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WOUNDED WARRIOR OR WAR HERO? OR MAYBE, NEITHER?:
RESISTING COMMON TROPES OF THE VETERAN AND DEVELOPING DIGITAL
LITERACY PRACTICES VIA NARRATIVE BUILDING AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION
IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SPACES

by

CASSANDRA ANN BRANHAM
B.A. University of South Florida, 2010
M.A. University of South Florida, 2012

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Stephanie Vie

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ABSTRACT

This project reports on the results of a study that investigated the social networking use of student and non-student veterans, with a particular focus on the narrative building and identity presentation practices involved in this use. In this dissertation, I argue that stereotypical and exclusionary tropes of the veteran, such as the veteran as war hero and the veteran as wounded warrior, are damaging to our veterans and to others, in both the society and the classroom. However, through the detailed analysis of survey data and data collected from an interview and social networking profile tour with one student veteran participant, I highlight the exclusionary nature of these tropes and argue that the complex digital narratives crafted in social networking spaces can offer resistance to popular tropes of the veteran. The complexity of my participants' digital narratives also offers support for the argument that elements of one's social networking profiles, when viewed independently and decontextualized, can lead to invalid and unfair assumptions about the users' identity. Additionally, I argue that, for my participants, many of whom demonstrated a nuanced and critical understanding of audience, decisions to self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces are intertwined with perceptions of privacy. Finally, this project culminates in the identification of a number of digital literacy practices present in my participants' social networking use, as well as a set of pedagogical and programmatic recommendations for writing teachers and writing program administrators interested in aiding student veterans in the process of transition and reintegration.

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CHAPTER 1: DIGITAL LITERACIES, SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES, AND TROPES OF THE VETERAN

Introduction

Portrayals of veterans returning from war are prevalent in American popular culture, with the film *American Sniper* and the Showtime series *Homeland* serving as two of the most recent popular depictions of veterans who experience difficulty readjusting to civilian life. Representing the two most common tropes of the veteran, those of war hero and wounded warrior, both *American Sniper* and *Homeland* featured lead characters who were depicted as post-9/11 male war heroes who experienced difficulty reintegrating into civilian life. Although depictions of veterans are important components of popular culture, and while some veterans *do* identify as heroes and many veterans *do* experience a range of disabilities from their service experiences, neither of these tropes accurately describe the lived experience of the majority of post-9/11 veterans. However, popular tropes of the veteran in the media can encourage viewers to see veterans as a homogenous group and, as a result, many veterans are left out of the traditionally constructed narrative of the veteran as either heroic or damaged, or maybe both, but rarely anything else, and almost always male and deployed.

Although portrayals of student veterans are not as common in popular culture, the comic strip *Doonesbury* does include a student veteran in its cast of characters. Leo Deluca, often called by his nickname Toggle, is a wounded Iraq war veteran, and the strip chronicles not only Toggle's wartime experiences, but also chronicles his difficulties readjusting to civilian life and in dealing effectively with his service-related disabilities (Trudeau). In addition to losing the sight in one of his eyes, Toggle suffers from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), known as the

signature wound of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. TBI can result in various symptoms or disabilities, and Toggle suffers from expressive aphasia, which is characterized by difficulty producing language. *Doonesbury* chronicles the successes and difficulties that Toggle experiences with reintegration, with story lines often centered on his relationship and eventual marriage to Alex Doonesbury. However, in addition to maintaining his relationship with Alex, healing from his service-related wounds, and working as an engineer in a recording studio, Toggle is also a student veteran, pursuing a degree in music studies.

Running since 1970, *Doonesbury* is well-known for its political content. Although Toggle is the only student veteran in the ongoing strip, *Doonesbury* does feature other veterans, including B.D., Toggle's former commanding officer, reservist, and veteran of Vietnam and both Gulf Wars who lost a leg in Iraq; Ray Hightower, an African-American Gulf War veteran who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and Elias, a Puerto Rican Vietnam veteran who serves as a counselor to veterans suffering with PTSD. *Doonesbury* does offer some diversity with the inclusion of Elias and Ray's characters, and while the comic importantly addresses issues such as PTSD and TBI, all of *Doonesbury*'s male veterans, with the exception of Elias, are positioned as wounded warriors. Toggle is both physically and mental wounded, as he suffers from blindness in one eye and expressive aphasia as a result of TBI. B.D. is physically wounded, having lost his leg in Iraq, and Ray, although physically wounded during the war, now suffers from PTSD. It is important to represent veterans in popular culture, as well as to address important topics such as PTSD and TBI, but it is also important to recognize the ways in which many of these representations play on the popular tropes of veteran as war hero or wounded warrior.

However, this is not to undercut the important work that *Doonesbury* does in addressing the difficulties many veterans have when transitioning from military service and reintegrating into society, difficulties that are often compounded by service-related disabilities such as PTSD and TBI. Additionally, *Doonesbury* works to highlight the difficulties faced by women in the military, through the stories of Mel and Roz. Melissa Wheeler, often called Mel, is a survivor of military sexual assault, and the strip chronicles not only Mel's healing process after her rape, but also her return to the military as an officer. Roz, an Army specialist, is an out lesbian, who was able to come out as a result of the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell in 2011. By telling the stories of Roz, Mel, Toggle, B.D., Ray, and Elias, *Doonesbury* does present a diverse cast of characters and does bring attention to important issues affecting U.S. veterans and military personnel.

Not only do tropes of the veteran as hero or wounded warrior pervade popular culture, they pervade academia as well. In her Master's thesis, *Rhetoric and Composition Constructs 'The Veteran': An Examination of the Student Veteran Identity as Found in CCC and TETYC Since September 11, 2001*, Linda Gail Smith (2012) performed close textual analysis on a corpus of nineteen published scholarly essays that included a direct reference to student veterans. Through this analysis, Smith identified six predominant student veteran tropes in rhetoric and composition research, five of which rely on the trope of the wounded warrior:

- student veteran as psychologically damaged (p. 23);
- student veteran as "other," as someone who is fundamentally different from traditional students and who does not belong in the classroom (p. 26);

- veterans as possessing homogenous and conservative political beliefs that “can be changed through access to proper education, transforming student veterans into educated citizens” (p. 27);
- student veteran as contextualized rhetorically against “sociologically negative examples” (p. 46) that reinforce stereotypical views of veterans as “unstable, uneducated, minority, conservative, manipulated, [and] forced into uniformity,” among others (p. 42); and
- student veteran as writing about traumatic experiences (27).¹

While L.G. Smith noted that “without a doubt, a percentage of military members and veterans encounter certain experiences of military life,” she argued, “skewing our thinking—and teaching practice—toward that percentage does a disservice to the remaining veterans who do not share that same experience” (p. 52). As college writing instructors, we do, and will continue to, encounter student veterans in our college writing classrooms. Now, in fact, because of the increasing numbers of veterans pursuing higher education as a result of the post-9/11 GI Bill, “it is probable that veterans will substantially transform postsecondary classroom dynamics, relationships across campus and in the community, and our understanding of the kinds of literacies students bring to our courses” (Doe & Langstraat, 2014, loc. 110 *Kindle*). In order to better serve this population of students, we must resist the tendency to view veterans as a homogenous group (Doe & Langstraat, 2014; Hart & Thompson, 2013a; Hart & Thompson, 2013b), and we must resist the tendency to stereotype our student veterans.

¹ The final trope identified by L.G. Smith is that of the veteran as historical anachronism, as evidenced by multiple references to the original GI Bill, but few references to the Post-9-11 GI Bill. This is the only trope identified by L.G. Smith that does not rely on the wounded warrior trope to function, but none of the tropes identified by Smith rely on the trope of the war hero.

However, in order to better understand the student veterans that are and will be enrolled in our writing classes, I argue that it is important to investigate the ways in which student veterans communicate, share and craft their own narratives, and present their identities. In order to focus on the digital communication practices of student veterans, I chose to locate my research within social networking technologies.² Not only are social networking technologies important within the U.S. military for both organizational and personal use, research on social networking technologies is also of interest to college writing instructors and researchers in the fields of rhetoric and composition and professional and technical communication. Recent research in the field of rhetoric and composition, which I will discuss at length later in this chapter, has begun to connect the use of social networking technologies to digital literacy practices, noting the importance of digital literacy practices for the narrative building and identity presentation that is characteristic of social networking technologies. Additionally, recent research in the field of professional and technical communication has examined the ways in which social networking technologies have altered the development and presentation of both individual professional identities and organizational identities, as well as the way in which social networking technologies support the development of community literacies. In light of these connections, in addition to investigating the ways in which student veterans use social networking technologies for communication purposes, narrative building, and identity presentation, this dissertation

² While my research in this dissertation focuses specifically on social networking technologies, some of the literature I consult is focused on social media more broadly. I am not equating the terms *social media* and *social networking technologies*; rather, social networking technologies are understood as a particular type of social media.

explores the digital literacy practices that are in play during this use, in an attempt to build upon and connect these lines of inquiry.

In this dissertation, I analyze the results of a survey I designed to learn more about the social networking use of student veterans. Thirty-six participants completed the survey in full, and 18 of my survey participants agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview. I was able to arrange and conduct interviews with three participants, and each participant who granted me an interview also participated in a profile tour, during which my participants led me on a guided tour of their social networking profile captured using screencasting software. Conducting both a survey and follow-up interviews allowed me to collect both quantitative and qualitative data about the digital literacy practices of student veterans in the context of social networking sites, and my examination of these practices is guided by the following questions:

- In what ways do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies for personal, professional, and academic purposes?
- How are digital literacy practices being employed by student veterans during these uses of social networking technologies?
- In what ways do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies to negotiate their veteran identities in online spaces? In what ways do these digital narratives of student veterans support or resist traditional veteran narratives?
- For what purposes do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies to seek out online communities of other veterans or communities that offer support to veterans?

- How did post-9/11 student veterans use social networking technologies during previous service and prior to service? What are the similarities and differences in how post-9/11 era student veterans currently use social networking technologies in comparison with how they used social networking technologies while serving in the U.S. military?

In the remainder of this chapter, I first establish the need to resist the tendency to stereotype or homogenize student veterans in the college writing classroom. From there, I provide an extended literature review on the topic of digital literacy and its role in social networking technologies before moving on to review the literature on identity and narrative in social networking technologies. My literature review concludes with a discussion of literature on personal and organizational uses of social media in the U.S. military. The chapter concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters in the dissertation.

Tropes of the Veteran

As discussed above, the two most common tropes of the veteran are the veteran as war hero and wounded warrior. While some veterans do fit into one, or sometimes both, of these categories, many do not fit in either of these categories. However, the portrayal of these tropes pervades popular culture and, in turn, influences citizens' perceptions of what it means to be a veteran. In her dissertation, *A Few Good Men and Women: The Rhetorical Constitution of Military Personnel Identity*, Ashly Bender Smith (2015) argued

despite the fact that films, reality television, and even news reporting are carefully structured and edited, and many viewers are aware that the "reality" is superficial, these popular media representations make a powerful impression on the public understanding of the military generally and personnel particularly. (p. 29)

A. B. Smith noted that many depictions of post-9/11 era U.S. military personnel were positive, depicting “contemporary service members ... as physically and morally strong; committed and loyal to each other and their duty; ... innately qualified for the jobs they perform, [and] as elite members of our society” (p. 60). However,

when military characters are negatively marked in these films, we are encouraged to see them as either damaged by their service—such as in *The Hurt Locker* or *The Valley of Elah*—or as aberrations within the identity, the kind of person who was not a true member of the group, such as the corrupted officer who partners with the villains in *A-Team*. (A. B. Smith, 2015, pp. 60-61)

In an attempt to respond to the misinformation that results from the widespread popular culture depictions of military personnel, and with the intent to change the inaccurate depictions of veterans in film and television, U.S. Army Veteran Chris Martin founded “Got Your 6,” an organization dedicated to “normaliz[ing] the depictions of veterans on film and television to dispel common myths about the veteran population” (“Got Your 6,” n.d., About section, para. 5). Martin noted, “the public can have skewed views of veterans based on what’s seen in film or on television,” because these depictions position veterans as “heroes on one end of the spectrum or broken veterans on the other end of the spectrum” (as cited in Hamedy, 2015, para. 4). Although this largely remains true, depictions of military personnel in film are more diverse now than in the past. A. B. Smith (2015) argued that this diversity is, in part, the media’s attempt to humanize military personnel “by characterizing personnel as a diverse group whose members have a variety of interests and associations beyond their military service,” offering a “counter-balance to the framing of service members as elite” (p. 56). In her discussion, A.B. Smith noted two films,

Windtalkers (2002) and *Red Tails* (2012), both set during WWII, in which race is a driving feature of the plot—*Windtalkers* tells a story of two white U.S. Marines “assigned to protect Navajo Marines who use their native language as an unbreakable radio cypher” (“Windtalkers,” n.d.), while *Redtails* focuses on the narrative of a “crew of African American pilots in the Tuskegee training program” (“Redtails,” n.d.). Martin Barker (2011) noted a similar increase in diversity, particularly in the representation of Latinos as U.S. military personnel. However, while Barker concluded that the increased depiction of Latinos in war films resulted in the development of a new character type, the Latino Grunt, who is “villain, victim, and hero all in one” (p. 148), A.B. Smith (2015) concluded that these humanizing efforts allow even negative perceptions of military personnel in post-9/11 films to “encourage the public to sympathize and support personnel” (p. 58).

Furthermore, in his analysis of Iraq war films, Barker (2011) demonstrated that although diverse depictions of military personnel in films are more common today, the depiction of U.S. military personnel in film has a complex history. Barker chronicled the development of several representations of military personnel in film, arguing that today’s societal perception of the war hero was influenced in large part by John Wayne’s portrayals of war heroes in WWII films—portrayals that were endorsed by the U.S. military itself in an effort to enhance public perception of the military. In these films, Wayne, who “encapsulated a certain image of American masculinity,” encouraged the American public to associate the same qualities they associated with Wayne—courage, morality, and physical fitness—with American military personnel as well (Barker, 2011, p. 51). Over time, however, additional characters came to influence America’s perception of military personnel: Rambo came to be associated with the image of soldier as

mercenary, while Vietnam films often featured Grunts, “ordinary soldiers, whose stories may be worth telling, but who do not have ideas or commitments beyond their situation” (Barker, 2011, p. 66). It is easy to see evidence of these character types in the predominant tropes of the veteran: we can easily imagine why the Grunt, the ordinary soldier who blindly follows orders, might have trouble reintegrating into society, thus characterizing the wounded warrior trope, while the veteran as war hero certainly evokes imagery one might associate with John Wayne, as discussed earlier. It is also easy to imagine a war hero as Rambo, relentlessly firing at the enemy and creating a wake of destruction in an attempt to protect his fellow soldiers and, by extension, America herself. While these characters are certainly attractive in film, they do not represent the many-faceted lives and lived experiences of the heterogeneous population that makes up the U.S. military. It is increasingly important for us, as both academics and citizens, to not only be aware of, but to offer critique and resistance to these tropes as well because, as boyd (2014) reminds us, “for better or worse, media narratives also help construct broader narratives for how public life works” (pp. 18-19).

Veteran as Hero Trope

The veteran as hero trope is enacted not only in popular culture, but also in mundane activities. One example of this, discussed by Mike Stajura (2014), veteran of the U.S. Army (1995-2002), as well as A. B. Smith (2015) occurs when, at large events, veterans are asked to stand and be recognized by the crowd for their heroism. Stajura (2014) explained that, while there are certainly veterans who are heroes, most veterans do not identify themselves as heroes, an idea echoed by William Astore (2010), retired lieutenant colonel of the U.S. Air Force, who argued that “the act of joining the military does not make you a hero, nor does the act of serving

in combat. Whether in the military or in civilian life, heroes are rare—indeed, all-too-rare. Heck, that’s the reason we celebrate them. They’re the very best of us, which means they can’t be all of us” (para. 7). In fact, as David Vacchi (2012) noted, in part because the word “*veteran* is a legal term with multiple definitions depending on the source, such as federal or state government agencies” (p. 16, emphasis in original), some former military personnel may not even identify as *veterans*, let alone as heroes. Vacchi’s conclusion is further supported by the California Research Bureau’s 2012 report of California’s Women Veterans, which found that “women who have served in the military do not consistently identify themselves as veterans” (p. 15), thus pointing to the sometimes exclusionary nature of terms like “hero” and “veteran” when applied homogeneously to describe all former military personnel.

Astore (2010) argued, not only is the positioning of military service as inherently heroic problematic for the many military personnel who do not view themselves as heroes or their service as heroic, but the military service as heroic narrative is also culturally damaging. Positioning military personnel as heroes encourages us, as a culture, to “blind ourselves to evidence of their destructive, sometimes atrocious, behavior” (para. 11), a perspective that also encourages us to “prolong our wars” (para. 12). Stajura (2014) also addressed the role of heroism in the military as a damaging narrative, arguing that “heroism is not a goal for any servicemember, nor should it be. Point blank, heroism is for war movies” (para. 9). The hero acts on the spur of the moment, is driven by emotion, and “recklessly endangers himself” (Stajura, 2014, para. 10), while soldiers “train, plan, and fight in a way that takes heroism out of the equation” (Stajura, 2014, para. 9). The culture of ethics in the military is rooted in operational success and protection of the unit. Thus, there is only room for heroic action in the context of

war when the plan has, in some way, failed. This is why, as Stajura (2014) noted, members of the military are “grateful for their heroes,” but are “uncomfortable when the word ‘hero’ is used loosely” (para. 13). For military personnel, Stajura (2014) asserted, “true heroes have qualities [they] aspire to but hope [they] will never have to emulate” (para. 13).

In addition to the apparent contradiction between the qualities associated with a hero and the qualities associated with military service, the hero narrative also excludes, among others, those veterans who served during peacetime, those who served during wartime but were not deployed, and those who, although deployed to combat areas, filled positions in which they were never required to leave the base and, as a result, were never exposed to combat. This is not to suggest that we should not honor our veterans, but to bring awareness to the idea that veterans are not a homogenous group, and that current (and long-standing) tropes of the veteran inhibit our ability to understand veterans as a diverse population.

Trope of the Wounded Warrior

Recognition of the veteran as hero trope and the trope of the wounded warrior are equally important in the writing classroom. Identifying a student veteran as a hero in the classroom might cause the student veteran to be uncomfortable, and this identification can also lead to the potential for the student veteran to be perceived as a representative of the military-industrial complex as a whole. Just as we, as writing instructors, would not expect a female student to speak on behalf of all females, we can also not expect the student veterans in our classrooms to act as representatives of the U.S. military. While some student veterans will choose to share their experiences and thoughts, acting as a type of cultural informant for both classmates and

instructor, these decisions to share must be the student veteran's choice, and must be recognized as the views and beliefs of an individual, rather than of an entire population.

The trope of the wounded warrior is of equal concern in the classroom. Viewing our student veterans through this lens encourages a perception of student veterans as less capable of receiving critique than our non-veteran students. However, "most student veterans crave clear directions and candid feedback from someone they trust" (Doe & Langstraat, 2014, p. 43). Thus, withholding feedback out of concern for student veterans, particularly if that concern is steeped in the perception of veterans as wounded, might damage our student veterans' relationships with the academy, rather than foster them. Doe and Langstraat (2014) argued, "student veterans, like other adult learners, have generally been away from the classroom for several years but possess often-unacknowledged workplace knowledge" (p. 13). Seeing student veterans as damaged has the potential to encourage us, as writing instructors, to continue to allow the literacy practices our student veterans bring to the classroom to go unacknowledged. Hart and Thompson (2013) noted the problematic nature of focusing only on the difficulties student veterans may bring to the classroom, arguing that, although the difficulties faced by student veterans are certainly important, the deficit model provides a limited and restricted view of student veterans, again positioning student veterans as a homogenous group.

