

College Students' Use of Facebook During Their Transition to College:
Mediated Belonging at a Small, Private Liberal Arts College

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Dedication

This work is dedicated all of those who supported me on this journey. Without your unconditional love and encouragement, I would not be where I am today. I stood on the shoulders of many, and I am grateful for the perspectives I gained from that vantage point.

Mom, you are the example of determination and hard work.

Dad, you are a fountain of interconnected ideas; clearly I inherited that trait.

Paul, you have shown me courage and possibility.

Ryan, you remind me of my roots and keep me humble like only a brother can.

Karen, you blazed a trail for me to follow.

And my cohort – especially the Anderson Center Writers – you shared your own processes and kept me moving forward.

I am deeply grateful.

Abstract

This study explored the effects of participation in a targeted Facebook group on students' sense of belonging as they transitioned to a small, private liberal arts college. Data collected through a mixed-method design illuminated the impact of participation in a targeted Facebook group on participants' sense of belonging as they made the transition to college. Evidence from this study indicates that students' participation in a targeted Facebook group may impact students' sense of belonging in various ways. Additional data indicate that the ways students engage with Facebook, their motivation to engage, the frequency of engagement and value attributed to such interactions are fluid. The intersection between perceived value, frequency and type of Facebook suggest taxonomy of Facebook usage. Understanding different types of usage will aid institutions in managing social media presence and determining best ways to introduce and engage new members within their communities.

Keywords: Transition; Belonging; Facebook

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

In 1964, H. Marshall McLuhan famously wrote “the medium is the message” as an articulation of the transformative power that new technologies have. He asserted that as a society becomes enthralled by new and exciting ways of connecting, its people are, on the whole more attentive to what is newly accessible and/or presented in more exciting ways than to what was presented in ways to which they were previously accustomed. Carr (2005) cites McLuhan’s contention: “A popular medium changes what we see and how we see it,” ultimately “altering patterns of perception” (p.58). Similarly, Michael Bugeja (2005) argues that our society has become inured to the ways that media and technology have altered the nature of our relationships, stating that we easily overlook their impact because they have become so much a part of the fabric of our experience. He makes the case that as time is increasingly consumed by hours spent in isolation within virtual communities, interpersonal skills will be lost, and our society will become less able to create, foster, and sustain face-to-face communities. As someone who spends much of her professional life helping students navigate entry into new campus communities, I find this assertion worthy of further examination.

In 2006, a colleague and I presented two separate conference sessions about online community development to groups of student leaders from various campuses. At the time, MySpace was popular, Facebook was emerging, and the first ‘tweet’ was years away. As I reflected about the increasing presence of social networking in students’ lives in preparation for our presentations, I had a nagging discomfort with the ways that students, in particular, were beginning to interact in this no-place of Cyberspace. Calling

to mind increasing instances of students sitting across the room from one another, communicating via instant-messaging or texting, rather than using their voices or making eye contact made me wonder what the use of the newest set of tools to facilitate communication would bring about for future generations of students. Would the ways in which students made connections with another shift significantly? Would students' understanding of what it meant to be in community with one another change? If so, how might institutions of higher education prepare to foster a sense of belonging for a generation of students whose understanding of community was changing?

During the conference workshops we presented, student participants were directed to place words from a long list of adjectives about community into one of three categories that they best fit. On opposite ends of our spectrum we had virtual communities and face to face communities, and in the center, 'equally applicable to both':

[virtual communities]	[equally applicable]	[face to face]
safe	supportive	dynamic
static	challenging	risky
engaging	warm	meaningful
authentic	fleeting	enduring

The list of descriptors provided to participants included the following:

I was shocked when students repeatedly placed the words 'safe' and 'supportive' in the column defining virtual communities, and 'risky' into the face-to-face column. When asked to share more about this choice, they shared the feeling that safety came from a) space for anonymity, and b) the opportunity for a quick escape when things got

uncomfortable. The option of “unfriending” someone (removing them from your list of peer connections online) or disconnecting was always present without the resulting complications or consequences that often cause discomfort in face-to-face interactions.

In this workshop, I found the students’ belief in the safety and comfort of on-line interactions disconcerting, and have continued to struggle with the implications for institutions of higher education as computer-mediated communication becomes an increasingly essential tool in our interactions with students and a critical medium through which students interact with one another and the world around them. In the context of my role as a student affairs administrator, I reflect regularly with students on how they can engage meaningfully with community. These reflections are complicated by multiple understandings of what is meant by community and by the manner in which social media is reshaping how people connect to and interact with one another.

The ways that students, faculty, and staff in higher education conceive of and seek community vary. Institutions of higher education, not to be caught unaware or left behind, have embraced new media in order to meet students where they are. But how much is understood about the ways interactions in virtual spaces differ from those that take place within the physical boundaries of campuses? Are higher education administrators forging ahead in confidence, utilizing social media in myriad ways, unaware of any pitfalls that may lie in wait? Are there ways in which usage of social media may undermine the very goals it is being utilized to support? As a student affairs professional, I have made intentional decisions about where and how I interact with students utilizing social media.

In this study I explore how Facebook, as a particular form of social media, may be affecting students' establishment of a sense of belonging in their new social context as they transition to college. Nancy Schlossberg (1989) wrote of the importance of belongingness in the context of transitions: "People in transition often feel marginal and that they do not matter. Whether we are entering first grade or college...we are concerned about our new roles. We wonder, will we belong? Will we matter?"(para 6). To ensure successful transitions to their institutions, it is of primary importance that colleges address the belongingness needs of students (Cooper, 2009; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002; Mayhew et al., 2010; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989).

As students transition into college communities, they prepare to navigate new academic and social settings, and the ability to integrate into both effectively has an impact on both student success and retention. Admissions processes address many aspects of academic preparedness, and are structured to ensure that students have the appropriate academic background for success within the institution and/or that the institution has in place any appropriate developmental courses to address admitted students' needs. Placement tests and advanced placement examinations also ensure that students are placed in courses appropriate to their knowledge and skill. Social integration poses a different set of challenges, not easily quantifiable, and not easily addressed through structured processes.

Students preparing for the social transition to college seek assurance that they will make friends and "fit in" with others in their new environment, and they seek cues about

what will help them best succeed socially. In the age of social networking, many of the first contacts students have with their new peers do not happen in face to face settings, but rather occur in virtual spaces such as Facebook. As students prepare to arrive on campus, get to know roommates, and begin to interact with peers who have yet to occupy the same physical spaces, do they give thought to their presentation of online identity and how it may or may not fit with the identities they hope to embody when they arrive on campus? How does presentation of self in online forums impact students' establishment of a sense of belonging within the community? Do they choose to make private all of their information, thus insulating themselves from any potential conflict, but also limiting the degree of connectedness they establish with their peers? Perhaps they decide, "this is me", and assume a take it or leave it stance. Perhaps they think intentionally about the messages sent by their virtual representations of self, including messages about privilege, access, individual and community values. To what extent is this presentation of self informed or influenced by norms and practices that have guided them through high school versus cues that they pick up from other members of their developing community? To what degree do the interactions with high school peers differ from those with college peers?

Whatever decisions students make as they prepare to become full members of a particular campus community, interactions that occur online between peers they have yet to meet face-to-face impact students' transitions to new settings. Those interactions also have the potential to both affect and become part of the processes within which students make connections to one another. The emergence of social networking platforms and the

ease with which students navigate them is complicating the backdrop against which institutions of higher education approach the work of building community with new students.

Considering the constructs of community on college campuses, new student experiences as they transition to college, and the ways in which these experiences are changing as a result of advancements in communication, particularly social networking. This study will explore the concept of belongingness, the usage of Facebook, and the ways in which the two potentially interact. The research questions the study aims to answer are (a) How do college students use Facebook as they are transitioning to college? and (b) How, if at all, does Facebook usage impact students' development of a sense of belonging as they transition to college? Towards this aim, in the next chapter, I explore the nature of community on college campuses, the history of social networking (in particular Facebook), and the history and purpose of college orientation programs. I also introduce the framework that will be used to explore the concept of belonging. In Chapter III, I describe the methodology of the study. In Chapters IV and V, I present my findings. Finally, in Chapter VI, I discuss the results of the study and provide recommendations.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I explore literature that relates to college students' sense of belonging. First, I provide a definition of community and examine the ways in which the nature of community has been changed by technology, including a discussion of the nature of communication that occurs within social networking sites. Because orientation and transition programs play an essential role in students' development of a sense of belonging as they transition to college, I next include background on the history and purpose of orientation programs. Finally, in this section, I introduce the construct of 'sense of belonging' that will frame my research.

(Re)defining Community

While multiple definitions of community exist, the focus of this study is the community that exists within the context of the college or university. To frame this definition, I begin with the six principles of community that Ernest Boyer (1990) put forth in the Carnegie Foundation special report *Campus Life: In Search of Community*. In the report, the kind of community that every college should aim to become is articulated in six principles:

First, a college or university is an educationally *purposeful* community, a place where faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus.

Second, a college or university is an *open* community; a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.

Third, a college or university is a *just* community, a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued.

Fourth, a college or university is a *disciplined* community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.

Fifth, a college or university is a *caring* community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.

Sixth, a college or university is a *celebrative* community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared. (p. 7)

Since 1990, Boyer's principles defining the essential aspects of community on college campuses have provided a framework for examining community in the institutional context (McDonald, 2002). However, when Boyer's principles of community were first published, computer-mediated and/or technologically advanced communication was not a presence in the ways that it is today. Michael Bugeja (2005) offers an interdisciplinary analysis of the intersections of media, technology, and society. In *Interpersonal Divide*, Bugeja argues that the meaning of community has changed in a technological age. He offers an examination of the ways in which computer mediated and/or technologically advanced communication is shaping the ways that we connect with one another and redefining community.

According to Bugeja (2005), community provides opportunities for acceptance, serving as a gathering space or proving ground. Communities are spaces where, through interaction, people skills are learned and values and character are developed. Bugeja asserted that community is particularly difficult to find in a technological era for a number of key reasons. One cause Bugeja offers is that people are seldom fully present, but are often occupying multiple spaces at any given time. This lack of focus diminishes the quality of interaction that occurs between individuals and the opportunities for learning with and from one another. Linda Stone (2009) describes such a lack of focus as continuous partial attention. Different from multitasking, which is motivated by a desire for increased efficiency and productivity, continuous partial attention describes a state in which “attention is on a priority or primary task, while, at the same time, scanning for other people, activities, or opportunities, and replacing the primary task with something that seems, in this next moment, more important” (Stone, 2009, para. 7).

Another fundamental challenge to finding community that Bugeja (2005) proposes is that technology has enabled individuals to create multiple, conflicting presentations of self that all exist at the same time, ultimately leading to a dividing of the self and a blurring of identity. This lack of wholeness challenges the possibility of authentic interaction with others in community; as individuals attend more and more to virtual communities and to multiple presentations of self within such spaces, they are less attentive to primary relationships where a sense of self is grounded. Finally, Bugeja (2005) critiqued the impact of the “overglorification of personhood” (p.100), a promise of almost immediate personal attention, which he saw as an outcome of the constant

responsiveness that individuals have come to expect via automated telephone responses, instant email replies from customer service agents and the round-the-clock presence of others on the Internet. This has fostered a skewed perception of the centrality and importance of the self and an expectation of immediacy in interactions with others. When this expectation goes unfulfilled, there is a negative impact on the individual and her or his willingness continue to engage. Given Bugeja's assertion that technological advancements in communication have redefined and weakened community, it is important to understand the nature of these changes and the implications for emerging communities. The following section provides an overview of the emergence and impact of computer-mediated communication on social interactions and the development of community in order to lay the foundation for an overview of current research on college students' use of social networking sites.

Communication in the Age of the Internet

The changes brought about by the emergence of computer-mediated communication are not unique to this particular technology; the emergence of new forms of communication and media has historically had tremendous impact on the ways in which communities form and individuals connect with one another. In *A Better Pencil*, Dennis Baron (2009) explores the history of writing technologies and their impact on the ways in which we interact with words and with one another, examining the ways that tools designed for a specific purpose have inevitably expanded to have impact much greater than their intended scope. His examination of this history illuminates the contention that surrounded such advancements. One such example is Plato's critique of

the teaching of writing itself; he argued that if people learned to write, they would become dependent on the written word to remember things:

For this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality. (Plato 360 B.C.E./n.d)

Literacy is so central to American society today that it is difficult to imagine a time when a grasp of the written word was not essential, yet there was an age when the thought of the common person being able to write was viewed as a threat to future learners. In much the same way, the grasp of new literacies and social practices is becoming increasingly common (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Herring, 2004; Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006), and such new means of engaging are bringing about a paradigm shift in the ways information is communicated and processed (Carr, 2009; Herring, 2004). Perhaps Bugeja's assertions about the implications of new modes of communications can be seen as paralleling Plato's critique.

Bargh and McKenna (2002) trace the parallels of the emergence of the Internet with those of other forms of communication: the telephone and telegraph in the ways that it facilitates two-way communication, and radio and television as a form of mass media.

Like other advancements in communication before it, the development of the Gutenberg printing press was simultaneously decried and celebrated because, while democratizing information, it was viewed by some as ‘dumbing-down’ materials to make them accessible to the masses. The Gutenberg printing press was demonized by some for its potential to negatively impact community by leading to individual isolation; individuals were able to move into private spaces with their own texts, rather than relying on a literate elite for the dissemination of information. The emergence of electronic media – particularly radio and television – was initially heralded as marking a return to community as people gathered together in community spaces to view or listen to programs and have common experiences together. As these forms of technology became increasingly accessible, this trend reversed; when individual families went from owning one television set to multiple sets, they also shifted from family viewing to increased isolation when individuals retreated to their own rooms with television sets (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004; Carr, 2010).

Bargh and McKenna (2004) identified several distinct differences between the Internet and communication advancements that preceded its development. The Internet (computer-mediated communication) combines person-to-person communication with the potential to operate as a mass medium. Further, the Internet offers opportunity for greater anonymity than its communication predecessors. Computer-mediated communication is any communication between two or more networked computers, including email, instant messaging chat rooms and other forms of technologies including short-messaging service (texting) and web logs (blogs) (boyd, 2006; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Herring, 2004; Pew

Internet and American Life, 2006). The most robust of these, which will be examined in this paper, is the social network site (SNS).

In the fall of 1969 a network linking computers at four universities in Utah and California was brought online and the first message was sent between the campuses (Leiner et al., 2012). This network was the precursor to a technological advancement that has changed the nature of information access and revolutionized worldwide communications. This was the Internet in its earliest form, and it has since become an ever-present force in American society (Leiner et al., 2012). The impact of Internet usage on individuals, communities and organizations is not fully understood. In *Interpersonal Divide*, Michael Bugeja (2005) cites journalist Ben Bagdikian:

It has taken two hundred years of the Industrial Revolution for [people] to realize that they are not very good at predicting the consequences of their inventions: to the surprise of everyone, automobiles changed sex habits. Information devices are no exception: machines for mass communications produce unexpected changes in the relationship of the individual to his society. (p. xi)

In many ways, the Internet and virtual worlds are uncharted territories, and yet these environments have significant impact upon individuals and their communities (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; boyd, 2006; Greenhow, 2011; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Herring, 2006; McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Pew Internet and American Life, 2006). Initial fears that increased computer-mediated communication would degrade communities are proving to be unfounded, and the Internet is proving to be of value in maintaining broader, more widely dispersed social networks (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Rainie, Horrigan,

Wellman, & Boase, 2006.) “The traditional human orientation to neighborhood- and village-based groups is moving towards communities that are oriented around geographically dispersed social networks. People communicate and maneuver in these networks rather than being bound up in one solitary community” (Rainie et al., 2006, p. 1). The Internet has become a space where identity development and exploration occurs, and SNSs offer spaces for identity construction, and relationship formation (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; McMillan & Morrison, 2006). Greenhow and Robelia (2009) suggest that new literacies are emerging through the use of SNSs, and describe online communication as “hyperpersonal, even more friendly, social, and intimate than face-to-face communication” (p. 1133).

A Pew Internet and American Life report published in 2006 (Boase et al.) indicated that the proportion of Americans online daily had increased over the previous two years. Further, rising percentages of Americans reported that the Internet had helped them “make big decisions or negotiate their way through major episodes in their lives in the previous two years”. In the three-year period between 2002 and 2005, the study found a 42% increase in the number of people who said that the Internet played a major role in their decision-making, specifically about college. A subsequent Pew report, entitled *Generations 2010*, explored the ways in which online usage varies by generation (Zickuhr, 2010). According to the *Generations* report, those in the “Millennial” generation, aged 18 to 33, were most likely to utilize the Internet for social or entertainment purposes, including social networking, playing online games, sending instant messages, and watching videos than those in older generations. These categories

of usage tended toward the more interactive in nature, versus those more prominent among older generations, who still tended toward usage of the Internet for information retrieval (Zickuhr, 2010). Greenhow and Robelia (2009) reaffirmed this finding, additionally asserting that the generation of students in college at the time fell into the category of those who had grown up as digital natives and thus interacted with the Internet in different ways. As such, they had developed a new habits and literacies for communication in this medium. Among these literacies is the use of social media. Young adults are more likely than other Internet users to use social media. Of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29, 83% are users of social networking sites. (Lenhart, Madden, Maggill, & Smith, 2007).

Social networking sites (SNS) were defined by boyd and Ellison (2003) as: Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211).

Most such sites serve to support the maintenance of preexisting social networks by enabling individuals to support existing relationships, but they have also been used to help strangers connect based on shared interests or activities. The first of these social networking sites was launched in 1997, and in the fifteen years since, waves of others have emerged as tools to target particular niche communities or provide opportunities for social, personal, or professional interactions.

Facebook, as a SNS, was designed to facilitate the engagement of college students enrolled at Harvard University. The network expanded quickly, first to other elite colleges, and then to other US colleges and universities. Within less than two years, Facebook began to spread worldwide. Following the emergence of Facebook and a number of other SNSs in the late 1990s, the ways in which individuals connect with their peers have significantly changed, and such changes have not only impacted preexisting relationships, but have also shaped the ways in which new and emerging relationships form (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; boyd & Ellison, 2003; McMillan & Morrison, 2006).

