Relational Development, Self-Disclosure, and Invasion of Privacy: College Students and Teachers as Facebook Friends

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RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SELF-DISCLOSURE, AND INVASION OF PRIVACY: COLLEGE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AS FACEBOOK FRIENDS

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By
Ryan Dearbone

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RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SELF-DISCLOSURE, AND INVASION OF PRIVACY: COLLEGE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AS FACEBOOK FRIENDS

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RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SELF-DISCLOSURE, AND INVASION OF PRIVACY: COLLEGE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AS FACEBOOK FRIENDS

Ryan Dearbone May 2014 73 Pages

Directed by Blair Thompson, Ph.D.; Kumi Ishii, Ph.D.; and Angela M. Jerome, Ph.D.

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This research examined how college students feel about their professors requesting them to be a Facebook friend. Recognizing the ways in which professors and students communicating through social networking could produce additional educational opportunities for collaboration and instruction, while also causing tension or awkwardness as the process develops. Semi-structured interviews were utilized by the researcher to obtain information from the selected participants, and the data were analyzed by comparative methods. Through this study, it was revealed that students are split on the appropriateness of professors as Facebook friends. They prefer little to no self-disclosure from their professors. They do not see Facebook friendships with professors as an invasion of their privacy. Although most students believe Facebook can be an effective educational tool, there are mixed feelings whether using Facebook as an educational tool strips the site of its originally intended social purpose, most students will accept their professor’s Facebook request but only because they feel that they have to. This study extends the limited initial research on Facebook usage in education, namely with students.

Keywords: Facebook, Students, Professor, Teacher-Student Relationship, Privacy, Appropriateness, Friend Request, Education
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Facebook began back 2004 when college student Mark Zuckerberg, created the social networking site (SNS) as a way for college students, both on their own campus as well as other campuses, to connect (Facebook, 2013). From there, Facebook expanded to high school students, and businesses within a 5-year window. Now, the site is associated with just about every type of business and segment of the population, from children to senior citizens.

As social media has continued to take shape within our society, researchers are constantly trying to grasp its pedagogical impact. As of January 2014, Facebook has 1.3 billion monthly users (Facebook.com-Investor Relations) on its social network. This is a large growth from 2004 when the SNS first became available to college students. Since then, the social media “boom” has been overwhelming and exciting at the same time.

Facebook has been used for years to connect people and groups through computer-mediated communication (CMC). Over the past few years, many researchers began to study the relationship between our online lives and our offline lives and how they contradict or support each other. This can take place individually or through group communication. Walther’s (1996) Hyperpersonal Communication Model, was based on showing that CMC is valuable on providing enhanced communication and better first impressions. In addition, Ramirez and Zhang (2007) noted in their research that CMC could allow for more closeness and attraction between two individuals than a face-to-face communication. They has previously tested face-to-face interaction after a period of CMC interactions.
Facebook is a hub for groups, businesses and even universities to use to connect to others. Even some college instructors are utilizing social networks as a means to connect with their students. A previous study by Mazer, Simonds, and Murphy (2007) noted that nearly 300,000 people on Facebook identified themselves as faculty or staff. Roblyer (2010) found that nearly 7% of the people surveyed say they use Facebook as a means to communicate with their students about class projects. However, this may not be a welcome connection for all of their pupils. This study looked at how college students really feel about having professors use Facebook. In addition, the study will explore how some students feel about possibly being approached by their professor about being Facebook “friends” for classroom-related activities. The study looked at the comfort level of the student being asked to befriend the professor, what circumstances would be applicable to that type of interaction, as well as their trust level for their professors. This study also looked at how the students may feel Facebook can be used as an effective educational tool and whether there is pressure to accept a teacher’s friend request.

To preview the thesis, Chapter 2 is a literature review that lays out the research on this topic up until now. Chapter 3 contains the methodology for the project, which explains how the researcher gathered and deciphered the information for this study. Chapter 4 describes the findings of the research and Chapter 5 discusses the findings and review the practical implications of them as part of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Thanks to our technologically advanced society, people now use Ipads and smartboards, replacing chalkboards and paper and pencils in the classroom. This has created differences in how students and teachers communicate with each other. Student-teacher communication used to be confined to the classroom or school building. But, now, with the progression of technology within our world, the options for communication between the groups have expanded tremendously. SNS such as Facebook are now being used as a pedagogical tool by teachers to expand learning outside of the class (Mazer et al. 2007). Today, only some professors use Facebook as an educational tool. This new phenomenon has proven to be very interesting as new rules of communication are being crafted in order to keep up with the changing mediums. This chapter reviews past research which looks at student-teacher communication in a computer-mediated communication world, particularly when it comes to Facebook.

Appropriateness

In the last decade research on this topic has grown, but there remain several elements of this growing CMC that have yet to be explored. Teclehaimanot and Hickman’s (2011) study represented one of the most interesting looks at this phenomenon. Their study looked at what college students felt was appropriate interaction between students and teachers on Facebook. The survey was broken up into two parts: what is appropriate for me to do with my professor on Facebook and what is appropriate for my professor to do with me on Facebook. Among the questions asked in the student interaction section were “it is okay for me to ‘poke’ my teacher” and “it is okay for me to comment on pictures my instructor posts.” The same questions were
asked but only from the teacher interaction perspective such as “it is okay for my professor to ‘poke’ me”, and “it’s okay for my professor to comment on pictures my instructor posts.”

The results of the study showed that there was not a significant difference between the acceptability of the student and teacher behaviors, meaning there was an equal amount of not liking or liking an action regardless if the person was either a professor or a student (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). That meant there was an equal amount of not liking or liking an action regardless if the person was either a professor or a student. They also noted that a lot of attention was paid to the acceptability of active and passive behaviors such as “pokes” or liking pictures, or commenting (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). The study also concluded that men found student-teacher interaction on Facebook more acceptable than women did. It also noted that there was no difference in how graduate and undergraduate students felt about the appropriateness of the interaction. There was also no relationship found between age of the student and their likelihood of finding it appropriate to have Facebook interaction (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011).

This study used qualitative methods to explore deeper into the interactions of student-teachers when using Facebook for academic purposes. Although Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) did a good job of establishing groundwork for what students feel is appropriate, their research does not include actual situations which may not have been covered in their survey. It also fails to take into account how the students feel when these appropriate levels are either respected or violated. The goal of my study was to add to this discussion.
Teacher Self-Disclosure

The exploration of teacher self-disclosure coincides with previous studies that looked at the risk instructors pose to themselves when they expose themselves to college students via social networks. Cayanus and Martin (2008) looked at the amount, relevance, and valence of self-disclosure on the part of the instructor through the social networking. Originally, the two researchers wanted to find out how the amount of disclosure would affect how much the student would learn and how impactful it would be to helping improve the environment for the student in the classroom. One focus of the study also relied on how much of the self-disclosure was negative versus positive. The study resulted in several interesting findings.

The first important finding as identified by Cayanus and Martin (2008) stated “the magnitude of impact involving amount of self-disclosure in the present study was low” (p.14). But if the information was relevant to the course material, the classroom and the class would have a greater impact and become more meaningful to the students. The researchers also concluded that greater motivation and student learning was found based on self-disclosure with less negativity. Cayanus and Martin (2008) tried to make the correlation that academic success was tied, at least in part, to the amount of self-disclosure demonstrated by professors. They also believed that a college student was more likely to do better on schoolwork and feel better about the classroom environment if the information disclosed to them was of a positive nature. If the information contained negative stereotypes or information that would shake the positive belief of who the professor was, Cayanus and Martin (2008) felt that would translate into the student’s performance in that class.
Another quantitative study written by Mazer, Simonds, and Murphy (2007) explored teacher self-disclosure on Facebook and its subsequent effects on students. Mazer et. al (2007) found similar data. The researchers found that positive self-disclosure generally created healthier and happier environment for the college students. However, the study is 7 years old and therefore fails to account for the massive explosion of Facebook into the mainstream. It does take a brief look at students’ overall feeling about such an online connection. But again, it fails to note if the social media connection is initiated by the instructor or the student. This study will focus on instructor-initiated contact.

Frymier and Houser (2000) described the student-teacher relationship as a form of “interpersonal relationship” because both sides must engage themselves into it. The study also concluded that communication between students and teachers is not just content driven, but also relational (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Frequency was another variable that Frymier and Houser looked at. The two authors noted that the more the communication between the student and teacher, the easier it is for the two to move past the prescribed roles and create an interpersonal connection (Frymier & Houser, 2000).

However, Frymier and Houser’s perspective has not been accepted by all scholars. There has been debate on whether teacher-student relationships are actually interpersonal or simply pedagogical in nature. Although many have cited that an instructional and interpersonal relationship is interchangeable, Sprague (1993) noted that there were differences between the two types of relationships. Sprague noted a lack of equality between the participants as well as time constraints as reasons that the two are not one in the same. This was acknowledged by Frymier and Houser (2000), but suggested the differences “do not affect the basic functioning of communication in relationship development and maintenance” (p.208). Disagreeing, Sprague
(2002) felt that instructional relationships were indeed a separate entity. The study looked at if students found interaction between student and teacher through Facebook, could be considered an interpersonal relationship.

The results of this study should work as a tool for instructors to use when it comes to determining whether or not to engage students in a social media-based relationship for class-related issues. It should also give them a better understanding of whether students would shy away from such a relationship. Finally, it will give note to how students feel about their privacy, or lack thereof, in regards to this type of connection.

Throughout the past decade, many instructors started to purposefully use email as a major source of out-of-class communication with students. According to one study, 75% of students primarily use email to gain clarification on assignments while 58% tried to receive their grades (Jones, 2002). A similar study conducted by Brunner and Yates (2008) found in their study of college student email usage among students in the journalism discipline, nearly 73% of students surveyed indicated they email their professors to ask questions about assignments. Their study also found that nearly 50% of participants said they emailed professors to ask questions about a test or quiz. Then software such as Blackboard and WebCT allowed professors to display grades to their students and open discussion boards to communicate with their pupils outside of class (Jones, 2002). But even though those means are available, does not mean they are being used. Brunner and Yates (2008) found that less than 20% said they contacted professors through email to express opinions outside of the class or to share information they thought the teacher might like.
Additionally of the 340 students surveyed about their preferred method of communication with their professors, 79 said they had no reason to email their teacher and through email and another 62 said they usually visit their professor during office hours because they prefer face-to-face communication (Brunner & Yates, 2008). These advances eventually evolved into instructors creating their own websites to give students greater access to them. However, the student-teacher interaction can be somewhat small because these pages are not always checked or updated frequently (Mazer et. al., 2007). This also leads to limited self-disclosure by the instructor.