Interestingly, the trope of the wounded warrior, which views all veterans as "potentially disabled and in need of civilian care" gained popularity at the end of the Civil War (Casey, 2014, p. 124). As members of the Union military began to return home, citizens began to worry that "soldiers might fail to adjust to peacetime life" (p. 124). Several months after the war, though, when these fears were unrealized, concerns that the reintegration of veterans would "be

disruptive to [the nation's] social well-being" (p. 124) were replaced with the narrative of the wounded warrior, a narrative that persists today. However, with a rise in awareness of the psychological wounds of war, the trope of the wounded warrior is now most commonly associated with severe cases of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a disability that Weigel and Detweiler (2011) argued is "negatively identified through the military's rhetoric, which privileges the able body" and mind (p. 30). As evidence for this claim, Weigel and Detweiler point to Leskin's presentation from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, which identified "resilient people" as less likely to develop PTSD (p. 30). Leskin, who is an employee of the National Center for PTSD, implied that "veterans with PTSD may not be successful, and if veterans were more resilient, they would be less likely to experience PTSD. In short, this language assumes that the veteran with PTSD is inadequate and, therefore, incapable" (Weigel & Detweiler, 2011, p. 30).

Weigel and Detweiler argued that military personnel are often reluctant to acknowledge the effects of PTSD in part because of a feeling of responsibility to uphold the persistent narrative of veteran as war hero (p. 31). This feeling of responsibility is also reinforced by the media, who often position stories of veterans suffering from PTSD as "hero becomes villain" narratives (p. 32), as depicted in the television series *Homeland*. The first several seasons of this Showtime series centered around the narrative of Nicholas Brody, a U.S. Marine who was rescued during a raid on a terrorist compound after being missing-in-action since 2003, and CIA agent Carrie Mathison, who believed that Brody had been turned by al-Qaeda during his time as a prisoner-of-war. Brody's role in the series, which ended with his death at the end of season 3, was characterized by the conflict between the U.S. government and the general population's

opinion of him as a war hero, his own struggles with PTSD, and Mathison's perception of him as dangerous, perhaps even a terrorist himself. Thus, Brody's character, throughout the series, encompassed several stereotypical tropes: that of war hero, wounded warrior, and hero becomes villain.

One *Time* magazine cover story attempted to dispel the "hero becomes villain" narrative by instead positioning the veteran as victimized by PTSD (Thompson & Gibbs, 2012).

Thompson and Gibbs noted that "more U.S. military personnel have died by suicide since the war in Afghanistan began than have died fighting there" (para. 8), with 18-24 year olds more likely to commit suicide than older groups of military personnel. Often, these suicides are the result of PTSD. Because student veterans, 58% of whom will fall into the 18-24 year old demographic (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015, p. ii), will continue to enroll in our college writing classrooms, it is important that we, as college writing instructors, are aware that while student veterans may experience PTSD, others may not, and that each student veteran who does experience PTSD will have a unique experience with the disability. We should not assume that all of the student veterans in our classes will have PTSD, but we should recognize that it is a possibility and be prepared to guide student veterans to appropriate resources when necessary.

Student Veterans in the College Writing Classroom

In her 2010 address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Valentino discussed the "ethical obligation" college writing programs and instructors have to "react responsibly" to veterans in the classroom. Valentino located this "ethical obligation" within the first-year writing classroom because not only do most universities require at least one semester of first-year writing, ensuring that student veterans will enroll in these courses, but also

because, in many cases, students enroll in first-year composition during their first semester at the university. Hart and Thompson (2013a) echoed Valentino's call in their piece, "'An Ethical Obligation': Promising Practices for Student Veterans in College Writing Classrooms," arguing that writing instructors may, in many cases, be the "first point of contact for veteran students" (p. 3). Additionally, the writing classroom is often a place in which a student's veteran status is disclosed. In the composition classroom, the popularity of the personal essay "likely facilitates, whether wittingly or not, disclosure of veteran status" (p. 4). In the professional and technical writing classroom, the ubiquity of the employment project, which typically asks students to compose (among other deliverables) a résumé and a cover letter, can result in disclosure of veteran status as well. As a result of the smaller class size characteristic of writing classrooms and the increased engagement between writing instructors and students, as well as between students in a writing classroom, student veterans are more likely to find themselves in situations in which they feel pressured to disclose their status as veteran. In order to avoid this, and to ensure that disclosure of status is the student's choice, Hart and Thompson contended that "instructors [should] consider a veteran audience when crafting assignments ... much like an instructor might be sensitive to differences in race, gender, and religious background" (p. 12).

Valentino's (2010) call was, in part, a response to the growing number of veterans returning to the college classroom as a result of the War in Afghanistan, part of the Global War on Terror, which began in 2001 and continues today. As a result of the length of this conflict, many veterans have returned to civilian life and, in turn, are using their educational benefits from their GI Bill in institutions of higher learning. The post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, which are available to current and former servicemembers who have served "90 days of aggregated active duty

service post September 10, 2011,” provide “up to 36 months of education benefits, generally payable for 15 years following [the servicemember’s] release from active duty” (“Post-9/11”). GI Bill benefits cover full tuition and fees at public schools while offering qualified student veterans a maximum of \$20,235.02 per academic year to attend private institutions. In addition to tuition and fee waivers, the post-9/11 GI Bill also offers, to qualified veterans and active-duty servicemembers, a monthly housing allowance, an annual stipend for books and supplies, and a one-time rural benefit payment for those who are relocating from highly rural areas.

A number of student veterans are taking advantage of these benefits, with an average of 108,568 veterans annually enrolled in full-time education programs between 2009-2012, and another 17,021 (on average) enrolled in part-time programs, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs “2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report” (p. 10). Some veterans (8% on average from 2009-2012) were also taking advantage of the post-9/11 GI Bill’s “Transfer of Entitlement” option, which allows servicemembers who have served, or agree to serve, a minimum of ten years in the armed forces to transfer some or all of their educational benefits from the post-9/11 GI Bill to their spouses and/or dependent children.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “between August 1, 2009 and January 23, 2013, approximately 1,143,105 veterans attended institutions of higher education in the United States, and the number of veterans, spouses, and dependents using post-9/11 GI Bill benefits grew 84 percent from the first to the second year of the benefit” (APSCU, 2013, p. 3). Further, “those enrollments promise to continue to increase or, at the very least, remain close to current levels for the coming decade as more veterans return from deployments and more veterans’ family members use the transferable GI Bill benefits” (Hart & Thompson, 2013a, p. 3).

Not only will we continue to see student veterans in our writing classrooms at both the university and community college level, we are also likely to see an increase in veterans' spouses and children using the transferable GI Bill benefits. Additionally, the majority of degree-completing student veterans who received GI Bill benefits "earned degrees at the associate level or higher," suggesting that we are likely to see student veterans in our upper-division writing classes as well as our lower division service courses (Cate, 2014, p. 2). As such, it is important for college writing instructors to understand how modern warfare might affect our veterans and their families, and how higher education might be more attentive to the needs of this particular population without viewing veterans as a homogenous group.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that the experiences of post-9/11 veterans are, in some ways, different than those of veterans from previous eras, so as not to perceive veterans as historical anachronisms, as L.G. Smith identified in her textual analysis of articles in the field of rhetoric and composition. Today, in part because of the elimination of the draft, less than .05% of the population serves in the U.S. armed forces (Pew Research Center, 2011a, para. 7), while 12% of the population served during World War II (Doe & Doe, 2013). Of course, the draft was in effect during the Vietnam War, with 9.7% of the population serving (Hanson & Beaton, n.d.); however, public dissent toward the war, emerging in 1967 and heightening until the war's end in 1973 (Lunch and Sperlich, 1979, p. 23), marked the beginnings of what is now termed the "military-civilian gap," which continued to increase as volunteer enrollment remained low during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Today, according to the Pew Research Center (2011), 77% of those "Americans [who] have family members who once served or are currently serving" (Pew Research Center, 2011b, para. 2) are over 50 years old, while only

33% of Americans ages 18-29 have a family member who is current or former military personnel, adding to the perceived distance between military personnel and civilians. Further, the absence of a draft during the extended Global War on Terror has resulted “in multiple deployments for those who have served,” with many post-9/11 veterans deploying “a half dozen times or more” (Doe & Doe, 2013, para. 13). While the familiarity of current military personnel with the rigors, stress, and demands of deployment contributes to the “specialized and professionalized nature of today’s military service” (Doe & Doe, 2013, para. 13), these experiences, in combination with the ever-changing nature of modern warfare technologies and communications technologies (Paquette & Warren, 2010), also resulted in the development of a veteran identity much different than those of previous eras, further separating the veteran from his or her previous life as a civilian. However, in spite of this increased gap between military and civilian identities, cultural reception of military personnel is much more tolerant and accepting now than post-Vietnam, evidenced in part by the earlier discussion of the frequency with which we as Americans honor our current and former military personnel at public events. Additionally, the Pew Research Center (2013) determined that public acceptance of the U.S. military remained high, with 78% of U.S. adults “saying that members of the armed services contribute ‘a lot’ to society’s well-being,” a slight decline from an 84% acceptance rate in 2009 (para. 1). Perhaps even more telling, of the 10 categories the poll asked respondents to rate in terms of contribution to the well-being of society, the military received the highest rate of acceptance, with teachers coming in second place at 72% in 2013 and 77% in 2009 (para. 2).

Thus, we are left with the question of how to attend to a population of student veterans who might feel very different from their civilian classmates, but who belong in the writing

classroom and deserve to be taught by instructors who recognize them as individuals, while also attending to their needs as a heterogeneous population with varying, yet also similar, lived experiences. One way for writing instructors to begin to better understand the needs of our student veterans is through exploring issues of identity and representation as they pertain to student veterans. In her dissertation, *At War with Words*, Grohowski's (2015) study of 299 current and/or former military service personnel revealed that, in online environments, only 26% of her participants always identified as veterans or military service personnel, with 15% never identifying as current or former military, and 45% revealing their decision to disclose their military status as contextual. While a number of scholars have identified digital composing as a popular way for military service personnel to explore and share their military experiences (Burden, 2006; Edwards & Hart, 2010a, 2010b; Hart, 2011; Robbins, 2007), Grohowski's (2015) research indicated that this may not be the case. Instead, her research suggested that veterans use digital composing tools, such as social networking technologies, to distance themselves from their veteran identities, only disclosing their veteran status in particular contexts. In fact, her data revealed that "many [veterans and current military service personnel] are looking to move beyond identifying themselves by their military status," which Grohowski attributed "in large part to the stigma they experience in civilian society because of their military experience and veteran status" (p. 82). In addition to this stigma, in part as a result of stereotypical depictions of military service personnel, veterans also often experience what Meehan (2012), retired U.S. Army Captain and co-author of the memoir *Beyond Duty*, referred to as an "identity crisis," arguing that veterans "need intensive help in rebuilding their identities" (para. 13) because, after leaving military service, "their identity is ripped away" (para. 6). DiRamio and Jarvis (2011)

identified the communal identity that is valued in the military, in which “individual identity becomes secondary to the identity of the group,” as a contributing factor of the identity crisis that many student veterans face as they attempt to transition between their former identities as military personnel, and their current identities as veterans, students, and citizens (p. 53).

DiRamio and Jarvis noted that, while a number of college students negotiate multiple identities, such as those of

parent, worker, and caregiver, the status of student veteran adds yet another layer to the complexity of intersecting identities. In addition to the social identities of race, culture, sexual orientation, and gender, other preentry variables, such as first-generation status, officer or enlisted rank, socioeconomic status, and disability all differentially affect the veteran as he or she enters the academy. (p. 56)

Therefore, although the negotiation of multiple identities is a common practice for college students, identity negotiation may be more complex for student veterans, particularly in light of the military-civilian gap which, as noted above, continues to widen as smaller percentages of the U.S. population serve or are directly connected to someone who serves or has served in the U.S. military.

College writing classrooms have the potential to assist student veterans in negotiating their identities, whether that identity is associated with their veteran status or not. For example, first-year composition courses can assist student veterans in negotiating their new identities as students as well as their identities as citizens, while courses in professional and technical writing can help student veterans negotiate their professional identities. The act of writing has long been tied to the concept of identity, and a number of theorists have conducted research on the

connection between the two. In part as a result of writing's close connection to identity, Hadlock and Doe (2014) concluded that the "first-year composition course can be an important site for transition and reintegration" and argued that we should "continue to explore the literacy habits of student veterans and develop a richer understanding of them" (pp. 92-93).

In this dissertation I argue that, in order for transition and reintegration to be successful, we must provide student veterans with the opportunity to develop their identities as both writers and citizens, and to do this, we must understand in what ways student veterans are already doing this work in online spaces and, more specifically, through social networking technologies. Social networking technologies are an interesting research site because they allow users to combine elements of text, images, and video to present a version of themselves to the world, and as such, it is important to understand how users communicate through and within these sites. Research on student veterans is popular, as is research on social networking technologies, but research that combines the two is lacking. This dissertation fills this gap by examining the ways in which student veterans use social networking technologies and by identifying the digital literacy practices employed in this use.

Defining Digital Literacy

Rather than attempting to define a discrete set of skills or tasks that make up the toolbox of digital literacy, it is Lankshear and Knobel's (2008) conception of digital literacies as a "myriad [of] social practices and conceptions" (p. 17) that I find valuable for this dissertation project. Lankshear and Knobel (2008) argued for a conception of digital literacies, which should be understood as "shorthand for the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged etc., via

digital codification” (p. 17). I do not think that it is useful to attempt to identify a list of valuable digital literacy skills because each individual uses new media technologies for different purposes and with different goals in mind. Technology use is rhetorically, socially, and culturally situated (Selber, 2004; Selfe, 2009a, 2009b) and, as such, there is no one-size-fits-all list of digital literacy skills that everyone should possess. Further, the population of student veterans is not a homogenous group and, as such, there is no one set of digital literacies that would work across the board for this population, either for personal communicative purposes or in the college writing classroom.

For the purposes of this dissertation and in communicating my interests in studying digital literacy to my research participants, I describe digital literacy practices as the social, communicative, and information gathering practices that take place in digital spaces and involve digital texts. However, while digital spaces are networked sites that can be accessed via the Internet, such as social networking sites, websites, or content-sharing platforms, this dissertation is only concerned with the digital literacy practices that take place within social networking sites. I am locating my research in social networking sites because I hope to contribute to the developing body of literature arguing for the importance of social networking technologies as a space in which users engage in complex communicative acts and in which many digital literacy practices are employed (Balzhiser et al., 2011; Buck, 2012; Davies, 2012; Fife, 2010; Kimme Hea, 2014; Shepherd, 2015; Shih, 2011; Vie, 2008).

Further, I am working with danah boyd and Nicole Ellison’s (2013) updated definition of a social network site (their preferred term) as

a *networked communication platform* in which participants 1) have *uniquely identifiable profiles* that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can *publicly articulate connections* that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with *streams of user generated content* provided by their connections on the site. (“Sociality” 157, emphasis in original)

Boyd and Ellison’s (2013) current definition evolved from their earlier (2007) definition of social network sites as

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (“Sociality,” p. 151)

a definition that, while useful, “does not accurately describe the landscape of SNSs today” (“Sociality,” p. 157). Boyd and Ellison’s (2013) updated definition maintains the existing components of their initial definition, yet expands to include an awareness of the role of user-generated content for creating meaning within social networking technologies. In her dissertation, *Engaging Others in Online Social Networking Sites: Rhetorical Practices in MySpace and Facebook*, Vie (2007) added to boyd and Ellison’s (2007) definition, arguing that “online social networking sites must also provide privacy policies and tools for users to protect their personal privacy in these spaces” (p. 16). Examples of digital literacies thus include the activities that users engage in when visiting these spaces, such as locating the site, constructing and maintaining a profile within the site, navigating the site to attain desired information,

communicating within the site, using the site to create knowledge or content, making and navigating connections within the site, and using the site's privacy settings (or purposefully choosing *not* to use them).

I chose to define digital literacies in this way for several reasons. First, as I noted above, I argue that it is important to conceive of digital literacies as a set of practices rather than a set of discrete skills, because while practices are rhetorically situated and can be altered and transferred for use in other contexts and for other purposes, skills are discrete, contextually-bounded activities that are often specific to a particular technology. Further, Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola (1999) argued against the conception of literacy as skills-based, concluding that “when we speak then of ‘literacy’ as though it were a basic, neutral, contextless set of skills, the word keeps us hoping—in the face of lives and arguments to the contrary—that there could be an easy cure for economic and social and political pain, that only a lack of literacy keeps people poor or oppressed” (p. 355). I also choose to define digital literacies as plural because, in the vein of literacy scholars such as Collins and Blot (2003), I find a singular definition of digital literacy to be exclusionary. While a focus on *literacy* often results in dichotomies (literate vs. illiterate; educated vs. uneducated), a focus on *literacies* allows for a relational conception of literacies as “intrinsically diverse, historically and culturally variable, practices with texts” (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 4). Thus, a focus on digital literacies, rather than on digital literacy as a single, monolithic thing that is the same for everyone, allows for a diversity of practices, specific to the individual and suited to his or her individual purposes.

I focus on the role of social, communicative, and information gathering activities in my definition of digital literacies because of the context that many people associate with the term

literacy. Digital literacies certainly involve the practices of writing and reading, but I do not associate digital literacies with only the act of reading or writing texts. This narrow conception of literacy as only associated with reading and writing practices leaves out a significant amount of literacy practices, such as those that occur in social networking sites, including crafting and maintaining an identity within the site, as well as creating a digital narrative to support that identity. Again, although reading and writing are significant components of digital literacies, other practices, such as navigating the web, searching for information, and signing in to and setting up accounts with social networking sites, to name only a few, are also significant digital literacy practices, but are not typically thought of as reading or writing practices. To provide another example, Donoso and Verdoodt (n. d.) pointed to the need for “increased ‘social media literacy’, i.e. the specific set of technical, cognitive and emotional competencies that are required to take full advantage of social media” (p. 11), arguing for the importance of understanding terms of service and privacy policies as important social media literacy practices. By defining digital literacies in this way for my research population, I was able to track a wide range of digital literacy practices among my participants—digital literacy practices that fall outside the purview of the reading and writing practices typically associated with print-based literacy.

Digital Literacies and Social Networking Technologies

While it is becoming increasingly common for college writing instructors to integrate social networking technologies into the classroom, sometimes the pedagogical benefits of social networking technologies can be outweighed if instructors fail to recognize, or fail to teach students to recognize, the importance of digital literacy practices to social networking technologies. Royce Kimmons (2014), in his discussion of the connection between digital

literacies and identity in social networking spaces, argued “we need to better understand issues of identity and literacy within social networking sites” (p. 93), but also warned instructors and administrators to “be very careful in any attempt to coopt such technologies for educational purposes, because they bring with them an entire host of embedded values and expectations that may likely be problematic and even contrary to meaningful learning and professionalism” (p. 97). Thus, it is important for instructors who incorporate social networking technologies in the classroom to do so in a critical way, choosing the social networking platform whose context best fits the desired classroom purpose and invites the types of digital literacy practices that the instructor wants students to develop.

Although an interest in digital literacy is well established in the field of rhetoric and composition, with theorists urging the field to pay attention to the digital literacy practices of our students (Selfe, 2009a, 2009b), researchers have recently begun to explore the digital literacy practices at play in social networking spaces (Balzhiser, 2011; Buck, 2012; Davies, 2012; Fife, 2010; Kimme Hea, 2014; Shepherd, 2015; Shih, 2011; Vie, 2008). Additionally, researchers have investigated students’ critical digital literacies (Gurak, 2001; Kress, 2003; Selfe, 2009a, 2009b; Vie, 2008; Wysocki & Johnson-Eilola, 1999) and urged college writing instructors to value digital literacies in the writing classroom (Balzhiser, 2011; Fife, 2010; Shih, 2011; Reid, 2010; Vie, 2008).