After conducting a review of the literature exploring the factors contributing to Facebook use, Nadkarni and Hofmann (2011) proposed a model that suggests that Facebook use is primarily motivated by the need to belong and the need to shape the ways that users are seen by others, which they describe as a need for self-presentation. The need to belong refers to the intrinsic drive to affiliate with others, and is closely associated with self-worth and self-esteem (Beaumeister & Leary, 1995; Nardkarni & Hoffman, 2011). In their analysis, Nardkarni and Hofmann described a number of the features that Facebook provides to facilitate interaction between users and support a feeling of belonging. The *friends* list allows individuals to create a public display of their connections. Others can view this list to create a sense of connectedness and allow outreach to a broader network of individuals, e.g. friends of friends. Each Facebook user has a space on her or his profile called a *timeline*. This is a space where others users can share information about life events, add status updates, post messages, photos, videos, or leave virtual gifts. The timeline also allows for a degree of greater interactivity because

users can comment on others' messages. *Poke* is a feature that provides users a way to nudge others to say hello. Facebook users can post their *status* on their profiles as a means of letting others know how they are feeling or what they are doing. Again, users who view the status update can post comments in response. Private communication with friends can be accomplished through *messaging*. Perhaps the most simple of all of the Facebook features is the *like* button. Users have the option of clicking a button reading "like" that appears beneath any photo, comment, status update, or other posting on Facebook. This generates a small 'thumbs up' icon that tells the user they have the approval of others. One additional feature offered by Facebook is *groups*, which allow users to join virtual groups based on common interests, hobbies, or shared community connections. Each of these features offers a very simplistic way for users to link to others and may be seen as a symbolic representation of their connectedness to others, enabling peer acceptance and boosting self-esteem (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Facebook, 2013; Nardkani & Hofmann, 2011, Seidman, 2013).

In addition to exploration of belongingness as a motivation for Facebook use, Seidman (2013) also explored the role of self-presentation. Beyond providing a context for connectedness with others, Facebook and other SNSs provide users with a venue to present themselves to others in ways that may not be normally expressed in their day-to-day lives. Although research has shown that user profiles generally present accurate presentations of self, such profiles also provide the opportunity for individuals to express hidden aspects of themselves or to present idealized or potential versions of themselves (Seidman, 2013). As individuals are preparing to transition into new communities, the

SNS may provide a space to try on and present broader aspects of self in an environment perceived as safer because existing off-line relationships are not necessarily at risk. Moreover, the SNS may be a venue to connect with others who share particular identities.

There can be perceived risk in choosing to disclose identities while relationships are forming, particularly when those identities may have been targeted for bullying, marginalization or misunderstanding in other communities. Chen and Sharma (2013) sought to understand the factors that influenced individuals' decisions to share information about themselves in social networking sites. By reviewing data compiled from surveys of 222 college students at a large public university, they found a correlation between trust, reciprocity and degree of identification with a community to individual self-disclosure. Their study indicated that identification with a community positively related to self-disclosure; participants who disclosed personal information were likely to have more friend connections because disclosure signified trust and such demonstrations of trust were rewarded. When members developed a strong sense of identification within a particular social network, they were "more motivated to engage in citizen behavior" such as increased participation and a greater degree of self-disclosure (Chen & Sharma, 2011, p. 272). Their study also suggested that efforts to increase self-disclosure among participants in a particular SNS would result in improved community identification among the participants. Other studies found that the relative anonymity offered in SNSs supported self-disclosure in ways that users found more comfortable than face-to-face interaction with relative strangers (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Seidman, 2013). It is possible that at a time when individuals are seeking to make significant relationships with

other newcomers to their community, they are more likely to disclose information because they realize they are moving away from friendships in their home communities and they desire to make new connections.

In order to examine the ways that social networking may affect college students' development of sense of belonging, it is important to first have an understanding of the ways that colleges and universities have historically helped students integrate into institutions. The following section presents literature associated with the mission, purpose, and key elements of college orientation programs. Next, literature that illustrates the concept of belongingness as an important component of these programs is explored to provide a lens through which to investigate the impact of social networking.

History and Purpose of Orientation Programs

The first formal college orientation program was first held in 1891 at Harvard and was implemented by LeBaron Russell Briggs who was then serving as the Dean of Men. Briggs recognized the impact that a structured system of support could have early in a student's education (Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989). Similar programs were quickly adopted at other colleges in the United States. The program at Harvard was designed to allow experienced students to assist new students as they adjusted to the institution, and included components intended to introduce students to the social culture of the institution. Though some of these rites of passage would likely be defined as hazing by the standards of today, they also served to create a shared experience and provide students an understanding of expectations for how to comport themselves both inside and outside of the classroom. Today, the vast majority of colleges and universities

have thought intentionally about the ways in which new members are welcomed into their communities. Results from a survey administered by Policy Center on the First Year of College indicate that in 2000, 96% of colleges and universities offered some sort of orientation program for new students (Barefoot, 2005).

As the demographic makeup of campuses shifted following the passage of the G.I. Bill in 1944, and subsequently the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, colleges and universities added more social components to orientation programs with the intention of ensuring that students arriving on campus with particular sets of experiences could build or access the support systems that would best enable their success (Altbach, Berdahl & Gumpert, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989; Zis, 2002). The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS), a consortium of higher education professional associations, has since established a clear set of guidelines to ensure that orientation programs are designed to best support student success. Under the guidelines established by CAS (2012), a student orientation program must:

- collaborate with colleagues and departments across the institution to promote student learning and development, persistence, and success;
- identify relevant and desirable student learning and development outcomes
- aid students and their parents/guardians and families in understanding the nature and purpose of higher education, the mission of the institution, and their membership in the community;
- articulate the institution's expectations of students and provide information that clearly identifies relevant administrative policies, procedures, and

programs to enable students to make well-reasoned and well-informed choices;

- inform students about the institution's history, traditions, and culture to facilitate affinity and integration;
- provide new students, as well as their parents/guardians and families, with information about laws and policies regarding educational records and other protected information;
- use qualified faculty members, staff, or peer advisors to explain class scheduling, registration processes, and campus life;
- inform new students, as well as their parents/guardians and families, about the availability of institutional services and programs. Information about personal health, disability resources, safety, and security must also be included;
- design and facilitate intentional opportunities for new students to interact with fellow new students as well as continuing students, faculty, and staff members;
- provide information about the physical layout of the campus, including the location and purposes of campus facilities, support services, co-curricular venues, and administrative offices; and
- provide information about technology resources used to conduct institutional business and scholarly work including information about student information systems, library resources, electronic databases, email, and online course software.

These standards are intended to ensure that important issues are addressed comprehensively in such a way as to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations.

The impact of well-designed orientation programs is clear. Programs that attend to both academic and social integration are critical to student retention. Empirical studies show that students strongly credit institution orientation programs with positively impacting their adjustment, performance and retention, as well as shaping their expectations about college (Mullendore, 2011; Rode, 2000). Tinto (1990) asserted:

Effective programs commonly stress the manner in which their actions serve to integrate individuals into the mainstream of the social and intellectual life of the institution and into the communities of people which make up that life. They consciously reach out and make contact with students in order to establish personal bonds among students and between students, faculty, and staff members of the institution (p. 36).

Opportunities to develop such relationships and to establish a sense of self-identity within the context of the community are important for the successful transition of students into campus communities. Such opportunities support the development of a sense of belonging.

Belongingness

Feeling included, having a sense of identification in relation to a community, mattering, connectedness to others and membership are all words or phrases used in various definitions of belongingness (Astin, 1999; Baumeister & Leary, 1995, Bugeja,

2005, Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2013). Community, mattering, and connectedness all require some degree of connection to others. Many studies have found that the establishment of relationships on campus is an essential element of retention as it helps to engage students in the social fabric of the institution (Astin, 1984; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2010; Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010; Pascerella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986; Thomas, 2000). Specifically, Tinto (1993) determined that developing a sense of interpersonal affiliation and establishing contacts with other class members are important parts of facilitating retention. Such connections have historically been facilitated through structured activities that orientation and transition professionals employ to build community as students arrive on campuses and begin to interact with one another in face-to-face settings (Barefoot, 2005; Mayhew et al., 2010). A key aspect of helping students become familiar with the campus and local environment is ensuring that students find and establish support networks and communities with which they can connect when on campus. This connection with peer networks is a key element for successful transition to and retention in college.

Belonging is inherently an aspect of mattering, and is an area to which individuals will attend once their most basic physical needs have been addressed. More specifically, once physiological and safety needs, such as ensuring adequate housing, are secured, the next issue faced by incoming students is often the fear or concern of whether or not they will make friends, find others to affiliate with, or be accepted (Maslow, 1968). Beaumeister and Leary (1995) also assert that the need for belongingness, i.e. the need to form and maintain key interpersonal relationships, is essential because “the establishment

of a sense of belonging is a foundational human motivation and failure to meet belongingness needs has an adverse influence on adjustment” (p. 497). Belongingness needs to encompass more than the need for simple affiliation. As Hagerty and her colleagues (1992) assert, “Sense of belonging is the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system of environment” (p. 173). They further delineate two dimensions of sense of belonging: valued involvement, which is the experience of feeling valued, needed, and accepted, and fit, which is the perception that one’s characteristics resonate with or complement the system or environment. This definition echoes Vincent Tinto’s (1988, 1993) definition of sense of belonging, which addresses students’ integration within the social and academic systems of an institution, sense of shared values with the institution, and feelings of affiliation and identification with the institution. Together, these factors have tremendous impact on students’ decisions about departure from an institution, as students seek both to belong to peer groups and to have a sense of belonging within the institution.

Hoffman et al. (2002), in exploring the concept of sense of belonging among first-year students, made the case for developing an empirical measure of sense of belonging, and aimed to develop a means by which to measure factors that contributed to the establishment of a sense of belonging. Hoffman and her colleagues developed and administered two surveys and conducted 24 focus groups to identify themes that participants shared in examining their development of a sense of belonging within the institution. Through their study, they identified two key factors that students consistently

identified as critical to their sense of belonging in an academic environment. These factors are both consistent with the concept of “valued involvement” that was put forth by Hagerty et al. (1992), namely:

- Functionally supportive peer relationships (those which allow the students to meet the changes and challenges they encounter within their new environment), and
- Belief in the compassion of the faculty and their own identity as more than just a face in the crowd (p. 251).

Strayhorn (2012) entered the conversation with a study that explored the relationship between first-year college students’ use of SNSs, sense of belonging, and persistence decisions. He aimed first to illuminate demographic differences in first-year students’ frequency of use of SNSs, and subsequently to understand any relationship between aforementioned frequency of use and (a) measures of sense of belonging and (b) academic persistence decisions. Strayhorn defines belonging as:

a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior. In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). It’s a cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an affective response or behavior (Strayhorn, 2012a, Chapter 1, para. 6-7).

Because Strayhorn's work lies at the intersection of SNS and belonging, and this study seeks to further illuminate relationships between the use of one particular SNS and changes in sense of belonging over time, his working definition of a "sense of belonging" will serve as the primary definition utilized in this study.

Social Media and Higher Education

The impact of social media has not been limited to individual choices and patterns of behavior. Applications of communications technology within higher education have created new avenues for research, teaching and learning. Colleges and universities have continued to explore this new frontier and the possibilities it affords to increase access and to change the ways in which connections between students and faculty and staff and between students their peers are forged within the academic setting and beyond (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). The dawn of the digital age marks an additional shift – a societal shift to which institutions must respond. This section will provide an overview of emergence of social media within higher education, and the ways that institutions are adopting and adapting to its usage.

In 2007-2008, the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research conducted a study examining the ways that colleges and universities utilized social media (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). The study, which has been conducted every year since, provides a clear picture of the increasing adoption of social media by colleges and universities, and explores how social media use has changed the ways that colleges and universities recruit new students within the 'networked' spaces where students spend their time. Further, the study provided a longitudinal look at the trends in social media

adoption among four-year accredited institutions in the United States. A proportional sample of public and private schools from all 50 states is included in the study. In the initial year (2007-08) 61% of the respondents reported that their institution used at least one form of social media in their recruitment efforts, with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube being most frequently used, supplemented by blogs, podcasts, and video blogging. By 2010-2011, the number had increased to one hundred percent of the 456 colleges and universities studied. The advent of multiple forms of social media and the degree to which these have become integrated into students' lives have made it a necessity for colleges to participate in some degree of social networking. Historically, institutions of higher education have responded to demographic shifts and societal changes by broadening the scope of programming and outreach; this is another such example (Altbach et al., 2005; Upcraft et al., 1989; Zis, 2002). Institutions of higher education have been increasing usage of the Internet and SNSs to recruit and research prospective students, and to communicate with current students through posts on Facebook, blogs, and use of Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter (Barnes, 2009; Barnes & Lescault, 2011; Finnegan, Webb, & Morris, 2007).

Colleges and universities have historically maintained control of the messages and introductory information that is readily accessible about them, particularly to prospective students (Finnegan, et al., 2007). Institutions of higher education have told prospective and incoming students (and their parents) what to expect and have attempted to create norms for appropriate engagement. This deliberate information sharing has been important in the context of new student orientation and transition because establishing a

sense of place and belongingness is critical to students' success and retention (Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1988, 1993). Ensuring that incoming students are hearing consistent messages about what it means to be a student at a particular institution shapes behaviors and allows new students to have a clearer sense of what they can expect from their new community. Historically, promotional materials and other messages have been carefully vetted and reviewed from multiple institutional perspectives before being distributed to a broad audience to ensure that just the right tone is set. Additionally, orientation programs have served to provide new students with introduction to the peer culture of an institution, often through returning students who serve as mentors to guide their new peers through the formal and informal environments.

Institutions were once able to better manage the methods through which new students encountered their new environments utilizing anticipatory socialization, which consisted of processes through which foreign environments are made familiar and newcomers become acclimated to the expectations and demands of their new environments (Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella, et al., 1986). Peer leaders are often utilized to facilitate interactions among new students, introducing new students to community norms and familiarizing them with terms and lingo common to campus. Such processes allow new students to connect within a setting that keeps as its focus institutional values and community expectations, thus providing incoming students with an understanding of context and community values to bear in mind as they consider how they want to first present themselves when engaging with their new peers. The advent of the Internet and subsequent emergence of other forms of computer-mediated communications has

changed the landscape. The locus of control has shifted, and institutions no longer have the time or ability to control information that is distributed to new students prior to their arrival on campuses, or the ability to manage the ways in which community members first encounter one another. Instead, the breadth of information available on the Internet and the ease with which individuals can add their own information to Wikipedia or connect with others on discussion boards such as www.collegeconfidential.com, have changed the playing field (Finnegan et al., 2007; Hoover, 2011; Unigo Expert Network, 2011).

As advancements in information technologies have increased avenues for information on the Internet, they have also created space for multiple truths, and for a loss of reliable data from a single source. As colleges establish Facebook pages or groups, students set up parallel pages to share their own perspectives and offer alternative views. Facebook's help center distinguishes between the two:

While Pages were designed to be the official profiles for entities, such as celebrities, brands or businesses, Facebook groups are the place for small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion. Groups allow people to come together around a common cause, issue or activity to organize, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content. (Hicks, 2012, para. 7)

Currently, it is possible for any individual to create a Facebook group, seeking others with common interests, make the group public, and wait for others to find it. On November 15, 2014, simple Google searches for "Facebook College Class of 2017" and

“Facebook College Class of 2018” yielded 2,410,000 results in 0.35 seconds and 3,600,000 results in 0.37 seconds, respectively; an indicator of the prevalence of this particular social networking medium in students’ transition to college.

This medium that offers tremendous opportunities to connect across vast distances poses challenges to some principles of community Boyer (1990) put forth in the Carnegie Report. The anonymity afforded by the Internet provides a space where the freedom of expression required by a just community may be easily threatened by incivility. The expectation of immediacy that Bugeja (2005) argues is a result of technologically mediated communication jeopardizes the development of just, caring communities. In a space where no one is fully attentive or fully present to one another, it is difficult to honor the sacredness of each individual or to create a purposeful community.

Should colleges and universities adopt new forms of communication via social networking? How? At what cost? Bugeja (2005) argues against seeking ways to do so, asserting that such interactions “flatten perception of community, prodding us to believe that every person and issue has two sides rather than many” (p.10) and leading us to view life “flatly, characterizing people as worthy or unworthy, based on their race, class, religion, culture, politic, or belief” (p.10). If Bugeja’s assertions are true, this myopic, dualistic outlook is counter to the sorts of communities that colleges and universities strive to foster.

Many argue that Bugeja is inaccurate or outdated and posit that what has changed is *us* – the ways that people think and connect and interact (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Carr, 2010; Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Greenhow, 2009; McMillan & Morrison,

2006; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Wellman & Haythornthwaite; 2002). Carr (2010) writes: “if you were to set out to invent a medium that would rewire our mental circuits as quickly and thoroughly as possible, you would probably end up designing something that looks and works a lot like the Internet” (p. 42). He further asserts that the interactivity of the Internet, and the ways that it engages multiple senses simultaneously creates a heightened sense of connectedness by providing continuous reinforcements.

If this is the case, it may be possible that Facebook and other social networking sites are providing opportunities for the formation of community that are broader than our current conceptions. SNSs may be providing ways to strengthen aspects of community as defined in the Carnegie Report (1990). Bargh (2002) found that the SNSs supported the formation of close relationships because “people were better able to express their ‘true’ selves (those self-aspects they felt were important but which they were usually unable to present in public)” (p. 581). Further, there are SNS features, such as the “like” button on Facebook, that provide low-risk opportunities to express support of others.

Beaumeister and Leary (1995), in exploring the need for belonging and interpersonal attachment, apply a very broad approach to the concept of belonging, and in so doing propose that “the need to belong can, in principle, be directed to any human being, and the loss of relationship with one person can be, to some extent, replaced with any other” (p. 500). At the same time, the need to belong is beyond merely a need for social contact; Beaumeister and Leary (1995) further argue that mere interactions with strangers will not suffice, but that it is relatively easy to establish new social bonds, which “form readily, without requiring highly particular or conducive settings” (p. 500).

Typically, the challenge in facilitating new ‘replacement’ relationships is that the formation of new relationships requires an investment of time and frequent contacts, but the process of relationship formation has changed as a result of the emergence of social networking. Facebook and other SNSs have created a space within which strangers who share a common bond come together. This is a space where potential first steps toward friendship can take place. Further exploration is warranted into the ways that such relationships develop, in particular when participants are aware that face-to-face meetings are likely in the near future, given that this is the context in which most students new to an institution are making their initial introductions to one another.

In preparation to leave a steady, well-established context where a sense of belonging may be more clearly established, students demonstrate a desire for both substitution and satiation (Beaumeister & Leary, 2005). Substitution is evident in the initial desire to establish social contacts that can, in part, be seen in early efforts of new students to generate numbers of friends. Satiation reflects the diminished desire to establish additional social relationships once the initial need is satisfied. Beaumeister and Leary (2005) stated that “people show tendencies to seek out interpersonal contacts and cultivate possible relationships at least until they have reached a maximum of social contact and relatedness” (p. 498). Because there are not standard numbers of relationships at which substitution and satiation are satisfied for all individuals, the energy invested in establishing new friendships tapers off for different students at different rates.