Mazer et al. (2007) set out to find how college students view teacher self-disclosure on Facebook on several levels: professionalism, privacy, effects on motivated learning based on the amount of disclosure. The group hypothesized students who saw professors with low amounts of self-disclosure on Facebook would be more motivated in the classroom and be more affective learners. Both of their hypotheses were supported (Mazer et al., 2007) The study went on to find that many students felt uncomfortable knowing certain aspects of a teacher’s life. There was a belief among students that pictures or statements on Facebook could intentionally or unintentionally hurt the instructor’s credibility. There remains much discussion among researchers about what is considered appropriate behavior when it comes to students and teachers when engaging in interaction on social networks like Facebook, thus the first research question addresses this element:

RQ1: How, if at all, does “appropriate” behavior from a professor positively or negatively affect the Facebook interaction between students-teachers?
Student Privacy/Invasion of Privacy

Another theme that came from the Mazer et al. (2007) study, which is the most relevant to this current study dealt with student privacy. Most of the students surveyed had concerns with their privacy and how allowing a teacher access to their Facebook page would affect how their teacher would view them. Some felt it would be an invasion of privacy (Mazer et al. 2007).

A similar study compared social media use by both faculty and students and the intended outcomes for both (Roblyer, et al. 2010) This study looked at how the Valparaiso University’s library was using Facebook to “friend” students in order to relay information and engage the student body. While the study showed that some of the student body was very receptive to the SNS addition, another segment of students were much more apprehensive. Twelve percent of the nearly 300-plus surveyed said they found it to be an “invasion of privacy.”

Trust when it comes to social media was looked at in another study that gaged responses from college students at a Texas University over the course of two semesters (Valenzuela et. al., 2009). They were asked about how the amount people use Facebook shaped their feelings regarding social trust. Social trust is how much a person trusts those they are dealing with on social media sites. A similar study conducted by Waters and Ackerman (2011) looked at the motivations for overall disclosure when it comes to Facebook. The study noted that women found more motivation, and therefore, were more willing to disclose information on Facebook as a means of storing information or for entertainment. Men were less moved by those motivating factors, according to the study. Valenzuela, et al.’s (2009) study ultimately found that social trust was high among those that used the SNS, especially compared to other categories: life satisfaction, intensity of Facebook use, and civic and political participation. Waters and
Ackerman (2011) also found that many of the people who use Facebook feel they spend too much time on the site.

The nature of Facebook was initially meant to be for social interaction, but the amount of interaction is left up to the user. That may be one reason why there may be a disconnection. A study published by Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan (2012) discussed the reasons why people use social media. The reasons varied from entertainment to self-expression to passing time. The study looked to see what users mostly wanted to use the social network for identifying entertainment purposes and passing time as the main reasons. Respondents noted that they became less motivated to use Facebook for informational purposes (Hunt et. al., 2012). Although many of these studies looked at invasion of privacy, the continuing growth of Facebook constitutes a greater need for strict parameters of what is privacy invasion and how it relates to students’ feelings, creating the need to ask the following questions:

RQ2: What sense of an “invasion of privacy,” if any, do college students feel by having a professor as a Facebook friend?

RQ3: What do college students constitute as an actual “invasion of privacy” if they are Facebook friends with their professor?

**Facebook as an Educational Tool**

However, in recent years the dynamic of Facebook has slowly began to change into a more educational tool. Madge et al. (2009) studied how Facebook was being utilized among college students. Only 10% of participants in the study actually used Facebook for discussing academic work with their classmates on a daily basis. Selwyn (2009) backed up this in his study on the education-related use of Facebook by students. His study showed that most students used
the social network as a way to gather last minute information on assignments or for clarification on schoolwork, talking among fellow classmates.

Mazer and Thompson (2009) also explored the importance of communication between students as a part of student academic support. Their investigation included analyzing which modes of communication students preferred to interact with each other about academics. Mazer and Thompson (2009) found students tended to prefer face-to-face to communicate academic support. The researchers stated the reasoning was that students could explain their academic issues, good and bad, better to their peers than they could by using electronic media. Though students’ use of Facebook to communicate academics has increased over time (Mazer & Thompson), it is still reasonable to assume that many students would prefer to receive academic support from their professors face-to-face rather than via Facebook.

Madge et al. (2009) also found in his study that even less used Facebook to talk to university staff, with only 1% of the respondents saying they did. This is in comparison to nearly 23% who used Facebook daily to find out about the latest social events going on around them. The study went on to ask how many of the participants actually looked up their professors on Facebook or communicated with them. Sixty-eight percent say they never used Facebook to look up University staff’s profiles, and 91% say they never used Facebook as a medium to communicate with University staff members. The study also noted that nearly 41% of those participants would not want to be contacted by tutors (student workers) through Facebook, even if it was strictly for formal teaching purposes.
Through the interview process, Madge et al. (2009) collected several interesting responses regarding the idea of talking to professors on Facebook for academic purposes. Here’s what one student told them:

No, Facebook and education should be kept strictly separate. Facebook is a social networking site and the ultimate tool of procrastination, and whilst the social side of university is important and it can help build and sustain bonds between people, asking people to go on it for educational purposes is essentially giving them a green light to NOT do work. Besides, there is already Blackboard and the university email accounts as an online way for the university to keep in contact with students. (Male, Physics and Astronomy, age 19) (Madge et al, 2009, pg. 149)

The study contained several statements similar to this one suggesting that Facebook and education should not be interdependent, when it comes to pedagogy. However, there were also nearly as many that were in favor of a more integrated use for Facebook within the classroom setting.

However, the other end of the spectrum showed that there was a segment of students that were in favor of using Facebook as a communication tool with their professors. Baran (2010) conducted a study to gauge the success of using Facebook by a professor as an educational tool. Baran conducted his research in Turkey. He allowed several professors to use Facebook as a part of a distance learning class. Everything was done online and the only form of communication with other students and professors was through Facebook as a part of the 12-week course. Some of the students were already using Facebook before the study took place. The others joined the social network in order to take part in the class.
At the end of the class, the students were surveyed in order to get their feelings on how the study went. According to Baran’s findings, all of the students believed that it was appropriate for a professor to use Facebook to socialize with students (Baran, 2010). The study also showed that almost 91% of the students felt that Facebook helped them maintain contact with their teacher (Baran, 2010). Nearly, 63% said they were excited when the teacher commented on their postings. Another study lined up with Baran (2010) and clashes with the findings of Madge et al. (2009), as Hewitt and Forte’s (2006) study found that of the 136 student respondents, 36% had seen their professor’s Facebook page. Of that, 19% noted that they were friends with their professors on the social networking site (Hewitt & Forte, 2006) while 66% of those surveyed found no issue with faculty having a presence on Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006). Finally, most of the students in the Baran (2010) study ended up adding their teacher to their profile because of their experience in the class.

Baran’s (2010) study looked mainly at a Facebook page that was created specifically for a particular class. This meant that all students in the class were, theoretically, able to see the messages that both the professors and any other student posted. It was aimed to create a place on the site in which everyone had the ability to communicate with each other regarding the class. This is different from what this study will look at, which involves professors contacting students on their personal Facebook pages. The student’s personal Facebook page can only be accessed by the student and the information posted on it would only be of benefit to that particular student. The professor would also have the ability to send direct messages to the student that are strictly private, if they so choose.

When looking at how much professors use Facebook as an educational component, Mazer et al. (2007) noted that nearly 300,000 Facebook users listed themselves as college faculty
or staff members. But Roblyer et al. (2010) reported only 6.5% of those listed on Facebook said that they actually use the site to communicate with students regarding class projects. The largest percentage of their usage is to socialize with friends and family, just like those listed as students.

Several attempts have been made to find out how students actually feel about the pedagogical element of Facebook. Though the ways that Facebook could and has been used in the classroom can vary, the amount of support of disinterest of using it as an educational mechanism is there as well. Irwin, Ball, and Desbrow (2012) conducted research in Australia to find out what the perception of students in college there had regarding Facebook as an academic tool. In order to gather responses, the researchers had professors post assignments on the social network as well as lead and respond to posted conversations. This went on throughout the course of an entire semester. At the end, the researchers collected the students’ responses to the experiment. According to the study, 51% of those who participated found Facebook to be a useful and effective learning tool, 37% said they didn’t find the use of Facebook effective, and 12% were unsure of how they felt (Irwin et al., 2012). This study will look at the reasons why students may feel that Facebook is or is not an effective tool to use in the educational setting. The other studies only focused on hard numbers as to how many felt a certain way.

That sentiment is shared by graduate students in the study conducted by Sarsar and Harmon (2011). 63% of the 33 graduate students who participated believed that Facebook can be designed to work as a learning environment. However, 72% of those surveyed said that they did not prefer using it as a learning environment, despite the fact that they believed it could be used that way. This is an interesting dichotomy in the use of Facebook going forward. It is the goal of this study to create an understanding as why although it appears that many students feel
Facebook can be used for a pedagogical benefit, they would prefer it not be used, leading to two important research questions:

RQ4: What are the perceptions of students of their instructor using the social network Facebook as a supplement to their teaching?

RQ5: What pedagogical benefits do college students feel they can receive from their professors using Facebook as an educational tool?

**Student Acceptance of a Professor’s “Friend” Request**

Another element to this conundrum is the initial overture from a professor to a student about becoming engaged in a Facebook relationship. If the student does not accept the instructor’s invitation or vice versa, then there really is no way the two can interact on this social level. Most studies rarely look at this aspect of what makes the student accept the invitation. Is it required for a class? Is there a real option to say “no”?

One study loosely looked at this as a part of a grouping or other types of people that a student may or may not choose to add as a friend. Karl and Peluchette (2011) studied who a student is more likely to accept a friend request from: a boss, their mother, a professor they do not know, or their worst professor. The results concluded that out of the 208 participants who returned the survey, most of them would accept a friend request from their mother and their boss before they would from a professor (Karl & Peluchette, 2011). Then between “friending” either the professor that the student didn’t know versus their worst professor, the majority preferred the professor they did not know. Based on this study, it could be assumed that most students would not prefer to be Facebook friends with their professors, despite the necessity that a situation might present. However, there are many factors that go into a student’s decision whether to
“friend” a professor for academic reasons. A couple of the reasons given in the study were familiarity to the professor and a lack of willingness to let the teacher have access to their personal information. These factors, such as student-teacher relationship, age, etc. can affect how the student will react if “friend requested” by their professor. The final research question is as follows:

RQ6: How do students react if he/she has been confronted with accepting an instructor’s “friend” request?