Of the theorists who have explored the role of digital literacy in social networking spaces, several have identified specific digital literacy practices that users engage in when using social networking technologies. Vie (2008), who supported the pedagogical uses of social networking technologies in the composition classroom, indicated that students use social networking

technologies to engage in digital literacy practices such as “shar[ing] class notes and ask[ing] questions about homework; find[ing] old friends and mak[ing] new ones; keep[ing] tabs on significant others; [and] track[ing] the latest trends in music, movies, and viral videos” (p. 16). In his study of Facebook use among first-year composition students, Shepherd (2015) noted that while students did not identify a correlation between composition and Facebook, students did engage in literacy practices such as audience awareness, attention to the rhetorical situation, invention, and process writing on Facebook, while also engaging in specific digital literacy practices, such as managing privacy settings (p. 86). In her case study of the digital literacy practices of one undergraduate student, Buck (2012), like Shepherd (2015), identified the following digital literacy practices at use in social networking sites:

- audience awareness (p. 17),
- identity presentation and the creation of self (p. 15, 28),
- the ability to manage online personas (p. 25),
- the development of chains of activity that create meaning when viewed in concert, rather than as discrete elements (p. 24), and
- the use of social networking sites to resist the designer’s intentions for the space (p. 32).

Like Buck (2012), Davies (2012), in her study of the literacy practices of 25 U.K. teenagers in Facebook, argued that Facebook users employ a number of digital literacy practices, including new ways of presenting the self, such as the construction of pictorial narratives and the “friends” list as markers of credibility and new ways of managing friendships (p. 27). Davies (2012) argued that these digital literacy practices are “embedded in [our] everyday lives,” and rely on “skillful authoring and careful reading” in order for users to interact effectively in social

networking spaces (p. 28), and it is this presence of digital literacy practices within the space of social networking sites that I find interesting in terms of my research. Here, the connection between digital literacy practices, identity, and narrative becomes clearer: social networking spaces invite the user to present his or her identity by authoring a narrative of the self. In order to do this successfully, however, the user must have knowledge of the digital literacy practices needed to craft this narrative within the particular space.

Social Networking Technologies, Identity, and Narrative

Connections between literacy and identity have been long explored and, in recent years, researchers have become interested in how identity operates within social networking technologies. In addition to those discussed above, Rice (2009) examined the connections between networked communication and identity, particularly exploring the role of networked communication in blogs in relation to the development of professional identity. Also examining the “complex terrain” of networked communication, Pigg and Dadurka (2012) argued for the connection between social media use and the development of community literacies, which are particularly important for developing the type of communal identity that, as discussed above, military personnel are encouraged to maintain. Additionally, Kaufer, Gunawardena, Tan, and Cheek (2011) encouraged college writing instructors “to think about how the advantages of social media with respect to identity and community building can be systematically deployed to enhance the learning gains of these writing spaces,” while Lillquist and Louhiala-Salminen (2014) and Shin, Pan, and Kim (2015) examined the ways in which organizational identities were presented through the use of social networking technologies.

Along with the growing body of scholarship that examines identity in the context of social networking spaces, Kimmons (2014) identified current understandings of the connection between social networking technologies and literate development as rooted in New Literacy Studies (NLS). Mills, in her discussion of the digital turn in NLS, explained “proponents [of NLS] regard literacy as a repertoire of changing practices for communicating purposefully in multiple social and cultural contexts” (Mills, 2010, p. 247). Kimmons (2014) argued that a New Literacy Studies foundation allowed for the development of “approaches [that] treat literacy expansively to include socio-cultural factors beyond mere skill acquisition and behavior modification” (p. 93), harkening back to the idea of literacies as complex practices rather than discrete skills. Within these approaches, though, Kimmons argued for the importance of developing a “better understand[ing of the] issues of identity and literacy within social networking sites and consider[ing] how embedded values of such media influence social participation and identity construction within them” (p. 93). Kimmons began the investigation he called for, problematizing the conception of “authentic identity” as it is applied to social networking technologies, many of which “are built on the premise that people can and should express their authentic identities online by connecting with friends, posting personal information about themselves, and interacting in a variety of ways” (p. 95).

Although these digital literacy practices are indeed important for identity presentation within social networking technologies, Kimmons called into question the context in which these practices occur and argued that social networking technologies are “developed within historical and social contexts, which dictate how such sites view authentic identity, what they value, and how they structure participant interactions” (p. 95). Thus, from this perspective, each social

networking technology, along with its affordances and constraints, establishes norms for the representation of identity within the particular site and, “in order to develop literacy or to successfully participate in a given [social networking technology], one must recognize and act in accordance with certain norms of behavior that the site recognizes as valuable and be cognizant of how others might interpret behaviors” (p. 96). Here, the connection between digital literacy practices and identity presentation becomes clearer; in order to present one’s identity in ways that will be recognized and valued within a particular social networking technology, the user must develop an understanding of the digital literacy practices valued by that technology and its community of users.

In order for a user to construct and present an identity within a social networking technology, he or she must also construct a narrative. For the purposes of this project, I am working from Page’s (2012) understanding of the connection between narrative building and identity presentation in social media spaces. Page (2012) described the narratives that are told in social media as “important discursive and social resources that create identities for their tellers and audiences” (p. 1) and argued that social media stories both “enable and constrain the narrative dimensions of linearity, tellership, embeddedness, and tellability in innovative ways that have yet to be explored” (p. 12). While more traditional narratives are often linear, relying “on a single sequence of past-tense events organized along a teleologically focused trajectory toward a definitive conclusion,” social media stories are “often open-ended, discontinuous, and fluctuating” (p. 12).³ Additionally, the tellership of social media stories is often collaborative,

³ Open-ended, discontinuous, fluctuating narratives are not unique to social media stories. Non-traditional written narratives, as well as narratives constructed in other new media spaces often

with multiple authors contributing to the development of a narrative, while traditional narrative often relies on a “single teller” (p. 13). The embeddedness of social media stories is also different from that of traditional narratives because, in social media spaces, “even where a sense of audience can be constructed through a visible network like the Followers on a Twitter account, and displayed through comments ... at least some part of the audience will only ever lurk and not make themselves known to the narrator” (p. 15). Finally, the concept of tellability, “the quality that makes a story worth telling in the first place,” operates in social media narratives not only via “a participant’s interaction with the text,” but is also “reflected in and contributes to the social interaction between a teller and their audience” (p. 16). Thus, narratives in social networking spaces may or may not be linear, told by a single author, embedded in particular contexts, or traditionally considered to be worth telling. Additionally, narratives in social networking spaces can be told with text, images, and/or video, and also work to present the identity of the user to his or her audience. Further, as discussed further in Chapters Three and Four, issues of audience awareness and context collapse complicate the process of narrative-building and identity presentation in social networking spaces.

U.S. Military and Social Networking Technologies

Organizational Use

The U.S. military has a complicated relationship with social networking technologies. The military was, for some time, largely resistant to the use of “Web 2.0” technologies, particularly social media. In 2007, the Department of Defense released a social media policy that

incorporate non-linear narratives. However, in this piece, I focus on these elements as they apply to social media and, more specifically, social networking technologies.

banned the use of many social media sites by military personnel, stating the risk to operational security as the primary reason for banning use of, and access to, these technologies (Cuccio, 2014, p. ii). However, since 2009, when the military lifted its embargo on social media for military personnel (Caldwell, 2010), military leaders have been thinking about how to most effectively leverage these technologies for organizational purposes. Additionally, since 2010, the Department of Defense has permitted “official uses of the Internet-based capabilities unrelated to public affairs” provided that this information is “relevant and accurate and provides no information not approved for public release, ... provide[s] links to official DoD content ... where applicable, ... and include[s] a disclaimer where personal opinions are expressed,” providing leaders with even more freedom to use social media technologies as they see fit (Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2010, p. 6), within the confines already imposed by the military, of course, such as restricting the release of classified information.

Lieutenant General Caldwell (2010), former media spokesperson for the U.S. military, former commanding general of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Command and General Staff College, and current president of Georgia Military College, has advocated heavily for the use of new media technologies by military personnel, arguing that, for military leaders and soldiers, “understanding the power of a tweet, the influence of a blog post, or the impact of a YouTube video is absolutely essential” (“Leadership,” para. 4). Major Fajardo (2014) of the U.S. Army agreed, arguing that “given the explosion and reach of media sites available, Army leaders can and should creatively leverage and integrate social networking as a leadership tool” (p. 7). Fajardo then identified four benefits of using social media for military leadership, including the

abilities to build trust, extend influence, facilitate and enable communication, and create a shared understanding (p. 7).

Public trust and perception of the armed forces is a significant concern for the U.S. military, particularly in light of the cultural pervasiveness of the wounded warrior trope. In order to offer alternative understandings of PTSD, for example, the military might release recent research on the causes, effects, and treatments of PTSD, all of which might increase the transparency and credibility of the military. Luckily, new media technologies have the potential to enhance the military's transparency and credibility, both of which are important to maintaining high levels of public trust (Caldwell, 2010). By encouraging soldiers and leaders to "tell their stories," new media technologies enhance transparency, creating an "opportunity [for military personnel] to talk directly to people, without mediation" (Caldwell, 2010, "Leadership," para. 4). Of course, transparency is also a concern for the military, as standards of operational security necessitate secrecy in many cases (Mayfield, 2011). However, now, more than ever before, the American public can see into the daily lives of American soldiers, and "sharing their personal stories is one of the primary ways in which service members reach out to the American public" (A. B. Smith, 2015, p. 92). This sharing of personal narratives through the use of social media technologies is particularly important in light of the military-civilian gap; as a small percentage of our population continues to serve, and the percentage of the population directly connected to someone who did or does serve continues to dwindle, soldier narratives will become even more important for maintaining trust and transparency between civilians and the military. Additionally, using new media technologies as tools for strategic communications, the military's term for audience-specific information dissemination, has the potential to enhance the

military's credibility in the eyes of the public. By building a connection with a particular audience through the sharing of information that is relevant to them, the credibility of the sender, and the organization that the sender represents, is enhanced. Access to a wide range of audiences through new media technologies enables military leaders to share the story of the U.S. military both at home and abroad.

Social networking technologies can also assist commanders whose units are deployed to Areas of Responsibility (AOR) by providing the commander with access to information that might enhance the units' situational awareness (Mayfield, 2011, p. 80).^{4,5} Social networking technologies can allow military commanders to observe the online communities in an AOR to "develop an ongoing understanding of the society in question, as well as its concerns and interests" (Mayfield, 2011, p. 80), information that can assist commanders when developing strategies. Additionally, commanders can use social networking technologies to better "understand potential threats and emerging trends within the AOR," information that can contribute to operational success (Mayfield, 2011, p. 80).

Because the potential benefits of organizational use of new media technologies in the military are numerous, Caldwell (2010) recommended that military leaders be trained to effectively leverage new media technologies for organizational purposes, evident in his inclusion of assignments requiring social media engagement in the U.S. Army's mid-officers' training

⁴ An area of responsibility is a specific geographic area "allocated to a commander in which the commander is responsible for the provision of intelligence with the means at the commander's disposal" ("Military," n.d.).

⁵ Situational awareness is the access to "accurate and real-time information of friendly, enemy, neutral, and noncombatant locations; a common, relevant picture of the battlefield scaled to specific level of interest and special needs" ("Military," n.d.).

curriculum. Further, military leaders who refuse to use new media technologies for leadership purposes are not only missing out on the operational benefits of these tools, but also run the risk of “informational and social isolation” (Fajardo, 2014, p. 9). Training can help to convince these leaders of the value of new media technologies for operational use. Since the military’s widespread acceptance of social media use in the military with the removal of the social media ban in 2009, the military has created a number of official spaces on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr, as well as in social media spaces such as YouTube and Vimeo. As a result, leaders who refuse to use social media technologies may find themselves “restricted in social awareness,” disconnected from their soldiers, and “unaware of many organizational changes not advertised elsewhere” (Fajardo, 2014, p. 9), thus decreasing the effectiveness and efficiency of their units. However, using social networking technologies has the potential to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of communication both within the military and between the military and the public by increasing the flow and speed of information (Mayfield, 2011).

Personal Use

In addition to serving a number of organizational purposes, social networking technologies are employed by military personnel for personal purposes as well. However, while a growing body of literature examines the organizational benefits of social networking technologies in the context of the military, the body of literature examining personal uses of social networking technologies amongst military personnel is smaller.

In their 1998 study of personal use of email and live interactive television by soldiers in the U.S. Army, Ender and Segal concluded that, while “old and new communication media are

available to soldiers and their families during a forward military deployment[,] the number of new media users is limited” (p. 67). It is likely that the limited use and dissatisfaction discovered by Ender and Segal (1998) was, in part, a result of neither of these technologies being widely used in the public at the time of the study. In the context of 1998, email and live interactive television were not heavily integrated into the daily lives of civilians, but the same cannot be said for social networking technologies today. However, although popular among other populations, there is less research that examines the ways in which military personnel use, or do not use, social networking technologies for personal use. However, Ender and Segal (1998) did call for this research, recognizing that “[n]ew media forms will continue to emerge,” and “[w]hile these and other media modes are established and use increases, there should remain a constant study and evaluation of the social uses, implications of use, and the potential impact on the organization and culture [of the U.S. military] via computer-mediated communication” (p. 79).

Recent research by Hart (2011) examined the ways in which female veterans used social networking technologies for professional development purposes, arguing that in male-dominated fields such as the military, social networking spaces can allow female veterans to engage in community literacy practices that allow them to “find their voice, raise collective consciousness, and possibly even effect public change” (p. 85). While Hart (2011) found social networking technologies to be a way to empower veterans and to provide them access to a larger community of veterans, Grohowski’s (2015) research indicated that, while veterans speak positively of online communities dedicated to veterans, they tend not to join these spaces unless they perceive a *need* to connect with other veterans. Further, veteran BriGette McCoy, an advocate for female veterans, has successfully leveraged social networking technologies to provide peer support for

victims of military sexual assault, demonstrating that online spaces can be successful sites of social action for current and former military personnel with a need for services (*Hearing to Receive Testimony*, 2013). So, while some valuable research does examine the personal use of social networking technologies by veterans, this research is limited.

In addition to Ender and Segal's (1998) early examination of new media technologies and recent research into social networking technologies (Grohowski, 2015; Hart, 2011; Hart & Grohowski, 2014), several studies have examined the use of broader social media technologies by military personnel. Carter and Williamson (2010) examined deployment music videos, concluding that these videos serve two functions. First, they are a form of "digital postcard," serving a communicative function between deployed military personnel and their loved ones. Additionally, however, these videos can also be interpreted as the "hyperfiction of play needed to offset the stark reality of war" (Carter & Williamson, 2010, para. 3). In other words, for the first time, social media technologies such as those used to distribute deployment music videos offer the public access to the ways in which members of the military cope with deployment and work to overcome boredom (Carter & Williamson, 2010). Additionally, these music videos can serve as tools to share (or potentially resist) the organizational narrative of the military, while also increasing transparency by making the daily lives of soldiers available for public consumption.

Military blogs are another form of social media use that has received attention from academic researchers. In his book, *The Blog of War*, former U.S. Army Major Burden (2006) collected and presented selections from a number of military blogs, many of which were written and maintained by active-duty military personnel. These blogs, and Burden's (2006) understanding of their purpose, established a connection between organizational and personal use

of new media by members of the military, as Burden argued that blogs are, for military personnel, “the perfect way to maintain contact, to tell their stories” (p. 3). This perspective was reiterated by U.S. Army Major Robbins, who explained that “soldiers create blogs because they are an effective, efficient way to communicate” with friends, family, and the members of the public (pp. 109-110). Similarly, the creator of *Doonesbury* launched the military blog “The Sandbox” in 2006, establishing the space as a “forum for service members who have served or are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, returned vets, spouses, and caregivers” (“The Sandbox”). Maintained until 2014, the blog consisted of over 800 posts from over 150 contributors, and one of the forum’s primary goals was to help overcome the military-civilian gap by allowing military personnel and their loved ones to tell their unmediated stories (“The Sandbox”). So, while these blogs do function to strengthen and maintain connections with friends and family, because of their public or semi-public nature, they also enable soldiers to tell their individual, personal stories to other interested audiences, similarly to the previously discussed deployment music videos. Not only do military bloggers “often set their task as providing a counterpoint to what the mainstream media or the military has to say about the war,” military blogs also enable bloggers to share images and short videos with their audience (Peebles, 2011, p. 10). Peebles argued that, in some cases, these videos and images can enhance public perception of military personnel by emphasizing the humanitarian efforts that many military personnel participate in overseas. In contrast, though, these images and videos can also highlight the horrors of war that are so often removed from the mass media, as we saw with the Abu Ghraib scandal when digital photographs of American military personnel torturing Iraqi prisoners circulated the Internet (Peebles, 2011, p. 15). Thus, rather than allowing the mass

media to interpret the war, the existence of unofficially-sanctioned military blogs maintained by deployed military personnel, along with the distribution of digital photographs and videos taken by deployed military personnel, provides the public access to a real-time, unfiltered, and uncensored version of the war from the front lines.

Of course, this is precisely why, from 2005 until the end of the social media embargo in 2010, military blogs were heavily restricted and subject to censorship by the military at large (Burden, 2010, p. 257). However, as we see with statements from officers such as Caldwell (2010), cited above, and evidenced in the military's own use of new media technologies, the military does seem to have begun to promote the benefits of new media and does want to enable military personnel to share their individual stories through new media, with the hopes that these stories will, in turn, align with and advance the organizational narrative of the U.S. military. This dissertation contributes to the growing body of research dedicated to the examination of social networking technologies among current or former military personnel, while also contributing to the literature that identifies social networking technologies as a site where digital literacy practices are employed. To this end, I report on data gathered by surveying and interviewing a national sample of U.S. military veterans and active duty military personnel.

Conclusion

This dissertation combines several threads of scholarship by examining the connections between digital literacies, social networking technologies, identity presentation, and narrative building. This research is located within the population of veterans in an attempt to begin to recognize the digital literacy practices that our student veterans might bring to the college writing classroom, while also working to position student veterans as heterogeneous, unique individuals

in order to offer resistance to popular veteran tropes. Locating my research within this population has allowed me to make both pedagogical and programmatic recommendations for college writing instructors interested in better facilitating student veterans' transition into college.

In this chapter, I have reviewed relevant literature and established the need for my research project. In Chapter Two, I present my research questions and discuss my research methodology, providing both theoretical justification of the chosen research methods and describing the process through which I conduct my research. I discuss the value of qualitative research in highlighting the individual, and I position myself as aligned with a critical research methodology. Finally, this chapter includes detailed discussions of my participants' demographics.

Chapter Three offers a discussion of the ways in which perceptions of privacy are bound up with the ways in which my research participants use social networking technologies for purposes of identity presentation. This chapter begins with a brief overview of relevant literature on the topics of privacy and identity formation in social networking technologies before moving into data analysis. In Chapter Three, I report on data related to how my participants used social networking technologies before, during, and after their military service, and I focus my analysis of this data on my participants' understandings of privacy and their decisions to self-identify (or not) as military personnel in social networking spaces. Through this analysis, I argue that, in part because of their military training and in combination with their experience using social networking technologies, some student veterans may possess a nuanced sense of audience that can be transferred to the classroom. Additionally, I argue that veterans who do not always self-identify as veterans in social networking spaces are more likely to disclose their military

affiliation in spaces in which they both use, and believe that they can effectively control, privacy settings.