The opportunity to continue to make connections in the form of Facebook friends without the need to commit to a more significant relationship may provide more avenues

for students to connect with peers in a wider range of social circles, offering a way to challenge the concept of satiation. Several researchers have proposed that because social media can support greater numbers of weak (or shallow) social ties, it can facilitate the development of peer acceptance (Ellison et al., 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009). This opportunity for broader connections may also serve to influence the ways in which students are socially integrated into their new campus communities. The initial interactions, occurring beyond the boundaries of physical space, provide opportunities for interaction regardless of physical proximity (Goodings, Locke, & Brown, 2007; Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002). Such interactions, without the limits of physical proximity, also provide for a greater degree of anonymity, which may allow individuals to be more authentic as they navigate their way into new communities. Others may choose to reinvent themselves and prepare to explore new spaces in new ways, or to engage in new ways of identity performance. Although some studies have indicated that the SNSs provide important opportunities for self-presentation, questions remain about the ways in which computer-mediated communities either foster or undermine the formation of authentic community. Such social networking sites require participants to engage in identity exploration as they make choices about how to present themselves in new spaces (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Greenhow, 2011; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; McMillan & Morrison, 2006).

More than any generation before them, many of today's traditional-aged students have had almost ever-present access to technology. Because technological advances have happened so rapidly, little is known about the impact of students' computer-mediated

connections to pre-college communities upon students' successful integration into a campus environment, or about the ways that computer-mediated interactions may facilitate such integration through fostering the establishment of new relationships. On the one hand, strong ties to pre-college social networks that are reinforced through electronic means might serve to keep students more firmly rooted in their communities of origin, while limiting their ability to integrate into their new setting (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; McMillan & Morrison, 2006). Other studies support the assertion that virtual communication may facilitate the establishment of new connections (Bargh & McKenna, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Mattei & Ball-Rokeach, 2005; Valenzuela et al., 2009).

In their study of social interactions across media, Baym et al. (2004) argued that rather than being treated as a single monolithic entity that "influences users through sheer exposure" (p. 300), the Internet should be viewed as a device utilized to bring about social and cultural goals. They, along with other researchers, propose that usage of the Internet and SNSs does not occur in a space separate from every day life, but is experienced as a part of an integrated whole (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Baym et al., 2004). Multiple studies have found evidence that virtual communication is not inherently more superficial than verbal or face-to-face contact, but that media used over the Internet can facilitate significant social interactions (Bargh, 2002; Baym et al., 2004; Mattei & Ball-Rokeach, 2002). This is an important consideration for institutions of higher education given that they expend significant efforts to foster the development of community. These efforts are occurring as definitions of community are simultaneously

being reshaped. Rapid changes in the ways that individuals communicate with one another within and across generations, and differing lenses through which information is filtered and interpreted, lead to confusion about the best ways to utilize computer-mediated communication to best meet students' needs. Although faculty and staff members may spend time using the same SNSs, or utilizing the same technology as students to communicate with one another, interpretations and perceptions of these interactions may vary greatly from those of students. Is it important that administrative staff understand the ways that students using social media in order use it effectively? Institutions have adopted social networking technology quickly, but without a complete understanding of the ways that institutional usage objectives in these spaces may differ from student expectations. In order to effectively support students as they matriculate, a clearer picture of student experience is necessary.

In *Marginality and Mattering*, Nancy Schlossberg (1989) describes the importance of ensuring that individuals in transition know they matter by ensuring that they experience five aspects of mattering: attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation. These aspects of mattering can all be achieved to some degree through SNS:

- Attention is the basic feeling that one has commanded the interest of another person; that they are visible. The invitation to connect with someone via Facebook or some other SNS provides attention.
- Importance is the belief that others care about what we do. When congratulatory messages welcoming new students to a particular community are posted by peers

who look forward to meeting them, a sense of importance is indicated by the approval of these new friends.

- Ego-Extension is rooted in a sense that others share in our joys and sorrows. As new students share messages about pre-college angst or the frustration, the shared experience provides a sense of connectedness.
- Dependence can be achieved by providing students the opportunity to respond to others' questions and offer support as they struggle with similar questions.
- Appreciation is an aspect of mattering that is generated with others feel that their efforts or contributions are appreciated. Within Facebook, peers can "like" others' posts, or send messages that reflect appreciation for the insights shared in that community.

Social networking can provide initial spaces for new students to experience mattering within new communities. This is critical to the engagement and ultimate success of students as a foundation for developing a sense of belonging.

Numerous studies have explored the impact of particular social networking sites on individual well-being, relationship development, and self-worth. Bargh (2002) asserted that the effects of the Internet on social interactions are dependent on the characteristics and goals of the individuals, groups, and communities making use of the particular modes of Internet communication. Bargh (2002) and others pointed out that there are persistent gaps in the use of Facebook and other SNSs along lines of gender, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status (Hargittai, 2010, 2008; Junco, 2012). Further, boyd's (2007, 2011) ethnographic fieldwork revealed ways that young people's

engagement with technology reflects social divisions along racial lines and class lines. From 2004 to 2009, she spent over 2000 hours observing the online practices of 103 teenagers across seventeen states, in addition to collecting ethnographic data from randomly selected online profiles and conducted qualitative interviews. boyd (2007) provided insight into the ways teenagers experienced social life online, identifying participation as a primary motivation of their usage of online social networking. In short, boyd found that teens participated in social networking sites because others did; that was where their friends were, and spending time in virtual interactions as “social voyeur” was a means of passing time while gaining insight into society at large.

One of boyd’s (2011) assertions was that Facebook’s origin as a college-only site gave it a more elite status, making it more attractive and more accessible to particular demographic groups:

The college-centered nature of Facebook quickly appealed to those teenagers who saw college, and thus Facebook access, as a rite of passage. They were aware of the site through older family members and friends who had already graduated high school and gone off to college. Before access became readily available, college-bound teens began coveting entrance. For many, access to the social world of college became a marker of status and maturity. Even those who had MySpace accounts relished the opportunity to gain access to the college-only Facebook as a rite of passage.

In September 2005, Facebook began slowly supporting high schools. While this gave some teens access, the processes in place for teens to join and be validated

were challenging, creating a barrier to entry for many potential participants.

Those who managed to join were often from wealthier schools where the validation process was more solidified or quite motivated – typically because they wanted to communicate with close friends in college. (p. 4)

The difference in the origins and purpose of Facebook, other SNSs and other forms of digital media continues to impact their usage today. The impact of this digital divide must be explored and mitigated if colleges and universities aim to continue utilizing forms of social media in their outreach to students. Hargittai (2008) found, for example, that there were clear distinctions between the usage of Facebook among first-generation college students and their peers whose parents had earned a college degree. A student's background impacts the ways he or she engages with digital media. Those who are already more privileged tend to have more Internet-use autonomy and resources, more online experiences, higher levels of know-how, and report engaging in more diverse types of uses than the less privileged, precisely the group that would stand a better chance of benefitting from these activities if they were more engaged with them (Hargittai, 2010, p.109). Hargittai (2010) also found that among first-year college students, parents' degree of educational attainment was positively correlated to increased knowledge and skill in navigating the Internet. Further, because of differentiated contexts of usage and varied accessibility prior to college, students from lower socio-economic status, students of Hispanic origin, women and African Americans demonstrated lower levels of skill with digital media than their White and male counterparts. Digital inequality is evident even among college students who are often assumed to be web savvy, and institutions of

higher education must be mindful of this divide as the institutions continue efforts to reach students using this medium. While institutions are supplementing more of their recruitment and other outreach efforts with usage of Facebook and other SNSs, it is clear that there are populations who are not positioned to benefit from these efforts.

Only a few studies have investigated the impact or consequences of Facebook use by college students as a distinct population. Silverman (2009) explored the effects of online social networking communities on college student experiences. He utilized an online survey and subsequent focus groups of students at the University of Southern California to understand how students utilized and benefitted from online communities and to explore students' attitudes and perceptions about staff and administrative involvement in these spaces. His phenomenological study combined data from survey responses of 376 students from across the United States with input from participants in six focus groups at the University of Southern California to explore students' own perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of their participation in online social networks, as well as their attitudes about administrative staff involvement in these networks. Silverman found that through social networking, students met three of the needs defined in Maslow's hierarchy: "the need for love and sense of belonging, the need for esteem and self-worth, and the need for self-actualization or reaching their full potential" (p. 21). His data supported a demand for institutions of higher education to be more attentive to the ways they utilize social media to support students through online interaction, because "online communities warrant attention and support similar to that provided to other communities within the institution" (p. 21). Further, he found evidence that students

expected guidance from their campuses about how to make the best use of SNSs while being safe and that they wanted to see some sort of institutional presence within their online communities. Finally, Silverman made a case that institutions could and should channel students' online involvement into in-person interaction in order to create more robust experiences in both virtual and face-to-face interactions. He suggested, for example "orientation leaders form online groups for students they interacted with over summer. This would be useful in following up with students to see how they are doing throughout the year" (p.24).

Junco (2012) conducted a study to explore the relationship between students' engagement and their type and degree of Facebook use. He surveyed 5,414 students at a 4-year, public, residential college, and collected 2,414 responses. In addition to the data generated by this survey, he reviewed responses to a 19-item scale from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These questions explored the relationship between frequency of Facebook use, participation in Facebook activities, and student degree of involvement and sense of connectedness to their college. Junco (2012) asserted that higher education administrators have an opportunity to help students use Facebook in ways that support the establishment of meaningful connections to the institution. Both Silverman's and Junco's studies offer evidence that students may be using Facebook in ways that both influence and are influenced by face to face interactions, but Junco (2012) illuminated the complexities of this interaction.

Junco (2012) studied the relationships between Facebook use (both time spent and type of activity) and student engagement, academic engagement, and co-curricular

engagement, utilizing surveys completed by 2,368 students at a medium, 4-year, public, residential institution in the Northeast. His data showed that while in general, Facebook usage was negatively predictive of engagement scale scores, some particular activities, such as creating events, responding to invitations or commenting on content were positive predictors of engagement. Additional findings were that while some sorts of Facebook activity, such as looking at photos or creating events, were positively predictive of involvement in co-curricular activities, other activities, including checking posts and posting photos were not. Results of his study show that, “in a natural setting and when left unguided, students will use Facebook in ways that are both positively and negatively related to their engagement, studying, and on-campus involvement” (Junco, 2012, p. 169).

Strayhorn (2012b) explored the relationship between the frequency of Facebook and MySpace usage and students’ sense of belonging and persistence decisions. His study reviewed a sample of 755 survey responses from first-year, first-time students at a large, predominately White, public institution in the Southeastern United States. Data collected for the survey looked particularly at the amount of time spent using Facebook or MySpace, but did not distinguish between types of use of the SNS (e.g., chatting, reading comments or posting pictures versus playing online games). While the results of the study did not support his hypothesis that frequency of Facebook or MySpace usage positively impacted students’ persistence decisions, linear regression analysis of independent variables and the sense of belonging index did reveal five significant predictors of sense of belonging:

- Members of social fraternities reported a higher sense of belonging than peers who were not members;
- Students who lived on campus reported a higher sense of belonging than their peers who lived off campus;
- Students who used SNSs infrequently or not at all indicated a higher sense of belonging;
- International students reported a lower sense of belonging than their domestic peers;
- Students who were motivated to attend college ‘to discover new things’ reported a higher sense of belonging than others (p. 793).

Understanding the ways in which these factors may or may not be affecting students’ sense of belonging or exploring other factors that may emerge through the process of the study will provide a more nuanced picture of the ways that students make meaning of their experiences in transition.

The studies discussed in this paper provide a foundation for understanding the ways that computer-mediated communication and social networking affect student interactions as they transition to college. In my study, I will explore how Facebook participation impacts the development of a sense of belonging to a particular community. As institutions of higher education increasingly use social media to communicate institutional values, norms, practices, and expectations, it will be important to understand the impact of this usage upon students in transition in order to identify best practices. It will also be important to understand how differences between Facebook users and non-

users affect their sense of belonging. Further, within this context, campuses must be attuned to the ways in which students from different socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds engage with Facebook versus other forms of social media, particularly if differences in their overall sense of belongingness may be exacerbated by the usage of such media.

The majority of studies I found examined SNS usage where one of the following is true: either there are no existing face-to-face relationships between participants or participants have a preexisting relationship and the SNS is used in support of that relationship. Only one study explored the impact of an SNS on the development of relationships that began online and transitioned into face-to-face relationships, but this study was limited to an exploration of relationship development among pairs of male and female students (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Exploration of the impact of social networking on a cohort of peers as the group moves from virtual to face-to-face interaction warrants examination, and could have significant implications for the ways in which institutions of higher education engage with incoming students in SNSs. Investigating the experience of incoming students who first encounter one another within a Facebook group, but subsequently have opportunities to develop relationships within the physical spaces of a campus provided a unique opportunity to explore the impact of Facebook engagement on students' sense of belonging.

Colleges and universities form distinct communities within which members share a common sense of purpose. Historically, new members have been brought into these communities and introduced to community values and expectations through orientation

programs that have provided face-to-face opportunities to build connections. Such programs have served to assist students in establishing a sense of belonging and support student success and retention. The emergence of social networking as a communications medium has broadened the avenues through which students connect with one another, and has moved many initial interactions outside of the purview of the institution. As a result, it is important that institutions consider the ways in which different populations engage with social media and have a clearer understanding of the impact of its use. This study purports to do just that; the methods described in the next chapter will illuminate the ways in which engagement with one particular social networking platform impacts its users as they navigate the transition to college.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Given the need to better understand the effects of social networking sites on new college students' development of a sense of belonging, my initial aim was to explore how participation in a targeted Facebook group affects new students' sense of belonging as they transition into college, and how the role of Facebook in that developing sense of belonging changes over the course of a student's first year of college. As the study progressed findings emerged that suggested several different typologies of Facebook usage.

In this chapter, I outline the methodology implemented for this study, including the research questions, study design and context, participant recruitment and selection strategies, and methods for data collection. Further, I describe my participant consent strategies and safeguards to ensure participant confidentiality. I then present my data analysis procedures, including how I bracketed my preconceptions as a researcher.

Study Design

This study was a concurrent mixed-method design. The initial step of the study was data collection via a survey instrument including both closed- and open-ended questions. The quantitative procedures provided a numeric way of explaining the behaviors and attitudes of the subset of the population from which interview participants were selected. Quantitative data also provided a means of comparing the experiences of respondents to ensure that those selected to participate in the interviewing phase of the study were representative of the larger population of students entering Midwest College in fall of 2013.

The qualitative component of the study included the open-ended questions on the survey instruments, but focused primarily on three individual interviews with study participants. The qualitative aspect of the research was prioritized, utilizing a phenomenological framework. Qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings that individuals create around particular experiences or phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998, Seidman, 2013). Phenomenology is a qualitative research framework that explores the lived experience of a small number of participants through deep and repeated engagement with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2003; Fischer, 2009; Merriam, 1998, Seidman, 2013). Phenomenology is an appropriate approach for this study because the aim of the research is to understand the ways in which students transitioning to college develop a sense of belonging within the context of their interactions on Facebook. Utilization of in-depth interviewing provided the space for participants to share and reflect on their lived experiences (Seidman, 2013).

Context of the Study

Data were collected at a small, private, highly selective liberal arts college located in the Midwest. The institution, which will be referred to as Midwest College, had an enrollment of 1,978 undergraduates and a student population comprised of 19% international students and 24% domestic students of color in the 2013-14 academic year. Research participants were selected from students who matriculated into the college in the fall of 2013 (the Class of 2017). This group totaled 548 students between the ages of 18 and 20, representing both U.S. citizens and international students.

Each spring since 2008, Midwest College's Office of Admissions has created a Facebook group for the incoming students, "Midwest College Class of XXXX". The group is private, and the Admissions staff and/or the Orientation staff control access to the group. The group serves as a space for incoming students to connect with their new peers and share concerns and questions. Additionally, select returning students (orientation leaders (OLs), resident assistants (RAs), and other key staff) provide accurate information in response to students' postings or direct them to other sources of information. In recent years, 75 – 90% of the incoming class members have joined the group in the six months prior to their arrival on campus. Participants for the study were selected from both participants and non-participants in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group.

Quantitative Data Collection

The first part of the study collected data via questions included in surveys administered to the class that matriculated to the college in fall 2013. Midwest College's Orientation Program administered its program evaluation in two separate surveys, each of which was distributed to half of the entering class; Institutional Research at the college randomly generated lists for survey distribution. Both surveys were administered via a SurveyMonkey secure account; the first was distributed at the end of the first week of classes, and the second after the first six weeks of the semester. Between 2007 and 2012, the response rate for the survey was between 47% and 52%. The response rate of the first survey used for this study was 55.8%, yielding a total of 153 respondents. The second survey used for this study yielded 101 respondents, for a response rate of 39.7%. A total

of 46.3% of the entering class responded to one of the surveys. First-year students accounted for 98% of all survey respondents, with transfer students making up only 2%. Additional demographic information about survey participants is in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Survey Participant Demographic Data by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

	Survey Administration One N=153	Survey Administration Two N=101
Male	40%	33.3%
Female	58%	67.7%
Transgender/Genderqueer	2%	0
White	72%	72%
Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander	16%	16%
Hispanic, Latino, Chicano or Mexicano	6%	6%
Black, African or African American	5%	5%
Native American	1%	1%
Multiracial	2%	10%

Each of the two separate surveys included the following questions:

- Prior to arriving on campus, did you join/participate in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group?
 - a) Yes

b) No

- On a scale of 0 to 10, with zero being not at all, 5 being neutral and 10 being very much, please indicate your response to the following statement:

I feel that I belong at Midwest College.

- How would you describe your participation in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group?

a) I was pretty active, posting questions and information and connecting with other people;

b) I used Facebook to try to get a feel for who my peers at Midwest would be;

c) I used the Facebook group only when I had something I really wanted to know;

d) I joined the group, but never really read anything that was posted there.

- What did you gain from participating in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook Group?

In addition, the first survey included the following:

- Occasionally, focus groups and/or interviews are conducted to further our understanding of students' experiences. If we may contact you regarding participation in interviews or focus groups, please provide your email address below. Agreeing to be contacted does not commit you to participating.

The last question listed above served to identify potential participants for the second phase of the study.

Participant Selection

Following the compilation of data from the two surveys, I identified 32 individuals who indicated a willingness to be contacted as potential participants in further study and followed up with a student recruitment letter sent via email (see Appendix C). Fifteen students initially volunteered to participate, but only 12 responded to the invitation for an initial meeting. I scheduled each of the 12 individuals for an information meeting and initial interview during which I reviewed the purpose of the study, secured signatures on consent forms and reviewed the measures I would take to ensure participant confidentiality. Ultimately, the 12 participants were divided into the following two groups:

- Users of Facebook/Participants in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group. These six participants are all Facebook users who indicated that they had joined the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group at some point in the summer before they matriculated to the College.
- Non-Users of Facebook/Non-participants in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group. These six participants were not participants in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group prior to their matriculation to the College. Half (n=3) did not have Facebook accounts at all.

Six participants were identified in each category: Users and Non-Users.

