view the world as contingent, nuanced, full of emergent possibilities, a constant becoming, embracing what Nathan Snaza (2010) refers to as dwelling: a constant questioning as we become.

Such examinations of the philosophical and methodological issues arising during the digital age led to a digital immersion study, which is the core of this dissertation. As a researcher, I immersed myself in the digital social media platforms of seven college students, exploring the role of these technological advancements in the identity emergence of college students. As part of this research, I engaged in two interviews with each of the human becomings (research participants) in the study. Each of these interviews occurred in digital venues: one in a chat room, another via video conferencing tools. Utilizing complexity theory and post-qualitative theories as a foundation, the possibilities and limitations of conducting research and reporting on college student identity in the digital age is examined. I view identity emergence as a phenomena, a process of becoming.

Implications of shifting our understanding of identity in these key ways will be examined, interrogated, and discussed for college student educators, researchers, and higher education.

Research Questions

This research is guided by the following central research questions:

1. How do researchers, educators, and practitioners explore/research/conceptualize issues of college student identity in the twenty-first century, accounting for digital space(s) as unique environmental contexts of identity emergence, or becoming?
2. What are the possibilities and limitations of researchers, educators, and practitioners discarding the 'developmental' language of a positivist, empiricist past by embracing complexivist epistemological positions rooted in the theories of complexity science and the post-qualitative turn?
3. How might researchers, educators, and practitioners conduct holistic research on digital identity utilizing the tenets of identity emergence and post-qualitative research?

Bricolage

Examining the topic of identity emergence in the digital age begins by shifting several traditional approaches to the act of research and writing. Structure, methodology, analysis, as well as traditional assumptions about the research process and conclusion of the process are all necessarily challenged in this dissertation. Naming this process and research agenda risked artificially enacting a cut (Barad, 2008a), opening the possibility that the research would become reductionistic, monological (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), and prescriptively methodological. However, as an obligatory framing of the inquiry, bricolage best described the approach, process, questioning, exploration, and journey being undertaken in this study. The research literature strongly supported the framing of this study (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013; Drotner, 2008; Hetherington, 2013), as did the articulated research questions. More importantly, my epistemological positioning as

primary researcher in this study dictated that a more complex, rigorous, and non-traditional approach to the research agenda and process be pursued.

Epistemological Positioning of the Primary Researcher

I consider myself a complexivist. This epistemological positioning means that I view knowledge as always contextual, in-process, interpretive, far-from-stable, and rooted in relationships. Slife and Williams (1995) would likely describe positioning oneself as a complexivist researcher in the realm of eclecticism. In such a position, researchers face several challenges, including criticism that one is intellectually uncommitted, or that one believes in theories, methods, and modes of analysis that are essentially contradictory. Such criticisms seem ill-founded in light of the continued dissolution and questioning of 'objective' science, however. As Kincheloe (2001) so aptly noted, researchers who position themselves as bricoleurs, and I would argue complexivists, "realize that knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power inscribed. They are attuned to dynamic relationships connecting individuals, their contexts, and their activities instead of focusing on these separate entities in isolation from one another" (p. 689).

As a complexivist, I question what it means to know, how knowledge is explored, and the grand metanarratives that drive all inquiry, research, and knowledge production. Being a complexivist means that I am methodologically, theoretically, and analytically multilingual (Scott, 2009), and that in order to understand identity in the digital age I needed to engage in multiple methodological, theoretical, and analytical processes. More importantly, being a complexivist, I recognized from the outset the limitations of my own knowledge. I knew that regardless of the journey the inquiry took, the bifurcations and circuitous routes that would be traveled during the inquiry would only lead to more questions and would fall far short of a holistic, complete, all-encompassing set of 'findings.' This position is antithetical to many current approaches and frameworks of conducting research: the work is never and will never be complete, but ongoing, emergent, and rooted in dialectical and material exchange that will continue across my own

lifespan, and likely beyond. As such, this study itself is only a snapshot into the issues surrounding self-identity, college students, and the role of digital space in the process of exploring, clarifying, experimenting with, presenting, articulating, emerging, and becoming.

Tenets of Bricolage Research

Kincheloe (2001) built on the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in conceptualizing and articulating propositions, questions, and frameworks of a bricolage approach to educational research. These original explorations of bricolage as a rigorous and more appropriate approach to conducting research resulted in further examination and articulation of the process by Kincheloe and Berry (2004) and Kincheloe (2005), who explored the possibilities, limitations, political challenges, and difficulties of framing, structuring, conducting, and validating research undertaken as bricolage. Throughout these initial writings, tenets of complexity theory and science serve as metaphors, foundations, and important conduits to explore how bricolage disrupts traditional approaches to educational research. The importance of complexity theory in conceptualizing a bricolage approach to research is explored below and throughout this inquiry.

Bricolage begins with an understanding of a bricoleur – “a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 680). At the root of this statement is recognition that reductionistic approaches to research should be avoided when employing the bricolage. Complexity theory challenges the reductionism inherent in many traditional research procedures (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008) in favor of more “multiperspectival way[s] of exploring the lived world” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 9). As a result, “abstract and objective procedural and methodological protocols” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 9) are discarded in favor of an emergent, flowing, dialectical, multi-methodological and multilingual approach to research.

Kincheloe and Berry (2004) discuss the importance of feedback looping to the process of conducting research through the bricolage. In living systems, feedback loops are the mechanisms

that allow growth and change to occur as a system interacts with its environment, other living systems, and exchanges information (Capra, 1996; Meadows, 2008). Further, feedback loops operate to keep living systems in a position not of equilibrium, but of disequilibrium. Being in disequilibrium is critical to the survival of all living systems, allowing for the exchange of information, the emergence of novel and creative solutions to challenges and problems, and ultimately (though paradoxically in a worldview dominated by Cartesian reasoning) stability over time. Though Kincheloe and Berry (2004) utilize the idea of feedback looping to discuss how researchers might begin the process of research in the bricolage, their larger and unarticulated point remains that feedback loops and the bricolage allow research and inquiry to become a living system. This position, also articulated by Alhadeff-Jones (2013), aligns with my own positioning as a researcher, and was important at the start of this inquiry.

In their discussion of the role feedback looping plays throughout the research process employing bricolage, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) state one place to begin any inquiry is through a “point of entry text” (POET). The authors (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) believe this text should be an autobiographical accounting of why a particular area of inquiry is important to the researcher, though any particular text could be used. The point of entry text is then utilized to begin dialogue and create the feedback loops that will lead to a rigorous, complex examination of the particular question(s) raised by the researcher. The researcher may take any one of numerous, circuitous routes through the process, potentially examining: multiple theoretical perspectives on a given topic; employment of multiple methodological approaches to examining a topic; exploration of a topic from multiple disciplinary, cultural, political, philosophical, or contextual positions; exploring the role of power dynamics; producing archaeologies or genealogies about the area of inquiry; and/or engaging in axiological, semiotic, or hermeneutic explorations of the topic.

Feedback looping occurs not only through examining a topic through multiple methodological, theoretical, or analytical positions, but also by engaging in dialogue with diverse

others and continuously returning to the point of entry text (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). As such, bricolage views research as a dialogue that is produced, enacted, and participated in by multiple actors: the researcher(s), faculty and/or staff, research participants, text, hypertext, environmental conditions, socio-historical, socio-political, and socio-technical conditions (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Resultantly, researchers employing the bricolage not only view research as a living system, but also recognize “that there is more than one answer to any inquiry” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 94).

Thus, bricolage enhances the complexity of understanding about an area of inquiry by shifting research away from positivistic, procedural, methodological empiricism rooted in a Cartesian metanarrative of control, predictability, and finality (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Mason, 2008). Resultantly, the goals of an inquiry also shift away from producing an ‘answer’ to a problem, to a more robust set of goals. As articulated by Kincheloe and Berry (2004), these include challenging taken-for-granted assumptions, decentering authority and privilege, understanding and being consistently cognizant of power dynamics in the research process, and seeking to “contest, deliberate, disrupt, unmask, reclaim, and track the past that has been misinterpreted, marginalized, colonized, silenced, or lost” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 129). Or, to put it another way, feedback looping in bricolage “demands a constant state of turbulence” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 129).

Inquiry on Identity, Complexity, and Social Media

This dissertation examines how researchers, educators, higher education practitioners, and others interested in issues of identity conceptualize, study, examine, analyze, and interpret identity in light of three major developments: 1) the rise of new digital technologies that has resulted in shifting patterns of relationship(s), communication(s), understandings of boundary and time, and questions about human and post-human identity (Aviram, 2010; boyd, 2011; 2014a; Braidotti, 2013; Buckingham, 2008; Everett, 2008; Haraway, 1997; 2004; Hayles, 1999; Lanier, 2011;

Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009; Poletti & Rak, 2014; Turkle, 1995; 2011); 2) a continued and persistent questioning of limitations imposed by empirical objective science and research signaling an ongoing paradigm shift (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013; Aviram, 2010; Barad, 2008a; Doll, 1993; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Slattery, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013; Taguchi, 2013); and 3) the discoveries and propositions espoused in complexity sciences (Capra, 1996; 2002; Cilliers, 1998; Cilliers & Preiser, 2010; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984), coupled with the growing influence of complexity sciences in undergirding a new epistemological positioning (Morin, 2008) and the increasing application of this new epistemological positioning to research and exploration of the human sciences and education (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008; Osberg & Biesta, 2010).

Given the robust and complicated nature of this inquiry, a bricolage approach to the research process was most appropriate. Here, I utilize Kincheloe and Berry's discussion to articulate where my inquiry commenced. In many ways, this was the start of feedback looping and created the complex conditions that allowed this research to become a living system and emergent process.

Point of Entry Text(s)

Kincheloe and Berry (2004) discuss the importance of utilizing a Point of Entry Text for all inquiries employing the bricolage approach to research. This text should serve a central focus of the study, allowing the researcher to continuously return to the text. This process of recursion develops the feedback looping necessary to create a complex and rigorous process, a proposition also espoused by Doll (1993). As stated earlier, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) argue that the point of entry should be an autobiographical piece that captures the reflexivity of the researcher, their interest in a particular area of inquiry, and allowing for the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher to be consistently focused, challenged, re-challenged, and re-articulated, especially relating to power dynamics that are evident in all research endeavors.

Though Kincheloe and Berry's (2004) assertion is one place to start, their description of research through the bricolage is not prescriptive or methodologically stringent. Each researcher discovers their own path through the bricolage, and in this case a diversion was necessary and warranted. This research began with point of entry texts. Here, texts is being used broadly to encompass more than black-and-white, printed, solely narrative written forms of texts, although these texts are important.

Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and the various reconceptualizations of this model (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013) serve as one important point of entry text in this study. The fragmented and bifurcated study of college student identity that was prevalent during the second half of the twentieth century was partially discarded through the articulation of these models. The conceptualization of college student identity as holistic, integrated, environmentally contextualized, cognitively focused, and shifting was attempted in these models, with some degree of success. At a minimum, the articulation of these conceptual models began a discursive shift amongst researchers and college student educators about the responsibilities, possibilities, and limitations of conducting research and structuring environments to achieve certain prescribed developmental outcomes in college students. In fact, as will be argued in subsequent chapters, the articulation of these models actually challenges the conception of 'development' as a phenomenon that occurs in a linear, stage-oriented, predictive pattern, as articulated in many traditional theories of student development.

Yet, the Models of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, particularly the most recent articulation (Jones & Abes, 2013) have significant oversights, particularly in the realm of environmental contextual influences. While student development theorists and college student educators have recognized and acknowledged the impacts of socio-politico-cultural factors (such as privilege and oppression, historical lineages, geographic location, legal issues) on college student and human

identity, technological spaces, particularly digital technological spaces, have not yet been adequately addressed by researchers, educators, or practitioners. The lack of response might be contributed to difficulties in articulating the goals of research on and about technological spaces (Fielding, Lee, & Blank, 2008; Hine, 2005; Markham & Baym, 2009), or on the persistent and increasingly evident call for more empirically-based research about issues of identity that remains mired in the Cartesian meta-narrative of generalizability, predictability, linearity, and certainty (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Jones & Abes, 2013).

In other words, college student identity researchers and college student educators are demonstrating in the present moment the rifts that occur during a large paradigmatic shift. Stuck between an epistemology of simplicity and an epistemology of complexity (Morin, 2008), researchers and educators are simultaneously seeking to accurately explain college student identity development, while being open to the possibility that such a phenomena cannot be explained through an exhausted epistemological position of simplicity. The technological spaces of digital social media are where this current debate is occurring within the field, though this reality goes unrecognized by many researchers and college student educators.

Therefore, the most recently articulated Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013) serves as a point of entry to this study. Through the conceptual model, the broad historical lineages of the research base on college student identity can be explored, examined, interrogated, questioned, challenged, de-centered, re-centered, and exposed, both for the incredibly bold positioning of the model in advancing an agenda of complex thinking, and for the challenges posed by leaving unexamined digital technological spaces.

Complexity Theory.

There are many texts that address the tenets, findings, propositions, and understandings of complexity sciences and theory (Capra, 1996; 2002; Casti, 1994; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Doll, 1993; Mason, 2008; Osberg & Biesta, 2010; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Taylor, 2001; Trueit, 2012).

However, in aligning with Kincheloe and Berry's (2004) assertion that there is a point of entry, Fritjof Capra's (1996) *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* was my point of entry into the rigorous study of foundational tenets of complexity science and theory. From this book, I have shifted into many divergent tracks, exploring issues of emergence, self-organization, systems theory, chaos mathematics, disequilibrium, and the non-linear fractal nature of information and living beings. Therefore, as a point of entry, Capra's (1996) work remains critical to understanding where the ideas and discursive shifts argued for in this inquiry may have originated.

Digital Social Media.

boyd and Ellison (2007) discuss key features of digital social media platforms. To be considered a digital social media platform, a site must allow an individual to create a profile, create a digital connection with other individuals engaged or utilizing the platform, and see connections between networks of people. Hundreds of websites and platforms currently exist that meet such criteria (Qualman, 2013), but the most popular among college students are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram (Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project, 2013). These sites become texts and points of entry for this study. My daily immersion in several of these sites at the start of this study, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Academia.edu, demonstrated that these digital locations are relational, interactive, constantly fluctuating, and dynamic points of engagement. By the conclusion of this study, my digital social networks expanded to include Wordpress, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and YouTube. Immersion in these digital platforms, and critical engagement with these texts, become a key point of entry into understanding their role in examining, questioning, challenging, and articulating the study and discussion on college student identity in the 21st century.

Feedback Looping

The importance of feedback looping cannot be understated within the bricolage (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Feedback loops ensure that the research is both a living system, and avoid the pitfalls of strictly linear, pre-determined, hierarchical and prescribed methodological procedures. As described by Kincheloe and Berry (2004), “feedback looping in bricolage functions as disruption, challenge, opposition, tracking, excavating, connecting” (p. 130) and requires a researcher to document points of bifurcation, “acknowledg[ing] the options and discuss[ing] why he/she chose one option and not other possibilities” (p. 132). Aside from documentation of choices, a process of self-reflexivity (Daly, 2007) and dialogue with diverse others is warranted and necessary.

Research Blog and Social Media Learning Networks.

Self-reflexivity and dialogue with diverse others were part of this research critical in creating the feedback looping necessary for the creation of a living system. Researcher subjectivity is an integral part of the research process, a point articulated clearly by Kincheloe and Berry (2004), who stated that researchers employing and working through bricolage “understand that the research process is subjective and that instead of repressing this subjectivity they attempt to understand its role in shaping inquiry” (p. 6). Thus, my research blog (available at <http://pweaton.wordpress.com>) served as one space where my own subjectivity about the research process, my assumptions, and the challenges of research were to be examined and documented.

I envisioned the blog serving as a point of entry for diverse others to disrupt the research process, challenge articulations that began emerging from the research, and providing additional avenues of exploration regarding the topics that emerged as part of the research. As the research process unfolded, it was my desire to notice patterns, relationships, and new modes of understanding, enhancing the complexity of the research inquiry and the rigor that could be

accomplished. As I will discuss in chapter 10, the use of the blog did not materialize as I had anticipated.

Despite this, the use of blogging is becoming increasingly important to research processes (Wakeford & Cohen, 2008), allowing geographically disparate researchers to stay connected and discuss issues of engaging in new, emergent, and cutting edge research such as that undertaken in this dissertation. While I started my blog in January, 2014, I had been connected to other researchers examining the impact(s) of social media on various college student issues and outcomes through social media networking. Through this process, I have developed a relationship with several other doctoral students nationwide engaging in research on various aspects of digital identity, digital student engagement, and digital civic literacy. Each of these researchers have blogs themselves, and we each regularly post updates on our ongoing thoughts, questions, and challenges of conducting research. Thus, this research process allowed me to become part of a larger learning community of scholars engaging in this research. Together we are challenging each other, engaging in rich dialogue through our blogs and social media accounts, and working toward presenting our work together as part of symposia and individual research presentations. Thus, this research is not a stand-alone project, but is part of a larger networked research agenda occurring by many other researchers seeking to understand the many possibilities and limitations of research on digital identity and college students.

Ongoing Presentations and Publications.

Part of the questioning undertaken in this research involves processes of interrogating, challenging, and questioning of dominant discourses surrounding research regarding college student identity in the twenty-first century. Bringing divergent trains of thought into conversation requires commitment to engaging in dialogue with researchers and college student educators nationally and internationally about the direction of research. Therefore, presenting ideas at

conferences, writing about the inquiry, and documenting the feedback of others became an important part of the dialogical process necessary for this inquiry.

I presented some of my ideas that are outlined in chapters three and four of this dissertation at the 2014 ACPA – College Student Educators International Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. The title of my paper, “Digital Social Media, Complexity Theory, and 21st Century Student Identity Research” sought to outline how digital social media environments challenge many traditional theories of college student identity ‘development,’ and articulated my own positioning that advancing discourse, research, and understanding about college student identity might be achieved by bringing tenets of complexity theory into our knowledge and discourse around these topics. The feedback from the discussant, as well as the audience members, was a helpful part of the process, and an important feedback loop that was created.

As this dissertation progressed I continued presenting on ideas from the research itself. In the summer of 2014 I presented a paper at the Curriculum Studies Summer Collaborative Conference entitled “Curriculums of Identity: Embracing Digital Space.” This paper sought to examine how digital architectural affordances release or constrain understanding of identity for individual users. Examining this issue from the perspective of curriculum allowed me to employ literature from the field of curriculum theory while articulating an understanding that learning about identity occurs beyond the confines of structured educational environments.

At the 2014 Association for the Study of Higher Education conference, I presented a paper entitled “Post-Qualitative Research in Higher Education: What Might Research Become?” This paper examined many of the foundational writings discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation, while also reporting on initial findings from the digital immersive portions of this study as described in chapters seven through nine.

Bifurcations: Paths Through the Process

Traditional Student Development Theory

Examining college student identity first means recognizing that identity, human identity, self-identity, and social identity are difficult to define, while varying across space, time, and culture. The roots of student development theory, particularly issues of identity, can only be understood by first carefully examining the discourses surrounding identity, as well as the strong connection between these discourses and scientific method. While this cannot be an exhaustive review, a thorough review of philosophical positions on identity is appropriate and necessary to understand the assumptions and positions articulated in the current research and understanding of college student identity. This examination leads to the conclusion that the very concept of identity is becoming increasingly contested in a postmodern and technological world, and is examined in chapter two.

Complex Identity

Complexity theory and science challenges the tenets of traditional college student development theory. Using the most recently articulated Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013) as a point of entry, some tenets of complexity theory will be applied to further challenge and shift the discourse on conceptualizing and researching college student identity. Here, the concept of identity emergence will be explored and articulated in more depth. The application of complexity theory to my understanding and articulation of identity emergence is articulated in chapter three.

Social Media

The rapid proliferation of digital social media into the lived experience of most college students means that identity must be explored in these unique environmental contexts. The complex study of individual college student identity emergence through and across social media contexts is one methodologically appropriate and necessary part of the research agenda that was

conducted in this study (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Hetherington, 2013). In this particular aspect of the research, I immersed myself in the digital social media platforms of seven college students. These sites became points of entry into the digital lives of these students, and served as the starting point for conversations regarding identity, identity across distributed social media space, relationships between digital and day-to-day real-life intra-actions and identity, and relationships between platforms in an understanding, exploration, articulation, or other processes of becoming. An understanding of current research on digital identity issues is discussed in chapter four. Chapter five introduces the portions of my research process that I label digital immersion. Finally, chapters seven through nine explore the complex digital intra-actions of the seven human becomings who participated in this study. These chapters demonstrate research as process, identity as an emergent phenomena, and showcase human becoming through and across distributed social media space in its nuance, complexity, and possibility.

Post-qualitative, Intra-active Research

As will become evident throughout Chapters two, three, and four, since there is a very real shift occurring in our understanding of college student identity issues, and since it is my contention that digital spaces must be accounted for in any future research on college student identity, the time is ripe to shift our understanding of traditional research on college identity issues. In chapter five, I further articulate my current conceptualization regarding the digital immersion portion of this dissertation project. I outline my understanding of the post-qualitative turn occurring in some realms of education and science (Barad, 2008a; Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; Taguchi, 2013). In articulating my digital immersion research process, I draw on the writings of researchers examining issues of new materialism, agential realism (Barad, 2008a; 2008b), and post-qualitative inquiry to articulate some of the challenges to our traditional understanding(s) of research, data, and analysis, and how these concepts relate to the research project undertaken in this dissertation.

Legal and Ethical Issues

As this research unfolded, I underwent a rigorous and thorough Institutional Review Board process. The intricacies of this study led to a full board review of this research, resulting in several important changes to the initial design and conception of dat(a)analysis. The issues raised by the Institutional Review Board will be examined in chapter six. This discussion is situated within my own understanding of literature from leading researchers in the field of digital studies, communication studies, and digital research, regarding ethical and legal issues associated with human subjects protections in and through digital social media and Internet platforms. The complexity of this discussion is enhanced by developments during the summer of 2014, where several high profile social media studies came under scrutiny for possible violations of ethical research protocol. The implications of these discussions for this study are discussed.

The Regressive Moment

William Pinar (2012), in his theory of *currenere*, refers to the regressive moment, “returning to the past” (p. 5), as critical to processes of exploring subjectivity (or as Gert Biesta (2014) states, the process of subjectification). As previously discussed, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) also articulate the importance of centering the researcher’s own subjectivity as part of a complex, bricolage approach to research. It is therefore appropriate, prior to continuing through the remainder of this study, to look back at what I anticipated would occur during this research, what actually resulted from the process, and the emergent, unpredictable phenomena that arose. This is what became.

Theory and Philosophy

I have long had a passion for educational theory and philosophy. When I began this dissertation work, challenging traditional student development theoretical perspectives was not my intention. Rather, I sought to expand dialogue, bringing digital spaces into the lexicon of practitioners, educators, and researchers. Yet, as I progressed through the prospectus, I found myself consistently challenging the traditional student development literature base. Complexity

theory, quantum theory, post-qualitative researchers: all shifted my experience with theory away from certainty (which for much of my professional practice had been how I operated with theory) toward questioning.

At the conclusion of this dissertation, theory and philosophy retain central importance. If anything, I'm more theoretical and philosophical now than I was at the outset. I realize that there is a vast world of theoretical perspectives college student educators and higher education researchers are not utilizing, and offer two thoughts in this regard. First, our work might be greatly enhanced by bringing into dialogue 'non-empirical' theoretical perspectives. This dissertation – by engaging complexity, quantum, post-qualitative, and new materialist theories begins this process. In chapter 10 I will offer the “progressive moment” (Pinar, 2012) – where I discuss other theoretical perspectives that have peaked my interest during the course of this project, and which will fuel my work beyond this project. Secondly, our failure to engage 'non-empirical' theoretical perspectives forecloses our thought (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). If anything, we need more persistent questioning, through engaging theory, as we continue becoming.

When I wrote the proposal for this dissertation, I also anticipated theory being more centrally focused as part of working through the immersion and interviews with each of the human becomings in the study. Theory still retained a hugely important role and I point the reader to chapters eight and nine as the highlight of these theoretical engagements. However, the constraints placed upon me by the Institutional Review Board led to the digital immersive portions of this dissertation being more narratively focused than I intended. This appears now either serendipitous, or exactly as the universe intended this project to unfold. There are beautiful stories in this dissertation. Each of the human becomings who participated in the study moved me personally toward a true ontological moment – recognizing the importance of being. Research as being. As we entangled and intra-acted over the many months of immersion, telling the narrative of what unfolded, attempting to capture the full complexity of the stories became the invigorating

process. Of course, this telling is only partial. But the narrative nature of the immersive portions of this project actually engages a multitude of theoretical and philosophical perspectives. I believe this will become evident to the reader in chapters seven through nine.

Spirituality and Religion

I do not consider myself to be religious. In terms of spirituality, I would say I have strong beliefs about the interconnectivity of energy forces across the world and universe. Therefore, as will become evident to readers diving into the immersive portions of this project, I was not expecting social media to have such a dynamic role in the spiritual and religious lives of students. However, four of the seven human becomings who participated in this study are thoroughly engaged in these discussions across distributed social media space. I am not drawing any generalizable conclusion about college students and their use of social media in this regard. Rather, I am highlighting what was unanticipated for me when I began this study.

Aesthetics

In a similar fashion, I anticipated and desired having the opportunity to showcase digital artifacts as part of the data analysis portions of this dissertation. As will become evident in chapter six, Institutional Review Board restrictions tied my hands in this regard. I have mixed emotions regarding this reality. In one regard, my use of thick and rich narrative description in chapters seven through nine invite the reader to imagine, for themselves, what I attempt to capture in words. There is power in this approach – and I believe that your ontological engagement with the human becomings in this study, captured through my own narration, allows you as a reader to become entangled and know the human becomings differently than I will. In many regards this is the point of the study, as will be discussed in both chapters five and seven.

However, what I did not anticipate heading into this research was the aesthetics of social media spaces. Immersion makes you ‘see’ and intra-act with distributed social media spaces differently. Over the many months of this study, I came to see a certain aesthetic beauty to social

media platforms. Layouts, designs, colors, photographs, fonts, pins – I used to think of these ‘digital artifacts’ as solely affordances or the ‘material’ of the spaces. There is still validity to this way of viewing the material of distributed spaces, as I will discuss in chapter eight. Yet, there is an aesthetic beauty as well – one that the reader will not be able to engage with for the human becomings in this study – but that I offer up as an unanticipated surprise resulting from the study.

Conclusion

Just above my writing desk, I have two quotes that I have pulled from the rigorous study undertaken in the first five chapters of this dissertation. One is from Sherry Turkle, who in a moment of consilience for me personally, discusses how we might view social media as a living project of bricolage. She states, “bricoleurs approach problem solving by entering into a relationship with their work materials that has more the flavor of a conversation than a monologue” (1995, p. 51). In the next four chapters, you are invited into the conversation I have been undertaking with a broad base of theoretical, conceptual, philosophical, and methodological materials, people, and space(s). I am not necessarily seeking necessarily solution to a problem, as Turkle asserts in her statement, though I do problematize a whole set of assumptions about what it means to ‘do’ research on college student identity issues in the digital age. As I stated earlier in this introduction, I am aware of the limitations of my own biases, my own quirks as a researcher-becoming, and the realization that my own ‘knowledge,’ and what you read in the subsequent pages, is a shifting, environmentally contingent, and flowing system. There is an ambiguity to this process. It is an ambiguity that I have been working to become increasingly comfortable with over the many months and years during which this dissertation developed.

The second quote is from Edgar Morin (2008), who states, “we need a kind of thinking that reconnects that which is disjointed and compartmentalized, that respects diversity as it recognizes unity, and that tries to discern interdependencies. We need a radical thinking, a multidimensional thinking, and an organizational and systemic thinking” (p. 98). My interest in college student

identity issues has long been about understanding how we can reconnect that which was disjointed in the twentieth century, as will be discussed in Chapter two. Researchers, educators, and practitioners are also interested in creating this holistic understanding (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Braxton, 2009). Yet, this is a difficult task to achieve. I believe the digital spaces that have arisen rapidly in the past quarter century only further complicate our attempts to reconnect the disjointed. The Internet, digital social media, and Web 2.0 platforms have actually created one of the most paradoxical situations imaginable: almost boundless and endless opportunities for connectivity, yet a feeling of more disconnection, fragmentation, and confusion. Seeking to understand how we advance research on college student identity in a digital age by developing more complex, rigorous, and post-qualitative research projects that are comfortable with ambiguity is one of the many tasks I undertake in this dissertation. This is a dialogue, an active engagement occurring in multiple space(s), with many people, and will continue occurring long after this dissertation project is complete. For now, I begin the conversation by providing an overview of the history of college student identity theory, and the recent shift that has occurred through articulation of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000) and critical theoretical readings of this model.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY AND COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Since inception of the field of student affairs, often attributed to publication of the 1937 *Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV)* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 1989; Nuss, 2003), practitioners and researchers have examined issues of identity in college students. Philosophical statements like the SPPV often emphasize the need for institutions of higher learning to ensure development of the “whole student” (Braxton, 2009, p. 573), explicitly mentioning spiritual, physical, intellectual, moral, cultural, and cognitive development. As I have argued (Eaton, 2014a), one critical way to examine the rise of student affairs as a professional field is to understand the dynamic shifts occurring on American college campuses in the early twentieth century. As campuses in the United States sought to educate ever-increasing numbers of students, and as the roots of strict academic disciplinary structures took hold in most colleges and universities, the profession of student affairs rose to fill a critical gap in the curriculum of higher learning in America: ensuring the continued emphasis on educating the whole student, not just their intellect. Understanding this early history of the profession is critical to appreciating the richness of college student development theory, particularly those theories attentive to identity.

In the early days of the profession, however, there was not much theory to guide the work of practitioners. Boland, Stamatakos, and Rogers (1994) argue the field of student affairs sought to justify its existence by turning toward an ever-increasing focus on articulating a set of theories to guide the work of the profession. In their reading of the history of student affairs, this turn-toward-theory began by co-opting theories from other disciplines such as developmental psychology and sociology, an acknowledgement of many foundational texts and articles exploring college student development theory (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Jones & Abes, 2013; Renn & Reason, 2012). In the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s through the present, student affairs practitioners shifted to an increased focus on social identity theory (race, ethnicity,

binary gender [male/female], sexual orientation, gender spectrums [inclusion of transgender theory], and religious and spiritual identity). For Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers (1994), who are highly critical of the marriage between student affairs and developmental theory, this focus on student development theory within the profession was the result of a desire among practitioners to compete with faculty, carve out an area of expertise, and justify increasing budget expenditures with little empirical evidence justifying such allocation of resources. En route, Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers believe student affairs practitioners have de-emphasized and undermined the purpose of higher education: intellectual pursuit.

This reading and critique of student development by Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers (1994) provides an important counter-perspective in the literature and discourse of the profession. As a researcher who has written about the rise of the profession of student affairs (Eaton 2014a), I have often emphasized the importance of student affairs as a challenge to the curricular structuring of colleges and universities, while also noting the field's own role in undermining the effectiveness of this challenge: educating the whole student (Eaton, 2014b). Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers (1994) make a bold assertion that as a profession, student affairs should "cease its identification with the student development model as the core of the profession" (p. 112) and instead return to the roots of the SPPV by focusing on the intellectual and academic mission of the university. In many ways, the field heard this call, shifting its discourse in *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006), though the field still places great emphasis on the importance of student development theory, particularly identity theory. This is as it should be. Colleges and universities still have a need for spaces that challenge the increasingly rigid, reductionist, de-humanizing space of the twenty-first century academy. Neoliberal pushes for skill attainment and demonstration of mastering competencies undermines much of the original philosophy of higher education (Giroux, 2014; Giroux & Giroux, 2006; Pinar, 2012; 2013), and student affairs educators, with their emphasis on educating the whole student, remain one of the

last best hopes within American colleges and universities for focusing on moral, cultural, and holistic education. Our best thoughts and potential for aiming toward such educational purposes and objectives, or at least being reminded of their importance, remain rooted in many of theories of college student development.

However, I agree with Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers (1994) that student affairs practitioners, researchers, and educators need to discard the “student development model” (p. 112) of the twentieth century. The difference, however, is that I believe the profession needs to discard the positivist position of ‘development,’ in favor of ‘emergence,’ a shift in the discourse and epistemological framing of the profession that I will describe vigorously in Chapter three. Asserting such a position is rooted in a re-reading of student development literature, particularly identity development literature, through the epistemological and theoretical lens of complexity theory.

Further, an important shift has occurred in the last ten years that has influenced all aspects of society, but particularly college students: the advent of digital social media. Digital social media space(s) radically challenge traditional developmental theory by altering conceptions of space, time, and environmental context, issues I will discuss in Chapter four. If we are to understand, research, and advocate for college student identity in the twenty-first century, then a potentially radical shift in thinking about research on college student identity is needed. The start of this discussion is outlined in Chapter five.

While my discussion may portend a drastic change for student affairs researchers, educators, and practitioners, the discourse and literature of the field has already shifted toward what I call a complexivist position: embracing the fluidity of identity, seeking to account for environmental context(s), and working against linear, generalizable examinations of identity issues in college students, favoring more holistic approaches bordering on post-qualitative inquiry. In this chapter, I will seek to outline and articulate what is meant by ‘identity,’ and more importantly, the history of college student identity ‘development’ research. In this brief literature review, I will

expose you to a basic understanding of how the field of student identity development literature evolved, particularly in the latter part of the twentieth century, provide an overview of some of the commonalities of student identity development literature, and expose the theoretical assumptions of many leading theories: namely that identity development is linear, generalizable, contingent on environmental context and cognitive processing within those environments, and in most cases reaches some peak, pinnacle, or developmental apex.

Through this chapter you will also find that social identity development theories, while important in understanding cultural differences, led to a period of fragmentation in the broader discourse and research of student identity theorizing and modeling, a process being challenged through articulation of integrationist theorizing and modeling (Baxter Magolda, 2009). To elaborate on the process of building integrationist models, I will discuss the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and its rearticulations (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013). This integrationist model of student identity recognizes the importance of studying individual cultural, social, cognitive, or moral theories, while also not losing sight of the holistic nature of the college student human experience. While this theory has greatly advanced conversation and understanding among student affairs practitioners, researchers, and educators, it's application to understanding and enhancing research on college student identity can be advanced by incorporating digital space(s) as unique environmental contexts. The need to consider such space(s) in the identity emergence, or becoming, of college students is one purpose of this dissertation, while the challenges of such a project in terms of research, 'analysis,' and representational theorizing or modeling is another.

What is Identity?

Defining identity is a challenge. Buckingham (2008) asserts that the term 'identity' "implies both similarity and difference" (p. 1) as "people attempt to assert their individuality, but also to join with others" (p. 6) in groups that share similar interests, visions, or characteristics. This latter idea,

that as social beings humans tend to group themselves together, recognizes that “the formation of identity often involves a process of stereotyping, or cognitive simplification” (Buckingham, 2008, p. 6). Erik Erikson, one of the most well known Western researchers on childhood and adolescent development also had this view. According to Evans et al. (2010), “Erikson stressed that identity ‘connotes both a personal sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others’ (Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 109)” (p. 51). In working with theories of identity, researchers often must account for various psychological, sociological, historical, political, environmental, and geographic conditions. The difficulty of working through and including each of these variables often means that research on identity is rarely truly holistic, but rather often focuses on fragmented or reductionist analysis; hence, research and understanding of identity has often fixated on age-related development of identity (Erikson, 1959/1980), or on models or understanding of identity related to shared characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, nationality, or broader social constructs such as spirituality or socioeconomic status. Operationalizing and defining identity is perhaps the most difficult challenge for any researcher, and is often influenced by the dominant paradigm of a field, or epistemological positioning of the researcher (Evans et al., 2010).

The difficulty of defining has led to different categories and approaches to researching identity, and subsequently different theories and models of identity (Evans et al., 2010). Of particular importance for this study is understanding the psychological, sociological, and constructivist approaches to studying college student identity that arose since the mid-twentieth century.

Nevitt Sanford and Arthur Chickering

Nevitt Sanford and Arthur Chickering were the first theorists to embrace and apply the psychological and sociological developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson in the context of the college environment (Evans, 2005; Evans et al., 2010). Chickering’s initial research,

conducted on students in thirteen different college environments, appeared in 1969 and resulted in his theory “Vectors of College Student Development” (Evans, 2005, p. 181). According to Chickering, college students developed specifically along seven different vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, developing purpose, developing integrity, and establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, 2005) Chickering theorized that “the establishment of identity is the central developmental issue during the college years” (Evans, 2005, p. 181). Sanford’s work theorized that for appropriate development to occur college students needed an adequate balance of challenge and support (Evans, 2005). These psychosocial theories became foundational in college student affairs educators understanding of developmental trajectories for which they viewed themselves responsible.

Sanford’s theory of challenge and support, coupled with Chickering’s theory of psychosocial development, highlight the important role of the college and empiricism in our contemporary understanding of college student identity development. First, Chickering clearly emphasizes these vectors of development occur specifically for college students during the college years. Though emerging adults not attending college may also change along certain of these developmental vectors, the vectors of development occur in a very specific environmental context: the college campus environment. Secondly, since there is an implicit privileging of the college experience in Chickering’s theory, development also becomes bound by age and time. This is not surprising given Erikson’s and Piaget’s theories of development focused almost exclusively on children through young adulthood. College, both in terms of age of attendance (which by the 1950’s had become late adolescence through early adulthood) and time (generally a four-year time period) became the final life experience leading to maturation, growth, and development. Empirically, theory had evolved and embraced a generalized and linear understanding of development.

Chickering's Thoughts on Identity Development.

A careful reading of *Education and Identity* (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) validates the idea that in the very broadest sense a linear conception of development had been embraced. In the preface, Chickering and Reisser (1993) discuss why their theory embraced the term vectors: "We call them vectors because each has direction and magnitude" (p. xv). The authors continue, complicating the discussion about how to think about development: "Although development is expressed more appropriately by a spiral or steps than by a straight line, we retain the term *vectors* in the interests of economy and historical continuity" (p. xv). The term vectors is drawn from mathematics and physics, implying both linearity and continuity of direction. Although Chickering and Reisser (1993) attempt to disrupt this idea by mentioning identity development as a spiraling process, their use of the term vectors could be read as an embrace of a linear conception of development. Further, the separation of development into different vectors began the process of fragmenting the study and understanding of college student development. Thus, although Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted that "development of college students. . .is a process of infinite complexity" and that developmental "movement along any [vector] can occur at different rates and can interact with movement along the others" (p. 34), their theory is essentially linear in its conception, and led to many empirical studies of the developmental trajectories of students in college, which will be discussed below.

As noted above, Chickering believed the formation of identity was the central developmental task of college. In fact, Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that "at one level of generalization, all the developmental vectors could be classified under 'identity formation'" (p. 173). In this regard, Chickering and Reisser followed in the footsteps of Erikson, asserting a position that identity development really focuses on the process of "journeying toward individuation – the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being" and "also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society" (p.

35). For these reasons, Chickering's theory often is called a psychosocial theory of identity development, with its embrace of both internal psychological processes and external social processes.

Despite the assertion that all the vectors might aptly be coupled together under a broad heading of identity development, Chickering and Reisser (1993) still retained a separate vector called 'establishing identity.' Specific developmental tasks need to be resolved within this vector. These include comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyles, sense of self in response to feedback from others, self-acceptance, self-esteem, and stability and integration. Movement along this vector was theorized to be greatly influenced by other people on the college campus, especially peers. Further, establishing identity was seen primarily as a process of "resolving crises" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 181).

The idea that crises are faced and resolved is the second way of viewing Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory as an embrace of linearity. Crisis resolution was a central tenet of Erikson's theory of identity development (Evans et al., 2010). Chickering and Reisser acknowledge this carry-over from Erikson, and again attempt to disrupt the idea of linearity in their theory, even though ultimately they reinforce a linear conception of the world. For example, in discussing how crisis resolution is central to the establishment of identity, Chickering and Reisser state that Erikson "warned social scientists not to think of these crises as 'resolved' once and for all. He knew the hazards of existence force a continual process of integration and that we struggle, progress, and regress in trying to maintain equilibrium" (p. 174). The idea of equilibrium is central to almost all college student development theory. Theoretically, the goal of many theories and models of student development is to help students achieve some developmental apex, some sense of equilibrium, after successful resolution of various developmental crises. As you will see in chapter 3, complexity theory challenges this linear conception of equilibrium and embraces the concept of disequilibrium.

Empirical Research.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reported on the impact of college in relation to various potential outcomes, including several of the tenets of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector establishing identity. Although there are few studies that sought to empirically examine this vector specifically, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) do report on a few longitudinal studies that appear to "support the proposition that college may play a role in students' identity development, although the impact may not occur, or be apparent, until the later college years" (p. 216). Particularly relevant to their analysis of empirical research regarding establishing identity is the difficulty of conducting such research empirically, and then making this research generalizable. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) cite several studies that were single-institution or included small sample sizes. As a result, the authors caution that "although the evidence suggests that identity development does occur during college, caution is warranted inasmuch as that conclusion rests more firmly on the consistency of the findings than on the methodological rigor of the designs or analytical procedures" (p. 216).

Social Identity Theories

As the social unrest of the 1960's – 1990's occurred, student development theorists greatly expanded their focus, seeking to understand the unique developmental trajectories of women, students of color, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students, students with disabilities, and other minority groups. College student development researchers and educators were not alone in this endeavor, as researchers in sociology, psychology, and other social science fields also sought to understand, theorize, and empirically verify the impacts of social identity on various developmental objectives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

What evolved was an explicit focus in researching social identity development, particularly in college students. Research, theories, and models emerged focusing on racial identity development (Helms, 1992; 1993; Renn, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2003; Tatum, 2003; Wijeyesinghe &

Jackson, 2012); ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1989; Torres, 2003); sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996); and gender (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986). College student affairs educators also began examining the potential impacts of socioeconomic status, ability status, and spiritual-religious affiliation on the development and experiences of college students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Jones, 1996). This was the period of fragmented student identity theorizing: reducing and atomizing supposedly holistic individuals into compartmentalized identity categories. In the tradition of 'development,' much of this literature maintained a focus on linear, stage oriented understanding of individual identity development, and sought to create generalizable theories or models.

Integrationist and Constructivist Approaches.

In 2000, recognizing the problems associated with a fragmented understanding of identity development, researchers began problematizing the reductionist and simplistic understanding of college student identity. Jones and McEwen (2000) published the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, a first attempt at integrating the wide swath of student development theory into one representational model. Conceptually speaking, the model illustrates CORE identity being comprised of an individual's typological characteristics, with aspects of social identity (class, religion, gender, race, sexual orientation) being separate from a person's CORE. Contextual influences, such as family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and life planning decisions, influence the relationship and salience of social identities to a person's CORE identity. The Jones and McEwen (2000) model was the first attempt at integrating various student development theories into a holistic understanding of college student identity, and ushered in the shift within the student affairs profession of complicating discussions, engaging critical discourses, and working toward creation of a truly integrated and holistic understanding of college student identity.

Not long after, Marcia Baxter Magolda (2001) published her groundbreaking work *Making their own way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-development*. Building on her earlier longitudinal study of college students' epistemological development (Baxter Magolda, 1992), Baxter Magolda further developed the conceptual framework of meaning-making, initially articulated by Kegan (1982), to explore the path toward self-authorship for young adults. As defined by Baxter Magolda (2001; 2009), meaning-making involves a transformative process away from conforming one's identity to meet externally defined expectations toward an internal self-definition of identity. This internal definition of identity involves articulating and maintaining personal values and beliefs regardless of external contextual influences. This process of meaning-making is critical in understanding "identity development as an evolving process in which we continually rework our sense of ourselves and our relationships with other people and as we encounter challenges in the environment that call our current conceptualizations into question" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 18). In her discussion on the continued evolution of applying meaning-making to longitudinal studies in young adult development, Baxter Magolda (2009) emphasizes "many college student development theories inherently include person in context by integrating cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions, and placing making meaning in the context of the social environment" (p. 626). Of vital importance in Baxter Magolda's framing of meaning-making is "the context of the social environment" (p. 626). Once bounded within physical space, the social environment of the twenty-first century college student extends into the digital world. The importance of this shift in social context is important to understanding issues surrounding twenty-first century student identity research, and will be discussed further in chapter four.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) introduced the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity by applying Baxter Magolda's (2001) concept of meaning-making as a filter through which students made sense of their identity and experience, dependent on different social contexts. Conceptually, this meant that students with less complex meaning-making capabilities

(less of an internally defined sense of self) were strongly influenced by external contextual influences. These external influences give individuals their sense of identity/identities, conforming to the externally defined expectations. In other words, individuals will conform to external expectations of who they should be when meaning-making capacity is more externally defined. Conversely, individuals with a more complex meaning-making structure are better able to filter out external influences, and maintain some separation between external expectations and internal realities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013). Regardless of one's meaning-making capacity, social and environmental contexts remain highly important. Additionally, it is important to note that complexity of meaning-making capacity is theorized to be dependent on experience, age, and maturity level. Baxter Magolda (2001) theorized that internal complex meaning-making is impossible for most individuals until their late twenties.

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) were eventually criticized for failing to acknowledge that for some individuals, social identities such as race, class, gender, or sexual orientation are an integral part of the CORE identity, as opposed to being salient only within certain environmental contexts (Jones & Abes, 2013). Additionally, the idea that meaning-making capacity is static, as opposed to fluctuating based on context, came under scrutiny, as did a failure to more fully integrate or recognize that contextual locations may harness different responses, partially in reaction to privilege and oppression:

the RMMDI demonstrates how certain contextual influences are more challenging to filter than others, regardless of a person's meaning-making capacity. Specifically, identities shaped by systemic forms of oppression, such as racism and heterosexism, might prove to be more challenging to filter in a complex manner as a result of the deeply rooted and pervasive ways in which privilege and power define the meanings of these identities. (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 118)

Baxter Magolda and King (2007) also noted that "individuals often use more than one meaning-making structure at a time" (p. 495). Resultantly, Jones and Abes (2013) have discussed how the filter of meaning-making, as presented in the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of

Identity (RMMDI) “needs to be applied with flexibility and caution” (p. 119). Further, Jones and Abes (2013) stress that “identity is always shaped within contexts” (p. 105), and that identity can also shape context. With context having such an important role in theorizing and modeling college student identity development, all environments, including digital social media environments, need to be examined. The affordances offered in digital space(s) for the exploration, articulation, and capacity to make meaning of identity will be explored further in chapter four.

Application of Critical Theory.

The theorizing and modeling of student identity research has greatly attended to issues of environmental context in the past decade, particularly as practitioners, educators, and researchers have introduced critical theory concepts into the lexicon of student development discourse. In their book *Identity Development of College Students: Advancing Frameworks for Multiple Dimensions of Identity*, Susan Jones and Elisa Abes (2013) utilize the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity as a foundation for re-imagining what student development theory might look like when read through the lens of critical theories. Specifically, Jones and Abes (2013) include three chapters that couple the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity with Intersectionality Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Queer Theory.

Intersectionality.

Intersectionality theory has increasingly been applied to student development theory. Strayhorn (2013) stated that practitioners and researchers have come to realize “that separate and discrete categorical approaches were inadequate for capturing the complexity of students’ lives” (p. 3) and that “it has become increasingly difficult to view students as members of discrete and isolated categories” (p. 4). Thus, the field has turned to intersectionality theory. The theory has origins in the writing of Kimberle Crenshaw (1995) and Patricia Hills Collins (1999) (Jones & Abes, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013) who sought to attend and account for overlapping identities, systems of power, privilege, oppression, and their impact on the lived experiences of individuals and social

groups. There is a distinctly action-oriented component to intersectionality theory, the goal being social change (Jones & Abes, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013). Jones and Abes (2013) articulate the position that “intersectionality as an analytic framework for understanding identity insists on. . .a more holistic approach to identity” (p. 135) focused not only on individual identity issues, but also “connecting individuals to groups; groups to society; and individuals, groups, and society – all in connection to structures of power” (p. 141). Thus, intersectional analyses of identity do not focus solely on individual identity issues, but also on group identity issues. The entanglement of individuals with groups lead to differing articulations of identity. Further, taking sociocultural, historical, political, and environmental influences into account is important in understanding identity from an intersectional perspective. As such, “identity models informed by intersectionality offer better ways of capturing the complexity of identity and portraying the full range of factors, contextual influences, social identities, lived experiences, and structures of power that contribute to a holistic interpretation of identity” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 154).

As I stated, the theory of intersectionality has been applied as an analytic framework in many recent studies and books focused on college student development. Terrell Strayhorn’s (2013) edited book *Living at the Intersections: Social Identities and Black Collegians* to center the experiences of Black college students, while also investigating how Black identity intersects with various other social identities in understanding personal identity and group identity on college campuses. In his book, authors explore how social identities such as gender, spirituality, sexual orientation, first-generation, or low-income interact with Blackness in the lived and developmental experiences of today’s college students. Further, the authors in the book explore multiple contextual environments, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Campuses (PWIs), maintaining the importance of accounting for environmental contexts in intersectional analyses.

Abes (2012) applies an intersectional and constructivist reading of one lesbian student's identity experiences during college. Her participant, Gia, was analyzed through both a constructivist and intersectional lens specifically to examine how lesbian identity interacted with social class and Whiteness. In her analysis, Abes (2012) points out how such a reading more aptly captures the power dynamics inherent in the salience of Gia's various identities. For example, since Gia was poor, she read many of her experiences through the lens of social class. Due to the constraints placed on her time because of work obligations, Gia was often unable to focus on her lesbian identity. However, Gia's lesbian identity was more evident and salient than her identity as a White woman. Abes examines how reading Gia's story through the lens of intersectionality allows for a more complex understanding not only of Gia's identity, but also how various power structures within society work together to subvert certain of Gia's identities (for example, her lesbian identity), while others remain contextually and necessarily salient (her socioeconomic status).

Patton and Simmons (2008) conducted a study using the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity and intersectionality theory to explore the experience of Black lesbian students at a Historically Black College in the South. In this study, which utilized a combination of phenomenology and narrative inquiry, the authors discovered three central themes that tied the women's stories together. First, the women all had the experience of "coming in" (p. 205) to themselves, which involved a process of internalizing their identity as a lesbian and learning how to operate within dichotomous identities dependent on context (a process involving both a downplaying of their lesbian identity in certain environments, as well as performing lesbian identity in other contexts). Secondly, what the authors refer to as a "triple consciousness" (p. 206), an awareness of three overlapping oppressions (race, gender, and sexual orientation) that may manifest themselves in various environmental contexts at any point. Finally, the theme of "Sister/Outsider" (p. 208), a term coined by Patricia Hill-Collins, was highlighted by the authors. In their discussion, Patton and Simmons note that for these women, racial identity was more salient

than sexual orientation or gender due to their operating and living in the environmental context of a Historically Black College. To validate this conclusion, the authors describe specific experiences from their female participants within their college environment, exploring and explaining how certain sociocultural and historical traditions within the campus environment work to subvert these women's lesbian identity. In this regard, Patton and Simmons' (2008) analysis becomes intersectional, as they explore how the privileging of heterosexual identity operates within this particular campus environment, forcing these women to often subvert their sexual identity in favor of their racial identity.

Jones and Abes (2013) use intersectionality theory to imagine how the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity might be further reconceptualized and advanced. In this reconceptualization, Jones and Abes draw on the four central tenets of intersectionality theory described by Dill and Zambrana (2009), including the importance of context, centering the experience of people of color, complicating identity, and promoting social justice and social change. Through application of intersectionality, the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity changes in very specific ways. First, environmental contextual analysis becomes crucial, not just from the individual perspective, but also from a larger sociohistorical or sociopolitical lens. Accounting for which identities become salient for individuals must be rooted in both a micro- and macro-environmental understanding that is focused on structural issues of privilege, oppression, and power. Patton and Simmons (2008) and Abes (2012) clearly articulate this understanding in their intersectional readings of lesbians, as noted above. For the individuals discussed in those studies, it was not only microsystemic environments that dictated their identity salience, but also macrosystemic systems of power. Further, since the women in these studies were dealing with various oppressed and privileged identities, environmental context was omnipresent. Jones and Abes (2013) discuss that using intersectionality theory with the Model of Multiple Dimensions of

Identity requires researchers not to necessarily view context as a filter, but rather as a consistent “influence on individual life circumstances, including the construction of identity” (p. 157).

Resultantly, the way CORE identity is viewed shifts in an intersectional reading of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. Rather than viewing the CORE as a set of essentialized, unchanging characteristics of an individual, as was proposed in the original model (Jones and McEwen, 2000), “the core is defined. . .as an active process of living authentically as the individual interacts with varying and shifting contexts” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 162). This idea of living authentically is pulled directly from the self-authorship work of Marcia Baxter Magolda (1998; 2009) and was also a finding of Susan Jones’ 2009 study on multiple identities and intersectionality. In addition, the analysis of CORE identity shifts from being solely an individual analysis to one also dependent on environmental context and macrosystemic issues of power and oppression (Jones & Abes, 2013). In applying such an analysis, it becomes more important to understand the experience of an individual, rather than assume that someone is more or less developed than another person.

In these ways, an intersectional approach to the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity does demonstrate a more complexivist approach to understanding and analyzing individual and group identity. By seeking to explore how multiple identities may intersect, overlap, and combine, and by placing these analyses in both micro and macrosystemic contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), Jones and Abes (2013) have advanced the discourse and analysis of college student identity beyond the confines of the linear, hierarchical and strict developmental trajectories of earlier theorizing and modeling. The use of intersectionality brings into the student development discourse a more critical reading of sociocultural and sociohistorical issues surrounding power, privilege, and oppression. Intersectionality theory challenges educators, researchers, and practitioners to understand the importance of environmental context while also accounting for power dynamics within entangled multiple identities. Bringing into conversation the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013) and intersectionality theory embraces the fluid nature of identity

power dynamics across environmental contexts, though there is still a centering of social identities in the process. Thus, the use of intersectionality theory is more complexivist than earlier student development models and represents an important step forward in our thinking, theorizing, and modeling about college student identity issues. However, the very nature of intersectionality theory and the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity still remain rooted in essentialized standpoint positions by centering what appear to be static socially constructed identities, highlighting a continued tension in the literature around accounting for lived experience without over-essentializing and becoming overly representative and generalizable. We see a similar set of issues in the application of Critical Race Theory to the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.

Critical Race Theory.

Stephen John Quaye (2013) discusses the implications of applying Critical Race Theory to the study of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). Critical Race Theory first originated in legal studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and increasingly has been applied to studies of education (Lynn & Dixon, 2013). Several tenets of Critical Race Theory become important in Quaye's (2013) application to the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. First, that race and racism are built into the structural fabric of American society and its institutions, including educational institutions. As a result, "color-blind policies are accepted as the norm" resulting in a maintenance of "racial hierarchies because people's inability to achieve is seen as a fault that lies with an individual, not within racist practices and norms" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 174). Secondly, that although race is central, the social construction of race leads to patterns of differential racialization. Quaye (2013) describes differential racialization in two ways. First, that who is considered White changes throughout time, and second that race has "many different interpretations and layers that shift depending on the context and a person's own construction of her or his race" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 177).

Quaye (2013) begins his discussion of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity reconceptualized through the lens of Critical Race Theory by discussing the CORE. Since Critical Race Theory articulates that race is central to the lived experience of Americans, race also becomes a central part of an individual's CORE identity in this reconceptualized model. This is critically important, because Quaye (2013) asserts that even for individuals who do not see race as central to their identity, race becomes a defining feature of their experience(s) and identity due to the centrality of race to the structuring of educational institutions and people's lived experiences. Further, race interacts with other identities (such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status) meaning that although race will always be salient, "the person's experience and understanding of race will shift depending on the other social identities she or he recognizes" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 184).

Quaye (2013) continues his discussion by articulating how the process of meaning-making is necessarily different in applying a Critical Race Theoretical perspective to the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. In the traditional reading of meaning-making articulated by Baxter Magolda (1998; 2001; 2009), individuals move from externally- to internally-defined sense of self. This reading of meaning-making was applied to the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) and its later reconceptualization (Jones & Abes, 2013). Quaye (2013) asserts from a Critical Race perspective this understanding of meaning making is challenged. Since race is central to the lived experience of individuals, it becomes necessary to continuously make meaning of "racist contexts" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 186). As a result, and particularly for students of color, there is never an opportunity to have a fully articulated internal sense of self that does not account for external interpretations of people. In other words, Quaye (2013) may be saying the idea of meaning-making itself may impossible to achieve in a racist society or institution.

Thus, the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity as read through a Critical Race perspective places race at the CORE of an individual's experience, while also recognizing race as a socially constructed identity. As such, "race is always present and central, yet the individual may not perceive it as such, and this, too, may shift depending on the context in which the individual is situated" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 188). Race will always overlap with other identities (intersectionality), and the filter of the model, still representative of meaning-making, "troubles the external-to-internal pathways by allowing openness and flexibility in regard to the nature of meaning making when race and racism are central" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 188).

Queer Theory.

David Kasch (2013) provides the last perspective on reimagining the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity through application of Queer Theory (Jones & Abes, 2013). In a manner similar to Intersectionality Theory and Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory is rooted in a reading of society through the structural dynamics of power. Specifically, Queer Theory seeks to disrupt normative understanding of gender and sexuality rooted in society's structural privileging of heterosexuality and gender binaries. Borrowing from the work of Judith Butler, Queer Theory believes in identity as performative, arguing "that identity occurs as an ongoing expression and enactment, rather than as an end product of development" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 199). Thus, "such social identities as gender, race, sexuality, and religion are something individuals do rather than something individual are" (Jones & Abes, 2013, pp. 199-200).

Since Queer Theory views identity as fluid, performative, and constantly shifting, the theory itself becomes the most clearly articulated position against the developmental language of traditional college student identity theories and models. In Queer Theory, the idea of becoming is central, described by Kasch (2013) as a "changing process. . .in which an individual's identity unfolds over an extended period of time without a fixed developmental end point" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 202). Kasch (2013) continues, stating that "as the term becoming suggests, there is no

location of arrival. Individuals' identities are endlessly transforming into some new form, meaning, or interpretation of identity" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 203). In conjunction with the idea of becoming is the role of desire in identity performance. In Queer Theory, desire "describes a compulsion and an incompleteness that needs fulfillment" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 202). As an individual performs their identity, they also are performing their desire(s) – "a quest for a socially intelligible, or 'accepted,' identity that is also personally authentic" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 202).

Kasch's (2013) queered reconceptualization of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity uses each of the central ideas from Queer Theory within the model. Heteronormativity becomes the context of all individuals' lived experiences, desire becomes the meaning-making filter, performativity is central to exploring various social identities, and at the CORE is not an essentialized individual, but rather an individual in becoming. Just as Critical Race Theory placed racism as part of the environmental context(s) in which all individuals operate, the Queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity views heteronormativity as pervasive to almost all environmental contexts. However, Kasch (2013) is careful to point out that our understanding of heteronormative contexts do shift based on specific environments, for example "relationships with families and peers, the college culture, policies and laws" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 204) and that as one challenges heteronormativity he/she/ze develops a queer authorship.

Desire and performativity are closely tied together in the queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. Desire becomes the meaning-making filter, challenging "individuals to redefine and reinterpret how and whom they understand themselves to be through desires that motivate the actions they take (and self-expressions they make)" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 205). Since desire is related to living authentically, there is also a connection to social identities. In the queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, there are not "distinct and separate social identities" but rather "fused unisons of social identities in which the particular social identities are mutually influencing and possibly inseparable from gender and sexuality" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p.

206). Thus, although the queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity seeks to center gender and sexuality in some ways, it also recognizes that gender and sexuality cannot be unhitched or examined separately from other social identities, such as race, class, or religion. As a result, a queered reading of identity sees “identities [as] performed more holistically” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 206).

Thus, the queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity articulates identity as process. As a result, the model does not view an essentialized CORE identity and challenges the very notion of identity ‘development’ altogether. Kasch (2013) describes this process of becoming through performance as an agential process, and articulates why this directly challenges traditional understanding of development: “Agency reflects the individual’s ability to act on elements within the model, whereas development involves the ability to influence that action across the sum of the total model toward a directed or intentional purpose” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 210). Kasch (2013) is challenging the ideas of traditional student ‘development’ theory by questioning how we could have directed or intentional ends, as well as who beyond the individual has the authority to determine what those developmental ends should and could be. In this ways, Kasch (2013) and the queered Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity move the discourse of student development theory away from traditional linear conceptions and understandings of identity toward more complexivist approaches.

Conclusion

There has been a shift in student development theory and research since the turn of the century. The introduction of constructivist, critical theoretical, and queer perspectives is greatly enhancing the work of practitioners and educators, even as it complicates the research process and analysis of college student identity in the twenty-first century. Abes (2009) believes this shift is necessary, and refers to it as the theoretical borderlands, noting “that to realize the complexity of student development it is important to use multiple theoretical perspectives in conjunction with

one another, even when they contradict” (Abes, 2012, p. 190). This shift in the theoretical and research foundations of the field is important and vital as it allows for a more nuanced reading of identity, not as essential, linear, and eventually in equilibrium, but as fluid, shifting, and environmentally contingent (Evans et al., 2010; Jones & Abes, 2013; Renn & Reason, 2012).