Chapter Four focuses on the role of narrative in social networking spaces and its connection to the development and presentation of digital identities. After a brief discussion of the role of narrative in social networking spaces, I analyze my participants' purposes for using social networking technologies, as well as their reasons for participating in (or choosing not to participate in) social networking sub-communities of/for current or former military personnel. Here, I argue that my participants' purpose(s) for using social networking technologies influence the narratives my participants' construct, which in turn affects my participants' digital identities and the ways in which these identities are read by members of my participants' networks. Next, I discuss the data collected during an interview and profile tour with Jethro, one of my student veteran participants. I provide an in-depth analysis of the digital narratives Jethro constructs in both Instagram and Facebook, noting the ways in which differences in these narratives result in differing digital identities for Jethro. Additionally, I analyze the ways in which Jethro's digital narratives both support and resist the common tropes of the veteran as war hero or wounded warrior, positioning Jethro's multifaceted digital identities as evidence against the view of veterans as homogenous.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I turn back to the idea of the trope of the veteran, and I make recommendations, based on my findings, for how we as college writing instructors can respond responsibly and ethically to current and former military personnel who enter our classrooms by resisting the urge to homogenize this population. In this chapter, I return to my research questions, discussing my conclusions in regard to each. Next, this chapter presents both

pedagogical and programmatic recommendations for working with and valuing student veterans in the writing classroom, before concluding with a discussion of the limitations of this research project and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

Introduction

The tradition of using qualitative methods is well established in both rhetoric and composition, with a number of theorists discussing qualitative research methods from ethnographic or feminist perspectives (Barton & Stygall, 2002; Bazerman et al., 2010; Bishop, 1999; Brown & Dobrin, 2004; Heath, Street, & Mills, 2008; Kirsch, 1999; Kirsch & Sullivan, 1992; McKee & Porter, 2008; McKee & Porter, 2009; Schell & Rawson, 2010), as well as in professional and technical communication (Blakeslee & Fleischer, 2007; Conklin & Hayhoe, 2010; Koerber & McMichael, 2008; McKee & DeVoss, 2007; Spilka & Sullivan, 1992; Thacker & Dayton, 2008), with researchers often examining the benefits of and ethical considerations involved with undertaking qualitative writing research. This rich history of using qualitative research methods in the field of writing studies rests on an even longer history of qualitative research in fields such as anthropology and education. However, as technological advances change the ways in which humans communicate and interact with one another and with the world, qualitative research methods must evolve as well, as digital writing researchers are faced with a new set of methodological and ethical concerns that qualitative researchers in writing studies and digital rhetoric are beginning to address.

In this chapter, I argue that qualitative and critical research methods are well-suited to enable digital writing researchers to not only address the ethical concerns involved in digital writing research, but also to ensure that research projects are designed and carried out in ways that are beneficial to the research population. Throughout this project, maintaining my stance as a critical researcher encouraged me to continually reflect on my study design and to maintain a

critical awareness of my own situatedness within the study. Additionally, qualitative research's focus on exploration, individuals, and thick description enabled me to highlight the individuality of each of my participants, which in turn enabled me to work against traditional tropes of the veteran by offering alternate depictions of student veterans through an examination and analysis of my participants' digital narrative and identities.

Methodological Framework

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research has its roots in sociology and anthropology, and was first applied as a method of inquiry in the early 20th century, although unstructured forms of qualitative research have existed for much longer, while researchers in education began to adopt qualitative research methods in the 1970s (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Before turning to a discussion of qualitative methods in the field of writing studies, I begin this section with the work of several education theorists to offer a brief introduction to qualitative research, which I define as the study of particular human interactions with each other and the world around us.

Robert E. Stake (2010), an educational psychologist and director of the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, provided a clear definition of qualitative research as the study of "how human things work in particular situations" (p. 14). Not only did Stake's definition focus on the role of the social, the human, and (implicitly) the natural, it also highlighted the role of context in qualitative research, pointing to the value of investigating "human things," such as interactions

and communicative acts, in localized, particular contexts.⁶ In fact, qualitative research recognizes the idea that “human things” change in response to the context in which they occur, thus valuing the agency of the local and particular and the ways in which context affects the way things work.

While research studies often involve both qualitative and quantitative elements, many researchers lean predominantly toward either qualitative or quantitative methods. However, research studies that employ mixed methods research, defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), are common in the field of writing studies, perhaps as a result of the field’s diversity and interdisciplinary background (Kirsch & Sullivan, 1992). Researchers who employ mixed methods are able to design studies that make use of the most relevant characteristics of both quantitative and qualitative research within the particular context of the research question(s). While research that is predominantly qualitative intends to explain, the primary goal of quantitative research is understanding (Stake, 2010, pp. 19-20). The goal of understanding is evident in the characteristics of quantitative research, including a “focus on deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, standardized data collection, and statistical analysis,” all elements that are focused on creating generalizable knowledge (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). In contrast, the importance of the particular is evident in the characteristics of qualitative research, such as “induction, discovery, exploration, theory/hypothesis generation, the researcher as the primary ‘instrument’ of data collection, and

⁶ Rossman and Rallis (1998) also identified a focus on the natural world, humans, and context as three of eight characteristics of qualitative research.

qualitative analysis” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). Further, explorations of events involve thick description, which requires a focus on the particular and is characterized by the presence of commentary and interpretation in addition to facts (Geertz, 1973). However, this is not to say that qualitative research cannot result in understanding or generalizable knowledge. Qualitative research can occur on a large scale and over extended periods of time, as we have seen in rhetoric and composition with the work of scholars such as Chiseri-Strater (1991), Cintron (1998), Haas (1994), Haswell (2000), and Herrington and Curtis (2000) who have conducted research in writing and rhetoric with studies lasting between one and nine years in length. Furthermore, small-scale qualitative research studies that investigate similar research questions can be analyzed as a corpus in order to produce generalizable knowledge.

In addition to focusing on particular “human things,” however, qualitative research also focuses on the values and situatedness of the researcher to the research site and study population. Quantitative research is often impersonal, with the researcher viewed as distinct and separated from the study and its results, and qualitative research often focuses explicitly *on* the researcher and encourages researchers to lay bare their own perceptions and understandings of the research problem, thus situating themselves within, rather than outside of, the context of the research (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Stake, 2010). The attempt to separate the researcher from the research subject in quantitative research lends to the view of quantitative research as objective, while qualitative research embraces its subjectivity. However, it can also be argued that research can never be objective, as all research is influenced by the beliefs and perceptions of the researcher. Qualitative research’s attention to the researcher’s own positionality allows the researcher to be self-reflexive both when designing and enacting the research study. The continued self-

reflexivity of qualitative research not only encourages the researcher to understand and expose her own positionality, and the ways in which her personal background (her context) affect that positionality in her research study, but also encourages her to reflect on the research process while it is occurring. This acknowledgement of one's own positionality and the recognition that "researcher values permeate inquiry" is also a distinctly feminist approach to research (Lather, 1992, p. 91), an approach that Kirsch and Sullivan (1992) identified as necessary when conducting mixed methods research. As a result of the "systematically reflect[ive]" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 9) nature of both feminist and qualitative research methods, the research process becomes emergent and iterative. In mixed-methods research, self-reflection and an awareness of the researcher's own positionality are necessary to allow the researcher to choose those elements of quantitative and qualitative research that will best suit her study. When a researcher is continually reflecting on her study, its design, and the positionality of her research participants and herself in relation to the study at hand, she is likely to be open to change, particularly when it becomes clear that changing the research design in some way could lead to increased benefits for research participants.

Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis (1998), qualitative methodologists and education policy reform researchers, identified the purpose of qualitative research as that which is designed "to learn about some aspect of the social world and to generate new understandings that can be used by that social world" (p. 5). Here, Rossman and Rallis point to the concern qualitative researchers have for their research participants. Ideally, qualitative research focuses on particular situations and particular research participants with the intent of making things better for the participants, and "empathy and advocacy are and should be part of the lifestyle of

the researcher” (Stake, 2010, p. 14), ideas that are also hallmarks of feminist research. While there are a number of ways that qualitative research can work to benefit participants, Rossman and Rallis identified four general uses of qualitative research, described in Table 1 below—instrumental use, enlightenment use, symbolic use, and emancipatory use—all of which are designed to benefit research participants in some way.

Table 1: Rossman and Rallis' (1998) Four Uses of Qualitative Research

Instrumental Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • findings are “intended [for] use by intended users” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 12) • “knowledge is applied to specific problems [and] provides solutions or recommendations” (p.12)
Enlightenment Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • findings “serve to enlighten the user” (p. 13) • research contributes to accumulated knowledge, “enhances understanding [and] offers heuristic insight” (p. 12), which in turn contributes “to a gradual reorientation of the user’s thought and action” (p. 13)
Symbolic Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • findings are used to identify “patterns and create narratives that makes sense of the world and its phenomena” (p. 14) • the research “process generates stories” that then become part of “cultural knowledge that offers new and often satisfying interpretations of familiar events” (p. 14) and “crystallizes beliefs or values” (p. 12)
Emancipatory Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • findings are used by researchers and participants to “collaboratively produce knowledge to improve their work and their lives” (p. 16) • research “becomes a source of empowerment both to the individual’s immediate life and to change structures that dominate and oppress” (pp. 15-16)

This is not to say that qualitative methods are not without weakness. In fact, Stake (2010) identified the subjective and localized focus on the personal and the particular as one of the weaknesses of qualitative research. Although I do agree that there is the potential for qualitative

researchers to focus on the particular while ignoring the whole, I also believe that a significant amount of research into the particulars of any human situation is necessary in order to determine patterns and overall trends. Although I understand that many small studies on their own, such as this one, are not generalizable across a broad population, small qualitative research studies can be aggregated and analyzed to come to general conclusions about a particular research question or set of related research questions, as discussed by Haswell (2005) in his call for more replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition. In an effort to increase the presence and visibility of RAD scholarship in rhetoric and composition, Haswell noted that RAD scholarship need not rely on statistics, and could include

a case study of one student when the participant's background is defined, observation procedure and data analysis are specified, and participant's behavior is recorded to the point that someone else could conduct a comparable study to validate, qualify, and perhaps add to the first study. (p. 201)

The challenge for the qualitative researcher, then, is to describe her study methodology and participant selection with enough detail to allow another researcher to replicate the study, thus leading to the possibility of developing generalizable conclusions.

However, as with any generalizations, the risk of stereotyping is present. Stake (2010) argued that

qualitative research contributes to stereotyping but also fights against it. By emphasizing a particular experience, dialogue, context, and multiple realities, a researcher can lessen the chance of simplistic understanding. But this researcher also reduces the chance of

improving generalizable knowledge. (2010, p. 28)

However, I argue that in order for generalizable knowledge to accumulate, particularly in the humanities, we must have an understanding of the particulars that make up the whole. In order to resist stereotyping, it is absolutely essential to understand the individual, the local, and the various contexts in which the topic of inquiry exists. As discussed in Chapter One, I hope that my work here will, in concert with other scholarly studies on digital literacies, social networking technologies, or student veterans in the writing classroom, contribute to the development of knowledge in these areas. Further, I know that in combination with other qualitative studies investigating student veterans in the writing classroom, policy change is possible. As a result, I see qualitative research and its focus on the particular as a benefit of my research, and I strongly believe that this focus on the particular has allowed me to resist and offer solutions to see beyond the common stereotypes of U.S. veterans. As discussed in Chapter One, many veterans do not identify with the two most common veteran tropes, the hero and the wounded warrior, yet these tropes are pervasive in popular culture and also, unfortunately, influence our understanding and treatment of student veterans in the academy. Thus, resisting these stereotypes and offering alternative understandings of student veterans as a heterogeneous group is one of my primary goals as a qualitative researcher.

Several components of my study design have allowed me to work toward my goal of offering resistance to the common tropes of veterans as war heroes or wounded warriors. As I discuss at length later in this chapter, one way in which I worked against perpetuating a view of veterans as a homogenous group was to assign each of my research participants a pseudonym, including those participants who only took part in the first phase of my data collection process by

completing a survey designed for current, former, and future military personnel. Although I do include some quantitative data analysis in Chapters Three and Four, the bulk of my data analysis is qualitative, and naming each participant allowed me to analyze the similarities and differences between my individual research participants rather than positioning my research participants as a homogenous population to be compared against other populations. Additionally, I chose to provide an in-depth analysis of the digital narratives and digital identities of one of my student veteran participants, Jethro, in Chapter Four. Analyzing Jethro's social networking practices allowed me to demonstrate that although individual posts from this participant might, when read out of context, offer support for one of the traditional tropes of the veteran, when read together, Jethro's social networking practices have allowed him to create two distinct digital narratives, both of which tell the story of a person with a multifaceted identity, of which the identity of student veteran is only a part.

Critical Research Methods

In addition to valuing the broad hallmarks of qualitative research, I also align myself with the critical research practices outlined by Sullivan and Porter (1997) in *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices*. Sullivan and Porter (1997) explained that “for the study of writing technologies, we advocate a view of research as a set of critical and reflexive practices (praxis) that are sensitive to the rhetorical situatedness of participants and technologies and that recognize themselves as a form of political and ethical action” (p. ix). Again, the role of context, the particular, and the positionality of the researcher are all present. However, Sullivan and Porter's critical research practices brought action research to the field of rhetoric and

composition, demonstrating how research involving writing technologies could be used for purposes of advocacy and to create change.

Critical research practices also reflect a concern for research participants that is a characteristic of qualitative research. Sullivan and Porter (1997) argued that critical research should begin ethically “with the involvement and personal commitment by the researcher to research participants” (p. ix) and should have “the betterment of research participants” (p. x) as its primary goal. Also similarly to qualitative research, critical research practices proceed “through a process of self-reflection and critical inquiry (a constant challenging of assumptions) ... [and] acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations,” and are “characterized by a flexible and adaptive approach” to the research design that “acknowledges methodological anomalies and divergences” (p. x).

Finally, action research is often associated with emancipatory uses of qualitative research, as discussed above. Eubanks (2011) provided an excellent case study of participatory action research in her discussion of and reflection on her attempts to design technology-training programs with women living in a YMCA in New York. Not only did Eubanks’ research lead her to the development of a new, more-inclusive approach to technology design, she also wrote at length about how her own understandings of technology, her research participants, and herself shifted throughout the research process. For example, Eubanks explained that her “own understandings of high-tech equity had been so colonized by digital divide theory that [she] couldn’t hear past [her] own assumptions” (p. 33). However, Eubanks soon came to realize that the women she worked with were not technology-poor; in fact, their lives were pervaded by technology. This recognition, and a changing of her own perceptions, led Eubanks to develop the

understanding she needed to envision a more inclusive approach to technology design. Without the reflexive nature of qualitative research in combination with the time spent getting to know participants in participatory action research, it is likely that Eubanks' perception of her participants as separated from technology may have persisted, thus preventing her from identifying the real problem her participants faced, which was not a lack of access to technology, but a lack of agency over that technology.

Action research has also gained popularity in the field of writing studies with scholars such as Grabill (2007) conducting and advocating for citizen action research, in which citizens come together to solve problems, performing what Grabill defined as “the knowledge work of everyday life” (p. 2). Similarly, Grabill (2006) explained the critical turn in professional writing research, during which research began to address issues related to “the neutrality and objectivity of the researcher; the goals and purposes of research; and the rhetorical nature of research itself” (p. 153), as influenced by Sullivan and Porter's (1997) critical research methods. Researchers such as Grabill (2007), Eubanks (2011), and Salvo (2001) valued the localized and specific non-expert knowledge of the citizens affected by and enmeshed in the problem at hand. Additionally, usability researchers in professional and technical communication have also embraced theories of participatory and user-centered design (Salvo, 2001; Spinuzzi, 2005). Spinuzzi (2005) articulated participatory design as a research methodology and explained this methodology as a “way to understand *knowledge by doing*: the traditional, tactic, and often invisible . . . ways that people perform their everyday activities and how those activities might be shaped productively” (p. 163, emphasis in original). Like participatory action research, the approach on which participatory design is based, participatory design employs a mixed-methods approach while also

valuing participants' perspectives and interpretation of research results, as well as the development of an emerging research design that changes in response to participants' needs (Spinuzzi, 2005). This type of research does not devalue expert knowledge, but it does recognize the limits of expertise when that expertise is decontextualized. In other words, although experts may have knowledge that is useful for a group of citizens attempting to solve a problem, participatory or citizen action research rests on the assumption that people who deal with a problem in their daily lives will offer unique perspectives of the problem as well as unique approaches to solving the problem. Thus, combining the local, specific, and contextual knowledge of citizens *with* the knowledge of experts allows for the development of more robust and creative solutions to problems.

In their introduction to the 2015 special issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly* on "Contemporary Research Methodologies in Technical Communication," McNely, Spinuzzi, and Teston noted that "many tools, technologies, spaces, and practices of technical communication today bear little resemblance to those of the late 1990s" (p. 1). So, although qualitative research methods such as participatory design and action research have helped to shape research in the field of technical communication, rapid changes in the tools, technologies, spaces, and practices of writing have resulted in the need for technical communication scholars to "adapt and extend traditional qualitative approaches for nuances of contemporary technical communication" (McNely, Spinuzzi, & Teston, 2015, p. 6). The same is true across writing studies more broadly; as writing research continues to examine the writing practices that occur in technologically-mediated spaces, such as social networking technologies, it is important to consider how these digital spaces and tools create new ethical considerations for qualitative researchers.

Ethical Concerns in Digital Writing Research

The history of qualitative research and associated research ethics is rich in writing studies, though the scholarship in this discipline that deals explicitly with digital research methodologies and ethics is more limited. This is interesting because, as McKee and Porter (2008) have pointed out, “research that involves the Internet and other online spaces . . . is fundamentally composition research . . . because almost all communications that occur on the Web occur in writing” (p. 712). While video and audio web communications have certainly increased since the time of McKee and Porter’s 2008 publication, the definition of writing within writing studies has also expanded to include multimodal texts. Thus, McKee and Porter’s argument still holds true—web based communication is writing-based and, as such, should be of interest to scholars and researchers in these disciplines.

McKee and Porter (2008) defined digital writing research as that which “focuses on . . . computer-generated, computer-based, or computer-delivered documents; . . . computer-based text production; and . . . the interactions of people who use computerized technologies to communicate through digital means” (p. 712). Although many of the ethical concerns present in non-digital writing research are still relevant in the digital domain, the context of the digital raises a number of ethical concerns that are not present when conducting research in non-digital environments. The prominent ethical concerns that are unique in digital writing research are varied understandings of public versus private digital spaces, associated understandings of what counts as sensitive versus nonsensitive information, and understandings of authors and texts/data versus understandings of human subjects (McKee & Porter, 2008, pp. 731-737; AOIR, 2012, pp. 6-8).

Although Sullivan and Porter (1997) did present a chapter on “The Politics and Ethics of Studying Writing with Computers,” the technological landscape, as well as the pervasiveness of computer and mobile technologies in the lives of many American citizens, has changed drastically since the time of Sullivan and Porter’s writing. Sullivan and Porter focused primarily on issues of ethics as they related to systems of power that are enmeshed in technology and positioned critical digital writing research as a potential tool for liberation of the oppressed. At that time, issues of access and the concept of the digital divide were popular in computers and composition research. Of course, concerns regarding access are still relevant, but improvements to and the increased ubiquity of mobile technologies have made discussions of access and ideas of the digital divide less relevant, as evidenced in the earlier discussion of Eubanks and her recognition that her participants’ lives were pervaded by technology, while theories of the digital divide led Eubanks to assume that her impoverished participants would have limited access to technology.

Public versus Private

Prior to the advent of the Internet and its widespread adoption, it was fairly simple to determine if a piece of writing was published or unpublished. Published work was considered available for public consumption, while unpublished work was considered to be the private property of the author. However, as writing studies investigates the growing amount of writing that is happening on the web, researchers must ask themselves: Should the writing that happens in digital spaces be treated as public or private?