Summary

In summary, this chapter reviewed information that is relevant to the topic of college student-teacher relationships on Facebook. The topics that this literature review covered were the appropriateness of instructors being on Facebook, teacher self-disclosure and how that affects students and their likelihood of “friending” a teacher, student privacy/invasion of privacy, Facebook as an educational tool, and student acceptance of a professor’s “friend” request. This was done by using information from previous studies that set up the research hypotheses and questions that hope to be answered in this current study.

The study of students and their social network with their professors has importance because this creates a base of understanding for universities and faculty members as to how to approach using social media in the classroom. The explosion of social networking such as through Facebook has created a feeling among some in higher education that in order to reach the current generations, steps to embrace and utilize this medium must be taken. It is important to be able to decipher what kind of relationship students want and are comfortable with when it
comes to Facebook. It is also important to understand how to reach this point with as little awkwardness as possible.

The number of studies that looked at this very topic is growing. Each one seemed to cover a different aspect of social networking, namely Facebook, and its connection to students. Several distinctly looked at teacher-student relationships within the confines of Facebook. However, most have failed to look at the long lasting effects as well as the circumstances that create this situation. This study looked to fill in the gaps that currently exist in the study of this new phenomenon by asking questions based off of information that is currently known regarding this topic.

**Recent Quantitative Study**

Recently, I conducted a pilot study (Dearbone, 2013) using quantitative methods to look at the comfort level of students at the prospect of being Facebook friends with their professors. I created one hypothesis (College students are more likely to feel that teacher-student interaction on Facebook is an “invasion of privacy”) and one research question (Are college students who have teacher-student interaction on Facebook satisfied with the teacher in general?)

In order to complete this study, I surveyed a total of 126 college students at a large, southeastern university. The participants ranged in classification from freshmen to seniors. The participants were randomly selected from five different academic departments who responded to emails sent out by me and relayed through the teachers in each department. They filled out two 7-point Likert-type scales and one 5-point Likert scale as a part of the survey.

The results of the study showed that student-teacher interaction on Facebook did have a positive effect on alleviating privacy concerns between students and teachers, but the student-
teacher interaction was not related to their satisfaction with their teacher. The study also went on to support Frymier and Houser’s (2000) theory that student-teacher interaction has components of an interpersonal relationship. Another finding was that even though there was no significant relationship between student-teacher interactions on Facebook, there is a strong and significant student-teacher relationship overall.

However, my initial study had several limitations. The first limitation was that it did not signify who initiated the Facebook friendship. It also had a small pool of participants for a quantitative study. The study also did not investigate how many instructors were actually using Facebook as an educational tool with their students. The next chapter will show how qualitative methods will be used in order to determine just how comfortable college students are with “friending” their instructor for academic purposes.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

The topic such as this one that deals with whether college students want to be Facebook friends with the professors could be looked at from both a qualitative and quantitative manner. The pilot study took a quantitative approach. Based on the results, the researcher has chosen to explore the same topic in a qualitative study as well. The definition of qualitative research is “an inquiry approach useful to exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2002, p. 58). By using the natural inquiry style, a researcher can get a rich, in-depth study that helps to understand the meanings which affect the actions of human beings. One characteristic of this style is that it is “a uniquely personal and involved activity” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 5). The researcher’s purpose was to study the participants’ experience through their eyes because meaning can be different for various people (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). An interpretive study encompasses the purpose of communication studies to study the symbolic meanings of humans and how those meanings affect their actions in different contexts (Cronkhite, 1986). The topic of how students feel about being Facebook friends with professors lends itself well to the qualitative method of study. These students have access to Facebook and already are account holders for the social media site, making them information-rich subjects.

In order to fully explore this topic, this study came from the words of those that are directly affected by the changing landscape of education. In order to hear from them, all participants took part in answering open-ended questions during a formal interview. This method was chosen because open-ended questions ‘provide the informant with freedom to introduce

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materials that were not anticipated by the interviewer” (Whyte, 1982, p. 111). It allowed for deviation from the closed box of prescribed questions and answers that were usually provided by questionnaires. All interviews were conducted in a qualitative style, which is “an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interests and experiences” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 170). This way allowed the participants to add more possibly pertinent information to the research in a free-flowing, open way.

Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

The participants were students at a large southern university. This study explored the actual experiences that college students had with their teachers on Facebook. Several classes within various departments on the campus were contacted by the researcher to be participants in this particular study. The students were asked for voluntary participation to be interviewed regarding professors and Facebook. Those interested were advised to email or contact the researcher via phone. Upon receiving correspondence from them, interviews were set up with 12 of those who contacted the researcher. Interviews were set up based on class schedules and availability. Each interview took place on campus in the researcher’s office or at the homes of the participants, and the home of the researcher as a point of convenience to both the subjects and the researcher.

The students varied from freshman to seniors. The demographics for this study were as follows: 7 females (6 Caucasian and 1 Asian) and 5 males (4 Caucasian and 1 African-American). Out of those, there were 7 seniors, 3 juniors, 1 sophomore, and 1 freshman who participated. The participants had varying degrees of interaction with professors because of their differing years in school at this university. Only one participant was currently Facebook friends
with any of his/her professors. Two participants were a part of a Facebook group for their discipline that a few professors were also members of, but they were not Facebook friends with those instructors.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with all 12 participants using an interview protocol (see appendix) which included questions regarding the depth with which these students have engaged in online relationships with their professors, their use of Facebook usage, their comfort level using Facebook as a means to communicate with a professor, and how they felt a Facebook relationship would evolve after they are no longer the professor’s student. The reasoning for the 12 participants was to have a diverse amount of people from varying years in school, age, race, and gender. The interview was set up specifically to answer the research questions (Whyte, 1982). However, these questions were only a guide for the interview (Creswell, 1998); at certain points additional questions were asked as follow-ups or clarifications to what the participants noted during the interview. The participants were also given a chance at the end of the interview to add information that might have not been covered during the course of the interview.

Prior to conducting the interviews, consent to work on this study was granted by the university’s Internal Review Board. In addition, informed consent was sought out by each participant before any of the interviews took place (Creswell, 1998). A digital audio recorder was used to capture each interview in its entirety with the interviewee’s consent.

After completing all of the interviews, each interview was transcribed completely using the researcher’s computer and the digital audio recorder. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio that came from the digital recording. All of the interviews were
transcribed by typing the audio directly from the recording. This includes the researcher’s questions and the participant’s responses, (Creswell, 1998). In all, there were 120 pages of transcription for the 12 interviews that were conducted.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the findings, the interview transcriptions were subject to open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The transcripts of each interview were read once in their entirety. The second reading consisted of underlining possible categories and themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After the second reading, there were more than 500 possible codes that were underlined or marked for consideration. For the third reading, a more direct form of coding took place. Phrases and words that stood out as possible themes were written in the left hand margin of the page. These were then transferred over to a separate document and separated by each participant. In all, 494 codes were initially brought over to the secondary document for review. The average amount of codes per participant interview was 40.

The researcher then looked through the list to find repetitive codes from a single participant that could be put together to condense the amount of codes. Multiple repetitive codes were found for each participant interview. In many cases, condensing these codes cut down the amount of codes per interview by half. From there, the researcher began to look for repetitive codes between the 12 interview transcripts. The researcher used the belief that if at least 6 (or half) of the respondents echoed the same sentiment regarding of the questions, it would be worthy of inclusion in the paper.

The researcher went question by question, culling the remaining codes to form patterns that appeared to create themes or uphold the original themes that were presented in the literature.
review. After going through the remaining data, the researcher determined that there were, indeed, 5 major themes and 16 subthemes to support them.

Verification Strategies

Due to criticisms that the method of qualitative research is unreliable and invalid (Creswell, 1998) certain levels of verification must take place within a study. There are three lenses which shape verification methods, according to Creswell and Miller (2004). They are the lens of the researcher, the lens of the study participants and the lens of people external to the study.

In order to ensure the integrity of the study, the researcher conducted member checks with the participants to verify the findings that were developed by the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participants were emailed a summation of the findings and asked to respond to the email and give a “yes” or “no” based on the information provided to them. Their answer was recorded on a member check form. A copy of this form is attached as Appendix C to this paper. This form was emailed to all of the participants as well. At the present time, 2 of the 12 participants have responded to the member check.

An additional check that was employed was the peer review (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A copy of the Peer Review form is also attached to this paper as Appendix A. The researcher presented this study to a fellow co-worker and recent Communication Masters graduate for review. The peer was able to read the study and discuss the findings with the researcher in an attempt to see if there were any areas that were unclear or could be wrong. The peer for this study found no such issues.
The next check that was used was thick, rich description (Denzin, 1989). All of the participants told stories regarding their experiences of either using Facebook to establish a relationship or deciding not to. In addition, each person used explanations to convey the reasoning for the answers they gave and those were used as a way to strengthen the findings presented in this study. Also, quotations from each of the participants were added in to thicken up the points made in each theme.

A third check, I, as the researcher, used was “reviewer reflexivity” by making known any biases had in this study upfront. It is up to the researcher to disclose any and all biases that might come up during the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.127). I had no personal biases in this topic other than an interest since I am a former graduate teaching assistant who would like to one day to teach on either a college or high school level. In addition, I am a current student, who also has a personal Facebook account.

Ethics Section

In order to protect the integrity of this paper, several steps have been taken to ensure ethical standards are met. All participants were asked to sign the attached consent form. The researcher reviewed the form with each participant to ensure they understood it completely. Once the participants consented, the researcher conducted interviews with each individual. The interviews took place in the researcher’s office, the homes of several participants, and the researcher’s own home. In all locations, privacy was maintained as no one else was in the room at the time of the interviews. Upon completion of the interview, participant numbers were assigned to the individuals in order to maintain confidentiality (Miller, 2012).
There are no known foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this project. None of the interview questions dealt with sensitive or overly personal information. The researcher pointed participants to the contact information section of the informed consent form. The participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the project and could ask to have the digital recorder turned off at any time (Miller, 2012). Participants received no direct benefit from participation. However, they are allowed to see the final study if they chose to. Only the primary investigators of this research project would have access to the research data. Raw data and recordings will be kept by Dr. Thompson in his office on campus for a minimum of 3 years.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This findings chapter shall provide themes, subthemes, and data that represent the participants’ voices. Through the thorough analysis of the data collected, five overarching themes emerged: (a) appropriateness, (b) teacher/student self-disclosure, (c) invasion of privacy, (d) Facebook as an educational tool, and (e) student acceptance of a professor’s friend request. Themes 1 and 2 cover research question one, theme 3 addresses research questions 2 and 3, theme 4 addresses research questions 4 and 5, theme 5 addresses research question 6 (see Table 1 for summary of themes and sub-themes). The following section explains the themes and subthemes discovered through the researcher’s analysis with specific, direct quotes from those who participated, to help support the findings of this study.