Qualitative Data Collection

Once participants had been identified, each participant was scheduled for three individual interviews. The first interviews occurred when the participants had been on

campus between 6-8 weeks, second interviews were conducted between weeks 12-14 of the semester, and the final interviews occurred within the first 3 weeks of their second semester in college, after a semester break of 5 weeks. Interviews followed the structure offered by Seidman (2013) for in-depth, phenomenological interviewing (Appendix D: Interview Questions). Seidman asserted that a three interview series is generally an effective phenomenological inquiry. The structure allows for sufficient time to “explore the participant’s experience, place it in context, and then reflect on its meaning” (p. 20). In implementing this strategy, I also adapted the proposed structure of the questions slightly in order to include opportunities for reflection and meaning-making at each of the latter two interviews. The first interview provided me with a foundation for understanding the context of the participant’s life with regard to the topic of the study. Questions that framed this interview explored both the participant’s history of Facebook use and their journey to Midwest College, including expectations about the transition to college. In conducting this study, it was also important to identify other factors that may have impacted the sense of belonging among new students; for example, being a first-generation student, an international student, or a student from an otherwise under-represented population may lead to a lessened sense of belonging (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stebleton, Soria, and Huesman, 2014). This type of information was solicited during the first interview, but also continued to emerge throughout the course of the study as participants became more comfortable with the interview process and with me and disclosed additional information. Table 2 provides demographic information about interview participants. It is important to note that students of color and international

students are disproportionately represented in the Non-users group. In this case, two international students come from a country where access to Facebook is

Table 2

Interview Participants' Demographic Data

	<u>Facebook User</u> N=6	<u>Facebook Non-User</u> N=6
International Students	0	4
Domestic (U.S. students)	6	2
U.S. Students of color	0	1
Men	2	0
Women	3	6
Genderqueer	1	0
First Generation student	1	2

blocked by the government. One domestic student of color comes from a household without access to the Internet. The first interview began with a limited number of structured questions so that the participants could guide the conversation, rather than being directed by biases that I might have inadvertently suggested in my questions. I explored the participants' responses and asked clarifying questions to ensure that I accurately understood their meanings. In order to understand how students perceived the effects of Facebook in their development of a sense of belonging, several questions were asked at more than one of the interviews (See Appendix C.) The second interview continued to explore the participants' use of Facebook, and asked the participants to begin reflecting on their experience of belonging within the college community as it related to their Facebook interactions. This interview provided an opportunity for

participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. The questions were generated after themes had been identified from the first two interviews.

An analysis of the interview transcripts allowed me to identify emerging themes addressing development of a sense of belonging and to ask questions that further clarified those themes. The second and third interviews also provided opportunities to engage in member checking, to ensure that I accurately understood participants' experiences (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis occurred in two stages. In the first stage, I analyzed responses from both surveys in order to understand basic patterns of Facebook usage among the population of new students at Midwest College. Survey questions that assessed frequency of use and motivations for use provided a broad understanding of who belonged to the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group, why participants engaged with the group, and what they believe they gained from either usage or non-usage of this means of connecting with their peers.

The two surveys also included open-ended prompts, and after the interview phase of the study commenced, I conducted a content analysis of the responses to the prompts:

- What did you gain from participating in the Class of 2017 Facebook Group?
- Please share advantages or positive outcomes you believe have resulted from waiting until you arrived on campus to connect with your peers.
- Please share any negative outcomes that you believe have resulted from waiting until you arrived on campus to connect with your peers.

I waited to review these data until after I had the opportunity to interview participants so that I could compare the interview responses to those reported in the survey, thereby providing additional confirmation of my findings.

Interviews were conducted following data analysis of the survey responses with the exception of the content analysis. Completed interviews were transcribed while I continued to collect data from other interview participants, in order to best identify connections that surfaced between participants' experiences (Seidman, 2013). I began with an indicative analysis of the data, seeking themes that reflected participants' experiences of belonging that occurred within the context of Facebook, and particularly the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group. Subsequently, in reviewing data, I also engaged in deductive analysis as additional themes began to emerge. Several aspects of belonging have been provided in the definition offered by Strayhorn (2012a), which included perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and feeling cared about and important to the group. This definition was used as a prompt for interview participants, and these aspects were utilized as predetermined codes in theme-generation, but I also remained open to additional aspects of belonging that participants named in the interview.

Following each individual interview, I prepared a transcript, and subsequently reviewed each transcript independently of the others. After reading through each transcript and adding notes reflecting both participants' nonverbal communication and my own reactions during the course of the interview, I began the coding process. For the first round of interviews I used a short list of preset codes, seeking to establish an initial

understanding students' views of and experiences with Facebook, their understanding of what it means to belong in a place, and their expectations of and hopes for their transition to Midwest College. I employed the same process for second and third rounds of interviews, with an expanded set of emergent codes to through which to interpret participants' responses (Merriman, 1998; Saldaña, 2013). The third round of interviews also provided an opportunity to member-check my perceptions and to explore with participants the impact of participating in the study. In addition to reviewing the transcripts for each round of interviews, I also compiled each individual participant's set of three interviews into a single document. I then reviewed each participant's set of transcripts to better understand each individual's experiences throughout the course of the transition to Midwest College. This process informed the procedure that is presented in Chapter IV, and frames a suggested taxonomy of Facebook usage. In addition, participants' individual sets of transcripts were analyzed using portraiture as a methodology. Four portraits of participants are presented in Chapter V.

Bracketing and My Preconceptions

Within any form of research, the researcher serves as the key instrument for analysis at every step in the process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The researcher's biases can impact their interpretations of data. As a researcher, I worked to identify and acknowledge any preconceived ideas that might affect my engagement with the topic. This process is defined as bracketing. According to Fischer (2009) "bracketing is not for the sake of gaining objectivity but rather of acknowledging our engagement in the

development of consensual (but always evolving) understandings of our research phenomena and processes” (p.583).

The initial motivation for my investigation had its origins in my own feelings of discomfort about the ways in which students’ on-campus interactions were being impacted by interactions in virtual spaces. I observed changes in the ways that these student interactions were occurring from a specific vantage point; as the coordinator of orientation and transition programming at Midwest College. I had an investment in the successful transition of new members of the community, and was concerned about the impact of interactions happening in SNSs. I was intentional about not allowing this discomfort to influence the questions I asked. In order to ensure that the participants’ voices were clearly heard, I allowed themes to emerge inductively, as well as in response to my research questions. Specifically, I did not identify any particular categories or themes of responses that I sought in advance of the transcription process. I was mindful of my assumptions, prior to the implementation of the study, and ensured that I did not allow these assumptions to influence the ways that I framed questions.

One of my initial assumptions was that participants in the Facebook group were more likely to report a higher initial sense of belonging than their non-user peers. I believed this would be the case because (a) Facebook users would arrive on campus with some established connections with peers through Facebook and would thus have some familiarity with names and faces of classmates, or (b) they would simply have a greater sense of familiarity with campus culture from reading questions and responses or posts made by other members of the group. The creation of social connections via virtual

means has been well documented (Bargh & McKenna, 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Mattei & Ball-Rokeach, 2005; Valenzuela et al., 2009). Researchers have further asserted that through supporting the establishment of greater numbers of weak (or shallow) social ties, SNSs can also foster the development of a sense of peer acceptance or belonging (Ellison et al., 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009).

Additionally, I assumed that with the passage of time, the belongingness scores of Facebook users/participants in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group would decline as those of the non-users increased. I anticipated that students who had arrived on campus with a sense of belonging based on connections established through Facebook would experience disappointment as many of those on-line connections failed to materialize into friendships in real life, while those who had arrived on campus without such expectations of such connections would develop a stronger sense of belongingness as they settled into their new environment and new relationships began to develop. Currently, little is known about the ways that relationships transition from origins in SNSs to face-to-face interactions in shared space. A deeper understanding of the ways that such relationships develop would be valuable, particularly given that this is frequently the context in which students new to an institution make their initial introductions to one another.

I was able to utilize survey data from the Orientation surveys administered after the first and sixth weeks of the semester to check these assumptions and confirm that what study participants reported was consistent with the experiences of the larger student body. The process of multiple interviews allowed me the opportunity to check my

interpretations with the subjects of the interviews to ensure accuracy. Further, member checking was utilized to ensure that my interpretation of participants' experiences was an accurate reflection of their intent. During the course of each interview, I asked clarifying questions to ensure that my understanding was correct. After the final interviews, each participant received a transcript of each of their interviews and had the opportunity to provide written and verbal corrections. Subsequently, all participants attended a group gathering at which I shared my initial observations and solicited their feedback.

Chapter Four: Taxonomy of Facebook Usage

In this chapter I first describe the data collected through the course of the study, beginning with survey data. Next, I summarize information gathered through interviews with participants, and the themes that emerged. I entered this study inspired to understand how participation in a targeted Facebook group affects new students' sense of belonging as they transition to college, however as the study progressed, data led me to an understanding of different types of Facebook usage. I used these findings to develop a framework to describe domains of Facebook usage that is outlined within this chapter.

Survey Data and Facebook Usage

In order to explore the initial topic, I began with an examination of quantitative data that were collected as a part of the orientation evaluation process. These data provided a backdrop against which to compare the insights and information that interview participants shared with me.

The first of the orientation surveys was distributed to half of the students in the incoming class, for a total of 274 students. The survey yielded 153 responses, for a response rate of 56%, which represents 28% of the students who matriculated to Midwest College in the fall of 2013. Of that group, 134 (or 88%) identified themselves as participants in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group, and the remaining 12% identified as either non-users of Facebook or non-participants in the Facebook group. Table 3 shows the responses of Facebook users and non-users of Facebook to the prompt: "On a scale of 0 to 10, with zero being not at all, 5 being neutral and 10 being very much, please indicate your response to the following statement 'I feel that I belong at Midwest

College.” After one week on campus, the mean belongingness score reported by Facebook users was 7.37 (SD 2.24) and that of non-Facebook users was 6.95 (SD 1.78); the independent sample t-test value was $t(26.85) = 0.36$ which was not statistically significant at $p > .15$.

Table 3

Belongingness Survey Responses – Week One

I feel a sense of belonging to Midwest College. (0 = not at all, 5 = neutral, 10 = very much.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean	SD
Facebook Users (134)	0	3	3	5	4	11	11	19	33	21	24	7.37	2.24
Non-Facebook Users (19)	0	0	1	0	0	3	2	4	6	3	0	6.95	1.78

Six weeks into the semester, a second survey was administered to the remaining half of the recently matriculated students. This time, 99 students of the 274 who were contacted responded to the same survey questions. This 36% response rate represents 18% of the students who matriculated to Midwest in the fall of 2013. At this time, the mean belongingness score reported by Facebook users was 7.34 (SD 2.69) and that of non-Facebook users was 7.18 (SD 2.46); the independent sample t-test value was $t(36.6) = 0.2562$. Again, with $p > .15$, the differences in the belongingness scores were not statistically significant.

Table 4

Belongingness Survey Responses – Week Six

I feel a sense of belonging to Midwest College. (0 = not at all, 5 = neutral, 10 = very much.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean	SD
Facebook Users (77)	1	4	3	1	0	8	7	7	10	19	17	7.34	2.69
Non-Facebook Users (22)	0	1	1	0	0	3	3	1	5	5	3	7.18	2.46

In addition to self-reported belongingness scores, on each of the two surveys, respondents answered questions about participation in the targeted Facebook group. Those who were members of the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group were asked the following:

- How would you describe your participation in the Class of 2017 Facebook group:
 - a) I was pretty active, posting questions and information and connecting with people.
 - b) I used Facebook to try to get a feel for who my peers at Midwest might be.
 - c) I mostly read what people posted but didn't have too much to say.
 - d) I used the Facebook group only when I had something I really wanted to ask.
 - e) I joined the group but never really read anything that was posted there.
 - f) Other:

and

- What did you gain from participating in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group?

Those who were not members of the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group were asked:

- Which of the following best describe the reasons you did not join the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group:
 - a) I do not use Facebook.
 - b) I did not know that the group existed

- c) I decided I would rather wait to connect with my peers when we arrived on campus
 - d) I have limited Internet access
 - e) Other
- Please share the advantages or positive outcomes that you believe have resulted from waiting until you arrived on campus to connect with your peers.
 - Please share any negative outcomes that you believe have resulted from waiting until you arrived on campus to connect with your peers.

In fall 2013, 83.73% of students matriculating to Midwest College joined the College's Class of 2017 Facebook group. The benefits they reported included:

- a sense of community and connection to others,
- a sense of what their classmates would be like
- insights into campus life from experienced peers,
- the chance to learn from others' questions,
- an increased sense of enthusiasm and excitement,
- reminders about upcoming deadlines, and
- getting access to general information.

That same fall, 16.26% of Midwest's incoming students did not join the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group. Those who chose did not join the group reported that they:

- were not Facebook users;
- did not know that the group existed;

- had limited access to the Internet;
- wanted to arrive on campus with no preconceived notions or expectations of others; and/or
- preferred to initially meet people in person rather than on-line.

Of this group, half reported that they felt at a disadvantage compared to their Facebook using peers and the other half perceived no impact of waiting to connect with others until arriving on campus. Despite the fact that the differences in Facebook users' and non-users' belongingness scores were not statistically significant, responses to the open-ended questions indicated that some students did perceive a negative impact as a result of not participating in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group. Responses that indicated negative impact included:

- People had already made friends and had been communicating for the last couple months;
- I was isolated for a little while when I arrived on campus,
- I don't know anyone;
- I wasn't sure who I'd connect with;
- It was difficult to connect with others without talking to them before;
- I can't get involved as smoothly and quickly as my peers.

These types of responses prompted me to explore further in order to understand the ways in which this negative impact might be experienced and mitigated.

During each interview conducted with interview participants over the course of the first semester they were asked to respond to the following prompt: on a scale of 0 to

10, with 0 being not at all, 5 being neutral, and 10 being very much, give me a number that tells me how much you feel you belong at Midwest College. Because several participants expressed difficulty or reluctance when I asked for only whole number responses, I allowed them to respond with non-whole numbers in order to best reflect their experiences.

Belongingness scores reported by the interview participants over the course of the study are in Table 5 below. In all but three instances (i.e., Ellen and Sara at Week 12 and Sasha at Week 20), all participants' belongingness scores remained steady or climbed over the course of their first semester, but each of those instances where a decrease in sense of belonging was reported can be attributed to a particular experience being navigated by the interview participant. Such instances are highlighted in the table. There were not meaningful differences in the belongingness scores between Facebook users and non-users over the course of the study.

Table 5

Interview Participants' Belongingness Responses

<u>Status</u>	<u>Week 6</u>	<u>Week 12</u>	<u>Week 20</u>	<u>Participant</u>
Facebook User	7	4.5	6.5	Ellen
Facebook User	8	8.5	9	Carl
Facebook User	8.75	9	9	Joseph
Facebook User	9	9	9	Lisa
Facebook User	9.5	9.5	9.8	Tracy
Facebook User	8	8.5	9	Rachel
FB User Mean	8.38	8.17	8.72	
Non-user	7.5	8.5	6.5	Sasha
Non-user	7	8	8	Yasmin
Non-user	8	8	8	Annie
Non-user	5	7	7	Nina
Non-user	9	7	7.5	Sara
Non-user	7	8	8	Denise
Non-user Mean	7.25	7.75	7.5	

Insight into the ways in which participants interacted with and made meaning of their usage of Facebook was gained through the course of interviews. This insight proves valuable, particularly in consideration of the resources that colleges and universities are directing towards this medium. Institutions of higher education have been increasing usage of the Internet and SNSs to create opportunities to reach students (Barnes, 2009; Barnes & Lescault, 2011; Finnegan, Webb & Morris, 2007).

Increasingly, staff time and energy are being invested in managing institutional presence on SNSs and maintaining connections with and observing multiple audiences in these arenas. Barnes and Lescault (2011) found that 100% of colleges and universities in their study utilized social media in their recruitment efforts. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (2012) reported that 97% of colleges did so. This degree of investment in SNSs makes sense only if the institutions believe that their users find value in the content and the interactions that occur within the context of the particular platform. While an increased sense of belonging is one possible outcome of such participation, a more nuanced understanding of the ways that users (and non-users) view Facebook and make meaning of their experiences using Facebook may provide useful information for institutions of higher education seeking to make more purposeful decisions about how to invest resources in SNSs.

Taxonomy of Facebook Usage

Themes that emerged in participants' interviews provided the framework for the taxonomy of Facebook usage I have developed, which is outlined in Table 7, below. Information gathered in the interviews suggests that there is movement between the

domains. Facebook usage is fluid; users may find more value in their engagement with Facebook at some times than at others. The nine domains on the grid below reflect the interaction between frequency/quantity of use on the horizontal axis and perceived value of use on the vertical axis. This movement between domains could be important for institutions to consider as they are making decisions about when and how to reach out to students via Facebook and what content is most appropriate given the ways that students are engaging with and making meaning of their experiences in this and other SNS.

During the first interview with each of the participants, I asked about their history with Facebook; if they had an account, I asked when they first established it, and if not, I learned a bit more about their attitudes towards Facebook. Note that all participants are identified by pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality. In addition, if participants requested to be identified using non-gendered pronouns, they are referred to as they/them/their, even in the singular. These users spoke about their usage of Facebook and of the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook page, their frequency of usage and the perceived value gained from Facebook interactions. I utilize quotes from participants to highlight the different ways that they used and made meaning of their interactions on Facebook. My aim was to understand the ways that participants' usage of Facebook impacted their sense of belongingness. In addition to this focus, insights into the ways that participants' usage changed over time also emerged. As I looked for themes in the interview transcripts, I noted similarities in patterns of usage described by participants. The following pages will provide insights into these themes with supporting information from interviews.

Facebook usage can be described using many different variables: types of activities engaged in, quantity of time spent in use, number of friends, frequency of status updates, etc. I chose to examine both the degree of usage (frequency and quantity of time) and the perceived value of the usage. From interviews with participants, I gathered

Table 6

Domains of Facebook Use

Perceived Value of Use ----- → High ----- Low	<p><u>Obligated</u></p> <p>Usage that is compelled or driven by some specific outcome or purpose that cannot easily be achieved by other means.</p>	<p><u>Pragmatic</u></p> <p>Usage for very specific, very targeted purposes, and very little else. The value exists in particular interactions with no expectations beyond that.</p>	<p><u>Focused</u></p> <p>Highly valued and high frequency usage. Users who engage in this way are the targets of many institutional social networking efforts.</p>
	<p><u>Outsider</u></p> <p>Usage engaged in, often grudgingly, which is limited because the user not effectively found ways to navigate in the space, or has found limited value in use of the site.</p>	<p><u>Dabbler</u></p> <p>Usage guided by no real focus or purpose, resulting in contentment with whatever comes of the time spent online.</p>	<p><u>Ritualistic</u></p> <p>Usage guided by specific patterns of engagement or routine may be driven by fear of missing out on desired interactions or content.</p>
	<p><u>Holdout</u></p> <p>Non-usage.</p>	<p><u>Skeptical</u></p> <p>Willing usage which occurs with a healthy degree of skepticism that anything of value will result.</p>	<p><u>Addicted</u></p> <p>This user reports spending significant time scrolling through and scanning materials repeatedly, but extremely limited value found in this usage.</p>
----- (Low) ----- Frequency/Quantity of Use ----- → (High)			

insights into the frequency and perceived value of time spent on Facebook. I have used the interaction of these two factors to create a framework describing Facebook usage along nine domains. Through interviews with participants, themes emerged in their descriptions of both the perceived value of Facebook and their degree of usage of Facebook. It became clear through these interviews that individuals may move between domains as their usage and motivations change over time. Table 6 describes domains of Facebook usage, which are further illustrated by the experiences of study participants.