There is a continuing need to expand the theoretical discourses applied to student development theory in order to achieve the goals articulated by Abes (2009). It is my contention that complexity theory affords student development theorists a new theoretical lens that will greatly enhance our theorizing and research on college student identity in the twenty-first century. The field has essentially embraced a complexivist epistemological position since the turn of the century. However, our research, teaching, and thinking about identity development still remains rooted in a positivist paradigm even as we embrace more complicated readings and analyses of identity. This problem is partly rooted in the field’s continual desire to justify its existence, but also in a modernist epistemological framework that provides a limited language and structuring of understanding identity, and more importantly, research.

In the next three chapters, I will outline my own thinking about potential future(s) for the field of college student identity research. First, I will articulate how the theoretical tenets of complexity theory might add to our understanding of student identity, providing us a new lens through which to re-read and challenge many of the foundational theories of the field. In this chapter, I will articulate the position that in fact the field needs to discard the language of development, in favor of the language of emergence, a concept pulled from complexity theory that closely aligns with some of the most recent writing on college student identity.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD A COMPLEXIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND IDENTITY EMERGENCE

The shift within college student development literature since publication of Jones & McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity indicates growing recognition that studying and researching identity in a reductionist, un-integrated fashion has inherent limitations. Reconceptualized models exploring Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013) have pushed theoretical understanding and discourse in a direction that embrace the multiplicity of lived experience, the influence of intersecting identities, the impact of environmental contexts on identity, and most recently have re-evaluated classic student development theories against the backdrop of advances in neuroscience and neurobiological discoveries (Blimling, 2013). Abes, Jones, and McEwen recognized in 2007 that "creating complex holistic development models may mark the significant challenge for development of student development theory in the 21st century" (p. 17).

Though these advancements in discourse and research have been important, they are limited by their positioning in a positivist, empiricist epistemology. Research and understanding of identity in the twenty-first century could be advanced by embracing new complexivist epistemologies (de Villiers-Botha & Cilliers, 2010; Morin, 2008) rooted in complexity theory (Cilliers, 1998; Mason, 2008), quantum sciences (Capra, 1996; 2010; Zohar, 1990), ecological theories, and emergence (Emmeche, Koppe, & Stjernfelt, 1997; Johnson, 2001). Student development theorists and researchers are somewhat late in adopting the language of complexity and emergence. A broader discourse on identity studies recognizes that tenets from complexity theory allow researchers to "develop a complexity based model of the self" as "a better alternative" than current discourse and research on identity rooted in positivistic, Cartesian epistemological positions (de Villiers-Botha & Cilliers, 2010, p. 21). An epistemological repositioning is necessary in advancing discourse away from the traditional 'developmental' lens inherent in many current

approaches to identity research, and as will become evident, in advancing a research agenda that embraces digital technological spaces.

Complexivist and Quantum Challenges to Traditional Student Development Theory

Inherent in the shift toward embracing complexity theory as an appropriate epistemological lens for the study of student identity is a re-examination of the traditional ‘developmental’ lens inherent in many of our current theories and models. Student development is a notion rooted in the Cartesian worldview, utilizing the language of linearity, progress, representational generalization, and directional stages in understanding student identity. In contrast, complexity theory embraces non-linearity, disequilibrium, environmental conditions, self-organization, and emergence as important contributors of understanding phenomena or complex systems.

Identity should be understood as a complex, emergent phenomena. As a complex phenomenon, shifting to complexity theory in studying student identity allows college student educators to avoid compartmentalizing identity and recognizes the reality that student’s many identities intra-act (Barad, 2008a) in various spatio-temporal-environmental contexts. Resultantly, student identity cannot be understood to exist as a priori, generalizable, monolithic systems, views that “lead us to disregard much of what it means to be human in the world” (de Villiers-Botha & Cilliers, 2010, p. 23). Rather, we must begin to view identity as nuanced, constantly in disequilibrium, and highly “contingent on. . .spatial and temporal location” (de Villiers-Botha & Cilliers, 2010, p. 34).

Several ideas from complexity theory and quantum physics are particularly important for unpacking and problematizing traditional understanding of identity, including disequilibrium, nonlinearity, and ideas from quantum physics about wave/particle dualities. Coupling these concepts with ideas about the importance of environmental context and emergence all challenge the traditional developmental discourse of student identity researchers.

Disequilibrium and Nonlinearity

Nonlinearity and disequilibrium are a set of concepts from complexity theory that have direct implications in articulating a complexivist understanding of identity. Both concepts emerged from the study of thermodynamics and biology, and were particularly influenced by the writings of Prigogine and Stengers (1984) who studied complex nonlinear thermodynamic and biological systems. Nonlinear systems operate in states far from equilibrium; in fact, disequilibrium becomes the basis of continued existence for nonlinear complex systems. Capra (1996) states that equilibrium is the equivalent of death in complex systems. Operating from a position of disequilibrium allows complex systems to continually exchange information with their environment and respond to ever-shifting conditions. As a result, nonlinear complex systems are unpredictable, at least according to traditional linear conceptions of predictability and control offered by traditional physics and mathematics.

Prigogine and Stengers (1984) believed that many complex systems, including all living beings, operated in a state of disequilibrium, though the appearance of equilibrium is often observed. What makes this seemingly paradoxical reality possible? As Capra (1996) describes, observing stability in a system over time is partially the result of feedback looping that occurs within the system. The system is continuously reacting to tiny fluctuations and perturbations in the environment to maintain the semblance of stability, and thus “as in a whirlpool, the same overall structure is maintained in spite of the ongoing flow and change of components” (Capra, 1996, p. 181). Despite this appearance of stability or equilibrium, the complex system is actually capable at any time of making an unpredictable shift. In complexity theory, such observed shifts are referred to as bifurcation points, moments when a complex system can metaphorically choose “from among several possible paths or states. Which path it takes will depend on the system’s history and on various external conditions that can never be predicted” (Capra, 1996, p. 183).

The unpredictable nature of a complex system operating from a position of disequilibrium and nonlinearity also highlights the role of different environmental characteristics in creating moments of bifurcation. Complexity theory posits that small disruptions or iterations over time can lead to large systemic changes, whereas sometimes large disruptions may not cause any systemic change. The impact of various environmental factors and changes on potential shifts within a complex system are the result of the systems history and environmental conditions, and highlight that as we move away from conceiving of the world as operating in equilibrium, “we move from the universal to the unique, toward richness and variety” (Capra, 1996, p. 182).

Hence, complex systems strive for healthy levels of disequilibrium, allowing the open exchange of information and energy with their environments (Capra, 1996; Cilliers, 1998), utilizing both positive and negative feedback loops (Cilliers, 1998; Meadows, 2008) to construct appropriate responses to environmental conditions, all in a nonlinear fashion. As a result, complex systems constantly create higher order functioning and structure. Many traditional scientific disciplines, including biology, physics, and chaos mathematics now recognize disequilibrium and small perturbations as constantly present in complex systems and as directly responsible for perceptions of stasis or equilibrium (Capra, 1996; Cilliers, 1998). This concept of disequilibrium and nonlinearity as the life source of complex systems is counterintuitive to many scientific, statistical, or empirical notions emphasizing balance and equilibrium, as well as many traditional student development theories that propose development as a linear, predictable trajectory punctuated with periods of equilibrium or full development.

Student Development Theory, Disequilibrium, and Nonlinearity.

Student development theory has often included some overt or covert conception of disequilibrium in many theories and models (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Many traditional theories or models of student development denote periods of cognitive or social dissonance as key to developmental shifts. These periods of cognitive

dissonance are equivalent to the concept of disequilibrium and bifurcation points from complexity theory. It is often theorized that once a student successfully reconciles these periods of cognitive dissonance (disequilibrium), they arrive at a moment of stability in a new developmental stage or level of functioning (Evans et al., 2010).

Despite the presence of disequilibrium as important in many traditional student development theories, developmental language also embraces stasis and equilibrium, often by conceiving of development as reaching predictable, consistent stages/statuses, or by framing development as having some endpoint. Complexity theory's concepts of disequilibrium and nonlinearity challenge these frameworks and theoretical concepts. Rather than viewing student identity as progressing through linear stages, statuses or levels, seeking periods of operational equilibrium, complexity theory challenges us to view identity as constantly shifting. As a complex system, human identity will be in a constant state of disequilibrium, the result of intra-acting (Barad, 2008a) with various environmental contexts, carrying with it a historical memory of previous encounters and life experiences. As de Villiers-Botha and Cilliers (2010) point out, complexity theory challenges us to recognize that "our identity and that of others is always in flux, always adjusting and changing as circumstances change" (p. 36). A truly healthy, vibrant, living student will have an identity that always maintains some level of disequilibrium, intra-acting with various environmental contexts, processing and exchanging energy and information, and appropriately adjusting to create a life and identity of increasing complexity.

Several student development theories already take this position, including the most recently articulated Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). Early foundational student development theorists, including Sanford (1967) and Chickering (Evans et al., 2010), also showed signs of thinking from a position of nonlinearity and disequilibrium. For example, Chickering and Reisser (1993) utilized the term "vector" in their theory of psychosocial development to denote that individual student development would follow nonlinear pathways

(Evans et al., 2010), though Chickering did believe that students needed to accomplish healthy developmental achievement in the first four vectors of development before they could adequately establish identity, which he believed was the core developmental purpose of college.

Despite some attempts to disrupt the notion that student development occurs in a nonlinear fashion, many theories of college student development still adhere to strict, rigid, hierarchical linear progressions. This reality cannot be ignored, especially since emerging models of student development, including the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013), incorporate previously articulated theoretical positions. For example, epistemological development theory (Baxter Magolda, 1992; 1998; 2001) builds on the work of Kegan (1982) to articulate the theoretical position that people progress through ways of knowing, moving from external knowing to internal self-authorship. The assumption in theories such as the epistemological development model, as well as many models of racial, sexual, or ethnic identity development (Evans, et al., 2010), is that an individual at a more advanced stage of development has bypassed or left behind earlier stages of development. Complexity theory would challenge such notions, arguing that environmental factors would greatly influence the functioning, structuring, and articulation of an individual's identity.

The Quantum Self

Danah Zohar (1990) examines how discoveries in quantum physics open new possibilities for understanding human consciousness, being, and relative to this discussion, identity. Part of Zohar's (1990) approach to examining questions of consciousness through the new physics occurs in explaining the particle/wave phenomenon. As explained by Capra (2010), "subatomic units of matter are very abstract entities which have a dual aspect. Depending on how we look at them, they appear sometimes as particles, sometimes as waves" (p. 67). Particles are discrete, static, confined, and anti-social. Zohar (1990) describes particles at the atomic level in language familiar to most individuals: protons, neutrons, and electrons. Waves are spread out over large regions of space,

interactive, and mobile, described by Zohar (1990) in less-familiar concepts such as photons, gluons, and gravitons.

Quantum discoveries have challenged the mechanical, predictable, stable Newtonian universe that dominates much of scientific discourse. Zohar (1990) emphasizes “that both the wavelike and particlelike aspects of being must be considered when trying to understand the nature of things, and that it is the duality itself that is most basic” (p. 25). Therefore, quantum scientists state “matter does not exist with certainty at definite places, but rather shows tendencies to exist” (Capra, 2010, p. 68). Quantum physics and theory have “demolished. . .deterministic laws of nature” by demonstrating “that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smallest units” (Capra, 2010, p. 68), but rather that we must look at everything in terms of relationships, multiple forms of being, and existence connected across vast areas of space, time, and environmental context.

Student Development Theory and Quantum Physics.

How does quantum theory relate to the study, understanding, and researching of identity issues? As stated earlier, the theoretical discourse and conceptual modeling within the student development literature has embraced a more complexivist approach, though the language may not currently represent this understanding. Jones and McEwen (2000) utilized the visual of an atom in constructing their conceptual Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, a representation that has continued through the most recent reconceptualization of this model (Jones & Abes, 2013). The visual of an atom is not without coincidence, because it allows us to utilize the concepts of quantum physics to extend and enhance the current conceptual discourse regarding identity into a more complexivist epistemological position.

Traditional student development theory of the ages-and-stages persuasion focused on the ‘particle’ aspects of human and student identity: static, generalizable, predictable, linear, and at a point of full development, unchanging. These selves do exist: most of us would adhere to an

understanding that as individuals we have a personality, a gender identity, sexual identity, racial or ethnic identity, perhaps even a spiritual or religious identity. There is, according to Zohar (1990), a truism in understanding that “we have a personal identity that abides across time” (p. 122). When we study identity from the perspective of any social, psychosocial, emotional, or personality perspective, we are in fact studying or discussing a particular aspect of identity: “something in particular that can be pinned down, if only briefly and somewhat” (Zohar, 1990, p. 113).

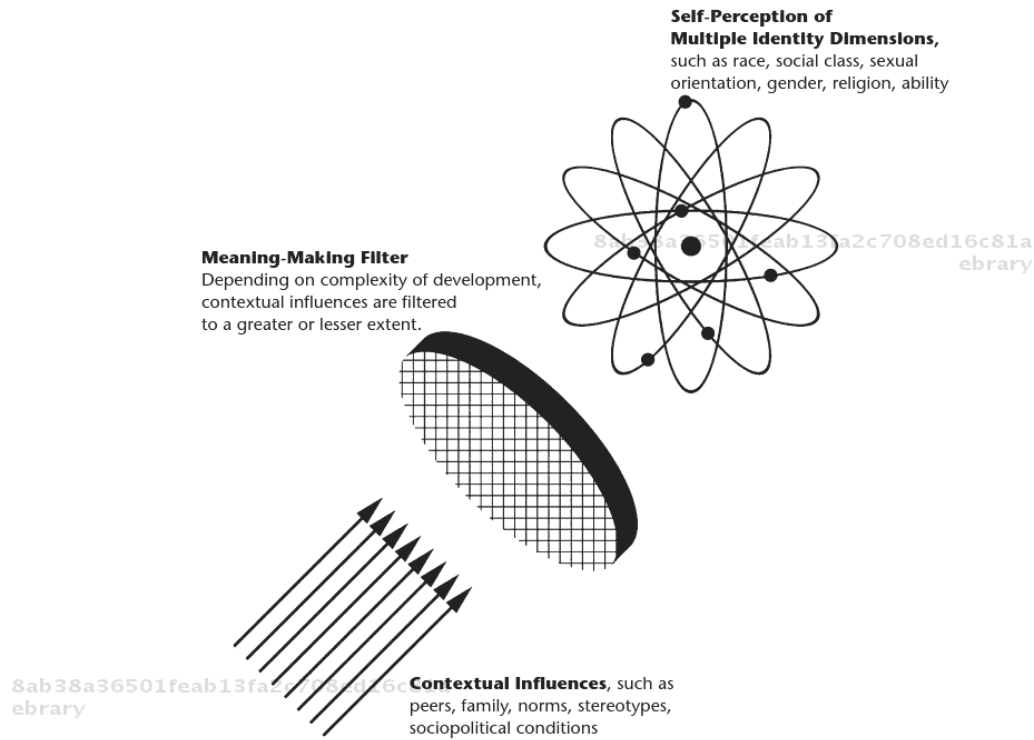
Student development theory has also embraced an understanding of the ‘wave’ aspects of human and student identity in examining and highlighting issues of intersectionality (Jones & Abes, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013) and meaning-making (Baxter Magolda, 1998; 2001). These theoretical and conceptual studies highlight and recognize the importance of relationships in understanding and negotiating identity. Zohar (1990) argues that “to fully know the person who I am, I must understand the relationships that I am – the wave aspects of my being” (p. 124). Specifically, intersectionality theory highlights the relationships between an individual’s various social identities both internally and externally. Internally, how an individual comes to see their various social and personal identities in relationship, and externally by examining the ways environmental contexts, sociopolitical conditions, and systems of power and oppression come into relationship with an individual’s various identities (Jones & Abes, 2013).

Meaning-making capacity of college students, a theoretical concept focused on how individuals make sense of self, also embraces a relationship-oriented understanding of identity. Baxter Magolda (1992; 1998; 2001) builds on the work of Kegan (1982) in describing her concept of meaning-making, focusing on the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal realms of development on the road to self-authorship. Interpersonal relations with others are particularly important to college students who, according to Baxter Magolda, “define their identity through relationships with others as well as through other external influences, such as social norms and campus climate” (Jones & Abes, 2013, pp. 99-100).

It is also possible to utilize our understanding of the wave function of identity to explain larger constructs important in identity research, such as social identity groups. As stated earlier, waves function in a relational way by spreading themselves out across larger areas of space and coming into relationship with other waves. Zohar (1990) explains this occurrence actually means waves overlap, and “through their relationships, their overlapping wave functions, some of their qualities merge in such a way that a new whole is formed” (p. 113). The overlapping of wave functions as creative force for something new is an apt analogy for social identity groups. Concepts such as race, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, and ability status are socially constructed through individual relationship. It is in the “overlap” and relationship between individuals with similar experiences that a new larger whole is constructed: the concept of shared identity or group identity. Like individual identity, social identity groups are not monolithic, though much of the popular discourse and theorizing around social identity treats individuals in a static and discrete fashion. Utilizing an understanding of quantum wave functions to describe social identity groups advances conceptual understandings and discourse around social identity groups as fluid, shifting, and relational, the same way personal identity will be demonstrated to be both fluid and shifting.

As currently articulated, the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Figure 1) (Jones & Abes, 2013) recognizes the quantum view of self as articulated by Zohar (1990). Examining the model more closely, the “particle” aspects of identity are individual identity markers: race, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, ability. The “wave” aspects of identity become contextually based relationships of an individual: family relationships, peers, sociopolitical relationships. Third, the meaning-making filter recognizes that identity is influenced by a combination of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive processes unique to each individual, as well as to each environmental context where an individual intra-acts.

FIGURE 5.2 RECONCEPTUALIZED MODEL OF MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY



Source: Adapted from Abes et al., 2007, p. 7.

Figure 1: Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity
(Reprinted with Permission – See Appendix E)

Specifically, this model embraces the quantum concepts of relational holism and complementarity (Zohar, 1990). These concepts state “that each way of describing being, as a wave or a particle, complements the other and that a whole picture emerges only from a package deal” (Zohar, 1990, p. 27). Examined through the lens of the quantum self, the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity explicitly recognizes that identity cannot be broken down into constituent parts. One cannot understand personal identity simply by examining the particle aspects of an individual, the same way one cannot articulate identity simply through examination of relationships. The model demonstrates a recognition that “the self is a fluctuating and fuzzy thing whose boundaries, both internal and external, are always changing” (Zohar, 1990, p. 126). Or, put

another way, “there is no way we could adhere to a notion of the self as a fixed, definite, and indivisible thing that abides unchanged through time” (Zohar, 1990, p. 124). Part of our changing identity dynamics is the result of environmental contextual influences.

The Role of Environment

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Development Model

Both Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1989; 2005) and Edgar Morin (2008) examine the influence of environmental contexts, as well as person-environment interactions, on the developing human. Bronfenbrenner’s work was partially influenced by that of Lewin (1936), who argued behavior was a function of person-environmental interactions, often shortened into a pseudo-mathematical equation of $B=f(PE)$. Bronfenbrenner, building on this concept, theorized it was not really “behavior” that was most greatly influenced by a person’s interaction with environment, but rather “development,” a concept he defined as

the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (2005, p. 107)

Bronfenbrenner’s initial theory was outlined in his 1979 book *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, and was subsequently built on over the next thirty years, with the final articulation of coming in 2006 just before his death (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner’s theory of ecological human development sought to correct three issues he perceived as problematic in the literature and research of human development. First, the focus on outcomes present in most developmental research (wide ranging, including cognition, work attainment, educational attainment, etc.), as opposed to process, was problematic. The ecological developmental model sought to correct this issue by focusing on proximal processes, defined as “particular forms of interaction between organism and environment. . .that operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,

2006, p. 795). Secondly, Bronfenbrenner's theory explicitly sought to change research design, away from simple causal, linear models, to more holistic and all-encompassing models of discovery that would account for both objective and subjective phenomenon (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Third, Bronfenbrenner aimed to account for factors beyond the immediate environment(s) in which a human being interacted, and their potential impacts on human development, including the role of a human beings historically situated self, a point to which we will return later in this chapter. Finally, Bronfenbrenner was aspirational, believing the ecological development model could produce more substantively relevant research that would then be used to inform public policy and create environments more prone to assisting human beings achieve their full potential (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005).

Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) proposed four environmental contexts were important to understanding the proximal process of human development across the lifespan.

- (1) Microsystems consisting of "structures and processes taking place in an immediate setting containing the developing person (e.g., home, classroom, playground)" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 80);
- (2) Mesosystems, comprised of the interactions between various microsystems;
- (3) Exosystems, comprised of interactions between two or more settings, "at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 80); and
- (4) Macrosystems, defined as "overarching pattern[s] of ideology and organization. . . common to a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 81).

The ecological development theory proposed here accounts for multiple levels of interaction across various space and time continuums, as well as the importance of an individual human beings' interaction with those various contexts, as vitally important to creating a holistic understanding of various developmental outcomes in human beings.

While a solid understanding of Bronfenbrenner's four environmental contexts, and their involvement with human development, is important, Bronfenbrenner's model also focused on the importance of person and time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Evans, et al., 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003). In focusing on the personal characteristics of an individual human being, Bronfenbrenner was articulating a position that all human beings have particular attributes or "dispositions" that "can set proximal processes in motion in a particular developmental domain and continue to sustain their operation" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795). Some personal attributes were biologically determined, according to Bronfenbrenner, lending credence to later articulations that his theory was not simply ecological (as originally expressed in 1979) but actually bioecological (biology and environment set certain developmental trajectories in motion). For example, Bronfenbrenner cites several studies that discuss the role of initial birth weight in subsequent lifespan development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Such a trait is biological, according to Bronfenbrenner, and while it may be influenced by environmental factors, the actual biological fact sets in motion a trajectory of development for an individual human being.

Renn and Arnold (2003) expand on the role of individual personal characteristics, particularly examining how such personal attributes lead to differential engagement with each of Bronfenbrenner's environmental contexts. Each individual human being has four attributes that contribute to their interaction with various environments on any given day: (1) attributes that invite or inhibit responses from others [for example, does a person have a naturally harmonious or avaricious disposition; is someone having a good day or a bad day]; (2) selective attributes that impact the way someone interacts with their environment [for example, does someone have the attribute of natural curiosity and extroversion, or are they more naturally hesitant to interact with others, shy away from new environments, etc]; (3) individuals' structuring proclivities [for example, do people seek more structured environments, or are they prone to seek out less structured environments]; and (4) directive beliefs about agency [for example, do people believe

they are capable of operating in a particular environment or not]. One important point is that while some of these characteristics and attributes may be typological in nature (i.e. related to personality or other characteristics), others shift day-to-day, hour-to-hour, or environmental context to environmental context.

Bronfenbrenner also was worried about issues of time in his research. Time was important both in terms of engagement with proximal processes, as well as lifespan time and future time. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) articulated three particularly important aspects of time in their bioecological model of human development: (1) microtime, which referred to “continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal processes” (p. 796); (2) mesotime, which referred to “the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks” (p. 796); and (3) macrotime, which “focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course” (p. 796). Macrotime refers not only to the changing and shifting dynamics of the macrosystem on a developing individual, but also to the important role of historical period on the overall developmental trajectory of a human being. Near the end of his 1979 book, Bronfenbrenner discusses research focused on the impact of the Great Depression on various developmental life trajectories of human beings born immediately preceding, during, and after this huge societal upheaval in the United States. Based on his analysis of these studies, the historical epoch into which one is born, and the macrosystemic changes that occur as a result, greatly impact an individual human beings developmental trajectory.

This point is crucial to the current study. The vast changes ushered in by digital technological advances would, according to Bronfenbrenner (2005), have tremendous impact on the developmental trajectories of human beings. The potential impact of digital technologies on human developmental trajectories, however, is far more than a macrosystemic shift in society’s values, culture, or mode of operation. In fact, the digital technological revolution is so all-encompassing

that new environmental contexts have actually been created in which human beings live, interact, and spend vast quantities of time. These are the digital social media contexts that are examined in this study. In the next chapter, I will examine how digital social media platforms are unique environmental contexts that must be accounted for in the examination of the human experience, as well as articulate how digital social media platforms align with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) various contexts articulated above.

As a developmental psychologist, Bronfenbrenner (2005) recognized the inherent dangers and difficulties associated with the empirically based developmental research agenda of the twentieth century. In a 1986 research article, he articulated one of the major issues facing developmental researchers, namely that "once we get beyond early childhood. . . the notion of a complex, integrated organism is forgotten. After infancy, developmental psychology becomes the study of variables, not of human beings" (p. 61). He argued for advancing a research agenda allowing for integration of biospsychological and environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), particularly since "very little is known about the extent to which the same environments can have different effects on human beings with differing personal characteristics" (2005, p. 73).

In advancing and proposing the ecological developmental model, Bronfenbrenner (2005) was articulating the need to understand and research human development as more than simply the examination of bifurcated, unconnected developmental trajectories. Rather than reducing individuals to sets of discrete, concrete variables, or examining their development in a single environmental context, Bronfenbrenner (2005) proposed a more holistic approach:

the relation of development to variously combined characteristics of the person and the environment is not one of mere statistical association but involves a set of processes through which the course and consequences of development are determined. Not only do some of the processes turn out to be quite convoluted – involving feedback mechanisms, sequential stages, and alternative paths of direct and indirect influence – but some paradigms fail to provide any indication whatsoever of what the processes might be. (p. 69)

Thus, in articulating his bioecological model of human development, Bronfenbrenner was advocating for a research process that focused not on outcome, but on process. Further, he sought

to ensure that researchers were encapsulating the unique characteristics and developmental trajectories of individual human beings, while also advocating for an understanding of the relationship between an individual human being and other individuals (parents, peers) as well as environments (micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory aligns well with thoughts articulated by Edgar Morin (2008) regarding the concept of self-eco-organizing.

Self-Eco-Organizing

Morin (2008) believed that the reductionist tendencies of modern science, focused on splitting complex problems into their component parts and examining these variables independently, rather than relationally, has led to a paradigm of simplicity, rather than a paradigm of complexity, in the modern world. In the foreword to Morin's book *On Complexity*, Alfonso Montuori (2008) discusses the role of Morin's critique in advancing holistic, transdisciplinary perspectives on many scientific issues, from biology and politics to issues of human identity. Montuori (2008) states Morin leveled "a trenchant critique of the notion of 'development'" (p. xvii) in his writing, partially articulated in his theory of self-eco-organizing.

The central tenet of Morin's (2008) theory of self-eco-organizing is to place environment back into the study of complex phenomena, including the study of human identity. A natural conversation occurs between the work of Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Morin (2008), who both articulated positions regarding centrality of environment. Both focus on the importance of the individual, but also articulate a position recognizing the relational impacts of person on environment and environment on person. Both also account for differential impacts of various environments (local and global) on individual human identity.

Where Morin (2008) distinguishes himself from Bronfenbrenner (2005) is through envisioning human beings, and their identity, as self-organizing, complex systems. This occurs in several ways through his writing. First, Morin (2008) recognizes complex systems (including human beings) cannot exist outside of various environmental contexts. This allows him to articulate

his belief that any complex system “cannot suffice unto itself, it can’t be totally logical except by introducing into itself the foreign environment. It can’t achieve itself, complete itself, be self-sufficient” (Morin, 2008, p. 19).

Morin (2008) relates the importance of environment to two central tenets of complexity theory and complex systems: information sharing and relationship. Local and global environments where we are situated become important precisely because there is exchange of information occurring that impacts self-organizing trajectories. In other words, complex systems build relationships with their environments through the exchange of information. Such exchanges highlight the non-deterministic nature of complex systems. Moving beyond deterministic predictability is precisely Morin’s (2008) contribution to the discussion at hand:

If we leave behind determinism, and conceive of a universe in which what is created is not only created out of chance and disorder but in self-organizing processes – that is to say where each system creates its own determinations and its own finalities – we can begin, minimally, to understand autonomy. Then we can begin to understand what ‘subject’ means. (p. 43)

By introducing the idea self-organization, Morin is able to speak of the autonomous subjectivity of complex systems. This is precisely how he introduces his concept of using self-eco-organizing to discuss human subjectivity.

Morin (2008) believes in a self-organizing relationship between individual human beings and society, articulating a position that while the individual produces society, the society also produces the individual. For this reason, Morin believed “the individual is an uncertain object” (p. 71) defined solely through self-eco-organizing relationships. Morin’s thinking allowed him to critique not only the notion of development, but also the “illusion of possessing a stable identity” (p. 75). Ultimately, “The I is something which must emerge” (Morin, p. 80) through the complex process he referred to as self-eco-organizing.

Emergence

Emergence is a concept pulled from complexity and system theory that accurately takes into account each of the concepts discussed earlier, including nonlinearity, disequilibrium, self-organization, and the importance of environmental contexts. Johnson (2001) describes emergence as “the movement from low-level rules to higher-level sophistication” (p. 18). Emmeche et al. (1997) articulate a more precise definition, stating that emergence is “formulated as the idea that there are properties at a certain level of organization which cannot be predicted from properties found at lower levels” (p. 83). Vital to understanding emergence is accepting anti-reductionism: complex systems are unpredictable and cannot be broken down, examined, or understood by breaking the system into constituent parts. Such a reductionist approach destroys our ability to understand the system. Further, putting together component parts of a complex system does not guarantee that the same higher level ordered complex system would emerge. This is due to the impact of environmental conditions and information exchange necessary for the self-organizing processes of complex emergence to occur (Cilliers, 1998; Johnson, 2001; Ricks, 2010).

Emmeche et al. (1997) discuss four levels where they believe emergence occurs: the physical-chemical, the biological, the psychological, and the sociological. These four levels match closely with Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) ecological development theory, particularly in accounting for the biological, as well as many currently articulated student identity theories that focus on the psychological and sociological aspects of identity. What makes Emmeche et al. (1997) discussion different is their articulation, much like Morin (2008), that environmental factors must be accounted for, but more importantly, that these levels of emergence must be studied in relation to one another.

In their discussion, Emmeche et al. (1997) discuss the difference between “resultants” and “emergents” as part of the research process. Resultants are the product of non-complex systems and have properties that can be easily predicted; emergents are not predictable, the result of a

complex self-organizing process. The concepts of resultants and emergents help Emmeche et al. (1997) describe the problems with vitalism/essentialism in scientific inquiry, and also to explain away simple deterministic, temporal causation that is the root of many current scientific, empirically based theories.

First, emergence discards the concepts of vitalism/essentialism. In its place, emergence argues for creativity (Emmeche et al., 1997). What this means is that each object, subject, or phenomenon we study may have certain recognizable characteristics, but those observations of characteristics are not essential, foregone conclusions. Rather, they are the result of creativity in self-organization that allowed those characteristics, that object, or that subject to come into being. Emmeche et al. (1997) refer to this as the ontological level of emergence, stating that “every new property whenever it is created and every time it is created is emergent. If ontologically interpreted then, emergence will characterize the one and only creative force in the universe” (p. 90).

Secondly, emergence replaces deterministic temporal causation with unpredictable process (Emmeche et al., 1997). Traditional empirical science typically attempts to explain or predict higher-level phenomena, given a set of variables, as temporally and causally related. Emergence discounts this predictable and linearly related set of ideas. As Emmeche et al. (1997) discuss, “even when a system is described 100% deterministically it does not follow that it is possible to predict the behavior of the system or to reduce its behavior to a more elementary level” (p. 104). What makes this possible is a central tenet of complexity theory: that simply given a certain set of base, constituent parts and putting them into relation does not mean the same higher-level organized structure will emerge (Capra, 1996; Cilliers, 1998). Or, stated more articulately: “there is no temporal, causal process going on ‘creating’ the higher level out of the lower one, and no reductionist say so has ever been able to show a cause running from the lower towards the higher level” (Emmeche et al., p 93). Emmeche et al. (1997) refer to this as the epistemological level of emergence, “designating a large scope of various and perhaps very different types of processes” (p.

90). In other words, the parts do not make the whole, but the whole cannot be explained without the parts.

Creative, non-deterministic, unpredictable processes as described by Emmeche et al. (1997) relate to the problems of representational theory and models discussed by Osberg, Biesta, and Cilliers (2007) and Osberg and Biesta (2007a; 2007b). Their central argument regards simultaneity of existence in higher-level ordered phenomenon, meaning that if “higher (or emergent) level consists of units of the lower level, then they exist simultaneously” (p. 224). Emmeche et al. (1997) make a similar claim, noting that

The reductionist idea to create a sort of dictionary, in which every higher level phenomenon can be translated to its micro-level constituents in itself proves that a conception of the higher level as merely reducible, subjective phenomena is never possible; one always has to use a description of the higher level to identify what is going on. (p. 104)

Osberg et al. (2007) believe this is why we must re-imagine the world not as representational, but as emergent.

Identity Emergence

Human identity is a complex system, and therefore should be viewed as an emergent phenomena. One of the very real challenges that have occurred as a result of college student identity researchers over-reliance on empiricist and positivist science is that we have become reductionist in our approach to studying college student identity. Almost all theories and models of college student identity development attempt to compartmentalize identity into neat categories: cognitive, moral, gender, spiritual, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and psychosocial developmental theories all attempt to study college student identity from a fragmented, disconnected, and predictable position. It is only in the last 15 years that researchers and educators have attempted to correct this disjointed study and understanding in articulating more holistic conceptual models, such as the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Jones & Abes, 2013), or by overlaying critical theories (such as

Intersectionality Theory, Critical Race Theory, or Queer Theory) onto existing models and theories of college student development. However, these efforts ultimately fall short of being truly holistic because their articulation is still rooted in an epistemology of certainty, linearity, and positivism. Emergence, through the tenets of complexity theory, gives us the conceptual theoretical framework necessary to correct these shortfalls.

Researchers and college student affairs educators need to discard our old developmental discourse. In doing so, the discourse of identity development will be replaced with a discourse of identity emergence. This shift will allow us to view college student/human identity as a complex, self-eco-organizing process that occurs across the lifespan in a nonlinear fashion, far from equilibrium, and highly dependent on environmental contexts. This is particularly important in allowing us to fill a gap in the research literature that fails to account for the importance of digital social media environments as key to the creative identity processes of today's college students.

Viewing identity as emergent also opens new possibilities connecting the ontological and epistemological. Zohar (1990) stated "the tension between particles and waves in the wave/particle duality is a tension between being and becoming" (p. 132). Identity emergence allows researchers and educators to view college student identity as a creative process of being and becoming. Digital social media environments highlight the tensions, creativity, and process of being and becoming in new ways that are important to examine and incorporate into the discourse of college student identity in the twenty-first century. In many ways, digital social media environments challenge our notions of identity as biologically or psychologically bound (Davis, Sumara, & Iftody, 2010), temporally predictable, linear, in equilibrium, or reaching developmental apex. Rather, digital social media platforms are unique environmental contexts where the processes of identity emergence take place for many of today's college students.

In the next chapter, I will build on this assertion, discussing current research on digital social media environments. In this discussion, I will examine the possibilities of this research, as

well as the inherent limitations. This will segue into my own attempt at conducting a study on college student identity in the digital age, examined as an emergent phenomenon, through the research process of digital immersion.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSING DIGITAL IDENTITY

College students in the United States are highly connected to digital social media (National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2012; Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project, 2013). In the last chapter, it was argued that college student educators and researchers focusing on issues of identity should embrace a complexivist framework, emphasizing identity emergence. The advent and rapid proliferation of digital social media environments punctuate this argument. Gilstrap (2011) argues, “many educational theories in use are not strong enough to address the philosophical implications of human ecological complexity in social networks” (p. 49). This is accurate. Digital social media environments challenge the spatio-temporal realities of traditional developmental theories. To date, researchers focused on college student identity issues have not articulated digital space(s) as important environmental contexts of student learning about identity in our theoretical and conceptual models, though there have been some attempts to understand college student digital self-presentation (Birnbaum, 2013; Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009; Lee, 2012; Martinez Aleman & Wartman, 2009; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

Building on already articulated discussions, this chapter will examine digital social media platforms, articulating the characteristics that make the space(s) unique environmental contexts to be considered in researching college student identity. A review of research that has examined the use of digital social media platforms by college students will demonstrate the challenges facing researchers and educators in incorporating these spaces into our discourse. This challenge stems, ultimately, from the continued adherence within the research literature to a positivist, empiricist epistemological position that seeks to generalize and essentialize digital identity and use of digital social media by college students. A broader research base focused on youth engagement with digital media will be examined to disrupt the idea that digital identity can be understood in any way other than as an emergent phenomena that occurs across various spatio-temporal environmental contexts.

What is Digital Social Media?

danah boyd (2014a) is one of the world's premiere researchers and public intellectuals exploring the role of digital social media in the twenty-first century, particularly among youth. She defines social media as "the sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content" (p. 6). Social media has unique features, as individual users are able to "(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 1). Erik Qualman (2013) articulates a list of over 100 different social media platforms and sites in his book *Socialnomics*, examining the ways each site offers different opportunities for connection, networking, marketing, and learning.

Social media platforms each have unique digital architectural structures. Understanding the architectural structure of a platform is important in examining the various ways people engage and use the platform for different purposes, but also what the platform allows an individual user and the larger public to accomplish (boyd, 2014a; Lanier, 2011; Morrison, 2014; Poletti & Rak, 2014). boyd (2014a) refers to the possibilities and limitations of social media architectural structure as affordances "because they make possible – and, in some cases, are used to encourage – certain types of practices, even if they do not determine what practices will unfold" (p. 10). With only a few exceptions, most social media platforms are constructed in ways that give rise to the following four unique affordances: "persistence: the durability of online expressions and content; visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness; spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared; searchability: the ability to find content" (boyd, 2014a, p. 11). These four affordances will become critically important in the subsequent discussion, particularly how social media challenges

biological, psychological, spatial, and temporal boundaries of identity (Davis, Sumara, & Iftody, 2010; Duncheon & Tierney, 2013).

Social media was designed for networking (boyd, 2014a; Christakis & Fowler, 2009); thus, many social media sites are repositories of personal connections, where people intra-act (Barad, 2008a) with family, friends, peers, professional colleagues, and sometimes imagined communities. Individuals may use different social media platforms to connect with diverse groups of individuals in their life. These various connections across different social media platforms give rise to what boyd (2014a) calls networked publics, defined simultaneously as “(1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (p. 8).

In different social media environments, much like real-life environments, people may articulate different aspects of self and connect with different networks of people. The notion that individuals may present different identities or have different social connections is not a new phenomenon ushered in by the digital technological revolution. Two important changes have occurred, however. First, people often present identity online with an imagined public in mind (boyd, 2014a). Sometimes the digital architecture of a specific social media platform partially dictates self-presentation (Lanier, 2011; Turkle, 2011; Morrison, 2014; Poletti & Rak, 2014), but often people creatively use social media to socially construct a particular identity with an imagined public in mind (boyd, 2014a). Secondly, social media increases the possibility for context collapse (boyd, 2014a). Due to the affordances in digital space (persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability), one of the challenges facing digital social media users becomes control of social context. In digital space, it is easier for various identities to be articulated across different platforms with a specific imagined public in mind, but also easier for those identities and contexts to collapse in on one another through shared connections across platforms or simply as a result of the open and public nature of most digital social media spaces.

One debate within the broader discourse on digital social media platforms centers on the role of digital architecture in articulation of identity/identities. This debate largely centers on a rift between technological determinists and indeterminists, who have differing opinions about the ultimate impact of technology on individuals in society (boyd, 2014a; Kelly, 2010). Lanier (2011) believes that digital social media has led to the diminution of human identity and complexity, a process he refers to as the “missionary reductionism” of social media platforms, where people are organized into “multiple-choice identities” (p. 48). boyd (2014a) argues that regardless of digital architecture, social media spaces are socially constructed, and that researchers must avoid a belief that technologies impact all individuals the same way. This debate is highlighted here primarily because it factors as an important discussion in the broader discourse on social media use, and the impact of such use on identity issues to be discussed below.

College students are highly engaged social media users, often interacting across multiple platforms. The Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project’s 2013 report noted that 89% of traditional college age students (18-29) utilize social media in their daily lives, a number also validated by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2012). College student engagement on social media cuts across multiple demographic lines: 70% of men and 74% of women have adopted use of social media; 80% of Hispanic, 75% of Black, and 70% of White individuals use social media (Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project, 2013). Platform use can also be discerned through such surveys. 27% of Twitter users and 28% of Instagram users are of traditional college age, and 86% of college students in the United States have a Facebook account (Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project, 2013). Studies demonstrate students interact, engage with, or utilize such sites anywhere from 26 minutes per day (Junco, 2013) to upwards of 120 minutes per day (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Gray, Vitak, Easton, & Ellison, 2013). While it is not possible to provide an overview of every social media

platform (for such articulation, see Qualman, 2013), a brief examination of some major platforms used by college students, and their architectural structures, is warranted.

Facebook

Facebook retains its position as the most widely adopted social media platform among today's college students (Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project, 2013). Started in 2004, the site has several architectural features that are important to note. First, individuals have the opportunity to build a robust profile. Facebook allows users to display information about personal demographics (including gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, where the user lives or has lived, birthday) and information about religious views, political views, or languages spoken. Users are also able to provide detailed information about educational history (it is important to note that when Facebook started in 2004, it was initially a site open only to college students) and work history. Additionally, users can include in their profile personal contact information, links to other social networking sites, personal blogs, or Twitter, and a plethora of information relating to personal interests (favorite books, quotations, movies, music, and sports teams/franchises).

There are robust attributes to Facebook's architectural design. Users can post photos in multiple ways: through the profile picture, through the cover photo, and through creation of photo albums. The Facebook "wall" retains its position as a location where users can receive comments from networked and non-networked connections (depending on an individual user's privacy settings) as well as post their own thoughts, links to news stories or videos, or other information for their followers or the larger public to view (again, depending on the user's privacy settings). Facebook users can also upload videos to their personal profiles. On an individual's personal profile page, one can view all the photos, videos, and friendship/network connections through this social network.

Facebook has also incorporated an elaborate framework of non-personal networking through “Groups” and “Like” pages. Groups are often pages designed to network people together in similar organizations, classes, or along other lines of interest. For example, individuals may be part of a “Group” for a student organization or professional organization where they retain real-life membership. “Like” pages are recent phenomena and are often used by corporations, political, religious, or other action causes, as well as non-profit entities, for publicity purposes and news sharing. By “liking” a specific page, an individual user will often get specific information or promotions from these organizations in their newsfeed.

The newsfeed is the individual interface where users see information that is posted by their friends, connections, and networks. When an individual user logs in to Facebook, the newsfeed pops up and serves as a central organizing ground of the information in the network based on that individual user’s preferences. Newsfeeds contain wall posts from an individual user’s friends, posts from “Group” or “Like” pages, and other information such as upcoming events, individual friends’ birthdays, and most recently advertisements.

There are many other features to Facebook that make it’s architectural framework so robust. Facebook contains a chat function and messaging center. Users can chat with individual people in their network and send messages to other Facebook users in their network or outside their network. There is an elaborate new function that allows a user to skip to various periods of time in their profile and use history. Facebook has designed this feature with the intention of documenting an individual’s entire life (it starts at birth) – or at least their entire life history on Facebook. There are elaborate privacy settings, blocking settings, and other features also built into the architectural framework of Facebook.

Twitter

Twitter started in 2006 as a micro-blogging site designed to concisely share information, news, and personal thoughts. The architectural framework of Twitter is quite different from

Facebook. Users do not build elaborate profiles. Rather, users have one profile picture, the option to have a background photo of some sort, both in their profile box and on their actual page, and are limited to 140 characters of text to describe who they are. Further, user profiles contain the individual users' current place of residence, and an option to link to an external website such as a blog or personal website. Each user also creates a personal handle that other users utilize to connect or send messages through. These personal handles are started with the @ symbol. For example, my personal handle is @peatonla. People can then choose to follow your twitter feed, and individual users can follow the feeds of others. Just as in Facebook, Twitter allows users to set privacy controls of followers and also has an option where new followers must be approved by the individual user. Twitter also allows users to send direct messages to people they are following (limited to 140 characters), post pictures as part of a tweet, and also post short videos.

Users of Twitter send "tweets," which are 140 character messages that get posted into the larger stream of tweets from around the world. Since they are limited to 140 characters, Tweets are often filled with shortened language. Many individual users will utilize hashtags (denoted with the # sign) to connect with other individuals discussing a particular topic. Hashtags are commonly used on Twitter to connect people discussing particular events, people, or situations, and individual users can follow specific hashtags. For example, if one wanted to have an online discussion on Twitter, an organization or user may create an official hashtag for that discussion or event, and then have people utilize that hashtag in each of their personal tweets about the event. The use of hashtags is increasingly common around large national events, such as conferences, sporting events, concerts, or television and entertainment. When a specific hashtag is utilized by large numbers of people, it becomes a "trending topic" on Twitter.

Instagram

Instagram is a photo and video sharing social media tool. There are several unique aspects to Instagram. First, unlike Facebook and Twitter, where users simply upload photos from phones or

cameras to their accounts, Instagram allows individuals to apply filters to their photos. A filter often will change the tone, color, or look of the photo. These photos can then be shared with other individuals on Instagram, as well as directly uploaded to sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Photos can also include hashtags to connect individuals at similar events, or to share photos with a specific audience. Video uploads through Instagram are limited to 15 seconds, and can also be tagged or shared on external social media sites. Although not as elaborate as Facebook or Twitter, Instagram is a social media tool used by an increasing number of college students and youth.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a form of social networking designed specifically for building professional connections. Individual users can build a profile that highlights their professional work experience. In many ways, the architectural framework of LinkedIn is designed to highlight your skills, experiences, education, and other professionally relevant information. Some users consider LinkedIn an online resume, though this is not how LinkedIn markets itself. Rather, LinkedIn markets itself as a social network designed to build professional, not solely personal, connections. A user's 'connections' can endorse them for specific skills, experiences, or recommend them to others, particularly potential employers.

Blogging/Personal Websites

Blogging is a way of creating and sharing information through the Internet that has grown in popularity over the past decade. People use blogs for different purposes. Some individuals use blogs as an online journal, chronicling their life and thoughts. Others use blogs to write critical commentary, social commentary, report research in progress (Wakeford & Cohen, 2008), or engage in debate. One aspect of blogs that make them unique is that posts can be rather lengthy, and can include embedded photos, videos, and other digital widgets. Additionally, many blogging sites allow individuals to comment on people's blog posts, creating a dialogic interface. Many news

agencies, professional organizations, and other social groups use blogs for these purposes: to share positions, seek feedback, or engage in critical debate on topics of importance.

Many blogging sites have evolved from simply sites where individual users post their content and thoughts to embrace the feel of a personal website. The interfaces and digital architecture of each blogging forum is a bit different, but many popular blogging websites allow users to build more elaborately designed sites with multiple pages. Blogging sites often allow individual users to follow other bloggers utilizing the same platform, to repost blogs from other users, or link to external blogs. Increasingly, blogging web platforms are building in tools that allow connection to other social media platforms. In this way, people can share blog posts on social media sites such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, or Twitter, “Like” posts, embed links to the authors social media platforms or feeds, build more robust About Me profiles, and many other tools. Here are some particularly popular blogging sites:

- Wordpress: <http://www.wordpress.com>
- Tumblr: <http://www.tumblr.com>
- Blogger: <http://www.blogger.com>
- Medium: <http://www.medium.com>

Though these are the most popular, there are literally dozens of different platforms available on the web that allows individuals to sign up, create, design, and operate a blog. Many of these services are free although utilizing advanced features or purchasing a domain name for an individual blog often requires an individual user to pay.

Pinterest

Pinterest was launched in 2010 and is designed as a space for individual users to collect and store visual bookmarks. As described on the Pinterest website (www.pinterest.com), one aim is to collect ideas about projects – including crafts, recipes, and other types of interests people may have. Users create boards where they ‘pin’ visual images – sometimes in the form of pictures, other times

in the form of infographics that provide directions for recipes or craft projects. Pins are collected from websites or developed by individual users, and users can pin to individual boards or community boards.

Digital Social Media as Unique Environmental Contexts

As discussed in the last chapter, the digital technological revolution is so all-encompassing that new environmental contexts have actually been created in which human beings live, interact, and spend vast quantities of time. These new environmental contexts are digital social media platforms. Given high rates of use and engagement by college students, it is necessary to conceptualize of social media platforms as unique environmental contexts where identity work is occurring. The digital technological revolution is much more than a macrosystemic shift in society's values, culture, or mode of operation. In fundamentally altering the ways human beings connect, communicate, intra-act, and explore self, digital social media environments have the potential of altering the trajectories of human identity emergence. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005), who believed greatly in the impacts of historical moment on the developmental possibilities and trajectories of human beings, would almost certainly view digital social media environments as necessary for inclusion in any holistic examination of human development. Therefore, it is possible to utilize Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) ecological development model as a point of entry toward articulating how such environmental contexts might be considered in the study of college student identity. Renn (2012) first expressed this possibility, though an exact articulation of the parallels between Bronfenbrenner's model and digital social media has not been attempted in the literature until now.

Context

Utilizing the four environmental contextual frameworks in Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) theory, digital social media platforms could be considered a microsystem(s) – interacting with other microsystems as part of a larger mesosystem (Figure 2). Conceptualizing digital social media

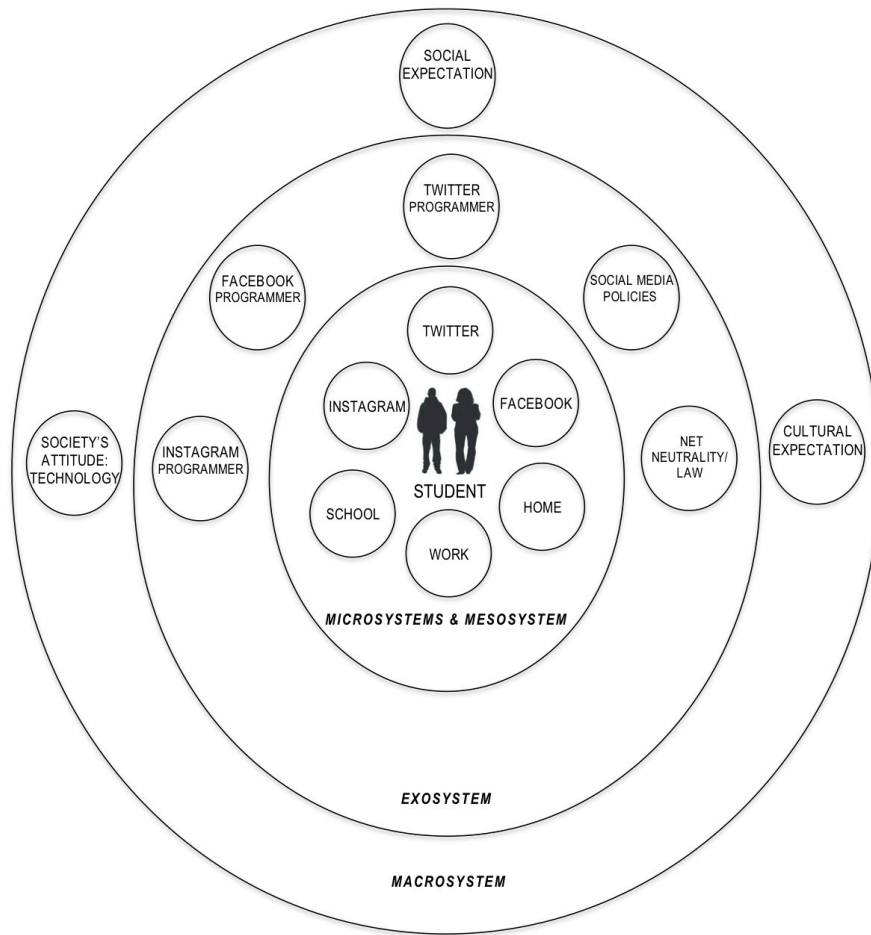


Figure 2: Social Media Platforms Envisioned in Bronfenbrenner's Theory

platforms in this way is helpful from multiple perspectives. First, since students may participate in multiple digital social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and many others - considering each as a separate microsystem accounts for the potentially different use of each platform as a result of the platform's digital architecture, or the socially constructed imagined audience of each particular user. Each different social media platform, as a microsystem,

interacts with other microsystems, such as a campus environment, home environment, work environment, or other social media platform environments in comprising the mesosystem.

Envisioning digital social media platforms as separate microsystems opens new possibilities for thinking through boyd's (2014a) concepts of affordances, collapsed identities/contexts, and why digital social media environments open new opportunities in the study of human identity. We can imagine that given the digital architecture and imagined audience, an individual user will present different aspects of their identity across various platforms, or present aspects of their identity in divergent ways on different social media platforms. If a student intra-acts with the same people across multiple digital social media platforms, or if a researcher were to view the student's different social media platforms, a more holistic and complex view of the student's identity might emerge. Further, since the microsystems of various digital social media platforms intra-act with other physically bounded microsystems (home, work, school), the importance of controlling a network and who has access to various social media contexts becomes of paramount importance to avoid identity and context collapse. As boyd (2014a) notes, the affordances of persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability made possible through the digital technological revolution make management, maintenance, and social control of different social media identities and contexts one of the central challenges for digital social media users. However, these affordances also represent one of the greatest possibilities we have for developing a more holistic understanding of student identity as an emergent phenomena.

Extending this discussion, we can view Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) notion of the exosystem as the actual location where programming and structural decisions are made about various digital social media platforms. As noted earlier, each digital social media platform contains pre-determined architecture that may dictate how an individual user constructs their identity or uses the platform. Decisions about digital social media platform architecture are often made by someone other than the individual user, but those decisions profoundly impact the way(s) the

individual may utilize, conform to, or disassociate from the platform (Carroll, Howard, Vetere, Peck, & Murphy, 2011). This perfectly aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) original articulation of the important role an exosystem has on a developing human being.

Finally, Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) concept of the macrosystem becomes critical in several key ways. First, there must be an accounting for society's attitude toward technology in the present-day postmodern paradigm, particularly among college students. Secondly, as noted earlier, Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) believed that historical period greatly impacted the potential developmental trajectory of human beings. Considering the present historic moment, with the advent and proliferation of digital technologies, is critically important in articulating the macrosystem. I have developed a visual representation incorporating digital social media environments as unique environmental contexts in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) original descriptions of the four levels.

Time

In the previous chapter, the role of time in Bronfenbrenner's (1979/2005) ecological development theory was also discussed. Like many educational theorists, Bronfenbrenner believed that levels of engagement with proximal processes greatly impacted both the trajectory and development of individual human beings. In higher education, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and Kuh, Schuh, and Whitt's (1991) discussion about engagement often take account of time, the general theoretical proposition being that the more time a student engages with particular activities, the more development occurs. In traditional development discourse, many theories and models also account for time through reference to the life cycle (child, adolescent, adult), in an ages and stages stance.

In digital space, however, it is possible and necessary to re-envision time. Duncheon and Tierney (2013) discuss the changing conceptions of time and their impact on theories of education and educational research, noting that in digital space there is "emergence of a unique temporal

paradigm” (p. 263), which they refer to as virtual time. Digital space has disrupted linear notions of time since “engagement in activities and relationships [occur] at any time and in any order” (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013, p. 249). Since students engage in social media platforms and informal learning processes at all hours of the day, in all different lengths of time, traditional notions of length of time on task, for example, become more difficult to measure. As Junco (2013) notes, people often lose sense, or have a false sense of their time of engagement on social media as well. Therefore, research that relies on time of engagement in digital social media environments becomes difficult to quantify, and therefore difficult to interpret as a proximal process, as originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005).

Additionally, lifespan time becomes more complicated in digital spaces. In digital spaces, “categories of time orientations that have formerly been taken for granted – past, present, and future – may require redefinition” (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013, p. 263). Part of the reason time must be redefined connects directly with boyd’s (2014a) discussion of the affordances offered by digital social media environments. In particular, the persistence of digital traces, their searchability, and their shareability all disrupt traditional notions of time. As people build their profiles, tweet their experiences, or share their stories in various digital social media contexts, not only do they have a living repository of their life history, but experiences are documented in a visible space that, dependent on the privacy of the platform and user-defined settings, allow new ways of documenting experience across time. In many ways, digital social media allows one to see their identity emerge across time.

Process

The main point is that college students are no longer bound by spatio-temporal realities characteristic of many traditional theories of student identity development.

The advent of social media technologies brings conflict to positivist, linear, predictable, and representational theories of college student identity development. Digital social media

environments expose a new reality: that identity is no longer confined solely to the self or spatio-temporal interactions within bounded physical environments (Davis, Sumara, & Iftody, 2010; de Villiers-Botha & Cilliers, 2010; Martinez Aleman & Wartman, 2009). The intersection of identity with digital space and time punctuates the importance of using complexity theory as an appropriate epistemological position, a point made by Davis and Simmt (2003):

Complexity is not just another category of phenomena, but an acknowledgment that some phenomena are not deterministic and cannot be understood strictly through means of analysis (i.e., literally, by taking apart or cutting up). A different attitude is required for their study, one that makes it possible to attend to their ever-shifting characters and that enables researchers to regard such systems, all at once, as coherent unities, as collections of coherent unities, and (likely) as agents within grander unities (p. 140).

Student identity is not deterministic, especially in the digital age, and thus can no longer be understood, explained, or examined through traditional student development theories rooted in an epistemological position of positivist empiricism. In the digital age “one’s identity is not controlled or isolated to one’s biological body” (Davis, Sumara, & Iftody, 2010, p. 117). This position is also expressed by de Villiers-Botha & Cilliers (2012) who argue that although “personal identity depends upon the spatio-temporal continuity of a personal body” it “does not exclude non-bodily personal identity” (p. 26). By bringing Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005), Duncheon and Tierney (2013), Davis, Sumara, and Iftody (2010), and de Villiers-Botha and Cilliers (2010) into dialogue, a new space is opened. This space requires us to critically examine what is meant by digital identity or identities, and how the concept of digital identity can and should be viewed as more than simply the articulated identity or identities performed through various social media platforms, but more as an emergent process of being and becoming.

What is Digital Identity?

One of the very central challenges facing researchers is whether to define digital identity. Does digital identity exist as a ‘true identity,’ a ‘hoped for’ or ‘aspirational identity,’ a performance, or perhaps a combination of all? Sherry Turkle (1995) was one of the first researchers to begin

questioning and exploring the role that technology played in articulating, defining, and performing identity issues. Her pointed question, even before the advent of digital social media, was “to what extent we ourselves have become cyborgs, transgressive mixtures of biology, technology, and code” (Turkle, 1995, p. 21). Turkle’s (1995; 2011) work explores the ways people use multiple technological tools, including robots, computers, phones, and digital spaces such as multi-user domains (MUDs), simulated environments, social media, chat rooms, and websites. Turkle (1995) discovered that in the digital age there are “fundamental shifts in the ways we create and experience human identity” (p. 10).

In her initial book *Life on the Screen*, Turkle (1995) began articulating a position partially informed by postmodern writers. Turkle (1995) wrestled and struggled with the ways technologies were fragmenting identity, removing people from the real world through simulated environments, and causing real human beings to become disconnected from one another, content to build relationships with robots, online therapists, and avatars in digital simulated environments. Yet, Turkle (1995) also articulated the possibilities of such spaces and realities ushered in by advancing computer and robotic technologies. She noted that in digital simulations and multi-user domains, people were given the chance “to express multiple and often unexplored aspects of the self, to play with their identity and try out new ones” (p. 12). Her initial writing explored people’s use of the Internet in the age before the advent of digital social media, an age categorized by much more online anonymity than the present day. Though Turkle (1995) expressed some initial fear about the potential impacts of technology on the human experience, she also took up a position that computers and technology allowed people to think through identity crises, the fluidity and multiplicity of identity. In ways previously unimaginable or unavailable to human beings, “computer mediated communications [could] serve as a place for the construction and reconstruction of identity” (Turkle, 1995, p. 14).

Turkle's (2011) second book *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* articulates a much more concerned tone about the ways technology influence modern day life. In this book, Turkle (2011) is able to explore the impacts of digital social media platforms, such as Facebook and MySpace, which came into existence and high use during the first decade of the twenty-first century. While Turkle notes that both adults and adolescents are using digital social media to continue their explorations of identity and identity issues, she also admonishes such platforms as sites of identity reduction, a line of argument also espoused by Jaron Lanier (2011) and Aharon Aviram. Aviram (2010) believes that digital technologies "undermine the individual's chances of developing a stable, continuous identity" (p. 213), primarily since digital media "transmits a 'clippy' (lacking continuity), superficial (or at least severely lacking depth), one-dimensional 'reality,' which is present oriented, enhances instant gratification of desires and leaves very little space for long term planning and expectation" (p. 184). Turkle (2011) states that digital social media platforms cause us to perform identity, and that "over time, such performance of identity may feel like identity itself" (p. 12). Since social media sites ask you to perform an identity, or reduce your identity, Turkle believes they often trick us into thinking "we will be presenting ourselves, but our profiles end up as somebody else – often the fantasy of who we want to be" (p. 153). For Turkle, the great social risks associated with digital technologies and digital identities as performed through virtual spaces or digital social media revolve around decreased human connection, increased levels of anxiety and depression, and other social ills. She sees great harm in people's assertions that their online selves are their "better selves" (p. 160) or that online identities make people "feel more like themselves than they do in the physical real" (p. 159).