Table 1

Summary of Themes and sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQs</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How, if at all, does “appropriate” behavior positively or negatively affect the Facebook interaction between students-teachers?</td>
<td>1. Appropriateness</td>
<td>1. Current methods of Internet communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Teacher/Student Self Disclosure</td>
<td>2. Keeping it completely academic</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Amount of contact</td>
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<td>4. Teacher/Student Disclosure Expectations</td>
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<td>5. Student Disclosure</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Disclosure &amp; Student Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sense of an “invasion of privacy”</td>
<td>1. Invasion of Privacy</td>
<td>1. Professor Trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
privacy”, if any, do college students feel by having a professor as a Facebook friend?

| What do college students constitute as an actual “invasion of privacy” if they are Facebook friends with their professor? | 1. Invasion of Privacy |
| 2. Privacy Settings |

| What is the perception of students regarding their instructor using the social network Facebook as a supplement to their teaching? | 1. Facebook as an educational tool |
| 1. Professor usage |

| What pedagogical benefits do college students feel they can receive from their instructor using Facebook as an educational tool? | 1. Facebook as an educational tool |
| 1. Educational usage versus social usage |
| 2. Facebook in the classroom |

| How do students react if he/she has been confronted with accepting an instructor’s “friend” request? | 1. Student Acceptance of a Professor’s “Friend” Request |
| 1. Feeling forced |
| 2. Educational and social connections |
| 3. “Friendship” as a relationship |
| 4. Pressure to accept or deny |
| 5. After the class |

**Appropriateness**

The theme of appropriateness emerged from the initial research question. Out of the 12 participants interviewed for this study, at least half (6) felt that it was not appropriate to be Facebook friends with their professors. One participant would not commit to one side over the other, instead choosing to say that she sees both sides and has been “on the fence” about this topic for years. This theme also explored the subthemes of the current methods of Internet
communication, how students feel about keeping the communication completely academic in nature, and the amount of contact with their professor they are comfortable with on Facebook.

**Current methods of Internet communication.** One of the first subthemes to come out of this theme looked at the other forms of electronic communication currently out there. Several of the participants felt that while they may not prefer to use Facebook as their means of outside communication, it would be an effective alternative, if necessary. Participant 4 put it this way, “I’m sure a bunch of students would rather do it over Facebook than over email or even from personal contact.” Although options like Blackboard and email do exist, Participant 12 noted Facebook would be “more convenient” because “not everybody always get on that [Blackboard and email]”. Participant 10 concurred: “A lot of us are on Facebook and we have a Facebook page and that would be helpful when we have questions and if people in our class have multiple answers to a question we could get it straight by having the professor answer it.”

**Keeping it completely academic.** The majority of participants expressed a sincere desire to keep all Internet communication, namely Facebook connection, with their professors, strictly academic in nature. While most of the participants preferred not to engage in a Facebook friendship with their professors, some did set parameters if a situation developed where they would need or have to “befriend” a professor on the social media network. Participant 1 in the study said a professor talking to him on Facebook would be appropriate if he or she was “asking if you turned an assignment in on time or why you were not in the class.” Participant 4 also felt that the best use of the conversation should mean it only slants towards education by “sticking to the academics, the schoolwork, and the assignments.”
Amount of contact. The participants all seemed to be in agreement over how much contact they wanted from their professor through Facebook. The overwhelming response was that professors should only contact them when they need to tell them something about class or ask a question. Participant 9 said she would be okay with the additional help from her professor, in the right measure: “If it’s professional and it’s pertaining to something ongoing after class that would be okay, I guess. I would feel awesome with a professor being that in touch with me and helping me.” But if the amount of contact becomes too frequent, or deviates from the academic relationship, then some participants indicated that the interaction no longer is favorable to them: “If they were liking everything I did- every picture, every status- I’d kind of feel uncomfortable about that. It would make me think they were creeping on my just my Facebook page,” explains Participant 7.

Teacher/Student Self-Disclosure

The second theme that came out of research question one looked at the disclosure of teachers, and to a smaller degree, that of the students, and the effects that has. This theme added texture to the “appropriateness” findings, as it gave a stronger base for reasoning as to why students may feel the way that they do about teacher self-disclosure on Facebook, as well as their own disclosure when communicating on Facebook with a professor. This theme looked at the expectations that students have for teacher self-disclosure, student self-disclosure, and disclosure and the effect it may have had on student success.

Teacher Disclosure Expectations. A number of the participants in this study admitted that they had little to no desire to find out more about their professors through social media. The exact information that should be disclosed by teachers varied among the participants. Some felt it
should be strictly academic information about the professor or general information about them. While others felt it should be whatever the professor felt was acceptable to share with his/her students. But, the overall feeling was that if it didn’t have something to do directly with their class and there was a foreseeable benefit, the professor should just keep it to themselves, even on Facebook. Participant 6 added, “I don’t feel like I should know this information”.Participant 12 expounded on this thought by framing the importance of the student-teacher roles: “I don’t feel that the professor should be on the same level as the student… the professor should act more mature than the student.” Participant 6 added, “I don’t feel like I should know this information.”

Another element of teacher disclosure also focused on the perception that the disclosed information can have. Nearly all of the participants pointed to a direct or subconscious act of judging their professor based off of what would be on their Facebook page. Participant 11 offers this thought on the topic, “The more they disclose on Facebook, the more I’ll know about them and how I’d judge them.” Participant 12 noted he didn’t want to see anything on Facebook that suggests that his professor was a “party animal.” “I don’t feel that the professor should be on the same level as the student,” he elaborated. Others said they had no problem with a professor having two different Facebook pages: one for their personal lives that they share only with people close to them, and a separate one that is only for academic purposes and has limited or no personal information that students can have access to.

*Student Disclosure.* The participants were asked at one point, how compelled would they be to disclose more information about themselves based off of how much information is disclosed by their professor. Even if a professor was forthcoming with information about themselves, many of the participants seemed less likely to engage in information swapping. Many of the participants discussed not feeling compelled to allow the professor into their world.
any farther, just because the professor decided to be open. Participant 4 stated it this way: “Just because they share different things with me, doesn’t mean I’m going to come out to them unless I need to.” Most of the participants mentioned the decision could be a blanket one, but could also be dependent on the specific person. Participant 4 noted that if he had the professor previously for other classes and had developed a level of trust with them, then he would be more likely to share personal information, such as what’s on Facebook, with him. He said that will serve as a basis for future communications online: “If I feel like that they could help me in different ways of life then I would definitely pursue it. But it would definitely have to be on a person-to-person basis.” However, Participant 4 noted that didn’t mean he would definitely share information with the professor just because of these favorable conditions, only that he would be more likely to.

Participant 3 had a less than pleasurable experience with one of her professors, which in turn, made her feel uncomfortable opening up to that particular teacher. Here’s what she had to say:

I had some weird stuff going on back home and I couldn’t make it to a few classes and one of my professors was kind of standoffish. So I went up and tried to talk to him after class, and it was stuff that you don’t just lay on anybody. But I wanted to give him a valid reason as to why I wasn’t in class and it was almost kind of awkward.

She would go on to later say that the professor understood for the most part, even though the encounter proved very uncomfortable for the participant. Similar situations could take place on Facebook because of the nature of the communication. Awkward conversations or
interactions between the college student and professor could lead to either side feeling unsatisfied or even uncomfortable in the end.

*Disclosure and Student Success.* The ability for these participants to succeed based on the amount and type of disclosure was looked at as well. A majority of the participants stated that the type or amount of personal disclosure would not have an effect on their ability to succeed as a student. Participant 2 saw the topic this way, “I don’t think if my professor goes out and parties on Friday night, that’s really gonna bother me and make me not do well in school.” Participant 1 said “it all lies with the student.” He would go on to explain later in his answer that it would be up to the student whether or not he/she would seek help from the professor on Facebook. But, he did not give a definitive answer if he thought the amount of information disclosed during that process would be completely beneficial or non-beneficial to the student.

*Invasion of Privacy*

This theme came from the second and third research questions for this study. Privacy in many ways is at the heart of this whole topic, as becoming a Facebook friend with a professor allows for a privacy wall to be brought down for an academic purpose. The participants were in agreement on most of these findings on privacy subthemes. The subthemes for this particular theme involved invasion of the student’s privacy, their comfort with general disclosure, and confronting professor’s regarding privacy matters.

*Privacy Invasion.* Once a student and teacher are Facebook friends, nearly all of the participants say they felt it was no longer an “invasion of privacy” if the teacher looked around your page or contacted you on Facebook. “If you put it out there… the Internet is written in ink,”
says Participant 7, who noted that you have to be careful what you put online because anyone could see it.

A subtheme that came out of this discussion was the amount of privacy settings that the participants had protecting their Facebook pages. Ten of the 12 participants stated that they have their privacy controls set to only allow friends to see what is on their page. “If I do not accept your friend request, then you are not going to be able to look at it,” said Participant 4. Only a couple of the respondents were not aware of what exactly the privacy settings for their page were. However, they were sure that they did have some type privacy settings in place on their page.

Comfort with general information disclosure. In the previous theme, it was noted that many of the participants preferred not to disclose additional information to their professors about themselves. However, the participants seemed to feel comfortable with allowing their professors to see what is already posted on their Facebook page. Many of them stated that they have nothing to hide, and are very mindful of the information they post to their page. For example, Participant 6 says, “Whatever is on my Facebook page is open for all of my friends to see.” There was also a feeling that several conveyed that if they allowed the teacher to be their Facebook friend, then they would have no right to get upset with whatever they found while browsing the student’s page. Participant 6 continued by stating, “If I put something on my Facebook that I don’t want my professor to see, then I shouldn’t have it put on there in the first place if I knew I was friends with them.” The same feelings were echoed by Participant 9: “I guess I just think about all of that stuff before I post stuff. It is not really an issue.” Participant 9 also noted to the researcher that over the years as she has gotten older, she has “deleted pictures” from her Facebook page, so now there should not be any unprofessional items on her page for people to dissect.
A sub-theme that emerged from the privacy invasion idea is how much the participants trusted their current professors. When asked that very question, nearly all of the respondents emphatically said that they trust their professors completely with the information that is contained on their personal Facebook page. Participant 7 noted this in one of her responses: “They’re all pretty professional. I wouldn’t think that any of them would get on there and be like ‘Oh my God, did you see what she posted? She deserves a C or an F in this class!’” This could be looked at as a positive for the teacher-student interaction that those who responded held the morality of their teachers in such high standings. There appeared to be a belief among the students that their professors are not the type to abuse the privilege that would be given to them.