Carl, a first-generation student from Kentucky, was not terribly engaged in his first foray into Facebook; he signed up for a while in seventh grade, but his account remained mostly dormant until his sophomore year of high school. At that point, he had engaged with a new peer group and found more reason to invest time and energy into building his presence on Facebook.

I just started having a new friend circle and thought I needed to do the hip thing and start using Facebook. I was pretty late to the game. When I got my new friend circle, everyone was asking why I wasn't using Facebook, it was kind of a peer pressure thing. Peer pressure was a pretty strong thing back then, and I wasn't losing anything by having a Facebook, so I just did it. I had nothing to lose. I used to do a lot more stuff in high school to impress people. I would like check in to places with friends, and I would upload as many pictures as I could and stuff like that. (October 22, 2013)

He shared a tendency to post frequently. This high degree of usage continued as he was preparing to transition to college, as he discussed decisions about connecting with new peers through the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group:

In the beginning when I was coming to a completely new environment, I was kind of feeling like I had to socialize on Facebook with people, anybody, really, to kind of get my foot in the door. Now that I've been here for a while, that doesn't really matter as much. (January 27, 2014)

After a semester on campus, Carl felt much less pressure to connect as broadly on campus; he was able to be selective and make choices about how and with whom to engage, because the stakes were less high.

Lisa, another first-year student, spent her summer preparing to travel to a college very far from her home state. She described her engagement on Facebook as she was preparing for the transition:

I know in the summer, when I was so excited and scared and anxious to come here, whenever there was a new post on the Facebook, I would read it and I would make sure that I had that knowledge in my head even if it wasn't at all relevant to me. Like when people were talking about dorm assignments and there were conversations like, "[Our residence hall] is the best", "No, ours is the best" I still would log that in my mind so that I would try to have more information about this place where I was going. (November 17, 2013)

Lisa spoke about eagerly reading every bit of information that she could find, and checking several times daily for new posts. Initially in their transition, both Lisa and Carl were motivated by a high level of perceived value in interactions that occurred in this SNS. Other participants shared similar reflections about their usage of Facebook when they were new users with a growing number of connections (with whom they had pre-existing relationships), or as existing users who were seeking specific information. In member checking discussions with interview participants, almost all that were Facebook users throughout middle and high school identified a period of time during which their engagement with Facebook was highly focused, but described it as a passing phase. I have termed high-value, high frequency Facebook in this way as a *focused use*.

Other users spoke about the perceived value of their Facebook usage as average, yet maintained a high frequency of usage. Some users whose Facebook activity I categorized this way expressed belief in the potential for high value experiences to occur within the medium, and engaged in particular patterns of behavior on Facebook. For these users, this type of usage was also motivated by a desire to adhere to the social norms and conventions that govern interactions in SNSs.

For Ellen, the latter was the case; she spoke about engaging on Facebook as a formality that had little to nothing to do with interactions in the physical world. She found the disconnect between these frustrating:

I have people who I feel like I have had substantial conversations with and then have friended on Facebook, but I don't use Facebook to talk to them

very much, it's kind of like a formality; when you meet someone, then you friend them on Facebook. (December 5, 2013)

Ellen's concern about the lack of connection between Facebook engagement and that in real life continued over the course of her first semester at Midwest College:

People who I've talked to once and who have friended me will like all my statuses, but then we see each other in the hall and there's no acknowledgement. (February 10, 2014)

Though she was disconcerted about the incongruence between interaction on Facebook and in person, Ellen did not describe her usage changing. She continued to engage regularly and to adhere to the perceived norms.

Sara described a ritualistic pattern of behavior that guided her interaction on Facebook:

Whenever a website updates that I care about, I have to read until I've gotten to where I was before, so that I am sure I didn't miss anything. I think probably part of that is the way I approached Facebook, too. I wanted to make sure that I didn't just not see something that I would have wanted to see. (January 24, 2014)

Usage which relies on particular patterns or customs to structure interaction on Facebook I have termed as *ritualistic* because it is guided by habit or routine or by social convention.

Other users were not readily able to speak to the value they found in their use of Facebook, or expressed concern about their degree of use and its potential negative

consequences. Some participants' comments indicated a low perceived value of usage despite the fact that their frequency of use remained high.

Sasha, for example expressed unease about her time spent on Facebook, but framed it as a concern about unproductive time.

I have been trying to limit my activity on Facebook because it's really time consuming and one thing I don't like about Facebook is that the feelings that you get after using Facebook is guilt and regret. (October 4, 2013)

Ultimately, she was worried enough that she employed a unique solution to manage her Facebook usage:

I remember in the beginning of the semester I said I wasn't very addicted to it but for some reason in the past month I have been going on Facebook quite regularly and I have been so addicted to it. I guess that in the past I have had to regulate my Facebook usage. So I've asked one of my friends to change the password. So, I don't know the password right now. That's more effective than deactivating your account temporarily. (December 3, 2013)

Alternatively, over the course of the semester, Carl discussed ways in which his perceived value in Facebook activities lessened. Despite the decreasing value he attributed to Facebook activity, his usage did not decrease:

I hate to say this, but Facebook is getting kind of boring...People don't really do anything on Facebook anymore. It's kind of a place for pictures

and witty statuses to get likes. That's pretty much what it's come to. I'll read over the newsfeed. Even though I've seen it before, I'll still read it out of habit. When I'm bored, I'll pop on my newsfeed and just scroll through. And sometimes I'll do it like ten times a day, and nine of those times I've already read it. And I'll notice it, but it's like that doesn't even matter. It's like, hypnotizing or something. (January 27, 2014)

Despite the fact that Facebook was “boring”, Carl continued to use it. His description of the experience as “hypnotizing” and Sasha’s decision to have someone else regulate her use indicate that neither of them found tremendous value in what was to be gained by spending time on Facebook. This sort of use I have termed as *addicted*. Although their perceived value of Facebook interaction varied, the users that I have described above as engaged in focused use, ritualistic use, and addicted use maintained the highest degree of usage; daily usage if not multiple times each day. The next three types of usage that I describe all involved Facebook use at least weekly, with varying degrees of perceived value gained from the interactions.

Some participants described utilizing Facebook for very specific purposes. Because the Facebook functions that they found of use were very limited in scope, their frequency of usage was not high. Tracy expressed very clear parameters about Facebook use:

I just use Facebook to keep in touch with people around the world where I wouldn't be able to otherwise because realistically, none of us has the time to sit down and write individualized emails to each of the 90 people that

I've met over the past five years. That would be lovely, but it's not realistic and I think that while the administration is flawed and maybe some of the execution is flawed, the idea of Facebook as a central hub for people to connect and keep in touch is a great idea. My use of Facebook is highly pragmatic. If I am not talking to you, you're not staying on it.

(September 30, 2013)

There was one particular moment on Facebook that Tracy found particularly significant in the process of their transition to Midwest College, and it is worth noting given its impact:

I thought really long and hard about whether I should even participate in the [Class of 2017] group beyond just reading what other people posted. And I did post, outlining where I was from, and what things I was interested in, etc. And I also mentioned, for the first time in an online setting, that I was non-binary transgender and that I prefer gender-neutral pronouns and things like that. It was really intimidating to click 'post' for that message, knowing that it was just going to be there. And nobody blinked an eye basically. It kind of clicked, "Yes! This is the right place, because it gave me that sense of security where you can just be open about things and not worry that people are going to shun or bother you about it. (September 30, 2013)

This was the one posting that Tracy made in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group. Aside from this particular interaction, Tracy's pragmatic approach to Facebook use remained constant as time passed:

I have been thinking lately about how Facebook is something that I use specifically to connect with people I know, not to make new friends, not to learn about the news, just the bare bones, I'm going to collect all the people that I know in this little box, and I can capture them in this way if I really want to. (February 6, 2014)

Joseph also spoke about Facebook not as a network or a platform to foster engagement, but more as a resource to provide him access to engage with contacts in a face-to-face setting:

I use Facebook to stay connected to people, not necessarily as a tool, but as a means of...if I need to get in touch with someone, here's my last ditch. If I don't have their number, address, anything of that nature, hopefully I can reach them or at least find something else about them that will help me reach them. I enjoy face to face conversation much more. (October 15, 2013)

He reflected on his earliest engagement with Facebook and the ways that his usage changed over time:

My use moved in a very quick shift from social use to informative use. (February 3, 2014)

Joseph was not alone in his perception of Facebook as more of an information resource than a social platform. Several participants spoke of using Facebook in this way, primarily to remember scheduled events, to keep track of birthdays, etc. Rather than recording happenings in a calendar, participants would rely on Facebook as a means of

managing this sort of data through event invitations and birthday reminders. In referring to usage as '*pragmatic*,' Tracy identified this category of use in which the value is high, because although the same purposes could be achieved through other means, Facebook collects all of the information into one convenient space.

Other participants expressed openness to potential value in usage of Facebook, but did not engage with a particular agenda. They logged on to Facebook once or twice weekly, rather than daily. Lisa, for example, found that she was pleasantly surprised by some of the ways in which she found value in random Facebook interactions:

I think, over Facebook, one thing that made me feel like I belong was people getting in contact with me when we hadn't necessarily been talking – just when they reached out to me or sent me an article that was really funny or really powerful and would say something like, 'thinking of you' and it would be something that was specifically tailored for my interests or for my sense of humor from people that I wasn't even super close with, but it felt like they understood who I was and what I was interested in. I feel connected to campus even when I see things that I am interested in that other students are participating in. It makes me feel like I belong because I am studying where these things are happening. (January 27, 2014)

Over the course of the semester, Sara's use of Facebook changed, and she became more aware of how much time she had been investing there. As she worked to limit her time on Facebook, she remained open to finding value in Facebook interactions. She did not have

negative perceptions of Facebook, yet was wary of spending too much unproductive time in the SNS, as she had earlier in the semester.

I feel like I check Facebook in case something important is happening, and spend maybe 10 minutes on it a day. Like, I really don't care about it that much. Usually I use it to...like my friend who goes to the University of Washington, we went and saw *Frozen* together while we were at home, and that was super fun, so sometimes I'll see something on the internet that's related to *Frozen*, so I'll send it to her on Facebook. So, it's definitely just a check-in sort of thing, rather than somewhere I want to spend actual time. (January 24, 2014)

In discussing of their Facebook usage, Sara and Lisa did not describe logging in daily any longer. For Sara, this more disciplined use of Facebook was a shift from her earlier patterns of use; a conscious choice to control her activity. Both were open to the possibility that they might find value in their interactions on Facebook, but had no strong expectations as they engaged. They “*dabbled*” in Facebook, engaging very casually.

At one phase in their Facebook usage, several users voiced healthy degree of doubt that what is achieved via Facebook is authentic. These users also expressed concern about how others perceived them or made meaning of their interactions in the SNS. Sasha clearly articulated her doubts in the value of what was achieved via Facebook, and spoke to the risks she perceived:

I wasn't a part of the Facebook group. I feel that communication on Facebook is very superficial in a sense. I would prefer talking to people

in person and I think I like the fact that I did not join the group from the beginning because I started fresh when I got here. It's really weird, because sometimes when people write on Facebook it might not be them...I think there are like multiple personalities that play a role, so when you talk to someone on Facebook they have the time to go back and edit what they are going to say and put smiley faces and stuff and you might not even be feeling that emotion so I think that you really get a better sense of someone when you meet them in person. (October 4, 2013)

Sasha also expressed concern about the ways that Facebook interactions could have lasting affects by creating a false sense of expectations. She believed that the personas users were able to create online could be difficult to live up to in person.

It's easy to connect with people in front of a screen but when you are meeting them in person the transition is kind of awkward. I don't know, like you have certain expectations that you have to meet. But if you didn't have those other expectations you could just be yourself. You're starting from zero and just starting to develop this bond. (October 4, 2013)

Pragmatic usage, skeptical usage, and dabbling each provide an experience that is of moderate value to the Facebook user.

Those who used Facebook rarely or not at all also articulated varying degrees of value to be found in their usage. Some such users found high value in a particular aspect of Facebook usage that achieved a goal that could not be easily accomplished otherwise.

Thus, such users expressed feeling ‘stuck’ or obligated to continue to maintain a presence on Facebook despite their personal desire to walk away from it. The perceived value gained was so high that it overrode the desire to disconnect. This type of usage I describe as *obligated use*.

Despite being very clear about the pragmatic nature of their initial engagement on Facebook, over the course of the semester, Tracy still felt compelled to engage to a degree beyond what they would have preferred:

I kept using it and still do. And as much as I’d like to get rid of it, I know that I probably never will because having moved around so much and having gone to so many different summer programs every summer for the majority of my life now, the people that I meet and become close to are all over. (September 30, 2013)

Yasmin, a first-year international student, had attended an international high school outside of her home country. She clearly expressed obligation when she discussed her use of Facebook:

I do have Facebook - I use it but it’s because it’s easiest for me to talk to friends from home and high school friends from around the world, so I kind of have to use it if I don’t want to be cut off from those people. (October 22, 2013)

Over the course of the semester, Yasmin expressed an increasing sense of obligation with regard to her Facebook use; she felt that she had very little choice:

Well, I am still stuck there, because I wanted to deactivate it, but I know that my friends back home, and my friends who are in other colleges cannot talk to me if I am not on Facebook. And our relationships will not be the same if I stay for a month or two months without responding to them. (January 24, 2014)

Yasmin's use of the word 'stuck' to describe her relationship with Facebook is a clear indication that she would prefer to disengage, but she felt that what she had to lose was too great. (Note: shortly after this interview, I received an email from Yasmin letting me know she had deactivated her Facebook account.)

Outsider usage describes use by individuals who had engaged with Facebook so infrequently that they were not able to effectively navigate the space or understand what is there. This sort of usage does not engage with a core group of existing connections in Facebook, and so there is nothing particular to serve as an anchor or as a frame of reference while navigating the space. This lack of familiarity reinforces the user's status as an outsider, as Annie experienced:

The thing is, I got a Facebook. Because my phone was broken, and I could not contact anyone except people who use iPhone because we could use iMessage and I have an iPad. So when I needed to contact them, I just used Facebook. But, besides that, I don't think Facebook is useful for me, because I don't know...there isn't any information on it, right? (December 5, 2013)

Annie began the year as a non-user, but ultimately made the decision to create a Facebook account out of perceived necessity. Because she had no real intent to be

engaged in the space beyond utilizing it as a messaging service, she had developed no framework for understanding or navigating Facebook. This left her feeling confused and frustrated by what she found there. Her transition from non-user to Facebook user still left her feeling dissatisfied and disconnected.

Holdout usage (or non-usage) reflects a choice not to engage in this form of social networking or a decision to disconnect for any number of reasons. Annie and Nina, both students from China, were familiar with Renren, an SNS based in China, but were not interested in connecting via Facebook. Annie felt very alone in this decision:

Everything is going well but I still don't have a Facebook yet. But I don't have the time to get a Facebook. I kind of had that difficulty when I was using Renren. And I don't know who to be friends with apart from getting their friend request. I am a little afraid that I may have the same problem in Facebook. I don't want to get a Facebook. Some times it is hard for me to get news because I don't use Facebook. Sometimes I think that if I want to ask for help it's more difficult than using a Facebook because I actually have to ask. One of my friends doesn't use Facebook, but is there anyone else? (October 1, 2013)

Nina was proud of waiting to make her own judgments and form her own impressions until she arrived on campus and could do so based on her own experiences. She had been an active user of Renren in China, but was also beginning to experience some doubts about this usage:

I didn't use Facebook in China. That doesn't mean I couldn't get access to it; that was more a conscious decision. Um...I think probably...I felt like I wouldn't be able to make real friends and it was kind of awkward for me just to say to a random person, "Hi, how are you". So I would like to wait until I arrive to Midwest College. Because I didn't join I didn't know anything visually until I arrived on the campus. It's something new - brand new for me. I wanted to see for myself rather than hearing from the comments on Facebook. I do use Renren. I used Renren since high school and I think basically all my real friends are there. I don't really add people if I don't already know that person. I was pretty active in Renren but at some point I felt like I didn't want to be. (October, 28, 2013)

Denise was clear that she didn't see the immediate value in social networking, but over the course of the semester, began to see some ways that she could benefit from engaging:

I never felt like social networking was necessary. I was making friends on my own. I wasn't comfortable using social networking, so I didn't see that there was a need for it. (September 28, 2013)

Over time, Denise began to see some potential for value in Facebook use, primarily because she felt that she was missing out on an important avenue for accessing information.

Well, it's...I can see how it would be useful, but I don't feel like it's necessary. And it's getting to the point where um, just things happening on

campus are posted on Facebook before anything else. So if you don't have a Facebook account you are not getting that information. So, I will probably get one eventually, even though I really don't want one because I am pretty sure I wouldn't keep up with it. It would just be an occasional thing to see what's happening. (January 28, 2014)

Ways of using Facebook and perceived value of such use varied with time and with the context within which the usage occurred. This suggests that there are multiple ways of moving through the various types of Facebook usage outlined in this chapter. In the following chapter, I will utilize portraiture to illustrate the ways that four participants engaged with Facebook and experienced belonging in their transition to Midwest College.

CHAPTER FIVE: Facebook and Belonging in Individual Contexts

As I engaged with each of my study participants in multiple settings on a small college campus, it became increasingly clear that my interactions with them could not be limited only to those directly related to the study. As a result, as I considered the most appropriate way to share findings from the study, portraiture emerged as the most suitable. Portraiture is a phenomenological methodology that relies on the trusting relationship that has been established between the researcher and the subject. The researcher “is seen not only in defining the focus and field of the inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002 p. 13). An aim of portraiture is to capture and reflect the complex and dynamic interactions between individuals within a given organizational context. As a methodology, portraiture has been criticized for failing to sufficiently acknowledge the power of the researcher in creating ‘reality’ through her or his interpretations of the subject’s experience (English, 2000, p.21). However, because context is essential to portraiture, and context is also, I argue, critical to the role that Facebook plays in the individual student’s development of a sense of belonging, this methodology offers a fitting structure to present findings. Additionally, in this particular situation it was not possible to extricate my role as researcher from my role in shaping the orientation and transition programming. Participants were aware of my roles, and further, those who were Facebook users were aware of my presence and participation in the group. As such, I found portraiture be an appropriate methodology.