Despite these potential social ills associated with digital social media, Turkle (2011) also is engaged in a more complicated conversation about the possibilities and limitations of digital social media as "identity workshop[s]" (p. 212). One way she does this is by focusing on the ways digital social media provide free spaces for identity exploration. Citing Erik Erikson's work on the need for

adolescents to have a period of moratorium for discovering and reconciling identity issues, Turkle seems to take up a position that, for youth, such spaces might be beneficial in providing a new environmental context for identity exploration previously unavailable to adolescents. She continues, citing Robert Jay Lifton's (1993) concept of the protean self, a theory of self-identity that views multiplicity as more important than an essentialized, unchanging, unwavering self.

This conversation in the book opens up a discussion regarding identity and identity presentation across multiple digital social media platforms. In grappling with these questions, Turkle (2011) is really examining whether our various digital identities, our presenting selves across various platforms, must be congruent. She describes one of her research participants, Stan, who believes that each of his online profiles "serves a different purpose," but also believes that "they must overlap, or questions of authenticity will arise" (p. 183). She notes what she calls the paradox of social networking: "it [is] easier to play with identity (for example, by experimenting with an avatar that is interestingly different from you) but harder to leave the past behind, because the Internet is forever" (p. 169). In this regard, Turkle is echoing boyd's (2014a) later discussion of affordances that arise in digital space. Ultimately, Turkle subtly takes up a position that "your identity on the computer is the sum of your distributed presence" (Turkle, 1995, p. 13) and that "when identity is multiple in this way, people feel 'whole' not because they are one but because the relationships among aspects of self are fluid and undefensive" (Turkle, 2011, p. 194).

Herein lies one of the great debates about the impacts of digital social media on identity: whether a distributed, networked, disembodied set of online identity presentations constitute a holistic version of a person's 'true' identity. This is a question examined by Dave Eggers (2013) in his witty and prescient novel *The Circle*. In the novel, Eggers envisions a world where technological innovations – from cameras and human computer chips to social media sites – bring to life the Orwellian vision of complete transparency and complete knowledge. A corporation known as "The Circle" rapidly proliferates the technological infrastructure necessary for consumers to have a

“TruYou” account. This centralized personal profile captures all pertinent information about users from the digital cloud and, beyond its use as a marketing tool, allows other users to interact with and understand your true identity.

The protagonist of the novel is Mae, a recent college graduate. One of the many existential crises she faces involves whether her identity, as captured and presented by “The Circle,” is really a holistic and true representation of who she believes herself to be. In the world of “The Circle,” there are no multiple identities. TruYou captures your true essence, your real identity, accessible for all users of the system, by creating a transparent world where everyone’s actions, purchases, networks, and online profiles are recorded, analyzed, and ranked. Human ambiguity simply does not exist, especially pertaining to issues of identity.

Although Eggers’ (2013) book is fictional, the idea of a “TruYou” account, pieced together through connecting various profiles, purchases, and actions in a digital world, parallels Turkle’s (1995) claim that we might just understand identity more holistically by piecing together the “sum of your distributed presence” (p. 13). This also parallels the earlier discussion, where digital social media platforms might be envisioned as separate microsystems that intra-act (Barad, 2008a) with one another in creation of mesosystemic structure. The questions facing researchers and educators alike are whether this understanding of digital identity offers new ways of conducting identity research, how to conduct such research, and whether these approaches will give us greater insights into identity in digital space and a greater understanding of identity and digital identity. These are questions that will be examined further below and in the next chapter.

Turkle’s (1995; 2011) examinations of digital identity are rooted in analysis of individual profiles and individual use of social media or other technologies. boyd (2014a) conducts similar research but reminds us that digital identity and digital social media are socially constructed. Part of what makes social construction of digital identity possible is how people use digital social media sites differentially, tied to the earlier discussion regarding imagined audience. boyd (2014a) states

Most teens use a plethora of social media services as they navigate relationships and contexts. Their seemingly distinct practices on each platform might suggest that they are trying to be different people, but this would be a naïve reading of the kinds of identity work taking place on and through social media. (p. 38)

This is because social media and digital identity is more than the collective of individual users thoughts, tweets, photos, or likes and dislikes. Digital identity through social media is “constructed through what [individual users] explicitly provide, through what their friends share, and as a product of how other people respond to them” (boyd, 2014a, p. 49). Thus what matters in examining digital identity and digital social media for boyd is not really the content of a users profile, but the context and process of digital identity social construction. Ultimately boyd (2014a) believes that “the ability to understand how context, audience, and identity intersect is one of the central challenges people face in learning how to navigate social media” (p. 30).

Given the debate and ideas about how to define, envision, and research digital identity, a particularly important question is raised for the current study: how do we conceptualize college student identity in the dynamic, unbounded, spatio-temporal spheres of digital social media environments? Utilizing the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & Abes, 2013), and the previously cited research, various possibilities arise. For some students, digital identity as expressed in various digital social media environments may constitute a completely separate identity, another of various social identities that revolve around and reflect their core personal identity. For others, digital social media environments may act as the meaning-making filter theorized in Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s (2007) reconceptualized model. For others still, digital spaces may be contextual influences (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & Abes, 2013) in the same way that sociocultural campus climate, family background, or geographic region are currently conceptualized. Some recent research on college student digital identity will demonstrate how difficult these questions about digital identity are to answer, at least as presently articulated in the research literature.

Current Research on College Student Digital Identity

Only recently has research emerged discussing college student identity online (Birnbaum, 2013; Lee, 2012; Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), and all of this research has focused not on “development,” but rather on theories of self-presentation or through a lens of digital identity construction. In many of these studies, digital social media platforms are seen as sites where college students “explore their identities” and “make public self-presentations through text and images” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 34). With many students using these sites, there is a natural inclination to understand how “gender, racial, ethnic, and social class identity” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 41) impact self-representation, agency, and digital identity. In fact, students make it “clear that their Facebook use is mediated by their racial and ethnic and gender identities” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 52), though “little research has been done to ascertain the effects of . . . class identity on online social networking” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 41).

In their book *Online Social Networking on Campus: Understanding what Matters in Student Culture*, Martinez-Aleman and Wartman (2009) present the most evidence presently available of how students utilize digital social media to mediate cultural, racial, ethnic, sexual, and gendered selves. Through their ethnographic interviews with four college students, various issues arise.

Students of color in this study discussed self-presentation online most poignantly in relation to not confirming potential stereotypes, demonstrating the intersection of larger cultural dynamics and power within digital environments. According to Martinez-Aleman and Wartman (2009) “students of color often talked about being very mindful of displaying images that would undermine their academic credibility on campus” (p. 53), an issue not of prevalent concern for White students. In fact, “White students were generally unaware of race/ethnicity distinctions in self-presentations” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 53) within this study.

For other students, Facebook offered an opportunity for cultural self-identification. One student, named Jordon, considered himself bicultural and believes “Facebook allows him the opportunity to post a specific identity so. . . people do not have to ‘guess’ his racial or ethnic identity” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 67). Another student, Teresa, utilized Facebook to post information about her Spanish cultural heritage. In these ways, the study demonstrates that students utilize Facebook for cultural self-expression or to educate people about their own self-identified racial or ethnic identity.

Gender and sexuality were also discussed in the Martinez-Aleman and Wartman (2009) study. One young man, who self-identified as black and gay, discussed the importance of self-presentation online due to his intersecting identities. This was also an issue for another student who self-identified as a lesbian, but chose “not [to] list her relationship status, or the sex of the people she is interested in on her profile, because she believes that everyone who needs to know about her sexual orientation already does” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 59). In fact, the authors of the study reported that students in their study were very aware that gender and sexuality norms from the campus carried over to Facebook. Women were said to pose “for Facebook pictures dressed in what they deem. . . a social class position” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 83), while men “seemed to conform to many of the cultural narratives of masculinity” (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 87). Based on this study, students conform to cultural, societal, or campus norms or make conscious decisions about self-presentation relating to social identity issues. From an ecological developmental perspective, the students in this study demonstrate how digital social media platforms can be seen as microsystems, interacting with other microsystems (in this case, the campus environment) or macrosystems (for example, attitudes toward sexuality, gender norms, and social class norms) in creating a digital identity that is presented by the authors as conformist.

Lee (2012) specifically studied the use of Facebook by African American college students at a Historically Black College in Texas. This study sought to dissect whether the salience of Black college student's racial identity, self-esteem, and personality characteristics impacted their Facebook use. According to Lee (2012), "racial identity and personality factors were not related to time spent on Facebook" (p. 345), meaning the centrality of race had no impact on these Black students use of Facebook. However, Lee (2012) also notes these students did utilize Facebook for presentation of "cultural and racial cues" (p. 345). On average, the students in this study self-reported "fewer than 14% of Facebook friends as non-Black" (Lee, 2012, p. 344), and 94% of the sample reported posting a photograph of themselves. Lee (2012) takes these self-reported measurements as signs of racial solidarity and strong racial identification, particularly as "these African American students communicate mainly with other African American friends, creating their own community" (Lee, 2012, p. 344). In some ways, this assertion by Lee is similar to discussions by Tatum (2003).

Birnbaum (2013) provides the most recent discussion about college student digital identity. Utilizing a qualitative photo-elicitation and semi-structured interview approach, Birnbaum (2013) identified six conforming fronts that college students use on Facebook to conform to undergraduate student norms. His six identified fronts were: the partier, the socialite, the risk-taker, the comic, the institutional citizen, and the eccentric. In this study, Birnbaum (2013) concluded that students were more apt to utilize digital social media in a conforming fashion, rather than as a site of exploration of self or for specific self-presentation. In many ways, his study parallels Martinez-Aleman and Wartman's (2009) study, and further confirms that one way researchers exploring digital identity in college students are envisioning social media is as part of a larger environmental context and social construct, influenced more by social norms and the influence of other microsystemic interactions in presentation or articulation of digital identity.

Zhao et al. (2008) also utilized Facebook to examine digital identity drawing a different conclusion than Birnbaum (2013). In their study, Zhao et al. (2008) discovered that many individuals utilized Facebook to present “possible selves,” rather than actual depictions of who they were. Students in this study utilized photos, quotes, and wall postings to project a certain image of who they wished they were, according to these researchers. Resultantly, Facebook became an environmental medium for navigating and discussing differences between the true self, the real self, and the hoped for self (Zhao et al., 2008).

All three of these studies recognize that digital identity is a real phenomena. Birnbaum (2013) and Martinez-Aleman and Wartman (2009) theorize that campus cultural norms intra-act with these digital spaces and student identity conforms to these cultural and social norms. Zhao et al. (2008) also recognize that cultural norms are important, but view Facebook as an environment of identity exploration, rather than a simple space of fitting or conforming to cultural norms.

Some additional research highlights the challenges associated with framing an operational definition of identity. For example, Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) studied college student use of Facebook, hypothesizing that students would use the site to “express identity,” particularly through inclusion of “information about religion, political ideology, and work, topics that are germane to identity development during emerging adulthood” (p. 228). To gain better understanding of how students expressed their identity online, the researchers included a list of 23 different identity markers that could potentially be included on Facebook. Students were asked to select which of these markers were present on their own Facebook pages.

Inclusion of these different identity markers highlights one of the problems of merging social media with traditional college student development literature and theory, at least as presently articulated. Of the 23 identity markers included by Pempek et al. (2009), only three have stand-alone theoretical roots in student development literature: religion, sexual orientation, and gender. A few others (work, relationship status, political views) are mentioned as part of other

student development theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, there are noticeable absences from this list: race and ethnicity, ability status, and socioeconomic status, to name a few. Other identity markers that are included, such as “media preferences – favorite books, music, and movies” (Pempek et al., 2009, p. 233) might aptly be conceptualized as identity performatives (Butler, as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), consumables (my preferred choice), or non-theorized aspects of identity: important, but not rooted in the theoretical college student development literature.

The Pempek et al. (2009) article is one of the few explicitly asking students to disclose their use of digital social media as a site of understanding or articulating identity. Issues of identity exploration in digital social media environments were also explored by Valkenburg, Schoeten, and Peter (2005), though their study focused on pre-college adolescents. Other studies (Birnbaum, 2013; Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009) view the use of digital social media platforms by college students as sites of identity conformity, or in the case of Zhao et al. (2008) as locations where students create an aspirational identity – a wished for self that either does not exist or cannot exist. Perhaps most striking in the case of Pempek et al. (2009) is discovery that “contrary to prediction, expressing identity/opinions was rarely selected in responses to survey queries for reasons for using Facebook” (p. 232). Though use of Facebook was not explicitly viewed as a tool for understanding or articulating identity, the fact that most students were posting information relating to their “identity” within the digital social media demonstrates the powerful role multiple platforms could play in understanding and researching issues of college student identity in the twenty-first century. Finally, Pempek et al. (2009) find a critical, though overlooked and rarely discussed aspect of how students demonstrate their identity on Facebook. In many cases, students reported that they included certain information simply because Facebook had a place to insert it. As Lanier (2011) noted, the structure of the platform impacts user engagement and information sharing.

The importance of platform limitations in expressions of identity became the foundation of Grasmuck et al. (2009) study on ethnic and racial identity representations on Facebook. Their study noted race and ethnicity are “conspicuously absent” as identity markers on Facebook, relinquishing “judgments about racial identities mostly a matter of visual display via pictures” (Grasmuck et al., 2009, p. 164), narrative constructions of self, or through utilization of quotes. Through content analysis of 83 undergraduate student profiles, their study sought to understand whether different racial and ethnic groups (specifically African American, Vietnamese American, Indian American, Latina/o, and White) produced and articulated racial and ethnic identity differently. To answer this question, the researchers quantified the number of photos posted and friendship connections (both on- and off-campus) and also developed a coding scheme to analyze student’s use of quotations, posting of information about cultural identity consumables (such as books, music, movies, and TV shows), and the narrative “About Me” section on Facebook.

One conclusion reached by Grasmuck et al. (2009) from their analysis of student Facebook profiles is that ethno-racial differences do exist in terms of identity construction on Facebook. For starters, the researchers noted that African American, Latina/o, and Indian American students tend to post more photos, have more on- and off-campus friends, and display information about cultural identity consumption at higher rates than Vietnamese American or White students. This analysis was strictly descriptive, based on quantitative percentages and not on any robust statistical analysis, which is one limitation of the finding. However, based on their earlier work (Zhao et al., 2008), the authors believe these findings represent aspirational identities: being highly sociable and engaged in cultural activities.

Grasmuck et al. (2009) further substantiate the claim that ethno-racial identity construction differs on Facebook based on content analysis of the quotation section of student’s Facebook profiles. In their analysis, “quotations selected by African Americans were highly infused with inspirational quotations about racial injustice from literature and popular culture” (Grasmuck et al.,

2009, p. 173), while “Latino students mixed religious and inspirational quotes. . .focusing on themes of political resistance, social change, and revolution” (Grasmuck et al., 2009, p. 174). Vietnamese American, Indian American, and White students, however, “almost never selected quotes that signaled racial or even ethnic identification” (Grasmuck et al., 2009, p. 175). One conclusion drawn from the content analysis of quotations is that “uplifting and often inspirational quotes related to racial themes of injustice frequently included by the African American, Latino, and Indian students convey a sense of group belonging, color consciousness, and identification with groups historically stigmatized by dominant society” (Grasmuck et al., 2009, p. 175).

There are many limitations and additional questions raised by studies that analyze content of postings by students on their Facebook profiles, not the least of which is a student’s actual perception or intent behind posting certain information and how those subjective decisions impact their meaning-making. Grasmuck et al. (2009) recognize this limitation of their study, and also stress that the campus where their study was conducted may not be highly representative of most campuses in the United States due to its heterogeneous racial and ethnic composition. Despite these limitations, digital social media platforms are increasingly viewed as “online venues that help minority students express and project a positive ethno-racial identity that enhances their self-conception” (Grasmuck et al., 2009, p. 180). The Grasmuck et al. (2009) study aligns with other studies on college student identity presentation online (Birnbaum, 2013; Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009) by emphasizing the ways that campus cultural environments or larger macrosystemic environments (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) intra-act to create certain presentations of self in a digital social media platform. Though researchers are attempting to gain more understanding of how digital social media platforms impact identity construction, performance, or development, there are still many questions remaining.

Several issues converge in digital social media spaces complicating the study of college student identity development. First, students either fail to recognize digital social media sites as

locations of legitimate identity development, or only minimally recognize these realities (Pempek et al., 2009). Secondly, operational definition of identity becomes blurred and chaotic. Researchers conceptualize ‘identity’ in digital social media environments along a vast continuum – from theoretical constructs rooted in the literature (such as gender, sexual orientation, and race), to student cultural normative identities (such as the partier, the institutional citizen, or the risk-taker). Third, internal and external impacts on identity shift, merge, and reveal themselves, as individuals vacillate between conforming to external norms (Birnbaum, 2013; Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009) or work through seeking feedback as they shift and contextualize their identity (Pempek et al., 2009; Turkle, 1995; 2011; Zhao et al., 2008). Fourth, digital social media platforms create the boundaries of identity representation through programmatic design (boyd, 2014a; Grasmuck et al., 2009; Lanier, 2011; Morrison, 2014).

What each of these studies on college student use of digital social media platforms attempts is to utilize existing epistemological frameworks, rooted in positivist, empiricist science, to articulate generalizable, essentialized accounts of how college student use digital social media spaces to articulate, explore, or present conforming identity expectations. These are important studies, but their general adherence to reductionistic and representational tendencies limits their ability to help educators and researchers understand from an individual perspective what is occurring in digital social media spaces relating to identity. Further, all of these studies are focused on a singular platform, with Facebook in particular having a strong presence in the literature base. Resultantly, our present understanding of identity work by college students in digital space is still limited. Filling this gap requires examination of college student use of multiple sites of digital social media, allowing us to account for the social context, architectural design, and imagined audience issues discussed by boyd (2014a), as well as to view identity as a self-eco-organizing process in digital social media spaces. Though this work has not yet been adequately done with college students, a substantial research base has been established with adolescent youth. Exploring these

studies provides the connection necessary to understand how a more complexivist epistemology is being utilized in the broader research literature on digital identity. In these studies it is possible to view how researchers are envisioning and binding together already discussed ideas of accounting for digital media as unique environmental contexts, accounting for the self, viewing identity as a nonlinear process rooted in disequilibrium and self-organization, and ultimately articulating a position that research on digital identity should be focused on identity emergence: a non-generalizable, unpredictable, unique process of becoming.

Studies on Youth and Digital Media

There are an increasing number of studies, books, and anthologies that report on research related to youth (adolescence) and digital identity (boyd, 2014a; Buckingham, 2008; Everett, 2008; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2012). Much of the fascination with exploring the concept of youth engagement with digital media and its impact on identity is tied directly to the Western belief that adolescence is the period of life where identity issues are most poignant and often resolved (boyd, 2014a; Buckingham, 2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1959/1980). Although this position itself is rooted in an outdated epistemological paradigm of development, the abundance of research on youth, digital social media, and identity does provide an entry into re-examining precisely how to research the topic of identity in digital space. Further, within this broader research base on youth and digital media, it is possible to see a shift in epistemological positioning toward an embrace of complexity theory and the language of identity emergence or becoming. Although it is unlikely that most of these researchers would articulate or categorize themselves as operating within a complexivist epistemological position, many of the conclusions reached in these studies do articulate such a position.

Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell (2008) most poignantly articulate this position in their study of how youth engage with various technological devices and spaces, including personal

websites, cell phones, and video production. Weber and Mitchell (2008) embrace and articulate the following position in the conclusion of their study:

our notion of identity as personal and social bricolage places those fragments within a single work-in-progress, an evolving active construction that constantly sheds bits and adds bits, changing through dialectical interactions with the digital and nondigital world, involving physical, psychological, social, and cultural agents. (p. 43)

Their articulation of identity in social space as bricolage is strongly rooted in many ideas articulated up to this point, including the language of complexity theory, a view of identity as process, and an explicit articulation of digital social media sites converging and being socially constructed (boyd, 2014).

Weber and Mitchell (2008) articulate how their research participants viewed identity as process. For example, the researchers asked students to participate in a collective video production exploring the social issue of HIV and AIDS. Through this process, students were asked to write a script, cast parts, and explore the dynamics of this social crisis in their community. One result of this project was that students utilized the video production process to explore multiple issues of identity, particularly in relation to gender issues and social constructions of masculinity and femininity. Through the process, the researchers observed students “trying on various identities” and exploring the role of external interpretation “in constructing gender identity” (p. 38). As students developed their videos, they were engaged in a process of active reflexivity, exploring their own understanding of gender norms, but also understanding the socially constructed nature of gendered identities through reflecting on “how others are looking at their productions” (p. 27).

Weber and Mitchell (2008) view this particular example not only through the lens of identity as process, but also an accounting for the impact of environmental conditions on how youth ultimately chose to produce their videos. Though the authors do not articulate this position explicitly, their argument in examining how identity is produced in these video productions is directly related to boyd’s (2014a) discussion of imagined audience. In the video productions, Weber and Mitchell (2008) observed that students “facilitate a dialectical relationship between

personal and social identities, one that shifts and flows, reacting to new information, situations, and contexts” (p. 40). The researchers continue, citing the way that students articulated and explored where their video productions would be available. This is an example of media convergence, and illustrates how it becomes possible to view digital social media contexts as microsystems that interact with various other microsystems, in this case community environments, peer environments, and across different social media platforms.

A further conclusion that Weber and Mitchell (2008) discern from their research on teen use of personal websites provides segue to Susannah Stern’s (2008) discussion of youth blogging. Weber and Mitchell (2008) state that videos, personal websites, and other technologically produced pieces by youth “tell stories of sorts (often nonlinear and multivoiced) and leave a digital trail, fingerprint, or photograph of ‘where I was then,’ ‘where we are now,’ ‘who I would like to be,’ and so on” (p. 27). Stern (2008) goes beyond merely doing content analysis of youth blogs, to an actual engagement with youth about the process of self-presentation through blogging. She learned youth view personal blogs as “visual artifacts of the[ir] self-evolution” and that “views of themselves as incomplete and evolving are commonly voiced among young authors” (p. 112).

Stern’s (2008) research findings on youth blogging support boyd’s (2014a) assertion that youth utilize digital spaces to construct a self for an imagined public, as well as Turkle’s (2011) assertion that these digital spaces become valuable as potential identity workshops. Stern (2008) reports that youth bloggers “use their personal sites to broadcast aspects of themselves in order to see what kind of reception they receive” and “test out different versions of their current and possible identities” (p. 107). How this happens has evolved since 1995 when Turkle wrote her first book, however. Today, “most young authors see themselves trying to capture who they are – albeit in a palatable fashion for the audience – rather than trying out entirely new and different identities” (Stern, 2008, p. 108). Stern’s study emphasizes several points made by boyd (2014a), including the

role of imagined audience, the desire youth have to connect with peers through digital space, and the importance of the affordances of digital space – particularly persistence and visibility.

Stern's (2008) study also highlights the importance of digital sites for creating identity spaces that are likely not welcome or supported in local environments or by imagined audiences. For example, she discusses how queer youth can find space online to practice the coming out process, to test the limitations and possibilities of their emerging queer identity, or to connect with an imagined public not present in their immediate local environments. Such spaces help queer youth learn about their identity, as well as "the chance to present the kind of identity or self-image they feel they cannot present in other spaces" (Stern, 2008, p. 107). The powerful role of digital space for this type of identity exploration, validation, and learning has been documented elsewhere. Both Turkle (2011) and boyd (2014a) discuss this reality for queer youth. Byrne (2008), Sandoval and Latorre (2008), and Lopez (2008) also discuss how creating new imagined audiences and exploration processes through digital spaces help youth learn about racial and ethnic identity issues.

What all of these studies on youth, identity, digital social media have in common is their embrace of a complexivist epistemological framework, both in research design and reporting. Each of these studies conceives of "identity as a process. . .something that can never be achieved once and for all. It is fluid and open to negotiation" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008, p. 43). Each of these studies goes beyond exclusive "analyses of and encounters with the actual artifacts themselves" (Stern, 2008, p. 113) to a deeper analysis of both content and process. For these researchers, this is achieved through starting from the epistemological position that identity is emergent, rather than static, fixed, essential, or measurable. It proceeds by recognizing that "it is precisely in the combination or mixture of social, cultural, and digital technologies that the possibilities for learning and identity reside" (Goldman, Booker, and McDermott, 2008, p. 187).

Conclusion

The realizations and practices of researchers cited in the last section are precisely what are needed in college student identity research in the twenty-first century. What I have been arguing throughout these first four chapters is precisely this: we have the realization; we do not yet have the practice. The realization is partially articulated through an embrace of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Jones & Abes, 2013), and the most recent attempts to overlap the critical theoretical perspectives of Intersectionality Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Queer Theory over this model. The realization is subtly articulated by Renn (2012), who stated that ecological development models such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) help us view identity "development" as "a highly individual process;" that "considering the near-infinite possible variations of PPCT [person, process, context, time] factors, it is moderately surprising that anything at all can be said about common developmental trajectories or outcomes" (Renn, 2012, p. 130).

There is realization that the digital technologies engaged with by today's students are likely impacting student identity. Evans et al. (2010) state "online social networks like FaceBook [sic] may open up new ways to study" many aspects of the college student experience. Renn (2012) recognizes that by embracing ecological frameworks for understanding and researching student development, there must be an embrace of "the processes and contexts in which student learning and development occur" (p. 131). Further, she articulates that in the twenty-first century, this must "include digitally mediated interactions" (p. 126). Researchers cited in this chapter (Birnbaum, 2013; Grasmuck et al., 2009; Lee, 2012; Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009; Zhao et al., 2008) are all cognizant of the need to conduct this research, advance new understanding, and begin accounting for digital spaces in the exploration, articulation, and meaning making processes of college student identity.

What the field does not have yet is a new process for doing this work. Since the literature remains rooted in an outdated epistemological position of positivist empiricism, researchers' attempts to advance a more robust research agenda and understanding of digital identity in college students fall short. Our current studies on this topic adhere to a desire for creating representational, generalizable accounts of digital social media use by college students, and perhaps a representational model of digital identity (although digital spaces are still unaccounted for in representational models of student identity development). What is needed now is a new approach of conducting research on this topic. The new *modus operandi* needs to be rooted in a complexivist epistemological approach that embraces nonlinearity, disequilibrium, and environmental contexts in new ways. The new approach must seek not to generalize across students, but to view each individual experience as a process that is unique and emergent. The new approach must embrace the self-eco-organizing principles of Morin (2008) and must examine the intra-actions (Barad, 2008a) that occur in digital space and non-digital space. In the next chapter, I will examine precisely how I envisioned such a research process occurring in studying the identity emergence, or becoming, of college students in the digital age.

CHAPTER 5

DIGITAL IMMERSION AND DAT(A)NALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I stated researchers who study college student identity have come to an important realization recently: that the study of identity in college students needs to embrace a more holistic, complex, individual, emergent perspective. As demonstrated through careful examination and interrogation of the literature of college student identity and youth identity, researchers and college student educators have been discussing identity from a complexivist epistemological position, even if this is not the language being used. Yet, as has also been demonstrated, the research methodologies and processes employed by researchers remain rooted in a reductionist paradigm of positivist empiricism, where generalizability becomes the ultimate goal. Such research practices make impossible the two very important tasks before researchers of college student identity in the twenty-first century. First, how to incorporate and account for digital spaces appropriately in twenty-first century studies of identity, and second, how to move beyond representational models and theories toward an embrace of identity as an emergent process of becoming. In this chapter, I will outline my understanding of issues regarding Internet research. Building on this brief discussion, I will re-articulate some of the limitations of current research on college student digital identity, and then articulate the research process that occurred in this dissertation research, including the process for conducting research on digital identity of college students in various social media spaces, utilizing various Internet technologies. This process will be referred to as digital immersion (Hine, 2009). Finally, I will discuss philosophical and 'analytical' issues I considered at the start of this study. Therefore, this chapter serves as another point of entry in the process of utilizing the tools available to explore college student digital identity, incorporating the bricolage approach outlined by Kincheloe and Berry (2004) in chapter one of this dissertation. As will be outlined, engaging and immersing myself as a researcher within the digital spaces of my research 'participants', as well as utilizing various approaches to the

interview process, is critically important for expanding and challenging traditional qualitative research methodologies.

However, it is both appropriate and necessary to engage in a reflexive moment regarding ‘analysis.’ As a complexivist researcher, I viewed limiting the possible ‘analytical’ procedures as inappropriate, introducing a false cut into the research process. As will become evident in chapters six through nine, allowing the dat(a)nalyses processes to unfold and emerge as part of the research process was both appropriate and prescient. As I prepared to conduct this research I felt challenged by the false limitations and reductions imposed in a pre-determined approach to analysis. Therefore, my discussion in this chapter on processes of analysis will expose both my personal challenges and hesitancy in articulating an analytical position, though I will articulate that my analytical position is best described as emergent phenomena. To articulate my own conceptualization of this process, I will be utilizing the writing of post-qualitative researchers such as Alecia Jackson (2013), Lisa Mazzei (2013), Patti Lather & Elizabeth St. Pierre (2013), and Hillevi Taguchi (2013), and drawing heavily from Karen Barad (2008a), who outlines her belief in advancing agential realist research rooted in the quantum philosophical writings of Neils Bohr. Each of these scholars challenge conventional understanding of data analysis in ways that connect topics already discussed throughout the first four chapters of this dissertation: utilizing the language and insights of complexity theory, quantum theory, and ultimately challenging representationalism in educational research.

Digital Immersion and Multi-Sited Study

In the introduction to their book *Internet Inquiry: Conversation about Method*, Annette Markham and Nancy Baym (2009) highlight several of the major ways the Internet changes traditional methodological approaches to qualitative research and inquiry. Throughout their text, the authors and their invited contributors make arguments for reconsidering the process of qualitative research “without reinvention” (p. ix). In Markham and Baym’s (2009) estimation,

convergent media platforms and redefined social and geographic boundaries ushered in by the Internet are all responsible for considering a shift in qualitative research method. A fourth important shift is particularly relevant to the research conducted in this study: mediated identities (Markham & Baym, 2009). The invention and wide adoption of digital social media platforms means that “our selves are produced through multiple media” (Markham & Baym, 2009, p. x) and that “the contemporary self, which used to seem fairly embedded in a human body, must now be seen as constructed with and in response to multiple media” (Markham & Baym, 2009, p. x). With identity and agency being disembodied, mediated, and dispersed through and across multiple digital social media platforms, I would challenge Markham and Baym’s (2009) notion that we need to only reconsider qualitative research in the space of the Internet. Rather, researchers need to begin conducting research that disrupts traditional sampling, methodological and analytical approaches to research. Digital social media platforms provide an opportunity to practice and enact these disruptions.

There are two issues that have arisen in the early minimal research examining college students and digital social media: limited platform examinations and the tying of studies to physically bounded locations. First, much of the present research has been limited to the study of one platform. Facebook, in particular, has been an important site of study (Birnbaum, 2013; Lee, 2012; Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2009). Other studies that have focused specifically on issues of identity in youth and digital media have also focused almost exclusively on the study of one particular type of social media (Buckingham, 2008; Everett, 2008), for example – personal websites, MySpace, chat rooms, multi-user game domains, or personal blogs. Secondly, many of these studies, though exploring student use of a particular digital social media platform, have also remained rooted in the study of students at a physically distinct location – a particular school, college, or university, a residence hall, a community center, a local library.

While such studies are important and have provided initial understanding about the influence and uses of digital social media on many issues including identity, these studies are also limiting, reductionist, and fall prey to the methodological constraints of current research paradigms. These studies limited the digital social media platform that was examined and adhered to strict methodological and analytical procedures. Resultantly, such analyses led to limited and reductionist conclusions. This is one issue addressed by Christine Hine (2009), who argues against such limiting methodological and analytical techniques in studying technology and the Internet. Hine (2009) cautions against the predisposition that researchers can predetermine the boundaries of a technology, where and how to study it, or that one technology is not influenced by another technology. Rather, she advocates for two approaches in studying technology: “immersion,” (Hine, 2009, p. 12) and “multi-sited study” (Hine, 2009, p. 13).

Examining each of these concepts is important to understanding Hine’s (2009) challenge for qualitative Internet researchers. By immersion, Hine (2009) is referring not only to a researcher’s presence in a particular platform or digital space being researched, but an active and avid use of technologies by the researcher in their own life. She refers to this as being engaged in the “relevant practices” (Hine, 2009, p. 12) of a technological space. However, Hine (2009) is also careful to point out that technological space is not a distinct location existing outside the physical world – meaning that technology is used, engaged, and absorbed in many physical spaces as well. Therefore, Hine (2009) also views immersion as visiting the spaces where technologies are created, where physical human beings engage them, so in her research she also immerses herself in the observation, study, and examination of such spaces. This last point refers to the way Hine (2009) defines a multi-sited research study: these occur in both technological and non-technological spaces.

The concepts of digital immersion and multi-sited study apply well to the present study. Given the observation by Markham and Baym (2009) that identity is mediated across multiple forms of media, studying the identity of college students across multiple sites of digital social media

is both appropriate and necessary. Additionally, setting artificial limitations on the digital social media platforms to be examined, studied, and immersed within would unintentionally limit the examination at hand. Therefore, in alignment with Hine's (2009) belief that digital research should not be artificially, geographically, or spatially bounded, the current study proposed several approaches to examining the specific research question about the role of digital social media platforms in the understanding and emergence of self-identity in college students.

Research 'Participants'

In order to understand identity emergence through digital social media, I proposed that individuals who participated in this study should be highly engaged social media users, as well as highly engaged across multiple different social media platforms. Since the study was also focused on college student identity, participants also had to be enrolled in an institution of higher education (college, university, community college, technical college, adult university college). There was an intentional and deliberate decision made not to restrict or bound the age of the student in this study, the type of institution where they were enrolled, or the geographic location of the student. Since research was conducted on identity and digital space(s), and given the various approaches that were utilized in the study to examine the issue of college student digital identity emergence, arbitrary restrictions and limitations were not needed or warranted. Placing such restrictions on the study at the front end would possibly have limited the type of learning that occurred during this inquiry. As I sought to fill a gap in the literature by not limiting platform examination, I also was open to the realization that some 'participants' might be engaged in platforms and spaces with which I was unfamiliar; this turned out to be true. Thus, I learned from and alongside these 'participants' not only about their identity, but also about platform(s), the use of platform(s), and environmental conditions with which I was unfamiliar.

Recruitment of ‘Participants’

I proposed using a combination of purposive, snowball, and opportunistic sampling in order to recruit participants for this portion of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Most research utilizes a purposive sampling technique in selecting a particular population to study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). For this portion of the study, I developed a promotional advertisement that I posted online in various social media platforms and e-mailed to professional colleagues across the country (see Appendix B). This promotional advertisement briefly described the purpose of this portion of the study, outlined the time commitments, and directed potential research participants to a web survey where they could express interest in participating in the study, provide information about their social media use and the various digital social media platforms with which they were engaged. The recruitment process was temporally bound for two weeks solely for the purposes of selecting the initial group of research ‘participants.’

Once the recruitment process for this portion of the study was complete, I reviewed the individuals who expressed interest in participating through the online web survey and worked to identify the number of individuals whom I wished to engage with for the remainder of the study. These individuals were then be contacted and invited to participate in the study. I will expand on this discussion in chapter seven.

‘Data’ Collection Processes

Once research participants were selected, they were sent a link to an online video where I discussed the details of the research study. In this video, I went over details about the digital immersion aspects of the study, discussed the interview processes that would occur, and discussed how participants could grant permission for participation by completing the university approved Institutional Review Board Informed Consent (see Appendix C), which I set up in an online form that was included in the initial e-mail to ‘participants.’ In order to ensure that research participants retained anonymity, I also included in the video a discussion about the selection of a pseudonym for

the study, including the use of pseudonyms for any online identifiers such as screen names or platform handles.

Finally, the video discussed the possible outlets where this research would be discussed and sought permission from participants to use their particular information in multiple locations. For example, outside of the dissertation, I requested to utilize information from this study in research journal articles, at conferences for presentation purposes, in public blogging and websites about the research process itself, and in future books to be written on this topic.

Digital Immersion.

This portion of the study sought to fill an important gap in the literature: viewing digital identity across multiple social media contexts. Therefore, following selection of research participants, I as the researcher proposed following my research participants in their various social media environments. In my proposal, I articulated an understanding that as a researcher I may be required to create accounts in various new digital spaces and learn the various platforms myself. As the study unfolded, I did need to create profiles in Pinterest, and become more active on Instagram.

For the purposes of building authentic relationships with my research participants, I decided to utilize my own personal accounts, rather than establishing separate research accounts for this portion of the study. There are clearly ethical issues involved in this decision. For example, my own social media accounts are quite robust, and I am actively engaged in multiple digital spaces including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Academia.edu, and Chronicle Vitae. The participants in my study also had access to my research blog (<http://pweaton.wordpress.com>) as the process unfolded. Giving full access to my participants was ethically responsible in breaking down arbitrary power dynamics often present in research studies. Since some participants may have viewed me as an authority, building authentic relationships helped to break down unnecessary power dynamics in the relationships that developed (Daly, 2007). Further, since I was

not meeting my 'participants' in a true face-to-face situation, it was important to establish trust, rapport, and understanding with my 'participants.' Giving full access to my true, authentic accounts was one effective way of establishing a trusting relationship with my 'participants,' a process described as important by Kivits (2005) in her discussion about online interviewing. Further, this approach is in alignment with my own philosophy about the research process: that the research 'participants' and I are actually researching together, learning together, and through our entangled relationships, becoming.

There were also issues dealing with retaining anonymity of the research participants involved in the study. I proposed dealing with this issue by pacing my official digital engagement with individual participants over the course of several weeks, rather than all at once. This ensured that people searching my profile(s) would not be able to easily pick-out those individuals who were participating in my study. Since many social media platforms leave digital traces of friendship or followership, this simple precaution ensured that I could be immersed in my participant's social media platforms without easily revealing those who participate to a larger public.

There were several goals to the digital immersion portion of this project. First, as a researcher I was interested in the processes that occur in digital space for the participants. It was important for me to understand through the immersion process how each participant engaged with various digital social media platforms, how participants self-present, and different attitudes, behaviors, consistencies, and inconsistencies developing across time on each of the various platforms where a participant engaged. Meticulous note-taking on each participant occurred during this process.

The second goal of the digital immersion portion of this study was to fill the research gap that traditionally views issues of digital identity from the perspective of a solo-platform (discussed in previous chapters). A key part of the interview process was to examine alongside participants their various digital identities, the relationship of these identities to self-perceptions of their

identity/identities, and my own interpretation of these individuals, their identity/identities, and ultimately the emergence that occurred over the course of the study.

Interview Space(s).

Each 'participant' in the study participated in two interviews and a member check. The interviews occurred in different technological spaces: a chat room that was determined between the researcher and research participant; a digital video space, through Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), so that screen sharing capabilities and recording of interviews was possible; and a third member check that occurred in the same video space of the second interview. The second interview and third member-check video chat were recorded using free, secure software through Zoom. Both interviews used an open-ended interview format (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Daly, 2007) In the first interview, the goal was to get to know how the 'participant' understands and describes their identity/identities. Questions included:

- Tell me about who you are as a person.
- Can you tell me about some aspects of yourself that are most important?
- How do you portray these aspects of self in social media spaces?
 - How do the platforms differ or alter your presentation?
 - What influences your portrayal of self in these spaces?
 - Has your use of these spaces differed or changed over time? What influences these changes?
- Based on how you present yourself in these spaces, can you pick out examples of how these important aspects of self are presented? What do you do to present these aspects of self/identity/identities in certain spaces?
 - Tell me how this artifact represents your identity?
- What aspects of self are not presented online?
 - What influences your non-portrayal of these aspects of self in these spaces?

During the second interview I prepared a series of questions specifically designed for each 'participant.' This second interview focused on my questioning the processes and performances of identity across digital spaces. Through my intra-action with the 'participants' spaces, I developed a sense of their presenting self/selves, their identity, and used information from the first interview to further interrogate the 'participants' identity emergence. These specific questions are outlined in chapter eight for each of the 'participants' (human becomings) in this study.

Orgad (2005) talks specifically about the process of moving from online to offline relationships with research participants, noting the epistemological and methodological strengths and challenges of this approach. Methodologically, Orgad (2005) notes that this process strengthens validity and breaks down unnecessary and arbitrary dualisms often present in research processes. For example, as I learned in this study, using this approach allows a researcher to understand the complex relationship between the online and offline world, and how both worlds mutually construct and are entangled with one another. Further, Orgad (2005) discusses how the relationship and openness of research participants will vary in each context, a point also made by Kivits (2005) and O'Connor, Madge, Shaw, and Wellens (2008). Some participants, Orgad (2005) notes, are more open and willing to share in an online space, a point also made by Junco (2014) when he refers to the online disinhibition effect. However, other individuals will feel more open in a real face-to-face conversation. In the case of this study, combining these multiple approaches to interviewing allowed for rich data collection and various viewpoints being interrogated simultaneously.

Finally, the third member check video chat occurred once portions of the dissertation discussing each participant were completed. The participant received an advanced copy of this text for their perusal, and together we discussed the characterization of the intra-actions that occurred, and well as the characterization of their identity emergence. Below, in my discussion of analysis as

emergent phenomena, what exactly occurred during this final member check video chat will become more apparent.

Analysis as Emergent Phenomena

More is at stake than ‘the results;’ intra-actions reconfigure both what will be and what will be possible – they change the very possibilities for change and the nature of change.

-Karen Barad

Karen Barad’s (2008a) book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* challenges researchers to rethink scientific processes, data analysis, representation, the role of the researcher, and research ethics. Utilizing the philosophical writings of Neils Bohr as her point of entry text, Barad outlines her onto-epistemological understanding of the research process, which she calls agential realism, in direct challenge to Western metaphysical epistemological practices of research. Focusing on the discoveries and philosophical quandaries from quantum physics, Barad affords us an opportunity to extend the discussions of Danah Zohar (1990), initially introduced in this dissertation in chapter three, about the quantum nature of identity, while also providing the framework for rethinking the ‘data analysis’ process for this study. In exploring the challenges presented by Barad, I will also explore the work of Jackson (2013), Mazzei (2013), Lather and St. Pierre (2013), and Taguchi (2013) who all contribute to a conversation about post-qualitative, post-humanist research, analysis, and the disruption(s) to representationalism in research.

What emerged as the data analysis plan for this study was not a prescribed, methodologically empiricist, linear, stable, structured approach. Rather, the analytical approach is best described as an emergent phenomena (Barad, 2008a). In adopting this approach, I consciously connected the thought patterns of Kincheloe and Berry (2004), Barad (2008a), Jackson (2013), Mazzei (2013), Lather & St. Pierre (2013), Osberg, Biesta, and Cilliers (2007), Emmeche, Koppe, and Stjernfelt (1997) and many others cited throughout this dissertation.

Note that analysis has already occurred. Reading traditional college student development theory and research on digital social media and identity through the lens of complexity theory and quantum physics is itself a challenge to traditional epistemological, theoretical, and conceptual approaches toward college student identity. As I have challenged these epistemologies, I have also directly challenged the ontology of the field – specifically in asking researchers, educators, and practitioners to reconsider not only modes of thinking about the topic(s) of identity or digital identity, but also how our approaches to researching, teaching, or discussing such topics impact our own way of being in our classrooms, in our offices, in our universities, or in the world. Our objective, empirical, positivist approaches to studying identity have created a non-existent separation from our interest(s), our students, and ourselves. In seeking to understand the identity of the ‘student’ or the ‘other,’ we have denied ourselves. We have denied our own emergent becoming, and our role in what Barad (2008a) calls the intra-active constitution of the world.

Embracing analysis as emergent phenomena means that as a researcher and living being (becoming) in the world, I did not arbitrarily select a false series of discursive or material cuts (Barad, 2008a) in the analytical process at the outset. Such ‘cuts’ take away possibilities for how the research participants, I, and you, the reader, will become intelligible (Barad, 2008a) to one another through the process of this research. An emergent phenomena approach recognizes, celebrates, and articulates intra-connectivity, what Mazzei (2013) refers to as the “entanglement of researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis” (p. 734). Perhaps most importantly, an emergent phenomena analytic approach breaks down the arbitrary empiricist walls of ‘researcher,’ ‘participant,’ ‘reader,’ ‘committee member,’ and other false boundaries dominant in a positivist paradigm of research.

Resultantly, the walls of representation come cascading down (Barad, 2008a). What gets written in subsequent chapters is not a representation of an external reality that exists unchanged past the point of a material-discursive (Barad, 2008a) production on the page. Rather, what you read in subsequent chapters will be a phenomena – “the observations obtained under specified

circumstances, including an account of the whole experimental arrangement” (Barad, 2008a, p. 119). The phenomena will be emergent as it is unpredictable and due to the increasingly complex features of the intra-actions that will occur throughout the research between myself, the ‘participants,’ and the ‘reader(s).’

As I have stated throughout this work, the goal of the research project is not to create a representational model of digital identity, or explain the thematic similarities across ‘participants’ of the study. Rather, embracing the emergent phenomena analytic approach allows this research to embrace holistic relational connection in new ways. The arbitrary and false separation between ‘researcher’ and ‘participant’ are broken down, as are the walls between ‘researcher’ and ‘reader’ and ‘participant’ and ‘reader’ (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013; Hetherington, 2013). Further, analyzing data as a phenomena recognizes that the ‘researcher,’ the ‘participants,’ ‘the reader(s),’ and the world are still becoming. Such an interpretive stance allows this research to be a living and breathing entity in and of itself, and as stated in chapter one, provides the possibility for feedback looping that creates the disequilibrium necessary for nonlinear emergence of all engaged in this research.

Finally, and quite importantly, this analytic approach recognizes digital space(s) as emergent phenomena. There is an intra-active emergent becoming in digital space. ‘Humans,’ ‘digital spaces’ and the ‘world’ are all entangled and emergent in digital spaces. Accounting for these entanglements and becomings in the analysis of this research is critically important. As Barad (2008a) discusses, time and space do not really exist in an agential realist world; “rather, iterative intra-actions are the dynamics through which temporality and spatiality are produced and iteratively reconfigured in the materialization of phenomena and the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries and their constitutive exclusions” (p. 179). Thus, as has been noted by boyd (2014a), Turkle (1995; 2011), Buckingham (2008), Everett (2008), Gardner and Davis (2013), and Subrahmanyam and Smahel (2013), digital space is emergent as much as ‘humans’ or ‘identity’ are emergent phenomena.

Accounting for these emergent phenomena holistically challenges research and ultimately analysis. As I have outlined the tenets of the ‘data’ collection process and ‘analytical’ process that were employed in this study, I will spend the remainder of this chapter interrogating and explicating some of the ideas that must be understood in the approach to the remainder of this dissertation. This examination serves to continue grounding the reader in the material-discursive phenomena of complexivist, emergent, post-qualitative (Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2013), intra-active, onto-epistemological research (Barad, 2008a), it’s application to identity, digital space, and the subsequent chapters that analyze the ‘becoming’ of this researcher, the ‘participants,’ and the ‘reader(s)’ of this work.

Entangling Dat(A)alysis

Near the end of her book, Karen Barad (2008a) discusses the “entangled genealogies” (p. 384) of her *Agential Realist* onto-epistemological approach to research (Figure 3).

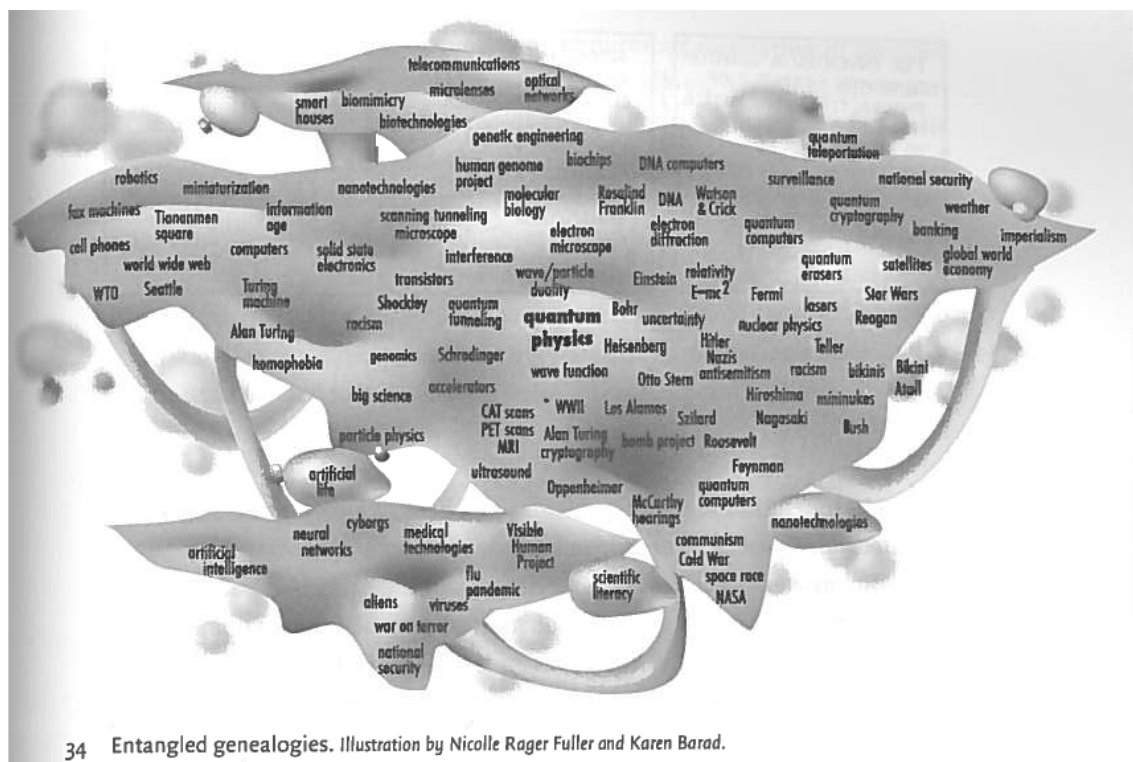


Figure 3 – Barad’s Visual Imagery of Entangled Genealogies
(Reprinted with Permission – See Appendix E)

Barad (2008a) visually captures her thoughts, while recognizing the tremendous limitations to doing so:

While the illustration gives the impression that the manifold is an assemblage of individual events, entities, and sets of practices, the fact is that these apparatuses of bodily production are intra-acting with and mutually constituting one another; that is, what is at issue is the primacy of relations over relata and the intra-active emergence of ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ as enacted by the agential practices that cut things together and apart. (p. 389)

Drawing heavily from quantum theory provides important disruptions for Barad (2008a) about the limitations of positivist empiricism and Newtonian physics, which view the world as a series of individually constituted entities possessing essential characteristics that can be measured, analyzed, and represented. In articulating her agential realist approach to understanding phenomena, Barad (2008a) lays the foundation for challenges researchers are grappling with regarding important questions that are directly related to this research study.

Identity as Intra-active Becoming

One of the central takeaways from Barad’s (2008a) reading of Neils Bohr’s philosophy of physics is that individual essentialism simply fails to exist in the quantum and macro world. The idea propagated in many studies of identity are that categories of identity “like gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality are properties of individual persons” and that such an approach to exploring, researching, or understanding identity perpetuates “the metaphysics of individualism” (p. 57). Here, we can begin interrogating several important ideas related to the current study. First, in alignment with a complexivist approach to understanding identity as emergent, Barad (2008a) supports the assertion that identity is not an inherent or essential, unchanging quality of humans. In other words, people do not have ‘race,’ or ‘gender’ or ‘personality,’ but rather these markers that are associated with people’s identities are just that: marks on the body that have occurred through what Barad (2008a) labels the intra-active material-discursive becoming of the world. In fact, Barad (2008a) draws on the theorist Judith Butler, who enhanced earlier discussions by Ernest Goffman (1959), that identity is a performance.

Barad (2008a) uses this articulated understanding that there are not independent objects/subjects with essential properties that can be measured and represented to embrace the Bohrian philosophy of phenomena. For Barad (2008a), phenomena are the basic units of reality in all research. To understand the notion of phenomena, Barad (2008a) engages an intricate and complicated discussion regarding apparatuses, measurement, agency, and scientific objectivity, all in an effort to establish, substantiate, and articulate her concept of intra-action. While I will not explicate fully the arguments and scientific basis for her discussion of apparatuses or measurement at length, understanding intra-action is important to understanding Barad's embrace of the concept of phenomena. Specifically, Barad (2008a) embraces intra-action "in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies" (p. 33). Continuing, Barad (2008a) notes "agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to the mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements* [italics in original]" (p. 33). From here, Barad (2008a) articulates her understanding of phenomena in a broader sense than Neils Bohr: "In my agential realist elaboration, phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of observer and observed, or the results of measurements; rather, phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components" (p. 33).

The idea of intra-action and phenomena directly relate to the study of identity broadly discussed in this dissertation. First, identity does not exist as an inherent and essential possession of individual entities (in this case, persons or humans); rather, identity is a fluid and emergent phenomena of intra-active agential becoming(s), to borrow the language of Barad (2008a), in various environmental contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), including digital contexts. Identity, which researchers and college student educators have treated as an object and as a social construction, is really a phenomena; by treating identity as a phenomena we continue shifting the discourse away from identity as essential, fixed and static, to understanding identity from a complexivist epistemological position comprised of intra-acting performative components, including both

human and non-human entities. What is promising is that this work and shift in the literature and field of college student identity has already begun by embracing Intersectionality, Queer, and Critical Race Theories, as well as the developmental ecological approaches articulated by Bronfenbrenner (2005), Renn (2012) and Renn and Arnold (2003). This work continues in my own approach of examining identity emergence.

Yet, we run into the problem of individuality. As articulated in chapter four, one of the propositions articulated by Renn (2012), and even articulated in my complexivist approach of identity emergence, is an embrace of an individualistic study of identity. If there are no individual entities, as Barad (2008a) states, then we run into a philosophical and conceptual dilemma that challenges the premise of this study: that the study of individual identity emergence is a more complexivist and holistic approach to the study of identity in general, particularly in digital spaces. How is it possible to overcome this dilemma?

Interrogating these philosophical, conceptual, methodological, and analytical quandaries is some of the important work occurring in the realm of post-qualitative studies of the new materialism. Researchers and theorists such as Jackson (2013), Mazzei (2013), Lather and St. Pierre (2013), and Coole and Frost (2010) are all drawing on the work of Karen Barad and others (Pickering, Deleuze, Spivak, Braidotti, and Butler), to complicate the discussion about framing a post-qualitative, post-humanist research agenda. Jackson (2013) extends the earlier discussion by Barad (2008a) about essentialist notions of identity and their impact on research. Qualitative research rooted in a positivist, empiricist paradigm seeks to “produce order and regularity in the guise of categories that erase difference and privilege identity among seemingly similar things” (Jackson, 2013, p. 742). In these approaches to qualitative research, methods of coding, thematic analyses, content analyses, or structural and post-structural readings “essentializes people and their experiences” (Jackson, 2013, p. 742). For Jackson, this approach to qualitative research is deeply problematic. One way to read Jackson’s (2013) understanding of the problems associated

with traditional qualitative research is that such approaches destroy human individuality by seeking out similarities and fitting human beings into essentialized identity categories rather than highlighting differences. This argument is similar to many arguments made in chapter three and four of this dissertation, as well as by theorists such as de-Villiers Botha and Cilliers (2010) or Davis, Sumara, and Iftody (2010).

Yet, Jackson (2013) is articulating a more robust position about post-qualitative research that aligns with Barad (2008a) and Mazzei (2013): specifically, that individuality cannot be the unit of measurement in a post-qualitative world. Rather, there must be a more robust set of processes that account for the various intra-actions occurring. This is why Mazzei (2013) states that “there is no separate, individual person, no participant in an interview to study to which a single voice can be linked” (p. 734). In arguing for a more robust understanding of research, the underlying positivist, empiricist assumptions “that people (*authentic, stable subjects of research*), who speak (*from a conscious center*), give us (*the researchers, also authentic*), rational, coherent truths that serve as foundation (*data*) for data analysis and interpretation” [italics in original] (Jackson, 2013, p. 742) must be challenged, disrupted, and displaced. In place of these assumptions, a new way of thinking and being becomes evident: the onto-epistemological position of Karen Barad (2008a): knowing is being and being is knowing. From this perspective there must be an accounting of the “entanglement of constitutive human and non-human elements” that make concepts such as ‘identity’ “constantly move between being socially constructed via discourse and existing as real, material entities” (Jackson, 2013, p. 743). In this accounting of entanglements, new challenges arise regarding representationalism, the construction of spacetime (Barad, 2008a), and the role of the researcher, each of which will be subsequently examined below.

The Issue(s) of Representationalism

A theme running through chapters three and four is that representation is a fundamental flaw of positivist, empiricist approaches to research on student identity. In chapter three, I

articulate a position that the linear, hierarchical, ‘developmental’ models outlined in chapter two fail to capture the truly dynamic intricacies of identity, or as de-Villiers Botha and Cilliers (2010) state, reduce the complexity of what it means to be human in the world. Embracing the language and epistemological position of complexity theory, and speaking of identity emergence, actually challenges the notion of identity representation altogether.

Barad (2008) greatly advances the problems of representation in her discussions on research and analysis. The challenge of representation is similarly articulated by Osberg, Biesta and Cilliers (2007), Osberg and Biesta (2007a; 2007b) and most recently by Lather and St. Pierre (2013). Lather and St. Pierre actually question whether qualitative research is even possible in a world where we give up representational logic and the privileged position of the ‘human researcher:’

If we cease to privilege knowing over being; if we refuse positivist and phenomenological assumptions about the nature of our lived experience and the world; if we give up representational and binary logics; if we see language, the human, and the material not as separate entities mixed together but as completely imbricated ‘on the surface’ – if we do all that and the ‘more’ it will open up – will qualitative inquiry as we know it be possible? Perhaps not. (p. 630)

For this study, the challenge of representation has already been articulated in an explicit choice made not to seek a grounded theoretical, thematic approach to ‘data analysis.’ Yet the problem of representation remains, as subsequent chapters will seek to create and characterize a set of intra-actions that occurred in the digital immersion and interview portions of this project. Barad (2008a) gives us the language to recognize that such intra-actions are phenomena, and challenges researchers to ensure that all conditions of the intra-actions are accounted for in their “differential becoming” (Barad, p. 91). This is the challenge and the possibility of utilizing an emergent phenomena analytical position.

Understanding the problem of representation rests in Barad’s (2008a) earlier discussions about phenomena and the false metaphysical notions of individually separate entities that are the legacy of positivist empiricism. Since the world is not filled with individually acting entities,

objects, or subjects, there is no way to represent such objects. In her explanation, Barad (2008a) is particularly critical of language and words. She believes that “representationalism. . .separates the world into ontologically disjunct domains of words and things” (p. 137) and that human beings place too much faith in the “belief in the power of words to mirror preexisting phenomena” (p. 133). To support her critique, Barad (2008a) once again draws on the writing of Neils Bohr, who believed that “language does not represent states of affairs, and measurements do not represent measurement-independent states of being” (p. 138). To counter representationalism, Barad re-emphasizes intra-activity, phenomena, and her concept of material-discursivity: “*a relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted* (i.e., discursive practices, in my posthumanist sense) *and specific material phenomena* (i.e., differentiating patterns of mattering)” [italics in original] (p. 139).

In order to unpack what Barad believes researchers are doing, and what they need to account for in their research ‘representations,’ she draws on the performative theory of Judith Butler (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) and diffraction theory (Barad, 2008a). Through embracing performance theory, Barad (2008a) reinserts the ‘researcher’ into the process, thereby “inist[ing] on understanding, thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being” (p. 133). Further, performativity “is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real” (Barad, 2008a, p. 133). Therefore, a ‘researcher’ is not seeking to ‘represent’ some external reality from which they are removed. The goal of ‘analysis’ is not to utilize language for accurate “descriptions and reality,” but rather to shift the focus “to matters of practices, doings, and actions” (Barad, 2008a, p. 135). In other words, ‘analysis’ is about embodying and enfolding the intra-active process.

For this dissertation study, there are profound implications. Again, in subsequent chapters the goal was not to ‘represent’ the identity of the research ‘participants.’ Rather, the goal was to capture and document process, not just of the research itself, but also process of identity

performance, identity entanglement, and identity emergence across various spatio-temporal digital spaces where the ‘participants’ and I intra-acted. Secondly, drawing on Barad’s (2008a) notion of using diffractive analysis as a counteranalytical position to representationalism, part of what the research ‘participants’ and I engaged was looking for “patterns of difference” (Barad, 2008a, p. 71) across spatial contexts. The idea here is not to see not just how identity is performed, explored, or articulated similarly across spatial context, but also to view the diffractive patterns of difference. Third, and importantly, capturing the process. Central to my argument in this dissertation is that digital space(s) are environmental contexts that most aptly challenge the concept of essentialized identity. As the research process enfolded and emerged with each ‘participant,’ identity was emerging. Each intra-action, via the digital immersive portion of the project, the interviews, and ultimately the emerging dissertation, were part of a collective becoming: identity emergence “dependent not merely on the nonlinearity of relations but on their intra-active nature” (Barad, p. 393).