Confrontation. Another theme considered whether students would actually feel comfortable confronting their professor if they felt somehow their privacy had been violated by them on Facebook. Eight of the 12 participants said that they would confront a teacher directly in this situation. Some of them did mention that they might wait to confront the professor until after they were no longer their student out of fear. Participant 6 admitted that the power of the professor would definitely play into how she would handle the situation: “I would probably be a little bit hesitant or I wouldn’t go as quickly probably if they were still my professor because I would be worried about my grade.”

The possible negative outcomes led others to say they would not confront the professor at all. Instead, they would opt for other ways of handling the situation. One participant said they would just be more careful about what they posted online. Participant 3 admitted that she wouldn’t feel comfortable in this situation and because of that “I would probably just delete them off of Facebook.” A similar case of being stuck in between a proverbial “rock and a hard place” is seen in another theme found later in this study.
Facebook as an Educational Tool.

There has been a metamorphosis of Facebook in recent years, from simply a medium for college students to connect, to an international hub for social connection as well as news and advertisement. Because of this, participants were asked a series of questions to find out how they felt about the implementation of the networking site into curriculums, or as a supplement to education. The subthemes that emerged from this theme were: is Facebook an effective educational tool, educational usage versus social usage, and Facebook in the classroom.

Effective educational tool. The participants were each asked if they felt Facebook would be an effective educational tool. Three-fourths of the participants felt that it would be an acceptable and useful educational tool (at least to some degree). Most of the reasoning for why was very simplistic in its nature. Several participants discussed the ability to post videos, pictures, and other media on the site that could be beneficial to the students individually or as a whole. Participant 5 used this example: “Let’s say they teach history or something; they can post a video about history and be like ‘hey guys, I want you to watch this,’ and say that it is something like on an exam or something, that would be helpful.” Another element that was brought up was the likelihood that more people check their Facebook on a consistent basis than they do their email or Blackboard account. Participant 6 had this to say, “I think kids might be more in to that where they didn’t have to check email all the time- just have like some kind of social media learning environment discussion board thing.” She compared the discussion board to hybrid of Facebook and the currently used Blackboard.

Participants 9 and 10 said they have seen Facebook work in the classroom already. Their nursing class has a Facebook group for one of their classes. They use it throughout the course of
the semester to talk to each other as students, and from time to time the professors will put stuff on the page as well to aid the students.

If there’s something that one of us finds that we know everyone else is having trouble with, we’ll post it. Like I just posted some chapters that everybody might want to read today for next semester or if somebody has just a question about when something is due, or how we are supposed to do this or how does APA format work, somebody else will get on there and post a link to some site that shows you step-by-step how to do APA.

-Participant 9

Both participants noted how this setup has made them closer as and improved the way they communicated with their peers regarding school materials.

However, a subtheme that emerged was that, at this time it seems that most of the professors that the participants have are not using Facebook at all. Only a couple of the participants were aware of their professors actually having Facebook accounts. A single participant, who said that he is Facebook friends with two of his current professors, noted that they use their Facebook pages to post information about upcoming events and information that is pertinent to their students. That respondent, Participant 8, said that the interaction with his professors on Facebook came both from wall posts on his page by the professor, and from posts to their own walls: “Like Dr. (omitted) letting us know something, he puts it on Facebook and everyone sees it- okay, we are there already.”

Another participant did note that one of his professors has used Twitter to communicate with students. He said the professor would post links, video, and reminders on his Twitter in order to help his students. The participant stated how helpful that was to him while taking the
class. Another participant said she believed the lack of use of Facebook by professors she has taken could be attributed to the fact that many of them are older and from a different generation.

*Educational usage versus social usage.* As mentioned earlier, the changing mission of Facebook can mean a lot of mixed emotions from its users. Since the question was posed about Facebook’s viability as an educational outlook, another element needed to be addressed. Participants were asked if the thought of using Facebook as an educational tool stripped the site of the social element that it was normally used for.

The participants were nearly “deadlocked” on how they felt regarding the issue. Those that felt that it wouldn’t hurt the site had varying reasons why. One participant said that he would actually access Facebook more if his educational materials were on there as well. For Participant 4, he felt that, “it (Facebook) is more relevant to them (students), so they know how to use it. But they will be more likely to get on Facebook than get on email if their teacher is on there.” But, he didn’t feel like it would change his main reason for using the site. Another felt it would be an “asset” to students because they could log on and learn different things through Facebook.

However, there were just as many detractors of having Facebook transformed into a more educational forum. Those participants were extremely adamant in their criticism of changing the site for more educational value. “I would not like it at all if that was my place to go to find out about information about a class or homework assignment for that matter,” Participant 3 told the researcher in her interview. “When I get on Facebook, I don’t want to think about class! I don’t want that to be academics at all,” echoed Participant 2. However, the most structured argument against the educational value of Facebook came from Participant 6:
It would definitely open up more doors to things, but at the same time, Facebook is kind of like a sacred world for students because they can complain about their teachers or complain about their assignments, post videos about how stressed they are about class or something about drinking lots of coffee before finals. When teachers are on Facebook, that’s almost like it bursts this bubble of, like, this world where everyone can vent and no one gets judged. So, that might be tampered with a little bit if there was some kind of educational environment on Facebook.

So far, Facebook has not implemented any type of educational component to the social networking site.

*Facebook in the classroom.* Facebook was looked at in this study largely from the outside of the classroom angle. However, in order to be complete, the researcher decided to also ask at least one question regarding Facebook in the classroom and its positive or negative effects. There were no parameters set as to what Facebook in the classroom might mean. The participants were simply asked how they felt it would positively or negatively affect their learning ability.

The majority felt that Facebook in the classroom would either negatively impact their learning ability or have no effect at all. Several of the participants who answered this question, listed reasons such as Facebook being a “distraction”, Participant 5 said “it doesn’t have an educational purpose”, and Participant 12 stated that students need to use “better sources than Facebook.”
Student’s Acceptance of a Professor’s Friend Request

As noted in the Methods section of this study, none of the participants had been sent a friend request by any of their current professors at the time when their individual interviews were conducted. Still, the researcher felt it important to find out what the participants would do if ever placed in that situation, so a series of questions were asked that centered on the acceptance or denial of a professor’s Facebook request. The final set of subthemes looked at the pressure for a student to accept or deny their professor’s “friend” request, the Facebook connection after the class is over, and the Facebook “friendship” as an actual relationship.

Pressure to accept or deny. When asked if they would hypothetically accept a friend request from a current professor, nearly all of the participants’ said that they would. However, only a couple said they would do so without feeling added pressure to do so. Many of the others that answered “yes” seemed to do so under duress. Most all of them said that would be a pressure placed upon them just by having to decide whether to accept or deny the request sent to them. The main feeling among the participants was that denying the friend request would result in tension between the participant and their professor. They believed that tension could manifest itself in awkward interactions in the classroom or worst case scenario, a lowering of their grade by the “slighted” professor.

Participant 11 explained his feelings on the topic, “Deny one, and then the professor feels uncomfortable around me… it might be a little awkward if they confronted me. There would quite a bit of pressure.” That sentiment was echoed several times by the others. Participant Three said that she would deny the professor’s request, but mentioned that it would be a double-edged
sword if she accepted, “you’re kind of at their will... I wonder their motives for adding you on Facebook… I would feel very uncomfortable.”

After the class. Although the overwhelming response from respondents was that they would reluctantly add their professors to maintain a positive relationship while still their student, what would happen if they were no longer their student and received the request? The researcher posed this every question to the twelve respondents to gauge how if they would feel any differently based on the change of circumstance.

Nearly all of the participants said they would accept a professor’s friend request after they are no longer their student. The difference between this answer and the one for the previous subtheme is the willingness of the participants’. This time, the participants mostly sounded positive about hitting the “Accept” button. Participant 10 said she would accept the request after she graduated because at that point, peers could not use their Facebook against her.

I think people can say that, ‘Oh well, you know the professor is helping (omitted) out because they’re really good friends or they’re Facebook friends. Whereas once you’re not in the class, people can’t really say those things.

Some of the participants looked at accepting the friend request after they are no longer their student a smart decision when it came to their future: “I would accept it if I felt it could be to use in the future,” Participant 4 said. The consensus was that many of these professors are good connections to either getting a job or professional advice in the future or turning the relationship into a more informal one, by connecting on similar interests.

“Friendship” as a relationship. The final subtheme to emerge from this theme was how the participants perceived accepting the friend request in relation to what to consider the
connection between teacher and student. Nine of the participants felt that the Facebook friendship legitimized a relationship between the two. For participant 2, “you are establishing a friendship, not just a professional, academic relationship that we have with our professors normally.” Some felt that the relationship was already created before the friend request was ever sent. The addition of a Facebook friend request just serves as an extension of that relationship. Participant 6 was one of those, “I feel like a professor wouldn’t friend request you unless they had a relationship with you.” Others felt that it was more of a starting point for a more personal relationship. Participant 8 said, “In a certain way, yes. It can because you actually are around that person through the week. So, you build a relationship around them.”

In summary, the themes that were presented throughout this chapter addressed the 6 original research questions. The themes and subthemes used thick, rich descriptions from the student participants about how they perceive Facebook relationships initiated by professors for academic purposes. The next chapter, which concludes this study, will include a discussion of the findings, how to apply this information in practical settings, potential limitations and suggestions for possible future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides additional discussion of the themes, the implications that come from the research, limitations and the researcher’s suggestions for future research. This study’s goal was to contribute to the discussion by both college students and their professors about how to communicate in an ever-changing world. This was accomplished through interviews with current college students, using thick, rich descriptions to determine how they feel about engaging in a Facebook friendship with their professors. Previous research has looked at the various factors which contribute to students making decisions on if and how they will become Facebook friends with their professors, but have failed to give qualitative reasoning for how the students felt about the situation.

Out of the research for this study and supported through the interviews, five themes emerged (appropriateness, teacher self-disclosure on Facebook, student privacy/invasion of privacy, Facebook as an educational tool, student acceptance of professor’s “friend” request). These themes are meant to answer the previously stated six research questions.