Strayhorn's (2012a) definition of belonging was consistently used throughout this study; however, an emerging model of belonging proposed by Vaccaro and Newman (2013) identifies the ways in which minoritized students define and develop a sense of belonging in contrast to their peers from privileged identities. The model provides a more nuanced examination of how students from different identities seek, understand, and experience involvement, relationships, belonging, and mattering. Their grounded theory study utilized two semi-structured interviews of 51 participants at a mid-sized public university. Their participants represented a broad range of identities across race, religion, gender, socioeconomic class, religious or spiritual background and sexual orientation. Over the course of the study, as they engaged participants in defining belonging they found that minoritized students added feelings of safety and respect from their peers, but also had different understandings of some of the foundational aspects of belonging as it was defined in the study. Students from privileged identities, for example, may think of involvement primarily as providing an opportunity for fun and engagement, while for their peers from subordinated social group identities seek spaces to be their authentic selves. As I interviewed participants throughout this study, each had three opportunities to address additional aspects of belonging that they felt were a part of their experience but were not explicitly included in Strayhorn's definition. These will be explicated in the portraits that follow.

Ultimately, the portraits in this chapter will clearly illustrate that the individual student's context was paramount in shaping his or her sense of belonging, usage of Facebook, and further, how that sense of belonging was influenced by Facebook usage.

Portraits were created for four of the study participants; two students were users of Facebook and/or participants in the Class of 2017 Facebook group, and two were non-users. These participants were profiled because their stories illustrate most clearly that there are multiple factors that affect sense of belonging as students are transitioning to college. Additionally, three of these participants reported a decrease in their sense of belonging at some point during the course of the study, as reflected in Table 7, below.

Status	Score on Belongingness Scale			Participant
	Week 6	Week 12	Week 20	
Facebook User	8	8.5	9	Carl
Non-user	9	7	7.5	Sara
Facebook User	7	4.5	6.5	Ellen
Non-user	7.5	8.5	6.5	Sasha

Portrait 1: In Search of Authenticity

Carl is a first-generation, first-year student who came to Midwest College from Kentucky. He was an active participant in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group. He also happens to be a gay man who was closeted while at home. Almost from the moment he set foot on campus, Carl set about redefining himself and being the authentic self he never felt able to be in his home community. Carl was clearly seeking to distance himself from his roots in Kentucky, while still finding ways to stay connected to his family. Even his selection of Midwest College represented something that he aspired to. As he told me in our first interview, “I thought [the name] sounded fancy and sophisticated. I applied for all the wrong reasons, but it worked out even if it was a bad

strategy” (October 22, 2013). Despite applying to Midwest College for ‘wrong’ reasons, Carl had definite criteria for the new community in which he would settle.

I was looking for a chance to kind of start over. Definitely I was looking forward to being in a place where I could come out. That was definitely a huge thing. I almost didn’t, but I am really glad I did. And I know this sounds really cliché, but getting away from all the drama of Kentucky, because there is so much stupid stuff that goes on there. It’s nice not having to deal with people who are the stereotypical people from Kentucky, don’t really care, kind of apathetic about stuff. People here seem to care about stuff and don’t really do stuff that’s like ‘in your face, I can’t believe you just did that.’ Definitely starting over, and being able to have the space where I could feel comfortable coming out...and being able to kind of forget about some stuff in the past. (January 27, 2014)

Within his first 48 hours on campus, Carl changed his first name to something he preferred over his given name and found that space where he could feel comfortable coming out. Those two experiences seem to have cemented his sense of belonging at Midwest College. “I’ve never felt so connected to a place as I have here” (October 22, 2013). In fact, Carl’s sense of connection to the college and his new peers deepened so quickly that he began to disconnect with those people from Kentucky with whom he had any Facebook connections. “I connect with people here. I am deleting people from Kentucky whenever they show up on

my newsfeed. I don't talk to you, I probably never will talk to you again, and I just delete them" (October 22, 2013).

Through the course of his first semester, Carl has had an idealized experience of Midwest College. A trip to Kentucky for a visit over Thanksgiving and evenings spent with the few friends from home whom he did maintain ties with provided insight into just how strong this perception is. "There's people I can hang out with, but it just kind of seems like they're sub-par" (December 13, 2013). Because his family had no Facebook presence, and he had deleted his other Kentucky connections, Carl felt a bit more isolated on his return visit, and his connections from home suffered further as a result. "I had fun, but I think if they were students here I would like them a lot more, as bad as it sounds...I tell people I like Midwest College people a lot better as a whole than people from my high school, just because they are a different kind of people" (December 3, 2013).

For Carl, cutting ties to home—through Facebook and in other ways—strengthened his sense of connectedness to Midwest College. He did not have to worry about any posts that he might make which would raise questions about his sexual orientation for his community in Kentucky. He felt able to be authentic and open about his sexual orientation.

It feels a lot better to not have to hide that. It may be why I like the people here more. That's at least part of the reason that I like it more here. I even changed my name when I came here. It used to be Trevor, but that wasn't really a symbolic thing I was just tired of Trevor and I couldn't ever

change it because everyone knew me as Trevor. When I went home, I was Trevor again, and I hate that name. That might be part of the reason I prefer to be here. (December 3, 2013)

Carl's strong sense of connection to Midwest College allowed him to thrive personally; he spoke of coming out on campus as giving him an opportunity to redefine himself, and he became involved in student government and with the student newspaper. For him, one important aspect of belonging is intention or agency. Knowing that he had a choice about where to be, and that he was there *on purpose* was important.

Through the course of his transition to Midwest College, Carl's Facebook usage shifted from focused use to addicted use. He began with a very intentional desire to make connections with peers as he transitioned to a new space and redefined himself. As he found his place at the College and severed connections with many of his former friends from his home community, his frequency of usage did not change, though his perceived value of his Facebook interactions diminished greatly. Carl ultimately described his usage of Facebook as "hypnotizing":

When I'm bored, I'll pop on my newsfeed and just scroll through. And sometimes I'll do it like ten times a day, and nine of those times I've already read it. And I'll notice it, but it's like that doesn't even matter. It's like, hypnotizing or something. (January 27, 2014)

Portrait 2: Alignment of Values

Sara is a first-year student from the western United States. Sara was not a participant in the Class of 2017 Facebook Group, not because she made an intentional choice, but because she overlooked the invitations to join the group. Ultimately, though, Sara felt that this was for the best.

I form first impressions really quickly and so I know if I had seen a post from somebody that annoyed me, I would have been looking for them on campus and thinking, like, “Oh, that was that person that said that thing,” or conversely, if there was someone who was posting a whole bunch of stuff I would have been seeking them out in almost a celebrity sort of way, that they were the person who posted a ton, so oh, I want to meet that person. It was nice coming in with a completely clean slate. But then I also felt like I’d missed out on stuff because people would be like, “Oh that’s that person who said that thing.” (October 14, 2013)

Sara was very comfortable with the transition from her community in Seattle to another similarly liberal community. Successful auditions for the Concert Choir and an a cappella group also helped her feel very comfortable with her place in the Midwest College community, and she quickly found a group of friends with whom she connected. This became her core group through the remainder of the fall semester. For Sara, friend groups assume a loose structure, with particular roles or personas that need to be present:

I want to be the comedic character that everyone wants to have in their group – people can look at me and think, “Oh, she’s that girl.” So I think that I kind of do

that in a way and also like I want to be like the nerdy girl, too, making obscure references to weird video games – that kind of thing. I do that. There’s also usually a really funny one. And someone who is not exactly like a rebel but someone who pushes boundaries – the one who’s the fun one to think of things to do, the responsible person who is like the group’s mom, or whatever. Those are the main roles that I can think of right now. (December 2, 2013)

Sara’s sense that each friend group should have particular personas represented proved to be a source of frustration for her as the semester progressed, because she frequently found herself in a role that she did not want to fulfill. In addition, a conflict between her values and the party culture that she experienced on campus has been a point of tension. She found the degree of partying that her friends were engaging in frustrating, and began to lose patience. Her expectation was that as time passed, the partying would decrease as people adjusted to newfound freedoms. The novelty did not wear off, and rather than assuming the roles she preferred to fill within a group, Sara found herself playing the role of mom more frequently, and she felt that others expected her to defend her choices more and more frequently. She worried that she was imposing her values on her friends, and limiting their social choices. She did not want to do this, but also did want to engage in the party culture in the same ways that her peers were.

For Sara, the break at the end of the semester served to clarify her sense of belonging at Midwest College. Being at home with a group of friends from high school provided her the background against which she could see the ways that she had grown and changed over the course of the year. The contrast was striking for her, and her

interactions over break empowered her to make decisions about with whom she invested her time and reaffirmed her sense of connection to Midwest College. It was not Facebook, however, but other forms of technology-mediated communication that Sara felt most impacted her sense of belonging. Using Skype and Google Hangouts to stay in contact with college friends during the semester break reinforced her ties to these peers. An examination of her Facebook friends confirmed that the majority of these were friends from high school; over the course of her time at Midwest College, she had friended very few of her college peers on Facebook, and only after she had already established face-to-face relationships with them. In fact, the organization to which she was most connected had a Facebook page that she was unaware of until after the end of the semester. Sara utilized Facebook to stay connected to high school friends, and over the course of the semester realized that she no longer had much in common with them. Most of her friendships from high school had revolved around shared experiences in theater productions. The friendships suffered without those productions to anchor them. Over the course of her transition to Midwest College, Sara's usage of Facebook shifted from ritualistic use to dabbler; she had initially adhered very closely to a very specific pattern of engaging on Facebook, but as her relationships changed and she became more aware of how time consuming Facebook had become for her, she made efforts to break established patterns. By the final interview, Sara spoke of Facebook as "just a check-in sort of thing; not a place where I would want to spend actual time" (January 24, 2014).

Portrait 3: (In)Visibility

Ellen, a first-generation student, grew up in an urban environment not far from the Midwest College campus. She arrived on campus optimistic, but also tentative about her opportunities to connect with her peers. Throughout middle and high school, Ellen frequently found herself struggling to make social connections with peers, primarily because her desire to excel academically set her apart from her peers. Ellen expressed to me that she was cautious and tentative in forming new relationships, and that made her transition to college challenging. Her involvement in the Class of 2017 Facebook group contributed in some ways to a feeling of disconnection as she settled in on campus:

I think part of it is that I am a little more open behind a screen, I guess. I feel less vulnerable. So, I feel like I expected to have more of a sense of belonging right when I got here because of the Facebook page and then I was kind of disappointed when that wasn't really the case. (October 15, 2013)

Beyond this disappointment, Ellen began to feel increasingly isolated, as peer connections were slow to form. She anticipated that joining clubs and organizations would start a process through which she would make connections with people, and did become involved in an on campus publication and had a role in a student directed play on campus. However, just after the play, when she hoped relationships with her cast mates would begin to coalesce, everyone had to refocus on the coursework that they had set aside for the play. As deadlines neared for the campus publication with which she was

involved, Ellen was sick, and missed two meetings, making it more challenging to feel connected.

Another obstacle to Ellen's development of a sense of belonging on campus was that she felt that her experience as a first-generation student from a lower socio-economic status rendered her invisible in some ways. She worried about acting the part, and felt her economic background set her apart.

I feel like a lot of people are just like, "I'm going to go to Patagonia and buy a \$140 sweater." And I'm like, "How can you do that?" And I was talking to a girl and she's in one of my classes and I get along with her fine, but she said, "You have a work-study job; how do you apply for that?" And I said, "You have to do it through the FAFSA." And she's like, "What's the FAFSA?" And I said, "It's the Federal Financial Aid thing." And she said, "Oh, my parents just pay for all of it." And I was like, "Wow."

I think people have a different view of what college is, and if you come from a background where everyone went to college and you have a lot of money, people are like, "Yes I'll work hard in college, but it's also about the fun!" I still want it to be about the fun, but because I'm the first one to go to college, I have to really focus on doing really well. So that also creates sort of a disconnect when people want to go out and party. I'm like, "I have to sleep because I have to get up in the morning and work and study." (February 10, 2014)

Ellen did not see her experience reflected in those of her classmates, and as a result, stayed very rooted in her friend group from high school, and this posed a particular

challenge for her development of a sense of belonging at Midwest College. Many of her friends from high school attended colleges in the area, and she was able to engage with them frequently. Friends from high school visited her on campus at least once a week.

It's good for me because it makes me happy to see my friends and talk to my friends, but at the same time, I know that I don't really have to try that hard because I'll always have these friends that I can talk to. So it does kind of make me feel like I don't have to put that much effort into making friends here because I have friends. And I don't know if it might make people who are looking at my page feel like 'she already has all these friends.' (October 15, 2013)

She later reflected:

I've always been someone who it takes me a while to be close to people, and I've known my high school friends for close to 5 years, so those are going to be the people who I turn to when I am having a rough time or I just need a laugh. I can see how that could be detrimental to my desire to connect more with people at college. (December 5, 2013)

Ellen's sense of belonging decreased between her initial arrival on campus and our first interview. She attributed her initial sense of belonging to the connections that she made on Facebook with her new classmates, but experienced a letdown when she arrived on campus and found that those relationships did not materialize. As someone who felt less vulnerable connecting with others from behind a screen, Ellen made inroads with others that helped her feel a sense of connection. Unfortunately, those connections did not hold up when she arrived on campus. Facebook had provided Ellen with a false sense of

connectedness that did not serve her well. She had found common interests with a number of classmates, and anticipated building relationships around those interests, but noted, “I was kind of disappointed when that wasn’t really the case, because you don’t know where to find those people, and you don’t have anything in common besides that one thing” (October 15, 2013).

Throughout the course of her transition to Midwest College, Ellen’s usage of Facebook shifted minimally. Prior to matriculating to college, Ellen had previously used Facebook primarily as a means of coordinating events with groups of friends, and given that many of her high school friends attended colleges in the area, initially not much changed in this regard. Her engagement on Facebook was primarily pragmatic, directed at messaging and coordinating plans with others. Over the course of the semester, this changed as she began to think about the ways in which Facebook interaction and face-to-face interaction differed. She was bothered by the discrepancy she saw and shared, “People who I’ve talked to once and who have friended me will like all my statuses, but then we see each other in the hall and there’s no acknowledgement” (February 10, 2014). Ellen already felt let down when she arrived on campus to find that the connections she had developed over the summer did not materialize into relationships. Further, as her class identity became more salient to her as she entered the college environment and as her understanding of her context changed, her motivations for engaging via Facebook changed, and maintaining pre-existing relationships became a priority. Frustrated further by the disconnect between face-to-face and Facebook interactions, Ellen continued to engage on Facebook, but did so more for entertainment purposes reading pages that she

found amusing. She became a skeptic, anticipating that little of value would come of her interaction on Facebook.

Portrait Four: Navigating Distance

Sasha was born in an Asian country, and has lived in several different countries throughout her life. An only child, she was very close to her parents. As she started college, her parents moved to another country, and so the place her family called “home” changed in the midst of her transition to college. Sasha was not a participant in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group. She made a conscious decision not to participate in the group:

I really was trying to delay the process of going to college because it really was formidable to me because I was going to go away from my parents, from my country, and from that little comfort bubble that I was in. College was something that I was not really looking forward to. (October 4, 2013)

In addition to her desire to forestall her transition to college for as long as possible, Sasha was also very aware of and critical about the assumptions that she feared would result from connecting with peers via social media. She brought a degree of insight and reflection beyond what was conveyed by other interview participants. Because she was preparing to move 10,000 miles away from what was familiar to her, Sasha reflected about who she would be and how she would interact in this new community. As a result, she decided to avoid the forms of superficial communication that she saw as a hallmark of Facebook. Rather than creating an on-screen image of herself that she would feel pressured to maintain, Sasha decided to wait and meet people in person first.

Sasha did experience a transition in her use of Facebook from primarily using it “only looking at old friends or renewing old connections to establishing new connections” (December 3, 2013). After a few weeks on campus, she began to connect with Midwest College peers on Facebook and was able to look at her new friends’ profiles with some context, rather than creating a narrative for them based on static images:

I met them and got to know them, and then I started our Facebook relationship. I knew stuff about them, so...I went in with a fixed set of mind, which was based on my interactions with them, and then going on Facebook. Because I knew from when people talk about their past and talk about their old friends, and then you look at your pictures, you’re like, “oh yea, that’s what they were talking about,” instead of looking at a picture and thinking, this *could* mean that. (December 3, 2013)

When she did choose to join the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group, midway through the fall semester, she did feel that it added to her sense of belonging. She explained, “Joining the Facebook group was a very small step, but it added to my feeling of being a part of Midwest College. Just a good feeling” (December 3, 2013). Sasha described an increasing sense of belonging at Midwest College until she traveled home over the extended break at the end of the semester. Because going home was not a possibility during the semester, she had made a decision to be fully present where she was. When she was able to travel to visit her family, she chose not to maintain any connections with people from College. Sasha shared, “When I went home, I just really wanted to be at home; I was going to see people after a month, so I didn’t stay in contact

with anyone from Midwest College” (February 4, 2014). This distinct separation between her life at college and her life with her family led to a more difficult transition back to campus; she did not ease back into the campus community, but experienced the transition as an abrupt separation from home, as she indicated when asked to respond to the belongingness scale:

I think right after coming back from home, this is one of the factors that could influence my answer. I want to say 6 or 7 for now, because things are a little...just getting back, things are a little different. I'm in a different time, and different setting, and different schedules altogether. I didn't do anything there, and now I am, like, so busy, working all the time. And I am still a little sad. I am sure as the semester progresses, and I feel a little bit less homesick, I will feel like I belong more, as I did before. (February 4, 2014)

As Sasha described her understanding of belonging, she added one facet to the definition: the capacity for mutual influence. Part of belonging, for her, is seeing the ways in which she has influenced and is influenced by shared values and knowing that there was space for multiple values and backgrounds in a shared community.

Belonging happens when you've passed the first stage of just orienting yourself and getting to know each other and the next stage is trust where you start expecting things from other people and knowing that you can count on them. One moment that comes to mind was in this program called Lives of Commitment. We did this activity called object share, where we presented an object that was important to us – that showed what we were motivated by or

dedicated to and so on and so on – our values. And it was when we were 30 people sharing our objects –sharing part of our lives; stories of our lives. It was at that moment that I really felt like I belonged in that community because we shared so many values and we respected each other. There was support for everyone because everyone knew that we came from different backgrounds we had respect for what everyone had done or what they had come from. (December 3, 2013)

Sasha kept her usage of Facebook separate from her college transition experience until the point at which she arrived on campus and had context within which to make judgments about her new peers. For her, usage of Facebook did have a positive effect on her sense of belonging, but only because she felt that the decision to join the Class of 2017 Facebook Group she was a specific moment at which she reaffirmed her connection to Midwest College.