An emergent phenomena approach to the analysis was wrought with new challenges. Yet this approach is more holistically complexivist and allowed for a new way of thinking about epistemology and ontology. This approach fully embraces the idea that “knowing is a matter of intra-acting” (Barad, 2008a, p. 149) and allows “subjects [to] emerge from a field of possibilities. The field of possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity” (Barad, 2008a, p. 147). This last point is particularly relevant to this study. With the conscious choice to study social media use across multiple contextual platforms, I recognized that digital space(s) are not singular, they are multiple. Further, I recognized that such spaces are not static, but themselves are emergent through intra-activity. This too must be accounted for in this research analysis.

Spacetime matter – The Intra-Activity of Digital Space(s)

Recall from chapter four that danah boyd (2011; 2014a) discusses the social constructionist nature of digital social media sites. Rather than viewing digital social media platforms as simply static spaces of ‘interaction,’ boyd argues that the spaces themselves are constructed, shift, and change over time as a result of the users occupying those spaces. Taking this anti-technological-deterministic view for boyd (2011; 2014a) is centered on her belief that the affordances of digital spaces – their persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability – dramatically alters the ways we think about all types of issues, from privacy to identity. I would like to build on this idea from boyd (and others, including Buckingham (2008), Everett (2008), Subrahmanyam, & Smahel (2013), Papacharissi (2011)), as well as the idea of ‘virtual time’ discussed by Duncheon and Tierney (2013), to conceptualize how the analytical approach of emergent phenomena might account for the creation of space and time through social media. Here again, the insights of Karen Barad (2008a) will become important.

In this study, the apparatus(es) being used to explore, examine, question, interrogate, and understand identity emergence include various social media platforms. I was intentional, not pre-selecting the digital platforms to be examined in order to allow for the possibilities that would emerge once research ‘participants’ were recruited/selected. In other words, I purposely decided not to enact a cut, a boundary that would limit the possibilities of the research endeavor. Rather, I allowed the environmental contexts to emerge as part of the process.

There are other apparatus(es) that must be accounted for in this study. Beyond the social media platforms themselves, there must be an accounting of the intra-actions that occur through the various interview processes, the daily intra-actions that will occur through the immersive portion of the study, my research blog (<http://pweaton.wordpress.com>), the computer where I type, the dissertation itself, the committee, the theoretical writing(s) and research examined throughout the research, the authors who wrote those works, and a plethora of other apparatuses.

Similar to the position taken up by Alhadeff-Jones (2013), there are many ways of measuring, exploring, or accounting for the analytical portion of this study.

However, the environmental context(s) of digital social media platforms must be given special accounting in this analysis. Barad (2008a) discusses how quantum physics challenges linear, static, bounded conceptions of space and time. Rather than viewing time and space as entities that actually 'exist,' Barad (2008a) challenges us to think of time and space as "intra-actively produced" (p. 181). At least spatially, this idea follows boyd's (2014a) assertion that the users 'interactively' produce social media platforms, that social media space is socially constructed. For this study, accounting for the intra-active creation of the digital space was important and necessary. This intra-active creation of digital space occurs for each of the 'participants,' in how they intra-act with their various social media contexts, and then how they bring their social media spaces into intra-action with one another, as well as other microsystems. Essentially, embracing the concept of intra-action and phenomena advances the discussion of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) even further. Social media sites do not just exist, they are intra-actively emerging material-discursive spaces.

Barad (2008) goes on to discuss Bohr's concept of apparatuses, and how (s)he accounts for the role of the apparatus in phenomena. I want to list each of Barad's points regarding apparatuses, and then relate these points to social media platforms themselves as particular apparatuses that are being utilized in this study.

1. "Apparatuses are specific material-discursive practices (they are not merely laboratory setups that embody human concepts and take measurements)" (Barad, 2008a, p. 146). Social media platforms are material-discursive practices. The platforms themselves are not static entities, but rather constantly shifting spaces of disequilibrium, nonlinearity, and emergent phenomena, including identity emergence. Through practices on social media sites, the platforms themselves become material entities. Further, the discursive

- practices that occur with(in) social media platforms and space(s) do not privilege language or words alone, but also pictures, movies, GIFs, hyperlinking, and a variety of other discursive practices that create the space(s). These material-discursive practices must be accounted for in the analysis of the dissertation, but also it must be recognized that the material-discursive processes continue long after the dissertation is complete.
2. “Apparatuses produce differences that matter – they are boundary-making practices that are formative of matter and meaning, productive of, and part of, the phenomena produced” (Barad, 2008a, p. 146). Social media platforms, in the material-discursive becoming, do create boundaries and differences. Accounting for these differences is of paramount importance in the analysis. Yet, the boundaries of social media platforms are often blurred, and this is where the diffractive analysis is important. For each ‘participant,’ understanding the ‘boundaries’ of their social media platforms will be important for examining the phenomena of identity emergence.
 3. “Apparatuses are material configurations/dynamic reconfigurings of the world”(Barad, 2008a, p. 146). Social media platforms themselves are not apparatuses that are statically created to ‘measure’ identity in digital space. Rather, they are continuously emerging and evolving, and therefore understanding this and articulating this point makes possible a non-representational approach to dat(a)nalysis.
 4. “Apparatuses are themselves phenomena (constituted and dynamically reconstituted as part of the ongoing intra-activity of the world)” (Barad, 2008a, p. 146). As stated in #1 and #3, social media platforms are phenomena. An entire separate study could be produced examining social media platforms as emergent phenomena.
 5. “Apparatuses have no intrinsic boundaries but are open-ended practices” (Barad, 2008a, p. 146). What are the boundaries of the digital space(s)? How do those boundaries blur for the ‘participants’ and myself? With hyperlinking, embedding, and

applications that can enfold and collect all of your social media interactions into one co-constructed space, these questions become difficult to answer in any definitive terms. It may be difficult to mark where Facebook ends and Instagram begins. Of course this blurring of boundaries challenges the very notion that I might even be able to look across platforms, because in making such an assertion I am taking a position that there are rigid boundaries that can be defined between platforms. These are issues that must be reconciled in the analytic portion of this study.

6. “Apparatuses are not located in the world but are material configurations or reconfigurings of the world that re(con)figure spatiality and temporality as well as (the traditional notion of) dynamics (i.e., they do not exist as static structures, nor do they merely unfold or evolve in space and time)” (Barad, 2008a, p. 146). Social media platforms, and identity in such space, are continuously challenging the traditional understanding of space and time. Platforms come and go, shift and change, enfold and intra-act with one another. In returning to boyd’s (2014a) affordances, the concepts of persistence, spreadability, searchability, and visibility cause researchers to rethink how spatiality and temporality impact identity and our understanding of identity.

Thinking of social media platforms as an apparatus of study for this research means becoming comfortable with the ambiguity of shifting nature of space and time. It means “shak[ing] loose the foundational character of notions such as location” (Barad, 2008a, p. 225) since in digital space location cannot be mapped to a physical locality and challenges us to think of a space that does not necessarily physically exist, but space that is continuously constructed (digital space(s)). Further, it challenges all traditional notions of objectivity, since as a researcher engaging in a process of digital immersion, I must account for my own becoming in the process. It is to this final point that I know turn.

The Role of the ‘Researcher’

Barad (2008a) also discusses the importance of taking new views of objectivity into account. Whereas positivist objectivity seeks to create distance between researcher and researched (subject or object), Barad’s version of objectivity, built again on a Bohrian philosophical-physical position, deals with ethical accountability. For Barad (2008a) “objectivity cannot be about producing undistorted representations from afar; rather, objectivity is about being accountable to the specific materializations of which we are a part” (p. 91). These same sentiments are echoed in the work of Lather and St. Pierre (2013), Jackson (2013), Mazzei (2013), Alhadeff-Jones (2013), and deal specifically with exactly what we are doing as researchers. We are not representing, we are not simply “making facts” (Barad, 2008a, p. 91). Rather, as researchers we are “making specific worldly configurations – not in the sense of making them up en nihilo, or out of language, beliefs, or ideas, but in the sense of materially engaging as part of the world in giving it specific material form” (Barad, 2008a, p. 91). Therefore, ethical researchers cannot leave out their own becoming through the process of research.

Taguchi (2013) talks about the inherent difficulty in all of this. She states that it is easy to get “caught up in the taken-for-granted images of thinking and doing analysis” (p. 706), and that to avoid these traps “we need to distort assumed practices of thinking, analyzing, and interpreting and produce a researcher ontology of multiplicity” (p. 714). In understanding that as researchers “we too are part of the world’s differential becoming” (Barad, 2008a, p. 91), we acknowledge as researchers that we are part of the process itself. I am becoming through this research, through the intra-actions in digital space(s). I am also accounting for this differential becoming of myself in several choices I have made. For example, the inclusion of the research blog (<http://pweaton.wordpress.com>), which allows not only the creation of a feedback looping mechanism as described in chapter one, but also for a material-discursive space documenting my own process through the research; the musings and questions of the research; the intra-action of

various theoretical and methodological streams of thought; and documentation of my own emergence (becoming) as a researcher exploring and enfolding into the complex questions being asked in my research agenda. Or secondly through the decision to be digitally immersive through my own social media platforms, rather than arbitrarily defined platforms designed solely for the purpose of research. This decision allows for an authenticity of relationship between the ‘participants’ and me, continuing to blur the line “between subject and object, and knower and known” (Barad, 2008a, p. 138).

What this means as a researcher is that in the subsequent chapters, to embrace Barad’s (2008a) notions of ethical objectivity, I must myself be part of the analysis, not as a separate entity, but as part of the intra-active becoming of the research and the world. This will require “an accounting of the constitutive practices in the fullness of their materialities, including the enactment of boundaries and exclusions, the production of phenomena in their sedimenting historicity, and the ongoing reconfiguration of the space of possibilities for future enactments” (Barad, 2008a, p. 391). In all that follows subsequently, I must not fall into the trap of representational analysis (Taguchi, 2013), but remember, account for, and strive to embrace and enfold myself into continuously remembering that “knowing is a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation” (Barad, 2008a, p. 379). Or, as Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2013) state more eloquently: “How might we become in becoming?” (p. 631).

Constraints of Study

Re-Centering the Individual?

I feel it important to discuss a decision made regarding the layout of chapters seven through nine. There are inherent contradictions that emerge in my decision to individually analyze each of the human becomings (participants) in this study. The contradictions – that we might consider de-centering the human altogether, or disembodimenting identity as some abstract essentialized ‘object’ or

‘concept’ that an ‘individual’ ‘possesses’ – are not easy to overcome. Admittedly, I’m still working through the philosophical dilemmas this is causing. The problem of the individual, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is challenging, particularly in a society and culture where the individual is often centered.

Yet, I stand by my decision to conduct dat(a)nalysis on these human becomings as I did – from an essentially individualistic perspective – for a few reasons. This approach ultimately adhered to the spirit of this project – examining identity as an emergent phenomena. I did not intra-act with the human becomings in this study through focus groups, but rather through individual interviews. The human becomings in this study are not intra-acting with one another in digital social media spaces, at least not to my knowledge. Thus, other ways of organizing the dat(a)nalysis, perhaps through centering the social media platforms, may have worked, but would not really adhere to the intra-actions that occurred. My intra-action with the human becomings in this study was individual – through individual profiles, blogs, and interviews, and thus I chose to represent them as such.

I think it is also important to discuss my decision to include each human becoming in each chapter, as opposed to creating a separate chapter for each. I imagine this creates some confusion, some difficulty for the reader in following ‘who is this person, what is their story?’ This decision, however, also adheres to the proposed research as described earlier in this chapter. There appears to be some linearity to chapters seven through nine, particularly since chapter seven and nine follows a linear time sequence (interview one and interview two). I could have made the decision to remix the interviews, selecting snippets of discussion with material artifacts, for example. Yet, I believe the layout of chapters seven through nine adheres to Barad’s (2008a) notion of capturing the totality of the ontological experience, thereby making the research and its partial representation ethical.

What is more, chapter eight in particular, which discusses immersive materiality, disrupts this linear sequencing, though my discussion of this disruption is not clearly articulated, with good reason. Remember that I was immersed in the social media platforms of the human becomings over the course of three months. Thus, each time I returned to these spaces I was continually being and knowing, watching emerge and unfold, the “choreographies of becoming” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 10) for each participant in the study. Even after the second interview I continued to observe, and thus portions of chapter eight are not linearly sequenced, although they appear to be.

Finally, while I articulate this position explicitly at the start of chapter nine, I believe that the dat(a)nalysis chapters are truly in the mangle. There are moments, in re-reading these chapters, where I am invoking certain theoretical and philosophical perspectives to articulate particular points, highlight certain quotes or digital artifacts, or trouble particular ways of reading. Further, at several points in these chapters I insert mini reflections of my own becoming as a researcher, much as I describe earlier in this chapter. Thus, my own interpretation of how this re-presentation of the dat(a)nalysis unfolded and emerged over the course of this process is, to me, truly reflective of mangling practices, of bricolage, and of complexivist epistemological positions. This is what I sought to accomplish in this dissertation research study.

Blogging and Feedback Looping

In my dissertation proposal, as well as my proposal hearing, I discussed my desire to create multiple levels of feedback looping in this study, in order to ensure the research could be viewed as a living, breathing entity. Specifically, I discussed my desire to attempt blogging as a site of field note taking, or thinking through thoughts that were emerging. While I did, several times over the course of the study, post about progress on the dissertation, I often failed to receive much feedback from these posts, and thus subsequently began posting less frequently. This is a constraint of the study precisely as more feedback through the blogging may have shifted the trajectory. As a researcher-becoming, I am continuing to navigate and seek to understand how the agency of

blogging sites, for example, might contribute to opening discussion and insights, as well as create a more communal forum for research in the future. I remain committed to examining further the implications of early public dissemination of research, questions, and insights or ‘analyses’ that may contribute to stronger, more robust and complexivist ways of viewing particular research questions.

I did create open feedback looping in other ways through this process. First, as discussed during my proposal defense and in earlier portions of this dissertation, I have several times presented ideas from my project at national conferences, including the Curriculum Studies Summer Collaborative Conference in Savannah, Georgia in June 2014, and the Association for the Study of Higher Education Conference in November 2014. I was honored to be invited to provide a Brown Bag Lecture for Louisiana State University’s Curriculum Theory Project on portions of my emerging dissertation dat(a)nalysis in December 2014. Further, portions of this research will be presented in 2015, including at ACPA – College Student Educators International, NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, the American Educational Research Association, the International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry, and the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies. Further, I have several times posted small segments of writing in Facebook, and have received enthusiastic feedback from academic and professional colleagues who are interested in reading the larger work. Thus, in these ways, feedback looping was created, though not as robustly as initially proposed or anticipated.

Institutional Review Board

As will be discussed in chapter six, the institutional review board limited possibilities for some truly robust ways of examining or re-presenting information in this dissertation. In my initial dissertation proposal, I suggested providing an option for participants to retain anonymity through selection of pseudonyms, or to forego anonymity. Unfortunately, this plan was not allowed to move forward. The constraints this placed on dat(a)nalysis are, retrospectively, quite substantial. This

dissertation is much more text-heavy than I originally anticipated. At the time of proposal, I anticipated having several human becoming participants willing to give permission to share their information publicly, which may have allowed for a more visual and differential understanding of what is occurring across distributed social media spaces. The opportunity to include photos, direct tweets, or lengthier passages of posting from blogs likely would have shifted the partial representations, and therefore, complexivist ways of knowing in this dissertation.

Despite this constraint, I must admit that what emerges in chapters seven through nine, though text heavy, provided an opportunity for me to think creatively. This was particularly true in chapters seven and eight, where I had to narrate in ways more akin to telling a story. I became creative about how to partially re-present key bits of information – which is what led to the word clouds, photo clouds, and graphs in chapter seven, and the decision to have the human becomings in the study create avatars, allowing me to visually map and re-present presence, space, and material artifacts in differential ways in chapter eight. Working through this ‘constraint’ actually ‘released’ some agency in ways I had not anticipated at the outset of the study.

Conclusion

I’m trying to complicate the locatability of human identity as a here and now, an enclosed and finished product, a causal force upon Nature. . . . Identity is inherently unstable, differentiated, dispersed, and yet strangely coherent.

Vicki Kirby

In the subsequent chapters, the new processes needed to understand, study, and think about college student identity in the twenty-first century will emerge. Throughout these first five chapters, I have attempted to interrogate the problems associated with the epistemology of ‘student development,’ particularly as it relates to research on identity in digital spaces. I have attempted to interrupt researchers and educators thinking about representation, space, time, linearity, hierarchy, and other conceptual assumptions from our obsession with positivist empiricism. I have articulated how research on digital identity conducted from a positivist position continues the

trends of the twentieth century by seeking to generalize and reduce the complexity of human identity and not accounting for the dynamics of digital spaces appropriately. Finally, in this chapter, I have outlined my own process for researching identity emergence in digital space. In doing so, I have problematized representational analysis, while also outlining what will be attempted in the following chapters: characterization of emergent phenomena.

CHAPTER 6

INTERLUDE – LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

This chapter serves as an important interlude, discussing issues raised during the process of receiving institutional review board approval for this study. Further, I will utilize this unintended space to highlight some of the additional literature that has recently emerged surrounding the ethical and legal implications of conducting research on and through social media (Charlesworth, 2008; Eynon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008;).

When I say this space is unintended, and refer to this chapter as an interlude, there is truth to the matter. I anticipated several hurdles in receiving approval from the institutional review board for this study. While I felt adequately prepared to answer many of the questions that were subsequently asked from me, there were a good number of issues raised during this process for which I was not prepared. Therefore, it is my hope that in writing this section, and including it in the dissertation proper, I am able to accomplish two things. First, as stated above, interrogate more closely some of the literature surrounding ethical and legal issues in digital scholarship. More importantly, however, illuminate for future researchers, as well as myself, some of the difficult questions that need to be addressed as we collectively write the rules that will govern research processes in digital spaces.

My study was submitted to the institutional review board shortly after my proposal defense, in the late spring 2014. Nothing saps the energy and momentum from a study more quickly than an extended review process. Despite my best efforts to fully articulate my study parameters, protection of my participants, and situate my decisions with solid support from the literature on digital social media research, evidence quickly gathered that I would run into a delay in receiving approval. First, one doctoral candidate colleague submitted paperwork and received approval for her study within seven days of submission. Second, I submitted paperwork for a separate research study that was approved in one day. This was not deterring or troubling to me as I recognized many potential legal and ethical issues encased in my study, such as: privacy,

participant agency for control of anonymity, national sampling, protection of interview data, and the very nature of the digital immersion process itself. As days turned into weeks, the long expansive summer appeared to grow ever longer, until I received word in early July that it was recommended my study go before the full board for approval, a meeting that would not occur for over six additional weeks. My despair at losing an entire three months of research quickly faded as I sought to best prepare for the meeting of the full board.

Lack of Preparatory Feedback

In the month preceding my full board meeting, several individuals asked me what issues the board had with my proposal. This was a question to which I had no answer. No feedback was provided prior to the full meeting. Lack of access to information about the particular concerns of the study made it difficult for me to prepare to address the board with any concerns that may be raised.

Concerns of the Full Board

Participant Agency and Anonymity

In my initial proposed study, I had articulated a position regarding participant agency and anonymity. Rather than arbitrarily deciding for my participants that they should select a set of pseudonyms, it was my intention to adhere to my own research principles of allowing participants to decide for themselves their own level of exposure through the writing and presenting that will appear in subsequent chapters, future conference presentations, articles, books, and other digital venues. For me, there was an issue of eliminating hierarchical power dynamics in the ‘researcher-participant’ relationship. Giving my participants a choice felt, to me, an important part of providing some agency to the human beings that participate in my research.

Further, it appeared both appropriate and potentially necessary to have capabilities of showing evidence of important moments: conversations, photos, or other artifacts of digital

space(s) in subsequent discussions. Digital space(s) function as highly intra-active, flourishing, emerging, remixed spaces (Josie Ahlquist, personal communication, September, 2014). Previous studies I have read, including work in texts such as Anna Everett's (2008) *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, David Buckingham's (2008) *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*, or Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White's (2012) *Race After the Internet* all have included various digital artifacts: screen shots of websites or social media accounts, photos, message boards. Adequate protection of participant anonymity was taken in cases where such issues needed to be addressed, but in other cases participants in studies were particularly open to revealing their identity (boyd, 2008; Goldman, Booker, & McDermott, 2008).

The Institutional Review Board showed tremendous concern about this aspect of the study, and therefore it was requested that all my participants utilize pseudonyms. Further, my approved study restricts my ability to use any digital artifacts: screenshots, extensive text from posts or tweets (due to search engine returns), or even photos. These restrictions are, in the board's view, an additional layer of security for participants, particularly as search engines become more sophisticated, and as privacy controls in social media sites are employed differently across users. Finally, the board articulated concerns over the ability of research participants to understand the potential long-term ramifications of revealing their identity would they have opted for non-pseudonymous participation. In other words, did the potential exist that a decision today regarding full disclosure come back to be a decision that a participant might later view as a poor choice?

Although there was a decision by the board to impose these restrictions on the study, there were counter perspectives present in the space of the meeting. One individual on the board expressed no concern over the potential of a research participant disclosing their information, articulating that my project appeared no different than an oral history research project, or archival research, where one may have access to an individual's personal story, artifacts of their life, and the perspectives of others writing about that person. Hearing this board member's perspective was an

almost diffractive moment for me. Until that moment I had not interpreted my research project in this way. It was clarifying to have this initial glimpse into my proposed study through the eyes of another, learning how they may interpret my research, its value, and of equal importance, how what I am doing, which appears to be cutting edge, new, and wrought with potential problems, could also adequately be placed under an umbrella of a 'valid research methodology' such as oral history or narrative (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Daly, 2007; Davis, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Mandatory Reporting

One issue raised by the institutional review board dealt with issues of mandatory reporting in cases of illegal behavior, or risky behaviors, including potential harm to self or others. Given the immersive aspects of this project, the board believed it likely that I would encounter students posting in social media regarding a variety of issues. One board member raised questions about whether I foresaw any potential for students to be participating in the posting of child pornography. Another asked about what I would do if a participant posted a comment about having participated in an illegal behavior, such as a rape. Still others asked questions about borderline college behaviors: encountering photos, posts, or tweets of underage drinking, utilizing illegal drugs or narcotics, or potentially damaging property (vandalism).

The central question here involved issues of mandatory reporting. While I had anticipated some of these concerns, I was caught off-guard about questions pertaining to child pornography or rape. Having worked with college students heavily engaged in social media for the better part of the past 10 years, I was able to address some of these concerns with the board directly. I utilized my own professional working experience to highlight my belief that truly egregious behaviors (child pornography, rape) would likely not show up in social media. Given the age of my participants, it was likely that photos, posts, or tweets of student drinking would appear; drug use I

was a little less concerned about given the increasing number of campuses utilizing social media to adjudicate students for violations of conduct or legal issues.

The board requested that I add a section to my Informed Consent regarding mandatory disclosure. This text appears in the Confidentiality portion of my approved informed consent and reads:

Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The researchers are mandatory reporters, meaning that any information posted online of an illegal nature, or that specifies harm to oneself or others, may need to be reported to appropriate authorities.

In terms of what would ultimately require reporting, particularly egregious illegal behaviors, including those with potential to harm self or others, as well as those that did inflict harm on self or others, were noted as most important. In speaking with the board, I discussed my educational background in counseling, noting that I found this training in the ethics of dealing with such issues to be of particular importance, especially regarding alcohol and drug issues. It was agreed that I would not report or be required to report on behavior in this arena that did not appear to cause harm to self or others.

Non-Participant Intra-Actions

A third concern raised by the board involved my viewing of information posted by, or captured through social media, by study non-participants. In this case, the board questioned my ability to filter through such information. To address this concern, I noted to the board that my questions in the immersive portions of the study were focused on college students use and understanding of social media surrounding issues of identity. While it would be important for me to note information posted by non-participants, the focus would be on the human beings' interpretation of this material in relation to issues of identity. Thus, while such information might potentially be discussed in the findings from the study, I would adhere to retaining anonymity of these posts, tweets, or other digital artifacts so as not to destroy confidentiality or break ethical protocol of individuals who had not agreed to participate in the study.

Sample Size

Finally, one member of the board questioned whether my study would yield any conclusive results given the small sample size. I wrote down in my field notes a direct question from this board member: “what could you possibly learn from 5-7 research participants?” This question centered on issues of generalizability and validity. I was careful to note that my study was not designed or intended to be generalizable – I was not seeking to build a theoretical construct or walk away from the study having described the essence of social media use in relation to identity work in college students. Rather, the study sought to gain an understanding of “particularity” (Creswell, 2009, p. 193). I noted that many qualitative research methods – including narrative inquiry, grounded theory, or case study, often utilize small sample sizes, still returning significant findings.

Highlighting Some Ethical Considerations

In proposing this study, I was careful to understand as robustly as possible potential ethical and legal issues that could arise. In chapter five, I outlined my procedures for protecting data captured online, drawn from reading work by scholars such as Andrew Charlesworth (2008) or Mark Davis (2013). One major concern highlighted in much of the literature surrounding ethical and legal issues in Internet research involves issues of the disappearing border between public and private information. As noted by Eynon, Fry, and Schroeder (2008), “protecting anonymity and privacy is more challenging” (p. 37) in the digital age. Even Charlesworth (2008) discusses the complications associated with tracing information back to participants, citing examples of conducting discourse analysis, publishing large portions of text, and ultimately having the anonymity of research participants compromised. Ultimately,

these socio-technical developments raise a series of questions about where the boundary is between private and public on the Internet, who has the possibility to delimit the boundaries, and what the ethical responsibilities and duties of social science researchers are amidst such ambiguity. (Eynon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008, p. 37)

Certainly, protecting anonymity or privacy is important in social science research. Many of the studies cited in the literature breaching such protocol are conducted through the public domain of the Internet – examining message boards, for example – where individuals are not often made aware of their ‘information’ being utilized for the purposes of research. During the course of this study, there were national and international discussions regarding ethical issues resulting from a study conducted at Facebook, now referred to as the emotional contagion study (boyd, 2014b; Gillespie, 2014; Lanier, 2014; NPR, 2014; Watts, 2014). In almost all of these cases, research was conducted without the informed consent of those participating. Certainly, these issues should be examined and discussed robustly.

In response to the Facebook study, which occurred during the interlude of summer, I too wrote about some issues that we might consider regarding ethical research practice in the digital age (Eaton, 2014e). Here I will highlight some of these thoughts.

Beyond Institutional Review Boards

In the fallout from Facebook’s emotional contagion study, there were many calls for increased accountability in corporate research, an issue with which I certainly agree. However, it should be noted that Facebook partnered with a trained researcher at Cornell University, and jointly, researchers at Facebook and this individual decided that the emotional contagion study did not pose any significant risk to those randomly selected for participation. Whether this is true or not is debatable and does not fall within the purview of this discussion. However, what is important to note is that the proposed solution – more institutional review board oversight – appears to have become a catch-all, relinquishing researcher responsibility. As I stated in my own musings about the Facebook study (Eaton, 2014e), researchers need to view ethical research practice as a process, as opposed to a checkbox. In the age of institutional review boards, are research ethics taught and practiced in such a manner? There should always be ongoing discussion regarding the potential impacts of a study, including “potential harm of the research” (Eynon, Fry, &

Schroeder, 2008, p. 35) and insurance that “participants’ perceptions of anonymity are met” (Eynon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008, p. 28).

Regarding my originally proposed study, I stand by the belief that I adequately considered these issues. Since I was not proposing to study social media anonymously, but rather with ‘participants’ who had agreed to participate, I believed I had taken appropriate ethical precautions in providing an opportunity for individuals to determine whether or not to retain anonymity. Retrospectively, I may have altered my proposed study further, providing an opportunity for individuals who decided against remaining anonymous to determine at any point in the study to retain anonymity. Further and more importantly, I would have more adequately addressed the ethical processes being undertaken – consulting with my committee, peers, and participants themselves, to ensure the research retained adherence to ethical and legal commitments.

‘Methodological’ Boundaries

What is more evident in the larger discourse surrounding ethics, legal issues, and Internet research, are the challenges of methodologies developed in a pre-digital age translating into digital spaces. I briefly discussed this issue at the start of chapter five. There is a need to continue pushing methodological boundaries, particularly in digital spaces. My personal concern, as a researcher-becoming, centers on how researchers, institutional review boards, and educators will navigate these difficult conversations. I personally worry that potentially new and innovative research methodologies may not be pursued due to overt restrictions; conversely, I question whether, in light of access to large quantities of data, careful questions will be asked regarding ethics and human subject protection. This latter point is what boyd (2014b) believes occurred at Facebook, and centers largely on issues of control, surveillance, and privacy. Ultimately, there is a need to continue pushing methodology to ask and answer new and innovative questions while still adhering to our ethical and legal obligations as researchers.

Conclusion

This brief interlude sought two outcomes. First, I discussed issues raised during my own Institutional Review Board process, highlighting my responses as well as adjustments made to the originally proposed study. Secondly, I began a conversation about ethical and legal issues in Internet research, highlighting briefly some of the current thinking in the field. It is worth noting that there is still minimal writing in this area, as the legal issues surrounding the Internet continue changing, and the ethical issues surrounding Internet research in the social sciences continue being debated. Thus, this brief discussion is not an expansive or totalizing examination of this topic, but rather addresses specific issues raised in the lead up to the study described in subsequent chapters.

Clouds

These word clouds have transferred into digital spaces in ways I previously had not recognized. Alyse's digital blog was where I first recognized this phenomena occurring (Figure 5).

The widgetry options of Alyse's blogging platform include Tag Clouds, a feature Alyse incorporated into the creative, reflective space of her personal blog to capture what she wrote about most often.

Anxiety Assumptions Backspace Blog blogging Breathing Brownies Change Children College
Compassion Confidence Crying DanteAlighieri Daring Definition Dreams Faith falling
fear FieldOfDream Forgiveness Friends God Grace health healthyliving Ink Iowa Fair Italy Letter Life
LifeLessons light Love MandyMoore marrianewilliamson Memories Midwest Midwestern MockTrial nike
Openness Poem Poet Poetry Prayer Prose Rain Rapunzel Reading reality running Sacred shine
Story Strength Sun Sunset Sweetcorn Tangled Tears Though Truth Vulnerability WarmFuzzies Water
Weakness Women World Writer writing Young

Figure 5: Adaptationⁱ of Word Cloud From Alyse's Blog

What does this tag cloud say about Alyse, her use of this digital space, and her identity (in this space)? As a reader, stop here and entangle yourself with this word cloud. What speaks to you personally? The power of the word cloud, and your intra-acting with the cloud, is important precisely because we each see something different about Alyse. For me, upon my first intra-action with this word cloud, I was drawn to the words 'writer,' 'writing,' 'love,' 'tears,' 'crying,' and 'poem.' Why these words for me? Writing, and seeing myself as a writer, particularly in completing this dissertation, has been at the forefront of my mind. Love resonated, not just given its prominent size within the cloud, but also in part from my having read Thich Nhat Hanh's (2007) *Teachings on Love* over the summer. Tears and crying made me wonder what makes Alyse cry, what brings tears to her eyes? Poem struck me as a literary form with which I have often struggled, especially during my undergraduate degree in English, but which I appreciate for its beauty, sophistication, and wide-range of forms.

For you, the reader, there likely will be a different set of connections to this word cloud.

Different words will appear important, will intra-act with your own lived experience, your own

ⁱ Due to IRB restrictions, this cloud is a recreation and removes specific tags that may be useful in identifying Alyse's non-pseudonymous identity.

unfolding identity in the moment of intra-action with this word cloud. For you, as for me, Alyse's becoming is differential. An ontological engagement occurs in this moment, as you read, that unfolds a particular way of knowing about Alyse and her identity. Your knowing is different than my knowing – what you know of Alyse thus far is not solely epistemological; rather, your knowing occurs through being (Barad, 2008a; 2008b), through entangling with the word cloud, complexly intra-twining lived experience(s) in your 'being' with Alyse. A similar process should unfold through the remainder of the dissertation chapters focused on re-presenting the various intra-actions with each participant. Your experience, your knowing of Alyse, Abigail, Miranda, Maxine, Alex, Selene, and TJⁱⁱ will come not only through my own partial representations of the immersive experience and multiple entanglements that have occurred over several months. Your own becoming, as you read, will also influence your knowing and being, and collectively, each of the participants' being. There are multiple epistemologies present in this process, and I as 'researcher' cannot predict or control what your experience of these participants will be. What emerges for you, as a reader, will be as much a complex, emergent phenomena as what has occurred for me over these several months. Jackson's (2013) concept of data analysis as "mangling practices" (p. 741), as an entangled, emergent, performative, temporally present-oriented process being discursively and materially enacted is occurring as you read. The reader is part of the dat(a)nalysis.

Although my own partial recollections, remembrances, and representations are clearly important, there is more I would like you to keep in mind as a reader. Each of the human becomings in this study continues becoming, even as you read. Were you to return to Alyse's blog today, the word cloud would be different. New posts, writing, and tags have shifted the size, shape, and visual cues of the cloud. She continues to emerge. So do the other human becoming participants, and here, I can introduce how I see visual clouds emerging differentially across distributed social media spaces for each of the human becomings in this study. In Pinterest, for

ⁱⁱ Pseudonyms selected by the research participants.

example, individual users ‘pin’ visual images to different boards of their own creating. Two of the human becomings in this study use Pinterest heavily. The viewing of the Pinterest boards, the pins occurring in these boards, and the frequency of pinning all speak to certain aspects of these human becomings various intra-acting, emergent, unfolding, performative identities (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Wordle Clouds of Pinterest Headings for Selene and Alex

These particular visual representations are imperfect, and fail to capture the true intricacy of the digital space of Pinterest, primarily as they rely heavily on text rather than the visual pins so predominant in the digital architecture of Pinterest. However, these word clouds are partial representations of the frequency, and thereby importance, of particular aspects of Selene’s and Alex’s emergent identity. Like Alyse’s word cloud, how Selene and Alex choose to represent their identity in the digital space of Pinterest consistently shifts as new pins are added to boards, or as boards emerge and disappear.

There are also visual clouds indicative of intra-actions with personal profiles from connections, friends, and professional colleagues. LinkedIn is particularly important in this regard. Endorsement of skills from connections on LinkedIn represents a continuously shifting and emergent aspect of identity, particularly regarding professional identities. In viewing both Miranda and Maxine’s LinkedIn pages the first time, I was struck by the visual markers of skill endorsements, speaking something about each of their multiple identities. I have partially recreated the top five skill endorsements for these two participants in bar graph form (Figure 7).

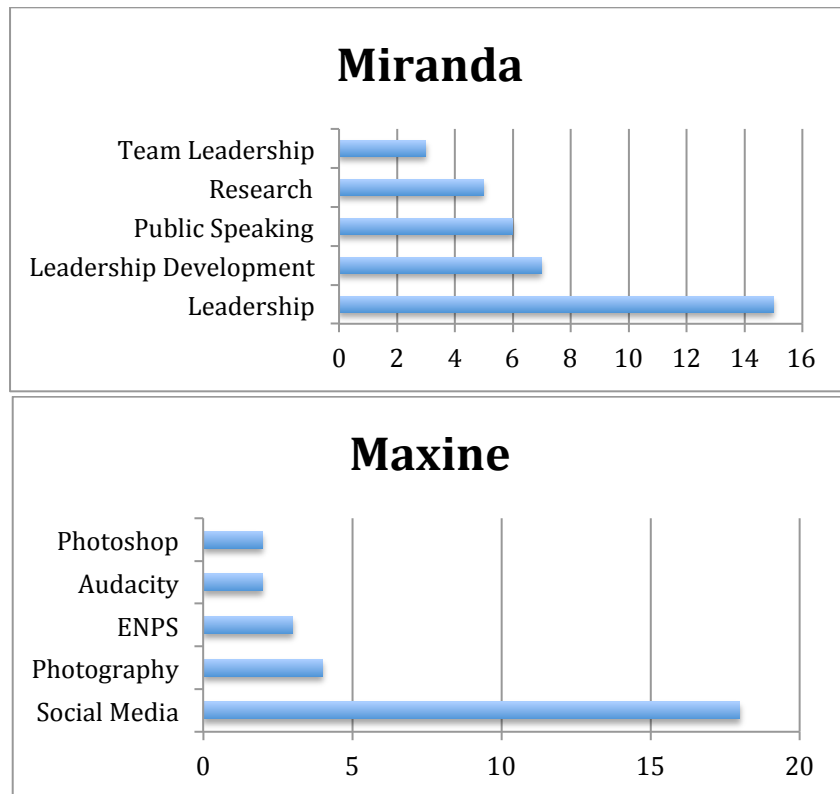


Figure 7: Partial Representations of Miranda and Maxine's LinkedIn Endorsements

LinkedIn chooses to represent such endorsements similarly, though the bar graphs are composed of profile photos from each endorsee. LinkedIn represents the importance of viewing digital spaces as emergent intra-active phenomena, primarily since in these cases neither Miranda or Maxine chose these particular representations of themselves; rather, they emerge through the intra-actions of others engaging the space digitally, choosing and using agency in articulating particular representations of these individuals' emerging identities. As with other spaces, these representations shift and change as new endorsements and connections continuously unfold in the space.

Facebook's digital architectural affordance of 'liking' particular pages, movies, music, books, and what I call other identity consumables, presents a different method of seeing a cloud emerge. Here, the cloud is visual, represented either through a photo or logo icon. Abigail 'likes' 157 different pages. Although not possible to present all 157 graphic representations in this

dissertation (Figure 8), the intra-acting with a wall of ‘likes’ becomes another performative, unfolding, entangled, material process of coming to know Abigail. Beyond what these few select



Figure 8: Partial Representation of Abigail’s Like Pages Through Facebook

images might help you know about Abigail, there is something more to the process of ‘liking’ a particular page involving the hyperlinking and community/social aspects of a space such as Facebook. As I immersed myself in Abigail’s ‘like’ space, clicking on each ‘like’ to better understand the particularities of the organizations, products, or pages that she selected to affiliate with, I learned about the vast networked connections that occur through such ‘liking’ pages. What do I mean here? Precisely that, in clicking on “Little Reminders of What Matters Most,” for example, 50,611 other Facebook users are part of this group, ‘like’ what in this case is a blog that spreads positive affirmations and reminders regarding enjoying daily life. 1,487,595 Facebook users ‘like’ “To Write Love on her Arms,” a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting people suffering with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide/suicidal thoughts.

Photo clouds are most prevalent across multiple spaces: Facebook, Twitter, and particularly Instagram. Human subjects protection prohibits me sharing with you such clouds, yet I think it important to speak of how photography and visual imagery also helps us come to know and be in digital space(s). Here, I will invite to the conversation TJ, one of the human becomings in this study, who during the course of this research was studying abroad. How do photos present a way of coming to know TJ? For one, the photos document TJ's experience, his temporal being. Over the course of the few months during which this research took place, there are photos of TJ swimming in the ocean, engaging with local school-aged children as part of his program's community outreach initiatives, hiking through a rainforest, and participating with friends in social events. TJ flashes an enormous smile in all his photos; really, the smile is larger than life. He appears fun-loving, a life-of-the-party man enjoying his study abroad experience, his friends, the local culture/cultural engagements. With TJ, something quite different occurred for me as a researcher. Seeing these photos, entangling with and understanding who TJ perceives himself to be and sees himself becoming, opened my imagination and memory, reminding me of my own intense desire to go abroad, an experience I personally denied myself during my many years of education, and which I will rectify this summer. The photo cloud is important, but so is the intra-action between TJ, his photos, our interviews, me as a 'researcher,' and now you as one reading the research. You cannot see the photo cloud – but you might partially imagine it. Can you envision TJ in the ocean, arms spread, a white-capped wave lapping the shore? Can you imagine TJ wading in the water; tiny ripples on a calm ocean, in the far distance a giant rocky boulder covered with foliage, even further the outline of a large mountain range, gray-white cumulus clouds reaching toward the highest levels of the atmosphere? Such a vision materializing in your mind, in the present, connects you and TJ. Looking across all 1,273 of TJ's photos, a constantly shifting cloud of visual images, allows one to understand, to partially know something about TJ and his many identities, his becoming within space and time.

I began this dat(a)nalysis invoking clouds: word clouds, photo clouds, pin clouds, 'like' clouds, the imagery of clouds encapsulated in TJ's photos, to articulate becoming in a differential way. Digital space(s), our partial identity representations in such space(s), are emergent. There are many types of clouds, just as there are many types of social media platforms. Clouds are not static, however. Clouds unfold, engaging with their environment(s), intra-acting, shifting shape, defying easy demarcations of boundary. Identity in digital spaces unfolds, shifts shape, and is a constant becoming. Each time I return to the space(s) of the human becomings who participated in this study newness emerges, possibilities arise. The identity of each participant changes, if ever so slightly, rebelling against representation, challenging stasis. Proceeding, I return to the initial entanglements with my participants, a profile of each that provides foray into my initial beautiful entanglements.

Human Becomings' Demographic Overviews

Recruitment for participation in this study began in August, 2014 by advertising the study in various social media space(s), as well as across select listservs of educators working with college students. A total of 14 students responded, expressing interest in participating in the study. Of those 14, seven completed informed consent agreeing to participate. Each student completed a participant questionnaire (See Appendix D), designed to collect basic demographic information about the student, their social media engagements, and technological devices with which each participant engaged in social media space(s).

Here I provide a brief overview of each human becomingⁱⁱⁱ in this study. In order to retain anonymity, each human becoming selected a pseudonym at the start of the study; near the end of the study, I asked each human becoming to create an avatar as a visual marker that will become important in chapter eight of this study. Information presented here was garnered from responses

ⁱⁱⁱ Through the remainder of this dissertation, I will refer to study participants as human becoming(s).

provided on the basic participant questionnaire. It is important to note that questions regarding gender, racial and ethnic background, sexual orientation, and religious or spiritual affiliation were left open-ended, allowing participants to self-define. Questions regarding hours spent using social media, technological devices on which social media is engaged, and year of academic engagement were selected from a pre-determined list specified by me. Further, a question regarding social media platforms utilized by participants was left open-ended, allowing the participant to list each of their platforms, rather than selecting from a pre-determined list. As stated in chapter five, one aim of this study was to intra-act with students in the social media space(s) where they engage, rather than enacting an artificial cut in pre-selecting platforms through which to study identity at the intersections of digital social media spaces.

Selene

Selene is a third year undergraduate student at a college in Georgia. Demographically she described herself as a female (gender), mixed race (racial/ethnic), heterosexual (sexual orientation), Christian (religious/spiritual affiliation). Selene spends a minimum of five hours per day engaged with social media, including: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and YouTube. She engages these platforms through a laptop computer, tablet, smart phone, and iPod.

Miranda

Miranda is a first year post-baccalaureate student at a university in Maryland. Demographically she described herself as a female (gender), Hispanic (racial/ethnic), straight (sexual orientation), Agnostic (religious/spiritual affiliation). Miranda spends three to five hours per day engaged with social media, including: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Hinge^{iv}. She engages these platforms through a desktop computer, laptop computer, and smart phone.

^{iv} Hinge is an online dating platform not presently available in Louisiana, where I was physically located while conducting this research. Therefore, I did not engage with Miranda or discuss this social media platform.

Alex

Alex is a second year post-baccalaureate student at a university in Illinois. Demographically she described herself as female (gender), White (racial/ethnic), heterosexual (sexual orientation), Catholic (religious/spiritual affiliation). Alex spends less than one hour per day engaged with social media, including: Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. She engages these platforms through a laptop computer and smart phone.

TJ

TJ is a fourth year undergraduate student at a university in Florida. Demographically he described himself as male (gender), Asian (racial/ethnic), Straight (sexual orientation), Catholic (religious/spiritual affiliation). TJ spends one to three hours per day engaged with social media, including: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. He engages these platforms through a smart phone and tablet device.

Maxine

Maxine is a fourth year undergraduate student at a university in Maryland. Demographically she described herself as female (gender), Black (racial/ethnic), heterosexual (sexual orientation), and spiritual with Christian values (religious/spiritual affiliation). Maxine spends one to three hours per day engaged with social media, including: Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Wordpress. She engages these platforms through a laptop computer and smart phone.

Alyse

Alyse is a third year undergraduate student at a college in Iowa. Demographically she described herself as female (gender), Caucasian (racial/ethnic), heterosexual (sexual orientation), and a Christian practicing the United Methodist faith. She spends three to five hours per day engaged with social media, including: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, and Wordpress. She engages these platforms through a desktop computer, laptop computer, smart phone, and tablet.

Abigail

Abigail is a fourth year undergraduate student at a university in Ohio. Demographically she described herself as female (gender), Caucasian (racial/ethnic), straight (sexual orientation), Christian (religious/spiritual affiliation). Abigail spends three to five hours per day engaged with social media, including: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. She engages these platforms through a laptop computer and smart phone.

Readers Guide

In order to more easily facilitate a following of the human becomings participating in this study, I have developed a reader's guide (Figure 9), which appears on the next page of this dissertation. This guide provides the basic overview information provided in this demographic overview, as well as the visual avatar created by each human becoming in the study.

Describing Space

Prior to moving into a discussion of the first interview with each of these participants, I would like to spend some time briefly describing my research and writing space. The material and environmental influence of these spaces and materials, the matter and devices engaged, must all be accounted for in examining the subsequent understanding of identity as an emergent phenomena (Barad, 2008a). I conducted this research while living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in a two-bedroom apartment. The home office is a sizable room dedicated solely to academic and scholarly pursuits. The room is filled with books – there are four bookshelves of various sizes in the space. The window overlooks a wooded area in the back of the apartment complex. As I wrote the leaves were changing, and autumn had arrived in South Louisiana, with cooler temperatures finally edging out the summer heat.

My physical writing desk sits along a short wall near the door. To my immediate right is a five-shelf bookcase. The desk is dark cherry oak, sturdy, in the fashion of a typical mid-price range build-it-yourself desk. This was purchased online several years ago. Atop the desk to the right sits a








		Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Pinterest	Blog	LinkedIn	YouTube	Snapchat	Hours/Day 5M	College Location	Year in School	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Religious/Spiritual
Selene		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		5	Georgia	3rd Year	Female	Mixed	Heterosexual	Christian
Miranda		✓		✓			✓		✓	3 to 5	Maryland	1st Year Masters	Female	Hispanic	Straight	Agnostic
Alex		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	1	Illinois	2nd Year Masters	Female	White	Heterosexual	Catholic
TJ		✓	✓				✓			1 to 3	Florida	4th Year	Male	Asian	Straight	Catholic
Maxine		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	1 to 3	Maryland	4th Year	Female	Black	Heterosexual	Christian Values
Alyse		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	3 to 5	Iowa	3rd Year	Female	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Christian - United Methodist
Abigail		✓	✓	✓		✓				3 to 5	Ohio	4th Year	Female	Caucasian	Straight	Christian

Figure 9: Reader's Guide

small lamp, which lights the workspace. To the left, a small stack of intricately connected books: Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler's (2000) *Engaging Minds: Changing Teaching in Complex Times*; Mark Taylor's (2001) *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*; B. Alan Wallace's (2003) *Buddhism and Science*; Morris, Doll, and Pinar's (1999) *How we work*; Terrell Strayhorn's (2013) *Living at the Intersections*; Coole and Frost's (2010) *New Materialisms*; Brenda Ueland's (1938/1987) *If you want to Write*; Maalouf's (2000) *In the Name of Identity*; and Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart's (1995) *The Collapse of Chaos: Discovering Simplicity in a Complex World*.

I write on a MacBook Pro. I keep on the desk a lined yellow pad of sticky notes where I jot down thoughts that emerge in my head while writing. I have also developed a habit over these several months of keeping several sheets of plain white printer paper near the desk where I keep more meticulous notes on each of the human becomings participating in the study, as well as a list of issues to resolve as I complete the dissertation. Writing these down physically has become a more streamlined and easier process than attempting to keep open multiple word documents on the desktop. I have eliminated the clutter of multiple open files to stay focused on writing.

All of the interviews for this study took place in this physical space, through the computer, utilizing the combination of chat room functions, and through Zoom. Abigail, Miranda, Selene, Alyse, and TJ all selected the Facebook chat function for their first interview, with Maxine and Alex selecting GChat. The digital immersion portions of this research took place in each of the social media platforms utilized by each human becoming participating in the study. I refer the reader to chapter four of this dissertation for a full discussion of each of the various social media spaces and their digital architectural affordances.

Immersion did not occur solely on the computer. My smart phone (an iPhone 5s) also became an important material object where portions of the immersive aspects of this research occurred. Social media smart phone applications, due to screen size and design capabilities, allow for different entangled immersions to occur. What you see on a social media platform engaged

through an Internet browser is different than what you see by engaging with the same platform through a smart phone application. Such differences must be remembered and accounted for in this dat(a)nalysis. For example, being with and coming to know TJ, an avid and frequent Twitter user, often occurred in real-time through use of my smart phone Twitter application Echofon, through moments of entanglement that occurred in the web-based application Tweetdeck, and through engagement with TJs historical Twitter feed on the Twitter website itself. I initially engaged Pinterest solely through the Internet web-based platform. However, near the end of the immersive portions of this study I began intra-acting with Alex and Selene's Pinterest profiles through the iPhone application. With Instagram, I never utilized the web-based platform, but relied solely on the iPhone application.

Undergirding Barad's (2008a) conceptual articulation of researching onto-epistemologically is recognition that "knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated" (p. 185). For me, coming to know Abigail, Miranda, Maxine, Alex, Selene, Alyse, and TJ occurred through being with each of these human becomings in various social media space(s) and interview space(s). For you, the reader, there is no opportunity for such immersion. Your being, your entanglement, comes solely through the partial representations here, but there is still being and knowing that will occur. This was precisely the reason I started this analysis with clouds: to begin an entanglement that will carry over to this moment where I will attempt to provide some further entanglements for you, while re-entangling, re-intra-acting, or re-memembering the space of the first interview.

Chat with Me

TJ

TJ and I intra-act through Facebook chat during an early morning in September. In the home office where I work, sun streams in through the window at this time of day, and I find it always feels warm, comforting: it is the best time of day for me to work because the space feels like my greatest

visions of what a scholarly space should be, accumulated through many years of daydreaming, reading novels, and most recently the various writing guides that have been important aspects of my academic coursework (Lamott, 1994; Morris, Doll, & Pinar, 1999; Ueland, 1938/1987; Wolcott, 2009).

TJ studies international affairs, and is currently abroad. I quickly learn that his interest lies in working with International Non-Governmental Organizations, such as the International Olympic Committee. TJ is interested in the “broad spectrum” of issues in International Affairs: “culture, politics, economics;” he plans to pursue a Master of Public Administration degree, although originally he intended to pursue Law School. However, this is not all I learn. TJ began his academic studies pursuing a degree in engineering. Growing up, “math and science” were his strong subjects. As a child, TJ read *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics*, and seeing advances in technology, dreamed of “build[ing] alternative powered passenger airplanes for a living.” Science is still important to TJ. He mentions studying Geography, Geographic Information Systems, noting that his turn from engineering occurred when “calculus. . .got a little to [sic] difficult” and he began paying attention to global issues, such as those in Venezuela.

I asked TJ what he saw as defining and important about his identity, outside of his academic pursuits. Here, TJ's identity emerged differentially. A traditional demographic marker arises: ethnicity. Recall that TJ's response on the demographic participant survey to the question of Racial/Ethnic classification was Asian. Without prompting, TJ discussed in this space the importance of his Filipino identity. He stated he is second-generation. His parents were born in the Philippines, immigrated to the United States, and he was born here. He tries to “actively learn and respect [his] heritage through different means, such as food and dancing” and he remains “active in social organizations around campus that allow [him] to learn and share [his] culture.” His family is clearly important to TJ: His cover photo on Facebook is a picture of him alongside his grandmother,

mother, brother-in-law, sister, and nephew. He noted that he is “a new uncle to my sister’s son” and must remember to “play the role of son, grandson, brother, nephew, uncle.”

TJ expresses the importance of music in his life, particularly as a musician. Starting at age 8, his mother made him take piano lessons. He moved to trombone. A beautiful entanglement. I too played trombone during my high school and college years. TJ stated that band and music “has helped [him] develop as a leader and well-rounded individual.” We spend several minutes reminiscing about days in the marching band, love of our universities, and music. TJ’s profile picture during this interview showed him on stage, playing a ukulele. Entangled here are his love of cultural representation and music.

Being Facey.

TJ is actively engaged in Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. He states that he uses social media in a

facey way – meaning I use it in a way to show off accomplishments, my credibility, and my reputation. It’s a nice confidence booster when someone congratulates you for getting a job or wishes you look [sic] as you travel around the world.

For TJ, social media as reputation builder becomes important. He believes that “recognizing accomplishments, credibility, and reputation means you’re living with a purpose.” Yet, the ‘facey-ness’ of social media does not cut across distributed space(s). Facebook and LinkedIn have particular audiences – family, friends, and professional colleagues – that make the ‘facey-ness’ of those space(s) important. Yet, these spaces have not remained static. TJ mentions Timehop, a digital application that can be connected to social media space(s) that will randomly pull status updates, photos, or other materials from the past and re-post in the present. TJ recognizes that his “old Facebook statuses resemble my Tweets today,” which he admits is “a little embarrassing, but it’s proof that I’m growing up.”

My Mind Day-to-Day.

Twitter is a different space. This articulated thought that Facebook in the past operated in the fashion of Twitter today is enhanced by TJs acknowledgment that on Twitter his followers “understand what goes through my mind day-to-day.” Delving more deeply into this discussion, TJ states “Twitter TJ sees something, posts about it, and thrives on the reaction of other people’s responses to my experience.” In asking for an example, TJ captures a screen shot of a recent Tweet revolving around his roommate asking for permission to leave the house. He states this is an example of a “rant,” and that “in real life, I HATE [sic] expressing anger and irritation,” but Twitter becomes the space for such emotional reactions to occur.

The Not Present.

I asked each human becoming in this study a question about the not present: aspects of identity not evident across distributed social media spaces. TJ responds to this question in the affirmative. “At all costs, I do not talk about romantic relationships and sexuality on any platform.” For TJ, this is partially about protecting the personal, stating “If I talk about relationships and sexuality, then what’s the mystery in that. [sic]. Pretty much my whole life would be on the Internet.” I’m struck by something else TJ states in this conversation, however. He states a view that relationships and sexuality are “a phase.” I probe more deeply here, seeking to understand what TJ means by “a phase.” For TJ, he cannot understand how people “focus on school, a career, relationships, family, hobbies all at once.”

I believe I understand, know something about TJ in this moment of being with him in this space. For TJ, social media and his present priorities are focused on school and career. I ask, “Do you think this will change in the future?” TJ’s response is striking: “As for the future, I am making plans based on my current state. So in that case, no, things won’t change. I either missed out on that phase, or it’s never going to happen. Sorry for the pessimism, haha.” He concludes this portion of

the conversation by stating he has “absolutely no desire” to have a romantic partner at any point in the future.

What has Emerged?

For you, what has emerged about TJ? What do you know of his identity and how this plays out across distributed social media space(s)? Had I made a decision to code this interview, certain themes may have been dictated. I may have thematically interpreted TJs multiple identities: Filipino ethnicity; family; musician; single/unattached in terms of intimate partner. Perhaps in examining the use of social media I may have simplified the discussion, coding to categories: personal, professional. Yet such a process may have missed several important ways of knowing TJ in being with him through this interview. For example, coding would likely have ignored the intricate details of TJs career trajectory, his navigating of a complex process of weaving together interests in science and technology with global politics and political economy. Breaking TJs identity or use of social media into smaller component parts might have caused me, and you, to not disentangle the intra-action between social media spaces – specifically, how Facebook previously operated in a more immature, stream-of-consciousness fashion, a role now performed by Twitter.

In subsequent discussions of TJ, each of these identity complexities will become important. What is significant in this moment is recognizing TJs identity as emergent phenomena. There is a material-discursive knowing of TJ that has occurred through being with TJ in this written account. This is not essential, not reductionistic, but occurs solely in this moment. It is a phenomena (Barad, 2008a).

My field notes from this initial interview are similarly striking. I wrote that TJ is very methodical in his answering of questions – there were long gaps between my question and his response. The time taken to respond in written fashion to questions situates each of these initial interviews in a unique position: at times the interviews feel conversational, at other times each interview feels stunted. Silence fills those spaces, as does anticipation of the response. TJs closing

thought, upon my asking a question “is there anything you are thinking of right this moment based on our conversation that you think you would want to tell me?” is “I’m truly second guessing if my use of social media is proper.” We spend a few final moments interrogating this idea of ‘proper,’ and I state that “I’m not certain there is such a thing as proper,” but that I appreciate the comment “because clearly you are now thinking about this a bit differently. And you will continue to think about it differently as we progress.” What a beautiful moment of entanglement as I close stating “we are constructing knowledge together,” and TJ states, “very true. I’m honored to be apart [sic] of this process with you.”

Abigail

Same time of day, early morning, 9:00 AM in the home office, early September, just a few days after my first intra-action with TJ. Following the business portions of each interview, I begin with a simple question: tell me about yourself. Abigail is an Ohio native, having lived there her whole life, and now attending one of the universities in the northeast part of the state. A senior early childhood education major, Abigail states “I really have no idea what I wanna [sic] be when I grow up.” The past two summers, Abigail has traveled out of state as part of a leadership development program with a Christian organization that she became involved with at her university. She spent one summer working in Virginia Beach, Virginia and this past summer interning in the mountains of Colorado, an experience she says “was awesome.”

It’s a Hope That I Need in my Life.

Abigail grew up in the church, but it was not until she came to college that she explored her own religious and spiritual identity. She became associated with a faith community called H2O, a decision she stated was

more personal. . .It was something I had to choose and pursue for myself. Then, I found a community [sic] within H2O. I have a ton of friends outside of H2O, but my closest ones are ones I met there. I think it’s a hope that I need in my life, and the community makes college bearable, basically.

I found this statement, “a hope that I need in my life” to be one of the more powerful statements and moments occurring during this entire research process, so I quite simply thanked Abigail for such a moving moment.

Yet the statement also struck me that H2O serves the function of bearing, surviving college. For Abigail, college academics have not proved difficult. She is “an Honors College kid, and I just take pride in doing my best in school.” Rather, the “college scene. . .like, partying and getting super drunk and having lots of sex” has been difficult. “I’ve gone to the bars and tried to be part of it, but it’s not something I enjoy.” H2O and the community within have reconciled the difficult social challenges associated with college social life on her university campus and within her university experience.

Beautiful, I Guess.

Abigail is active in Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Social media is not about professionalism, to Abigail, but rather “to entertain and keep in touch with friends.” Self-presentation is predicated on platform: “Twitter is mostly just me trying to make my friends laugh or interested in what I’m saying. I try to keep a low profile on Facebook, and Instagram I try to make my life look... beautiful, I guess [sic].” Abigail also states that she is an “external processor,” so turning to social media affords opportunities of feeling “‘heard’ without anyone in particular hearing or responding.”

There are distinct communities in Abigail’s social media spaces, and this impacts how she utilizes the spaces. Like TJ and others, and similar to boyd’s (2011; 2014a) discussion of imagined communities, the network of each space becomes important. Abigail speaks specifically about Facebook being a “low profile” space because of connections. She associates with “all kinds of friends, plus professors, mentors from high school, my parent’s friends – people who don’t really share an age or an interest/experience with me necessarily.” Facebook becomes a space for

responding, not necessarily actively posting. Only occasionally does Abigail spend time connecting photos, for instance, from Instagram to Facebook.

Both Instagram and Twitter are spaces of more distinct daily posting. Abigail's comment, that Instagram is a space for making life seem beautiful, is particularly striking. Inquiring more deeply, she tells me that Instagram rarely allows observers to see "what's going on behind the camera." These are not selfies. Rather, for Abigail, she tries "not to post things on Instagram unless I feel like it's a beautiful moment I want to look back and remember." Often, these beautiful moments are tied to faith: "a lot of those 'beautiful moments' on insta [sic] are linked to something I think God is doing in my life, so often the captions will reflect that."

Abigail's faith is also present in Twitter. Yet, Abigail is careful. She does not "really want to be that annoying Christian on twitter [sic]. I don't want people unfollowing me because I'm always spamming that TL with my beliefs." Twitter, of course, is not solely about sharing your own thoughts, but also about reading the thoughts and comments of others. For Abigail, faith often enters the sphere of Twitter in this way. She follows "a good amount of accounts that share verses or theologians who post religious ideas and if I feel like I needed to hear it someone else probably needed to hear it, so I share it." This is also true of music. Abigail states that at times she is moved to post the lyrics to songs she hears, particularly if they are inspiring.