Appropriateness

The first research question looked at the appropriateness of teachers’ and students’ conduct on Facebook towards each other and how that facilitates positive and negative relations. The findings showed that there is still an argument whether any type of communication between a student and their professor on Facebook or any other SNS is preferred. Six of the twelve students were adamant about their belief that Facebook should not be used as a tool to communicate between students and teachers. Their reasoning was that if there was pertinent
information that needed to be shared by either the professor or the student, it should be done through either traditional email, Blackboard, or face-to-face communication. Wang, Woo, and Quek (2012) found that even though students were using social networking tool to a degree, the preferred method for them to communicate with each other and with teachers was face-to-face. Madge et al (2009) and Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) also found a general sense of the current means that were discussed being more acceptable than adding in the social realm of Facebook when it comes to disseminating information such as grades, assignments, and other pertinent information.

One person was on the fence about this topic and the remaining five said it would be an appropriate manner of communication. Their basis was on the fact that not as many people check their emails or Blackboard as much as they do their Facebook page. So with that belief, professors may have a better chance to reach their students by going through the same channels that they use most often, which in most cases is Facebook. Those numbers are similar to those that Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) found when they researched the “appropriateness” topic. While their study looked at certain actions such as “poking” and “commenting on pictures, statuses, etc.” the respondents in this study barely mentioned those as options that they would want a professor engaging in with them on Facebook. Instead they continued to have laser beam focus on the need to communicate with a professor only for classwork or other academic endeavors.

That also meant that students only wanted to be contact by professors when there was something necessary that they needed to know. Otherwise, they found the communication “weird”. Several of them noted that they didn’t feel comfortable if their professor just decided to message them on Facebook or leave a post on their wall trying to make small talk. They said that
type of communication was unnecessary. A few said that, as long as the information was needed, they wouldn’t put a specific timetable on how many times a professor could contact them. This correlated well to the Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) study, which found that students overall rejected the idea of the professors communicating with them on Facebook (namely through comments, posts, pokes, etc.) However, they were more agreeable if the information was pertinent to the class, which not many seemed to feel, as a whole.

**Teacher Self-Disclosure**

This study also looked at teacher self-disclosure and its effects on students. The study supports Mazer et al.’s (2007) belief that a teacher’s credibility could be enhanced or damaged based on the amount of self-disclosure. Many of the participants in this study noted that it was not only the amount of disclosure, but the type of things they disclosed. Some found it okay for the professors to tell family stories or other personal stories as long as there was a direct benefit to either the school work or to have the students get to know them a little better. But they found it in poor taste for professors to engage in talk that would make the student feel differently about them, such as drinking alcohol or sexual activities. Other items that professors have disclosed on Facebook range from their political affiliation to sexual orientation or marital status and beliefs on certain controversial topics.

Hosek and Thompson (2009) said that professors reveal private information in order to create relationships and build closeness between them and the students. However, that does not always seem to be something that students are particularly fond of when it comes to doing it via Facebook. Several of the students that were interviewed noted that they prefer to create a relationship with an instructor through face-to-face communication. Frymier and Houser (2000)
said that college-level professors should be encouraged to give out personal information in order to foster these more developed relationships. But, as many of the participants in this study noted, they are fine with not knowing a lot of intimate detail about their teacher.

You could phrase it as, “ignorance is bliss”. However, it does change for the participants if they find out that they have shared interests. That’s when the participants seemed more interested in learning about the professor, but only on those shared interests. That also seemed to boost interest in the class according to Mazer et al. (2007). That study noted that students who had teachers who engaged in high to medium disclosure levels tended to do better in class and have an overall higher opinion of the teacher. Outside of that, many of the participants in the current study felt they would still rather keep a safe distance in terms of teacher sharing. This goes along with another component in the Mazer et al. (2007) which revealed that 85 percent of the participants of that study had never looked at their professor or professors’ Facebook page.

The topic of teacher self-disclosure correlating into student success supported the theory by Cayanus and Martin (2008) saying the magnitude of impact involvement using self-disclosure would be low. Most of the participants that were interviewed for this current study said that whether the information was positive or negative, their classroom would not reflect it. As one participant put it, “it is all about the student”. This would suggest that it is more of an internal commitment to excellence that is not built upon what a teacher does or doesn’t do to aid the process.

This is interesting because Mazer (2013) suggests that interest and student motivation are not the same. While a student may be interested in the information presented in the class, or presumably the teacher (which could be based on the level of personal interaction and or
disclosure), it does not necessarily mean that the student will be motivated to improve their own level of work in the class. Mazer (2013) notes that an emotional attachment many times to a class or an emotional connection that can develop over time. Christophel (1990) says this type of connection can be attributed, at least in part, to teacher immediacy. That study was conducted well before Facebook was created. However, it is very possible that the immediacy of teacher-student interaction could increase that attachment among some students.

Another study by Christophel (1992) says that students’ motivation to succeed is tied stronger to the negative teacher behaviors than the positive ones. That was apparent in the current study as well. Most of the participants directly or indirectly noted that they would have a harder time if their professor crossed the line in disclosing things about themselves. Several participants in the current study admitted to consciously or subconsciously judging their professor based off of the information and contact that they would have with them on Facebook. The studies by Mazer et al. (2007), Frymier and Houser (2000), and Hosek and Thompson re-affirmed that teacher credibility is at the heart of what they post online. The information that is provided by the professor has the power to make or break them in the eyes of the students. That is why most of them did not want to know intimate details about their professor, so their classroom perception would not be changed and thereby become a demotivating factor, according to Christophel (1992). However, the participants in this study, when asked how much it would actually affect them, their answers made it appear that ultimately it would not be much a factor. Ultimately the Christophel study is much older than Facebook, so while the premise of the questions may have sparked answers similar to what was gathered in this study, there is no guarantee that overall, the outcomes would remain the same.
This finding did not match up completely with another study. Hosek and Thompson (2009) looked at the rules and boundaries that make up Communication Privacy Management between college students and their professors. They found that teachers do, in fact, disclose information in an attempt to better convey information and build a connection to their students. The study did suggest that students were affected by the use of self-disclosure would, in some way, affect their performance. One of the key ways the study pointed to was the issues of credibility that comes with too much or too little disclosure.

This would suggest that how a student perceives their teacher’s self-disclosure and chooses to use it, is varied. There are some students who likely use the information as a motivator since they feel that their teacher is trying to help. While there are other students, who will not appreciate the disclosure from their professors, as they might feel it is over-sharing and not beneficial to the tasks that they are being assigned. The comparing of the research seems to agree with the earlier quote of Participant 1. It is ultimately up to the student how they will use the information provided to them.

So this topic is left up for much debate, even after the findings from this current study. Some of the participants feel that while there is some degree of judging of the professor taking place by the student, there is not necessarily a correlation regarding how, or if, it will affect the student and his or her grades.

**Student Privacy/Invasion of Privacy**

The next theme that was looked at was the perception of an “invasion of privacy” that students may feel if they are Facebook friends with their professor. Mazer et al. (2007) stated in one study that most of the college students that were surveyed said they had some concerns with
their privacy. They also felt that by letting a professor access their Facebook page, it would affect how their professor would perceive them. This was partially supported in the current study. None of the students interviewed for the current study indicated having any problems with their privacy on Facebook. Most of them knew exactly what privacy settings they had for their account.

Additionally, the majority of them acknowledged that if they accepted a friend request from their professor’s friend request, there was very little chance that the professor would be able to invade their privacy, because they allowed them in. Also, the participants stated that they don’t have anything posted on their pages that they aren’t comfortable with their teachers, or anyone else, seeing. From these answers, professors should assume that their students would trust them implicitly if they became Facebook friends. This would also indicate that these students are aware that some merging of the classroom, job world, and social world could occur, meaning that they have to conduct themselves on social networking sites accordingly to fit into those worlds.

It also partially supports the findings from Dearbone (2013) that the teacher-student contact through Facebook eliminates some of the privacy concerns that students may initially have. However, those interviewed in the current study did admit they do think about if the information they do have posted could affect how they are perceived by their professor. That part partially supports the findings by Hewitt and Forte (2006). Their research suggested that some students (which they separated by gender) would feel that the information they provided on Facebook would “skew” their professor’s perception of who they actually are.
Another study that culled the current study was by Robyler (2010), who suggested that very few participants would find a Facebook connection between students and teachers to be an “invasion of privacy”. Through that study, it was ascertained that many people did not find it to be an invasion. Only 12% of 300-plus people surveyed believed it was an invasion. That percentage fell right in line with the findings from this study. A small percentage of the 12 people that were interviewed for this study felt that a teacher having access their Facebook page would actually constitute as an invasion of privacy. The reason why has a lot to do with social trust. Nearly all of the participants in the current study strongly felt that they could trust their current professors not to abuse the information that they had posted on their Facebook. In conjunction with that, the participants noted that they had only put information on their Facebook that they would feel comfortable with someone seeing. Anything that they felt might be inappropriate or would compromise the way that people would see them either was taken down or never posted. This showed a greater awareness among users of how Facebook is being used by people as a determining factor in items such as school, possible job opportunities, relationship creation or termination, and other variables that come along in life. It also showed an understanding of what would actually be considered an “invasion of privacy” in this particular circumstance.

**Facebook as an Educational Tool**

Madge et al. (2009) determined that very few college students use Facebook for educational purposes, as in talking to each other about assignments or connecting with professors or other university officials regarding school topics. This was supported by the current study. Hardly any of the participants had used Facebook to communicate with their professors (Only one of the participants is actually Facebook friends with a professor; two others are on a group
Facebook page for their major along with other classmates and a couple of professors, but are not actually Facebook friends with them specifically).

However, there was a much more positive reaction for the use of Facebook as an educational tool. In the current study, three-fourths of the participants believed that Facebook would be a useful and effective tool for education. This percentage is higher than the 51% that felt the same way, according to Irwin et al. (2012). Many of the reasons were based on the accessibility to posted videos, links, and pictures that could aid the students in the classroom. But, none of the positivity was directed at specific contact with their professors in order to gain knowledge or understanding of assignments or other work.

As noted in the Findings sections, some students have seen the importance of Facebook use as a method to classroom success. The use of the platform to communicate with other classmates on different assignments seems to have worked in the cases of a couple of the participants that were interviewed. The current study looked at the educational versus social aspect of Facebook that was briefly touched on in the Madge, et al. (2009) study. There were a couple of quotes from that study that opposed using the site as both social and educational hubs.

So, in the current study, participants were asked if they felt that by adding the educational component to Facebook, did they feel that it would strip away the social DNA of the site. The fact that this question deadlocked the pool of participants could suggest two things: one, since not many students have used Facebook for educational purposes, they are unaware of how different the site would be in terms of look and feel if there was to be a stronger emphasis on education instead of social interaction. Second, it could suggest that even if the site were to make
a shift to a more educational medium, as long as there was still the social aspect, these students would only involve themselves with that and not worry about the educational portion.