Although there is much debate on this topic, my answer to this question is: it depends. As noted by McKee and Porter (2008), each individual platform for communication on the web

exists according to particular community standards of use and varying degrees of public access. Some platforms, in particular social networking technologies, also offer users some degree of control regarding whether their personal information is publically searchable or available only to specified users. Additionally, users of a particular platform, or tool within a platform, might have differing expectations of privacy than those stated by the creators of the platform. Because of this widespread variation in understandings of privacy between platform and user, as well as the diverse types of writing that take place on the web, McKee and Porter (2008) argued that digital writing research must consider, in addition to whether writing on the web is public or private, whether the writing is dealing with topics of a sensitive nature. Thus, when determining whether or not IRB approval is needed to analyze writing on the web, the researcher must consider the expectations of privacy among users of the particular platform, expectations of privacy for the users whose writing is the subject of study, and the sensitivity of the writing topic. For example, while any information that a college professor posts on his or her publically searchable academic blog would be considered public and non-sensitive information and, as a result, would not require informed consent for use, a post by a 20-year-old college student in a discussion forum for individuals struggling with an eating disorder should be considered differently. While the discussion forum might be publically searchable, it is likely that, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and that the forum is intended for use by people with eating disorders, users might consider their writing in this space to be private. In a situation like this, I would argue that informed consent is necessary. Not only is it likely that this community of users has some expectations of privacy, the sensitivity of the topic requires that individuals be allowed to decide if they wish to participate in the research project. Concerns regarding privacy and the sensitivity

of information are especially relevant to my research population of veterans and current military personnel, many of whom take careful measures to protect both their identities and their military affiliation in digital spaces. As I discuss later in this chapter, I view my participants' writing in social networking spaces as private or semi-private interactions and, as such, I have obtained express permission from my participants when including and analyzing images or texts from their social networking sites.

Author versus Person

McKee and Porter (2008) argued that although “some regard the Internet as a vast storehouse of available writings to be harvested freely by any and all researchers . . . not all postings to the Internet should be treated like books in a library” (p. 733). This quote addresses the issue of how we understand writing on the Internet—should writing that happens in digital spaces be treated as a text or data composed by an author, or as part of the identity of an individual (or perhaps multiple) human subject(s)?

Again, I argue that the answer to this question is largely dependent upon the type of writing and the forum in which it is found. Some writing on the web clearly operates according to print-based standards, such as writing published in online scholarly journals, online magazines, or online news outlets. Digital writing that falls into these categories is considered published and authored and can be used and cited accordingly. Although much of the writing on the web does not fall into such clear cut categories, all web-based writing “of any sort in any venue, are pieces of writing in a tangible format—and, as such, they are copyrighted from the point of their creation” (McKee & Porter, 2008, p. 734). As a result, McKee and Porter stated that in “most digital writing research, there is no such thing as ‘person’” (p. 734), an idea that I

argue against in later chapters. Here, McKee and Porter were responding to the person/author topos and the way in which digital writing research had often positioned author and person on opposite ends of a continuum. Following the understanding that texts produced on the Internet are protected by copyright, the distinction of person is never valid, and all texts on the Internet are thus read as texts produced by an author, making these texts subject to citation but not to IRB protocols for research with human subjects. Recognizing that the positioning of author and person as false binaries, McKee and Porter argued that “the continuum should instead develop along the distinctions of author/person versus person/author,” an important step toward enabling digital writing researchers to make well-informed ethical decisions about their research. However, I argue that, rather than being understood as a text that is authored, the type of writing that happens in social networking spaces, particularly, should be read as communicative interactions.

Regardless of this distinction, though, I agree with McKee and Porter’s (2008) assessment that, regarding digital writing, fair use guidelines always apply, while informed consent may be necessary. Again, the researcher must assess whether the writing is, or is expected to be, private or public, whether the writing deals with a sensitive or non-sensitive topic, and whether the writing is considered published or semi-published. Although there are clear cases in each of these categories, there will always be blurry spaces as well. In fact, fair use guidelines themselves are open for interpretation, as they are a set of principles designed to guide an individual in determining whether Fair Use applies in a particular situation. Thus, in addition to determining if the writing they wish to research is public or private, written by an author or representative of a person, digital writing researchers must also consider if and when Fair Use

applies to their work. Thus, when determining whether digital writing research requires informed consent, in addition to consulting with the IRB, digital writing researchers should consider plotting their research along these axes (public → private and author → person) to determine if informed consent should be obtained. In Figure 1, I have plotted my research participant Jethro's two primary social networking profiles on McKee and Porter's (2008) grid to demonstrate how understandings of privacy can vary from person to person and from site to site. Although Jethro's Instagram profile is completely public, he does reveal some sensitive information in this space, such as references to drug use. However, as discussed further in Chapter Four, Jethro's audience in Instagram is much different from his audience in Facebook, which consists largely of family members, friends, and other strong ties, and Jethro tends not to reveal sensitive information in Facebook, although his Facebook profile is private, viewable only to friends. However, as shown in Figure 1, neither of Jethro's profiles fall squarely in the portion of the grid requiring or not requiring informed consent, further contributing to my decision to obtain not only informed consent, but also express permission from Jethro when using any text or images from his social networking profiles. Figure 2 shows the sample scenarios discussed earlier as plotted on McKee and Porter's (2008) grid to provide additional points of comparison.

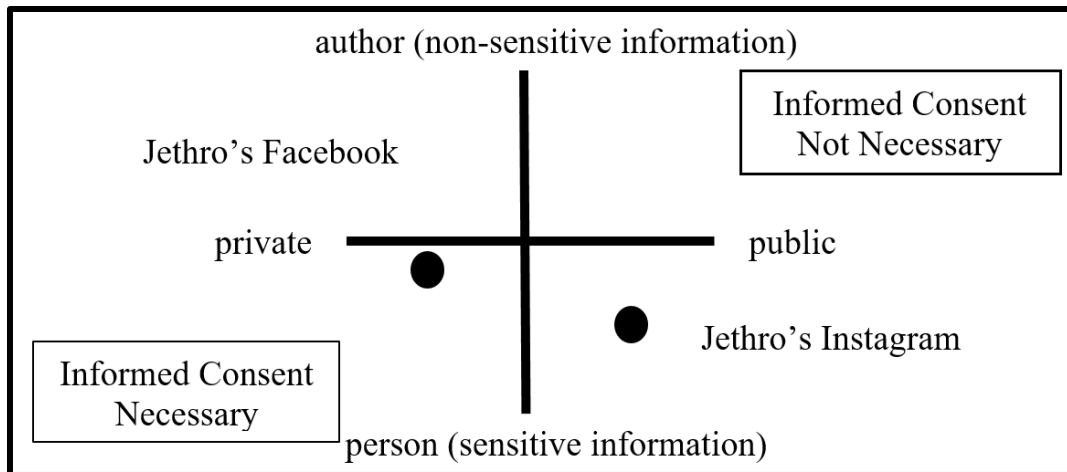


Figure 1. McKee and Porter's (2008) grid to determine necessity for informed consent in digital writing research.

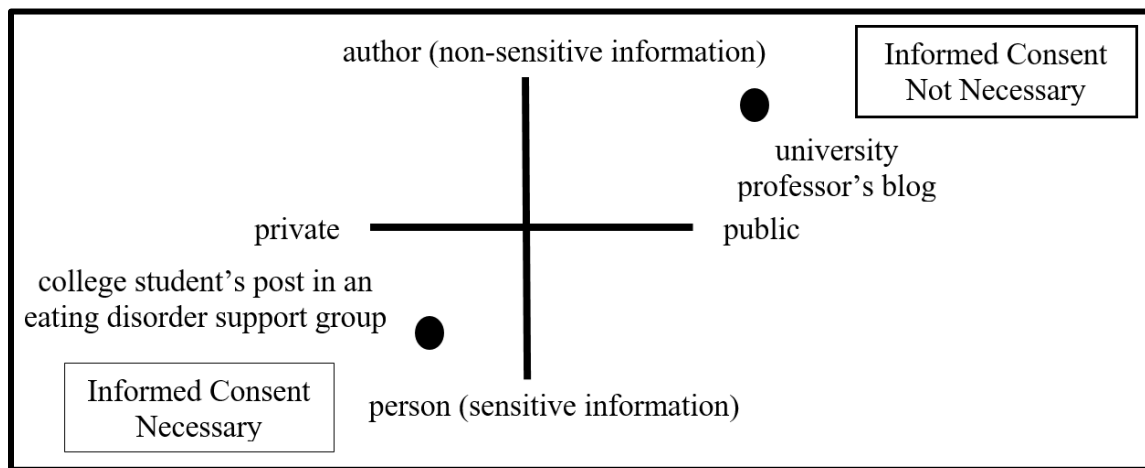


Figure 2. McKee and Porter's (2008) grid for ethical decision making in digital writing research with sample scenarios.

Casuistic-Heuristic Approach

Because of the myriad of individual ethical decisions that must be made when conducting digital writing research, McKee and Porter (2008) recommended a casuistic-heuristic approach to conducting digital writing research and described this approach as “a rhetorical, case-based

approach to ethical decision making that uses rhetorical principles of invention and analysis in order to address the tough ethical questions facing researchers studying writing in digital environments” (p. 720, emphasis in original). The casuistic-heuristic approach requires that paradigm cases be established to set a standard baseline for what is considered unethical behavior. New cases are then compared to paradigm cases, and the “circumstances of the case” are thoroughly examined and discussed among a research community in order to determine the best course of ethical action for designing and executing the research. This case-based approach also encourages “attentiveness . . . to the complexities, differences, and nuances of human experience, including the researcher’s own experiences” (p. 724).

Finally, the casuistic-heuristic approach also encourages an attention to audience, which includes both research participants and the researcher’s professional colleagues, and encourages the researcher to consult with these audiences when determining ethical considerations for research studies. Not only did McKee and Porter (2008) advocate for the researcher to consult with research participants during the research process regarding the design of the study, they also recommended, in accordance with the *CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies* (2003), that the researcher consult various other groups, such as institutional agencies, other experienced researchers, and existing research studies. However, in digital writing research, it can be more challenging to determine these multiple audiences (McKee & Porter, 2008; AOIR, 2012). In 2015, the *CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies* were revised to include a section on conducting studies involving digital/online media, which recommended that digital writing researchers should “explicitly justify [their] research choices and [their] positioning as researchers when [they] plan,

conduct, and publish [their] studies” so as to make clear the ways in which the researcher negotiated the topics of public vs. private, author vs. person, and informed consent. This focus on explicit justification of both research choices and the situatedness of the researcher recognizes the value of the casuistic-heuristic approach recommended by McKee and Porter (2008) in its explicit attention to context, situational details, and the researcher’s positionality.

My Positionality

In an effort to situate myself in relation to the topic of my research and to my research participants, I use this section to discuss my own motivations as researcher, teacher, and citizen. Here, I argue that my motivations as researcher, teacher, and citizen align in a concern for the ways in which we, as writing instructors, can better facilitate student veterans’ transition into the academy. I also argue that my conversations with my research participants and my decision to ask my research participants for their feedback regarding my analysis of their social networking practices was instrumental in my understanding of my participants’ social networking use.

As a researcher, I am committed to learning more about the types of digital communication my participants value and why. My use of critical research methods allows my research participants to speak for themselves—to tell me what is important in the context of their social networking use—rather than searching for the presence of pre-defined activities that I find valuable. This is why, in the profile tours that I discuss later in this chapter, although I had a set of questions to guide my participants’ discussion, I relied on my participants to determine which elements of their social networking profiles were and were not relevant regarding their identity. Of course, in order to keep the project manageable, boundaries were needed, which led me to locate my research within social networking technologies, focusing primarily on the

communicative acts that take place in these spaces for the purposes of identity presentation and/or narrative building. Learning more about my participants and what is important to them has also allowed me to work toward an understanding of student veterans as individuals, rather than as a representation of one of our culture's predominant tropes of the veteran as hero or wounded warrior, important work as more student veterans enter the college classroom, as discussed in Chapter One.

As a teacher, my goal is to minimize the challenges student veterans face at the classroom level, thus demonstrating my commitment to my two primary audiences, student veterans and college writing professors. Anecdotally, from my own teaching experience, I find that military-affiliated students are often the most goal-oriented and task-driven students in the course. However, I have also found that when these students face a writing task for which the purpose is unclear, they are not as motivated to succeed. I have also spoken casually to a number of student veterans enrolled in my courses over the years who have had trouble with their post-9/11 GI Bill funding, who were unsure of how to access resources available to them on campus, and who experienced moments in the university in which they felt ostracized as a result of their military affiliations. As a writing instructor, I am often the first introduction many of my students have to the university, and writing classes are often, particularly at larger universities, the smallest class students will take in their first semester at the university. As a result, students may feel more comfortable approaching their writing instructor for help navigating university resources, and it is important to me to be able to effectively guide any student to relevant campus resources.

I am also personally committed to my research population of current or former military personnel as a result of my personal connection to the military. My father was a member of the

U.S. Army during the Vietnam War, and not only did I grow up watching him struggle with various disabilities as a result of his service, I also witnessed him struggle to effectively navigate the services available to veterans in the US, many of which are lacking in scope and effect. Regardless of my thoughts about the morals of war, I do believe that, as a nation, it is our responsibility to care for those who have defended our various freedoms, and I hope that my research will make a small step toward making higher education a more welcoming environment for our military-affiliated students. I return to discussions of my positionality later in this chapter, where I address the ways in which self-reflection and critique informed the development of my method.

In the interest of developing an interpretive study that was focused on people and valued “different views” and “multiple meanings” (Stake, 2010, p. 15), I have intentionally encouraged my participants, in the interviews and profile tours discussed later in this chapter, to analyze their own interactions within social networking spaces. In addition to offering my research participants’ interpretations of their own communicative acts, I also offer my own interpretation if it differs or expands upon the interpretation of the participant. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants, allowing space for “unexpected developments” to emerge in the research process (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Finally, in order to allow my participants ownership of their own words and ideas, and in line with the value action research places on participants’ perspectives and interpretation of research results, each of my interview and profile tour participants have been given the opportunity to offer suggestions for revision, or to offer additional information to clarify ideas, in the sections of the following chapters in which they are

represented.⁷ Self-reflexivity, recognizing my own positionality as a researcher, and valuing the varied perspectives of my research participants was vital in allowing me to accurately represent my research participants as individuals who are part of a heterogeneous group of current, former, and future military personnel.

As discussed above, qualitative research's focus on the particular allowed me to use the data I have collected from surveys, interviews and profile tours to highlight my individual participants. And although the research presented here investigates student veterans as a group, I do so with the recognition that student veterans are not a homogenous group and that each student veteran has unique experiences. The qualitative and critical research methods discussed above have allowed me to resist stereotyping, as qualitative methods allow the researcher to "seek data that represent personal experience in particular situations" (Stake, 2010, p. 88). It is this data about the unique experiences of student veterans, in particular their unique experiences with digital literacy practices, that I am concerned with here, allowing this project to add to the growing body of literature dedicated to developing a more accurate public image of veterans, while also contributing to the body of literature concerned with how to better respond to student veterans in the college writing classroom.

My research design also addresses the prominent ethical concerns surrounding digital writing research: issues of public vs. private and author vs. person. Because my research

⁷ Only one of my participants, Jethro, whose interview and profile tour are discussed at length in Chapter Four, offered feedback on my writing and analysis. Jethro provided feedback only on Chapter Four, although he did provide feedback on the full chapter, not only on the portion in which his digital narratives are discussed. Not only did Jethro's feedback enhance my understanding of his digital narratives, he also offered valuable interpretations of other participant data discussed in the chapter.

participants' perspectives of their own social networking use are vital to my research, and because much of the information my participants shared with me was semi-public or, in some cases, private, I obtained informed consent at each stage of data collection—surveys, interviews, and profile tours. The IRB did not require signed informed consent at any stage of the research process; however, the informed consent document appeared as the first item participants viewed in the survey. Additionally, the informed consent document was provided, via email, to each of my interview and profile tour participants in advance of our meeting, and I discussed the informed consent document, as well as how I would use the data collected from the interviews and profile tours in this dissertation and in later publications and presentations, in detail. Finally, participants who provided contact information were given the option to determine how they would like to be referred to in publications and presentations involving this research—by full name, first name, or pseudonym. Each participant that responded asked to be identified by pseudonym, although only one participant, Jethro, took the opportunity to choose his own pseudonym. Just as I think my participants' voices and perspectives are important in understanding their online identities, their perspectives are also important to my ability to represent their identities accurately.

I also made the decision to obtain express permission from my participants when including and analyzing screenshots for their social networking profiles. Although some of my participants maintained publically searchable social networking profiles, I did not make use of any content without obtaining permission. Although this decision did limit the data set I had access to for this project, I am confident knowing that I have not violated any of my participants' expectations of privacy. While a researcher conducting a similar study might view the texts

composed in social networking sites as public and non-sensitive, leading him or her to analyze publically searchable profiles of student veterans and likely widening the researcher's pool of data, I argue that because most social networking users view their posts as semi-private communicative interactions, these texts should be treated as private, and informed consent should be obtained. Finally, because it was not feasible to obtain informed consent from other users whose social networking profiles were linked to those of Jethro, whose digital narratives I analyze in depth in Chapter Four, I chose to redact both real and screen names in any screen shots taken of Jethro's social networking profiles. Additionally, when these screen shots include faces of my participant or his connections, I have used digital software to lightly blur the faces of these individuals.

Research Methods

Research Questions

One important element of critical research practices is the recognition that research questions are “an intermediate state [of the research study], though in much published research they pretend to be the starting point” (Sullivan & Porter, 1997, p. 5). I found this statement to ring true when I was developing this study; what began as an investigation into whether the U.S. military provided adequate social media training to military personnel has grown into a study of the ways in which military personnel use the digital literacy practices associated with social networking technologies for purposes of narrative building and identity formation. Yet, without my prior research on U.S. military social media policy documents, I would not have been prepared to conduct the research that formed the basis for this dissertation.

In addition to allowing research questions to develop over time, Sullivan and Porter (1997) urged researchers to make evident “the political and ethical positioning of the questions” (p. 5). Part of this work was done above, as I revealed my motivations as researcher, teacher, and citizen in working with military personnel as my research population. I complete that work here, as I discuss the exigency of and what I hope to learn from each of my research questions.

The first set of research questions I developed was:

- In what ways do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies for personal, professional, and academic purposes?
- How are digital literacy practices being employed by student veterans during these uses of social networking technologies?

The exigency for my examination of the digital literacy practices employed by student veterans as they use social networking technologies stems from recent work in the field of writing studies that associate social networking technologies with digital literacies (Balzhiser, 2011; Buck, 2012; Davies, 2012; Fife, 2010; Kimme Hea, 2014; Shepherd, 2015; Shih, 2011; Vie, 2008). Discussed at length in Chapter One, this body of work is growing and developing, and this dissertation contributes to this emerging body of knowledge. Work that values the types of writing that happens in social networking spaces is important because these are increasingly the spaces in which our students (and faculty themselves) are writing. Rather than making an all-too-common argument about the deterioration of writing or students’ inability to compose outside of social networking technologies (Arum & Roksa, 2010; Birkerts, 2006; Carr, 2011), I argue that it is important to meet our students where they are, to value the writing and reading they engage in, and to demonstrate the ways in which the rhetorical and literate practices they develop while

communicating within these digital spaces can be applied to other communicative situations, such as a classroom assignment or a piece of workplace writing.