What has Emerged?

Abigail spends very little time discussing in full detail the 'not present' in social media. Personal business, "something I wouldn't tell anyone but my closest friends" does not appear in any social media space. Abigail does not spend time clarifying what this means for me, partially the constraint of time limitations on this interview. What emerged during this interview was commitment to faith, to a certain presence in social media that demonstrates beauty in the world, part of Abigail's persona – she states that she is "a pretty hopeful and optimistic person in general." The title of this chapter is partially derived from this interview with Abigail. "Beautiful." Abigail's

reflections of hope and beauty as central to intra-actions across distributed social media space(s) was particularly poignant as I left this interview, and in moving forward I was curious how such beauty and optimism would play out across the distributed social media spaces of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Miranda

On a Sunday afternoon in mid-September, the sun begins peeking through what has been a cloudy, overcast sky. I am intrigued to begin interviewing Miranda. An unanticipated emergence occurred during participant recruitment: two graduate students expressed interest in participating, Miranda being the first. This was an important emergence to maintain in keeping with the spirit of inquiry. I had not necessarily stated that college students be defined as solely undergraduate students. A graduate student perspective meant that I would have a full foray into the influence of social media across the post-secondary educational experience, what identity means and how it emerges and shifts across space-time of educational endeavors. There was another important and beautiful entanglement that would occur as well. Miranda attends graduate school at one of my alma maters.

There is More Than One Right Answer.

When I ask Miranda to tell me about herself, what she thinks about when I mention identity, she immediately begins discussing the transition she is experiencing regarding academic identity. As an undergraduate student, she attended a private university in Texas where she majored in civil engineering. This major was selected from the College Board's book of majors, partially due to Miranda's strength in math and science during high school, but motivated more by what she describes as a unique personality characteristic. A self-proclaimed "challenge junkie," Miranda "selected engineering" because "it was the most difficult degree to earn at [my university]. So I wanted to earn the degree to know that I could do it." Yet, as she progressed through her undergraduate degree program, she "realized I was not getting any fulfillment out of the material. I

was unable to see the application of the work, so I started looking for value outside the classroom.” This led to educational experiences in a variety of experiential leadership programs on campus: “student activities, orientation, leadership development, and teaching a course for first year students.”

In graduate school, studying education, Miranda is faced with a different set of academic identity issues. She states her “instinct is to be a problem solver, critique, and find some sort of solution. The material is now largely discussion and reading material, so it’s been a transition to adjust to a place where I am able to think about what I’m reading, not just accept it.” This is a particular shift for Miranda. As a civil engineering major, she was trained to think a particular way about the world. Now, as a graduate student in a completely different academic discipline, she recognizes “there is more than one right answer.”

I Don’t Speak Spanish (Unfortunately).

Miranda also states her Latina identity is important. “I don’t speak Spanish (unfortunately), but I’ve had a strong influence of it in my upbringing and being a relationship oriented individual.” Miranda’s parents are both of Mexican descent. Her mom “moved from Mexico to Texas at 14, and my dad’s parents are Mexican as well. My mom is one of seven siblings, so I have a large extended family.” The influence of family on Miranda is important. She says she was raised to recognize that “family is the most important thing in life” but “never quite fit in with my family.”

Here, Miranda’s family entangles and complicates her earlier expression of academic identity, the importance of schooling and education. At a young age she felt like an “outcast,” being “driven academically.” Yet she harnessed that academic ability in support of her family, noting at this moment in the interview that “my career choice to become an engineer” arose partially due to “financial hardships” her family experienced due to her father’s health issues. “I wanted to pick a career that would allow me to provide for my family.” Here, nuances start to arise. Miranda is cognizant that her choice of civil engineering as an undergraduate degree was “mostly fueled by my

proud parents, and that I didn't have any personal investment other than to make them happy." Her new academic field – education – was not something her parents were open to at first, but the family "is in a good place now." Her brother, now a sophomore in college at a university in Massachusetts, is studying mechanical engineering. Her family is well educated. Miranda's mother graduated from college at age 30, missing graduation as she "suffered morning sickness with me." Her father is an Air Force veteran.

I've Always Loved Pictures.

Miranda has social media presence in Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Hinge. Since she is "more of a visual person," Miranda states that Instagram is her favorite social media platform. I inquire about how these aspects of identity we've discussed – academics, Latina, family – might play out in social media. For Miranda, social media is not about wide-cast sharing of "mundane daily experiences" like what she is "eating or drinking," but rather about events that have "greater significance." Thus, she might post photos of activities, like "exploring a state park, brewery, or museum." The caption might explain "where I am, who with [sic], or why I am there."

Photos become important for another reason later in our conversation, when I inquire about whether Miranda is intentional or seeks to explore and represent her Latina identity in social media. Although she does not "intentionally post things to convey that aspect of her identity," Miranda does state that she has "'hidden' pictures or posts from family members that I've been tagged in if I didn't want others to see those aspects of my life." I wonder what this means – to hide a photo – and Miranda explains this is about untagging, removing the photo from her timeline on Facebook, for instance.

I wonder what precipitates this, and here our conversation turns to the intra-acting components of social media, family, institutional life, and the discursive power of photos. Here, I will quote Miranda at length:

I don't enjoy saying this, but I want to be as honest as possible. [My university was] largely made up of students of high financial status, and it was difficult to be in that environment when I wasn't in the same socioeconomic status as my classmates. It was never a pressure that people applied directly, but it was obvious with the things that my friends had that I did not. For instance, my friends did not often consider financials when we planned Spring Break, when that was a huge deal for me.

Miranda goes on to explain that her family is not poor, but at her undergraduate institution, financial status held power. Thus, Miranda “would hide photos” from her timeline that might signal to others her financial situation. Below, I will unpack more fully the very material-discursive nature of this reality for Miranda.

Shifts in Time.

Miranda also clearly articulated that her use of social media has changed over time. In high school, she states she was more “angsty” on Facebook: “I usually complained about school work and was much more expressive of my emotions.” Now social media is about “big life updates, like my decision to go to graduate school.” As she began the transition to graduate school, knowing she would move out of Texas, she grew closer to her extended family. As a result, she is becoming more “willing to include them in my social media presence.” As a graduate student with limited financial means, she does not face the same challenges with her new classmates that she faced as an undergraduate student. However, “socioeconomic status is still a pretty sensitive subject for me, so I might continue to be hesitant to post anything that conveys that” – she states about her social media spaces.

What has Emerged?

Miranda’s interview fills out many important aspects of her becoming. There are the very concrete discussions of her emergent identity as graduate student, career and vocational identity, and how she defines and emerges in her Latina identity. Yet, the conversation about pictures, socioeconomic status, institutional affiliations, and family identity all seem to converge in important ways. With Miranda, material-discursivity and discursive-materiality congeal differently for me. What I mean is material objects contribute importantly to a discursive conversation in

social media. Photos, even digitally, become material objects. In their materiality, these photos contribute to a discursive, shifting reality around socioeconomic status. These photos have agency, and Miranda aptly expresses their agentic qualities. Photos become significant indicators of socioeconomic status, and thus, in her decision to post specific photos, or to untag herself from specific photos, Miranda is contributing to a discourse around socioeconomic status. Yet, this discourse is shifting. Although Miranda states that she is still hesitant to post photos that may reveal certain aspects of her socioeconomic status, she is more open to the possibility of expanding her network to include her extended family.

This conversation revealed to me the realities of partial representation in digital spaces more poignantly than many others. Intra-actions between physical and digital spaces, a return to a more Bronfenbrennerian reading of identity, also occurred in this moment. Networks of complex intra-actions between other human becomings influence the choices of particular photos becoming present or not present across distributed social media space(s) for Miranda. It was a poignant reminder of the not present, but also how identity is shifting, changes subtly and drastically over time.

Maxine

Maxine and I spoke on a Tuesday evening in mid-September. Maxine selected GChat for this interview; the chat space functions similarly to Facebook chat, where each of the previous interviews had occurred. Immediately, a beautiful entanglement. “I’m doing pretty well! I’m making red beans and rice while talking to you!” Maxine asserted. Remember that Maxine is completing her undergraduate degree at a university in Maryland, so I’m immediately intrigued by this revelation. Maxine reveals that her father is from Reserve, Louisiana, and in terms of cooking red beans and rice, “my grandma taught me well.” She has lived in Maryland her whole life, however, “except for one year in RI [sic] when I was 10.” Her mother is a Detroit native; Maxine “grew up watching Saints football and Tigers baseball, so I hope to be a sports producer someday!”

As a senior completing her broadcast journalism degree, I inquired about her interest in broadcasting sports, a vocation that I stated has “lots of work.” Maxine:

I was the sports editor of my HS paper. My freshman English teacher became my mentor because she was big into print journalism while she was in college. I still talk to her today, and I consider her a good friend. I chose broadcast because sports have so much action involved, and I just think it is a visual profession.

Spirituality and Service.

Our conversation shifted toward other aspects of Maxine’s identity she finds important. Stating “God is the center of my life,” Maxine expressed that she is very spiritual, although “I am still exploring which church I want to really be a part of.” She grew up Catholic, “but this summer I lived in NYC and interned with the BBC. I tried a Catholic church, but ultimately spent my time with Hillsong Church,” which she described as a “mega church.” Her questions about God, faith, and spirituality center on tensions between traditionalism and purposeful living. Hillsong Church concentrated “on living a life focused on God that has meaning and purpose, whereas Catholicism has more of an emphasis on traditionalism, in my opinion.” Maxine’s desire to live a life of spiritual purpose is beyond rhetorical. She stated that she “is very into social justice and service. . .so I am spending my spring break leading a service trip to SC [sic].”

I Can’t Escape It.

Maxine and I turn toward a conversation on how identity plays out across distributed social media spaces. Maxine stated “as a journalism major, I feel like I have to use it everyday.” Her professors “make us submit videos through Twitter,” and in her classes she has spent considerable time discussing the impact of social media on journalism. As with each of the human becomings in this study, social media has differential purposes and uses for Maxine: “each one has a specific purpose,” Maxine stated. As a reminder, Maxine is one of the most active human becomings participating in this study, engaged on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Wordpress. Maxine divided these spaces into categories: “Professional: Twitter/LinkedIn/Google+ (but I rarely use it). Personal: Facebook/Instagram/Snapchat (most personal).”

I began by interrogating the professional. Maxine asserted that “Twitter crosses barriers a bit,” but she considers this a professional space primarily since she uses it “to follow a lot of journalists and professors,” but also because her handle “is on my resume next to my name, so I guess that’s why I categorize it as professional.” I dig a little deeper. As a diffractive moment, remember that TJ utilizes Twitter as a space dedicated to ranting, stream-of-consciousness thought. Maxine views the space of Twitter quite differently, harnessing its performative agency in ways contrary to TJ. “I post mostly about my Detroit Tigers and NOLA Saints but I literally post about everything new music, breaking news, bible quotes...[sic].” I asked Maxine if this is what she meant about the crossover, which she answered affirmatively.

Facebook and Wordpress are quite special for Maxine. Here again I am reading diffractively through TJs experience, but Maxine utilized the same words TJ used to describe Twitter in speaking of Facebook: “It’s more about my day-to-day.” For Maxine, this is because

Facebook is for friends. I am part of campus groups, and I like to see status updates from my friends. Now that I am a senior, I get so excited when my friends post about getting job offers. That happened today actually, and I messaged my friend to tell him congrats.

Continuing, Maxine stated that Facebook is not a place for professional connections. “I don’t feel like journalists in NYC need to know (or really care about) the parties that I am going to, or the people that I hang out with. It’s just not ‘important’ or I guess relevant is the better word.” Wordpress functions similarly. Maxine describes her blog as “circumstantial,” explaining its performative agency as a diary, a space to post “when one of my friends did something really nice or when I learned an important lesson that day.”

People can Infer About my Faith.

Since Maxine had discussed the importance of spirituality to her life, I returned to this topic and asked whether this played out in social media. Maxine stated “I post about my beliefs but I don’t really discuss it with others over social media so people can infer about my faith.” Since Maxine stated she posts about her beliefs, I inquire whether she might provide some examples.

From Facebook, Maxine shares a very personal status update with me:

I posted this about my grandma's passing...
"If God is for us, who can be against us?" RIP to my queen, my angel...my beautiful grandmother. You can now rest easy in the arms of our beloved savior. Love you to the moon back, Mae Wilmington^v. I promise to tell my family and friends that I love them everyday...just like you did.

Although this post appeared in Facebook, I remembered Maxine stating that she sometimes would post Bible verses on Twitter. Thus, I inquired "do you keep your spirituality off Twitter/LinkedIn because of their professional nature?" Maxine stated that she definitely keeps this aspect of identity off LinkedIn, but shares a recent Tweet: "The power of prayer inexplicably amazing. . . sending love to my family in Louisiana. Y'all will get through this [sic]." This tweet is also in relation to the passing of her grandmother, so there is some intra-acting across spaces: the sharing of spirituality, faith, and personal issues, even if subtly, across the professional and personal spaces of digital social media.

What has Emerged?

Maxine's interview began for me shifts in understanding the intra-actions between physical space(s), digital space(s), and the many people occupying and mutually unfolding across contexts. There was of course the connection Maxine feels to the state of Louisiana, where I currently reside, and where she has connection to extended family. What is evident also in this interview is how communities of people in spaces once again play such an important role for Maxine. Twitter and LinkedIn, with their professional demeanor, operate differentially from Facebook and her blog – which appear to be more about connecting with 'friends,' as opposed to professionals, or for sharing specific aspects of the lived experience. There is also the spiritual – connections between seeking a faith home, connecting such a home to personal beliefs in issues of social justice and service, and also how those aspects of self intra-act and entangle with digital space(s). Maxine does not seek to proselytize in social media space(s), a mutual intra-action with Abigail; yet she does

^v Pseudonym.

utilize the space(s) of social media to share messages of hope, resilience, and healing rooted in faith: these appear in both Facebook and Twitter, meshing and entangling space(s) that sometimes are personal, sometimes professional.

Alex

It is a sunny Friday afternoon in mid-September when I first have an opportunity to intra-act with Alex. Our time together comes after a particularly busy week for me – a symposium on campus, and various responsibilities to external professional organizations, including hosting Twitter chats, several meetings and classroom preparations, made this time reprieved. Alex is the second human becoming to participate in the chat interview portion of this study on GChat. This is important because although GChat is the function selected by Alex for this portion of the research study, she had never actually utilized the function before. After a short delay as Alex figured out the logistics of the space (to which she responded with a positive affirmation “you learn something new every day! [sic],”) we began the conversation as I had the previous four: a thank you from me for Alex’s willingness to participate; the business of selecting a pseudonym, and my opening question: “So Alex – why don’t you tell me a little about yourself.”

Alex is very methodical in her answers. There are long gaps between my questions and her responses, not because she is disengaged, but rather because of the care Alex places into providing thorough responses. This will become important below when I discuss some of what emerged from this interview. Alex is a second year master’s student studying higher education and student affairs at a university in Illinois, where between her many responsibilities she works in housing and is an “Associate Resident Director in Greek Court [sic].” She is a Nebraska native, aspires to work in “Housing, Greek Life, and Admissions” following degree completion. Further, Alex loves “to bake, exercise, garden (grad school doesn’t allow for much of that) and be with my friends and family.”

Describing my Identity to Anyone.

As with Miranda, my opportunity to discuss issues of identity and social media space are differentially focused with Alex due to her post-baccalaureate studies. Thus, I turn more specifically to issues of identity, asking “when you think about your identity or identities, what is most important to you?” Since Alex knows the focus of this study, she asks me a clarifying question: “do you mean on social networking sites or how I would describe my identity to anyone?” This is an important moment in the conversation. Alex is cognizing in this question that there may be diffractive differences between how she might describe issues of identity to “anyone” and how such articulated conversation may occur in digital social media space(s). To begin, I’m interested in knowing more about Alex as a human becoming, how she would make meaning of her identity/identities broadly, rather than diving forthrightly into a discussion of social media, so we begin in this space.

Alex clearly recognizes her multiple intersecting identities.

I identify myself as a graduate student, a female, a daughter, I am in a relationship so a girlfriend to my significant other, a member of the Catholic faith, and a member of the middle class. Oh and I’m also a first generation student. I’m proud of that.

There are other identities that emerge immediately after this discussion. Alex is “a member of Alpha Omicron Pi, which is a national sorority, so sometimes that comes out.” Of equal importance, Alex states she has “great pride from being from Nebraska,” which she describes as relevant in two regards. First, “I love talking about how we do things in Nebraska,” and second “when I job search I want to be closer to home. Being close to my family is pretty important to me.”

Not Obvious to People Who do Not Know me Well.

Alex is clear that her social media use is more limited now than when she first intra-acted with sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. “I am on social media every day,” but “the older I get the less time I spend on them.” She may spend “30 minutes a day on Facebook.” Twitter, a social media application Alex describes as her “least favorite site” and which she constantly

contemplates deleting, is still part of her social media lexicon solely resulting from her “supervisors. . . always telling me about people to check in the Greek world so I keep it for that and Interfraternitiy [sic] Council (IFC) is on there so I monitor that.” Alex, however, states her love affair with Pinterest, a conversation that I will expand on a bit more below.

For Alex, whose social media use habits have shifted and changed over time, a very real part of navigating social media spaces involves issues of identity. In response to my question, “how do you think you portray these different identities in social media spaces,” Alex responds

All of the identities that I listed above are mentioned on my social media spaces but they are not obvious to people who do not know me very well. I'm a pretty private person and that definitely shows on my profiles. I don't post very much on Facebook and what I do post is probably related to graduate school or maybe a pictures [sic] with my boyfriend. He is back in Nebraska so we only see each other when I'm home for a break. I have Twitter but I don't use it. I mostly have positive quotes because I like to be positive. Instagram is pictures about my life and I'm not sure that someone could pinpoint my identity from those photos. They could see that I'm in grad school, I like to be with my friends, I have one picture on there with my parents so there is a little bit of that family and daughter identity.

This issue of being a private person has not come up explicitly in previous conversations with the human beings participating in this study. Fortunately, Alex expands this discussion with me without prompting. Sibling dynamics function into an understanding about why privacy and identity are somewhat intricately entwined in social media spaces for Alex.

Being the “oldest of three,” Alex talks about differences in social media use between she and her siblings. For example, her sister, 13 months her junior, “posts everything on Facebook...good or bad. It has always drove me crazy [sic].” Describing her mother as “the poster mom for a helicopter parent,” Alex recognizes that it is not important or necessary to share “a lot about myself with others online. . .I would rather fly under that radar than be someone everyone has a comment about or feels the need to know what is going on in my life.” Thus, anything Alex posts “has a purpose.” Alex may share “positive quotes, quotes about motivation, and leadership quotes. I think that they represent that I am a mature person who is very driven.”

I want to purposely focus on Pinterest. Prior to beginning this study I had not personally

intra-acted with Pinterest as a social media space. While I was vaguely familiar with the concept of Pinterest, my own vast social media presence made such intra-actions unnecessary. However, as I met the human becomings in this study within their social media space(s), Alex began for me an education in Pinterest. Whereas social media space(s) such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter appeared uninteresting to Alex, she described Pinterest as “her dangerous site. I can spend a hour and a half on that site and not even realize it. I love Pinterest.” Why this intense fascination with Pinterest, I inquire?

There are so many great ideas on there! I can find great recipes on there, gift ideas, workouts to try, etc. I love looking at the wedding stuff on there but that's way down the road so that's just for fun. Two of my best friends are engaged so I look for wedding Ideas on there [sic].

Aspects of Alex’s identity that were previously not mentioned emerged in this conversation. In particular, this discussion of “wedding stuff” describes aspirational aims Alex envisions not only for her, but also in support of friends’ engagements. Her previous discussion regarding love of cooking or exercising also re-emerges in this moment. Each of these aspects of Alex’s identity will be important in subsequent discussions.

What has emerged?

With Alex, I want to return to a discussion regarding the use of a chat function as tool of inquiry. Alex, more than many other human becoming participants in this study, spent extraordinary amounts of time constructing answers to questions I posed during this initial interview. Resultantly, there were long moments of silence and anticipation for me, as a researcher. Barad (2008a) discusses the importance of capturing and seeking to unpack the phenomena of research; Jackson (2013) discusses the importance of recognizing what it means as researcher to be in the mangle. These moments of silence were particularly important to this interview space. Not only was I anticipating Alex’s answer to the question I had posed, but I was able to reflect in these moments on her previous response. Alex’s long answers are rich narrative moments full of many emergent insights. In many ways, how I came to know Alex through this interview space was

largely informed by a beautiful entanglement with anticipatory silence. As a researcher, I actively stayed in these moments during this interview, simply being in the space, awaiting the next moment of emergence, as Alex made herself intelligible to me.

Selene

On a cool Tuesday mid-morning in late September, I articulate the hopefulness of autumn to Selene: “I am lovely! Fall has arrived in south Louisiana, finally!” I stated in response to Selene’s question “how are you?” Cooler weather temporarily arrived in south Louisiana that day, and in these spaces of time between summer and winter, I always articulate into the universe the optimism that summer’s stranglehold has finally broken. Though this would not turn out to be true (summer hung on for a few more weeks), the reprieve in stultifying heat was a welcome change of course on this morning.

Selene is a third year college student studying marketing management at a college in Georgia. Our first beautiful entanglement occurs early in the interview. Selene states part of her motivation for participating in this study is rooted in her academic study, where she is working toward a certification in social media. In the marketing world, social media has become an important skill set. The social media certification at Selene’s college is designed specifically to assist marketing majors in understanding “all the different handles. You know how to properly hashtag and you know how to get the right persons attention through posting pictures, writing a post, or a video.” Selene’s interview occurs near the end of the first round of interviews for this study, and in this moment I reflect on what has motivated each of the human becomings to participate. Selene’s ‘formal’ academic study through a certification program intra-acts with my own educational pursuits in key ways. Although we are engaged in research within digital social media spaces for different reasons, in this moment I recognize our entanglement is mutually constituted through research: seeking to be and know how social media influences our various behaviors and intra-actions with others. For Selene, this constant unfolding is already being put to good use. She is

working with her neighbor, who runs a non-profit organization, assisting in “get[ting] everything going with his social media handles.”

I Love Being Able to Express Myself.

As with each human becoming in this study, I seek to learn or understand aspects of self or identity that are important to Selene. In discussing her neighbor’s nonprofit, Selene mentions that she enjoys volunteer work. She has “done mission trips with my church and also do some volunteer work and family members work place. [sic]” With Selene’s introduction of church into the conversation, I ask whether faith and church are an important part of her life. “Yes. I believe in a higher power but I do not claim a religion. I feel that religion has become more of a certainty than a mystery and about faith [sic].”

Other important aspects of Selene’s life include family, design, and art. Selene states “my family is very important to me. No matter where I go or what I do they have always been there for me.” Selene is also interested in design and art, a revelation that will become vitally important in future intra-actions with her social media spaces, particularly her blog. “I love being able to express myself and art and design allows me to do that.” In particular, Selene is “interested in fashion, but I also enjoy painting using different mediums.” I do not consider myself particularly fashionable, so I quip “sadly I am not fashionable ☺ [sic]” to which Selene responds “lol I think we all have a little something in us.”

They all Have a Different Meaning to Them.

Selene states that people, including her, use social media for a variety of reasons:

some use social media to stay in contact with old friends from high school, to keep updated on the latest in celebrity news, some may use it as an outlet, or even to promote a business or their passion in art or music. we also use it to meet new people [sic].

However, how the spaces are used varies. Selene states that she sees “many differences” across spaces; for example, “things I would post on tumblr I might not be fitting for Facebook or vice versa.” Selene’s decisions on what to post, how to post, and the appropriate nature of posting in

digital space(s) appears influenced by a confluence of factors, including the communities or imagined communities of the social media platform, as well as architectural affordances (boyd, 2011; 2014a; Morrison, 2014). She provides me with an important and relevant set of illustrations.

For me i see face book as a site to keep people updated about your life and how you're doing. Most of my friends are from elementary school all they way up so i feel like they add me to see how life. For each site its different because they all have a different meaning to them. twitter i basically just talking to yourself and tumblr is just reflagging pictures and videos that relate to you or that you find funny [sic].

There are many revelatory tidbits to unpack in this one statement. First, a moment of self-reflection that today's college students have known the world with social media since elementary school, prompting me to think about life history issues, as well as recollections of educational history, differently (a potential future study). Or the idea of conversing with self, which Selene suggests is the function of Twitter. This appears to entangle beautifully with other high Twitter users in my study, such as TJ or Abigail. Then there is Tumblr. Selene is the only human becoming in this study utilizing this particular blogging platform. Again, this will become important to remember in a subsequent chapter as I will discuss how the architectural affordances of a blogging site such as Tumblr allow Selene to portray, enact, and intra-act with others in a unique and powerful way regarding art, design, gender, and race.

Actual human communities, not simply imagined communities (boyd, 2014a), are important to how Selene utilizes digital social media spaces as well. We spend a significant amount of time discussing Facebook, not only because Selene has friends in this space dating back to her time in elementary school, but also because of her family's use of this space to remain connected:

well my immediate family created a fb page to help us to remain in touch. there are so many of use its hard to know what going on all the time so the page helps us to make a post about upcoming events, accomplishments, and pictures. we also sometimes have our little jokes going on. not all of my family have instagram or twitter but for those that do i am able to never miss a moment. like my cousin making a touchdown or graduating [sic].

The use of Facebook as a space of family gathering emerges here. Physically separated and constrained by time, Selene's family is able to remain connected through a unique architectural

affordance of Facebook: groups. The use of Facebook for this continual connection is also, according to Selene, part of the importance of family to her lived experience.

As she had mentioned art, design, and faith earlier in our conversation, I turn to how these aspects of self are articulated for Selene in social media spaces. Selene states that “if I saw a piece of art that I liked I would post a picture and write something about it or I would share/retweet the post to my friends/followers.” In terms of spirituality and a higher power, Selene states that she posts regarding this topic mostly in Tumblr, since “Tumblr is like my journal so I feel I can post freely without getting harassed about my opinions.”

I Strive to be Great.

The not present, the absence, the concealed. For Selene, social media is not a space to “post my emotions.” Even on Tumblr, where she feels more comfort in sharing the “hidden parts,” Selene may not post about emotions; these aspects of self she may save for “an actual journal.” Selene states that she has “depressive moments,” times where she feels “as though nothing is going right or I don’t feel I can be successful doing something.” She sometimes feels plagued by feelings of self-doubt, particularly involving “school and accomplishing my goals of having my own business.”

Being successful – academically and professionally – is important to Selene. This emerges only toward the end of the interview, in our discussion regarding what is concealed in social media spaces. Selene states “I strive to be great and to be remembered for something amazing.” This desire has been fuel for spreading messages of encouragement through social media. For example, she noted that earlier that morning she had posted a short video to Facebook about “smiling and pushing yourself.” Motivating others, demonstrating strength even through feelings of self-doubt, is important to Selene, and will become subsequently critical in examining her Tumblr account during the second interview.

What has Emerged?

Selene's interview brings into the conversation a variety of important issues. As mentioned throughout the narration in this section, social media spaces are utilized for very specific purposes, partially the result of imagined or real communities, although also influenced by digital architectural affordances. However, a broader issue has emerged for me in this moment. Agency. Selene's interview once again demonstrates that agency is not easily defined in social media spaces. For example, the use of Facebook to remain connected with family through formation of a group, where announcements and accomplishments are shared, demonstrates several levels of agency. First, the agency of the platform: an exosystemic programmatic decision impacting Selene and her family's use of the space. Second, the agency of communities, in this cases a family, to adopt the agential capacities of specific platforms. Selene mentioned that it was her aunt who started the family group on Facebook. Third, user agency, resulting from the previously mentioned platform and community agency. Selene is both released and constrained by the family Facebook group, or her use of the space of Facebook to retain contact with elementary school friends. This is a community and human connective agency enacting presence on the agency and use of the digital space of Facebook.

Mentioning constraining and releasing of agency is important to this discussion. Re-reading this transcript, thinking through issues of agency in research and social media more broadly, I am particularly interested in how Selene recognizes that aspects of self important to who she is, for example belief in a higher power but non-belief in religion, are not articulated in specific spaces. However, other digital spaces allow for emergence of these aspects of self. I have utilized foreshadowing quite liberally in discussing Selene's first interview, preparing for what I already know emerges in the second interview regarding the topic of a higher power, art, design, and importantly, the topics of gender and race, which were not discussed in this first interview. What emerged as important in this moment are the concepts of agency and the complicated nature of

understanding and articulating how many forms of agency are intra-acting in digital social media spaces, both releasing and constraining the transparency of identity and becoming.

Alyse

With Alyse I encountered scheduling conflicts, an issue I personally feared heading into the interviewing process. We rescheduled our initial interview twice, so when we finally connected on that final September mid-Monday morning, I was prepared and excited to learn what might emerge in this closing of first round interviews. I had been immersed in a weekend of intense reading, which always fuels a strong desire for persistent questioning and perspective seeking. This appeared to be the cognitive, emotional, and physical state I personally inhabited that morning.

Alyse and I beautifully entangle in many ways. As a junior at a college in Iowa, Alyse is working toward a degree in English, with a minor in Politics and Civic Engagement. This strikes me as not too dissimilar from my own path through undergraduate education, where I too majored in English and completed a minor in a similar civic engagement type degree of leadership studies. She continues:

I'm part of the mock trial team, concert band, spiritual life leadership team, and an editor for the *Midwestern Times*^{vi} (our school newspaper). I also work in the Career and Civic Engagement Center as a Career Assistant, and I do a lot of work on the social media aspect of that office. I'm also a big writer - it's one of my passions.

As with Selene, social media entangles with Alyse's career aspirations or job functions. While I had not previously thought of social media as part of my own 'job responsibilities,' it turns out that in my own assistantship and volunteer work, managing social media for official organizations or office entities is also an important part of my own work. I see other beautiful entanglements emerging across the human becomings in this study. Just in this one statement from Alyse there are potential intra-actions with Abigail, who also serves in a spiritual leadership role in her own college life, or with TJ, who also has a background in music.

^{vi} Pseudonym.

Thought and Depth.

Like Alex before her, Alyse is slow in responding to questions. One fascinating emergence from these initial interviews relates to differential reactions toward the chat room interview. I ask Alyse whether she might expand on “why some of these areas are important to you: writing, politics, civic engagement, spirituality.” There is a five-minute pause. Recognizing my question may have been overwhelming, I state “that may be a really big question – but just think through it broadly – piece by piece is fine.” Two minutes later I recognize that the delayed response was due to Alyse constructing a fully written paragraph explaining each of these aspects of her identity, and why they are important.

Alyse begins with writing.

Writing has been important to me for as long as I can remember. When I was little (like early elementary school) I would always be journaling or writing short stories. Now I write more poetry and it has just become a way for me to express myself, as well as a form of stress relief.

From this introduction into why writing is important, Alyse elaborates on politics and civic engagement. This interest developed only when Alyse arrived in college, where she developed an interest in “things like public policy, as well as the courts and justice system.” She also believes it is important for people to be “engaged citizens,” and has learned through civic engagement projects “the various ways our government works in the lives of US citizens [sic].” Alyse describes a continuum of civic engagement processes:

this could mean taking an interest in grassroots efforts to impact policy making, or volunteering in some way to make a difference in the lives of others, or donating some other form of resources to spark change in some aspect of society.

Alyse ends her long response to my question with spirituality, which she describes as “something that I feel I need for just everyday life. It is a way to get in touch with something bigger than ourselves, and allows me to feel like we’re never truly alone.”

Subliminal Messages.

Alyse is very clear about certain social media spaces: “there’s a lot of junk that gets shared.” Her use of social media in articulating important aspects of self discussed earlier seeks to counteract such “junk.” One way she does this is “through Facebook posts” where she often tries “to offer something reflective or important about my life.” Immediately a contrast emerges between Facebook and Twitter. On Twitter, Alyse is more “casual,” often “invok[ing] some level of humor or sarcasm far more than on Facebook.” I ask Alyse what she means in stating her desire to use Facebook as a reflective space, or “a space to offer something important.” She responds by stating that Facebook tends to be a place where “especially high school but also some college people, send a lot of subliminal messages [sic].” Her messages counteract negativity, and she shared an example. Alyse posted this update on Facebook:

You, as a person, as a member of this crazy human race, will never disappoint. You may make mistakes. Your actions may have consequences. But YOU will always be forgiven and loved and cherished, and you will never disappoint those who love you most.

This update counteracted what Alyse described as an “especially stressful” day.

Alyse is only the second human becoming to share a specific example with me about a post or decision made on social media speaking specifically to aspects of self that are important. While this message appears solely related to counteracting the often negative messaging appearing in the space of Facebook, I ask Alyse whether this message represents other aspects of self we previously discussed as important: “do you see that as political, as spiritual, as civic engagement, as part of your responsibility as a writer?” Alyse strikes me as “quite intentional” in her response:

Hm I think definitely an aspect of civic engagement, since one area I’m very passionate about is awareness for depression and mental illness. This status was a way of reminding people, particularly those struggling with depression, that there is hope and help and that they are worthwhile. I also tried to make it well-written and something that people want to read, just because of the language [sic].

Outside of Facebook, I recognize that Alyse is also active on social media platforms such as Wordpress and Instagram, so I ask her to elaborate on the use of these spaces, whether there are

differentials. Alyse admits that Instagram “has been a little unused for a little while,” but that “my wordpress definitely reflects all four of those areas [sic].” Alyse continues, stating she “actually use[s] categories like Thoughts on Life, Thoughts on Spirituality, Thoughts on Love, etc., to emphasize these various passions of mine.” Perhaps the reader will remember this to be true. The adapted word cloud present near the beginning of this chapter reflects words such as “love” and “life” to be prominent posting tags for Alyse. Further, Alyse utilizes her blog to post “on various social issues, my own personal struggles, poetry, and other things that reflect my passions.” These posts come “about 3 times a month,” though like me, Alyse recognizes how difficult it can be to actually maintain and keep up with a blog on a regular basis.

I Also Sometimes Curb my Political Ideology.

What about the not present for Alyse, that which is concealed? In keeping with her desire to counteract negativity in social media spaces, Alyse refuses to post “when I feel angry or really frustrated.” However, Alyse states, “I also sometimes curb my political ideology so more people can relate, rather than sparking controversy.” While she admits controversy to sometimes be a good thing, “I haven’t gotten comfortable enough with my views and what not to try to intentionally spark this! [sic]” I am naturally curious about this topic, as Alyse is the first in the study to speak specifically of politics. “What makes you hesitant to post that,” I ask.

I would say I am very liberal. So my hesitations are that more conservative friends may not want to read my posts if they think that they are just filled with liberal ideas. So I try to find some middle ground a lot of the time, since I do value ideas on both ends of the spectrum.

While she admits that she has more liberal friends, some of her “closest friends would identify as more conservative.”

My time with Alyse wraps up at this point as she informs me of some other obligations she must attend. Rather than waiting, we schedule our second interview immediately for mid-October. Alyse informs me she is going to Japan for two weeks as part of a school exchange program, but

marks me in her calendar. We will intra-act again in a few weeks – a conversation that I very much look forward to.

What has Emerged?

Alyse has a certain intentionality regarding her persona. Her long and well-articulated responses to questions mirrors her own evident thoughtfulness in posting and utilizing social media spaces for particular purposes, and in highlighting specific aspects of self. The big four, as she refers to them: writing, politics, civic engagement, and spirituality. This conversation ends with only a very surface level understanding for me of Alyse's connection to writing or spirituality. I anticipated such gaps as the outset of this dissertation project, partially informing my own desire to conduct multiple interviews with each of the human becomings participating. As with each interview, I am intrigued to dig deeper, be more immersed in the social media platforms of each human becoming, seeking to better understanding their being and our mutually entangled and unfolding knowing that will emerge. With the conclusion of this interview, I am able to turn now to such work and analysis of efforts in this regard.

Conclusion

In this initial chapter of entangling with 'data' from interviews with the human becomings that participated in this study, I have attempted to bring the reader into being with me in the process of conducting this research. In doing so, I have excavated each interview, enacting what has emerged as a form of narrative in describing the material-discursive and the discursive-materiality that unfolded through initial interviews with the human becomings in this study. While my narrative has sought to capture my own interpretation of what occurred during this process, my aim was also to allow the reader an opportunity of being with the human becomings, coming to know them through personal entanglement. This leaves me with a question as researcher: what has emerged for you? While I have highlighted my own partial representations, in each reading and

re-reading, new ways of knowing these human becomings likely emerges through the process of being on the page.

Secondly, this chapter sought to begin discussion on issues of agency and materiality that have emerged since the dissertation proposal. Viewing social media space(s) as agentic, I have sought to begin a discussion about how to rethink agency in social media space(s). This discussion disrupts the notion of the 'individual' as the sole or most important agent in social media space(s). This discussion will continue in the next chapter, where I examine in more depth the social media space(s) of the human becomings in this study. Insights in the next chapter are gleaned specifically from the digital immersion portions of this project and will focus on digital architecture, intra-actions between spaces, diffractions of intra-actions across social media space(s), and how these observations served as prelude to the second and final interview with each human becoming in this study.

CHAPTER 8

IMMERSIVE MATERIALITY

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot fully be claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated.

Karen Barad, 2008a

Why Materiality?

The process of being with each human becoming in this study, being in distributed digital social media spaces partially representing identity, observing partial representations of social media platforms in their differential becomings, observing a constant unfolding emergence over these several months focused for me how, in many ways, I am working through a philosophical research dilemma: what does it mean to conduct research on ‘college student identity’ from a posthumanist, post-anthropomorphic perspective? In seeking a partial answer to this question, this chapter highlights processes and experiences that occurred during portions of the digital immersion aspects of this study that helped me both be (ontology) and partially know (epistemology) discursive and material realities of the human becomings in this study.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012), Coole and Frost (2010), Tuana (2008), and Barad (2008a, 2008b) have all called on researchers to re-engage the material as part of the research process. What is meant by material? Primarily, each of these research-theorists seeks to disrupt the centering or privileging of both the human and/or the discursive by reinserting matter into any ethical process of conducting, and in this case, ‘analyzing’ research. More succinctly, inserting the material asks, “how does our intra-action with other bodies (both human and nonhuman) produce subjectivities and performative enactments not previously thought?” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 119).

Social Media Space(s) as Agentic

Agency is important to this discussion. New materialist, post-qualitative, complexivist researchers all disrupt historical and traditional examinations of agency as anthropocentrically rooted, or as solely determined by discursive structural power of what can and cannot be said, stated, enacted, or experienced (Barad, 2008a; 2008b; Coole & Frost, 2010; Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Lather, 2013; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). Matter and humans, the inorganic and organic, all perform and enact agency through intra-active relations. Intra-actions, the entanglements of linguistic, social, political, and biological forces (Coole & Frost, 2010), what Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe as “the mangle” (p. 123), what Barad (2008a) calls an “entangled genealogy” (p. 389) (see chapter five), recognizes that exploring identity at the intersection of digital spaces must account for the agency not only of the human becomings in those spaces, but the agency of the space(s) themselves, as well as the material, technological devices utilized to engage such spaces.

This complex understanding of agency, of the material, was multiply engaged in this study. In speaking about digital architecture in chapter four of this dissertation, I largely situated digital social media spaces as unique environmental contexts of identity emergence, drawing heavily on Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological theory of person-process-context-time (PPCT) environmentalism. While this is and was an important way to think about digital social media space(s), new materialist and post-qualitative theories, with which I have engaged over the past several months, now require an even more robust understanding of how identity emerges in social media spaces.

Researchers must view social media spaces as performing agency. What I have come to recognize in viewing and intra-acting with digital social media space(s) is that examining digital architectural affordances as static, solely controlled externally, is an important but limiting theoretical perspective. Certainly, many social media platforms and their digital architectures are

controlled by external programmers, which I labeled as an exosystemic environmental context in chapter four. However, viewing digital social media platforms as agentic, not solely through the digital architectural affordances designed by programmers, but rather as inherently performing and enacting agency, recognizes more fully, holistically, and robustly, that even social media space(s) are becoming through entanglements and intra-actions across space-time. Such becoming of the social media space(s) themselves is not solely a function of centering the 'human' profile, but also recognizes the intra-actions of digital social media space(s). How else to account for the embedding of Instagram accounts into Facebook, or the engagement of blogs with Twitter feeds?

How Methodological Decisions Become Performative Materialisms

What I recognize now, in this moment, is that several decisions made in structuring this study account for the importance of material agency, as well as a decentering of human identity as the sole, or most important, identity to examine and understand. For example, envisioning and immersing myself across the multiple digital social media platforms of the human becomings participating in this study no longer is solely about filling a critical gap in the literature and research on digital social media. Rather, I now recognize this methodological decision as one seeking to understand agency and intra-action more broadly; coming to see and know social media space(s) through being more intra-actively engaged in social media space(s). Prior to this study, I had not intra-acted with Snapchat or Pinterest, and had very little intra-action with Instagram. In this process of intra-acting with these spaces, my own identity continually emerged.

Being with each of the human becomings in this study across space-time, through multiple intra-actions, was an equally important decision. The methodological decision to conduct interviews across and within intra-actions of two very distinct platforms had particular performative material impacts. Each human becoming in this study initially intra-acted with me in the chat room interview, as described in chapter seven. Most selected the Facebook messenger application, although Maxine and Alex both selected the chat function offered through

Google+/Gmail. Between the first and second interview, my deep immersion and intra-action with the digital social media space(s) of each human becoming offered particular insights, questions, and musings, built through the initial intra-action in the first interview, that directly fed into the second interview, conducted virtually through Zoom, an online video chat function. Each intra-action became a performative, material moment – a true phenomena in Karen Barad's (2008a; 2008b) understanding of the concept. The discursive, environmental, technological hardware and various social media space(s), the physical biological body: all became implicated in this process. For me, I was enacting a process of coming to know through being with these human becomings across multiple environmental contexts.

When I designed this study, I did not necessarily recognize or cognize the importance of questioning the material, or agency. However, I sensed enough to recognize that enacting an artificial cut – for example by selecting only one social media platform through which to engage identity, or only conducting one interview in one particular platform, would be too reductionistic, too limiting in seeking to understand how college students in the digital age understand, make meaning of, enact, or perform identity. My own sense of identity has not evolved solely along discursive, static, essentialized, or demographic understandings. For example, choosing not to focus solely on monolithic categorizations such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual affiliation – as the sole or most important views of identity in digital space(s), appear in this moment as so vital and critical to researching identity as an emergent phenomena, utilizing a bricolage approach (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). As an emergent researcher and human becoming, deciding not to enact such a cut into this research process afforded better entangling with the theoretical perspectives of the new materialisms or Karen Barad's (2008a; 2008b) onto-epistemological articulation of agential realism. I had no way of articulating or 'knowing' that, beyond identity, what I was undertaking in this research process was examining agency and materiality in very complex ways. This emerged as the summer and autumn unfolded.

The Material of Social Media

Over the many months of being immersed in the various digital social media platforms of each human becoming, the world, and ultimately emergent identities, made themselves intelligible in many ways. I began thinking about material, discourse, and agency in unanticipated ways. Concepts bound together in theoretical reading from new materialist, post-qualitative writers (Coole & Frost, 2010; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Tuana, 2008) congealed at moments as part of a lived experience reinforcing particular ways of knowing. For example, in their introduction to the new materialisms, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010) articulate an “ethical and political” need to examine “the saturation of our intimate and physical lives by digital, wireless, and virtual technologies” (p. 5). This call to action is rooted not only in understanding human (organic) elements, but also exploring the inorganic, the material. I believe this has specific implications for this study. Coole and Frost (2010) continue, stating “that ‘matter becomes’ rather than that ‘matter is.’” Are social media platforms matter? Are platforms inorganic, or might they be envisioned as living entities, ‘becoming’ as part of the unfolding of the world Barad (2008a; 2008b) discussed, or the “choreographies of becoming” (p. 10) discussed by Coole and Frost (2010)?

Thinking through these issues occurred as I came to recognize within the immersion portions of this project that not only do each of the human becomings utilize, engage, enact, and unfold differentially across digital spaces, but also that digital spaces intra-act. Boundaries are not so clear in digital spaces. Social media spaces often infiltrate one another’s supposed domains: tweets appear as Facebook status updates; photos from Instagram creep into Twitter, Facebook, or blogs; posts to blogs are shared on LinkedIn. I came to view concepts such as material-discursivity from differential perspectives. Social media platforms contain multiple levels of material: the platform itself can be viewed as a material object, shifting over time, but with each encounter or engagement, a material moment occurs. There are material within each platform: photos, videos, tweets, ‘liked’ pages, shared content such as news stories, or as discussed in chapter seven, tag

clouds. These 'material' objects are in some ways archival (Rivard, 2014), but also discursive. Each 'material' object in a human becomings' digital social media spaces contributes to a certain discursive construction of identity. These material objects are part of an intra-active process of becoming, of identity as an emergent phenomena.

Viewing these 'material' objects through my own epistemological lenses leads to specific discursive readings. Selene's Tumblr is an appropriate example. Tumblr functions differently than a site such as Wordpress, which is used by Alyse, Maxine, and Abigail. Comprised almost entirely of photos, I can best describe Selene's Tumblr as a giant collage wall, and did so in my field notes. One striking aspect of Selene's Tumblr page are the many photos of Black women, Black women's hair, and messages of empowerment regarding Black women. My field notes read:

What strikes me the most – the first emergent portion of this entanglement – is the images of Black women. Women in fashion. Women in Science. Women in Business. Women as passionate lovers. Caretakers. These Black Women are not monolithic. These women are all shades of Black. The women, in all manner of work and life circumstances, are celebrated [sic].

This observation is important for several reasons. First, Selene and I did not spend time during our first interview discussing race or gender. Our conversation about what Selene believes to be important about her identity focused on belief in a higher power, art, design, and family. Tumblr reveals Selene's passions for art, design, explorations of belief in a higher power, but these many photos of Black women struck me as important. I had to question why this was significant. Were the dominant discourses of my profession and educational background focusing what I saw? Was I centering race or gender due to power dynamics – me, a White Male 'researcher,' Selene a Black Female 'research participant?' How do these particular photos contribute to certain discourse(s) about Black Women in society? How can I represent these discourse(s) (if at all) in an ethically responsible manner – for Selene? These types of heavy questions were constant through the immersive portions of this project. Yet, I knew I had to ask, which is precisely why I wrote such

observations down in field notes, utilizing such reflections in preparation for each of the second interviews.

There were also notes of disjunction between space(s). Certainly, many of the human becomings in this study discussed how space is used differently based on a host of factors, most notably issues of human community, the actual 'social network' of the platforms being employed. However, through the course of this dissertation I have also come to observe that social media platforms themselves are 'becoming,' and this is partially dictated by discourse. Hence, we have discursive-materiality. The most prevalent example of this are the recent changes to Facebook's digital architectural affordances regarding gender (Eaton, 2014d). However, this was observable in other ways throughout the course of this study. For example, public discourse surrounding political liberalism impacts how Alyse utilizes her blog, carefully crafting her messages, posts, and sharing of information. Abigail, Maxine, and Selene all discuss the importance of faith and spirituality in their lives, but also noted how discourse regarding religious fundamentalism inhibit, in certain regards, their sharing, retweeting, or posting.

The questions arising from the impacts of discourse on material social media sites themselves cannot be ignored, but also cannot be overly simplified. The various ways the human becomings in this study create and represent identity across their various social media spaces are the result of a confluence of factors: digital architectural affordances; social network imagined communities; public discourse; private discourse; lived experiences; aspirations; the list could go on. I anticipated in chapter five that part of what I would encounter in the digital immersive portions of this project would be moments of diffraction: observations not discussed in interviews; identities discussed in interviews not observed; intra-actions between digital social media space(s). I could examine these issues, these diffractive moments in the mangle (Jackson, 2013) through almost innumerable different theoretical and philosophical perspectives.

I am focusing in this chapter on the material. What I seek to unpack are my observations about identity constructions (Poletti & Rak, 2014) across distributed social media spaces for the human becomings in this study. These identity constructions should be thought of as partial material representations across distributed social media spaces. Moreover, I seek to acknowledge and problematize social media platforms as static, constrained through digital architectural affordances. Doing so acknowledges that, like the human becomings in this study, social media platforms are also becoming. In these ways, this chapter draws on insights gleaned from new materialist and posthumanist researchers, philosophers, and theorists. In particular, Coole and Frost's (2010) assertion on materiality is important here:

It is in these choreographies of becoming that we find. . .objects forming and emerging within relational fields, bodies composing their natural environment in ways that are corporeally meaningful for them, and subjectivities being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes. In this monolithic but multiply tiered ontology, there is no definitive break between sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena. (p. 10)

In each of the human becomings' distributed social media platforms I have observed the impossibility of disentangling, the hazardous and ambiguous (Coole & Frost, 2010) unfolding of identity, the diffractive moments leading to persistent questioning (Snaza, 2010) about identity in these digital landscapes.

Immersion

For each of the human becomings in this study, I have created a visual representation, partially representing particular material artifacts from various spaces. These visual representations will appear at the beginning of each section. These are partial representations – mere glimpses into the material moments being discussed in the larger narrative of the dissertation text.

TJ

TJ's identity constructions in social media occur in Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Figure 10). As TJ discussed in his first interview, there are real differences across these three distributed spaces. Real material moments occur as you engage with TJs profiles. With TJ, there are incredibly

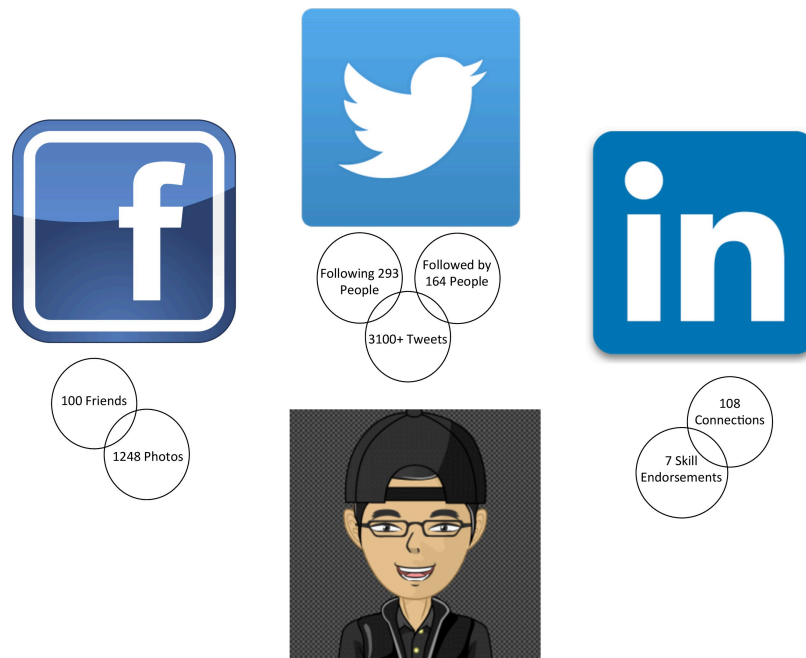


Figure 10 – TJ's Material Visualization

visible moments of becoming occurring right in these spaces, particularly on Twitter, where TJ is most active.

Facebook.

I begin with an analysis of TJ's Facebook profile. Of the many social media accounts engaged by the human becomings in this study, Facebook remains in my mind the one space where constructions of social identities (gender, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual affiliation) often discussed in student development literature (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) can be most explicitly articulated. The architectural affordances of Facebook allow for most of these social

identities to be selected, if desired by the user (socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity are the two exceptions).

In this regard, however, TJ has minimal information on his Facebook page. Clicking on the “About” section of TJs profile leaves one with little material information about social identities. TJ has decided against filling in most of these options, so they are not present on his site. The one exception is gender. TJ is Male. One intra-acting with this space sees other identities present, however. TJ works at a Courtyard Marriott; he studies International Affairs at a university in Florida. He was born on July 19. He has opted against listing a relationship status, important in light of TJs comments from the first interview that he refuses to talk about relationships or sexuality in social media sites. TJ is connected to his sister on Facebook, but no other family connections are listed.

There are other material moments in Facebook. TJ has 100 friends on Facebook. He has, as of the time of writing, 1,284 photos. These photos are the most material engagements in TJs Facebook space. TJs profile photo has changed two times over the course of this project. His first photo showed him on stage playing a ukulele. His present photo shows him on a balcony, his larger than life smile, pointing his fingers at the camera; in the background is the ocean, a large rocky boulder rising from the harbor covered in green foliage, boats sailing by in the background. TJs cover photo has changed three times. Initially, his photo showed him on a beach with members of his family, as described in chapter six. For a long period of the immersion, TJ changed his cover photo to an illustrated map of the country where he is studying abroad. At present, his cover photo shows TJ with two of his male friends, posing with some waitresses at a Hooters restaurant. As in most photos, TJ is in the center, his larger-than-life smile portraying his outgoing, fun loving, life-of-the party performance of identity.

The importance of these photos cannot be understated. On Facebook, TJs first photo dates back to 2009, where he looks much younger, part of his high school days. In over 1200 photos

there are almost no photos where TJ is pictured alone. TJ is not a 'selfie' man. It is clear from TJs photos that he has participated in marching band at his university; he has photos of his cluster group from Leadershape. During the course of this study most photos are from his study abroad excursions. My characterization of his identity as 'larger-than-life,' or 'life-of-the-party' is drawn from this performance and construction of photos on Facebook. Whether TJ sees his identity in this way remains to be examined. However, in my intra-acting with the space of Facebook, this is what emerges.

There is a real impossibility of representing Timelines – primarily since Timelines are the most actively constructed and shifting spaces on Facebook, representing multiple agencies. However, my field notes contain several posts from the timeline that caught my attention. One post, a story entitled “29 reasons you love being a Filipino American” appeared and is one instance of TJ expressing his racial or ethnic identity explicitly in this space. TJ also occasionally posts links to music he enjoys, or short videos.

Facebook timelines also demonstrate moments of agency from other users, particularly through processes of posting and tagging. Coming to know TJ through posts from friends sending him birthday wishes, or tagging TJ in photos, differentially unfolds his identity in this digital space. On TJs profile, in particular, I began recognizing posts from his friends regarding jobs and internship opportunities. These posts began appearing following the conclusion of our final interview; however, I raise this point in segue to discussing TJs use of Twitter. The posting of jobs and internships by friends represents partial ways of knowing about TJs potential future identities. Links shared by one of TJs friends in particular connect to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as the United States Federal Government website USAJobs. Recall from the first interview TJs declaration of wishing to work for a non-governmental agency, such as the International Olympic Committee. Seeing posts about working for the government potentially represents a diffractive moment between stated objectives and possible future pathways. Or, more

appropriately, such moments represent the emergent and unfolding identity pathways of TJs career and vocation. These conversations are also occurring for TJ in the space of Twitter.

Twitter.

TJs Twitter feed had, at several moments over the months of immersion, posts regarding his future life plans. While, in our first interview, TJ expressed a desire to apply to a Master of Public Administration program, tweets began appearing about potentially completing an internship at the embassy in the host country of his study abroad experience; applying for Law School; perhaps applying for a Fulbright Scholarship or Pickering Fellowship; geography graduate programs; even Medical School appeared in one tweet. For me, these Tweets represent moments of ultimate becoming. TJ turns to the space of Twitter to work out some of the most profound life questions facing a soon-to-be college graduate: who do I want to be? How can I most impact the world? Which profession shall I attempt to undertake in my post-undergraduate life? Conventional student 'development' literature would portend that TJ should have established, near the end of his college career, his vocational identity (Evans et al., 2010). Yet, in these moments on Twitter, not only is TJ unsure of his future vocation, but he continues to imagine possibilities for who he will become. TJ may not have a linear plan, a pathway of steps leading him to his post-baccalaureate life; he is simply being, allowing the world, and ultimately his future identity, to unfold. Observing these brief tweets allow the emergent possibilities of TJs future identities to materially occur – defying time, space, and linearity.

Twitter differently represents TJs identities in other profound ways. For example, on TJs Twitter profile, he explicitly states the following: Filipino | 21. Unlike Facebook, TJ has explicitly selected to represent his ethnic identity and age in this space. His profile picture is the same as on Facebook. His cover photo is different: a world map, country names representing geographic borders. TJ follows an astrological handle that posts his horoscope almost daily; he is a Cancer. On Twitter, I came to recognize TJs immense love for his university's athletic teams, as well as sports in

general. Tweets about supporting the teams, watching games, or celebrating victory are frequent on TJ's Twitter feed. There are occasional posts with pictures. For example, in my field notes I mark a photo posted of a huge sun tattoo on the back of his leg. I made a note to ask about the significance of this tattoo for TJ.

At one point in the study, TJ posted to his twitter feed a 'Timehop' status update. Timehop is a smart phone application that randomly pulls status updates, photos, and Tweets from several years ago; a user can then repost those updates in a photo frame on a profile wall. I am reminded that TJ spoke of how his use of social media spaces has changed. Facebook, in his younger days, was TJs space to share more stream-of-consciousness thinking, which now occurs on Twitter. This post of a Timehop status update appropriately demonstrated TJs discussion of shifting spatial roles for his social media platforms.

Timehop represents a particular technological agency – in this case, the agency of a phone-based application – to randomly re-represent and create anew TJs identity. I recognize Timehop posts as specific material moments connecting space-time identity in particular ways. For example, there is an idea in complexity theory positing all historical memory as continually carried within complex systems. Timehop functions in much the same way in the digital space of Twitter. What is 'past' can become re-present, re-representing a material emergent identity moment from the 'past,' in the 'present.' Shifting the landscape of the social media space, Timehop performs agency in TJ's remembrance and perhaps continually unfolding identity in the present, and importantly how TJs social connections on Facebook intra-act with his identity. This is certainly the case for me. I have only been intra-acting with TJ for a relatively short period of "clock time," but Timehop, performing agency on my being with and partially knowing of TJs identity "becomes synchronous, blending past, present, and future" (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013, p. 250).

Duncheon and Tierney (2013) refer to this as virtual time, explaining that "time is no longer governed by linear, measurable units but rather by the capacities of the digital world" (p. 250). The

disruption of linearity in time across digital social media spaces portends the disruption of linear models of 'development' in our understanding of identity. In these Timehop moments, TJs identity cannot be understood as linearly apparent, evident, controlled, or predictive. Rather, his identity unfolds, emerges, re-emerges, and is for me truly complexivist: knowing occurring through the intra-action and agential materialization of multiple forces of time, space, and place; organic and inorganic. Similarly, Facebook itself performs agency in the space of timelines. Posts on walls will occasionally disappear, not struck from the record, but hidden. The further back in time you go on a users Facebook wall, the more likely you will run into 'highlights' from the year. This agency, performed by Facebook, is not a holistic view of a profile, but rather a partial representation. The material moments that occur on the wall are not controlled by an individual user, but rather by Facebook.

What is most striking about TJs Twitter feed is the true frequency of posting, his use of the space to truly post his daily thoughts and reactions to what occurs around him. As of this writing he has over 3100 Tweets; he follows 293 people, and is followed by 164 people. Thus, the space is slightly more robust in terms of his social network reach. A different side of TJ appears in particular Tweets. My field notes recognize TJs working through emotional issues on Twitter. For example, in one tweet TJ posted about "emotion running through my veins;" in another, about wanting to not be so "emotionally attached to every little thing in this world;" in a third, about listening to songs that are reminding him of his first love, his father, and his "shitty past [sic]." Each of these many Tweets are material, discursive, and ontological moments of becoming. Being with TJ in these moments, not in 'real' time or 'clock' time, but in synchronous time, were important in my knowing something partial about TJ.

LinkedIn.

TJ's LinkedIn profile contains a different photo. He is leaning, his left shoulder against a wall, wearing a black button down shirt, smiling as always. As with Facebook and Twitter, TJ

maintains a small circle of connections (108). His background summary states his love of “service and knowledge,” in addition to “serving as a role model in the classroom, workplace, and community.” Again, future vocation arises in this space. TJ states his intentions of pursuing a Master of Public Administration following graduation, with a bit more detail. On LinkedIn he states his desire to focus on Public Management and Organizational Theory.

As LinkedIn serves more for the purposes of professional networking, functioning in many ways as a resume, TJ lists his work and volunteer experiences. As viewed in Facebook, TJ has worked for the Courtyard Marriott. LinkedIn presents new information – his formerly completing the Disney Internship program, serving as an Attraction Operator at Epcot. TJ’s LinkedIn contains information about ‘causes’ he cares about, including: economic empowerment, education, disaster and humanitarian relief, olympism, and ecotourism. One also learns that TJ is connected to and following the International Olympic Committee; Peace Corps; Teach for America; U.S. Olympic Committee; and U.S. Department of State on LinkedIn. Finally, in viewing TJs LinkedIn account, you would learn that TJ has limited working proficiency in Spanish; has been endorsed for skills in hospitality, leadership, leadership development, customer service, Microsoft office, public speaking, and team building. Finally, that he has worked with both LeaderShape and the Filipino Student Association on his home campus.

Preparations for the Second Interview.