As Sasha prepared for her transition to college, she initially approached Facebook as a skeptic. Not only was she doubtful about the authenticity of connections that could develop via Facebook, she was also trying to avoid facing the impending move away from her home and family. Sasha was also very guarded about the amount of time that she spent on Facebook. She equated its usage to wasting time, which elicited feelings of shame and guilt. As the semester unfolded and Sasha struggled with homesickness, she found herself using Facebook more and more frequently to view the profiles of friends from high school. Her usage increased over the course over the latter part of the semester,

until she described herself as addicted to Facebook. She eventually asked a friend to change her password in order to control her usage:

I remember in the beginning of the semester I said I wasn't very addicted to it but for some reason in the past month I have been going on Facebook quite regularly and I have been so addicted to it. I guess that in the past I have had to regulate my Facebook usage. So I've asked one of my friends to change the password. So, I don't know the password right now. That's more effective than deactivating your account temporarily.

(December 3, 2013)

After final exams she regained access to her Facebook account, and upon return from the semester break, while the amount of time Sasha spent on Facebook had increased in comparison to her usage early in fall semester, the focus of her usage had narrowed. Sasha became a pragmatic user, with a very specific purpose for which she engaged on Facebook - to combat homesickness and stay connected to family and friends from home. She stated, "I look at Facebook every single day, to see how my friends are doing, to look at their pictures" (February 4, 2014). While initially, Sasha avoided connecting to her Midwest College peers via Facebook because she was trying to forestall the inevitable move to a place thousands of miles away from home, it was ultimately Facebook that helped her maintain a sense of connection to place.

The portraits of these four study participants reflect very different ways in which individuals' Facebook usage changed over the course of time. No clear pattern of movement between domains of Facebook usage emerged and there was no common

experience in the course of their transitions that prompted users to move from one domain to another. For each individual user, multiple factors played a part in the transitions between domains. There is no singular profile of the Facebook user, and therefore no predictable path the user will take through the various domains of Facebook usage. Each user's engagement was impacted by the intersection of multiple factors; thus their individual motivations were different. For example, Carl found the opportunity to redefine himself and share an aspect of his identity that had previously been hidden. This led to an increased sense of connectedness to Midwest College and enabled him to disconnect from his past. The act of unfriending people on Facebook was one representation of Carl's new beginning. By contrast, Ellen felt isolated as a result of two aspects of her identity that she found particularly salient in her new college environment. As a first-generation student from a lower socio-economic class than that of many of her college peers, she found a degree of comfort through staying strongly connected to her high school friends. Facebook facilitated this continued contact.

Neither Sasha nor Sara participated in the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook group prior to arriving on campus, though both eventually joined. Sasha initially avoided connecting to peers on Facebook because she had such trepidation about the transition to college. She ultimately used Facebook to maintain a sense of strong connection to friends and family from home; it served as a way to stay connected and stave off homesickness. Sara also found that Facebook better served as a way of maintaining ties to friends from home. She had maintained a very specific pattern of Facebook usage, and as she transitioned to Midwest, she did not adapt those patterns to include her new community.

Numerous factors shape users' engagement with Facebook and with others via Facebook, while use of Facebook itself does not appear to significantly impact the ways in which users experience belongingness as they transition into new environments.

In the following chapter I will provide a summary of the study and its outcomes. I share some of the resulting implications for theory and practice and address the limitations of the study. Finally, I offer recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: Summary, implications for practice and future research

This study explored the ways in which students used Facebook and its impacts on their sense of belonging as they transitioned to college. I began the study with some concern about how Facebook usage was negatively impacting the ways in which students are engaging in community and with one another. I have come to realize that the usage of Facebook as a social networking site is much more complicated than pokes, likes, and comments. While for some, Facebook usage may enhance a sense of belonging to a place, for others the experience may be quite different. Survey data and participant experiences expressed in interviews showed that students approach Facebook with a wide range of expectations, and with varying perceptions of the value of such interactions. As a result, understanding the impact of Facebook interaction requires an exploration of the intersection of multiple individual factors, such as the degree of Facebook use and the perceived value of gains from such use. These individual factors must be considered in addition to institutional context. Determining the ways in which participation in a targeted Facebook group impacts individual students' development of a sense of belonging requires a nuanced contextual examination.

Evidence from this study indicates that students' participation in a targeted Facebook group may impact students' sense of belonging in various ways. This impact can be both positive and negative, reaffirming a student's sense of connection to the institution at some times, while illuminating a false sense of connectedness at others. Additional data from this study indicate that the ways in which students engage with Facebook, their motivation to engage, the frequency of their engagement and the value

they attribute to such interactions are fluid. Students' participation and level of engagement are shaped by the aforementioned influences, and the interaction between these influences is also subject to change over the course of the individual's transition.

One key finding of the study is that students attribute varying levels of value to the content they encounter on Facebook, and the intersection between this perceived value and frequency and type of Facebook use provides a framework for understanding different types of Facebook usage and how students engage with and make meaning of their Facebook interactions.

Limitations of the Study

In considering the findings of this study it is important to be aware of its limitations. For example, the students who opted to participate in the study may be somehow different than their peers who did not participate. The very act of participating in the study may have led to an increased sense of belonging among those participants because it fostered a sense of connectedness and a specific experience of mattering. Further, information about students' usage of Facebook was based on self-reported data, and it is possible participants' self-perceptions and/or recollections of their use may differ from their actual usage.

Another limitation is that in describing student use of Facebook I did not use numbers to quantify the amount of time participants spent on Facebook or the number of times they logged into the SNS or checked the Class of 2017 Facebook page as high or low. Rather, I used participants' own descriptions of their usage and how it changed over time to guide my characterization of their frequency of use and the perceived value of

their usage and how those changed over time. While I did check my assumptions with the participants, there is an absence of concrete values that could be useful to anyone seeking to replicate the process.

The small number of participants in the study is another factor that limits the generalizability of this study. I was able to identify only three participants who were not Facebook users at the time the study began. Two of the three were active on Renren, a popular social networking platform in China. The ways in which the students engage on Renren and its potential impact on their transition to college was not assessed in this study. Other participants who were not participants in the Class of 2017 Facebook group were active on Facebook in other ways; the ways in which these connections influenced their transition to college was not explicitly explored in the context of this study.

The context of the study is a small, private, highly-selective, residential campus, and as a result there are likely limitations in the generalizability of its outcomes to different institutional types. In addition, my role at Midwest College must be considered. I am a member of the student affairs staff at Midwest, and at the time that the study was conducted I had responsibility for the College's orientation program, and thus a clear interest in the success of the program and in its outcomes. I believe that I was able to mitigate any bias by keeping as my focus this study's potential for impact beyond the Midwest College campus, rather than specific implications for the Midwest community.

The study was further limited by its focus on one particular form of interaction (the Midwest College Class of 2017 Facebook Group) on one particular social networking platform; Facebook. Despite these limitations, the outcomes of the study

indicate that Facebook users and their patterns of usage vary greatly, as does the perceived value found in Facebook interactions; institutions of higher education should be attentive to the wide range of users engaging with their institutions via Facebook while being mindful of the potential limitations of their efforts in this virtual space.

Implications for Practice

The significant degree to which institutions of higher education utilize social networking and direct financial and staffing resources towards managing their presence in SNSs necessitates further exploration into the ways that students are engaging in these spaces and making meaning of such interactions. Given indications that colleges and universities will continue to utilize various forms of social networking with increasing frequency, it is important for practitioners to be thoughtful about how interactions in these spaces are structured (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). Institutions should be prepared to engage with students in myriad ways, but should remain mindful of the limitations of each; SNSs continue to emerge and evolve and the ways in which different generations of students engage with them is also changing. New users may engage in different ways than those who are experienced, and even among those who are well practiced, there is no monolithic user profile. Understanding these differences will serve institutions well as they are managing their social media and determining the ways in which to introduce and engage new members within the communities they are joining.

Facebook can serve to support and reinforce several of the six principles of community articulated by Boyer (1990): The “*open* community...where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed”

(p. 7) can be fostered in this SNS, as students are learning how to navigate communication in their new environment. More advanced students can model what is and is not acceptable within the setting, and institutional values can be reflected in the language and interactions that occur within the SNS. The “*just* community...where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued” (p. 7) is seen in the ways students find ways to share their authentic selves and find support, as Tracy did when they disclosed their identity as non-binary transgender. Tracy’s experience is a demonstration of the identity exploration that can occur within social networking sites (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Greenhow, 2011; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; McMillan & Morrison, 2006). Additionally, Boyer’s (1990) notion of the “*caring* community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported” (p.7) can be seen in the times in which new members of the community reached out with supportive, encouraging comments to others’ posts or questions or other concerns expressed in the Class of 2017 Facebook group.

Facebook and other SNSs can serve as a tool to reinforce and support community, and can even provide a context within which a community can have its earliest beginnings. However, even if these traits of community can be supported via Facebook, they cannot exist solely in the SNS. If they are not reinforced in face-to-face contexts, the sense of community becomes hollow and inauthentic, as Ellen expressed when she shared, “people who I’ve talked to once and who have friended me will like all my statuses, but then we see each other in the hall and there’s no acknowledgement. Are we friends or not?” (February 10, 2014).

In its most recent iteration, the CAS Standards (2012) for good practice in orientation programs recognizes that they must continue to be dynamic and responsive: “Orientation professionals will need to evaluate ways to deliver orientation content as new technologies emerge that change how, when, and where students learn” (p.191). The ways in which technology is referenced, however, are limited to increasing opportunities for distance learning:

As on-line education grows, institutions must envision new types of orientation programs to help students succeed in a technology-based, asynchronous learning environment that requires new ways of communicating with classmates and instructors. New and creative programs and methodologies must be assessed if the personal and educational needs of new students and their families are to be met (p.2).

This call relates specifically to technology-based education, but students are connecting socially in spaces mediated by technology, and are engaging in new ways of community building with their peers. They are coming to spaces such as Facebook without the structure, expectations, or degree of accountability that a course syllabus provides in the case of on-line learning. I do not recommend that institutions attempt to closely monitor or structure the interaction in SNSs; there would simply be too much to manage, and creating the expectation that those spaces are seen as an extension of an office or department would be a misstep.

As institutions consider their engagement in virtual spaces where they have an official presence, they should be mindful that focusing too narrowly on social networking

sites as a means of engaging with students will leave some students out entirely, and will leave others feeling left out. Not only are there students who chose not to engage in social networking, there are students who are skeptical about the authenticity of what they experience in SNSs and others who already feel like outsiders of such spaces.

Additionally, as was the case in this study, students from traditionally underrepresented populations on campus are still likely to have barriers to their use of SNSs. Outreach done via SNSs should be complemented by parallel efforts through other avenues, or should redirect students to gain supplemental information via a primary source such as a departmental web page, for example.

Additionally, outreach done via Facebook or other SNSs should be dynamic in order to best engage the broadest range of users over the course of time. Content that is information-heavy should be provided early in the transition process, but should also be interspersed with lighter, more entertaining content in order to keep the broadest range of users engaged. In this way, during the time when students in transition are most likely to be focused users, they will be exposed to information relevant to their transition. As they modify their ways of interacting on Facebook, a variety of content is most likely to continue to engage those users who are less focused in their usage.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although quantitative data from this study show that the impact of Facebook interaction on students' sense of belonging is not statistically significant, qualitative findings indicate that a more nuanced understanding of the impact on the individual is warranted. This study focused specifically on students in a small, residential, liberal arts

institution; students who have elected to attend such an institution may be inclined to a stronger initial sense of belonging than their cohorts at different types of institutions. The Midwest College student body is recruited from across the United States and abroad; expectations for belonging may differ among students at institutions with a more regional population. Future study should explore differences in initial sense of belonging and expectations of belongingness among students transitioning to college in order to illuminate the impact of Facebook usage and sense of belonging at institutions of differing types. Students attending large public institutions may have different initial expectations of belonging. Commuter students may have different expectations of belonging than students who are attending residential campuses. There may be distinctions that are specific to women's colleges or historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), or Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), for example.

This study also did not explore the differences in effects of Facebook participation on students of color, first-generation students, or students from other marginalized identities. The study did not investigate differences across gender or ways in which commuter students or others attending college in the communities where they live might be differently impacted. The need for further insight into how student identities and experiences impact the ways in which they engage with SNS and make meaning of these experiences provides a number of opportunities for future research. Vaccaro and Nelson's (2013) emerging model of development of belonging for privileged and minoritized students suggests that further exploration of the particular ways that students from

particular subordinated identities utilize Facebook or other SNSs to foster their sense of belonging may be warranted. For example, Carl spoke of the importance of agency or intention as a factor in belongingness. Knowing that he had a choice about where to be, and had chosen to be in a specific community, and to be there intentionally, was important. Ellen shared a similar thought about the difference between belonging in the context of a family, where it is “inherent” versus belonging which can evolve as a result of choosing to insert oneself into a different community. Both Ellen and Carl are first generation students, and although there are only two of them, the fact that they voice such similar thoughts about belonging leads me to wonder if there are ways that belonging is more complicated. Does belonging develop differently for first-generation students? Do these students feel as though they have to make a choice to “not” belong to their home communities in the same way in order to belong in a new place?

Additionally, as the demographics of social media users continue to change it is important that institutions of higher education continue to be mindful of who is using various forms of social networking and how they are using it. The Pew Research Internet Project found that Facebook continues to be the social networking platform of choice for the majority of adults who are online, but increasing numbers of young adults are utilizing multiple SNSs (Dugan & Smith 2013). As other SNSs gain popularity within particular demographic groups, individuals may migrate away from Facebook or use it in different ways. Facebook is now over ten years old. Students arrive and will continue to arrive on campus having had a history of Facebook use. Future research should stay

abreast of the ways in which users are engaging differently because Facebook is no longer a new phenomenon.

New forms of communication will continue to emerge as technological advances are made. Communication will continue to change as it has since the development of the written word, and these changes will continue to shape societal interactions. There is much more to be understood about the nature of interaction on Facebook and in other SNSs. It is true that such interactions may impact students' development of a sense of belonging as they transition to college, but the degree of influence is tempered by other factors in the student's experience. Ultimately, students are finding – and creating – community, and are individually making choices to use SNSs in ways that validate their experience of community.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Materials

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Research Exempt from IRB Committee Review
Category 2:
SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS, STANDARD EDUCATION TESTS & OBSERVATIONS
OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR**

Route this form to: See instructions below.	U Wide Form: UM 1571 Rev: 2/15/08
IRB Use Only	
#	

Submission Instructions:

E-mail a copy of this application and any other materials required to the Research Subjects' Protections Programs Office: RSPPeRev@umn.edu

Electronically submitted protocols must be sent from a University of MN e-mail account. Original signatures are not required. U of M x.500 IDs have been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

Academic Advisors and Co-Investigators should be carbon copied (Cc) on the submission e-mail.

For help with this form and to download additional appendices: see <http://www.research.umn.edu/irb/download/> or call 612-626-5654

1.1 Project Title (Project title must match grant title. If different, also provide grant title):

Exploring the Effects of Facebook Participation on Entering College Students' Sense of Belonging

1.2 Principal Investigator (PI)

Name (Last name, First name MI): Hart Ruthenbeck, Robin Denise		Highest Earned Degree: M.S.
Mailing Address:		Phone Number:
		Pager or Cell Phone Number:
		Fax:
U of M Employee/Student ID:		Email: hartr006@umn.edu
U of M x.500 ID (ex. smith001): hartr006		University Department (if applicable):
Occupational Position: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Fairview Researcher <input type="checkbox"/> Gillette Researcher <input type="checkbox"/> Other:		
Human Subjects Training (one of these must be checked--refer to training links at the end of this section): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CITI, <input type="checkbox"/> Investigator 101, <input type="checkbox"/> NIH training (EXCEPT for 5/8/06 to 2/29/08), <input type="checkbox"/> UM/RCR (between 1994-2003) <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Indicate training received, when and from which institution:		HIPAA Training (Required if Data Contains PHI): <input type="checkbox"/> HIPAA
As Principal Investigator of this study, I assure the IRB that the following statements are true: The information provided in this form is correct. I will seek and obtain prior written approval from the IRB for any substantive modifications in the proposal, including changes in procedures, co-investigators, funding agencies, etc. I will promptly report any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events or unanticipated problems or incidents that may occur in the course of this study. I will report in writing any significant new findings which develop during the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation. I will not begin my research until I have received written notification of final IRB approval. I will comply with all IRB requests to report on the status of the study. I will maintain records of this research according to IRB guidelines. The grant that I have submitted to my funding agency which is submitted with this IRB submission accurately and completely reflects what is contained in this application. If these conditions are not met, I understand that approval of this research could be suspended or terminated.		
hartr006	6/14/13	
x.500 of PI	Date	

Training Links:

FIRST (Fostering Integrity in Research, Scholarship and Training): <http://cfisgacy.research.umn.edu/first/humansubjects.htm>

HIPAA: <http://www.research.umn.edu/first/AdditionalConsent.htm>

- "UM/RCR" includes all human subjects protection training offered in-person or online at the University of Minnesota from 1994-2003.

- The online NIH tutorial offered during the period May 8, 2006-February 29, 2008 is NOT acceptable to meet this requirement.

- If you completed a version of this training not included on the list provided, provide details as indicated

3. Institutional Oversight

3.1 Is this research proposal being reviewed by any other institution or peer review committee?

Yes.

It is the responsibility of the PI to secure the appropriate approval from these committees and document that approval to the IRB. Attach a copy of documentation of approval, if received, and indicate committees below.

If yes, please list which committees will review this proposal:

[Midwest] College IRB will review this proposal after the University of Minnesota IRB process is completed.

No.

4. Conflict of Interest

4.1 Do any of the investigators or personnel listed on this research have a potential conflict of interest associated with this study? Conflict of interest is defined in Appendix Y.

Yes. Include [Appendix Y](#).

No.

5. Summary of Activities

Use lay language, do not cut and paste from or refer to a grant or an abstract.

5.1 Briefly state your research question.

In what ways, if at all, does participation in a Facebook group targeted specifically towards incoming students at a particular institution impact students' development of a sense of belonging at the institution? In what ways, if at all, does students' sense of belonging change over the first semester? In what ways is Facebook related to that change?

5.2 Describe the tasks subjects will be asked to perform.

Describe the frequency and duration of procedures, psychological tests, educational tests, and experiments; including screening, intervention, follow-up etc. *Reminder: No personal or sensitive information can be sought under exempt guidelines. (If you intend to pilot a process before recruiting for the main study please explain.)*

This is a two-phase study. The first phase will involve data collection through a section of a survey administered to half of the first year class who will be randomly selected. The first year class currently numbers 560; the survey will be administered to 280 students. Subjects will be divided into 3 categories based on their degree of participation in the [Midwest] College Class of 2017 Facebook Group. The categories will include those with no participation, those with limited participation (membership in the group, but few posts or comments and primarily passive involvement), and those with high participation (regular posts or comments). Four to six participants in each category will be interviewed three times over the course of their first semester in college. Subjects for interviews will be primarily selected from survey participants. If survey participants do not yield sufficient subjects in each category, additional recruitment measures will be implemented, including direct email solicitation.