Connected to the field's interest in digital literacies is an interest in the ways in which users of social networking technologies present their identities online. Researchers who have identified social networking spaces as sites in which digital literacy practices are employed have also associated identity presentation with digital literacy practices (Buck, 2012; Davies, 2012; Kimmons, 2014; Shepherd, 2015), while other researchers in the field of writing studies have examined the role of individual, professional, and organizational identity in social networking spaces (Kaufer, Gunawardena, Tan, & Cheek, 2011; Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Pigg & Dadurka, 2012; Rice, 2009; Shin, Pan, & Kim, 2015). Identity presentation in social networking spaces is particularly important for military personnel, though, as their online identities are often viewed as an extension of the identity of the U.S. military, and of U.S. citizens at large. Consequences also exist when military personnel portray an online identity that resists the overall narrative of the military, as evidenced by stories such as that of Specialist Terry Harrison, whose Instagram posts resulted in national outrage and her indefinite suspension from the U.S. National Guard (Penzenstadler, 2014). As a member of the U.S. National Guard, Harrison and her coworkers were responsible for participating in ceremonies at military funerals for veterans or servicemembers, but two of Harrison's Instagram posts that poked fun at these rituals were considered by many to be distasteful, unprofessional, and in direct opposition to the organizational narrative of the U.S. military. In one post, Harrison and 13 of her fellow soldiers are pictured around a casket that is covered in an American flag, as is common in military funerals. However, Harrison and her comrades are clearly jovial rather than serious, as one might

expect. Comical expressions and body language, coupled with the caption “We put the FUN in funeral—your fearless honor guard from various states,” angered many viewers and caused the post to go viral (Penzanstadler, 2014). Additionally, another post on Harrison’s Instagram added to the public’s outrage: Harrison posted a selfie from her car, in uniform, with the caption, “It’s so damn cold out...WHY have a funeral outside? Somebody’s getting a jacked up flag.”⁸

Whatever our personal reactions to Harrison’s post, we must also remember that the content of her posts pales in comparison to the images that circulated the Internet during the Abu Ghraib scandal of 2003. Near Baghdad, Abu Ghraib prison became an American military prison early in the Iraq war, and before 2003 was over, the prison was identified as the site of a number of human rights violations, many of which were supported by video and photographic evidence. Disturbingly, not only were these acts of extreme violence and humiliation against Iraqi prisoners (many of whom were civilians) committed at the hands of American soldiers working in Abu Ghraib, those committing the acts of violence were also the ones filming it, leading Seymour Hersh (2004), writer for *The New Yorker*, to argue that this “abuse of prisoners seemed almost routine—a fact of Army life that the soldiers felt no need to hide” (para. 11).

While one may sympathize with Harrison, who seems to have made some unfortunate decisions regarding audience along with some questionable attempts at humor, it is much more difficult to sympathize with the seven U.S. military personnel at Abu Ghraib directly involved in human rights abuses against Iraqi prisoners. Although the images from Abu Ghraib are certainly

⁸ In line with my positionality as a critical researcher, I have purposefully chosen not to include a reproduction of Harrison’s Instagram posts. Although these images are readily available online, because I was unable to attain Harrison’s permission to use the images, I have not included them here.

disturbing, without photographic and video evidence, these abuses may not have been discovered, and future abuses may not have been prevented. However, it is also important to remember that stories like Harrison's are not the norm, nor is Abu Ghraib. And while it is easy to attack individuals like Harrison, who received a significant amount of digital backlash in addition to the penalties she faced in the material world, it is likely that most individuals will have some elements of their identity that contradict the organizational narratives they represent, and military personnel are no different.

However, because student veterans are often in the process of negotiating between their military, civilian, and student identities, it is important that we, as writing instructors and researchers, understand how student veterans understand themselves. To that end, in an effort to better understand how student veterans negotiate their varied identities in online spaces, I asked:

- In what ways do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies to negotiate their veteran identities in online spaces? In what ways do these digital narratives of student veterans support or resist traditional veteran narratives?

These questions are also motivated by an interest in the relationship between stereotypes and identity formation. In light of prevalent tropes of the veteran, these questions allowed me to analyze the ways in which veterans' identity construction in digital spaces might resist or reinforce these stereotypes. Not only does this work allow my research participants to offer a number of alternatives to the stereotypical tropes of veteran as hero or wounded warrior, it also contributes to the work of writing researchers who are interested in the relationship between writing and identity. Through the ubiquity of social networking technologies, users share their thoughts, through writing, in public or semi-public ways, more than ever before, and my research

here helps to build toward an understanding of how social networking technologies affect the processes of identity formation and presentation. Additionally, learning about how student veterans negotiate their varied identities in digital spaces might allow writing faculty to better facilitate the process of identity negotiation that student veterans undergo when entering college. As discussed in Chapter One, many student veterans struggle with the process of negotiating their existing military identity with their return to a civilian identity. Adding the identity of a student, in addition to other identity positions the student veteran may inhabit (e.g., parent, spouse, child, worker), can often be overwhelming. Understanding how student veterans negotiate their individual online identities can help us, as writing instructors, to better assist our student veterans in the process of understanding their student identity, and also allows us to encourage the transfer of digital literacy practices from the military to the classroom.

In addition to often experiencing difficulty in their transition to a civilian and/or student identity, many student veterans often experience difficulty navigating both on- and off-campus resources that may be vital to their success. My interest in guiding student veterans to useful resources encouraged me to ask questions about student veterans' participation in particular communities within particular social networking technologies:

- For what purposes do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies to seek out online communities of other veterans or communities that offer support to veterans?

Not only does this set of questions allow me to identify particular digital resources that might be beneficial for student veterans, it also allows me to identify the needs student veterans are turning to these digital communities to fill, information that might better allow institutions of

higher learning to provide additional useful and effective campus resources to address our student veterans' needs.

The final exigence for my project is rooted in theories of transfer. Although the U.S. military does allow military personnel to maintain social networking accounts for both personal and organizational purposes, the military also restricts the information that military personnel are allowed to release. While this restriction of information is for purposes of operational security (OPSEC) and is in no way unique to social networking communication, I argue that these communication restrictions may make military personnel more attuned to the importance of audience and context when using social networking technologies, practices which could potentially be transferred and applied to new situations. In order to investigate how military service might have affected the ways in which student veterans used social networking technologies before and after service and to determine if the training and/or restrictions provided by the military regarding use of social networking technologies affected the way in which military personnel used social networking technologies after ending their service, I asked:

- How did post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies during previous service and prior to service? What are the similarities and differences in how post-9/11 era student veterans currently use social networking technologies in comparison with how they used social networking technologies while serving in the U.S. military?

Overall, I composed my research questions with an awareness of my own positionality in mind. Because I am not a member of this population, I do not purport to make any assumptions about the ways in which student veterans do or do not use social networking technologies.

However, when developing these questions, I hoped that they would allow me to better understand the individual ways in which student veterans develop and use digital literacy practices in social networking spaces for the purposes of narrative building and/or identity presentation, and whether or not these narratives and online identities resist or reinforce traditional tropes of the veteran. Additionally, as discussed above, I provided my interview and profile participants the opportunity to read and offer revisions to my manuscript in order to ensure that my interpretations of them were accurate. In areas of the manuscript where my perception of a participant is different from their own, I included a description of both of our understandings so as to highlight the importance of audience when examining issues of digital narrative and identity.

Study Design

The design of my study is heavily influenced by the work of Buck and Davies, and I implement elements of each author's research design into my own. Buck (2012a, 2012b) conducted a case study of the digital literacy practices of one undergraduate student, relying on Lankshear and Knobel's definition of digital literacies as "myriad social practices" (as cited in Buck, 2012, p. 10). Buck was able to examine her participant's self-presentation strategies and trace the participant's digital literacy practices across two semesters by

- conducting individual interviews with the participant,
- observing the participant's online activity and the texts he contributed to social networking sites,
- collecting a time use diary kept by the participant, and

- conducting a participant-directed profile tour, in which the participant explained his various social networking profiles to the researcher.

Similarly, Davies (2012) examined the literacy practices of 25 U.K. teenagers in Facebook, arguing that new literacy practices are “collaborative, participative, multimodal and distributed and therefore less individuated and less author-centered” (p. 21). Davies traced her participants’ digital literacy practices by conducting semi-structured interviews, creating friendship groups amongst participants (in which all members of the friendship group were members of each other’s networks on Facebook), conducting participant-led Facebook tours, and collecting and analyzing screenshots of data contributed by the participants.

Like Buck (2012a, 2012b) and Davies (2012), I wanted to include both interviews and profile tours in my data collection process. I chose to conduct interviews for their ability to provide me with more in-depth information about student veterans’ social networking technology use than I could gather from a survey or through observation, but I also wanted to collect more general information about the typical social networking habits of military personnel. So, I began the data collection process by administering a digital survey designed for current, former, or future military personnel, who may or may not have been actively enrolled college students at the time of completing the survey. I used this survey as an initial data gathering effort, as well as to identify participants for the second phase of my study, consisting of the semi-structured interviews and participant-led profile tours. In line with the reflexive nature of critical research practices, the data I collected and analyzed from the survey greatly influenced the lines of questioning I pursued in the interviews and profile tours.

Participant Selection

My dissertation project was designed to result in pedagogical and administrative suggestions for working with post-9/11 student veterans in the writing classroom and in the university at large. However, it was also important to me *not* to discount the experiences of current, former, or future military personnel who may *not* be students (either now or previously) or who may not be veterans of the post-9/11 era. As a result, I marketed my survey to all current, former, and future U.S. military personnel, indicating areas in which the data collected from my pre-9/11 veteran participants differs from the data collected from my post-9/11 veteran participants. Similarly, I discuss areas in which the data collected from my student veteran participants differed from the data collected from my non-student veteran participants. Additionally, I chose to use the terminology “current, former, and future U.S. military personnel,” rather than “veteran,” whenever possible, in order to be as inclusive as possible, as discussed in Chapter One.

Of the 77 participants who began my survey, 61 identified as current, former, or future military personnel. The 16 surveys in which the participant indicated that he or she was not current, former, or future military personnel were immediately discarded from my results. Of the 61 remaining participants, only 36 completed the survey in full, with participants tending to drop out around the mid-point of the survey. Although the survey contains 46 questions in total, many of the questions included logic and, as a result, no single participant would ever encounter all 46 questions. I discuss the dropout rate of my survey in greater detail in Chapter Five when I discuss the limitations of this study. However, for this project, I have only analyzed the data collected

from the 36 participants who completed the survey in full, and the demographics of these participants are represented in Tables 2 and 3.

As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, although a large percentage of the participants who complete my survey identified as former military personnel, a small percentage of my participants identified as currently enrolled students. While this is a limitation of my study, I was pleasantly surprised to see the wide distribution of age ranges, time served, and military branch affiliation. Although I expected that my survey distribution methods would result in a large number of student veteran participants, instead my survey participants represented a wider demographic range than I expected.

Of the 36 participants who completed my survey, 19 indicated willingness to be contacted for an interview. Of those 19 participants, three responded to my follow-up requests and participated in an interview as well as a profile tour, explained in detail below. The difficulty that I experienced enrolling research participants in the interview and profile tour phase of my study was somewhat unexpected; while I did not anticipate that I would reach each of the 19 participants that indicated an interest in participating in a follow-up interview and profile tour, I hoped to conduct interviews and profile tours with a minimum of five participants. I cannot pinpoint the exact reason for the low rate of participation in the second phase of my data collection, but I expect that the length and perceived redundancy in the survey, which I discuss in Chapter Five, may have influenced my survey participants' decisions to remain in the study during the second phase of data collection. However, after conducting profile tours with the three participants who remained enrolled in the study, it became evident that the interview and profile tour conducted with a student veteran resulted in richer data that was more relevant to my project

than those conducted with a pre-9/11 veteran and a career military officer who served both before and after 9/11. Although these two interviews and profile tours did produce interesting data, in order to better highlight the ways in which student veterans might make use of social networking technologies, I chose to focus on only the interview and profile tour conducted with the student veteran participant, and it is this interview and profile tour that I examine in depth in Chapter Four.

Additionally, as discussed above, I made the decision to assign each of my participants' a pseudonym, with the exception of one participant, Jethro, who chose his own pseudonym. The use of pseudonyms for all of my participants allowed me to highlight the individuality of each of my participants, even when analyzing survey data. I used an online random name generator, behindthename.com, to create pseudonyms for my participants, controlling only for gender when running the generator. Thus, anyone who identified as a male in their survey response was assigned a traditionally masculine name, while participants who identified as female were assigned traditionally feminine names. Participants' pseudonyms along with their particular demographics can be found in Table 4.

Table 2: Military specific demographics of participants.

Are you a current, former, or future member of the U.S. Armed Forces?	Former Military Personnel	27
	Current Military Personnel	9
In what branches of the military have you served? (Several participants served in multiple branches.)	Army	14
	Navy	5
	Marines	8
	Air Force	7
	National Guard	3
	Coast Guard	2
How many years have you served in the U.S. Armed Forces?	1-4 years	8
	5-8 years	13
	9-12 years	10
	13+ years	5

Table 3: Participant demographics.

Gender	Male	26
	Female	10
Age	18-24	1
	25-34	15
	35-44	14
	45-54	2
	55-64	4
Current Student Status	Currently Enrolled Student	6
	Not a currently Enrolled Student	30
Type of Institution Attended (for currently enrolled students only)	2-year college	1
	4-year public university	3
	4-year private university	2

Table 4: Participant pseudonyms and individual demographics.

Pseudonym	Veteran Status	Branch	Years Served	Gender	Age	Rank*
Aiden	veteran	Navy	1-4	M	25-34	Petty Officer Third Class (E-4)
Alden	veteran	Marines	20	M	55-64	Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CW3)
Anneliese	student veteran	Air Force National Guard	9-12	F	25-34	Staff Sergeant (E-5)
Chase	veteran	Navy	5-8	M	45-54	Petty Officer First Class (E-6)
Clifton**	current military personnel	Air Force	17	M	35-44	Lieutenant Colonel (O5)
Clinton	current military personnel	Marines	9-12	M	25-34	(E-6) Staff Sergeant
Colbert	veteran	Navy	5-8	M	25-34	Petty Officer Third Class (E-4)
Corey	current military personnel	National Guard	1-4	M	18-24	Staff Sergeant (E-6); Officer candidate
Dave	veteran	Marines	5-8	M	25-34	Sergeant (E-5)
Driscoll	veteran	Coast Guard	1-4	M	55-64	Petty Officer Second Class (E-5)
Edison	veteran	Army	1-4	M	35-44	Army Specialist (E-4)
Ericka	veteran	Marines	5-8	F	35-44	Sergeant (E-5)
Ethan	veteran	Marines	5-8	M	45-54	Corporal (E-4)
Gary	veteran	Navy	5-8	M	55-64	Petty Officer First Class (E-6)
Griffin	veteran	Army	9-12	M	25-34	Staff Sergeant (E-6)
Jethro**	student veteran	Army	1-4	M	25-34	Army Specialist (E-4)
Joanie	current military personnel	Air Force	9-12	F	35-44	Major (O4)
Johnny	veteran	Air Force	5-8	M	35-44	Senior Airman (E-4)
Julie	current military personnel	Army	5-8	F	25-34	Captain (O3)

Pseudonym	Veteran Status	Branch	Years Served	Gender	Age	Rank*
Katherine	veteran	Navy	1-4	F	25-34	Petty Officer Third Class (E-4)
Mackenzie	veteran	National Guard	9-12	F	25-34	Sergeant (E-5)
Mattheus	student veteran	Army	9-12	M	25-34	Sergeant (E-5)
Melanie	veteran	Army	5-8	F	35-44	Army Specialist (E-4)
Oliver**	veteran	Air Force	1-4	M	55-64	Airman First Class (E-3)
Philip	student veteran	Army Marines	9-12	M	35-44	--
Randolph	current military personnel	Army	18	M	25-34	Sergeant First Class (E-7)
Royce	veteran	Army	5-8	M	35-44	Army Specialist (E-4)
Rupert	veteran	Marines	5-8	M	35-44	Sergeant (E-5)
Samantha	student veteran	Marines	5-6	F	25-34	Lance Corporal (E-3)
Sherwood	veteran	Army	21	M	35-44	Sergeant First Class (E-7)
Simone	current military personnel	Army	9-12	F	35-44	Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO-2)
Tiana	veteran	Army	1-4	F	35-44	Army Specialist (E-4)
Tim	current military personnel	Coast Guard	14	M	35-44	Lieutenant Commander (O4)
Thornton	current military personnel	Air Force	5-8	M	25-34	Technical Sergeant (E-6)
Walt	student veteran	Army	9-12	M	25-34	--
Zachariah	veteran	Air Force	9-12	M	34-34	Captain (O3)

*Current rank for active military personnel; rank at end of service for former military personnel.

**Denotes participation in an interview and profile tour.

Survey Design

First, I began with a general survey (Appendix A) of current, former, and future U.S. military personnel, designed to collect general data about how my participants used social networking technologies. My goal was to collect a minimum of 100 survey responses. However, in part because the project was conducted over the summer, when many student veterans are not on campus, and in part because of the way in which I distributed the call for my research, which I discuss later, I only received 61 survey participants who identified as current or former military. None of the participants who completed my survey identified as future military personnel.

The results of the survey provided me with a data pool that helped me to identify which social networking technologies are preferred by the participants in my study, as well as how frequently and for what purposes these social networking technologies are used. Since I am interested in personal, academic, and professional uses of social networking technologies, my survey includes questions about all of these uses. In addition to providing me with valuable data, however, the survey also asked participants to indicate if they would be willing to participate in follow-up interviews and profile tours.

My survey includes some multiple choice questions, which I included because research indicates that respondents are more likely to complete surveys that contain multiple choice or check-off box questions (MacNealy, 1999, p. 153). Additionally, I value the quantitative data that resulted from these questions, and I used this data in later chapters to note areas of similarities and differences across my population of research participants. However, my survey also contains open-ended questions, which have the potential to “elicit information that the

researcher may not anticipate” and are “especially appropriate for surveys of an area about which little is known” (p. 153), such as the digital literacy practices of student veterans using social networking technologies.

Survey Methods

I relied primarily on snowball sampling methods to reach potential survey participants. Personally, I am acquainted with several student veterans, several current military personnel, and several military spouses.⁹ I asked these individuals if they would be willing to complete my survey or to ask people in their military networks who might be willing to take the survey to do so. Because social networking technologies are the site of my study, and because my contact with many of these people is located solely within Facebook, I used Facebook as a way to facilitate many of these requests, sending personal requests along with a brief description of my dissertation to several of my personal contacts.

Additionally, again because social networking technologies are the site of my study, I distributed the link to my survey via Facebook and Twitter, the two social networking sites that I use regularly. Between opening the survey on June 22, 2015 and closing the survey on September 6, 2015, I posted the link to my survey on Facebook five times and on Twitter three times. My Facebook posts resulted in 63 trackable shares and six tags, and my tweets resulted in nine retweets and two favorites. Examples of these calls for participants are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

⁹ None of the student veterans who I asked to participate in my study or who I asked to share my study were or are *my* students.

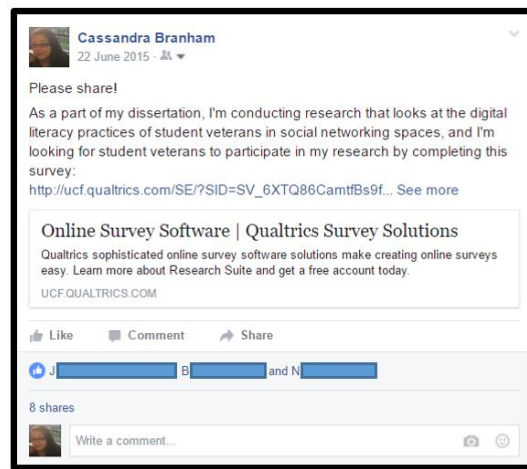


Figure 3. Call for research participants via Facebook.