With each of the human becomings in this study, I combined reflections from the first interview with observations and questions arising from field notes in the immersion portions of this project, to develop a set of personalized questions. For TJ, the questions that emerged were:

- Last time we chatted, you ended by musing about whether you were using social media in a truly proper way. Have you thought about this at all since?
- Last time, you talked about how you use Social Media in a “facey” way – to show off accomplishments, etc. I wonder if we can talk about this a bit more – because I make some different observations about the “facey-ness” of your social media [lots of pictures of you having fun, for example; though some of you doing things like Relay for Life, visiting the children in your study abroad host country, etc].

- Emotions: Talk about this – I see many different sides to the emotions in your tweets. “Shitty past,” “Emotions in Veins.”
- I always want to return to the ‘not present.’ Last time we discussed that you do not present too much about relationships or sexuality. I wonder if we might talk about that a bit more.
- Last time we chatted, we talked about you applying to a Master of Public Admin; lots of stuff in the past month on Twitter regarding Future Life: Embassy Internship? Law School? Classes that were dropped/not dropped? Fulbright? Pickering Fellowship. GRE/LSAT; Med School? So what is going on?
 - What takes you to these spaces to figure this all out?
- Yik Yak App: I noticed you retweet from a Yik Yak App. Have you picked up following Yik Yak? If so, do you post?
- Sports: Is this a big part of who you are? Or is this a college thing?
- Tattoo? Why the sun?
- Horoscopes – what about them?
- Something about a handshake – tell me about that?
- Final Thoughts.

Abigail

Abigail and her social media presence initiated for me a new thinking about the agency of social media (Figure 11). Like TJ, Abigail also uses Timehop, so being and knowing Abigail occurs along different continuums of space-time. For me, the notion of synchronous time drawn from

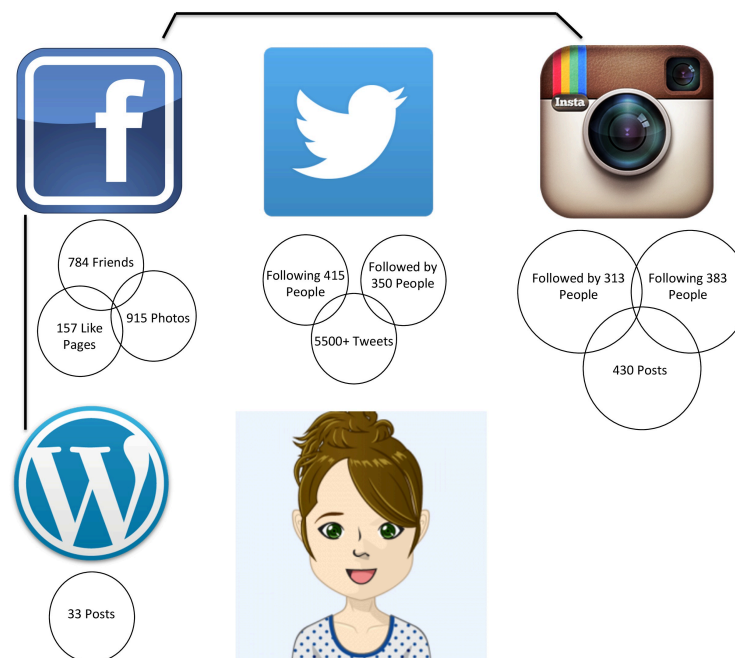


Figure 11: Abigail's Material Visualization

Duncheon and Tierney (2013) is even more present in Abigail's spaces than in TJs, where Timehop is employed, though only sparingly. More importantly, Abigail's digital social media spaces intra-act in ways that allowed me to articulate the becoming of social media platforms, highlighting again a nuanced understanding of agency. An important reminder to the reader here: Abigail stated that her actively engaged social media platforms were Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Facebook.

I can account for the material of Abigail's Facebook page: 915 photos; 784 friends; her profile picture is with her best friend, 'selfie' style as I call it; and her cover photo pictures Abigail and two friends seated on a bench, leaning against a fire-engine red wall, laughing. In her 'About' section, we learn more about Abigail: she is Female; born in October; and has selected Christianity as her religious views. Through Facebook Abigail is connected to her mother, who is listed under the 'Family Connection' section of the profile. Abigail has opted to fill in more details about her identities as well. She describes herself in this space as a lover of Christ, a learner, possessing an "adventurous soul" and list one quote as a favorite: "People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone."

Abigail's Facebook profile also contains what I have described as identity consumables: 157 'like' pages, including lists of books, music, movies, TV shows, and restaurants, that might offer particular material moments of insight into Abigail, her identity, and the continued beautiful entanglements that occur as one intra-acts with the space. I created a picstitch with some of Abigail's 'like' pages in chapter seven, focusing mostly on organizations and causes Abigail has listed as important. What might you learn about Abigail from recognizing her favorite movies: 'Up,' 'The Fault in Our Stars,' and 'Camp?' TV shows: 'Grey's Anatomy,' 'The Big Bang Theory,' or 'Suits.' What about music: musicians and bands such as Natalie Sprouse, The Head and the Heart, or Sleeping at Last? These are not exhaustive lists of what Abigail has shared in the space of Facebook,

but represent for me, in each instance, a particular material moment, entanglement, and intra-action.

The Timeline of Abigail's Facebook page is an active space. While Abigail occasionally posts news stories, her identity through Timeline emerges more as a result of other users' agency. Abigail's best friend frequently shares information on her timeline that creates, in certain ways, nuanced understandings of Abigail's identity. The unique ways identity emerges in these cases is represented, for example, in the posting of results from an online quiz "Which Disney Duo are you and your Best Friend?" In this case, Abigail and her best friend match with the fictional characters of Mike and Sully from Disney/Pixar's 'Monsters, Inc.' Abigail's mother has, over the course of this study, also posted or tagged Abigail in several photos and updates. Abigail has been pictured as a loving daughter, supporting her mother's collegiate alma mater by wearing a sweatshirt on the day of a big game.

What Abigail posts or shares on her timeline are not often status updates, but rather links to news stories or lyrics from songs. Many beautiful examples might be presented. Abigail posted a story about recognizing and disrupting potential sex trafficking acts occurring in public, a moment representing her interest in issues of women's and human rights, as well as what I consider to be a spark of online activism. Abigail also shared, at one point in the study, a post from one of the pages she likes called 'Humans of New York.' In this photo is a young woman sitting on a piece of luggage in a New York City Subway. There is the obvious bustle of a subway station behind her, people rushing to catch trains. Under the photo, a caption:

I wish I'd partied a little less. People always say 'be true to yourself.' But that's misleading, because there are two selves. There's your short term self, and there's your long term self. And if you're only true to your short term self, your long term self slowly decays.

Intra-acting with this particular photo reminded me of Abigail's initial interview, where she discussed the difficulties she faced as a student with the party scene in college. The caption struck me with its notion of 'two selves,' in this case linearly ordered (short-term and long-term), but

important in recognizing that just as in this study there are multiple selves, multiple identities, and for Abigail there is some recognition in this moment, perhaps, of a future self. Here again, synchronicity occurred in the space of the digital: past, present, and future.

A final note about Abigail's Facebook, particularly involving intra-action with other social media spaces. Abigail selected to connect her Instagram account to Facebook, so although not all of her Instagram photos appear in Facebook, several do over the course of the study. More importantly, however, is a moment that shifted quite importantly my coming to be and know Abigail. There is a single post where Abigail discussed and shared a link to a Wordpress account where she would document her summer internship and leadership experience in Colorado. Abigail does not consider Wordpress a social media space, evidenced by her decision not to include it in her list of social media platforms, which was collected during the initial participant survey. However, I clicked on this link, a decision important to understanding and coming to know Abigail's emergent identity.

Wordpress and Instagram.

In connecting with Abigail's Wordpress account, I came to be with and learn more about her faith, her commitments to joy and celebration of the human spirit, and how these aspects of Abigail's emerging identity can only be partially represented: language cannot convey these parts of self; nor can photographs. This was particularly evident in Abigail's reposting of a friend's blog discussing the un-instagrammable aspects of being. In this powerful post, Abigail's friend asserts that in this age of social media there is too much focus on ensuring other people 'like' us and what we post, which draws away from connections to Jesus and faith. Poignant for me in this blog post was the notion of wanting to capture in photos and words that which cannot be captured through such mediums: spirit, love, a sense of awe and wonder regarding the universe and being. Thinking and writing through this moment again, several months after the initial intra-action with this post, I am now thinking about Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's (2010) notion that "there is no definitive

break between sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena” (p. 10). In re-posting this particular blog post, Abigail made ‘real’ for me what Coole and Frost (2010) are articulating.

Thus, I see this particular moment as one of multiple materiality. The post challenges the very conception of capturing in language or photos what is spiritual. I have returned to this post several times over the course of this study, attempting to wrestle with how it addressed the idea of social media as a space of performance. I have also wrestled with how Abigail has discussed her use of Instagram to capture the beautiful joys of life. How does this particular re-posting disrupt the notion that Abigail and other Instagram users have in portraying what is beautiful? Of equal importance, the post highlighted how social media, in many ways, removes one from the ontological – the being in the moment of beauty, grace, spiritual, or human intra-action.

The remainder of Abigail’s posts on Wordpress document her summer experience as a member of the Leadership Team in Colorado. Her many reflections document the struggle of helping others in their spiritual journey, share some particularly poignant photographs from her experience, but most critically engage and record her own spiritual journey. One post in particular discusses her love of the musical “The Last Five Years.” In this post, Abigail discusses the song “The Next 10 Minutes,” speaking about how growing in her spiritual walk might be taken in 10 minute increments – and eventually she will have spent a lifetime trusting God.

During her first interview, Abigail explicitly stated hesitancy of posting to social media an abundance of updates or information regarding her faith. Finding the blog through the intra-active nature of social media was so vitally important to my understanding the root of Abigail’s faith, as well as her spiritual struggle. Her many posts over the summer spoke to some of the affirming choices she has been making regarding living a life of spiritual fulfillment. In one post she speaks of “choosing the discipline of celebration” as a lesson and path to walk. In another, she speaks of choosing joy over despair, a parallel with her notions of capturing the beautiful through her

Instagram account. In one particularly poignant photograph, Abigail's best friend has captured the stars in the sky from atop the mountain retreat in Colorado. It is 1 AM Abigail tells me; the mountains are accentuated by the light from stars; in the firmament you can see the stars – small and large speckled bursts of light; some are burning bright white, others a shade of cool blue. Although this photo is captured on Abigail's blog, it is representative of these 'beautiful' moments of joy she seeks to capture through her many photos on Instagram, and will become important to interrogating even more intently some of Abigail's sentiment of what constitutes beauty of the world.

Preparation for the Second Interview.

For Abigail, the questions that emerged were:

- Timehop: Can you talk a little about how you think your use of social media has changed over time?
- [Person #1] – She posts a lot on your Facebook timeline. Tell me who this is/talk about her.
- GRE Study Materials – Are you planning on pursuing graduate work?
- Talk to me about the song "The Next Ten Minutes." What makes this song so important? What is the musical about?
- "I've been telling my friends lately that what I want for my life is to move and grow and never stop. The idea of feeling stuck is scary to me" – What does it mean to grow and never stop? What does it mean to be scared of being stuck? What does that mean to you?
- I was struck by your re-posting of the "Un-Instagramable Life." What do you consider the Un-Instagramable?
- I want to go over the series of photos on Instagram that celebrate the beautiful.

Miranda

In my field notes of observations across distributed space for Miranda I note that student identity is quite apparent. While Miranda is engaged across Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram (Figure 12), I also recognize that aspects of Miranda's identity in distributed spaces will not be covered in this dissertation. For example, on her participant survey, Miranda stated she was also actively involved in utilizing Hinge, an online dating site, to which I have no access. Further, the use of Snapchat complicates an understanding of identity in social media space due to the architectural affordance of deleting a post once it has been opened and read. I was unable to resolve issues of

how to incorporate Snapchat into the design of this study, and its relatively recent entre into the world of social media platforms leaves space for future research on this topic.

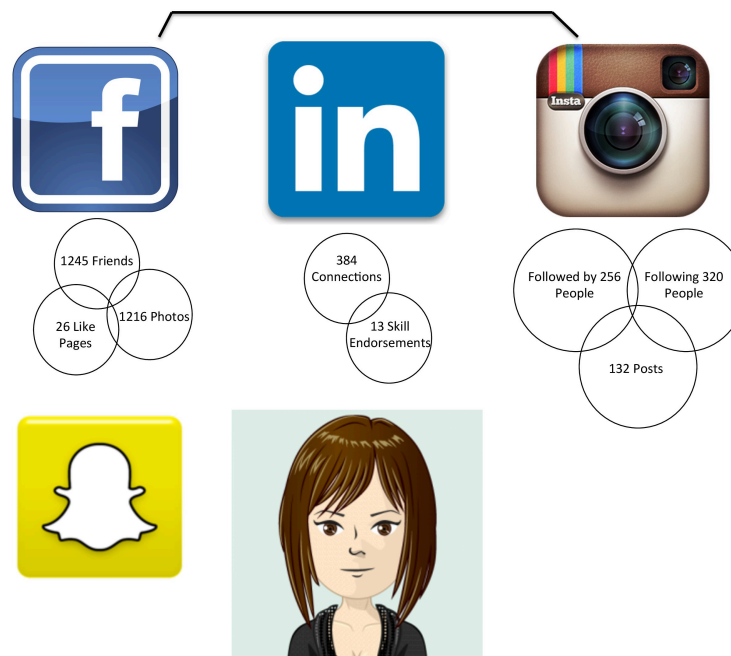


Figure 12: Miranda's Material Visualization

Facebook.

A wealth of material is present on Miranda's Facebook. Her profile picture has changed once over the course of this study. In the initial months of my immersion in her social media spaces, Miranda's profile photo was a very professional-looking head shot: Miranda is centered, smiling, and the background has the blurry aspect of a filter from a professional photographer. An observer notices arches, reminiscent of standing in a covered walkway at Louisiana State University (though this is not where the photo is taken). Recently, Miranda's profile photo changed. As of this writing she is standing in Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House: in the background is the statue of Andrew Jackson on horseback; slightly off to the right of the photograph is the White

House of the United States, and behind that one can see the Washington Monument. Miranda is bundled in a blue coat, a dark maroon/burgundy colored scarf wrapped around her neck. While the profile photo on Facebook has changed, the cover photo has remained consistent: a photograph of her college graduation, with the graduating class seated in front of a large picturesque and ornate building at her undergraduate institution. It is dusk and becomes clear that graduation was held outdoors.

In my initial immersive experience with Miranda's space, she had 1,209 photos, and 1,245 friends. This too has shifted, and as of this writing these quantifiable numbers are 1,216 and 1,253. I make note of this shift solely to remind the reader that with each intra-action in a social media space there are changes, shifts, and new possibilities of understanding the emergence of identity. The material of the space is different, and thus there is a new way of being in the space with Miranda, or any of the human becomings in this study, with possibilities for new ways of knowing as well. The very first of Miranda's photos date back to 2007. Again, there is an impossibility of adequately presenting or representing the many photos from this wall; hence, some of my observations of what I learned about Miranda in intra-acting with this space. There are photos of Miranda as part of her high school cheerleading squad. Miranda is pictured with friends in various styles of dress during this time: there are photos of what appear to be banquets, pool parties with friends, and even a throwback photo of Miranda with friends dressed in 80's apparel. High school graduation photos show Miranda wearing a National Honor Society collar – a detail of these photographs I noticed only after my initial interview with Miranda, where she highlighted the importance of academic success throughout her life.

There are hundreds of photos that document Miranda's collegiate experience. I am particularly drawn to a photo from 2010 entitled simply "college" where Miranda is standing with her family: mom, dad, and brother. Miranda's discussion of the importance of her family, both immediate and extended, particularly in relation to photographs is important. As the reader may

remember, Miranda discussed how at times she would untag herself from photographs with family: part of the material-discursive role of photos intra-acting with physical environments, in this case her college, and the subsequent discussion regarding racial and ethnic identity, as well as socioeconomic status. There are many photos with her friends – Miranda seems to be engaged in her college experience in these photos. In another, she is pictured with a medal, having completed a half-marathon, telling me something of her commitment to fitness, or at least to running. In still others Miranda is carrying the banner to her academic college from her undergraduate institution at what appears to be a commencement ceremony. There are college graduation photos. Most recently, photos of Miranda appear with her new graduate student colleagues: taking trips into Washington D.C., engaging in orientation activities to graduate school, participating in discussion circles.

I am highlighting these photos at great length due to their material nature, certainly. I view these photos as material within the space of Miranda's Facebook. However, these photos also remind me of the space-time discussions with TJ and Abigail. Although not facilitated by Timehop, perhaps in some ways photos saved through Facebook (potentially Instagram as well) represent a synchronicity (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013) of time. I have not been with Miranda in these spaces, places, and times. Yet, the photos allow me to partially be in these spaces, and to partially know about Miranda and her many emergent, unfolding identities. Again, in each return to this space I see something new – there are new possibilities and emergence of new ways to be and know Miranda's identity (or perhaps, subjectivity).

Beyond photos, Miranda's timeline is an active space, multiple agencies intra-acting in creating differential ways of being with and knowing Miranda. Several examples from my field notes include posts from friends to her timeline regarding dogs and wine. I made notes to ask questions about this in our second interview. There were, at the beginning of the immersion experience on Facebook, moments highlighting what Miranda noted in the first interview: the

identity of graduate student being prevalent. For example, the sharing of a story entitled “8 struggles only a graduate student would understand.” On her birthday, her timeline filled with messages from friends. There is also this: occasionally Facebook will have viral posts, and during the several months of immersion one of these posts involved listing 10 books most influential in your life. The idea behind such a viral post is to post your response, and then tag others to do the same.

My own love of books and reading drew me to Miranda’s response to this viral post. Miranda’s books include *The Giving Tree*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, *The Giver*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Kite Runner*, *Ender’s Game*, *The Opposite of Loneliness*, *The Defining Decade*, and *Love Does*, *Bob Goff*. Whereas most people who participated in this viral posting simply listed their books, Miranda went a step further, adding some commentary on why particular books were important or influential. These small emergent insights into knowing of Miranda were extremely powerful and beautiful to me. For *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Miranda wrote that her father used to read to her every night, and this was the last book he read her as part of this tradition. With *The Kite Runner* Miranda stated that “for you, a thousand time’s over” is her favorite line from any piece of literature. Finally, although she wouldn’t consider herself a religious person, *Love Does*, *Bob Goff* represents for her a certain approach to living life.

Miranda’s Facebook is a space of nearly unending possibilities for being and knowing. I could continue, outlining many additional emergent moments. Where I will end with this partial representation of Miranda’s Facebook is through examining some of the other material moments in the ‘About’ section of her profile: Miranda has listed her birthday (September); listed herself as single; and importantly is also connected to 10 family members. Although she lists no additional details in her profile (no favorite quotes, for example), she does offer some identity consumables. Some of her favorite artists or bands include Beyonce, Jason Mraz, Justin Timberlake, and the Josh Abbott band. Movie selections include “The Breakfast Club,” “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off,” “Slumdog

Millionaire,” and “Across the Universe.” Finally, digital social media space intra-action occurs once again. Miranda has her Facebook linked to Instagram. Not all photos are shared, but there is once again an intra-action between spaces occurring for Miranda.

LinkedIn.

On LinkedIn, Miranda has as her profile photo the same photo initially described from Facebook. You learn that Miranda is currently working in a graduate assistantship at the student union of her current university in Maryland. Further, there are other experiences Miranda has participated in that emerge. During her undergraduate days Miranda served as President of her academic college; co-taught a first-year seminar course; and worked as coordinator of orientation week programming. Further, one learns that Miranda was a Research Assistant in an Environmental Engineering Lab. This experience resulted in a publication within a peer-reviewed journal, which is also listed on LinkedIn. Miranda also has several endorsements on LinkedIn. A partial recreation of these endorsements was listed in chapter seven. There is also a written endorsement Miranda wrote for one of her former undergraduate institution supervisors.

Preparation for the Second Interview.

Combining immersive observations and notes from the first interview, these questions emerged for Miranda’s second interview:

- I pick up a theme about dogs and wine. Talk about that.
- In Interview #1 you said that you never quite fit in with your family so you seek to “create communities and inclusive environments for all.” Do you think you see this playing out in your social media spaces?
- Family – you talked about growing closer to family – I’m interested in social media in this regard.
- The SES discussion – let us discuss further this aspect of your social media experience.
- Instagram – Let’s talk through photos – what you think these photos say about you/identity.
- Snapchat – you mentioned you use it? Let’s discuss that. How do you use it?
- The not present – Just talk about identity broadly – who you are – why it is or is not present in social media.

Maxine

Expansive material begins to unfold with Maxine, who is quite actively involved across more social media spaces than TJ, Abigail, or Miranda (Figure 13). Maxine's use of her blog, her active construction of self (Poletti & Rak, 2014) across distributed spaces such as Twitter,

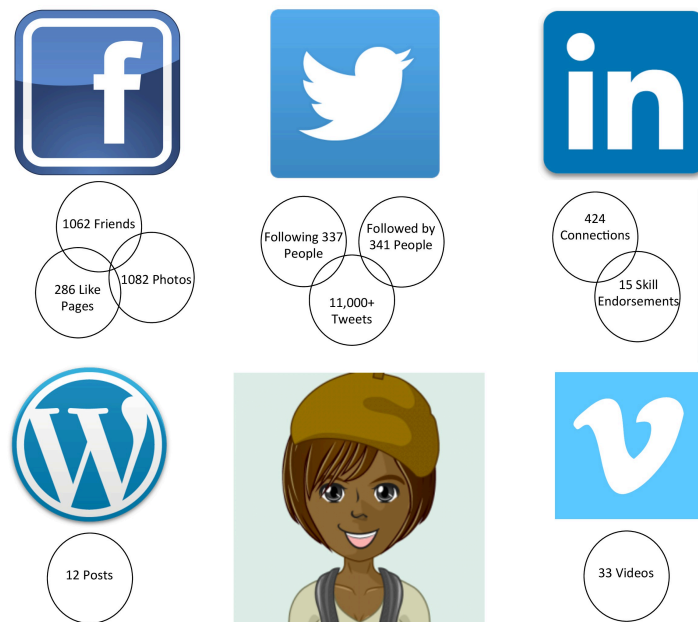


Figure 13: Maxine's Material Visualization

Facebook, and LinkedIn, offer many possibilities for being and knowing about the many Maxine's that continuously emerge.

Blog.

Maxine's blog has a catchy, fun, and playful title; unfortunately I cannot reveal this title as a basic web search returns the blog. Like Abigail, Maxine began her blog as part of a summer internship experience, in this instance, one occurring in New York City. Each post has a title, a message. There are moments of self-reflection; there is currere (Pinar, 2012), which perhaps also connects with the idea that in digital space there is synchronous time, as opposed to clock time, a

concept discussed by Duncheon and Tierney (2013). I want to catalogue each of these material moments, these messages, as particular ways of being with and knowing Maxine, her emergent identity not only through the course of her internship and summer in New York City, but also as moments where many aspects of Maxine are revealed, ever so slightly, in certain discursive ways.

Maxine labels herself a skeptic. “Yes, a skeptic.” I imagine that for the reader, as for me, seeing the word skeptic arouses specific thought patterns. There is a discourse and power around the word skepticism. Much skepticism arises across Maxine’s many blog posts. Her initial post discusses uncertainty about living in a giant urban area such as New York City, even though she acknowledges her own rearing in another large urban area on the East coast of the United States. Her cataloguing of the journey is tied, Maxine states, to her role as a journalism major. Maxine establishes the blog as a journalistic endeavor, an opportunity to suspend skepticism and seek to represent the truth.

My labeling Maxine’s blog a discourse of skepticism extends beyond city life. For example, Maxine reveals a particular personality trait in her initial blog post, carried through subsequent posts. Strategic checklists have guided Maxine throughout much of her life. Her blog posting seems to question whether this approach to life is causing her to miss out on opportunities: of meeting new people, exploring new ideas. She refers to the summer internship with possibility for a “change” in such approaches. Her second post embraces this philosophy regarding future career. Maxine states explicitly she is unsure about what to do with her life following college. While this should put a rising college senior into some state of panic, Maxine is also not certain it is appropriate to stifle her spirit, creativity, and energy by shutting down possibilities for what may emerge in the future. She refers in her second blog post to a doorman at her summer home, who each day engages her in a conversation about continuing to challenge herself through the summer

internship, embrace the opportunities before her. Maxine accepts such a challenge, musing about how she cannot let Mr. Blake^{vii} down, and thus seeks “to give him a reason to be proud.”

In her internship, Maxine was responsible for putting together a presentation for colleagues. A post simply titled “Nerves,” discusses a lack of internal self-confidence, a certain skepticism about her own creativity. This post’s simplicity and brevity belies the complexity of issues discussed. One could read this post as a beautifully illustrated example of Baxter Magolda’s (1998; 2001) epistemological examination of self-authorship in college students. In the post, Maxine discusses needing to embrace her own voice, a sense of internal confidence not dependent on the external validation of others. She acknowledges that embracing such internal confidence is necessary to release her potential. Maxine does not seek accolades, but rather expresses a desire in this post to emerge into a more self-confident professional. A similar theme is explored in a post toward the end of the summer entitled “Fear.” In this post, Maxine discusses her role as external validator for friends and colleagues, reflecting that perhaps she does so to receive the external validation necessary to overcome fear of letting herself down. In these moments, I observe Maxine emerging into self; yet such emergence is not linear. Rather, this emergence is ongoing, environmentally contingent.

Maxine’s blog also provides testament to the skepticism arising from finding the most appropriate spiritual home, while also celebrating the spiritual of the daily. In one post, Maxine reflects on news from her college town that a pedestrian student was hit and killed by a car. News of this incident came on a Sunday, and Maxine reflects on the message of the pastor that day: to celebrate the ordinary of life as the truly spiritual. This message, for Maxine, is more about offering our gifts to those around us: a laugh, a smile, a hug, a kind word that does not make us “superheroes,” but does make us “extraordinary.”

^{vii} Pseudonym

While I have carried the theme of skepticism through these blog posts, I have not read skepticism as necessarily negative. Maxine's blog (as is Abigail and Alyse's) is an incredibly hopeful space. Here, skepticism is a creative force, a questioning, an offering of possibilities. Skepticism may be celebratory as well. Maxine reflects celebration of intra-action with others throughout her blog posts. In "Mentors," she discusses Mr. Marable^{viii}, a neighbor who served as a pseudo-best friend and grandfather figure in place of her real grandparents, who were geographically dispersed from where she grew up. Citing the ordinary – a smile, breakfast at the truck stop, or helping him with his garden, Maxine recognizes how powerful he was as a mentor. She mentions her older sister, who consistently exudes beautiful passion for "life, love, and family." Mrs. K^{ix}, a former teacher, supported Maxine in overcoming challenging barriers, viewing such obstacles as moments of learning. Her parents are also mentioned, not only for being "great providers," but also as mentors who remind Maxine that mentorship is a "continuous process."

Although "Mentors" explicitly examines these five people, Maxine also discusses friends throughout many posts, including her final post from July. Entitled "Support Systems," Maxine reaffirms her understanding of family as your first friends and discusses her second sister – an emergent moment of understanding more holistically Maxine's family. However, she also reflects on the end of her internship, looking forward to her senior year in college. Maxine struggles with the skepticism of post-college college friends in this post – what will it mean? Who will be her friends? There is a poignant moment of becoming in this post, with Maxine recognizing that the journey toward following her path, and her friends' journeys as well, may be filled with moments of solitude, times where she may need to be selfish. She reflects that these moments are okay, part of following "respective paths."

^{viii} Pseudonym

^{ix} Pseudonym

Having reflected and partially representing these many blog posts, I see more explicitly these moments of autobiographical reflection, of Maxine's becoming. My narration of this space is woefully inadequate. Yet, I was ontologically engaged with Maxine in this space. This engagement helped me to partially know Maxine, her intra-actions with others, her persistent questioning of space and time, past-present-future. In Maxine's blog there was synchronicity of time; there is currere: moments of regressive and progressive movement (Pinar, 2012). Finally, there is materiality – for the text and writing itself is material and discursive. The platform of Wordpress, and Maxine's selected layout design: a simple black and orange-ish background.

LinkedIn.

Maxine's LinkedIn profile shows her professional headshot. She is wearing a business suit; there is a brown backdrop; and her body is angled, ever so slightly, at least symmetrically speaking. As with each of the human becomings who engage with LinkedIn, the material of this space is almost always professional. What I learn from this space are details of Maxine's various pathways through her collegiate experience, particularly in relation to connecting classroom and professional experiences with her study of journalism. She has an impressive list of involvement activities. During this study, she has been serving as an intern for a community service learning leadership program at her university, as well as serving as teaching assistant for a journalism course on the history, roles, and structures of journalism. In addition, she is a 'community assistant,' at her university, an undergraduate leadership position working in residence life. She has also completed an Alternative Spring Break experience.

Maxine has completed many internships and work experiences conducting various types of journalism work. Her LinkedIn shows the experience of working in New York City over the summer for the British Broadcasting Corporation. In addition, she has worked with Voice of America, and several local news organizations, in roles as diverse as digital media coordinator, production assistant, and public affairs assistance. Further, she is engaged in professional organizations,

serving in her university's Association of Black Journalists, and is connected with professional networking groups through LinkedIn, such as the National Press Photographers Association and the T. Howard Foundation. Finally, Maxine's LinkedIn shows many skill endorsements. Social Media, Photography, Newswriting, AP Style, Communication skills, and multitasking skills; a host of computer based programs (ENPS, Photoshop, Audacity, Final Cut Pro).

Lastly, another moment of digital spaces intra-acting. Near the bottom of Maxine's LinkedIn page is a link to her Vimeo page. If one is not familiar with the architecture of LinkedIn, you would not even recognize that the rather larger box containing Maxine's photo near the bottom of the page is actually a link to an external site, or to a file such as a physical resume or document. I myself almost missed this, but hovering my cursor over the space was excited to discover Maxine had uploaded four videos on her Vimeo account. This has since expanded, and now contains 33 videos. Many of these are projects for her various journalism classes: mock news stories, interviews with individuals. Discovering this small trove of videos provided even further opportunity of being and knowing Maxine: in this case, viewing and seeing real life examples of work she has produced, which made material for me her passion for the study and work of journalism.

Facebook.

Facebook's materiality makes even more complex Maxine's potential identities. Maxine is connected with 1,062 friends and displays 1,082 photos. She has harnessed Facebook's architectural affordances, providing more robust information in her 'About' section than TJ, Abigail, or Miranda. Engaging this section, one learns that Maxine is Female; born in February; Interested in Men; Single; connected with seven family members; and religiously labels herself Catholic, with a note: "Jesus is my life! Love it!" Further, Maxine provides written information in her 'About' section, such as being the middle child, being 6' tall, a disdain for the color pink, and an intense fear of birds. There are also a variety of quotes and song lyrics. One that is particularly important to note is "DON'T STOP TIL YOU GET ENOUGH!-Michael Jackson [sic]." My field notes contain mention that

Maxine's Facebook page reveals a passion for the music of Michael Jackson. Finally, in simply viewing her front page, you see yet a different picture of Maxine as a profile shot. In this photo, she is outdoors, wearing a professional and colorful tank top. In her cover photo, she is with two female friends; they are smiling, and the picture is somewhat pixelated, set against a dark backdrop leading me to believe it was taken in the evening, selfie-style.

Facebook is where Maxine's love of sports and athletics become materially evident in social media space. She follows five sports teams: the New Orleans Saints; the Detroit Tigers; the Detroit Red Wings; Louisiana State University athletics; and the University of Michigan football. Maxine has selected to follow 23 musicians and bands, demonstrating an eclectic taste in music: Michael Buble, TI, Drake, Robin Thicke, Jason Mraz, Maroon 5, Trey Songz, and Michael Jackson to name a few. She 'likes' 22 movies: "The Nightmare Before Christmas," "27 Dresses," "Dear John," "Friends with Benefits," and "The Lion King" are among selections near the top of her list. In terms of books, she lists the Harry Potter series, *The Secret Lives of Bees*, and the Bible. Finally, Maxine has 'liked' 206 organizations. These are wide spectrums of 'likes:' Buffalo Wild Wings Restaurant, The Left Bench (a news and media organization), Women's Basketball, various clubs and organization pages from her university, and even some pages that follow specific athletes, such as Venus Williams, Reggie Bush, or David Villa. Maxine demonstrates more robustly than many other human becomings in this study the profound materiality of Facebook. In this space, many ways of being and knowing Maxine emerge.

Minus the space of LinkedIn, where Maxine lists herself as a member of the Association of Black Journalists, and photos on social media sites that allows one to see Maxine is Black, there is no explicit discussion of race on social media. There is one exception to this on Facebook, buried deep in Maxine's 'like' pages. She is part of a group "I Love Being Black." Constructions and discussions of race in the space of Facebook occur mostly through photographs (Lee, 2012). Thus, understanding racial or ethnic identity constructions in social media spaces such as Facebook

involves much more critical examination. I made a note to ask Maxine about her racial identity in our second interview, to better understand how she constructs personal understanding of race, while also seeking to unpack further constructions of race in social media spaces.

Even Maxine's timeline is an active space of identity construction, demonstration of multiple levels of agency, and recognition of the voluminous intra-actions occurring in social media spaces. During the time of this study, Maxine's timeline has been filled with links to various organizations with which she has become involved: the TedX conference at her university, where Maxine is serving as a coordinator, and also encouraging her friends and others to apply for a speaking spot. There are links to her work with the Community Service Learning office, including information about Alternative Spring Break, and at one point she even posted a link to a site called BrainyQuotes. Her many connections and friends post on her timeline as well: tagging Maxine in photos or sharing music videos. Maxine's entire Facebook is an active, intra-active space of becoming. There are multitudes of material objects, and each time I return to this space, I once again know something slightly new about Maxine. I see many possibilities about who she is becoming in the constantly unfolding space of her multiple social media accounts.

Twitter.

Like Facebook, Twitter is a space where Maxine actively shares information about sports. This observation follows from our first interview, where Maxine stated that Twitter was a space of her connecting with more professional individuals, journalists, and others working in her potential fields of study. Yet even more emerges in this space. In her profile box, Maxine describes herself as a daughter, sister, and friend. Further, she lists a Bible verse, Jer 29:11: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (New International Version).

In Twitter, once again, there is simply troves of material that might be examined. Maxine is highly active in this space. She has over 11,000 Tweets and 300 followers. I find it important to

highlight one particular observation about Maxine's Twitter account. This observation comes following our second interview, where I remained immersed in the platforms of the various human becomings participating in this study. Maxine has spent significant time posting information about protests resulting from decisions in the United States not to indict police officers who killed unarmed civilians.^x What is particularly interesting about these tweets is not simply Maxine's use of the space to cover and post information regarding protests occurring on her campus, but also to provide commentary about journalistic coverage of these events nationally. Specifically, Maxine posted a tweet that discussed how journalists were being given 'warnings' about when specific information would become available in various cases. Maxine was explicit during our first interview that the space of Twitter is one for posting more heavily about news, utilizing the space as a journalist. Yet, it was not until I read these tweets that I came to know, even more fully than her LinkedIn or Vimeo pages, exactly how passionate Maxine is regarding her endeavors in journalism. Although she states her desire to be in sports broadcasting, her experiences in journalism might take her down many possible pathways – there are many ways she may unfold and become as a journalist. I am enamored of her continual becoming.

Preparation for the Second Interview.

In blending notes from the first interview and observations of intra-actions across these various social media spaces, I developed the following questions for Maxine's second interview:

- You stated Snapchat is the most personal social media site. What do you post on there; how do you think those posts impact some of your major identities?
- Blog: Lots of posts about friends; this is an important part of your identity? What about family?
- Blog: You talked a bit about work, work ethic, avoiding mediocrity. What makes this important to you? Your sense of self?

^x The protesting discussed here began in Summer 2014 following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. In this instance, I am discussing protest events that unfolded in November and December 2014 following grand jury decisions not to indict the police officer involved in that case, as well as cases that occurred in Cleveland, Ohio and New York City, New York.

- Confidence in work/internal confidence: you posted about being nervous a lot of times you start something new. What makes you particularly nervous?
- Study Abroad – where did you go?
- Blog: “I don’t know what I want to do with my life.” This is interesting – because I wonder if any of us do. Have you figured it out?
 - LinkedIn: You have a lot of experience at these Intl Organizations for Digital Media. In Interview #1 you stated you wanted to be a sports broadcaster, but I see only one position on there. Talk about that.
- Blog: On your first post you said you are a Skeptic. What does that mean?
- I noticed that you had created 4 videos on Vimeo. What were these about? Do they say anything about you?
- Facebook: You said in Interview #1 that you were spiritual, more about purpose/meaning. On Facebook you self-identify as Catholic – can you talk about this?
- Facebook: Pictures – tell me what these pictures say about you.
- Social Justice and Service – I see that you are part of a group Alternative Breaks; but how else do you think this shows up in your social media accounts?
- I love being black: Liked. Can you talk about your racial identity? Is this important to you?

Alex

Whereas Maxine has many social media spaces, and is actively constructing and emerging across these spaces, Alex has a presence in many spaces (Figure 14), but agentially is more selective regarding the material she posts, shares, or retweets. One aspect of this study that appeared

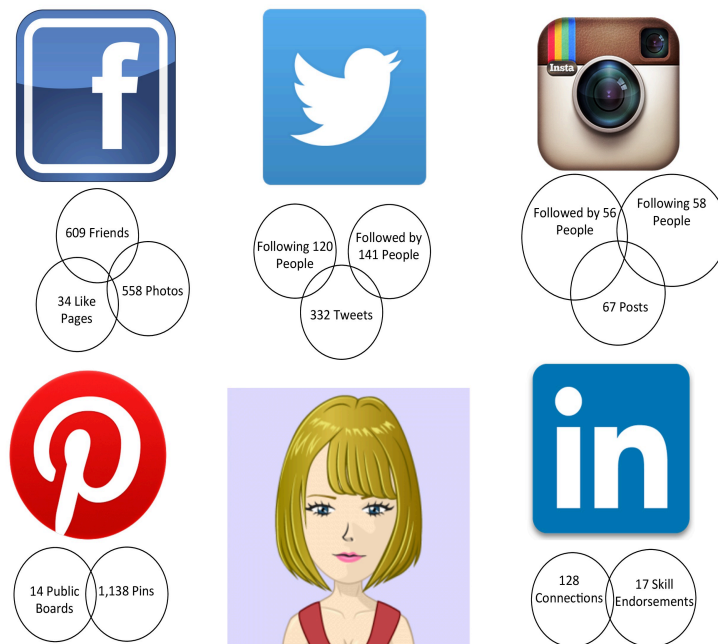


Figure 14: Alex's Material Visualization

important at commencement of thinking through qualifications for participants was high social media engagement. Alex certainly is engaged in these spaces; however, frequency of posting appears less important to me now. In fact, the absence of posting can signal and lead to as much information and insights on identity emergence and becoming as the insights offered through thousands of posts. Alex's spaces are testament to this reality. The one exception is Pinterest, which is where I will begin unraveling my immersive material experience with Alex.

Pinterest.

Alex is one of two human becomings in this study who utilize Pinterest (Selene is the second). Prior to this dissertation research, I had not personally engaged with Pinterest. Thus, Alex and Selene both opened a new digital world; and, important to this study, one that contains multitudes of possibility for engaging with concepts throughout this dissertation such as identity, emergence, agency, and materiality. As a reminder, Pinterest users create self-titled boards on which they pin photos, memes, and other digital representations of 'material' items they find interesting from other users or boards on Pinterest.

One way to view Alex's boards, and their importance to her many emerging identities, is through frequency of posting. While this is a quantitative approach to intra-acting with this space, there is merit to such a method. In chapter seven, I undertook to partially and differentially represent Alex's Pinterest space in just such a manner, creating a wordle cloud based on particular words that appear in Alex's board titles. From most popular to least popular, the titles of Alex's boards are as follows: To Do Before 'I Do' (204 pins); Secrets to Happiness (138 pins); Things I Love (130 pins); Dream Home (112 pins); Recipes (109 pins); Love Makes Everything Grow (74 pins); Workout (69 pins); Holiday (66 pins); Student Affairs (51 pins); It's the Thought that Counts (49 pins); Ideas for my children someday (40 pins); Crockpot Recipes (37 pins); Live Life to the Fullest (37 pins); Cheers (22 pins).

Intra-acting with each of these boards is a completely new and unique ontological and epistemological experience. For me, these boards opened new possibilities of understanding the concepts of identity emergence, choreographies of becoming (Coole & Frost, 2010), and shifting agency – particularly since Alex, Pinterest, and other Pinterest users, many of whom Alex is likely not connecting with, come together to partially represent Alex’s continually unfolding identity in this space.

The boards themselves contain ‘material’ items in the form of pins that appear to speak about identity representation, to me, more aesthetically and creatively. A few, although not exhaustive list, of examples. On her board, “To Do Before ‘I Do,’” Alex has pinned many photos: wedding dresses; bridesmaids dresses; a pin entitled “Fall Wedding Colors 2014” – radiant orchid, royal blue, aluminum, aurora red, misted yellow, sangria, mauve mist, cognac, bright cobalt, cypress. There are photos of beautiful flowers, many of them in fall colors – dark oranges, maroons, yellows. Wedding Rings; cakes; table decorations; hairstyles; wedding invite and save the date ideas; and site locations, such as churches, outdoor weddings, and reception halls. I am not personally a big wedding fan, yet this board is beautiful, engaging, creative, and full of possibilities – the many options of a future self for Alex as a bride.

Several of Alex’s boards contain references to food, desserts, and cocktails. Often people refer to Pinterest as a digital space to share ideas regarding foods and crafts. Engaging with these boards allowed me to intra-act more with Alex’s identities in ways that are not so easily prevalent in other digital social media spaces. On “Yummies,” Alex has shared delicious dessert ideas. Strawberry sweet rolls with vanilla cream cheese glaze; pumpkin silk pies; cookies, candies, brownies, snack mixes. This is her most populated board, with over 200 pins. Similarly, her recipe boards have photos of more elaborate meals. Ham and pineapple kabobs; Spicy Hawaiian chicken burgers; bacon-wrapped chicken dishes; and recipes using seafood, particularly shrimp. There are crock-pot recipes as well. Slow-cooking spinach and artichoke dip; chilis and soups; chicken, beef,

and pork sandwiches; and recipes for desserts. Her “Cheers” board contains many drink options, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. Fruit smoothies; holiday cocktails; sparkling strawberry lemonades. Many of these beverage options are citrusy – bright colors, reminiscent of summer and beaches.

There are boards about homes, gardening, holidays, and children. “Dream Home” has Alex pinning up photos of internal and external home décor. There are different imaginings of home entryways; patios; kitchens; bathrooms; and decks. Alex also has pinned on this board various ideas for home organization: shelving, closet organization, even ideas of different patterns for organizing photo frames on walls. On her board “Love Makes Everything Grow,” Alex has ideas about gardening. This board is filled with photos of different flowers and plants, craft ideas for building your own planters out of old home materials, and homemade solutions for weed infestations. Similarly, Alex’s holiday board contains many pinned ideas about decorating for the holidays. Door wreathes for all holidays – including St. Patrick’s Day and the 4th of July; autumnal holidays, such as Halloween and Thanksgiving; and of course winter holiday decorations – snowmen, mantle and fireplace decorations, and Christmas trees. On her “Ideas for my Children Board” Alex has pictures of bedroom decorations – many including baseball bats. There are also ideas about announcing a pregnancy to the world, art projects for children, beds, toys, and boredom busters for kids. Each of these boards is representative, potentially, of many possible becomings that may emerge in Alex’s future.

Pinterest is also a space of the present. Alex has represented aspects of identity in these ways as well. Her “Workout” board presents ideas for burning calories while walking; losing back fat; toning thighs; and perfecting abs. Additionally, there are suggestions for ‘quick’ workouts, possibly representing how to stay fit in busy, frenetic times. There are also ideas for healthy eating on the workout board. Alex’s “Things I Love” board represents her interest in fashion. There are pins of hair fashion, nail fashion, and clothing fashion. 40 ways to tie a scarf, homemade beauty

remedies, jewelry and makeup ideas are all pinned on this board. In her role as a graduate assistant and emerging professional, Alex's "Student Affairs" board is a unique space. Here she has posted mostly infographics pertaining to vocational issues: developing an ideal resume; networking through social media; dressing for success in the job interview; and asking or answering interview questions effectively. However, this board also contains infographics on issues of concern to many student affairs professionals, such as goal setting, leadership, signs of alcohol abuse in students, time management, and academic success.

Finally, Alex has two boards filled with motivational messages. Social media is replete with photos overlaid by text – famous quotes, inspirational messages, thought-inducing aphorisms. Here I want to focus specifically on the board "Live Life to the Fullest." Imagine in an interview, I were to ask Alex "what would it mean to you to live life to the fullest?" Would this board's pins represent her answer? Going on adventures. Dating country boys. Slow dance in the rain. Visit Crete. Throw a dart on a map and travel to wherever it lands. Have a surprise party thrown for me. Bake in the middle of the night with someone I love. Feel beautiful. Hold a baby panda. Participate in the 3-day walk for the cure. Wear nothing but cowboy boots for an entire day. Take my mom on the vacation of her dreams. Celebrate my 100th birthday. Live happily ever after. Visit the Sistine Chapel. Read the Bible. Fall in love. Change someone's life. Kiss at the top of the ferris wheel. Go on a road trip with friends. Ice skate in Central Park. Move into an apartment with my best friend. Become a florist. Learn to play piano. Kiss in the rain. Have my family at my wedding. Put together a family cookbook. Have a 50th wedding anniversary. Find the person that will make me forget my past. Graduate college. Leave my mark on the world. Pet a panda. Be in two places at once. Live.

Pinterest is unlike other social media spaces. In this space, a different sense of time emerges. Futurity is more ontologically present within Pinterest. Pinar (2012) may call this the progressive moment. Imagining the future. Synchronicity of time emerges so heavily for me as a researcher in these moments. Pinterest is one social media space where a progressive moment –

the possibilities of becoming – becomes materially real. Alex’s many boards are partially representative of this phenomena. For her, these boards might be an imagining, a potentiality. Intra-acting with the spaces, others may become entangled in what will become the unfolding of possibilities of identity. There are no demarcations of time or boundary here, however. How Alex emerges in the future, whether true to the pins and boards or not, does not erase the potential for these progressive (Pinar, 2012) possibilities to still unfold, ontologically. This aspect of Pinterest is powerful, important, and highlights for me the truly powerful aspects of social media for imagination, creativity, aesthetic intra-actions with identity – both present and ontologically becoming.

Facebook.

On Facebook, Alex’s profile picture appears professionally taken. She is seated on a railroad track, late afternoon autumnal sunlight glimmers through the trees and shrubs in the background, which have lost most of their leaves. Alex is wearing what appear to be black leggings or jeans, a maroon and white striped shirt, a jean jacket, and cowboy boots. This is her only solo profile picture. In every other photo that has served in the role of profile picture, Alex is shown with others. Her cover photo has remained the same throughout this study. A fuzzy or hazy meadow and field with tall grasses is overlaid with the quote “If your dreams don’t scare you, they are not big enough.” This same quote appears in various iterations on Alex’s Pinterest board “Secrets to Happiness.”

The ‘About’ section of Facebook contains few details about Alex. One learns Alex currently lives in Illinois, attending graduate school and serving as an Associate Resident Director for Greek Court. Prior to that, Alex lived in Nebraska, where she also attended college. She was born in December, has an interest in men, and identifies as Catholic. Alex has not listed connections to family through Facebook, nor has she provided any additional narrative detail about who she is, a particular affordance of Facebook that has only really been employed thus far by Maxine. However,

Alex does provide one quotation under the 'Favorite Quotes' section: "You can't be who you need to be if you stay where you are." Alex has posted 558 photos and intra-acts with 609 friends.

Alex lists few 'identity consumables.' She has 'liked' 34 pages, consisting mostly of organizations she has worked for or associated with. Many of these pages are for departments at her current university – Housing, Fraternity and Sorority Programs, and the university's page. She also has 'liked' several pages from her former university. Further, there is an emergence on this page. Alex has liked Alpha Omicron Pi. While this may appear related to her work as Director for Greek Court in her current university, it is also a moment where I learn that Alex herself is part of this organization (Alpha Omicron Pi).

Alex's involvement with Alpha Omicron Pi (AOII) becomes more evident in her photographs. Bid day photographs appear in 2009. In many subsequent photographs posted in Alex's Facebook account, there are large groups of women. Sorority squat photos are prevalent as Alex appears to be participating in community service projects, attending formal events, or socializing with friends. There are photos of Alex at a friends wedding, cheering on college athletics with friends, and even posing for a picture flashing the AOII hand symbol in front of Mount Rushmore. Her most recent photos are from her graduate student experience, and show Alex with her graduate student classmates and professional colleagues. Alex is almost always consistently photographed in large groups, though there are occasionally photos where she is photographed with only one other person. Her solo shots are few and far between.

Finally, the space of Alex's Timeline is demonstrative of learning other unfolding aspects of Alex's experience. For example, one learns that Alex completed an internship experience over the summer at a university in Kansas. The material artifacts of this internship come in the form of a picstitch on her timeline, developed to thank her internship supervisors. In the picstitch, Alex is standing at the entryway to the university. This picture is stitched or framed together with a photo of her nametag, the university's logo, and a shot of campus buildings. Facebook friends and

colleagues have posted on Alex's wall throughout this experience. There is an inspirational message in the form of a photo (similar to those on her Pinterest board "Secrets to Happiness") stating "I'm not telling you it is going to be easy; I'm telling you it is going to be worth it." Still other photos that have appeared on her timeline during this immersive portion of the project celebrate the anniversary of her alma mater's chapter of AOII; photos of Alex participating in what appear to be some homecoming festivities on her current campus; and information on travel. A colleague tagged her in a status update as they traveled together to a regional conference. Alex has also visited, during these months of being immersed in her Facebook, the national headquarters of her sorority; attended a football game at a university out-of-state; and also attended a conference in Nashville. In this Timeline space, there are once again demonstrations of multiple levels of agency, as both Alex and other users construct understanding of her emerging possible identities.

LinkedIn.

Alex's LinkedIn is quite simply a well-developed digital resume. She has a different profile picture: this one more of a professional headshot, and is connected with just over 100 other people. However, there are minor differences between Alex's LinkedIn and the other human becomings who participated in this study. One relates to the level of specificity regarding job responsibilities that Alex has decided to include. Rather than simply keeping a chronological list of professional work experiences, Alex has also developed bullet points, detailing her responsibilities in these various roles. This level of detail may appear unimportant; perhaps even arbitrary given the architectural affordances and 'purpose' of LinkedIn. However, even in reading these bullet points there are ontological moments of becoming; these bullet points reveal to me, and others, something about Alex, representing a particular way of knowing what is her constantly unfolding and emergent professional identity. "Supervise" staff, "advise and provide guidance" to Greek chapters, "conduct staff training." Each of these moments, as well as the myriad moments captured and represented in other bullets of responsibility on this site, capture a particular way of being and

knowing Alex. It should be noted that Alex includes four professional positions in this space: her current role working as Resident Director; her role as Interfraternity Council Advisor; the summer internship previously mentioned; and her undergraduate responsibilities as a resident assistant.

The other noticeable difference between Alex's LinkedIn and other human becomings in this study who utilize this space is the sheer number of endorsements Alex has accumulated: Residence Life (17); Student Development (16); Student Affairs (15); Event Planning (12); Greek Life (9); Student Leadership (9); Interviews (7); Organizational Communication (4); Social Media (4); Leadership (4); Training (3); Public Speaking (3); Organization (2); Student Engagement (2); Academic Advising (2); Administration (2); Management (2). Alex lists her education, demonstrating a different way of harnessing the architectural affordances of LinkedIn. Rather than creating a separate section of organizational and leadership experience involvement, Alex opted to simply list her student engagement activities from undergraduate. These included serving as a Chancellor's Ambassador, Student Government Senator for the College of Fine Arts and Humanities, new member educator and social chair for her chapter of AOII, and Panhellenic Council Vice President of Programming. She is a member of the Order of Omega, an honor society for fraternity and sorority members. Finally, she lists two additional honor societies where she retains membership, including Lambda Pi Eta and Golden Torch Society.

Twitter and Instagram.

Alex posts very minimally in the spaces of Instagram and Twitter. In fact, as Alex articulated in our first interview, Twitter is a space she rarely uses. Her last post occurred back in April, so this space is not an active construction, but is retained as part of Alex's distributed social media presence. On Twitter, Alex has 141 followers, follows 120 other users, and has posted a total of 332 tweets. Some of these are really retweets from other handles she follows, such as inspirational quotes or Oprah World. In many of her personal tweets, which seem to heavily cluster around her

transition to graduate school, Alex expresses excitement about her new role as Greek Council advisor or as a Resident Director.

On Instagram, the very first photo posted shows a flower garden, harkening back to the earlier discussion of Alex's Pinterest board "Love Makes Everything Grow." There are photos appearing to document her move from Nebraska to Illinois, including a photo of the highway sign "Welcome to Illinois: The Land of Lincoln." In one photo, Alex has photographed a stack of books from her first semester of graduate school. Then there is this: a photo of three paintings on a wall. One has a heart, with a verse from Song of Solomon 8:7 ("Many waters cannot quench love neither can floods drown it"); a second, with an anchor and Hebrews 6:19 ("We have this hope as an anchor for our soul"); and a third, with a cross, Isaiah 7:9 ("If you do not stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all"). The caption on this photo is "One of my favorite Christmas gifts." I make this observation because Alex does not discuss faith or religion in her other social media accounts. What might this photo say about Alex's faith, religion, or spirituality? Conceivably, a lot. Maybe nothing.

However, these are precisely the moments that occurred throughout the digital immersion portions of this study that I see as ruptures, fractals, and diffractive. Something new emerges in this material moment of viewing this photograph. New questions emerge and new possibilities arise. There are more ways of being with and knowing Alex (and the other human becomings in this study) than can ever be partially represented, even across distributed social media spaces. Alex only has 55 photographs posted on Instagram, but these 55 photos are different ways that Alex makes her becoming known to the world.

Preparation for the Second Interview.

These are the questions that emerged for Alex in preparation for the second interview:

- I just want to walk through Pinterest – can you just talk through all of this with me? I'm fascinated by how this all works, and also what these Boards say about your identity/identities.
- Who follows you in these spaces? Are there differences in the communities?

- Tell me about Greek Life – what made this such an important experience for you?
- Lots of stories/posts about ‘Best Friends’ on your Facebook – Can you talk about this?
- Facebook Photos – There are lots of group shots – in looking at these photos – what does they say about you? What do you think it says about you to other people?
- In Interview #1, you stated that the most important identities to you right now are being a student and a woman. I don’t know that I saw a lot of posting about being a student in your social media. Could you talk about how you think you portray or make meaning of this identity in your social media accounts?
- What about the relationship/the boyfriend? It is not social media public – is this because, as you stated, you are a very private person?

Selene

Selene introduces to this study two new social media platforms: Tumblr and YouTube (Figure 15). There are unique architectural affordances in these spaces, allowing for different forms of material knowing. Voice and sound become important through YouTube, offering new ways of thinking about agency, being and knowing someone through musical tastes, shared videos, potentially even lyrics. Selene also is the second human becoming to participate in this study utilizing Pinterest. Further, she retains a presence on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thus, there are many material ways of being with and knowing Selene.

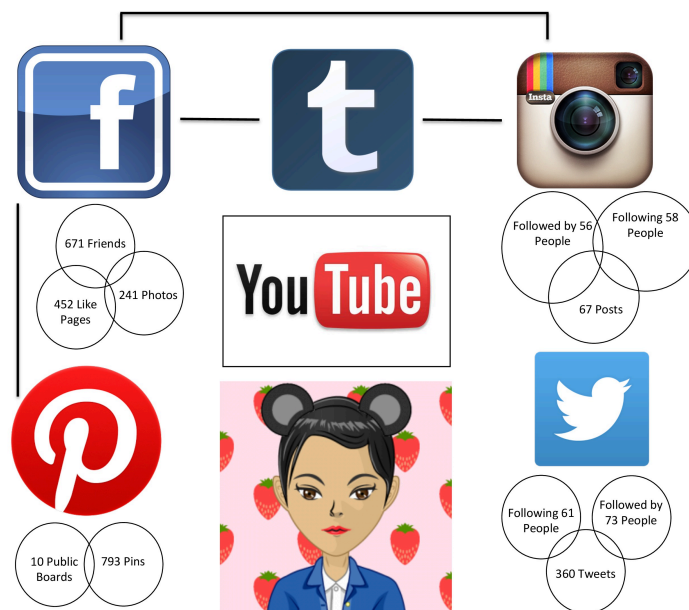


Figure 15: Selene's Material Visualization

Tumblr.

Tumblr is a blogging platform. However, unlike Wordpress, which is largely dependent on text-heavy representations through writing, Tumblr functions more like a giant digital bulletin board. Users post images, GIFs, memes, and other visual representations that become mangled together in a giant and ever-unfolding stream of partial being and partial representation. In this space, Selene labels herself not by name, but as Moongoddess: On a journey to the moon. There is a small photo of her – wearing some round sunglasses, a bright light behind her, making her appear almost as a silhouette. This photo has an applied filter: there is a purple hue to the photo, making it appear almost vintage. The cover photo space shows a silhouetted person standing against the backdrop of a giant moon. Tumblr provides multiple widgets that can be employed by users. Selene has opted to include an “Ask me anything” widget, where visitors to her site can submit a question to her, and she will respond. Further, she includes links to her Instagram and Facebook pages in this profile space, highlighting the intra-active nature of digital spaces – however, not all spaces. Remember that Selene is actively present on other social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube.

Selene is so active on Tumblr that I really cannot do justice to the constant unfolding and emergence of the space. The space is beyond static. There is movement. Color. Vibrancy. I find the space to be aesthetically beautiful in the many ways shape shifts, new ways of seeing, being, and knowing always being revealed. Let me begin with a quote-a-graph Selene posted, which caught my eye from the first intra-action I had with this space. It stated, simply, “In the world through which I travel I am endlessly creating myself.” Or another quote-a-graph, speaking of the moon:

The moon is a loyal companion. It never leaves. It’s always there, watching, steadfast, knowing us in our light and dark moments, changing forever just as we do. Everyday it’s a different version of itself. Sometimes weak and wan, sometimes strong and full of light. The moon understands what it means to be human. Uncertain. Alone. Cratered by imperfections.

These quotes beautifully encapsulate the concept of becoming. Every day different, each moment creating self. There is more I see here through connections to the cosmos. Selene’s Tumblr

wrestles with this idea of the higher power she discussed during her first interview. What are the intra-actions and relationships that accompany us on our journey, Selene appears to ask. Relationships are not solely with other organic beings – but also what might be considered inorganic. For Selene, this relationship is to the moon, and while I have selected only one representative quote, there are throughout her Tumblr photos and quotes pertaining to relationships with a higher power.

As I foreshadowed at the outset of this chapter, Selene's Tumblr also reveals messages of empowerment regarding gender and racial identity. In my field notes, I wrote down the quote from another quote-a-graph posted in Selene's Tumblr: "Shout out to all the girls who used to think they weren't good enough but now know better." For me, moments such as these connect with insights gleaned from the first interview with Selene, where she discussed her desire in social media to promote positivity, but secretly also harbors self doubt. Are these messages through Tumblr moments of personal empowerment? Are they meant to empower others? Does the agency of the space allow for multiple interpretations of these various quote-a-graphs? Do these interpretations shift over time? I personally found many of these philosophical questions that are being wrestled with throughout this dissertation – issues of representation, agency, discourse, identity – to be more pronounced and present in my intra-actions with Selene's Tumblr.

Throughout the space Selene has posted photos of Black women. Should I read these photos through Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Strayhorn, 2013)? I made a note to ask a question about these many representations of Black women throughout Selene's Tumblr account. These photographs and infographics create many possible discourses around Black women. For example, in one infographic, there are details about the growth of Black businesses, up 258% since 1997. In another, a discourse of celebration: "Black women appreciation is everyday every week: #MelaninMonday #TransformationTuesday #RedLipWednesday #ThighThursday #FullFigureFriday." There are throughout hundreds of photos. Black women of all sizes, all shapes,

all shades. Hair is prominent throughout Selene's Tumblr: short hair, long hair, natural hair, dreads, weave, highlights, curly hair, and many forms of styling hair. These representations of Black women on Tumblr might be viewed in many possible ways – as discourse, as agency, empowerment, celebration, perhaps even aesthetically, celebration of beauty. These are question I note to ask Selene during the second interview.