Several studies are supported by the findings of this study. When you look at the amount of students that said “no” to the use of Facebook for education, it supports the perceptions of the participants of the Madge et al. (2009) study as well as Selwyn (2009), where their studies showed very little use of Facebook for academic purposes. Both studies also showed a strong dissent to the thought of using the site for such a purpose. Rather, those participants preferred keeping the site as a place for social interaction to take place only. However, on the other end of the spectrum, this study also supports that there are people who see the use for Facebook as an educational mechanism. Several studies used in previous chapters, Baran (2010); Irwin et al. (2012); Sarsar and Harmon (2011), found that the amount of students who had used Facebook previously for some type of pedagogical need, tended to be more favorable to using the social network. It is worth noting, that two of these studies were done in more controlled settings, while one was a simple survey, so the exposure and use of the site for academic purposes did vary.

**Student’s Acceptance of a Professor’s Friend Request**

The researcher decided to take a very point blank approach when it came to acceptance of a professor’s friend request. Several questions were asked that wanted to know had they ever been asked, what their response was, and the reason for their particular acceptance or denial of their professor’s request. Until this current study, Karl and Peluchette (2001) had been the only researchers to this point to look at the acceptance or denial of a friend request of a professor by a student. However, it’s only in the form of comparison between professors and other people you probably wouldn’t want to talk to on Facebook or let them have access to you. Their study
compared would you rather accept a friend request from a boss, your mother, a professor you
didn’t like or a professor you didn’t know. While it proved quite interesting, it didn’t answer the
simple question of strictly student-teacher friend request acceptance or denial.

This study found that most of them would accept the request. However, most of them
said that they would be doing it because they felt they needed to do so. They placed the
importance of maintaining a working relationship with the professor as the main reason why.
Many of the participants didn’t want to create an awkward space between the two because they
had chosen to deny the friend request.

So, Karl and Pelcuchette (2001) research was partially supported in the notion that most
college students would probably not want to have a professor as their Facebook friend, even if
it’s strictly for academic purposes. However, it’s unclear from their study how many students
would actually accept or deny the request. It is also unclear what their reasoning would be for the
acceptance or denial.

The final subtheme that was looked at is the type of connection that a Facebook
friendship creates. Frymier and Houser (2000) believed that the student-teacher relationship was
an “interpersonal” one because it takes engagement from both sides. Dearbone (2013) also found
that parts of the teacher-student relationship are “interpersonal”. Frymier and Houser (2000) also
found that the frequency of the communication between the two sides determined the ability to
move past their labels and establish the interpersonal connection. So the question was asked in
the current study, does having a Facebook friendship constitute having a real “relationship”
between the professor and student? This idea was supported by the participants in this study.
Many felt that the relationship already existed in some way, shape, or form prior to the friendship request being made.

But as noted in the literature review, there is not a definitive answer to whether the teacher student relationship is actually a true relationship in the sense of interpersonal interaction. So while these findings do support the idea of Frymier and Houser (2000), more research will need to take place in order to specify if the student-teacher relationship actually qualifies more to the pedagogical side rather than interpersonal realm. The researcher for this study does tend to believe after interviewing the participants that many of those students do feel that the relationship is interpersonal once it bleeds over into social networking. When it is only contained to the classroom or email, the students sounded more inclined to believe the relationship was only pedagogical in nature.

**Practical Implications**

The findings in this study suggest several things that should be considered going forward as education and social networking begin to intersect more. While the amount of professors using Facebook as a way of communication with their student varies by discipline, department, and campus, there appear to be some universal things that should be looked at if they want to use it academically. The findings of this study can be helpful for any and all university faculty and staff when beginning to engage in social networking with students.

First, professors should take time to figure out the makeup of their classes as a whole and their students as individuals. That way they can assess if using Facebook would work well as an educational tool for that exact class of students. Also, the professor would need to take into consideration both the frequency in which they contact students, as well as what they are saying.
to them whenever they do contact them. Based on the research of this study, students only want to be contacted when absolutely necessary and only for academic purposes.

Those who contact students may also want to be aware of their own Facebook profile, as students will tend to judge their professors based off of what they see online. This can create a stronger relationship between the teacher and the student or it could “weird” the student out and complicate or alter a connection between them. Most students don’t want to peer into the lives of their professors for any reason. Even though social media gives them the access to, many don’t feel compelled to engage in finding out.

Professors should also be aware that just because they are willing to share information about themselves, doesn’t mean their student population will ever be as compelled to do the same. Most students only wanted to address the teacher on academic topics unless they are known to have shared mutual interests. Even in that scenario, it seemed that the students wanted to keep a defined wall of separation between them and their professors when it comes to what they know about them. This could be because many students do not feel that teacher disclosure, or to a lesser degree, student disclosure, will affect their ability to succeed in school. Instead, the belief is that it is intrinsic to the student themselves that will ultimately determine if they fail or succeed in college.

It appeared that many students do not find the professor-student Facebook connection to be an invasion of their privacy as long as it is framed within the academic realm. They realize that if they allow such a relationship to take place, then they can’t get mad at what a professor might see based on the access they now have to that page. This means that universities and their professors can look at this as a good thing because it would allow them to approach students with
a friend request in a manner that doesn’t seem like they are trying to do anything that would be considered spying on their students, when that truly is not their goal.

Professors who want to use Facebook to enhance their classes will likely have a group of students that believe that Facebook will be an effective tool to use as a supplement for their classes. However, the professor must be careful not to clog the student’s Facebook timeline with messages or simply overdo the use of Facebook for classroom purposes, as there are still many that see Facebook as a social networking forum only and are not interested in using it for an educational site.

Finally, professors need to be aware of the peculiar situation they put their students in when they send them a Facebook friend request. Whether they want to or not, many times the students may feel like they have to in order to appease the teacher and not have a perceived “retaliation” for not hitting the “accept” button. This can make the relationship experience more one-sided as the student feels forced into this situation, but will not say anything about it because they have less power in the situation.

Most professors will likely see the most positive student response after the class is over and they know they will no longer have to take that professor again. That is the point where they feel more equal with the professor, or at least believe that there are no repercussions based on their Facebook page. Some students may also see it as a chance to use their professor for advice down the road and maybe even want to learn more about them as a person.

In summary, while Facebook has been around for a while, its integration into academia is still pretty new. Therefore, there will be growing pains associated with it as both students and teachers look for comfortable ways to make Facebook more valuable in the educational realm.
As professors come in who are younger and more in tune with both the current culture of students and social networks, the concept of melding the two for effective educational tools will become a lot easier. But as of right now, there is a process of creating those parameters that will determine its use and, ultimately, its success. If a professor or university can tap into how to effectively use Facebook to engage students in their schoolwork, while creating or maintaining relationships with them, then they may see big improvements in their overall classroom performance.

**Limitations and Future Research**

As with all research performed, there were some limitations during this study. First, the small amount of participants used in this study made for less data to analyze. Future research should attempt to extend the amount of participants interviewed. Another limitation is the amount of participants who were actually Facebook friends with their professor was small. Only one person was a Facebook friend to his professors, and he sought them out on Facebook. While the perspectives of the rest of the participants on how they would handle and how they felt about each situation was valuable and set a good base, any future research should lean more to anyone currently is Facebook friends with their professor in order to make better comparisons. Future research should also be completed on multiple campuses for a single study; that way a comparison can be made between universities. It can also expand and diversify the pool of participants. Future research that would help this study could also focus more on the “chat” features on Facebook where people talk directly to each other in private conversations. That may change some of the opinions of the participants if they were Facebook friends with a professor and then the direct chat communication began from their professor.
Finally, future researchers may want to look at the evolution of the relationships that are created by students and professors through Facebook. Do they last? How often is communication? What is the type of communication, educational or personal? This would be a great way to look into the lasting impact of the teacher-student Facebook friendship.

Conclusion

This research adds to prior research that looks at the trend of Facebook and other social networking and how it plays into higher education. This study does so by looking at how comfortable college students are with being Facebook friends with their professors by looking at appropriateness, teacher/student self-disclosure, invasion of privacy, Facebook as an educational tool, and student acceptance of a professor’s friend request. The research also provides practical implications for professors and universities to examine when trying to determine if implementing Facebook into their teaching structure is a benefit or a drawback. In conclusion, the worlds of social networking and academia are starting to merge, and Facebook is at the forefront of that. So, if used properly, both professors and students will see a shared benefit of using Facebook to communicate for academic purposes while working through a course together.
REFERENCES


Dearbone, R. (2013). Are college students comfortable being social media friends with their teachers? Unpublished manuscript. Department of Communication, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.


INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Are College Students Comfortable Being Facebook Friends with Their Professors?
Investigator: Ryan Dearbone, Department of Communication, 270-303-2467

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: To determine how college students feel about being Facebook friends with their professor. This “friending” is initiated by the professor and is done so on an individual basis strictly for academic purposes.

2. Explanation of Procedures: You, as a participant will be asked a series of questions as part of a semi-formal interview at a private location on campus. The interview should last roughly 30-40 minutes and will be recorded for transcription and accuracy purposes. You will be allowed to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer and you can stop the interview at any time if you wish not to continue. Once the interview is over, the researcher will use the information you provided to build his study. Your name will not be used for any of the written papers. Instead your identity will be protected using either a number or pseudonym in place of your name. Before the completed paper is presented for final approval to the university, the researcher will bring the information back to you in a written form for your confirmation.

3. Discomfort and Risks: There will be no risks or discomfort associated with participation in this study.

4. Benefits: The researcher will not give any benefits to the participants in this study.

5. Confidentiality: The interviews will be private and all information gathered will be stored securely.

6. Refusal/Withdrawal: Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date ____________

Witness ___________________________ Date ____________

I agree to the following interview to be audio recorded. (Initial here) ____________

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

WKU IRB# 14-191
Approval - 11/11/2013
End Date - 11/11/2014
Expedited
Original - 11/11/2013
APPENDIX B

Appropriateness

1. Do you feel it is appropriate for a professor to use Facebook to communicate with student/students for academic purposes? Why or why not?

2. What do you consider appropriate behavior for a professor/instructor/tutor to exhibit on Facebook, when it comes to a student? Please give an example to illustrate.

3. What do you consider appropriate behavior for a student to exhibit on Facebook, when it comes to a professor/instructor/tutor? Please give an example to illustrate.