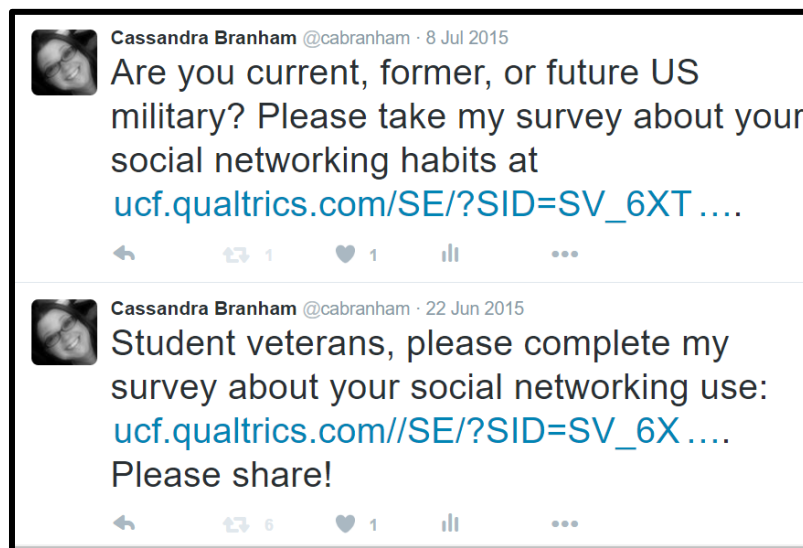


Figure 4. Call for research participants via Twitter.

While I could have certainly shared the link to my survey on Facebook and Twitter more during this period of time, my personal worries about bothering the members of my social networks inhibited me from doing so. I found myself very uncomfortable with the promotion of

my own survey and, as a result, did not make the most effective use of my own social network. Although I am active on Facebook, my “friends” consists of both professional and personal contacts, and I worried that my personal contacts would be confused or annoyed by my posts. I am far less active on Twitter and have fewer contacts in this social networking space, yet most of my contacts in Twitter are purely professional. In retrospect, I should have worked on leveraging Twitter more effectively to distribute my survey. Not only are my professional contacts much more likely to share posts related to my scholarly work, the retweet function embedded within Twitter makes this sharing much easier. In fact, in Facebook, several people within my network attempted to share my post, but inadvertently shared only the decontextualized link to my survey, without an explanation of what the survey was about or for whom it was intended, which may have contributed to the presence of some survey participants who did not fit within the study population.

Finally, at the recommendation of one of my student veteran contacts, I decided to post the link to my survey, along with a link for participation, in several online communities for veterans. The majority of these posts received no attention, but one post to a particular Facebook group elicited a negative reaction from one veteran. In response to my post requesting participants and sharing my link, one user of the site commented, “We’re not lab rats.” I chose to respond by explaining to him that I was sensitive to his concerns, participation in the survey was completely voluntary, and that my goal was to use my research to better do my own job as a college writing instructor. The user responded again by telling me that “they” would never understand veterans, who were “a different breed.”

For the rest of the day, this post weighed on my mind. The purpose of my research is to help student veterans, not to create uncomfortable situations for veterans through the process of conducting research. I did not and do not want to position myself as a researcher who does not always consider her population's best interests. Additionally, I was aware of the divide that often exists between academic researchers and the public, a divide that Chess and Shaw (2015) discussed at length, arguing that the opacity of academic research, both in scope and the language used to describe it, has the potential to alienate or cause potential participants to mistrust the researcher and her intentions. I decided that posting requests for survey participants in online spaces in which I was not an active participant went against my stance as a researcher in this particular situation and, after making this decision, deleted the post discussed above, as well as the other posts I made in online communities for veterans. Radhika Gajjala (2002) wrote about similar concerns in her examination of her failed attempt to conduct a cyberethnography of an online discussion group for South Asian women, noting that the digital community was open to her research initiatives, since she was a member of the group *before* developing her intention to study the group, but was far less accepting of a researcher who was not already a part of the community. Gajjala's (2002) experiences reaffirmed my decision to conduct and/or call for research online only in digital communities of which I am a part. Although I wish that I had taken screenshots of the interaction I described above, and although the interaction took place in a public online space, I do not know that I would be comfortable sharing it here in its entirety without redacting the information to protect the identity of the user, who would have been unaware that his conversation was recorded.

Although my decision not to post the link to my survey in public online communities for veterans might have limited my potential respondents, I am happy with my decision. I continued to use snowball-sampling methods to leverage my professional contacts to help with the distribution of my survey. Via email, I distributed my survey to several academics who are working in the area of veteran studies and asked them to share my survey with any interested participants. Although snowball sampling did not provide me with as large a data set as I had hoped, I am satisfied with the 83 responses I received, which resulted in 36 surveys completed in full by participants who identified as current or former military personnel. I chose to close the survey on September 6, 2015, after reaching data saturation.

Interviews and Profile Tours

The second phase of my study lasted from September 7 - November 23, 2015 and consisted of one open-ended interview (Appendix B) with each of three participants. During these interviews, I asked participants to discuss with me some of the activities they performed within the social networking sites they take part in and the rhetorical choices behind those decisions. None of my participants were non-users of social networking sites; each of my 36 survey participants indicated that they currently use some form of social networking technologies. Not only was I interested in the information my participants could provide me with during an interview about their social networking use, I was also interested in their perspectives on that use and their decisions behind that use, making interviews an excellent choice for data collection (Stake, 2010, p. 95). Additional benefits of interviews are that they enable the researcher to elicit additional information, clarify answers, or pursue interesting threads in the conversation through follow-up questions (MacNealy, 1999, p. 204).

Similarly to Buck (2012), I curated online texts produced by my participants, collecting and analyzing texts that were discussed during the profile tours as well as those that were not (p. 12), although I did ask my participants' permission to use each of these texts. It is important to note that, like both Buck and Davies, I did not join my participants' individual social networks, with the exception of one participant who was already a part of my social network on Facebook and Instagram. I was interested in the choices that my participants made when presenting themselves within various social networking sites and, as a result, I wanted my perspective of my participants' social networking profiles to be the same as any other member of the public in terms of what elements of the participants' social networking profiles I could view without the participants' guidance. Texts that were restricted by privacy settings were discussed during open-ended interviews or during profile tours, which I discuss below.

Immediately following each interview, I asked my interview participants to show me around their social networking profiles, and I recorded these profiles using screen-capturing software (and remote screen-sharing software when conducting digital interviews). I used pre-written questions (Appendix C) to spark this sharing, which are designed to urge users to tell me about the choices they have made (or do make) when creating or sharing information on their social networking profiles. The purpose of these profile tours was to gain a better understanding of how my research participants see themselves and to understand the decisions they are making as they craft their digital identities. In alignment with qualitative methods and critical research practices, the participant-led profile tours allowed my participants to identify and discuss the elements of their social networking profiles that they found valuable, rather than simply asking them to discuss elements that I believed were important.

Measurement Instruments

As I analyzed the data from these varied sources, I developed an emergent coding scheme to assist me in categorizing the types of digital literacy practices that my study participants employed in various social networking spaces. I used some of the digital literacy practices identified by Buck, Davies, Vie, and Shepherd (discussed in Chapter One) as initial codes, but additional codes emerged during my data analysis and are discussed further in Chapter Five. Additionally, it is important to note the practices I observed are not all of the same type. For example, while I observed practices associated with functional uses of digital literacy, such as locating a social networking site, or maintaining a profile within that site, I also observed digital literacy practices that were more critical in nature, such as demonstrating an awareness of the rhetorical situation or engaging in digital advocacy. Thus, in Chapter Five, I further categorize the digital literacy practices that I observed in my participants' social networking use in order to better highlight the diversity of digital literacy practices that my participants possess.

I began with these initial coding categories:

- constructing and maintaining a profile (or profiles) within a social networking site (or sites)
- finding old friends
- making new friends
- monitoring others
- communicating with others
- demonstrating audience awareness
- making use of privacy settings (or purposefully *not* using privacy settings)

- demonstrating awareness of the rhetorical situation
- inventing
- engaging in identity presentation
- constructing narrative
- demonstrating the ability to manage online personas
- participating in communities within the social network (e.g., Facebook groups)

After a preliminary analysis of the data collected from my survey, I added the following codes:

- staying in touch with friends and family
- locating various social networking sites
- finding information
- sharing information
- dating
- sharing photos
- networking for professional purposes
- playing online social games
- engaging in digital advocacy
- recruiting
- event planning
- negotiating issues of content collapse
- finding/sharing humor

The use of an emergent coding pattern allowed me to see patterns in the data that I may not have noticed if I had a predetermined idea of what patterns to look for. I did use the codes previously

identified by other digital rhetoricians as I guide, but I did not allow these existing codes to restrict my analysis of the survey data. When analyzing my data in Chapters Three and Four, I provide direct quotes from my participants' survey, interview, and profile tour responses in order to demonstrate how I interpreted the data to represent particular digital literacy practices.

Conclusion

Qualitative and critical research practices have been instrumental in my ability to conduct ethical research that maintained a consistent focus on the betterment of my research participants. Although in some cases, my stance as a critical researcher caused me to make decisions that limited my pool of available data for analysis, I am confident that these decisions placed the good of my research population above my own needs as a researcher. In the remainder of this dissertation, I return to discussions of method and my stance as a critical researcher where appropriate.

CHAPTER 3: STAYING IN TOUCH, MAINTAINING PRIVACY, AND UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCE: PRESENTING DIGITAL IDENTITIES

Introduction

In Chapters One and Two, I have discussed the exigence and design of my project at length. In this chapter, I present and discuss some results from my surveys, interviews, and profile tours that explore issues of privacy and identity and the ways in which issues of privacy and identity are intertwined in social networking spaces. I begin with a brief discussion of the concepts of privacy and identity, focusing specifically on how these concepts are understood in digital spaces. Then, after briefly revisiting the demographics of the 36 participants who completed my survey in full, whose responses I analyze and discuss in this chapter, I discuss issues of privacy and identity as they pertain to my participants. In this chapter, I argue that while many of my participants can be classified as digital natives, my participants overall seem to have developed a nuanced understanding of audience and a keen awareness of privacy within the social networking spaces that they use. Additionally, I argue that my participants' decisions to self-identify as military personnel (or not) within social networking spaces are entwined with their perceptions of privacy in the space, and found that participants were more likely to self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces that they considered to be private or semi-private, and in which they felt comfortable in their ability to manage the site's privacy settings. Finally, using this data discussed in this chapter as support, I argue in Chapter Five that my participants' understandings of audience, evident in their ability to recognize and address issues of context collapse (a topic that I explore in more detail in Chapter Four), are valuable

digital literacy practices that can be transferred to other writing situations, such as those that take place in the college classroom.

Understanding Privacy in Digital Spaces

The increasing ubiquity of access to Internet technologies and, more specifically, social networking technologies has altered our societal understanding of the concept of privacy, as “the ability to instantly connect and share with people around the world has begun to break down the walls of privacy control that our society had upheld for generations” (McCormick, 2014, p. 595). Internet technologies, and social networking technologies in particular, have complicated the notion of privacy. In the material realm, public and private spaces are clearly delineated, often by material barriers, such as walls, fences, or gates. In other situations, private spaces in the material world might be indicated by signage that informs an individual that he or she is entering private property. As a society, we have internalized notions of public versus private as they relate to the material realm and, as a result, we as citizens generally understand the differences between private and public spaces and that these spaces hold different expectations for behavior. However, even in regard to physical space, the lines between public and private spaces can be blurry. For example, although shopping malls are privately-owned spaces, many people perceive shopping malls as public spaces, in part because they are open to the public and because they have been culturally positioned as gathering spaces in the US, particularly for American teenagers. But, because shopping malls are private, they can determine who they let in as well as who they choose to keep out. For example, it is common for shopping malls to prevent loitering, a tactic that is helpful in preventing homeless people from gathering in the mall. Most consumers also maintain expectations of personal privacy when they are in a shopping mall; for example,

most consumers do not expect to be filmed or photographed while shopping (with the exception of security monitoring technologies). Online, where there are no physical boundaries to assist in the determination of public versus private, these boundaries become even more unclear.

Private and public spaces are not often clearly delineated in the digital world, and social networking technologies further blur the distinction (Barnes, 2006), offering users the ability to connect with a wide and diverse audience within spaces “that are neither conventionally public nor entirely private” (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011, p. 75). Although social networking technologies do require users to read and agree to their terms of service, which discuss the notion of privacy as it relates to the particular platform, research suggests that because terms of service agreements are often lengthy and difficult to read, the majority of users agree to the terms of service without reading them (Smithers, 2011). A 2015 article published in *The Guardian*, “I Read All the Small Print on the Internet and It Made Me Want to Die,” sarcastically reflects many users’ feelings about reading terms of service agreements (Hern, 2015, n.p.). Additionally, Hern (2015) references an experiment conducted by F-Secure, a London-based digital security company, which demonstrated the dangers involved in agreeing to terms of service that one has not read. In June of 2014, F-Secure set-up a free WiFi hotspot in London’s financial district, but included the following clause in the terms of service: in exchange for WiFi, “the recipient agreed to assign their first born child to [F-Secure] for the duration of eternity” (Hern, 2015, n.p.). While this clause is not enforceable by law, as the practice of trading children for goods or services is illegal, the experiment did bring to light the risks involved with blindly agreeing to terms of service contracts for digital technologies.

Additionally, while social networking technologies do offer their users the ability to adjust privacy settings, McCormick (2014) argued that although “most users of social networking sites utilize some sort of privacy setting to control who sees their personal information, . . . what many people forget is that once you put the information on the Internet, others may be able to find it, regardless of the controls that the owner has put in place” (p. 595). As a result, McCormick (2014) suggested that social networking technologies “have created a false sense of control over personal information by allowing users to change their privacy settings” when, in fact, “there are limits to the ability to regulate who accesses their information” (p. 596). Indeed, a 2016 report on privacy from the Pew Research Center revealed that “people indicated that their interest and overall comfort level [with the disclosure of personal information] depends on the company or organization with which they are bargaining and how trustworthy or safe they perceive the firm to be” (Rainie & Duggan, 2016, para. 7). Additionally, although many Americans cite concerns about privacy, 83% of adults surveyed by Pew Research Center revealed that they would, in certain scenarios, willingly trade personal information for goods or services (Rainie & Duggan, 2016, para. 5).

Concerns about and an awareness of the issues surrounding privacy in social networking technologies were prevalent in not only my participants’ survey responses, but also in the interviews and profile tours I conducted with my participants. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the majority of my participants were aware, and did make use of their privacy settings in some social networking spaces, while opting not to make use of their privacy settings in other spaces. Additionally, many of my participants indicated an awareness that privacy settings in social networking spaces are neither stable nor secure, suggesting that my participants, in

contrast to the typical user described by McCormick (2014), realized that their ability to control their information in social networking spaces is limited. However, even with this awareness, some of my participants do, to some extent, seem to have developed a false sense of security in particular social networking spaces in which they feel secure and able to effectively manage their privacy settings, evidenced by those research participants who, as I will discuss later in this chapter and in Chapter Four, felt comfortable self-identifying as military personnel in certain social networking spaces but not in others.

In his 2006 discussion of new media technologies, van Dijk lamented the “low capacity for privacy protection that [new media technologies] offer” (p. 16), noting that users’ privacy and personal autonomy can be violated when using networked communication technologies (p. 112), such as social networking platforms. Not only should users of social networking technologies be concerned about the risk of other individuals accessing their private information, users must also consider the risk of their private information being sold or used by a company. While terms of service agreements do provide this information, users are often unaware of the potential sharing of data because, in most cases, users do not read the terms of service, and as a consequence, may view the sharing of personal information as a breach of privacy. Computer scientists Zheleva, Terzi, and Getoor (2012) defined a privacy breach as the situation “when a piece of sensitive information about an individual is disclosed to an adversary, someone whose goal is to access information that they are not authorized to access” (p. 11). Depending on the situation, sensitive information could refer to almost any personal information one does not wish to reveal, particularly if the “adversary” in question is a corporation. Privacy breaches can occur in a number of ways, and Zheleva, Terzi, and Getoor (2012) identified four types of privacy breaches

that can occur when using social networking technologies: identity disclosure, attribute disclosure, social link disclosure, and affiliation link disclosure. Identity disclosure occurs when the “real” identity of a social networking user is revealed by someone other than the user (Zheleva, Terzi, & Getoor, 2012, p. 11). Many of my participants did identify as themselves in social networking spaces, but other participants used pseudonyms or screen names intended to hide their offline identity, making identity disclosure a concern for these participants. And, as I discuss in Chapter Four, some participants use their offline identity in some social networking spaces but adopt an assumed identity in others, revealing that considerations of how to identify oneself in a social networking space are often dependent upon the particular technology and its community of users.

Attribute disclosure occurs when sensitive attributes, or “attributes that individuals may like to keep hidden from the public, such as political affiliation and sexual orientation” are revealed to or determined by a party without the consent of the user (Zheleva, Terzi, & Getoor, 2012, p. 12), while social link disclosure occurs when a private and/or sensitive relationship between two users is made public or revealed by/to someone without consent of the users (p. 14). Attribute disclosure was identified as a concern for many of my participants, particularly as it related to identification as current or former military personnel. As I discuss later in this chapter, many of my participants expressed hesitancy to identify themselves as current or former military personnel within social networking spaces, citing concerns regarding privacy and risk as influencing their decisions to identify as military personnel. Though none of my participants directly addressed social link disclosure as a concern, I argue that it is a concern for those participants who chose not to self-identify as current or former military personnel in social

networking spaces. Van Dijk (2006) referred to the ability to “determine one’s own personal relationships and conduct without other people observing and interfering with them” as relational privacy, a right that van Dijk asserted is threatened by the use of communication networks (p. 113). Although van Dijk was writing about new media technologies more broadly, it is easy to see how the publicly articulated connections that are characteristic of social networking technologies threaten this right to relational privacy. For example, if a user is former military personnel but does not identify as such in social networking spaces, revealing a social link between the user and her former unit commander might, in turn, result in attribute disclosure.

Finally, affiliation link disclosure occurs when a user’s affiliation with a particular group or organization is revealed against the user’s wishes ((Zheleva, Terzi, & Getoor, 2012, p. 15). For my participants, affiliation link disclosure is very closely related to attribute disclosure—if a user is identified as current or former military personnel (attribute disclosure), then it stands to reason that the user is (or once was) affiliated with the U.S. armed forces. While it is common for civilians to identify anyone who is or did serve in the armed forces as affiliated with the military, it is also important to note that some former members of the military *may not* identify themselves as military affiliated any longer, although they were affiliated with the U.S. military during their service, similarly to the many former military personnel who do not identify as veterans, as discussed in Chapter One.

Understandings of privacy in social networking spaces are clearly enmeshed with issues of identity, as social networking technologies require users to carefully consider what aspects of their identities they want to remain private, as well as how best to keep that information private. Papacharissi and Gibson (2011) argued that, within social networking spaces, users are

continually negotiating between and among public and private spaces, as “the self traverses from privacy to publicity and back by cultivating a variety of social behaviors or performances” (p. 76). Yet, the concept of privacy is also at odds with one of the primary affordances of social networks—shareability (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011), making the code switching that is involved in negotiating public and private performances of identity in social networking spaces a complex rhetorical act.