I point to aesthetics because one other prominent feature of Selene's posts on Tumblr relate to art. There are photographs of famous pieces of art, such as a GIF of Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night." In this GIF, the photograph comes to life – the stars moving and spinning. Selene posts photos of abstract art, art with lots of color. Artistic renderings of different fashions. There are photographs of people as 'art.' Renderings of nature. And, I cannot help but feel that photographs of the cosmos, the moon, and the firmament that appear throughout the blog also are artistic. As a researcher, I have struggled with whether my rendering of the blog as aesthetic space comes from my understanding of Selene's passion for art and design, or whether this is a visceral response to the unfolding and beautiful mangle of the Tumblr account. Despite this personal tension I feel with wanting to rectify this anxiety over representation of the space, my intra-acting with the space has almost always been one that has felt like visiting a virtual art museum. Certainly there is much to learn from this space – how I come to be with and know Selene is powerful, impactful, and important to this study. How she represents herself in this space, the daily "creation" of self is a note to discuss further in chapter nine. In this chapter, however, the sheer materiality of this space, as well as its constant unfolding, is important to examining exactly how the affordances of particular platforms allow new ways of being and knowing, new insights into agency, and raise questions about discourse through visual representation.

Pinterest.

Although Selene's Pinterest is composed of 10 boards, the bulk of this space may be broken down into explorations of crafts and fashion. On boards such as "Products I love" and

“Organization” there are pins of commodities – luggage, plug-in speakers, tents, handbags – as well as various organizing systems – for jewelry, crafting supplies, shoes, sunglasses, even bulletin boards. “Will be done” and “I might do this” are filled with various crafting projects, particularly in relation to fashion: decorating shoes, accenting clothes utilizing every day household products, developing hair flair, and even some projects relating to home decoration. On “Nails, Makeup, and Bodycare,” Selene pins many options for do-it-yourself facial scrubs, acne treatments, and general body maintenance.

Two boards, “Favorite places and spaces” and “Food” are important, but do not compose a bulk of the material in this space. Still, these spaces are revelatory for understanding Selene’s construction of self. There are many pins of spaces with water on Selene’s “favorite places and spaces board.” Islands surrounded by crystal clear ocean water, waterfalls in Australia and New York, rivers, bathtubs, waterparks, caverns, and lakes. Further, this space contains pins of many types of bedroom arrangements – tents in trees, large beds, bunk beds, futons, overstuffed couches, beds tucked away in secret spaces, beds overlooking bodies of water. I find these pinned artifacts intriguing. There is a particular way of imagining what brings comfort, solace, and respite to Selene. There is for me an intriguing relationship to water, which patterns some of Selene’s discussion of attempting to understand the world spiritually through a higher power. In many ways, natural forces such as water may be another higher power Selene embraces in this relationship. Finally, Selene’s food board contains cookies, cakes, dips, sandwiches, and ‘stuffed’ foods, such as peppers, chicken, and hamburgers. There is an intra-action between Selene and Alex’s space here as well. Like Alex, Selene has pinned a recipe for ham and pineapple kabobs. These two human becomings are not physically intra-acting in the space of Pinterest, and yet in moments such as this they are connected, in relation, through a shared pin from another board.

Facebook and Instagram.

241 photos, 671 friends, 452 like pages. There are many material objects on Selene's Facebook. There are also many intra-actions. Selene has linked her Facebook to both Instagram and Pinterest. The agency of the spaces are connected, and like her decision to connect Tumblr to Facebook and Instagram, the intra-actions across space should be accounted for in thinking through the material primarily since the boundaries of these spaces are not as clearly defined as I write about them here, nor are they meant to be. On Facebook, we learn that Selene has worked at MetroPCS, Family Dollar, and Marshalls; she is connected to 13 family members through Facebook. As a reminder to the reader, Selene discussed during her first interview her family's use of Facebook for retaining connection with one another. Further, Facebook lists her hometown as Jamaica, so I made a note to ask about this interesting emergence from the space. Her only robust biographical information on Facebook is her birthday (September) and her interest in men.

In her photos on Facebook, Selene is often, though not always, photographed with other individuals. Her first photo dates back to 2010. In one particularly interesting set of photos, Selene is photographed with her friends as part of a 'tacky prom' photo shoot. The ladies are wearing bright colors, large glasses, headbands, and oversized hair clips. In many ways, these photographs are similar to a 1980s photo shoot. In others, Selene is shown with friends – at sporting events, eating out, at a masquerade ball. There are photos with her family, including some that appear to be extended family. Finally, some of Selene's photos are just of her: in some cases these are selfie style photos, in other cases someone else takes the photo.

Since Selene has opted to connect her Facebook and Instagram spaces, I will place here a short discussion of the photos shared through Instagram. Many photos in this space show Selene alone. Many of these photos are selfie-style. There are photos of Selene at a fashion photo shoot; others show her working out, standing on the beach, or simply showing off different styles of hair. There are many photographs of her with her twin brother. Various fashions are showcased in the

space of Instagram as well. Long dresses, jeans and t-shirts, beachwear. In some cases, Selene has opted to develop pic stitch photos of her in various poses. These photos have a different character than the photos of Facebook, appearing more lively and reminiscent of day-to-day living.

On her 'like' pages are a mix of retail stores, music, books, TV shows, and movies. Musically, Selene has 'liked' Mary J. Blige, Maxwell, Jennifer Hudson, Jill Scott, Rihanna, and Trey Songz, to name a few. She likes Disney movies and the film "Love and Basketball." Among many other intra-actions with spaces on Facebook, Selene has selected to 'like' pages such as "relationship quotes," pages for retailers such as JCPenney and AMC Theatres, and YouTube.

YouTube.

Selene is the only human becoming in this study that utilizes the space of YouTube. While this is not a space where Selene posts her own videos, scrolling through the space provides various insights and new possibilities for ways of being with and knowing Selene. On YouTube she has liked several videos: videos with motivational messages; dance choreography routines; videos on how to do hair in different styles; workout and stretching videos; and music videos. The question that emerges in this space, for me as a researcher, is what these videos mean to Selene. What might these videos say about her emerging identity over time? Do the lyrics to songs hold particularly agency for Selene's vision of becoming, understanding of self, or vision of the world?

Preparation for the Second Interview.

The questions that emerged for Selene's second interview were:

- Start with Tumblr: Tell me about Moon Goddess.
- I noticed there are many quotes on your Tumblr about relationships, romantic relationships. What makes these quotes particularly relevant?
- Many photos of Black Women; Many quotes about Black Women Empowerment – talk about the importance of these photos, these quotes to who you are.
- Talk about Pinterest.
- Are you from Jamaica?
- Full name on Facebook?
- Instagram – Almost all Selfies? What are you conveying about yourself?

- Interested in YouTube – Lets walk through some of this – what does this say about you? Is there some reason these videos get posted that says something about your identity? Messages of the songs?

Alyse

Blog.

I must begin with Alyse's blog. For me, this is one of the most powerful spaces with which I intra-acted during this research project. I began chapter seven discussing the word cloud widget Alyse utilizes, tagging various posts. This cloud shifts shape with each new blog post, showing a constant movement and emergence of what Alyse grapples with and finds important to discuss in this space. She has included other widgets in this space: for example, her blog is connected to Instagram (Figure 16), and she also has categorized her posts: Poetry (8); Thoughts on College (8); Thoughts on Community (1); Thoughts on Life (21); Thoughts on Love (4); Thoughts on Spirituality (6). While there are many themes that emerge in this space, two that are particularly powerful are Alyse's determination to see and work out being a writer and discussions of faith and spirituality.

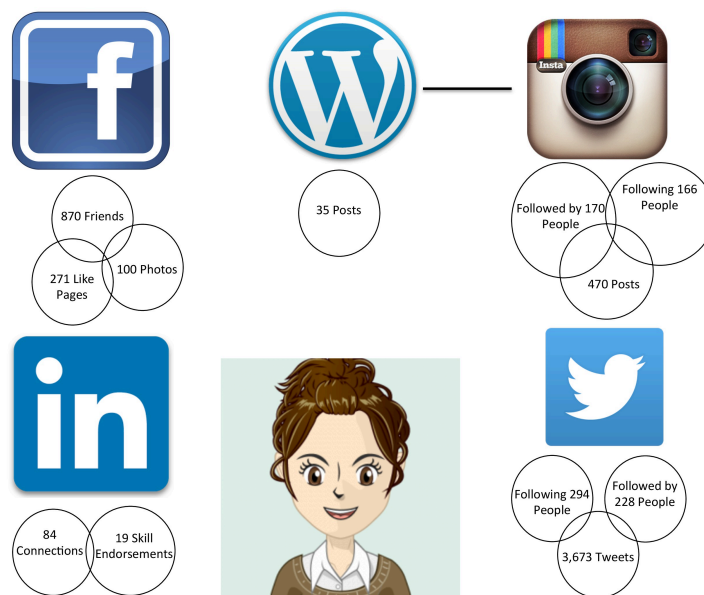


Figure 16: Alyse's Material Visualization

Alyse's thoughts on writing are prevalent throughout her blogging, and resonate with me as one attempting to work out my own vision of what it means to be a writer. In one post, Alyse states that, like Aristotle, she sees herself as a writer because "it is what I repeatedly do." She discusses the tensions of perfectionism, and how she sees blogging as one way of overcoming this perfectionism. Alyse states the need for writers to give up their love of the backspace key; and how through blogging you "give your writing a chance." In this regard, Alyse also discussed in one blog post the ways that perfectionism leads to chronic procrastination. There was, for me, an intense moment of self-reflection in reading and intra-acting with this post. Alyse unfolds before me in the unique complexity of her many identities. Why do these simple words speak to me? Perhaps because of the unique connection we share in this regard. I see partial aspects of myself in the word perfectionism – and this connects Alyse and I through the digital realm. There is a moment of collective humanity in this space and moment. There is a powerful moment I may not have caught if we had not entangled in this digital space about a nuanced aspect of self, not essentialized necessarily, but collective.

Although Alyse stated in her first interview her hesitancy about sharing and posting information in social media regarding political issues, her blog appears to be a space where such discussions occur, not frequently, but occasionally. For example, during the summer of 2014, when the United States was facing a particularly contentious debate surrounding an influx of children crossing the southern border from several central American countries, Alyse posted a blog about the immigration issue. I would categorize this post as leaning toward a humanitarian position. In still another blog post, Alyse discusses the difficulties she faces with her church's position on homosexuality – and whether this position precludes her from continuing to see this as a spiritual home for herself.

This particular post regarding her church's position on homosexuality is coupled with a post about Alyse leading a prayer service for her friends at college. In this post, one learns that two

parents who are pastors raised Alyse, speaking to the legacy she feels toward faith and spirituality. Yet, there are other ways that Alyse explores issues of spirituality through her blog that I consider to be as powerful as the explicit discussions. For example, Alyse posted a photograph of the sun shining through the trees in one of her writings, with a caption “the light never leaves us.” In another post she talks about how mistakes and challenges we face help us “fall upward,” taking us to greater places. In still another she discusses her late grandmother’s battle with cancer, the power of retaining the memory of her grandmother by participating in various causes devoted to the eradication of the disease such as Relay for Life, and recognition that at times it is okay to cry.

Thus, for me, Alyse’s blog represents this vulnerable space of becoming. Here she opens up about many important topics – sharing her poetry, writing prose about her life challenges, seeking to overcome the impossible on a regular basis. There is documentation in this space about her life as a college student – including being in a sorority, seeking to overcome the challenges of feeling like you are only as good as your to-do list makes you out to be, and most recently narrative of her trip abroad to Japan, which occurred during the time of this study.

LinkedIn.

Within the space of LinkedIn, Alyse provides a written narrative of her current and future work experiences. She is studying English and Civic Engagement at her college in Iowa, and states she is also a member of the mock trial team and wind ensemble. Further, she states her interests in the areas of social justice and law, literature and publishing. Her current job, as marketing coordinator for her college’s career engagement center, is focused on social media outreach and program marketing. She has previously held positions as an Intern in a law firm and at a local public library. Like Alex, Alyse has provided some bullet points about her roles and responsibilities under each of her work positions, though these are not nearly as lengthy as Alex’s descriptions.

Viewing Alyse’s page also reveals that she speaks Spanish and has accumulated several endorsements of skills: Public Speaking (11); Social Media (7); PowerPoint (6); Editing (6);

Research (5); Marketing (5); Social Networking (4); Facebook (4); Microsoft Office (3); Teamwork (3). Alyse has a standard headshot photo that appears to have been taken on a cell phone. She also is connected with 81 other people.

Facebook.

Alyse's Facebook page shows a cover photo of her mock trial team holding a trophy, having recently placed first in a competition. Her profile photo has shifted five times over the course of this study – from a selfie-style photo taken in her car at the start of the immersive portions of this research through several iterations of photos she captured with other friends in a variety of settings. Her photo at the moment of this writing is her giving a friend a kiss on the cheek. On Facebook Alyse has 870 friends, 100 photos.

In the 'About' portion of Facebook, Alyse provides information regarding her full date of birth (including the year). She lists her educational institutions, as well as shows connections to seven family members. Alyse has listed English and Spanish as languages, labels her religious views as Christian – United Methodist, and has also stated her political views as Democrat. Further, Alyse has utilized the narrative portion of the profile to fill in some favorite quotes. She has some lyrics to the song "525,600 minutes" from the musical "Rent." Some other quotes include Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear," and a quote from Marianne Williamson:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure... We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

Alyse's timeline is filled mostly with status updates. In some cases, over the course of this immersion, these status updates have come from different parts of the United States and the world. As previously mentioned, Alyse is a member of a mock trial team. There are several posts about competitions that have occurred across the country, including several at universities in Iowa, and one at a university in Boston. In many of these posts, Alyse has provided an update about

performing well, and usually includes a photo – with team members, coaches, or mentors. There are several posts with updates from her short trip to Japan over the course of the semester. Some of these updates included a photo; another included a general update regarding sites that were visited in and around Tokyo. Third, Alyse often posts updates about her academic endeavors, especially pertaining to her studies in pre-law. Her timeline contains several posts about successfully overcoming constitutional law, and working through a course in contract law. Perhaps most importantly, Alyse actively uses her Timeline to spread messages of hope. Some of these updates come in the form of inspirational messages she has written; still others through activities she has participated in or news stories she shares, although these latter two demonstrations of spreading hope are not as prevalent in the space. The idea of spreading hope through social media was an agency Alyse discussed during our first interview.

Alyse also ‘likes’ 271 organizations, pages, and other identity consumables. A small overview of some of these ‘likes’ include movies: *Rent*, *Legally Blonde*, *Frozen*, and *Chocolat*; television shows: *Bones*, *The Biggest Loser*, *America’s Got Talent*, and *House*; music: *Amelia* and *Melina*, *Beyonce*, *Indigo Dream Band*, and *Imagine Dragons*; her books page include links to authors, including *Harriet Beecher Stowe* and *Emily Bronte*, as well as books such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Alyse also has opted to include a ‘like’ page for certain people, including historical figures such as *Joan of Arc*, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, and *Martin Luther King, Jr.* Finally, in terms of other product pages liked by Alyse, there are alternative medicine pages, including several to products for essential oils and antidotes; religious organizations, such as “The Thoughtful Christian” or “United Methodist Women;” and several organizations related to news and her interests in literature and law, including *NPR*, *The Huffington Post*, a community called “Dear English Major,” and *The American Mock Trial Association*.

Twitter.

On Twitter, Alyse's profile photo is a more playful headshot – her hair is covering her right eye, she wears a big grinning smile, and her head is tilted slightly to the left. The cover photo appears to be her college, although it may be the town where she lives. Prominent in the photo is a giant tree, with what appear to be blooming flowers. This cover photo also appears to have been filtered – meaning that the photo does not necessarily appear to be in real-color, but rather looks almost matted. On Twitter, Alyse follows 294 people and has 228 followers. She has just over 3600 Tweets at time of this chapter writing. A majority of these tweets can be summarized as pertaining to school – particularly what appear recently to be inside jokes regarding constitutional law class or the pre-law program in general. Other Tweets contain tidbits of college life struggles and opportunities – insights on procrastinating, late nights, or various student activities. There are many Tweets that include a picture, often of an animal: a dog taking a nap, a baby llama, a baby kitten, and even a photo that shows Donald Duck at Walt Disney World following a mama and her baby ducklings.

There are a fair number of retweets as well. Some of these retweets appear to be from teammates on the mock trial team with which Alyse participates, and as previously discussed in this section discuss traveling to various competitions throughout the semester. However, there are also retweets that address certain current events. One retweet asks how many more lives must be lost and utilizes the #blacklivesmatter. In another, the issue of solving systemic racism is discussed. The retweet (which actually is four separate tweets/retweets) reads quite simply:

[TWEET 1]

Things folks say will stop racism

- 1) money
- 2) educating black people
- 3) interracial marriage
- 4) mixed race children
- 5) not sagging pants

[TWEET 2]

- 6) not wearing hoodies

- 7) speaking properly
- 8) not saying 'nigga'
- 9) not talking about racism
- 10) not calling racists racist

[TWEET 3]

- 11) a black president
- 12) black tv personalities
- 13) having black politicians
- 14) owning a sports team
- 15) knowing a black guy

[TWEET 4]

- Things that actually stop racism.
- 1) nothing on that list.

These retweets fall in line with Alyse's discussion from the first interview regarding her interest in social justice, civic engagement, and current events. Tweets such as this, posted as retweets, might be read in several ways. These tweets were not generated by Alyse, but her retweeting potentially signals her agreement with the tweet; retweeting becomes a form of communicating interest in a topic of conversation. Still other Tweets on Alyse's page contain random musings – about her post-graduate plans (one tweet in particular discussing her desire to go abroad to England or Scotland); her willingness to go out of her way in avoiding people on introverted days; or love for her mother.

Instagram.

Alyse's photo activity is much more prominent on both Twitter and Instagram than in the space of Facebook. On Twitter, Alyse has posted over 200 photos, and on Instagram this number increases to 470 photos. These photos on Instagram show many aspects of Alyse's daily-lived experience. There are many photos of Alyse in professional dress, posing with sorority sisters or mock trial team members. Some photos show various food and beverage items – coffee drinks, desserts, or full dinners. There are nature and 'location' shots: her college campus at sunset, a stream and wooded area near her college, photos of Navy Pier in Chicago during a 4th of July outing, and a field covered in snow is just a small sampling. There are also photos of running shoes, fingernails, animals, screen shots of text message conversations or the weather conditions. The

earliest of these over 400 photos dates back to high school, where Alyse posted a photo of a certificate for a 4.0 grade point average, and several photos with friends from senior luncheon or graduation parties.

Preparation for the Second Interview.

- Blog: Can you tell me about the theme you chose?
- Tell me about this difference – on Linked In you mention your interest in Law. This was not necessarily something I remember talking about.
- I've noticed that your Instagram is connected to your Facebook and your Wordpress. What prompted this decision?
- I want to talk about the photos: tell me about your photos; what do they say about you?
 - I want to ask about a specific photo: There is an intra-action between spaces regarding spirituality. You write this blog post about the pain of your spiritual community sometimes; then there is this photo on FB of someone speaking at convention and your caption says: "Amidst the anger, frustration, and sometimes hurtful words that exist at Annual Conference...." Talk about this.

Conclusion

I could have begun this chapter with Alyse. Yet, I ended with Alyse because it was from her blog that the idea of multiple materiality in digital spaces first emerged. In my extensive field notes from each of the human becomings in this study I wrote this about Alyse's blog:

The digital spaces are filled with moments of emergence – these brief, fleeting moments where my intra-action with these participants becomes momentarily material – by which I mean I witness becoming. The materiality of the intra-actions occurs in multiples over the course of this research project. I will refer to this as multiple-materiality. Allow me to explain: Barad (2008a), Coole and Frost (2010), other writers engaged with the work of new materialisms are engaged in a philosophical and theoretical project seeking to explain how, by measuring, or engaging with discourse, or with the world, a material phenomena occurs. For these writers, the phenomena is fleeting – it emerges in that moment of measurement, of intra-action. The multiple-materiality of digital spaces, to me, works similarly; but the space of the digital becomes multiply-material precisely as one revisits. The site(s) of these intra-actions may be viewed as material: although these sites exist in digital space, we can view them as real material spaces. Yet, they become newly emergent each time someone intra-acts with them. When I engage with the profiles, pages, and digital artifacts of my participants, that space, those artifacts, becomes newly-material. Digital spaces have multiple-materiality.

This has been, in many ways, the point of this chapter. To document the multiple material of digital spaces – the ways that intra-actions are so important to understanding digital spaces as material; the artifacts of these spaces as material; and the ways that these multiple material realities

consistently emerge as a phenomena. No two intra-actions with the spaces are ever the same. Artifacts serve as discourse; artifacts have agency; and the spaces themselves are agentic, not only through digital architectural affordances, but in the ways the spaces provide nuanced ways of seeing and re-seeing, being and re-being, presenting and re-presenting, knowing and re-knowing, all organic and inorganic entities that intra-act with the spaces. In the next chapter, I will conclude the research process, highlighting the second interviews with each of the human becomings from the study, while also engaging further in the “entanglement of researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis” (Mazzei, 2013, p. 734). These possibilities might be viewed as entangled genealogies (Barad, 2008a), emergent phenomena, or choreographies of becoming (Coole & Frost, 2010).

CHAPTER 9

MANGLED-THEORY-ANALYSIS-ENTANGLED-BECOMINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to open discussion, create possibilities, and “diffract. . . thought” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 5). This chapter is documentation of dialogue that occurred during the second interview with each of the human becomings participating in this study. Documenting these dialogues is important to the initial goals of this dissertation research: attempting to capture the full process, accounting for the totality of the process, and adhering to this research as an emergent phenomena, all discussed in chapter five. Yet, what emerged as I began writing this chapter was more than simple documentation of the second interviews. Rather, I began having moments where different theoretical perspectives would arise. Lisa Mazzei’s (2013) concept of the “entanglement of researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis” (p. 734) became ever more concretized as I read through interview transcripts, re-watched the videos alongside the transcriptions, and began writing through these second interviews. Harry Wolcott’s (2009) notion that “writing is thinking” (p. 18) kept re-emerging in my head. I could feel the synapses in my brain firing as I would type words, think through theory, watch the connections and intra-actions unfolding in my mind and on my computer screen.

Like Barad’s (2008a) notion of entangled genealogies, I had a sense that all the theoretical perspectives and philosophical quandaries overtly and covertly discussed in this dissertation overlapped and entangled with one another. I began imagining that, perhaps, the dat(a)nalysis in this dissertation could have emerged quite differently. Perhaps I might have followed the lead of Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2012): selected some theoretical perspectives and ‘plugged in’ my ‘data,’ reading moments through various theoretical lenses. What I have attempted in this chapter is similar, with a slight bend. Rather than pre-selecting the theoretical perspective or philosophical issue to engage, I allowed the theoretical perspective and philosophical

perspectives to pick us – me as researcher and the human becomings’ interview that I am working with. The final interviews, unpacked and re-presented in this chapter, exemplify a differential form of becoming. There is a mangling of theory-analysis-entanglement as the human becoming participants continue to emerge for you the reader, and as the theoretical and philosophical issues discussed or highlighted became evident to me as researcher.

This approach seems appropriate and necessary to me as a complexivist researcher. This is bricolage – utilizing the theoretical and philosophical tools at my disposal to interrogate, question, challenge, and open possibilities (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). It is complexivist – as it engages multiple epistemologies. Moreover, this chapter is ontological – its emergence was and is about being in time-space moments that I believe perfectly demonstrated for me the intra-active nature of this process. There was congealing materialization as I typed; at times, it felt like Nancy Tuana’s (2008) notion of viscous porosity, which she describes as neither solid nor fluid, with unclear borders. There was questioning and unfolding as theory and philosophy became intelligible to me in new ways, or as the human becomings from the study emerged, partially, in imperfect representations on the page.

Importantly, there was/is a personal resistance to the gravitational pull inherent in research processes. The desire to reduce the complexity of this process – to determine the ‘outcomes’ or the ‘thematic findings,’ has felt all too real to me, especially as I approached this final chapter of interview analysis. In this regard, I am reminded of Taguchi’s (2013) discussion of doing the work of post-qualitative research, discussed in chapter five. I have pondered: is there is too much detail, accounting for every word? Conversely, I have struggled with the limitations imposed by the institutional review board process, particularly the limitations of language in capturing the material (so important in chapter eight), which in some ways bound me to partial representations I had not initially imagined. Did these limitations, this imposed cut, reduce complexity? There are no simple answers to these complex feelings or thoughts – except to stay committed to keeping open

possibilities, rather than “foreclos[ing] thought” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 5). This chapter is really my attempt at both re-presenting the second interview and the many dialogues that emerged in the process of working through the process.

Virtual Intra-Actions 2.0

Each of the second interviews took place via video chat, utilizing technology provided by Zoom, a web-based platform. The capabilities of Zoom allowed me to video record the conversations as they occurred, providing me with an opportunity to re-watch and transcribe the interviews after their completion. In addition, Zoom has screen-sharing capabilities – meaning I could share my screen with participants, or they could share their screen with me, while we were talking. This feature of the platform became important as I requested several times for participants to walk and talk me through specific digital platform spaces (such as Pinterest or blogs), highlighting important aspects, artifacts, or moments. Each of these second interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Following the interviews, the video recordings were downloaded from my personal account online and stored on an external hard drive, as indicated in chapter five. I transcribed each of the interviews, watching, listening, and noting moments of particular relevance, while also taking notes regarding theoretical or philosophical issues that emerged from re-engaging with the interviews.

Is Self-Presentation Self-Authorship? [TJ]

In the second interview, TJ and I discussed a range of topics – relationships, emotions, future career and personal aspirations, and the many aspects of his becoming that do not present or construct themselves across distributed social media spaces. TJ readily admitted that since the start of the digital immersion portions of this study he has been more conscious of his posting in social media spaces. He also articulated his understanding of the study as one seeking to build a connection between how important social media is to people’s lives; whether there is authenticity to the construction of self in social media spaces. The issue of ‘authentic self’ is one I actually seek

to problematize in this study, although in a subversive way. Questions of authenticity in digital spaces have been discussed by many theorists and philosophers of the digital: Sherry Turkle (1995; 2011), danah boyd (2011; 2014a), and several authors who contributed to edited collections such as Zizi Papacharissi's (2011) *A Networked Self* or Anna Poletti and Julie Rak's (2014) *Identity Technologies*. Authenticity has also been critical to the discourse of student development theory, most prominently in theories of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1998; 2001; 2009).

In these discussions, a working assumption is that an individual possesses a 'real identity' – thus, self-actualized individuals have reached a developmental apex where their internal sense of self matches with an external presenting self, regardless of people's reactions or influence. Or, in the case of digital identity, that there is congruence between someone's individual physical and internal sense of self, and the self constructed online. Philosophically and theoretically I seek to subvert the notion that authenticity is either developmentally static, or wholly contingent on an actual human subject. Being is authentic – this is the ontological. In distributed social media spaces, being is not totally controlled by a human subject, but rather by the many constraining and releasing agencies of social media spaces, intra-actions across those spaces, and multiple agentic forces of other human and non-human agencies that coalesce in material moments of becoming. These material or multiple material moments of becoming are ways of knowing. Epistemologically these phenomenal moments are complexivist precisely as they emerge, re-emerge, and become part of the constant and unending unfolding of the world. TJ may have been thinking about his posting – but this does not make those posts inauthentic. It makes such posting partial. What becomes evident in TJ's second interview as well is that the constraining and releasing agencies of social media spaces act as a force on the authenticity of presenting self – and this is one of the many issues I believe so necessary to think through regarding identity issues in the digital age.

For example, in the second interview TJ once again discussed his “use [of] every platform with a different purpose.” TJ referred to the ‘faceyness’ of Facebook in his first interview, and in the second interview he elaborated:

What I’m like expecting to do is put on Facebook that I’m an intern at an embassy, like when it becomes official, just to show that I’m in the process or I’m doing something with my life. I’m trying to show off that I’m meaningful, that I’m using all my skills in every way I can, to my friends from high school.

On Facebook, TJs photos are meant to convey that he is “utilizing my time wisely. I try to build myself as someone who is productive. I don’t want to be seen as someone who is boring, or just post selfies all the time.” His photos and posts on Facebook “have purpose” and are not “sad.”

Twitter operates very differently for TJ. Since Twitter is “so convenient to use, and in my eyes it is a little more private,” TJ posts the “constant thoughts going through my head through the day.” I observed several times over the course of the study what I refer to as ‘emotional tweets’ from TJ, and in the second interview we spent a good deal of time talking about this. TJ stated, “nobody really knows me completely. You only know yourself completely. Whenever I put it out there it makes me feel a little better. I’m trying to clear my mind of all this bad stuff.” What is the ‘bad stuff?’ A failed relationship with a high school girlfriend that has partially resulted in his decision not to pursue relationships in his life; his absent father whom he has not known since the age of five when his parents divorced; his confusion over the direction of his life occupationally and the desire for the future in the present. These aspects of self are ‘present’ in Twitter through tweets discussing emotion; but also they are not present. Minus his often constant stream of tweets regarding his potential future endeavors, TJ does not discuss explicitly his relationships, his missing father, or his desire to “get over this phase of having so many emotional outputs” that “occupies too much of my time” and that he “expected to get over in college.”

TJs thinking about, and subsequently his actions in digital spaces, challenge the notion that congruence between internal senses of self and external presenting self necessarily becomes resolved. Rather, TJ is harnessing the agency of the social media platforms to present authentic and

consistently emerging selves. His cognizing of imagined communities – high school friends on Facebook, more college friends on Twitter – also factors into these self-presentations. Further, his understanding of how each digital space operates – what I refer to as the agency of the space – is critical to understanding TJ's engagement and unfolding identity in these spaces. Twitter is viewed as 'private,' whereas Facebook is viewed as more public. Twitter is more 'to the point,' whereas Facebook is more nuanced, more complicated. Viewing TJ across these distributed social media platforms is necessary for a more nuanced identity profile (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2013), but even in these spaces representation is incomplete and partial. With TJ, specifically, I began questioning whether we might reconsider the notion of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1998) in digital spaces. Is online self-presentation really a form of self-authorship – and could it not function as a form of *carrere* (Pinar, 2012) – looking back, living in the present, projecting and imagining forward? I believe this may be the case in digital social media spaces. If college student educators begin thinking in these terms, then self-authorship is not developmentally linear, but rather is emergent: the result of becoming within and across digital spaces. Digital spaces are authentic – at any age and at any time.

What other emergent phenomena occurred in TJ's second interview? I learned that TJ has dreams of adopting a child, providing the home he never had, by which he means being a father figure: "The fact that I can serve as a father figure and friend and a mentor and a counselor for a child that I didn't have in a father figure – that's what I didn't have." While his Tweets have reverberated with the many possibilities of post-baccalaureate life, TJ seems settled on pursuing the Masters of Public Administration, still aspiring to work for International Non-Governmental Organizations, ultimately landing at the International Olympic Committee. There were discussions of his love of these Olympic sports – volleyball, gymnastics, diving: "I've watched YouTube videos of the 2012 Olympics" a lot, TJ shared. Finally, there is his celebration of cultural heritage and astrological forces. You may recall my observation of TJ's sun tattoo on his leg. This sun is the

symbol on the Philippines flag – and its presence on his leg is celebration of his cultural heritage. I learn also that TJ has another tattoo – a Japanese symbol on his opposite leg – the memory of a foreign exchange program from middle school.

Voice and the Intra-Active Nature of Digital Spaces [Alyse]

There was a circuitous path through the dynamics of my second interview with Alyse, highlighting the importance of thinking through the intra-active nature of digital spaces, discussions of voice, and how intra-acting digital spaces may release or constrain a voice that is constantly becoming. In this case, the end is the beginning. In her concluding thoughts, Alyse shared the following with me regarding digital spaces:

I think for me it is kind of a way to craft my identity for people that aren't close to me. And I think this is an interesting thing because, um, as accurate as, I don't think, I don't by any means put on a false persona, but people meeting me in person might have a few surprises based on what I do and don't post. But I think it's kinda fun to look back over my posts, who people think I am and whether that is who I am or not.

Alyse believes her partial representations of online self are accurate, portraying who she is. Yet, what was most striking about the second interview was an elaborate discussion pertaining to Alyse's blog. I was interested in the connections between spaces – her decision to link Instagram to her blog, but not Twitter, for example. What, I wondered, influenced such decision making? For Alyse, these decisions are based on audience, and most importantly, voice: "I included my Instagram so people could see life behind the blogger." Here, the intra-actions of Instagram and Wordpress are intentionally designed to make Alyse's blog more 'real-life' – what goes on behind the scenes of this space, for the voice in this space? A different discourse emerges in linking these two spaces, since the material-discourse of the photos tell a different story than the heavily text-laden agency of Alyse's blog.

However, Alyse does not include in her blog the widget to her Twitter account. This decision is the result of a becoming, emerging voice: "I'm still trying to figure out what my voice is on Twitter, and so a lot of the stuff on there is going to be inside jokes and stuff like that, I just

wasn't sure of putting it on my blog which is more public." The public, the private, the continuum in-between; this is a very prominent discussion regarding not only the linking and intra-action of distributed social media spaces for Alyse, but also what is posted in the digital space of the blog. During the first interview, Alyse stated her hesitancy, her caution, with posting too much about politics or hot-button issues. Yet, there were diffractive moments for me as a researcher during the immersive portions of this project. I observed the aforementioned tweets and retweets regarding issues of race. I read blog posts about the conflict between the stated positions of Alyse's spiritual home, the United Methodist Church, and issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights. Further, Alyse's blog contained at least one full post discussing issues of immigration policy. Thus, one of my questions to Alyse highlighted these diffractive moments. What made it possible, I wondered, for these issues to be present in the space? Were there issues that are not present, but that hold particular value or importance to Alyse?

Voice has much to do with this conversation. Alyse discussed that, in person, she is less afraid to state her opinion regarding specific political issues. As an example, she talked about serving as a delegate from her college to the United Methodist Church's summer convention, where at one point she addressed, publicly, the need for the church to address issues of racism. These public pronouncements may carry over to her blog, and Alyse readily admits that some issues are easier to discuss than others in this space. When she posts about issues – gay rights, mental health, immigration – she feels there is something "really important to say, so when I share my thoughts in those ways I'm hoping someone else can latch on to what I'm saying and feel like maybe they can be inspired to make some change." Although these public blogs on potentially political issues are few and far-between, there are several where Alyse has articulated some very particular positions.

The one exception is on women's rights, an issue Alyse says is very personal and important to her. Many topics pertaining to women's rights, including reproductive rights, body image issues, and equality in the workplace, factor into this discussion. Alyse suggested that "a lot of people don't

understand where feminists are coming from” when discussing such topics. Thus, Alyse states she has many posts “in draft form” pertaining to issues of women’s rights, but these are not yet public.

There was, for me, a clear moment of becoming in this discussion. First, a rather lengthy excerpt:

When I’m writing these things about feminism I’m realizing that it is not so black-and-white; but there are two clear sides. . .With feminism I think there is this spectrum. It’s not like there are necessarily two points of view. . .I’ll be writing something that is really consistent with the stuff I’ve written before, but then I come to a point where I think ‘well, it’s also okay if women want to be stay at home moms so how do I want to say this, that does accurately represent what I view, so I think this is the standstill I’m at; which shades of grey do I want to express?

Colliding and intra-acting in this moment are many moments of becoming. Public discourse intra-acting with personal belief; public discourse intra-acting with digital spaces; digital spaces intra-acting with a public and private discourse often viewed as polarizing, with two opposing views, when in fact there may be many spaces along a continuum.

The challenge Alyse is dealing with in this lengthy moment is partially discursive, but also one about voice. She believes that “to make a very bold statement is something that gets a lot of people worked up, so for me, I’m sort of more about starting that conversation person-to-person.” Intra-acting in person protects Alyse from coming “across as really angry” in the digital space of her blog. However, posts-in-progress also prevent Alyse from taking up a position she has not fully developed yet:

Once I post something, once it’s out there, people will think of me to some degree in terms of that post. . .but I also believe in being able to clarify things. So there is sort of that issue of once it’s out there it will sort of become part of my definition. But I also would like to think that future posts will be beneficial to clarifying things; but then the issue is that not everyone reads my posts.

Becoming in digital space, at least for Alyse, is simultaneously a permanent and non-permanent experience. In a space such as Twitter, one surrounded by friends, joking, taking positions, or posting has impermanence with few consequences for voice. Alyse feels comfortable, in this space, sharing a certain voice that is ‘authentic.’ Yet, in the space of her blog, a space she views and imagines as more public, there is more permanence to the emergent voice.

Complicating Notions of the Individual [Alex]

“How do you analyze networks,” I asked Alex. A central philosophical and theoretical challenge in this dissertation centers on what I referred to in chapter five as the problem of the individual. Social media simultaneously centers the individual – through the identity or user profile – while also challenging the very notion that an individual human subject should be centered – emphasis here on the ‘social’ of social networking, and the releasing and constraining agencies and discourses discussed throughout portions of the previous two chapters in this dissertation. For me, Alex’s entire second interview focused this discussion further.

These questions began through intra-actions with pictures. One observation I noted in Alex’s Facebook page was, she is always photographed with large groups of people. This observation is true on Instagram as well. It should be noted that near the end of the immersive portions of this study Alex did change her Facebook profile picture to her professional looking photo described in chapter eight. However, this is not the norm. “Selfies. No. No way, you’ll never catch one of those with me,” stated Alex.

For me, what I think it says about me, is that I need to be surrounded by others to be comfortable. . .I like being around people. I like to be surrounded by close people. I think you’ll find pretty consistent in all of my pictures that the same people reoccur in them, so close friendships are very important to me.

Webs of human relationships are critical to Alex – particularly in distributed social media spaces. These webs or networks of human relationships started early in life: “I think a big part of this is my sister and I are only 13 months apart. . .so for me, it’s really weird to go and take a picture by myself.” Intra-acting with photos I observed Alex’s de-centering of self. The material objects become part of a discursive construction of self in digital space for Alex: ‘self’ may not really exist as a material concept for Alex in distributed social media space, and photos are some evidence of this way of being.

However, there is also a centering of the self in specific social media spaces. For example, Pinterest was a space Alex and I spent considerable time discussing. The reader may remember

from chapter eight my discussion of Alex's board "Live Life to the Fullest." I pondered a question: do the pins on this board represent, in some important ways, how Alex may answer the question "What does it mean to live life to the fullest?" Alex stated during our second interview, "If somebody ever said make a collage that describes you, or pick pictures that describe, that is what I would describe this as; this is a collage of Alex." Yet, the thought that this board represented a collage of who she is came only after Alex stated earlier in our conversation that "it means nothing to me now; I should delete it. I just have kept it I guess, but I can't make it private otherwise I would because it's pointless."

Pinterest raises the tension of the private-public continuum of such importance to understanding a 'networked' and 'individual' self in distributed social media spaces. Alex's practicing of agency, her harnessing of the agentic powers of various distributed social media spaces, and her use of material artifacts across these spaces all intra-act in highlighting this phenomena of identity in the digital age. For example, Alex taught me that on Pinterest there are public boards and private boards. This is a particular agency of the space, and Alex utilizes this agency in her Pinterest space. It is not until our second interview, utilizing the screen share function, that Alex reveals to me additional boards: My Future Apartment; Backgrounds; Elle^{xi}; Cade^{xii}; Smoothies; Eat Healthy; Hidden Workout. Why are these boards hidden? In some cases, such as with Elle and Cade, Alex's board represent ideas for gifts, and she does not want those individuals to see those ideas.

Yet in other cases, "Hidden Workout" or "Smoothies" being two superb examples, there is some diffraction. Alex has a public workout page, so why the private page as well? In the case of the Smoothies board, Alex stated, "I just didn't feel people needed to see that I was trying to eat healthy – I don't feel that people who look at my Pinterest need to see that necessarily." Or, as she

^{xi} Pseudonym

^{xii} Pseudonym

mentioned in regards to the Hidden Workout board, Alex stated, “Some of them [the exercises] I’m just self-conscious, and then there are some that really I’m doing them just for me.”

This conversation returns to the idea of releasing and constraining agencies in digital social media spaces. Alex is harnessing the agency of a space like Pinterest to constrain or hide certain aspects of what she finds important – of her emergence, her becoming. This can be viewed also as creation of a private sphere in the public space of digital social media. These agentic decisions directly relate to the imagined communities (boyd, 2014a) of the space: “I’ll follow anyone on Pinterest.” However, this decision is also related directly to a certain architectural affordance of Pinterest: the specification that once a board is public it cannot be made private. Quite succinctly, there are many intra-acting agencies that influence Alex’s decisions and identities across these distributed social media spaces. Alex agrees with my statement that Pinterest is the most accurate reflection of who she is: “Oh yes, definitely, these are all things that I like – I think this is a very accurate description of me.” Arguably, this is also the most public space, since along with LinkedIn, Pinterest remains the only space that Alex does not control whom she follows or who follows her.

Facebook is very different. Alex states she has “a lot of control over my Facebook. There are a lot of things, I think that people look at Facebook, like if they want to get to know you they go to Facebook, so I don’t want garbage on Facebook.” Alex’s imagined community in Facebook contains “people that I graduated with from high school; from college a lot of friends and sorority sisters. Obviously all of my family members are on there.” Again, Alex uses the architectural affordances of the space to release and constrain her personal agency in key ways. For example, Alex discussed how one of her favorite topics to discuss and learn about is women in leadership, specifically issues of the glass ceiling. She described how she recently heard a TED^{xiii} talk on career advice for women:

I’ve been toying do I just go and post that in my cohort Facebook page. . .or do I go and post that on my Facebook wall because there are so many women that I think are my Facebook

^{xiii} TED is a nonprofit organization that hosts conferences globally focused on “ideas worth spreading.” Keynote speakers give talks of usually 20 minutes or less. For more information, visit <http://www.ted.com>.

friends that would really enjoy watching that, but I'm like do I do that or do I not do that cuz [sic] I get really annoyed when I see all of these articles and pointless things that are cluttering up my Facebook so I'm like I don't want to clutter up somebody else's.

Our specific reasoning for discussing this topic was whether Alex ever thinks about presentations of self as woman in digital space, an aspect of her identity that she discussed as important during her first interview. Posting the TED talk

would be an example of being a female. . . I have to give myself like 24 hours to think do I really want to post this or do I not? So yea, other than that though, I don't really think being a woman would come out on any of my pages. Maybe Pinterest a little bit because you see I have pins on there for my future children and weddings. It's not on Twitter. It's not on LinkedIn.

What is most intriguing to me regarding Alex's understanding of distributed social media spaces is the tension that one can be most accurately represented in one specific space, and that the individual has ultimate control of this presentation. While Alex appears to suggest this is the case (for her, Pinterest is very accurate, Facebook is very controlled), she also stated that it is Facebook where someone goes "if they want to get to know you." Does the space of Facebook really represent, most accurately, Alex? Perhaps, due to the many photos that began this discussion, the idea that Alex may not be an 'individual' per se, but may exist through the relationships that define her. Or perhaps, as a controlled space, since

I want to be very private and I only want you to see the good things. . . I'm not going to update how my day is going and that I'm super busy and all of this stuff because you don't need to know if I'm having a bad day. . . so I am very aware of what I put out there and very reserved about it, if that's maybe the right word.

Human relationships define Alex in many ways. Her distributed social media spaces, and her presentation of self in these spaces, are often defined by these relationships.

A final example of this occurred as Alex and I discussed my observation about Alex's Facebook use for documenting or reflecting on her sorority experience as a member of Alpha Omicron Pi (AOII). The reader may remember that over the course of this study several photos and stories appeared on Alex's timeline pertaining to sorority life. Alex traveled to her national sorority headquarters; she posted photos about her undergraduate chapter anniversary celebrations; one of

her friends shared a story about the difference between sorority life on Instagram and in real life.

Alex states she

had a great Greek life experience. It gave me a lot of great leadership opportunities, a lot of great networking opportunities, so I think it plays a very big role in my life because it has made me the better version of who I want to be, I guess.

Yet, Alex admits “I miss it. I miss being an undergraduate student. And I miss having that, and so, that’s my way, I guess, that I still stay connected with it.” This is a powerful moment of reflection, perhaps another sign of currere (Pinar, 2012) in digital space. Alex retains connection to these communities through the platform of Facebook in ways that are important to understanding her continuous becoming. Although she is not an undergraduate student, the lessons and memories of that network greatly influence the continuous unfolding of the world synchronously – past, present, and future bound in multiple material moments that defy easy centering of the individual.

Photos as Dialogue, Power, Purpose and Discourse [Selene]

Selene’s photos across distributed spaces exhibit power, purposeful dialogue, and ultimately, discourse. In chapter eight, I discussed my observation that across Selene’s Tumblr there are photos of Black women: various roles in society, shades of skin tone, and importantly, many types of hair. What I learned from Selene in the second interview is that hair is a powerful discourse across distributed social media spaces. Photos on Instagram, where Selene often posts many selfie-style photos, are often meant to showcase her hair. In YouTube, where there are videos showing styling of natural hair, there is a purpose. On Twitter, where occasionally Selene posts reactions about others’ responses to her hair, there is a dialogue. Across these distributed social media spaces, Selene is participating in a discourse: not just about hair, but about emergent identities, about becoming, about creativity, art, and setting purpose for her life, for her siblings and cousins, and for her family.

Although Tumblr is where I first noticed the visual cues of Black women’s hair, I find beginning with Instagram to be appropriate for unpacking dialogue. Selene used to utilize a smart-

phone application, Ask.fm, where individuals could ask questions. Ask.fm can be easily connected to various social media profiles, and is marketed as a “social Q&A that let’s you explore your friends personalities by asking them to answer smart, interesting, and fun questions about themselves.”^{xiv}

Selene stated that when she would post photos on Instagram, many people would use Ask.fm to question her: “is this your hair? Is this your weave?” In particular, Selene noticed men as more interested in these conversations:

I notice more White men they comment, um, more positive things because I think, I don’t know why they like the natural Afro. Black men are more like ‘is that a weave?’ I’m thinking more White guys comment positive things and then the Black guys comment negative. Girls, mostly, females don’t comment on my hair.

Selene sees these questions about hair as part of a dialogue – about identities, about self-expression, and about popular culture.

A few examples. Regarding identities, Selene sees hair as a way to showcase her many identities. “I am natural, I don’t do perms anymore. . . I do wear weave of course, I mean, I like weave, I like changing my look.” Although she is natural, weave becomes one way to “change my view for a day, or my personality, sometimes I want to be Halle Berry, sometimes I just want to feel like a different person.” Yet, the questions she receives from photos of shifting and changing hairstyles on Instagram are, to Selene, somewhat problematic. “I feel like as a Black woman. . people feel like I shouldn’t be able to do that. I don’t know why, but if I want to change my look, let me change my look, I don’t see what the big problem is about that.” I see this conversation as one highlighting, once again, the role of becoming, the shifting, emergent self, and in a way, a harkening back to questions of authenticity raised by TJ. These are all ways of being and knowing Selene.

Different ways I put my hair will portray different sides of me. Everyone has different sides of them and sometimes I just feel like I can show that different side through my hair. Like the happy me will be through a happy funky style or a cute little color or something, or the model me would have some straight sharp style, something funky. . .or braids maybe, something just casual like she’s laid back and chill. . .letting everybody know that I’m not

^{xiv} Retrieved 19 December, 2014 from <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ask.fm/id635896473?mt=8>

just one basic person that you just look at and see the same thing every single day. Don't get too used to the 'do.'

Selene also views hair, photos of hair, and the questions she receives about hair as part of a larger cultural dialogue. For example, in returning to the topic of weave, Selene states that she often receives "comments about how, um, it's shocking to someone that I have hair. Like, really? How do you think the weave gets in my head?" Larger cultural ignorance intra-acts with digital spaces in these moments, often perplexing Selene. In still other moments, Selene is harnessing the agency of popular discourse, perhaps even stereotypes, to send certain messages about her many emerging identities: "when I change my hair it gets, it would change my first impression on someone. Like if my hair is wild and natural they would think I'm some kind of cultural person or something, or if my hair is short and flipped up, someone will think I'm some type of hair stylist."

What is important about this entire segment about photos of hair across distributed spaces are the dialogues occurring. These are dialogues with self – who does Selene wish to be today? These are dialogues with other human becomings, including friends, and as will become important in a subsequent discussion, family. Across most distributed social media space, Selene is not necessarily constrained (Facebook is the one exception to this, and I refer the reader to chapter seven for a more detailed discussion regarding the constraints of Facebook for Selene). Her agency, the agency of the distributed spaces, the agency of various discursive frameworks from popular culture, history, and the future all sync-up, intra-act, become entangled. Selene is not only participating in dialogue, but also is materially creating discourse – about Black women, about the intersections of Black women in various roles within society, and about power. This is becoming. This is an unfolding of the world. With each new photo posted, each new question fielded in the spaces of Ask.fm, Selene is becoming. Dialogue is occurring. Discourse is materializing. Identity emerges in these spaces through material-discursivity, discursive-materiality, and is unending – again, no two photos of hair, no intra-actions with various social media spaces, are ever the same.

Selene, the space, and the world entangles in a constant and unending process of being: and therefore an equally unending process of becoming intelligible, and thus, knowing.

There is dialogue and discourse in the not present, as well. Family, and the importance of family was discussed heavily in chapter seven, when I highlighted Selene's family and their use of the agencies of Facebook to maintaining contact across distributed geographic spaces. However, in the second interview Selene also discussed her younger sister, and her many younger cousins – and how the agency of these individuals seem to enact specific forms of constraint in digital spaces beyond those discussed earlier. Here, constraining agency should be viewed more vitalistically – as a force intra-acting with family history, personal history, and the future. Again, synchronicity.

Specifically, Selene will not post information about emotions, about struggle. “I don't really open up about my emotions as much as I probably should. . . I feel like if I do show them then my sister will see a side of weakness, and she has to look up to me.” This pertains not only to emotions, not wanting to utilize distributed spaces to “be angry or sad,” but also to personal struggles. In particular, academic struggles:

I get really sad about school. Me and school are like oil and water. My sister is a senior, so I don't like to show her that I'm struggling in school, or that school is hard for me, and I want her to feel like it was a breeze for me. She is going to school for engineering, which is a much bigger field than marketing, so I don't need her to see that 'I'm struggling with marketing, you're going to struggle with engineering.' That's not what I want her to see. And then engineering, a lot of women don't go into that field, yet alone a lot of Black women, so I need her to feel like she is that Black female who is going to be blowing the men, blowing everyone out of the water.

Selene's struggles with school intra-act with her own drive for success. The reader will remember that Selene also has struggled with feelings of self-doubt from time-to-time. Expressing positivity, strength, and power in social media spaces is “for my sister and also my younger cousins. I feel like if I don't keep this image up for them, they won't have anything really stable to look at.” This too is becoming. Selene is positioning herself in relation to her family, and harnesses the agency of social media to, whether consciously or not, to engage in dialogue with her sister and cousins.

In my reading, this aligns well with Selene's working mantra: "I feel like we all connect in our own ways. We are all connected." Which returns us to Tumblr. Selene informs me that her connecting with the moon, being a moon goddess as she often refers to herself, in part relates to these conversations she has had with the moon since she was a young child. Her pseudonym for this study, Selene, is actually the Greek goddess of the moon. There is a powerful way, particularly in Tumblr, that Selene has expressed her connection with the moon. The many materials described in chapter eight relate these connections. Yet she also posts photos of the moon on Instagram, relating to a dialogue and discourse on religion, spirituality, faith. "I like the freeness of not having a religion. . . I'm not Christian, I'm not Muslim, I'm not this, I'm not that. Tumblr I feel like I can do that openly." Although she is reticent to post these thoughts on Facebook, since her family is "really big on Christianity, like, really big," these material moments in digital spaces are a continuous part of her unfolding and emergent identities, her desire to reinstall the mystery of faith into the universe, and her participating in a discourse about intra-acting, intra-connectivity, and a constant unfolding of intelligibility in the world. Tumblr, and all of Selene's distributed social media spaces, powerfully show this being, and the knowing associated with being.

Untagging: Race, Ethnicity, and Class on Social Media [Miranda]

When I speak of agency and emergent identity in social media spaces, I believe it important to discuss the agency of other human actors in how we become. Distributed social media spaces, with their varied architectures, provide many possibilities for becoming through agentic forces not embodied within an individual user who is emerging. Miranda's discussion during our first interview regarding 'untagging' of self – from photos in particular – raised this issue for me. During our second interview, we spent significant time discussing the topic of untagging. Miranda stated "I would consider myself not so much a poster on social media, its more people posting to me." This is particularly true in the space of Facebook. Thus, when I raise the point about other humans' agency being entangled with our own unfolding identity, Miranda stated "that is a really interesting

observation. There are things that I do control or that I will remove from Facebook. . .mostly in the form of photos.”

As with Selene, there are overlapping, unfolding, and intra-acting dialogues and discourses surrounding race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in Miranda’s decisions to untag:

It mostly happened when I was in high school and the first few years of my undergraduate career probably when I was a little more uncertain about my own identity and a little more cautious about my identity and being a little more cautious about how others perceived me . . . so it was an unfortunate reality that, um, being associated with being Latina at my institution or even at my high school, um, automatically associated you with being less educated or likely of a lower socioeconomic background, and I think I experienced that most of my entire life and it wasn’t like anyone teased me for it or anything like that but, since I do have much lighter skin than my mom or my brother, um, most people can often, can either think I’m White or Hispanic. If they think I’m White, they might say something that suggests that they don’t, that they aren’t quite as accepting of the Latina population uh, which is very unfortunate obviously, and I think there is still a lot to unpack in terms of my emotions in blocking those photos and things like that, but I just never wanted, and I think to a certain extent my parents might have felt the same way, I never wanted to be discounted based on any of those things, and its unfortunate that they were perceived in a negative light, um, at my school, and especially at my high school, but that is sort of the way it was, and I never wanted that to be a part of my identity, I just wanted to be able to prove things for myself, so I removed anything from my Facebook that might suggest that I would be of that background, and therefore of a lower socioeconomic status, of a lower education background or any of those things.

This conversation relates partly to issues of colorism. Phenotypically, Miranda is lighter than her brother or her mother. Her decisions to untag herself from photos is demonstrative of specific dialogues and discourses on race within the larger society in the United States, intra-acting with both personal aspirations and digital social media. Miranda’s decision to “prove things for myself” speaks to defying stereotypes associated with being Latina – poor, uneducated. In social media, she sought to ‘untag’ herself from these dialogues and discourses.

Geography and institutions of learning are also highly influential to this discussion. Here, we might take up a Bronfenbrennarian analysis. Miranda’s various microsystems – school, friendship groups, community, geographic location, and importantly social media spaces – all intra-act in ways that are mutually reinforcing and constructive in her becoming. For example, in Texas, which is “pretty conservative,” Miranda believes that despite “a very large Mexican population,

often there is still, um, a lot of, yeah, somewhat I guess racism you could say, very subtle, but still there in terms of what people associate with populations.” Throughout her life, Miranda has been in private school, and this has influenced her networks. “Mostly my friends, they are mostly White or Asian, and then with my family, its very obvious they are Hispanic.” In college,

my race was never a topic that came up, and I wouldn’t say that people outwardly discriminated to me against it, however, I think, as a result of my upbringing and being so primed to sort of hide that and conceal it, it just made sense for me to do it because I had always done that.

Miranda is again speaking of social media spaces here – the intra-acting of particular microsystems, larger discursive structures in society, and the powerful agency each of these spaces plays in her emerging identity across distributed social media spaces.

Presently, living in a different part of the country, and in a graduate program where there are “women faculty of color,” Miranda has a new, emergent becoming. “For me it has been a total 180 to be in an environment where I am both consciously and unconsciously accepted.” Thus, Miranda’s becoming in these spaces, in relation to issues of race and ethnicity, is unfolding, shifting, being recreated. Untagging “hasn’t happened recently.” Now, Miranda states

I identify as a Latina, so somebody who is Mexican American more specifically. Back when I was in Texas I wouldn’t be as comfortable, I mean, I would say that it was recent that I would be comfortable expressing that and conveying that without being asked.

It would be comfortable, perhaps easy, to read this unfolding in terms of some linearly and predictive trajectory of ethnic or racial identity development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). However, I believe that Miranda exhibits a much more nuanced understanding of the intra-actions between race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the presentation of self in social media spaces. As she stated near the end of our second interview, she believes herself to be a “purpose driven individual,” and this plays out in the spaces of social media – particularly in relation to the posting of photos, the untagging of photos or posts. There are multiple agencies enacting releasing and constraining forces that impact the constant and unending becoming in these spaces – particularly regarding race and ethnicity.

Beyond Intersectionality [Maxine]

Maxine's second interview intra-acts with both Miranda and Selene's discussions of the intra-acting nature of race, ethnicity, and gender, while additionally highlighting religious and spiritual becoming as important to a discussion about the role of social media in examining and articulating such becoming. Further, Maxine carefully articulated the subtleties associated with observing becoming in social media space(s), particularly surrounding traditional social identity markers such as race, gender, and spirituality. For college student affairs educators, this importance cannot be understated or diminished. Simply viewing distributed profiles may fail to capture the intricacies of precisely how becoming occurs in these spaces – an observation that Maxine highlighted for me several times throughout the second interview.

For example, in regards to race. I made, perhaps, a common faux pas during the second interview, asking Maxine about her views on identity as an African American. "Well, not to cut you off or anything like that, but I prefer Black, just because I feel now, in twenty-first century culture, there's a big African population and they can strictly identify with being African American." I mention this moment as one of clarity, of learning, of researcher becoming, which stands out as important to my own emergence during this dissertation process. Further, this moment spoke again to power dynamics of the relationship: in this case, I became very aware of my own racial identity, the power dynamics associated with my White racial identity, and the problematics associated with attempting to label, for Maxine, an identity that she had not articulated prior to this point in the interview. By this I mean, specifically, that Maxine had not used the words African American, and thus my own labeling of her identity in this way potentially created an unbalanced power dynamic in the research process.

Maxine continued discussing race, elaborating on why she feels Black is a better signifier than African American. "Going back and looking at my history, we go back to Virginia with slaves, and we can't trace, so I don't know if I'm Caribbean, or if I'm from Africa, Central America, or

someplace like that.” Maxine has also clearly been becoming in her navigation of racial dynamics across campus environments and larger social environments. “I think that being on a college campus is really hard because you have those really pronounced Black groups like the Black Student Union or even the Divine 9,” groups that Maxine says have “stigmas” associated with them. Maxine expressed particular moments during her college career where decisions regarding campus involvement intra-acted with such stigmas in ways she found difficult to understand:

sometimes it comes from Black people themselves, like, ‘why weren’t you at the BSU meeting?’ or ‘why don’t you attend these social events or identify with that?’ And I’m just like, well, because I decided to do service programs or alternative breaks, where there are more diverse communities, that makes me less Black or questions my Blackness? So I think freshman and sophomore year that affected me a lot more.

However, Maxine is careful to note that while she recognizes her own ability to navigate these dynamics on campus, “when I walk off of this campus people look at me and they look at a Black woman, and that’s something I don’t take very lightly.” Not “taking lightly” the identity of being a Black woman is partially derived from the influence of Maxine’s dad:

I’ve had plenty of conversations with my dad about how men look at Black women. . .and he’s like ‘I’m sorry someone might question you in your identity, but I raised you to be stronger than that.’ So yeah, I identify with it a lot, and its not something I’m ashamed of, I’m very proud of it.

Here, we begin to see how race also intersects with gender in ways that have been highlighted by other theorists (Crenshaw, 1995; Strayhorn, 2013).

How this translates into distributed social media spaces is also important for Maxine. “I don’t think I do anything on social media overtly like ‘I’m a Black woman,’ but I know that, for example, for African American history month I’m posting facts about Black female heroes all the time” or following “quote, unquote Black Twitter^{xv}.” Maxine continued, discussing how she will occasionally “spend time talking about social issues,” providing the example of retweeting an interview with Daniel Radcliffe about Emma Watson.

^{xv} According to Wikipedia, Black Twitter can be defined as “a cultural identity on the Twitter social network focused on issues of interest to the Black community, particularly in the United States.” Retrieved 29 December, 2014 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Twitter

I was like, yeah, Emma Watson was objectified from day one, the first two movies^{xvi} she had was like big puffy hair, but the third movie they straightened her hair and all of a sudden she became this sex symbol thing.

Such digital posting on issues facing women also shifts into the arena of activism around topics

Maxine feels are particularly important to discuss as a woman, such as domestic violence and rape.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, like I did a lot of stuff about advocacy about sexual assault like, you know, its not just a woman's job to like cover herself head-to-toe and act a certain way and stuff like that. . . like the Hannah Graham^{xvii} story rubbed me the wrong way, the way it was presented like 'how did her friends leave her?,' and I'm like 'how did someone do this to an innocent girl?' Or what she was wearing or she was drunk and all this stuff, and I was like 'you are not putting fault at the person who did this to her and I think that's absolutely atrocious.'

Maxine has "no problem saying I'm a feminist" in social media spaces, which she defines as "strictly say[ing] men and women should be on an equal playing field" or that it's important to "uphold women's rights."