4. How often would you feel comfortable with your professor contacting you on Facebook? Why?

5. In what ways do you treat your interaction with your professor different than those with others you connect with on Facebook? How do you treat it the same?

6. How formal is your professor when communicating with you on Facebook? Please give examples to illustrate.

Teacher Self-disclosure

1. What types of information would you consider it appropriate for teachers to disclose? Can you give me examples to illustrate?

2. How does the “amount of disclosure” by an instructor on Facebook play into your perception of your instructor?

3. How, if at all, does the type of “disclosure” by your instructor on Facebook connect to your ability to succeed as a student?

4. How compelled would you be to disclose more information about you based off of how much is disclosed by your professor?

Invasion of Privacy

1. In what ways do you feel that instructors having access to your Facebook page could be an “invasion of privacy”?

2. How much, and what kind of information about you would you feel comfortable with your professor knowing based off of his/her access to you through Facebook?
3. How much do you feel you can trust any of your current professors to not abuse knowing the information currently on your Facebook page? Why?

4. What kind, if any, privacy settings do you have set up on your Facebook page?

5. Would you feel comfortable addressing a professor you believe has invaded your privacy?

6. In what ways, does your in-class relationship with your professor determine how much information you would be okay with them learning through Facebook?

**Facebook as an Educational Tool**

1. How can Facebook be effectively used as an educational tool?

2. How are any of your current professors using Facebook to enhance their course?

3. How, if at all, does the thought of using Facebook as an educational tool strip the site of the social element that you normally use it for?

4. How often, if at all, does your professor contact you using Facebook?

5. What does your professor generally say to you when he/she contacts you on Facebook?

6. How often do you respond to your professor on Facebook?

7. How often is the student-teacher interaction accomplished through wall posts and how much is accomplished through direct messaging or “chat”?

8. How, if at all, do you feel Facebook in the classroom has/would positively or negatively impact your learning ability?

9. How, if at all, have you and your professor ever discussed your Facebook interactions in class or any other FTF settings?

10. How, if at all, has the Facebook interaction between student-professor changed the classroom interaction?

**Student’s Acceptance of a Professor’s Friend Request**
1. Have you been sent a “friend request” by any of your instructors? If so, did you accept? Why or why not?

2. What were your reasons for accepting or denying the request?

3. What positive or negative pressures have you experienced to accept or deny the request?

4. How likely are you to accept or deny a professor’s friend request once you are no longer their student? Why?

5. If you are currently a Facebook friend of a professor, do you plan to continue communicating with them via the social site once you are no longer their student? Why or why not?

6. What circumstances would make you feel comfortable being a Facebook “friend” to your professor(s)?

7. Do you feel the accepting a professor’s friend request means you are establishing a “relationship” with them?
Appendix C- Member Check Attestation

Dear Participant,

Thanks again for your participation in my thesis study. Here is a summarized version of the findings for you to look over and respond to me about. Please let me know if you note any parts you do not feel are correct or represent your beliefs. Please email me back at ryan.dearbone557@topper.wku.edu.

Through the analysis of the data collected, five themes emerged: (a) appropriateness, (b) teacher/student self-disclosure, (c) invasion of privacy, (d) Facebook as an educational tool, and (e) student acceptance of a professor’s friend request.

Here is a table that outlines the themes and subthemes that came out as a result of the research.

Table 1

Summary of Themes and sub-themes

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<th>RQs</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<td>How, if at all, does “appropriate” behavior positively or negatively affect the Facebook interaction between students-teachers?</td>
<td>3. Appropriateness</td>
<td>7. Current methods of Internet communication</td>
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<td>4. Teacher/Student Self Disclosure</td>
<td>8. Keeping it completely academic</td>
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<td>12. Disclosure &amp; Student Success</td>
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What sense of an “invasion of privacy”, if any, do college students feel by having a professor as a Facebook friend?

What do college students constitute as an actual “invasion of privacy” if they are Facebook friends with their professor?

What is the perception of students regarding their instructor using the social network Facebook as a supplement to their teaching?

What pedagogical benefits do college students feel they can receive from their instructor using Facebook as an educational tool?

How do students react if he/she has been confronted with accepting an instructor’s “friend” request?

### Appropriateness

Out of the 12 participants interviewed for this study, at least half (6) felt that being Facebook friends with their professor was not appropriate.

*Current methods of Internet communication.* Several of the participants felt that while they may not prefer to use Facebook as their means of outside communication for educational purposes, it would be an effective alternative, if necessary.
Keeping it completely academic. The majority of participants expressed a sincere desire to keep all Internet communication, including Facebook, with their professors, strictly academic.

Amount of contact. The overwhelming response from participants was that professors should only contact them when they need to tell them something about class or ask a question.

Teacher/Student Self-Disclosure

Teacher Disclosure Expectations. A large number of the participants in this study admitted that they had little to no desire to find out more about their professors through social media. Some felt it should be strictly academic information about the professor or general information about them. While others felt it should be whatever the professor felt was acceptable to share with his/her students. But, the overall feeling was that if it didn’t have something to do directly with their class and there was a foreseeable benefit, the professor should just keep it to themselves, even on Facebook.

Nearly all of the participants pointed to a direct or subconscious act of judging their professor based off of what would be on their Facebook page. Others said they had no problem with a professor having two different Facebook pages: one for their personal lives that they share only with people close to them, and a separate one that is only for academic purposes and has limited or no personal information that students can have access to.

Student Disclosure. Even if a professor was forthcoming with information about themselves, many of the participants seemed less likely to engage in information swapping. Many of the participants discussed not feeling compelled to allow the professor into their world any farther, just because the professor decided to be open.
Disclosure and Student Success. A majority of the participants stated that the type or amount of personal disclosure would not have an effect on their ability to succeed as a student. Participant 1 said “it all lies with the student.” He would go on to explain later in his answer that it would be up to the student whether or not he/she would seek help from the professor on Facebook.

Invasion of Privacy

Privacy Invasion. Once a student and teacher are Facebook friends, nearly all of the participants say they felt it was no longer an “invasion of privacy” if the teacher looked around your page or contacted you on Facebook.

Ten of the 12 participants stated that they have their privacy controls set to only allow friends to see what is on their page. Only a couple of the respondents were not aware of what exactly the privacy settings for their page were. However, they were sure that they did have some type privacy settings in place on their page.

Comfort with general information disclosure. Many participants stated that they have nothing to hide, and are very mindful of the information they post to their page. There was also a feeling that several conveyed that if they allowed the teacher to be their Facebook friend, then they would have no right to get upset with whatever they found while browsing the student’s page.

When asked that very question, nearly all of the respondents emphatically said that they trust their professors completely with the information that is contained on their personal Facebook page.
Confrontation. Eight of the 12 participants said that they would confront a teacher directly if they felt their privacy was being violated online. Some did mention that they might wait to confront the professor until after they were no longer their student out of fear. The possible negative outcomes led others to say they would not confront the professor at all. Instead, they would opt for other ways of handling the situation. One participant said they would just be more careful about what they posted online.

Facebook as an Educational Tool.

Effective educational tool. The participants were each asked if they felt Facebook would be an effective educational tool. Three-fourths of the participants felt that it would be an acceptable and useful educational tool (at least to some degree). Several participants discussed the ability to post videos, pictures, and other media on the site that could be beneficial to the students individually or as a whole. Another element that was brought up was the likelihood that more people check their Facebook on a consistent basis than they do their email or Blackboard account.

However, a subtheme that emerged was that, at this time it seems that most of the professors that the participants have are not using Facebook at all. Only a couple of the participants were aware of their professors actually having Facebook accounts. A single participant, who said that he is Facebook friends with two of his current professors, noted that they use their Facebook pages to post information about upcoming events and information that is pertinent to their students.

Educational usage versus social usage. The participants were nearly “deadlocked” on how they felt regarding the issue. Those that felt that it wouldn’t hurt the site had varying reasons
why. One participant said that he would actually access Facebook more if his educational materials were on there as well.

However, there were just as many detractors of having Facebook transformed into a more educational forum. Those participants were extremely adamant in their criticism of changing the site for more educational value.

*Facebook in the classroom.* The majority felt that Facebook in the classroom would either negatively impact their learning ability or have no effect at all. Several of the participants who answered this question, listed reasons such as Facebook being a “distraction”, Participant 5 said “it doesn’t have an educational purpose”, and Participant 12 stated that students need to use “better sources than Facebook.”

**Student’s Acceptance of a Professor’s Friend Request**

*Pressure to accept or deny.* When asked if they would hypothetically accept a friend request from a current professor, nearly all of the participants’ said that they would. However, only a couple said they would do so without feeling added pressure to do so. Many of the others that answered “yes” seemed to do so under duress. Most all of them said that would be a pressure placed upon them just by having to decide whether to accept or deny the request sent to them. The main feeling among the participants was that denying the friend request would result in tension between the participant and their professor. They believed that tension could manifest itself in awkward interactions in the classroom or worst case scenario, a lowering of their grade by the “slighted” professor.

*After the class.* Although the overwhelming response from respondents was that they would reluctantly add their professors to maintain a positive relationship while still their student,
what would happen if they were no longer their student and received the request? Nearly all of
the participants said they would accept a professor’s friend request after they are no longer their
student. The difference between this answer and the one for the previous subtheme is the
willingness of the participants’. This time, the participants mostly sounded positive about hitting
the “Accept” button.

Some of the participants looked at accepting the friend request after they are no longer
their student a smart decision when it came to their future because many of these professors are
good connections to either getting a job or professional advice in the future.

“Theory” as a relationship. Nine of the participants felt that the Facebook friendship
legitimized a relationship between the two. Some felt that the relationship was already created
before the friend request was ever sent. The addition of a Facebook friend request just served as
an extension of that relationship. Others felt that it was more of a starting point for a more
personal relationship.

Thank you again for your help! I hope that you found your participation in this study as
valuable as I have. I look forward to seeing your responses to this summary of the findings.

Ryan Dearbone
Peer Examination Attestation

The role that I played in Ryan Dearbone’s research was that of the disinterested peer during the peer debriefings as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The debriefings occurred at the end of the project where I was provided information about the study. As part of the process, I listened to Ryan Dearbone’s oral explanation of transcriptions; in addition, I read the master code list and reviewed the open coding and axial coding of the data.

The central purposes of the debriefing sessions were to establish credibility and explore aspects of the research that might otherwise have remained implicit in the researcher’s mind. Through the process of playing devil’s advocate, I attempted to probe potential biases, explore meanings in the data, and clarify basis for interpretation of the data by studying the coding procedures and categories.

Attested by: [Signature]
(Peer Name)
Date: 4-8-14