Participants in the study will be asked to reflect on their transition to college and developing sense of belonging at the institution, and how these were impacted by their usage of Facebook and participation in a particular Facebook group.

The relevant section of the survey and sample interview questions are attached.

Attach all surveys, instruments, interview questions, focus group questions etc.

5.3 Describe what non-participants will do during this period (activities and supervision if applicable):

If your subjects will be students, it is important that the study design not penalize students who will not be participating if not all students will be participating.

N/A

5.4 How long do you anticipate this research study will last from the time you are determined to meet the criteria for exempt research?

Exempt research is generally considered short-term in nature. This office routinely inactivates exempt applications after five years from the time it was determined to meet the exempt criteria. If you think your project will extend beyond five years, contact the IRB office (612-626-5654 or irb@uma.edu).

12 months

6. Participant Population**6.1 Expected Number of Participants: 280 TOTAL: 280 students will be randomly selected for the survey, 15 - 18 interview subjects will be selected from this group.**

of Male: 100

Female: 150

6.2 Expected Age Range

Please confirm subjects are at least 18 years old, checking all that apply (you may not conduct research with subjects younger than 18 under exempt category two, if you would like to include subjects younger than 18, you must complete the full IRB application requesting expedited review if appropriate):

18-64

65 and older

6.3 Describe the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects in this research study.**Inclusion Criteria:**

All participants will be currently enrolled students at [Midwest] College.

Exclusion Criteria:

[Midwest] students who have not participated in orientation/transition programs at [Midwest] College will be excluded.

6.4 Location of Subjects during Research Data Collection

Check all that apply:

Elementary/Secondary Schools (include Appendix M)

Community Center, specify: _____

University Campus (non-clinical), specify: Macalester College

Subject's Home, specify: _____

International Location (include Appendix K): _____

Other special institutions, specify: _____

7. Compensation**7.1 Will you give subjects gifts, payments, compensation, reimbursement, services without charge or extra credit?**

Yes.

No.

If yes, please explain:

8. Recruitment

8.1 Are subjects chosen from records?

- Yes. Complete 8.1a-c
 No. Continue to 8.2

8.1a What type of records:

- Medical
 Educational
 Employment
 Other: _____

8.1b Are the records publicly available?

- Yes. Proceed to question 8.2
 No. Proceed to question 8.1c


8.1c Do you already have permissible access to the private records? (i.e. through your job, volunteer work, internship, etc.)

- Yes. Describe how you have permissible access.

In my role as the Associate Director for Campus Programs, with support from [Midwest] College Institutional Research, I regularly administer two orientation surveys to newly matriculated students. My questions will be added to the first of the two surveys.

- No. You must ask the custodian of the record to make initial contact for you (describe how they will do this in question 8.2) and let the potential subject contact you if they are interested. Attach a letter of cooperation from the custodian of the record indicating that they will make initial contact on your behalf. Please note that even if the custodian is willing to give you the private list, if you do not have permissible access to the records, the fact that the custodian will give you the list does not create permissible access. The custodian will still have to make initial contact.

8.2 Describe the recruitment process to be used:

Attach a copy of any and all recruitment materials to be used e.g. advertisements, bulletin board notices, e-mails, letters, phone scripts, or URLs. 

Survey participants will be randomly selected from students who matriculate to [Midwest] College in fall 2013. The initial survey questions will be included in a broader orientation evaluation that is distributed randomly to half of the incoming class at the close of orientation (See 8.1c). Interview participants will be selected from those who volunteer to participate further on that survey and provide their email contact information. If survey participants do not yield sufficient participants for interviews, direct email solicitation to individual first year students may be used.

8.3 Explain who will approach potential subjects to take part in the research study and what will be done to protect individuals' privacy in this process:

Initial contact of subjects identified through records search must be made by the official holder of the record, i.e. primary physician, therapist, public school official.

Interview participants will be selected from those who volunteer to participate. I will send individual emails to students who volunteer to participate in interviews, and if necessary, will send additional emails individual students in the first year class.

9. Confidentiality

See [Protecting Private Data Guideline](#) from the Office of Information Technology (OIT) for information about protecting the privacy of research data.

9.1 Describe provisions that will be taken to maintain confidentiality of data (e.g. surveys, video, audio tape, photos):

On the initial survey and in raw data, identifiers will be used. No analyzed or interpreted data will include identifiable information.

Interviews will use names in the process, but transcripts and all analyzed and reported data will include pseudonyms.

9.2 Describe the security plan for data including where stored and for how long, noting that you may not keep identifiable data indefinitely:

Data will be kept in a password protected file at [Midwest] College for 3 years.

9.3 Will the PI have a link to identify subjects?

- Yes.
 No.

9.4 Will identifiable data be made available to anyone other than the PI?

- Yes.
 No.

If yes, explain who and why they will have access to the identifiable data:

No identifiable data will be made available to anyone other than the principal investigator, but that data collected on the normal survey of students will be available to the Director of Campus Life, the Dean of Students, and Institutional Research at [Midwest] College. Identities associated with data collected from individual interviews will be accessible only to the primary investigator.


10. Informed Consent Process

Reminder: If you are mailing a survey to subjects and asking them to return it to you, or doing a phone interview, you must send or read a consent statement which includes the same information as the consent form but is not signed.

10.1 Describe who will conduct the consent process with subjects and how consent will be obtained:

Recruitment materials that are distributed will contain language addressing consent. Consent forms will be discussed and documentation obtained immediately prior to interviews. Participants completing the online survey will receive information about consent as a part of the online survey.

10.2 Recognizing that consent itself is a process of communication, describe what will be said to subjects to introduce the research: Do not say "see consent form". Write the explanation in lay language.

If you are using telephone surveys, attach telephone scripts. 

This study is intended to help us better understand the ways that participation in the [Midwest] College Class Facebook Groups affects students' development of a sense of belonging as they transition to [Midwest]. If you agree to participate, you will have the opportunity to reflect and make meaning of your process of transition to [Midwest]. Some thought-provoking questions will be asked as we ask you to think about the ways that you have been impacted by your engagement on Facebook as you transitioned to [Midwest].

10.3 Prepare and attach consent forms for review. For exempt category two research, it is not necessary to obtain signed documentation of consent (i.e. a signature). Please submit a 'consent information sheet' which does not include a signature line. The IRB office reserves the right to require that you obtain signatures, but in most cases it is not necessary.

Even though the IRB may determine that some research is exempt from the federal regulations, adequate provisions still need to be in place to protect research participants.

In making its consideration of exempt status, the HRPP/IRB office still has to determine that:

- a) The research involves no more than minimal risk to participants
- b) Selection of participants is equitable
- c) If there is recording of identifiable information, there are adequate provisions to maintain the confidentiality of the data
- d) If there are interactions with participants, there will be a consent process that will disclose such information as:
 - that the activity involves research
 - a description of the procedures
 - that participation is voluntary
 - name and contact information for the investigator
- e) There are adequate provisions to maintain the privacy of participants.

[Information Sheet for Research](#)

This regulation does not apply to FDA regulated research.

You have reached the end of this form. Please make sure that you have responded to every question on this application (even if your response is "not applicable").

APPENDIX B: Survey Protocol**Exploring the Effects of Facebook Participation on Entering College
Students' Sense of Belonging
SURVEY PHASE****Survey**

The Midwest College Orientation program evaluation is administered in two separate surveys. Each is administered to half of the entering class; Institutional Research at Midwest College randomly generates lists for survey distribution. The first survey is administered via SurveyMonkey on the Friday of the first week of classes, and the second after the first six weeks of the semester. The first of the surveys will be used to identify interview participants. Between 2007 and 2012, the response rate for the survey has fallen between 47% and 52%; the response rate for the fall 2013 administration was 51%

Introduction.

We are dedicated to assisting all new students in their transitions to Midwest College. This survey seeks vital information to help us better understand your Orientation experience. Rest assured that Midwest College will respect the confidentiality of your responses. Any reports or findings related to this study will be summarized in a way that maintains confidentiality. If excerpts are used in publications or presentations, any information that can specifically identify you will be kept confidential.

Participation is voluntary, but we sincerely hope you will take this opportunity to improve the Midwest experience for yourself and/or others.

Survey questions. The orientation program evaluation survey consists of thirty-three questions grouped in 6 parts.

Questions from the General Belongingness Scale were included in the survey, spaced throughout (Q2, Q15, and Q29)

Q2: I feel a sense of belonging to Midwest College

Respond on a scale of 0 – 10, with

0 = Strongly Disagree

5 = Neutral

10 = Strongly Agree.

The questions addressing Facebook usage prior to arrival on campus were included in section 2, beginning with Question 8:

Q8: Prior to arriving on campus, did you join the Facebook group “Midwest College Class of 2017”?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No
- C.) Other (please specify) [textbox for responses]

If the response to Q8 is A.) Yes, the respondent will see the following set of questions:

Q8-A1: How would you describe your participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group (select all that apply)?

- I joined the group, but never really read or posted anything there.
- I used Facebook to try to get a feel for who my classmates at Midwest would be.
- I mostly just read what other people posted; but didn't have too much to say.
- I used the Facebook group only when I had something I really wanted to ask.
- I joined the group but never really read anything that was posted there.
- Other (please specify) [text box for responses]

Q8-A2: What did you gain from your participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group?

Q8-A3: Please share any negative encounters or interactions that you experienced as a result of your participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group.

If the response to Q8 is B.) or C.), the respondent will see the following set of questions:

Q8-B1: Which of the following best describe the reasons you did not join the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook Group? (Check all that apply.)

- I do not use Facebook.
- I did not know that the group existed.
- I decided I would rather connect with my peers when we all arrived on campus.
- I had limited Internet access.
- Other (please specify).

Q8-B2: Please share the advantages or positive outcomes that you believe resulted from your lack of participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group.

Q8- B3: Please share any negative outcomes that you believe have resulted from your lack of participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group.

Q15: I feel that I am a member of the Midwest community

Respond on a scale of 0 – 10, with

0 = Strongly Disagree 5 = Neutral 10 = Strongly Agree

The following questions were at the close of the survey, and served to gather demographic data and to identify potential subjects for phase two of the study.

Q28. Please indicate your gender.

- A.) Male
- B.) Female
- C.) Transgender male
- D.) Transgender female
- E.) Genderqueer

Q29. What is your racial/ethnic background? (Check all that apply.)

- A.) American Indian or other Native American
- B.) Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander
- C.) Black or African American
- D.) White (non-Hispanic)
- E.) Mexican or Mexican American
- F.) Puerto Rican
- G.) Other Hispanic or Latino
- H.) Multiracial
- I.) I prefer not to respond
- J.) Other (please specify):

Q30. The Campus Life Office occasionally conducts focus groups and/or interviews to further our understanding of students' experiences. If we may contact you regarding participation in interviews or focus groups, please provide your contact information below. Agreeing to be contacted does not commit you to participation.

- A.) Yes, I am willing to participate in interviews. You may contact me via email at [Box for text submission].
- B.) No, I am not interested.

Use of survey data. The survey responses to Q8 and Q8-A1, as well as responses to Q30 were used to identify potential interview participants. I sent a recruitment letter to 15 students who were non-Facebook users and/or non-participants in the class of 2017 Facebook group Facebook. From this group, a total of eight indicated their willingness to participate in the study. While attempting to schedule initial interviews, one potential participant did not respond, and another withdrew from the study, leaving me with 6 students in this group. Concurrently, I sent recruitment letters to students who were participants in the Class of 2017 Facebook Group and who indicated their willingness to participate in the study. Because there were , and 6 students who were non-Facebook users and/or non-participants in the Class of 2017 Facebook group.

Responses from all surveys to questions from the General Belongingness Scale were analyzed to identify any correlation between use of Facebook/participation in the Class of 2017 Facebook group and sense of belonging.

APPENDIX C: Student Recruitment Letter

Dear [STUDENT],

In addition to my role as Associate Director for Campus Programs at Midwest College, I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota under the direction of Professor Rebecca Ropers-Huilman.

The study is an investigation of the ways in which students' utilization of social media impacts their transition to college. In particular, I am interested in understanding the ways that your degree of engagement on Facebook and in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group has shaped your transition and to Midwest and your development of a sense of belonging at Midwest.

I am inviting your participation, which would involve taking part in three interviews during the fall 2013 semester. The interview process will allow participants to reflect on and explore the ways that they have become connected and developed a sense of belonging within the Midwest community, and will serve to improve the experiences of future cohorts of incoming students. Your participation is voluntary; should you choose to skip questions or drop out of the process at any time, there will be no penalty.

Each interview will be digitally recorded. I will give you a copy of the transcript of the interview and invite you to make any clarifications you'd like, to ensure that your thoughts are accurately represented. All recordings will be kept for 3 years. Throughout the process, every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and anonymity. If you agree to participate you will be provided with further information about the process and will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

The information gathered through the interviews will be primarily used for assessing and improving the orientation and transition experience, and so the data would be shared with appropriate members of the Midwest community. Additionally, I may share an analysis of the data with my broader scholarly or professional community. In no case would you be individually identified in any way.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know via e-mail at rhartrut@[Midwest].edu or by phone, 651-696-6874. You may also contact me if you have any further questions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robin Hart Ruthenbeck
Doctoral Candidate, University of Minnesota
Associate Director for Campus Programs, Midwest College

Participants may be solicited from respondents who complete the phase-one orientation survey. In the phase-one survey, respondents will be asked to quantify their degree and type of Facebook usage throughout the summer before their arrival on campus. Six interview subjects will be selected from each category:

No Facebook usage/ No participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook Group

Participants in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group

APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

Exploring the Effects of Facebook Participation on Entering College Students' Sense of Belonging

INTERVIEW PHASE

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 6 students in each of 2 categories:

- (a) those with no Facebook usage/participation in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group and
- (b) those who were participants in the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook Group.

In accordance with the structure outlined by Seidman (2013) for in-depth, phenomenological interviews, the study consisted of three separate interviews of each participant. Each interview was be digitally recorded.

First interview. The first interview provided the subject with introductory information about the project and the researcher, and included time for explanations of confidentiality, the time commitment involved in participation. The interview began with a limited number of structured questions so that the participants could guide the conversation, rather than being directed by my biases. I probed participants' responses deeply and asked clarifying questions to ensure that I accurately understood their meaning. In order to understand how students' perceive the effects of Facebook in their development of a sense of belonging, several questions were asked at more than one of the interviews. These questions are indicated with an asterisk in the lists below.

Introduction and interview one.

- Thank subject for participating
- Describe the project and my role as researcher
- Reiterate that participation is voluntary
- Explain confidentiality
- Describe the time commitment
- Review informed consent form and have participant complete form.

Questions:

- How did you come to be at Midwest College? What are the choices that led you to come to Midwest?
- Tell me about your use (or lack of use) of Facebook. How long have you had a Facebook account? Why do you use Facebook? Did your usage of Facebook as a high school student differ from the ways you have used it since graduating from high school?

- *On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all, 5 being neutral, and 10 being very much, can you give me a number that tells me how much you feel you belong at Midwest?
- *What does ‘belonging’ mean to you? When do you know that you belong in a place?
- *Others have defined belonging as perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). Considering that definition, tell me about times when you have experienced a sense of belonging as you transitioned to Midwest.
- Did/does your interaction on Facebook help feel connected at Midwest? In what ways? Please share specific examples.

Interview two. The second interview explored the subjects’ usage of Facebook as well as their understanding of ‘sense of belonging’. This interview will be conducted after students have been on campus between six and eight weeks.

Questions included:

- Tell me about your use of Facebook? Has it changed since we last spoke?
- How did you use the Midwest Class of 2017 Facebook group?
- *What does ‘belonging’ mean to you? When do you know that you belong in a place?
- *Others have defined belonging as perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). Considering that definition, tell me about times when you have experienced a sense of belonging as you transitioned to Midwest.
- For Facebook Users: Think back to your interactions on Facebook that happened over the summer. Tell me about a time when you have had a sense of belonging through connecting to others on Facebook.
- Is there anything else you think I should know?

Interview three. The final interview was conducted after students had completed their first semester.

- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all, 5 being neutral, and 10 being very much, please give me a number that tells me how much you feel you belong at Midwest.
- I’ve shared with you a definition of belonging that I am going to repeat for you now: *perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of

connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers).” Does that definition resonate with your experience? What aspects of that definition are most relevant for you? What is missing?

- Think back about the summer, before you arrived on campus. What were the things you were most hoping for in a new ‘community’? How did you envision yourself? Were your expectations met?
- Tell me about your connections to Midwest and/or people from Midwest over the extended break. What did that look like?
- Where have you experienced your strongest sense of connectedness to Midwest in the time since you arrived on campus?
- Tell me about recent moments when you have experienced a sense of belonging at Midwest. Have any such moments happened via Facebook?
- How has participating in these interviews impacted your sense of belonging at Midwest?
- Is there anything else that you think I should know that I haven’t asked about?

APPENDIX E: Consent Form**Consent for Participation in Research Interview**

Robin Hart Ruthenbeck

Associate Director for Campus Programs, Midwest College

Doctoral Candidate, University of Minnesota

Study: *Exploring the Effects of Facebook Participation on Entering College Students' Sense of Belonging*

Purpose: This study will explore the effects Facebook participation on students' sense of belonging as they transition to Midwest College. Data from the study will also be used for program assessment and improvement of Orientation programming and communications. The study is being conducted in fulfillment of the final academic requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Policy and Administration at the University of Minnesota.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Whether or not I choose to participate will have no impact on my relationship with Midwest College or the University of Minnesota.
2. I will be asked to participate in 3 interviews. The first interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Each successive interview will last between 75 - 90 minutes. Each interview will be digitally recorded and notes may be taken during the process.
3. I understand that I will be asked reflective and thought-provoking questions. However, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end my participation at any time.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports or articles using information obtained from this interview. My confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure through the assignment of a pseudonym in any written transcript or shared data. A separate list matching participants' names with their pseudonym will be filed and secured in password-protected file at Midwest College. All information collected will remain confidential except as may be required by law.

5. The researcher conducting this is Robin Hart Ruthenbeck, Associate Director for Campus Programs at Midwest College and doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota. You may ask any questions you have of Robin now. If you have questions later, you may contact her in the Midwest College Campus Life Office (2nd Floor of the Campus Center) or via email or phone: rhartrut@Midwest.edu (651-696-XXXX).

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences committee at the University of Minnesota and the Midwest College Institutional Review

Board. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650 and the Midwest College Institutional Review Board at [address] or by phone at [phone].

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in this study:

Participant's Signature

Date

The researchers would like to digitally record this interview. I understand that the recording will be transcribed and the dialogue will be used for the researcher's dissertation, reports, or articles generated from this research. The recordings will be securely stored in a password protected computer file. My signature below indicates that I am willing to be recorded.

Participant's Signature

Date