It is this last point, the upholding of women's rights, that intra-acts in particularly poignant ways in examining Maxine's spiritual and religious becoming – and that really moves this discussion beyond the confines of intersectionality theory. There are only snippets of detail regarding Maxine's spirituality in social media spaces; however, the diffractions across these spaces are important to note. On Facebook, Maxine lists her spiritual identity as Catholic. Yet, her blog makes clear that she continues seeking out new spiritual fulfillment. Maxine noted she has not "really updated my demographic information on Facebook in a while" but that if she were updating her religious and spiritual information "I would probably change it – I probably wouldn't put anything." Differential gender relations are, according to Maxine

a serious problem we have in the church today. We are going to have these older men tell someone who is an African American 21 year old female about how she should live her life, and I'm like 'what do we necessarily have in common?' . . . And, um, like I said, a lot of the issues going on with the church today are associated with women, whether it be about abortion, or how women can't be priests, or sex before marriage, and I think a lot of it is

^{xvi} Harry Potter Movie Series

^{xvii} Hannah Graham was a student at the University of Virginia who, in Fall 2014, went missing and was later found dead.

heavy handed and its hard to put all that pressure on us when they don't have any female leaders in the church to kind of be role models and examples, so I think it's a double edged sword, to have, to be telling me what to do, how to live my life. . .yes there are sisters and things like that, but to not have someone on the alter every week where I'm going to mass and being a support for me is very backwards and doesn't make much sense.

Understanding why Maxine is moving this discussion beyond intersectionality requires further interrogation. Here, I must re-invite Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2013) to the conversation, who discussed the importance of creating nuanced identity profiles as part of robust intersectionality theorizing. The concept of a nuanced identity profile is important, particularly as it relates to Renn's (2012) notion that perhaps college student educators might better create holistic understandings of identity issues through individual portraits. However, what Maxine's interview aptly challenges is the very notion that there would or could be stasis. The issues Maxine grapples with regarding spirituality extend beyond an intersectional perspective. Examining her identity from a strictly intersectional perspective would minimize the complexity of her intra-acting, emerging, and unfolding becoming.

This is particularly true when examining how multiple agencies intra-act in the spiritual becoming exhibited by Maxine. "I think going to college made me really skeptical about a lot of things. . .I grew up Catholic and I came to college and I got really skeptical of that." This skepticism, for Maxine, is "a really good thing," because "you should never be satisfied, you should always ask more questions." Maxine has taken up this questioning in her spiritual life, particularly over the summer when she began attending a megachurch in New York City. "Their sermons were about everyday life and that's something I can relate to much more," said Maxine. She continued, noting that "there are male preachers, female preachers, and even in like this church setting, people of all sexual orientations, all different races." Yet, this experience is not one she could express to her dad. "My dad is very much like Southern Catholic," and thus "when I go home, every Sunday, it isn't a question, I have to go to church." So although she believes her dad knows about her changing relationship with religion and spirituality, "I don't discuss it as much as I want to." Her decision not

to change demographic information on Facebook is partially influenced by the agency of others intra-acting with that space. However, her blog has become a space where musings about these topics can be more freely discussed.

Thus, Maxine is demonstrating the limitations of harnessing intersectionality theory in studying identity. Intersections of social identities – Black, Woman, and Spirituality/Faith – are all important for Maxine. Yet, had I employed a strictly intersectional perspective in my analysis, I may have missed several important nuances. For example, while intersectionality theory often employs discourse in examining power dynamics, such discussions often focus on larger systemic structures of power. Clearly intersectionality theory would have allowed me to discuss, for instance, patriarchal dynamics within Catholic Church doctrine and practice. However, I question whether a strictly intersectional analysis would have allowed for a factoring of familial power dynamics. Maxine’s dad greatly influences her own relationship with being a woman as well as her relationship with God, and in the interview I see her working through the complicated decisions relating to discussions both offline and in distributed online social media spaces.

There is more to account for in Maxine’s interview. We spent a great deal of time discussing the importance of relationships in her life, and how those relationships are shaping her future, particularly in relation to career. “I’m very much a people person, and so, um, the people in my life directly affect my mood and how I’m feeling and stuff.” Maxine’s decision to start blogging about her experience in New York was, in part, a decision to work through her thoughts about the importance of these relationships in her life. As Maxine stated, “it was a great learning experience for me because I saw how much my personal life really does affect how I’m able to act in a professional mindset.” Thus, over the summer Maxine was utilizing the blog to develop “confidence within myself” or attempting to determine her future career trajectory. She does not have this figured out yet, but

talking to my mentor over the summer, he was just like ‘nobody really knows what they want to do but you have to just try a whole bunch of different things’ and I think that’s something I’m really afraid of actually, I’m actually a control freak and I’m a planner and the fact that I can’t plan where I’m going to be in the next five years really worries me.

While she is still passionately committed to sports broadcasting, Maxine stated

the international internships. . . have really opened my eyes to combining both, so, like doing international sports, covering things like the Olympics or the World Cup, or looking at the social standing. So even in Brazil, everything that was going on with like in the barrios and stuff like that and how people were overtaking their neighborhoods and like pushing people out of their homes, I’m really interested in the cultural side of sports.

Here, there is an intra-action with TJ, who also has interest in working with the Olympics.

With Maxine, I see the value of nuanced identity profiles; however, I also see the limitations of developing such profiles from a strictly intersectional perspective (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2013). Such an approach would have limited my understanding of the constant unfolding, shifting, and dynamic processes occurring as Maxine navigates her continual becoming in both physical and digital spaces. Watching this process unfold, intra-acting and entangling with the process of Maxine making her thoughts, her feelings, her questions and challenges intelligible to the world across distributed social media spaces, was and is more important than the eventual outcome. While many social identities are important to understanding Maxine’s interview, there are also agencies, history, and environmental contexts that must also be accounted for, which takes the interview and entirety of the immersive portion of coming to know and be with Maxine beyond the confines of a strictly intersectional perspective.

True Diffraction [Abigail]

In chapter five I discussed Barad’s (2008a) notion of diffractive analysis: looking for “patterns of difference” (p. 71) across spatial contexts. You may notice, as a reader, that the pattern of discussing each of the human becomings in this chapter is different than chapters seven and eight. The re-mixing (Josie Ahlquist, personal communication, September, 2014) was not intentional, but emerged as I felt drawn to writing about specific concepts for each of the human becomings in the writing and thinking through of this chapter (Wolcott, 2009). Yet, it seems the

universe has adequately structured this chapter. Closing with Abigail is important for two reasons. First, it brings full circle the questions of performativity, self-authorship, and authenticity discussed in TJs vignette from this chapter. In this way, Abigail will serve as a bookend to TJs partial representation. Secondly, Abigail truly allowed me to think about Barad's (2008a) concept of diffraction – and how those patterns of difference across and between physical and digital spaces are so critical to examining identity issues in the digital age.

Abigail's blog will be the focal point of this discussion. Reading the blog, I felt that Abigail had a life-changing experience in Colorado over the summer. Her reflections of connecting with God, the discussion of her walk of faith in 10 minute increments, based on her favorite song "The Next 10 minutes," and the photos – what I referred to as the material of these spaces - all instilled in me a sense that serving in Colorado had been a powerful, life-changing experience for Abigail. Indeed, the experience was life-altering, but not in any way I anticipated. In our second interview, Abigail exposed what many have discussed or questioned about social media – is online portrayal authentic? Is it simply performative? Despite the blog posts, Colorado was not an enjoyable experience for Abigail. "This summer I felt stuck. I felt like I didn't have any way to love the world . . . I kind of actually hated it most of the time." I was personally awestruck by this account. Abigail discussed her disdain for "the things you're supposed to enjoy about the mountains, like hiking, like sitting out in nature for hours on end. That's not really me." Further, since she was in the mountains Abigail "felt like I was trapped with the same people all the time and I couldn't get to see new perspectives or new things, I was always stuck on a mountain."

At the outset of this study I anticipated many more moments like this. For me, these moments failed to materialize. Certainly throughout the study, several of the human becomings have focused and discussed particular aspects of self they choose not to communicate through social media spaces. Yet, Abigail poignantly has a real difference – there is, for all intents and

purposes – a true ‘performance’ occurring in Abigail’s blog. Near the end of our discussion, Abigail elaborated:

I’m a real external processor, so I talk everything out or I write everything out, so I think I attempt to filter my thoughts either through my journal or my conversation with my friends before I put anything on the Internet, I guess, and so my blog is like a small glimpse into me in that way.

I choose to see this not as inauthentic. Abigail is not sly or deceptive. Rather, I believe Abigail was using the blog as a medium of making intelligible, both to herself and the external world, the enjoyable aspects of the experience. “I think looking back I’m way more thankful for it and I enjoyed it more than I did in the moment.” To me, this represents authentic becoming. The agency of the blog – the need to capture in words her positive thoughts about the Colorado experience, align with Abigail’s personality: “I’m much more of a positive person.”

Abigail, to me, appears to demonstrate such diffractive moments across social media spaces. On Instagram, for example, Abigail does not seek to capture the most beautiful photos, but rather beautiful moments. She provided an example. Abigail discussed one photo, posted on the day of our second interview, showing one of her peers defending a senior thesis project in fashion.

I thought it was super cool that I know all these people who do all these things, and we’re in this little bubble of college for right now but then we’re going to go out and do all these things in the world and I think its so cool that I got to see a glimpse of her journey. I think I thought the moment itself was beautiful, not necessarily the picture.

Thus, all her photos on Instagram are somewhat diffractive. Abigail does not “think I can just be like here’s the story behind this specific one,” but rather seeks to capture photos of beautiful moments she “want[s] to remember.”

The one space where Abigail stated she may post negativity is Twitter. “Twitter can be different. . .the more negative thoughts about how crappy things are, what I don’t like about places, so like my negative side” may get posted on Twitter since, according to Abigail, “its easier to get lost in the stream.” The desire to be lost, to have her negative side not as visual or present, is also important to understanding Abigail’s becoming. Since she views herself as a positive person, like

other human becomings in this study, she often utilizes her personal agency, choosing to express only positivity across distributed social media spaces.

Diffractions - highlighting differences between actual lived experiences or thoughts, and partial representations in distributed social media spaces, seem to serve as creative, imaginative forces for Abigail. I was personally struck by Abigail's ability to articulate, in words, the process of becoming:

I think I'm becoming. I think the end goal is to become a better version of yourself, so just to continue to like, I guess to continue to grow in love and compassion for yourself and the world, and I think the juxtaposition of those two – how you love yourself and how you love the world and how they go together – is, would be a better version of you, so growing in those things.

When I reflect on these diffractive moments throughout the interview with Abigail, what struck me was that she is harnessing the agency of social media spaces to become, to emerge. Abigail is constantly seeking to overcome the negative aspects of herself – her negative thoughts, her negative emotions – to become a better version of herself, to grow in “compassion” for self and others around her. I also believe that, for Abigail, this is a very spiritual, personal journey. Surely she is dependent on the relationships in her distributed social media spaces, but perhaps she is also using social media spaces as a creative force to make intelligible, to herself, the power of imagining or creating and capturing the good, the loving, the beautiful moments to remember about the journey.

Conclusion

There are many exhibited intra-actions across and between the human becomings in this study that occurred during the second interview. Some of these are evident – such as the connections between TJ and Maxine both wanting to work with international sports, or the complex intersections of social identities discussed by Alyse, Selene, and Miranda. In re-presenting these final interviews, I have drawn on many theoretical and philosophical traditions to complicate the reading, understanding, and conclusions that may be drawn from this study. The purpose, again, was to begin a process that will carry on long after this dissertation is completed – in thinking

through the many ways we might complicate discussions of identity in distributed social media space(s). Creating the complicated conversations (Pinar, 2012) and fractals that open possibilities for future inquiry, wonder, imagination, and ways of being and knowing that are complexivist – unpredictable, non-linear, and emergent. In the final chapter I will offer some implications and insights into how I will carry this work forward.

CHAPTER 10 FRACTALS

We shall not cease from exploration,
And at the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

What I seek to do in this concluding chapter is discuss fractals – the possible pathways that have opened as a result of this study, the possibilities for practice, and personal reflections from the process. I begin with the T.S. Eliot quote, which I first read at the conclusion of Patrick Slattery's (2013) book *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*. As I write this conclusion, I truly feel this sense of not 'knowing.' This may be Eliot's point – that each ending is a new beginning; we are not the same people we were when we crossed a time or space the first time. We are being in that place completely anew, which means our knowing will be completely different. I am also reminded of William Doll's (1993) notion of recursion, of William Pinar's (2012; 2013) concept of study, of Nathan Snaza's (2010) concept regarding ethical practices of persistent questioning, of Barad's (2008a) notion that as researchers we might return to the ontological. The mangle (Jackson, 2013). All is entangled, intra-acting.

Fractal Pathways

While chapters seven through nine have focused on the digital immersion portions of this study – seeking to examine the many ways that college students in the digital age are becoming or emerging across distributed social media space, my larger dissertation project has been focused on philosophical issues related to research in higher education, research in digital spaces, and the role of college student affairs educators in the twenty-first century. I am reticent to write a set of monolithic implications for practice; doing so goes against the nature of the project in certain regards. Thus, rather than taking this approach, I would like to return to the beginning, as T.S. Eliot discusses in the small poem beginning this chapter, offering my thoughts on what I have learned

and beginning the dialogue and journey down the fractal pathways that will continue becoming and emerging following this dissertation.

Accounting for Digital Spaces

My first research question asked “How do researchers, educators, and practitioners explore/research/conceptualize issues of college student identity in the 21st century, accounting for digital space(s) as unique environmental contexts of identity emergence or becoming?” My own journey through this dissertation process has connected me with other researchers, many who are doctoral students, grappling with this question. There are good questions and good research being done here. Josie Ahlquist is researching the impacts of digital social media on leadership development and digital citizenship. Adam Gismondi is seeking to understand digital social media civic engagement issues with college students. Paul Gordon Brown, in a study similar to my own, is examining social media impacts on understanding of self. Other researchers, such as Reynol Junco (2014), have begun thinking through how current theoretical perspectives used in student affairs and with college students are impacted by social media. Junco’s contribution to this discussion is particularly strong in beginning a discussion related to re-examining traditional student development theory and social media.

In these research studies there is evidence that accounting for digital spaces is becoming more important to the questioning of researchers in higher education, student affairs, and education more broadly defined. What is more challenging is accounting for the rapid proliferation of digital social media spaces, and I believe, digital migration patterns of students. Our discourse is still largely dominated by single-platform studies. Therefore, I wonder how, as researchers, practitioners, and educators, we continue conducting important research in areas of importance to education, accounting for the very real differences in platforms, agencies, and experiences. As evidenced by the digital immersive portions of this research study, there are severe complications arising from an attempt at generalizability with social media. In this study, the affordances/agency

of different social media spaces are employed differentially by ‘individual users.’ Moreover, these affordances and agency shift, often without much notice to users, much less researchers.

Of course technology, including social media, and its harnessing for educational ‘outcomes’ continues to become increasingly important in the twenty-first century. In educational arenas ranging from academic achievement tracking to quote, unquote ‘lifelong learning,’ technological advances are promising to utilize the habits, achievements, and ‘failures’ of individuals, often through big data algorithms, to map out individualized learning plans, forecast future learning opportunities, or determine educational trajectories. Yet, one lesson that I learned from this study, which I believe many of us know intuitively, is human becomings are more complex than our technologies allow us to present. In other words, what we think we know (the epistemological) from social media is really quite limited when compared to being (the ontological). Moreover, our current theorizing, what we use to program certain affordances or agencies within social media, are often premised on epistemologies of simplicity, not epistemologies of complexity (Morin, 2008).

I do not want college student affairs educators, researchers, practitioners, or scholars, to forget about complexity. My own research in this dissertation sought to embrace complexity theory, post-qualitative inquiry, and new materialist philosophy/theory to disrupt traditional approaches to studying and researching college student identity issues. I continue to push against the gravitational pull so inherent in research (Taguchi, 2013) that reduces complexity toward “foreclose[ing] of thought” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 5). Like ‘identity,’ social media platforms are nuanced, changing, shifting, intra-acting with multiple agencies, participating in their own becoming, becoming intelligible to the world’s constant unfolding (Barad, 2008a). Thus, in relation to accounting for such spaces, it is important and critical, I believe, that researchers, educators, practitioners, and scholars not reduce the complexity of social media platforms – viewing such spaces as monolithic, static, or unchanging.

Identity as Emergent Phenomena

My second research question, “what are the possibilities and limitations of researchers, educators, and practitioners discarding the ‘developmental’ language of a positivist, empiricist past by embracing complexivist epistemological positions rooted in the theories of complexity science and the post-qualitative turn,” sought to address issues of predictability, control, and the challenge of understanding identity holistically in the twenty-first century (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The language of identity work with college students in the United States, as described in chapter two, retains adherence to certain assumptions: namely, that identity is embodied within an individual, follows normally distributed linear causal pathways, and reaches some developmental apex. While chapter three examined some ways complexivist epistemologies may usher in a new way of discussing identity as an emergent phenomena, “as a creative process of being and becoming” (p. 64), philosophical issues remain for educators interested in issues of identity work.

For starters, the issue of control weighs heavily on my mind. What makes it possible for us, as educators, to believe we can, or should, ‘control’ identity? What would it mean for us to relinquish such control, to see identity not as ‘outcome,’ but as a continuous process? Certainly this is the direction college student affairs educators are moving in larger discussions, but we remain committed to epistemological positions rooted in predictable, one-size-fits-all mentality, even if we claim this is not really our position. Such commitments often bleed into social media spaces. Increasingly, college student affairs educators are discussing how we might harness social media toward particular outcomes and objectives, including identity outcomes. Does our entering such space, imposing our vision or understanding of ‘appropriate’ developmental trajectories, potentially destroy or constrain the process of becoming for college students? Certainly my study could be read, in certain regards, to signal such constraints from the intra-action of multiple agencies in social media spaces. Selene is careful about posting specific aspects of self in Facebook due to

family influence; Miranda has practiced untagging; TJ and Abigail suggest Twitter is more private, thus there are less constraints and it is easier to get lost.

There is also the issue of control through architectural affordances. For example, certain decisions built into platforms allow for what I have called curriculums of identity (Eaton, 2014d). Educators must think through these digital curriculums, or ways of knowing and being. Yet, I wonder whether it is our responsibility to challenge potential reduction in these spaces. Or, should we leave certain spaces for our students to become, to work through, to create their own identity and ultimately a new world, different than the one we inherited? I have seen this play out in particular ways even during the course of this dissertation study. For example, the issue of YikYak, with its anonymity, is leading to crises about how to address racist, sexist, or homophobic comments. These spaces are 'educational,' certainly, but they are not retained, developed, or endorsed by educational institutions. Thus, we see in examples such as controversies surrounding YikYak questions about our role as educators. Do we create policy? Do we discipline students? Do we address the issue by participating ourselves in the dialogue? Do we seek to create larger forums of education on our campus? These questions are not easy to answer – and I think as educators we need to continuously ask ourselves about roles, responsibilities, and questions that are emerging about the constant unfolding of the world, identity, and subjectivity resulting from proliferating and changing social media spaces.

What this ultimately comes down to is an issue of epistemology and ontology. We may not really 'know' anything about how college student's identity can, will, or should 'develop.' Or, rather, we may 'know' only that there is no monolithic view on 'identity.' There are many identities, subjectivities, and social media platforms. All is entangled, intra-acting, emerging, becoming, including in digital spaces. Recognizing this multiplicity – the ever changing – is precisely what complexity theory, post-qualitative inquiry, posthumanist, and new materialist philosophy is

attempting to help us recognize. There is connectivity across space-time, and there is nuance. Identity is not static; it is an emergent phenomena.

Releasing ourselves as educators from an obsession with prediction and control re-humanizes and re-materializes (Petra Hendry, personal communication, December 2014) our practice. As a result, we reconnect with our students, with the world around us, and with being as part of a cosmological unfolding. This does not mean we cease asking questions or engaging in dialogue – in fact, it releases us to continue with an unending exploration of the world becoming intelligible through not retaining commitment to one way of being or knowing. It allows us as educators to engage with complexivist epistemologies. This is an ethical call.

Ethical Research Practice

In my last research question, I sought to answer the question “how might researchers, educators, and practitioners conduct holistic research on digital identity utilizing the tenets of identity emergence and post-qualitative research?” As I re-engage this question near the end of this process, it is important to note that I do not like my use of the terminology ‘digital identity’ in the framing of the question. Perhaps I should have used ‘digital identities’ or ‘digital subjectivities,’ or digital ‘re-presentations.’ Regardless, I’m still wrestling with this question at the end of the process, because I still do not know how to phrase it appropriately.

Language aside, the heart of this inquiry has been toward attempting more holistic research; accounting for the many intra-acting agencies embodied in the mangles that coalesce into “choreographies of becoming” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 10). My own attempt is imperfect, as it should be. Yet, I think my approaches to this study have been important. I utilized my working knowledge of research ‘methods’ to devise an inquiry based on mashing together tenets of ethnography, case study, and narrative research into the digital immersive foundations. Engaging new theoretical perspectives such as complexity theory, I sought to bring into conversation and open possibilities for questioning traditional approaches to understanding, studying, and

researching college student identity theory. I embraced post-qualitative inquiry to challenge notions of simplistic representations. By harnessing technology, I conducted interviews in two diverse digital spaces (chat room and video), attempting to account for the minutiae of encounters in my always incomplete and emerging partial re-presentations in chapters seven through nine. Finally, I heeded Karen Barad's (2008a) calls – to account for the material, to see each encounter as a phenomena, to avoid or account for agential cuts being imposed – as an ethical responsibility. It appears now, more than ever, to truly be a bricolage (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

My Progressive Moment

In this final section, allow me to have my own progressive moment about potential future research and writing that will emerge from this dissertation.

Photography and Visual Cues

I was struck by the many visual, photographic artifacts present in distributed social media spaces. These visual cues signal potential areas of future research. Some researchers of social media have already discussed the importance of photos (Birnbaum, 2013; Lee, 2012), and others have begun describing photo elicitation projects (Kortegast, Branch, Kelly, Latz, Linder, & McCann, 2014). In this study, these photos and visual cues were particularly poignant in Selene's blog, in Abigail's Instagram, in Alex's Pinterest or Facebook, and I did discuss how these photos can be seen as ways of representing self (selfie versus group) or as part of participating in a dialogue and discourse with others in distributed social media spaces (see chapter nine, in particular Selene's section). I envision spending more time thinking through these issues in the future, and potentially researching strictly visual dynamics of social media spaces. I'm particularly interested in looking at how visual representations contribute to discussions of discourse, or of 'social identities' such as race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or religious and spiritual affiliation. My interest in this area comes not only from observing the many visual cues present, but also realizing and coming to know from human becomings such as Miranda that untagging oneself also

contributes to particular dialogues, as does making public or private specific forms of visual cues in spaces such as Pinterest, as discussed by Alex.

Posthumanism and Materialism

I am increasingly drawn to concepts of post-humanism and (new) materialism, and what these theoretical concepts might mean for educators. As described by Katherine Hayles (1999), “the posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (p. 3). Further, Hayles (1999) describes that “the presumption that there is agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the ‘will of others’ is undercut in the posthuman” (p. 3). I believe at several points throughout the dissertation I have embraced this language and theoretical positioning – particularly in chapter eight, when discussing materiality. I have used the theorizing of new materialist philosophers and researchers (Barad, 2008a; 2008b; Coole & Frost, 2010) throughout this dissertation, while embracing post-qualitative inquiry. I have discussed agency as not only possessed by a ‘human,’ but also by distributed social media spaces, by other human actors, by larger environmental forces, by discourse. I hope to continue my inquiry along these paths, but my knowledge of theoretical underpinnings is still emerging, particularly in relation to post-humanism. In the immediate future I will be reading and completing a review of Nathan Snaza and John Weaver’s (2014) book *Posthumanism and Educational Research*. In addition, I plan on immersing myself in more writing by Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti (2013), including *The Posthuman*. Brad Petitfils’ (2014) book *Parallels and Responses to Curricular Innovation: The Possibilities of Posthumanist Education* and John Weaver’s (2010) *Educating the Posthuman: Biosciences, Fiction, and Curriculum Studies* are additional texts that may assist me in moving my dissertation work into the realms of more solid implications for college student affairs educators. In relation to materialisms, I am particularly interested in reading Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s (2008) edited collection *Material Feminisms*. I must be more immersed

in this reading to fully articulate and think through the ramifications of this study in contributing to these discussions.

There is an additional issue relating to materialism with which I have become interested. I mentioned briefly in chapter seven how social media platforms are influenced by other material entities – for example, how a social media platform engaged through a web-based platform on a computer may be different than one intra-acted with through a smart phone device. I failed to be as intentional in my study about questioning the human becomings participating about the ‘devices’ used to intra-act, and what, if any impact this may have had on design, layout, sharing, engagement, or becoming. As technological devices continue to proliferate, including now smart watches, smart eyewear, and other forms of ‘wearable’ technological gadgetry, new avenues of inquiry are opening related to the questions in this dissertation. Many of these questions will follow the materialist and posthumanist theoretical positions.

Voice

Particularly in relation to blogging, I have become interested in issues of voice. Although I think blogs hold a particularly poignant position relating to the emergence of voice in social media, other platforms also appear to move voice in specific directions, or allow for the emergence of particular kinds of voice. For example, you might recall that Alyse discussed how she is still attempting to find her voice on Twitter. There are moments throughout the study where voice becomes disembodied from the particular human becoming whose profiles and pages are being examined. This is particularly true in relation to tagging, to posting on walls. Thus, issues of voice appear to be incredibly important to the world of social media. I anticipate attempting to further interrogate these ideas, starting by examining Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa Mazzei’s (2008) book *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry*.

Additional Theoretical Lenses

Following the trajectory of Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) discussion of 'plugging in' theory to 'data' that has already been collected, I believe that much of my early post-dissertation work will center on reading deeply and more thoroughly some theorists with whom I have not yet been fully engaged. Of particular note, much of my reading throughout this project has referenced the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, particularly the importance of rhizomatic reading. In addition to posthumanism, and continued forays into the theoretical writing of new materialisms, acquainting myself with these theorists appears important.

In relation to my work and interest with post-qualitative inquiry, I hope to become attentive to the work of indigenous researchers. In November, I attended and presented a paper at the Association for the Study of Higher Education conference entitled "Post-Qualitative Research in Higher Education: What Might Research Become?" The discussant for my paper, intrigued by the direction of my own thinking in this area, encouraged me to read and study in this area to imagine the possibilities for how thinking in post-qualitative inquiry really follows the trajectory of indigenous researchers and epistemologies (Stephanie Waterman, personal communication, November 25, 2014).

Cyber-Currere

William Pinar's (2012) concept of currere – which I have referenced quite liberally through chapters eight and nine – has emerged as a theoretical perspective where I would like to begin my post-dissertation thinking and writing. I have already written and presented about social media spaces and releasing and constraining affordances (or agencies), as sites of curriculum (Eaton, 2014c). Pinar (2012), who discusses "the significance of subjectivity to education," believes that as educators and human beings "we must become 'temporal,' living simultaneously in the past, present, and future" (p. 5). Being in "a temporally differentiated sequence of ourselves as

individuals might enable us to understand the problem that is the present” (Pinar, 2012, p. 5), which may be translated in my current thinking as ‘becoming.’

There are many moments in my field notes where this idea began germinating. Maxine and Alyse’s blog signal these simultaneous moments of living in the past, present, and future; Alex’s Pinterest – with her boards of future home, future kids, future wedding; the various discussions regarding Timehop and its influence, bringing the past into the present. Or the many discussions regarding space-time, begun in chapter five, continuing in chapters seven through nine, where being in multiple distributed spaces in clock time and virtual time (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013) contributes to various subjectivities. Applying this theoretical concept of currere, thinking through the ramifications of thinking in this way, will introduce a new theoretical lens to the field of college student affairs educators, one that I believe augments well with Baxter Magolda’s (1998) notion of self-authorship, and challenges notions that digital selves are inauthentic selves (Aviram, 2010; Turkle, 2011).

I would like to introduce the notion of cyber-currere to the field of education. Harnessing currere disrupts and challenging some of the traditional ways that Pinar (2012) and others (Autio, 2006; 2014; Aviram, 2010; Biesta, 2014; Lanier, 2011; Turkle, 2011) have discussed human subjectivity in digital space. Pinar (2012) expresses specific angst regarding the role of digital technologies in education and human subjectivity. I believe Pinar’s (and others) distress might be culled by introducing the four aspects of currere – the regressive, the progressive, the analytic, and the synthetic – into digital spaces. Essentially, I will ‘plug’ my dissertation ‘data’ into Pinar’s (2012) theory, much as Jackson and Mazzei (2012) advocate in their book *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research*. If human subjectivity and human subjectification (Biesta, 2014) is the aim of education, then it is important that theorists such as Pinar (2012) recognize the important work occurring in digital spaces. Social media is educative, a site of intense synchronous subjectification.

Cyber-currere is important for college student educators as well. Traditional student ‘development’ theories, as discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, historically have followed linear pathways. The past fifteen years has seen a shift away from such models, toward more critical and complexivist theoretical perspectives. If our role as college student educators is to value the “whole student” (Braxton, 2009), then such value must occur in digital spaces as well. Yet, I do not want college student educators to control such spaces. Cyber-currere, as a philosophical mantra, will afford college student educators new ways of thinking about college student authenticity, and ultimately, our work. Viewing digital spaces as synchronous means we may not need to ‘develop’ our students, but rather ‘become’ alongside these already “whole students.” This releases us – to view becoming as an endless process; to seek knowing from multiple epistemological positions; to question; to seek our own continual becoming; to return to the ontological space of being. Such a return is more holistic – as it engages not only the human elements of becoming – but the inorganic, the material, the spiritual, the aesthetic, the vitalistic (Bennett, 2010), and the environmental.

This is not an end, but a beginning. Not knowing, but questioning, exploring and being part of the continual unfolding and becoming of the world, for the first time.

REFERENCES

- Abes, E. S. (2009). Theoretical borderlands: Using multiple theoretical perspectives to challenge inequitable power structures in student development theory. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(2), 141-156.
- Abes, E. S. (2012). Constructivist and intersectional interpretations of a lesbian college student's multiple social identities. *The Journal of Higher Education, 83*(2), 186-216.
- Abes, E. S., Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2007). Reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity: The role of meaning-making capacity in the construction of multiple identities. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(1), 1-22.
- ACPA & NASPA (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Alaimo, S. & Hekman, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Material feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Alhadeff-Jones, M. (2013). Complexity, methodology, and method: Crafting a critical process of research. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education, 10* (1/2), 19-44.
- Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Doing narrative research* (2nd Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 25*, 297-308.
- Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., & Lindholm, J. A. (2011). *Cultivating the spirit: How college can enhance students' inner lives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Autio, T. (2006). *Subjectivity, curriculum and society: Between and beyond the German didaktik and Anglo-American curriculum studies*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum & Associates.
- Autio, T. (2014). The internationalization of curriculum research. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *International handbook of curriculum research* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 17-31). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Aviram, A. (2010). *Navigating through the storm: Reinventing education for postmodern democracies*. Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.
- Barad, K. (2008a). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Barad, K. (2008b). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. In S. Alaimo & S. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms* (pp. 120-154). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in student intellectual development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1998). Developing self-authorship in young adult life. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39(2), 143 – 156.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2009). The activity of meaning making: A holistic perspective on college student development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 621-639.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. & King, P. M. (2007). Interview strategies for assessing self-authorship: Constructing conversations to assess meaning making. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48, 491-508.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's way of knowing*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bennett, J. (2010). A vitalist stopover on the way to a new materialism. In D. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, and politics* (pp. 47-69). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2014). *The beautiful risk of education*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Birnbaum, M. (2013). The fronts students use: Facebook and the standardization of self-presentations. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(2), 155-171.
- Blimling, G.S. (2013). New dimensions to psychosocial development in traditionally aged college students. *About Campus*, 18(5), 10-16.
- Bloland, P. A., Stamatakos, L. C. & Rogers, R. R. (1994). *Reform in student affairs: A critique of student development*. Greensboro, NC: ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse.
- boyd, d. (2008). Why youth heart social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 119-142). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- boyd, d. (2011). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39-58). New York, NY: Routledge.
- boyd, d. (2014a). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- boyd, d. (2014b, July 1). What does the Facebook experiment teach us? [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://socialmediacollective.org/2014/07/01/facebook-experiment/>.
- boyd, d. m. & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, article 11. Retrieved November 18, 2011, from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>.

- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Braxton, J. M. (2009). Understanding the development of the whole person. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 573 – 575.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Six theories of development* (pp. 187-249). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed.). (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology* (6th ed., pp. 793-828). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Buckingham, D. (Ed.). (2008). *Youth, identity, and digital media*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Byrne, D. N. (2008). The future of (the) “race:” Identity, discourse, and the rise of computer-mediated public spheres. In A. Everett (Ed.), *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media* (pp. 15-38). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Capra, F. (1996). *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Capra, F. (2002). *The hidden connections: Integrating the biological, cognitive, and social dimensions of life into a science of sustainability*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Capra, F. (2010). *The Tao of physics: An exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Carroll, J., Howard, S., Vetere, F., Peck, J., & Murphy, J. (2001, December). Identity, power and fragmentation in cyberspace: Technology appropriation by young people. In *Proceedings of the 12th Australasian Conference on Information Systems (ACIS 2001)* (Vol. 1, pp. 95-102).
- Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of homosexuality*, 4, 219 – 235.
- Casti, J. L. (1994). *Complexification: Explaining a paradoxical world through the science of surprise*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers.
- Charlesworth, A. (2008). Understanding and managing legal issues in Internet research. In N. Fielding, R. M. Lee, & G. Blank (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of online research methods* (pp. 42-57). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Cherry, K. (2002). A writer’s pledge of allegiance. In W. Heyen (Ed.), *September 11, 2001: American writers respond* (p. 74). Silver Spring, MD: Etruscan Press.

- Chickering, A. W. & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and Identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Christakis, N. A. & Fowler, J. H. (2009). *Connected: The surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Cilliers, P. (1998). *Complexity and postmodernism: Understanding complex systems*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cilliers, P. & Preiser, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Complexity, difference, and identity: An ethical perspective*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Cohen, J. & Stewart, I. (1995). *The collapse of chaos: Discovering simplicity in a complex world*. London, England: Penguin Group.
- Collins, P. H. (1999). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Coole, D. & Frost, S. (Eds.). (2010). *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, and politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1995). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: Key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 357-383). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, & D. Birman (Eds.), *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (pp. 312 – 333). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Daly, K. J. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Davis, M. (2013). Doing research 'on and through' new media narrative. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 159-175). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Davis, B., Sumara, D., & Luce-Kapler, R. (2000). *Engaging minds: Changing teaching in complex times*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Davis, B. & Simmt, E. (2003). Understanding learning systems: Mathematics education and complexity science. *Journal of Research in Mathematics Education*, 34(2), 137-167.
- Davis, B. & Sumara, D. (2006). *Complexity and education: Inquiries into learning, teaching, and research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Davis, B., Sumara, D., & Iftody, T. (2010). Complexity, consciousness and curriculum. In D. Osberg and G. Biesta (Eds.), *Complexity theory and the politics of education* (pp. 107-120). Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.

- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- de Villiers-Botha, T. & Cilliers, P. (2010). The complex "I": The formation of identity in complex systems. In P. Cilliers & R. Preiser (Eds.), *Complexity, difference, and identity: An ethical perspective* (pp. 19-38). New York, NY: Springer.
- Dill, B. T. & Zambrana, R. E. (2009). *Emerging intersections: Race, class, and gender in theory, policy, and practice*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Doll, W.E. (1993). *A postmodern perspective on curriculum*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Drotner, K. (2008). Leisure is hard work: Digital practices and future competencies. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 167-184). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Duncheon, J. C. & Tierney, W. G. (2013). Changing conceptions of time: Implications for educational research and practice. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(2), 236-272.
- Eaton, P. W. (2014a). Whole learning: Student affairs' challenge to college curriculums. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30(1), 64-74.
- Eaton, P. W. (2014b). Writing student affairs: Discursive shifts and the challenges of holistic education on American college campuses. In B. Smith, K. Becker, L. Miller, N. Reid, & M. Sorenson (Eds.), *Collective unravelings of the hegemonic web* (pp. 23-34). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Eaton, P. W. (2014c, August 28). William Pinar and cyberspace: Complicating the conversation [Weblog Post]. Retrieved from <http://pweaton.wordpress.com>.
- Eaton, P. W. (2014d, June). *Curriculums of identity: Embracing digital space*. Paper presented at the Curriculum Studies Summer Collaborative Conference, Savannah, GA.
- Eaton, P. W. (2014e, July 10). Rethinking research ethics: An initial response to the Facebook study [Weblog Post]. Retrieved from <http://pweaton.wordpress.com>.
- Eggers, D. (2013). *The circle*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Emmeche, C., Koppe, S., & Stjernfelt, F. (1997). Exploring emergence: Toward an ontology of levels. *Journal for General Philosophy of Science*, 28(1), 83-119.
- Erikson, E. H. (1959/1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Evans, N. J. (2005). Psychosocial, cognitive, and typological perspectives on student development. In S. R. Komives & D. B. Woodard Jr. (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed.) (pp. 179 – 202). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Everett, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Eynon, R., Fry, J., & Schroeder, R. (2008). The ethics of Internet research. In N. Fielding, R. M. Lee, & G. Blank (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of online research methods* (pp. 23-41). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Fassinger, R. E., & Miller, B. A. (1997). Validation of an inclusive model of homosexual identity formation in a sample of gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 32(2), 53 – 78.
- Fielding, N., Lee, R. M., & Blank, G. (Eds.). (2008). *The SAGE handbook of online research methods*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Gardner, H. & Davis, K. (2013). *The app generation: How today's youth navigate identity, intimacy, and imagination in a digital world*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gillespie, T. (2014, July 9). Social media collective weigh in on the debates about the Facebook emotion study [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://socialmediacollective.org/2014/07/09/social-media-collective-weigh-in-on-the-debates-about-the-facebook-emotions-study/>.
- Gilstrap, D. L. (2011). Human ecological complexity: Epistemological implications of social networking and emerging curriculum theories. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 8(2), 36 – 51.
- Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Giroux, H. A. & Giroux, S. S. (2006). *Take back higher education: Race, youth, and the crisis of democracy in the post-civil rights era*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goldman, S., Booker, A., & McDermott, M. (2008). Mixing the digital, social, and cultural: Learning, identity, and agency in youth participation. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 185-206). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Goldman, S., Booker, A., & McDermott, M. (2008). Mixing the digital, social, and cultural: Learning, identity, and agency in youth participation. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 185-206). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Grasmuck, S., Martin, J., & Zhao, S. (2009). Ethno-racial identity displays on Facebook. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 15, 158 – 188.
- Gray, R., Vitak, J., Easton, E., & Ellison, B. (2013). Examining social adjustment in the age of social media: Factors influencing successful transitions and persistence. *Computers & Education*, 67, 193 – 207.

- Hanh, T. N. (2007). *Teachings on love*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Haraway, D. J. (1997). *Modest_witness@second_millennium.femaleman_meets_oncomouse: Feminism and technoscience*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. J. (2004). *The Haraway reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Helms, J. E. (1992). *A race is a nice thing to have: A guide to being a white person or understanding the white persons in your life*. Topeka, KS: Content Communications.
- Helms, J. E. (1993). *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Hetherington, L. (2013). Complexity theory and methodology: The potential of 'complex case study' for educational research. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 10 (1/2), 71-85.
- Hine, C. (Ed.). (2005). *Virtual methods: Issues in social research on the Internet*. New York, NY: Berg.
- Hine, C. (2009). How can qualitative internet researchers define the boundaries of their projects? In A. N. Markham & N. K. Baym (Eds.), *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method* (pp. 1 – 20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Jackson, A. Y. (2013). Posthumanist data analysis of mangling practices. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 741-748.
- Jackson, A. Y. & Mazzei, L. A. (2008). *Voice in qualitative inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jackson, A. Y. & Mazzei, L. A. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Johnson, S. (2001). *Emergence: The connected lives of ants, brains, cities, and software*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Jones, S. R. (1996). Toward inclusive theory: Disability as social construction. *NASPA Journal*, 33(4), 347 – 354.
- Jones, S. R. (2009). Constructing identities at the intersections: An autoethnographic exploration of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(3), 287-304.
- Jones, S. R. & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 405-414.

- Jones, S. R. & Abes, E. S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Junco, R. (2013). Comparing actual and self-reported measures of Facebook use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 626-631.
- Junco, R. (2014). *Engaging students through social media: Evidence-based practices for use in student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kalpidou, M., Costin, D., & Morris, J. (2011). The relationship between Facebook an the well-being of undergraduate college students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(1), 183-189.
- Kasch, D. (2013). Queer theory. In S. R. Jones & E. S. Abes, *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity* (pp. 191-212). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: Implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association (ACPA), Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I), Association of College Unions – International (ACUI), National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), National Association for Campus Activities (NACA), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA).
- Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kelly, K. (2010). *What technology wants*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2001). Describing the bricolage: Conceptualizing a new rigor on qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 679-692.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). On to the next level: Continuing the conceptualization of the bricolage. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(3), 323-350.
- Kincheloe, J. L. & Berry, K. S. (2004). *Rigour and complexity in educational research: Conceptualizing the bricolage*. New York, NY: Open University Press.
- Kivits, J. (2005). Online interviewing and the research relationship. In C. Hine (Ed.), *Virtual methods: Issues in social research on the Internet* (pp. 35-50). New York, NY: Berg.
- Kortegast, C., Branch, K., Kelly, B. T., Latz, A., Linder, C., & McCann, K. (2014, November). *Enhancing ways of knowing: Participatory visual methods in higher education research*. Paper Presentation presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J., & Whitt, E. J. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a *nice* field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Lamott, A. (1994). *Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Lanier, J. (2011). *You are not a gadget: A manifesto*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Lanier, J. (2014, June 30). Should Facebook manipulate users? The New York Times. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/01/opinion/jaron-lanier-on-lack-of-transparency-in-facebook-study.html?_r=0.
- Lather, P. (2013). Methodology-21: What do we do in the afterward? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 634-645.
- Lather, P. & St. Pierre, E. A. (2013). Post-qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 629-633.
- Lee, E. B. (2012). Young, Black, and connected: Facebook usage among African American college students. *Journal of Black Studies*, 43(3), 336-354.
- Lewin, K. (1936). *Principles of topological psychology*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc.
- Lifton, R. J. (1993). *The protean self: Human resilience in an age of fragmentation*. New York, NY: BasicBooks.
- Lopez, A. (2008). Circling the cross: Bridging Native America, education, and digital media. In A. Everett (Ed.), *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media* (pp. 109-128). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Lynn, M. & Dixson, A. D. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of critical race theory in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Maalouf, A. (2000). *In the name of identity: Violence and the need to belong*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Markham, A. N. & Baym, N. K. (Eds.). (2009). *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Martinez-Aleman, A. M. & Wartman, K. L. (2009). *Online social networking on campus: Understanding what matters in student culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mason, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Complexity theory and the philosophy of education*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mazzei, L. A. (2013). A voice without organs: Interviewing in posthumanist research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 732-740.
- McCarn, S. R. & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24, 508 – 534.

- Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Montuori, A. (2008). Foreward: Edgar Morin's path of complexity. In E. Morin (2008), *On complexity* (pp. vii-xliv). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Morin, E. (2008). *On complexity*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Morris, M., Doll, M. A., & Pinar, W. F. (1999). *How we work*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Morrison, A. (2014). Facebook and coaxed affordances. In A. Poletti & J. Rak (Eds.), *Identity technologies: Constructing the self online* (pp. 112-131). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Nakamura, L. & Chow-White, P. A. (Eds.). (2012). *Race after the Internet*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). (1989). *Points of View*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). (2012). Promoting student learning and institutional improvement: Lessons from NSSE at 13. Annual Results 2012. Retrieved from http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2012_Results/pdf/NSSE_2012_Annual_Results.pdf#page=8.
- NPR. (2014, July 1). Facebook's newsfeed study: Was it ethical or a violation of policy? National Public Radio. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2014/07/01/327248369/facebooks-newsfeed-study-was-it-ethical-or-a-violation-of-privacy>.
- Nuss, E. M. (2003). The development of student affairs. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 65-88). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Connor, H., Madge, C., Shaw, R., & Wellens, J. (2008). Internet-based interviewing. In N. Fielding, R. M. Lee, & G. Blank (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of online research methods* (pp. 271-289). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Orgad, S. (2005). From online to offline and back: Moving from online to offline relationships with research informants. In C. Hine (Ed.), *Virtual methods: Issues in social research on the Internet* (pp. 51-66). New York, NY: Berg.
- Osberg, D. & Biesta, G. J. J. (2007a). Beyond re/presentation: A case for updating the epistemology of schooling. *Interchange*, 38(1), 15-29.
- Osberg, D. & Biesta, G. J. J. (2007b). Beyond presence: Epistemological and pedagogical implications of 'strong' emergence. *Interchange*, 38(1), 31-51.
- Osberg, D., Biesta, G., & Cilliers, P. (2007). From representation to emergence: Complexity's challenge to the epistemology of schooling. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(1), 213-227.

- Papacharissi, Z. (Ed.). (2011). *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, L. D. & Simmons, S. L. (2008). Exploring complexities of multiple identities of lesbians in a Black college environment. *The Negro Educational Review*, 59(3/4), 197-215.
- Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30, 227-238.
- Petitfils, B. (2014). *Parallels and responses to curricular innovation: The possibilities of posthumanist education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project. (2013). 72% of online adults are social networking users. Retrieved from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/social-networking-sites.aspx>.
- Phinney, J.S. (1989). Stages of ethnic identity development in minority group adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 9(1/2), 34 - 49.
- Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pinar, W. F. (2013). *Curriculum studies in the United States: Present circumstances, intellectual histories*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Poletti, A. & Rak, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Identity technologies: Constructing the self online*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Priogogine, I. & Stengers, I. (1984). *Order out of chaos: Man's new dialogue with nature*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Qualman, E. (2013). *Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Quaye, S. J. (2013). Critical race theory. In S. R. Jones & E. S. Abes, *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity* (pp. 166-190). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Renn, K. A. (2008). Research on biracial and multiracial identity development: Overview and synthesis. In K. A. Renn & P. Shang (Eds.), *Biracial and multiracial students* (pp. 13-22). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Renn, K. A. (2012). Approaches to college student development. In K. A. Renn & R. D. Reason (Eds.), *College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes* (pp. 114-133). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Renn, K. A. & Arnold, K.D. (2003). Reconceptualizing research on college student peer culture. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 74(3), 261-291.
- Renn, K. A. & Reason, R. D. (2012). *College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ricks, T. E. (2010). China, microbes, and complexity: How to improve mathematics education. In H. Zhang (Ed.), *Complexity, Chinese culture, and curriculum reform* (pp. 112-122). Shanghai, China: East China Normal University Press.
- Rivard, C. (2014). Archiving disaster and national identity in the digital realm: The September 11 digital archive and the hurricane digital memory bank. In A. Poletti & J. Rak (Eds.), *Identity technologies: Constructing the self online* (pp. 132-143). Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Sandoval, C. & Latorre, G. (2008). Chicana/o activism: Judy Baca's digital work with youth of color. In A. Everett (Ed.), *Learning race and ethnicity: Youth and digital media* (pp. 81-108). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Sanford, N. (1967). *Where colleges fail: The study of the student as a person*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Scott, C. (2009). Epistemological multilingualism: A tool for conviviality. *Paideusis*, 18(2), 43-54.
- Slattery, P. (2013). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era: Teaching and learning in an age of accountability*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Slife, B.D. & Williams, R.N. (1995). *What's behind the research: Discovering the hidden assumptions in the behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Snaza, N. (2010). Thirteen theses on the question of state in curriculum studies. In E. Malewski (Ed.), *Curriculum studies handbook: The next moment* (pp. 43-56). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Snaza, N. & Weaver, J. (2014). *Posthumanism and educational research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2013). The posts continue: becoming. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 646-657.
- Stern, S. (2008). Producing sites, exploring identities: Youth online authorship. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 95-118). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (Ed.). (2013). *Living at the intersections: Social identities and black collegians*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Subrahmanyam, K. & Smahel, D. (2012). *Digital youth: The role of media in development*. New York, NY: Springer.

- Sue, D. W. & Sue, D. (2003). Racial/cultural minority identity development: Therapeutic implications. In D.W. Sue & D. Sue, *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (4th ed., pp. 205 – 233). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Taguchi, H. L. (2013). Images of thinking in feminist materialisms: Ontological divergences and the production of researcher subjectivities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 706-716.
- Tatum, B.D. (2003). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria: And other conversations about race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Taylor, M. C. (2001). *The moment of complexity: Emerging network culture*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Torres, V. (2003). Influences on ethnic identity development of Latino college students in the first two years of college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(4), 532 – 547.
- Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. A. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 577-596.
- Trueit, D. (Ed.). (2012). *Pragmatism, post-modernism, and complexity theory: The “fascinating imaginative realm” of William E. Doll, Jr.* New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tuana, N. (2008). Viscous porosity: Witnessing Katrina. In S. Alaimo & S. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms* (pp. 188-213). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ueland, B. (1938/1987). *If you want to write: A book about art, independence, and spirit*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Valkenburg, P. M., Schouten, A. P., & Peter, J. (2005). Adolescents’ identity experiments on the Internet. *New Media & Society*, 7(3), 383-402.
- Wakeford, N. & Cohen, K. (2008). Fieldnotes in public: Using blogs for research. In N. Fielding, R. M. Lee, & G. Blank (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of online research methods* (pp. 307-326). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Wallace, B. A. (2003). *Buddhism and science: Breaking new ground*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Watts, D. J. (2014, July 9). Lessons learned from the Facebook study. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from: <http://www.npr.org/2014/07/01/327248369/facebook-newsfeed-study-was-it-ethical-or-a-violation-of-privacy>.

- Weaver, J. (2010). *Educating the posthuman: Biosciences, fiction, and curriculum studies*. Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.
- Weber, S. & Mitchell, C. (2008). Imaging, keyboarding, and posting identities: Young people and new media technologies. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 25-48). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Wijeyesinghe, C.L. & Jackson, B.W. (2012). *New perspectives on racial identity development: Integrating emerging frameworks* (2nd ed). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Winkle-Wagner, R. & McCoy, D. L. (2013). Many into one: Using intersectional perspectives to understand Black first-generation college student identities. In T. L. Strayhorn (Ed.), *Living at the intersections: Social identities and Black collegians* (pp. 41-60). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Wolcott, H. F. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S. & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24, 1816-1836.
- Zohar, D. (1990). *The quantum self: Human nature and consciousness defined by the new physics*. New York, NY: Quill/William Morrow.

**APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Roland Mitchell
Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: August 19, 2014
RE: IRB# 3499

TITLE: Emergent Identity of College Students in the Digital Age Examined through Complexivist Epistemologies

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review type: Full ☒ Expedited ☐ **Review date:** 8/8/2014

Risk Factor: Minimal ☐ Uncertain ☒ Greater Than Minimal ☐

Approved ☒ **Disapproved** ☐

Approval Date: 8/8/2014 **Approval Expiration Date:** 8/7/2015

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 10

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): _____

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

APPENDIX B
PROMOTIONAL GRAPHIC

SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH STUDY

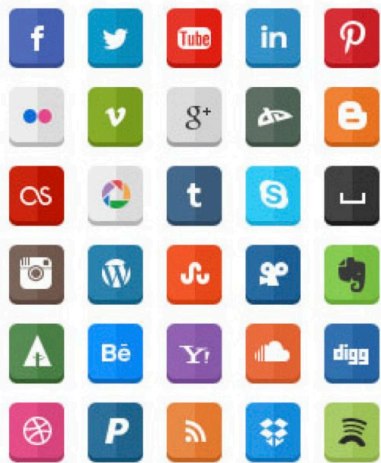
ARE YOU:

- A CURRENTLY ENROLLED COLLEGE STUDENT?
- HIGHLY ENGAGED ON MULTIPLE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES?
- WILLING TO COMMIT TO PARTICIPATING IN TWO 1 HOUR INTERVIEWS?

THEN I'M LOOKING FOR YOU!

FILL OUT A SHORT SURVEY TO
PARTICIPATE:

<http://bit.ly/1n6ROHf>



This study has been approved by the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB #3499): 8/19/14. .
Questions may be addressed to Paul Eaton (pweaton@gmail.com).

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Qualtrics Survey Software

8/13/14 7:28 AM

Consent Form

Study Title

Emergent Identity of College Students in the Digital Age Examined Through Complexivist Epistemologies.

Performance Site

Louisiana State University Agricultural & Mechanical College, Baton Rouge, LA

Investigators

The following Investigators are available to answer questions about this study:

Paul Eaton, Doctoral Candidate, 940-367-3607, pweaton@gmail.com
Dr. Roland Mitchell, Associate Professor, 225-578-2156, rwmitch@lsu.edu

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how college students utilize various digital social media platforms to understand, explore, articulate, and make-meaning of their identity or identities, as well as how college student identity or identities emerges in various digital social media platforms.

Participants

Participants in this study are currently enrolled or continuing college students. Participants are above the age of 18.

Number of Participants

A maximum of 10 individuals will participate in this study.

Duration

This study should last between 3 - 4 months for each participant.

Study Procedure

This study will be conducted in three phases and three digital venues.

Digital Social Media Platforms: Participants will grant access to their various digital social media accounts to the co-Principal Investigator. The participant will add the co-Principal Investigator to their social network. Participants agree to grant access to their social media accounts to the co-Principal Investigator for the duration of the project.

Interview #1: Participants agree to participate in an online interview through a digital chat function agreed upon between the co-Principal Investigator and the participant.

Interview #2: Participant agrees to participate in an online interview to be conducted through Zoom, an online video chat software function.

Member Check: Participant agrees to a member-check interview to be conducted through Zoom, an online video chat software function.

Benefits of participation

Participants may benefit from this study in several ways. The questions and research process may assist participants in reflecting on their identity or identities. The questions and research may also assist participants in understanding

the impacts of digital social media platforms on their experience, identity or identities, and college experience.

Risks of participation

There are minimal risks involved with participation in this study. Participants may experience emotional or psychological distress in discussing their identity or their experiences with digital social media.

Confidentiality

Participants will be asked to select a pseudonym for each of their digital social media profiles. Anonymity will be retained through paraphrasing of information located on social media accounts. Participants should be aware of long term privacy issues associated with participation. Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The researchers are mandatory reporters, meaning that any information posted online of an illegal nature, or that specifies harm to oneself or others, may need to be reported to appropriate authorities.

All interviews will be downloaded and stored on a secure external hard-drive. These interviews will be accessible only to the Researchers. Portions of the interviews may be used in journal articles, conference presentations, books, website presentations, and the final dissertation for this project. In all cases, anonymity is retained through use of pseudonyms selected by the participants.

Right to Refuse

Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss to any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Signatures

I have read the Informed Consent Document and Reviewed the Participant Preparation Video. All of my questions regarding participation in this study have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding participation in this study to the researchers. If I have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landon, Institutional Review Board, 225-578-8692, E-mail: irb@lsu.edu, Website: www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in this study through my electronic signature below.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX D INTEREST SURVEY

Qualtrics Survey Software

5/18/14 8:21 AM

Digital Social Media & College Students - Participant Interest Survey

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study examining college student use of digital social media platforms and identity issues. Please fill out this short questionnaire. If you are selected for this study, you will be contacted by Paul Eaton (pweaton@gmail.com), Co-Principal Investigator, within the next 14 days.

Name

E-mail Address (Please provide an e-mail you check regularly).

College or University where you are Enrolled (Participants must be currently enrolled or continuing college students).

Please Select your Academic Standing.

- ☐ First-Year College Student
- ☐ Second-Year College Student
- ☐ Third-Year College Student
- ☐ Fourth-Year College Student
- ☐ Fifth-Year College Student
- ☐ Post-Baccalaureate Degree Student

Please Estimate the number of hours you spend engaging on social media in a typical day.

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1 -3 Hours
- ☐ 3 - 5 Hours
- ☐ 5+ Hours

What technologies do you utilize to engage with social media? (Select all that apply).

- ☐ Desktop Computer
- ☐ Laptop Computer
- ☐ Smart Phone
- ☐ Tablet Device
- ☐ Other

Digital Social Media are defined as any platform where a user can create a public or semi-public profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view the profiles of others with whom they may or may not be connected. Some common and popular social media platforms are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Wordpress. Some websites that function with chat and profiles are also social media platforms.

Please list all the social media platforms where you have an account and engage regularly.

Do you have access to a device with video chat capabilities?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Demographic Information

Gender

How would you describe your racial or ethnic background?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

APPENDIX E LETTERS OF PERMISSION

1/19/2015

Rightslink® by Copyright Clearance Center



RightsLink®

Home

Account
Info

Help



WILEY

Book: Identity Development of College Students: Advancing Frameworks for Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Logged in as:
Paul Eaton

LOGOUT

Author: Susan R. Jones, Elisa S. Abes, Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (Foreword by)

Publisher: John Wiley and Sons

Date: Feb 1, 2013

Copyright © 2013, John Wiley and Sons

Order Completed

Thank you for your order.

This Agreement between Paul W Eaton ("You") and John Wiley and Sons ("John Wiley and Sons") consists of your license details and the terms and conditions provided by John Wiley and Sons and Copyright Clearance Center.

Your confirmation email will contain your order number for future reference.

[Get the printable license.](#)

License Number	3552821072019
License date	Jan 19, 2015
Licensed Content Publisher	John Wiley and Sons
Licensed Content Publication	Wiley Books
Licensed Content Title	Identity Development of College Students: Advancing Frameworks for Multiple Dimensions of Identity
Licensed Content Author	Susan R. Jones, Elisa S. Abes, Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (Foreword by)
Licensed Content Date	Feb 1, 2013
Licensed Content Pages	352
Type of use	Dissertation/Thesis
Requestor type	University/Academic
Format	Electronic
Portion	Figure/table
Number of figures/tables	1
Original Wiley figure/table number(s)	5.2
Will you be translating?	No
Title of your thesis / dissertation	#Becoming: Emergent Identity of College Students in the Digital Age Examined Through Complexivist Epistemologies
Expected completion date	May 2015
Expected size (number of pages)	315
Requestor Location	Paul W Eaton 7878 LaSalle Ave #216 BATON ROUGE, LA 70806 United States Attn: Paul W Eaton
Billing Type	Invoice
Billing address	Paul W Eaton 7878 LaSalle Ave #216 BATON ROUGE, LA 70806 United States Attn: Paul W Eaton
Total	0.00 USD

<https://s100.copyright.com/AppDispatchServlet>

1/2

1/19/2015

Rightslink® by Copyright Clearance Center

[ORDER MORE](#)

[CLOSE WINDOW](#)

Copyright © 2015 [Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.](#) All Rights Reserved. [Privacy statement.](#)
Comments? We would like to hear from you. E-mail us at customercare@copyright.com



To: Paul Eaton
dissertation inclusion only

Date: 12/8/2014

Re: Your reference: dissertation only
DUP reference [invoice] #: DUP9339
Reprinting Fee: \$0 (use of one figure in dissertation)

Permission is granted for non-exclusive world rights in the English language for use within dissertation only, not to be 'published' (no excerpting or derivative use, one-offs, splits or other editions of similar content. No use in repositories or databases where the material is available singly - outside the forthcoming book/journal as a whole. As example, Copyright Clearance Center), in print media only, of the following described material:

"The Ontology of Knowing, the Intra-activity of Becoming, and the Ethics of Mattering; Fig. 34," in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Karen Barad, pp. 389-. Copyright, 2006, Duke University Press. All rights reserved.
Republished by permission of the copyright holder. www.dukeupress.edu

The granting of this permission is made subject to the following additional conditions:

1. The payment of any fee indicated above. If payment is not received by the publication date, this grant of permission will terminate and all rights granted herein will be rescinded. Our Federal I.D. number is 56-0532129.
2. A credit line substantially similar to that noted above is used.
3. No rights are granted to art work, photographic images or other materials contained within the above-described material, the copyright to which is held by another entity. Additionally, no rights are granted to any third-party material cited within the article requested.

Please remit check payments to:

Duke University Press
Accounting Dept./R&P
905 West Main St., Suite 18B
Durham, North Carolina 27701 USA

Wire transfer payments to:

Bank: Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.
301 S Tryon Street
Charlotte, NC 28282 USA

ABA#: 053000219 (Domestic wires only)
Swift Code: WFBUS6S (Foreign wires only)
Beneficiary: Duke University Concentration Account
24 Blackwell St., Suite 1000
Durham, NC 27701

Account #: 2023740253053
Details: Duke University Press
Rights & Permissions/DUP#9339

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Diane Grosse
Manager, Rights & Permissions
Duke University Press
E-mail: permissions@dukeupress.edu

VITA

Paul William Eaton received his Bachelor of Arts degree in English, History, and Leadership Studies from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in 2002. Following completion of his baccalaureate studies, he pursued his Master of Education degree in Counseling and Personnel Services at the University of Maryland College Park, which he earned in 2005. His passion for working with college students led him to the University of North Texas, where he worked as Coordinator of New Student Programs (2005-2007) and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he served as Director of Orientation (2007-2013) and Director of Institutional Assessment (2013).

During his time at Louisiana State University, he has been an active member of the Higher Education Administration Program and Curriculum Theory Project. He anticipates receiving his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in May 2015 and plans to pursue work as a researcher and faculty member.