However, Papacharissi and Gibson argued that users can develop an “advanced form of digital literacy [that] can enable individuals to *redact* performances of the self online so as to navigate public and private boundaries fluently” (p. 76). This idea of redacting the self is also connected to the idea of context collapse, the flattening of various, distinct audiences into one that occurs in social networking technologies (Marwick & boyd, 2010). In our material lives, we might interact with our family and coworkers very differently, and these audiences may never mesh. However, in social networking spaces, members of the varied audiences merge together into one, inhibiting the ability of the user to alter his or her identity performance for these audiences, and as our digital and offline selves increasingly overlap, the audiences that we share our identities with in social networking spaces will continue to become more diverse. Thus, a user with critical digital literacies would arguably be able to engage in self-regulation by redacting elements of his offline identity that did not meet the expectations of all of his varied audiences from ever appearing as elements of his online identity (or identities), thus presenting an identity that was appropriate for all the members of his audience. Alternatively, a user with advanced digital literacies might also engage the use of features within various social networking technologies that allow users to choose which members of their network view specific posts or

information, although in general, these features seem to be used infrequently. Later in this chapter, I argue that many of my participants engage in this type of identity redaction as a direct result of their nuanced understanding of audience.

Understanding Identity in Digital Spaces

As discussed in Chapter One, researchers in both rhetoric and composition and professional and technical communication have explored the role of social networking technologies in the shaping of and performance of identity, with researchers also recognizing the importance of digital literacy practices to engage in online identity presentation and management. Several researchers in rhetoric and composition have also identified social networking technologies as sites in which digital literacy practices are employed, and Kimmons (2014) reminded us, too, that in relation to social networking technologies, these digital literacy practices are site specific, and users must learn new or varied digital literacy practices in order to present their identities in ways that conform to the behaviors valued within each individual social networking technology they use.

In addition to understanding the ways in which social networking technologies encourage users to present and manage their identities in specific ways, it is also important to consider the ways in which the concept of identity might differ generationally. While each generation is known for particular attributes, in relation to digital technologies, arguably the most important generational marker is the divide between those known as *digital natives*, typically identified as those born in or after 1980, and those born pre-1980, sometimes divided into the categories of *digital settlers*, those who grew up before the wide-spread use of digital technologies but who adapted to their use, and *digital immigrants*, those who adopted the use of technologies such as

email and social media late in life, but who may only possess functional digital literacies (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). In the context of my study, it is important to consider how digital natives and, in some cases, digital settlers who have become heavily immersed in the digital world might view online identity differently than their older, analog-friendly peers, because the majority of my participants fall into these two categories.

In Table 5, I have classified each participant as either a digital native, a digital settler, or a digital immigrant, based on the information these participants provided in their surveys and, when applicable, their interviews and profile tours. However, as I will explain later in this chapter, I do not associate the term “digital native” with any particular set of skills or digital literacy practices. Here, I use the term digital native only to identify participants who grew up during or after the widespread adoption of digital technologies in the US. Thus, 16 of my participants can be classified as *digital natives*, with 15 between the ages of 25-34, with birth years between 1981 and 1990, and one between the ages of 18-24, with a birth year between 1991 and 1997. Additionally, I argue that the 14 participants between the ages of 35-44, with birth years between 1971 and 1980, can certainly be classified as *digital settlers*. Based on their survey responses, I also classify my two participants identifying between the ages of 45-54, Ethan and Chase, as *digital settlers*. Both Ethan and Chase maintain accounts on several social networking technologies, and neither man seems to possess the naiveté of digital technologies that is characteristic of digital immigrants (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Similarly, I classify two of my four participants between the ages of 55-64 as *digital settlers* as well. Driscoll and Gary both maintain accounts on more than four social networking sites, and both men also identify a variety of both professional and social uses for social networking technologies. However, my remaining

two participants between the ages of 55-64, Alden and Oliver, seem to fit the profile of *digital immigrant*. Alden indicates that he only uses Facebook “to stay in touch with prior military folks and to stay in touch with family and friends,” and views social networking technologies as useful only for personal purposes, and though Oliver maintains accounts on both Facebook and LinkedIn, he indicates that he uses both accounts for only social and/or personal purposes. Further discussion that occurred during Oliver’s interview and profile tour, in combination with the difficulty Oliver had in using digital technologies during his interview and profile tour, contributed to my identification of Oliver as a digital immigrant.

Digital natives, alternatively referred to as millennials, are identified as ““native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (Prensky, 2001, para. 5) who not only have consistent “access to networked digital technologies,” but who also possess “the skills to use those technologies” (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 1). Digital natives are framed as having innate abilities to use digital technologies, which are positioned not as simple components of the life of the digital native, but as essential to the digital native’s way of life. Researchers also argue that digital natives access and take in information much differently than their predecessors, taking in varied pieces of information at a rapid pace from a variety of sources, both professional and peer-based (Prensky, 2001; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). However, the speed with which information can be accessed and the digital environment’s low barriers to production have been shown to restrict the ability of digital natives to make the best decisions based on the information they have accessed (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). However, many of the characteristics attributed to digital natives have been challenged, leading to a rise in scholarship addressing what is commonly referred to as the myth of the digital native.

Table 5: Classification of participants as digital natives, digital settlers, or digital immigrants.

Pseudonym	Age	# of Social Networking Accounts Maintained	Digital Native, Settler, or Immigrant
Aiden	25-34	3	Digital Native
Alden	55-64	1	Digital Immigrant
Anneliese	25-34	8	Digital Native
Chase	45-54	3	Digital Settler
Clifton	35-44	4	Digital Settler
Clinton	25-34	1	Digital Native
Colbert	25-34	5	Digital Native
Corey	18-24	1	Digital Native
Dave	25-34	1	Digital Native
Driscoll	55-64	4	Digital Settler
Edison	35-44	4	Digital Settler
Erica	35-44	4	Digital Settler
Ethan	45-54	6	Digital Settler
Gary	55-64	6	Digital Settler
Griffin	25-34	3	Digital Native
Jethro	25-34	6	Digital Native
Joanie	35-44	5	Digital Settler
Johnny	35-44	4	Digital Settler
Julie	25-34	6	Digital Native
Katherine	25-34	3	Digital Native
Mackenzie	25-34	5	Digital Native
Mattheus	25-34	4	Digital Native
Melanie	35-44	8	Digital Settler
Oliver	55-64	2	Digital Immigrant
Philip	35-44	2	Digital Settler
Randolph	25-34	2	Digital Native
Royce	35-44	2	Digital Settler
Rupert	35-44	1	Digital Settler
Samantha	25-34	5	Digital Native
Sherwood	35-44	1	Digital Settler
Simone	35-44	2	Digital Settler
Tiana	35-44	1	Digital Settler
Tim	35-44	5	Digital Settler
Thornton	25-34	6	Digital Native
Walt	25-34	1	Digital Native
Zachariah	34-34	3	Digital Settler

Research addressing the myth of the digital native importantly reminds us that both access to, engagement with, and agency in regard to digital technologies are not consistent for everyone, regardless of age (Bowen, 2011; Bowen, 2012; Selwyn, 2009; A. Smith, 2016). Additionally, research suggests that although digital natives may use digital technologies earlier in life and more often than their generational predecessors, their familiarity with these technologies might restrict their ability to use these technologies critically (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011). This lack of critical use is evidenced in the research, discussed briefly above, that indicates that digital natives often have difficulty assessing the validity and credibility of information found on the web, in combination with the reality that not all people born after 1980 have consistent access to digital technologies, exposes the dangers of assuming that everyone born after 1980 is, indeed, a digital native in terms of their experiences with digital technology. Not only are there important cultural implications involved with these assumptions, but pedagogical concerns as well. As writing instructors, we cannot assume that all of our traditionally-aged college students will be expert users of digital technologies, not can we assume that our non-traditional students will not possess critical digital literacies (Bowen, 2011; Bowen, 2012). So, as previously discussed, while I use the term digital natives to describe the majority of my research participants, I use this term to generally describe individuals born after 1980 who have had regular access to digital technologies throughout their lives, but I do not assume that digital natives possess any innate abilities to make use of digital technologies.

When discussing the concept of digital identity, it is also important to consider the ways in which digital identity differs from identity in the physical world. As Gergen (1991) explained, post-industrial society resulted in the emergence of fragmented identity; as adults increasingly

began working outside of the home and interacting with wider and more diverse audiences, it became increasingly necessary to create multiple, or fragmented, identities. For example, a married woman with children working outside the home in a factory must now, in addition to negotiating her identities as mother and wife, present additional identities of employee and coworker. Until the advent and widespread adoption of digital Internet-based technologies, however, it was unlikely that an individual's fragmented identities, or the disparate audiences privy to the performances of these distinct identities, would ever interact, enabling individuals to effectively maintain somewhat unique identities in specific situations and for specific audiences. However, as the idea of context collapse indicates, social networking technologies flatten these various audiences, leading users with advanced digital literacy skills to redact elements of their identity that are not appropriate for all members of their audience, while users with less developed digital literacies might post content that is not equally appropriate for all members of their audience. An anecdotal example of the ways in which users with less developed digital literacies might experience issues with context collapse is presented by Williams, Lundqvist, Fleming, and Parslow (2013), who studied how online information can affect identity and reputation:

Some of the staff who had allowed students to be their friends on Facebook felt that the students hadn't fully understood what they were revealing when they made the request for friendship; for example, one member of staff told of a student who had spent a weekend updating her Facebook status to show what a great time she was having, and then approached him to ask for an extension on handing in a piece of coursework because she was unwell over the previous weekend. (pp. 111-112)

This anecdote clearly demonstrates that not all digital natives possess critical digital literacies, such as an understanding of audience or of the rhetorical situation.

Research also suggests that the ubiquity of social networking technologies has resulted in the formation and presentation of digital identities that are fairly accurate representations of the user's face-to-face identity (Rowe, 2010), which is very different from the digital identities presented by early adopters of Internet technologies, who often used the Internet as a place to experiment with identities very different from their real-world identities (Turkle, 1995). This is not to say that this type of identity play is not still prevalent on the Internet; many users maintain disparate identities on various social networking sites or in other online communities, and these digital identities may or may not reflect characteristics of the user's face-to-face identities. My research data, however, determined that my participants' digital identities mirror (at least some aspects of) their face-to-face identities; as I will discuss in Chapter Four, many of my participants revealed that they use social networking technologies to interact with family members, friends, and other real-world connections, rather than employing the use of social networking technologies to make new friends, as was more common in the early years of social networking technologies. Thus, critical users of social networking technologies must grapple with questions of identity in new ways, as they determine how to best redact their identities to appropriately suit all members of their audience.

Participant Demographics

As discussed in Chapter Two, my survey yielded a wider range of participants than I initially anticipated. Although my survey was designed for current, former, and future military personnel, because the focus of the study was on student veterans, and because many of my

academic contacts work with student veterans, I expected that the majority of my survey participants would be student veterans. However, this was not the case: of the 36 completed surveys that I analyze in this chapter, only six participants identified as currently enrolled students. Of these six participants, one was enrolled in a two-year college at the time of the survey, three were enrolled in a four-year public university, and two were enrolled in a four-year private university. However, I intentionally did not limit participation in my study to student veterans because I believe that all military personnel have valuable perspectives on the topic of this dissertation.

To briefly summarize the previously discussed demographics of the 36 survey participants who completed my survey, represented in Tables 2 and 3 in Chapter Two: twenty-seven participants identified as former military personnel, while 9 identified as current military personnel. My participants each served between 1-20 years in the U.S. military and represented the following branches—Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, National Guard, and Coast Guard—with 27 of the 36 participants deployed during their military service. Twenty-six participants identified as male, 10 participants identified as female, and participants represented all age ranges included in the survey, from 18-24 to 55-64. In Table 4, also located in Chapter Two, I have included each participant’s pseudonym along with his or her relevant demographic information.

Social Networking Use and Perceptions of Privacy

In order to better understand how my participants viewed privacy in relation to social networking technologies, I asked my survey participants a series of questions designed to identify if and why participants chose to use social networking technologies prior to, during, and

after their military service. Only two participants indicated that privacy concerns prevented them from using social networking technologies, and both of these participants indicated the presence of these concerns during military service, but did not experience the same concerns prior to or after military service. I argue that this finding, while reaffirming McCormick's (2014) assertion that privacy settings encourage users to develop a false sense of security, also points to the possibility that military culture might encourage users to develop a more critical understanding of privacy, although it is interesting that this concern seemed to dissipate for these participants after concluding their military service.

Prior to Military Service

Many of my participants did not have access to social networking technologies prior to their military service, though those who did noted that they used social networking technologies primarily for social and/or personal purposes. Sixteen participants (44%) indicated that they did use social networking technologies prior to entering military service, while 20 participants (56%) indicated that they did not use social networking technologies prior to entering military service. However, 15 of the 20 participants who did not use social networking technologies prior to their military service indicated that social networking technologies did not exist at that time, as shown in Table 6. Of the remaining five participants who did not use social networking technologies prior to military service, Driscoll and Johnny indicated they had no access, Anneliese indicated she had no need, and Royce and Walt indicated they had both no need for and no interest in using social networking technologies, as shown in Table 7.

Table 6: Use of social networking technologies pre-, during, and post-service.

	Prior to Military Service	During Military Service	Post-Military Service/Now
Did/do use SNTs	16 (44%)	24 (67%)	36 (100%)
Did/do not use SNTs	20 (56%)	12 (33%)	0 (0%)

Table 7: Reasons for not using social networking technologies prior to and during service.

	Prior to Military Service	During Military Service
SNTs did not exist	15	7
No need for SNTs	3	1
No interest in SNTs	2	2
No access to SNTs	2	3
Concerns about privacy	0	2

Although my survey gathered information about the age ranges of my participants, rather than exact ages, examining the age ranges of those participants who indicated that social networking technologies did not exist prior to their military service provides a better understanding of how some of my participants understood social networking technologies. Although the earliest social networking technology (as defined by boyd & Ellison, 2007), SixDegrees.com, was released to the public in 1997, social networking technologies did not become mainstream until 2003, with the release of social networking technologies such as LinkedIn, Couchsurfing, and MySpace (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 212).¹⁰ Thus, the eight

¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, I am using boyd and Ellison’s 2013 definition of social networking technologies as “a *networked communication platform* in which participants 1) have *uniquely identifiable profiles* that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can *publicly articulate connections* that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with *streams of user generated content* provided by their connections on the site” (“Sociality,” p. 157, emphasis in original), in

participants ranging in age from 35-44 who indicated that social networking technologies did not exist prior to their military service may have, instead, just not been using social networking technologies prior to their military service, since these participants would have been 18, the minimum age to enter the U.S. military, between 1990-1999. Thus, for those entering the military in the late 1990s, although social networking technologies did exist, these participants may not have been aware of their existence.

Two participants between 25-34 years of age also indicated that social networking technologies did not exist prior to their service. These participants, with birth years from 1982-1991, would have been 18 between the years of 2000-2009. For these participants, social networking technologies did exist prior to their service. I point this out not in order to make my participants' responses seem "wrong," but to bring attention to the subjective nature of surveys. Although I did provide a definition of social networking technologies to my participants, I did not include historical information about social networking technologies. However, a brief timeline of the development of social networking technologies may have allowed my participants to more accurately reflect upon their relationships with social networking platforms prior to entering military service.

During Military Service

In comparison, and as shown in Table 6, 24 participants (67%) indicated that they did use social networking technologies during their military service, with only 12 participants (33%) indicating that they did not use social networking technologies during their military service. And,

combination with Vie's (2008) assertion, "online social networking sites must also provide privacy policies and tools for users to protect their personal privacy in these spaces" (p. 16).

as shown in Table 7, while seven participants who did not use social networking technologies prior to their military service also indicated that social networking technologies did not exist at this time, two participants, Griffin and Philip, indicated “concerns about privacy” as a reason for not using social networking technologies during military service. However, none of the participants mentioned privacy concerns as a reason for not using social networking technologies prior to or after military service, information that aligns with McCormick’s (2014) conclusion that many users of social networks develop a false sense of security via their ability to manipulate privacy settings, without developing a nuanced understanding of how information is shared on the web, which enables a user to develop an awareness that nothing on the web is truly private. As I explore further later in this chapter, many of my participants self-identify as military personnel in some social networking spaces but not in others, and for many of these participants, their perceived ability to control the privacy of their information is a deciding factor in whether they self-identify as military personnel in a particular social networking space. However, the concerns about privacy and social networking technologies that Griffin and Philip developed during their military service may be an indication that the military’s focus on the control of information and the need for privacy encourages/allows some military personnel to develop an awareness of issues of privacy within social networking spaces.

In addition to concerns about privacy, Griffin also noted that he had no access to social networking technologies during his military service, nor did he have an interest in using them. Similarly, although Philip did have access to social networking technologies during his service, he indicated that he had no need for or interest in using these technologies during his service. Three other participants, Rupert, Ericka, and Tim, also indicated a lack of access to social

networking technologies during their service. These three participants are in the 35-44 age demographic, so it is likely that these participants served in the mid-to-late 90s, a likelihood that at minimum holds true for Rupert, who further indicated that his lack of access to social networking technologies during service was because he served in the late 1990s when, as previously discussed, social networking technologies had not yet gained widespread popularity.

After Military Service/Present Day

At the time of the survey, all of my participants were users of social networking technologies. First and foremost, this information points to the increasing ubiquity of social networking technologies in the United States. Of 36 participants, ranging in age from 36-64, each maintained an account on at least one social networking site. Additionally, none of the participants allow concerns about privacy to prevent them from using social networking technologies; this is not to suggest that none of my participants are concerned with privacy in the digital realm, just that these concerns do not outweigh the perceived benefits of social networking use for my participants. As I will discuss in the following section, for my participants, decisions about identity presentation are intimately tied to understandings of privacy. In digital spaces where my participants believe they have a good understanding of and ability to effectively use privacy settings, many of my participants are comfortable sharing aspects of their identity that they might redact in spaces in which the user perceives less of an ability to manage privacy, which substantiates my claim that veterans seem to have a more nuanced understanding of audience and a better awareness of privacy than their non-veteran peers.

Identity Presentation Strategies in Social Networking Spaces

When asked, “Within the social networking sites you participate in, do you self-identify as serving/having served/intending to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces? In other words, does your profile information or do your posts indicate your affiliation with the military?” 19 (53%) of my participants indicated they “sometimes” identify as military personnel, with 12 participants (33%) always identifying as military personnel and five participants (14%) never identifying as military personnel, as shown in Table 8. This information supports similar findings by Grohowski (2015), whose study of current and former military personnel revealed that, in online environments, 45% of her participants reported that their decisions to self-identify as military personnel were contextual, with 26% of her participants always self-identifying and 15% never self-identifying as military personnel. Grohowski’s research, as discussed in Chapter One, indicated that veterans use social networking technologies to, in some cases, distance themselves from their veteran identities, only disclosing their veteran status in particular contexts. Grohowski’s claim is further supported by my finding that, for 53% of my participants, the decision to self-identify was contextual.

Table 8: Self-identification as military personnel within social networking spaces.

Pseudonym	Veteran Status	Age	Self-Identify?	Why do you choose to always, sometimes, or never self-identity?
Corey	current military personnel	18-24	Always	“Because my service in the military represents a part of my own identity. I feel serving is not something to usually hide or be ashamed of.”
Aiden	veteran	25-34	Always	“Because it’s an honor to have served my country.”
Clinton	current military personnel	25-34	Always	“I keep in touch with a lot of my brothers that I have served with, we just link ourselves based on old units.”
Dave	veteran	25-34	Always	“I am proud of my past and not afraid to show it regardless [sic] of potential attacks.”
Samantha	student veteran	25-34	Always	No response.
Johnny	veteran	35-44	Always	“I think because some of my writing deals with the military life. I am not ashamed of my service, even though I would not do it again. The way my life has played out, my service is central to the person I am.”
Rupert	veteran	35-44	Always	“I identify myself as pruior [sic] military and now promoting the military.”
Tiana	veteran	35-44	Always	“I am proud of what I did and what I stand for by serving my country and would do it again if I could.”
Ethan	veteran	45-54	Always	“It is who I am.”
Alden	veteran	55-64	Always	“Proud of my military service and the opportunity to represent my country in combat.”
Driscoll	veteran	55-64	Always	“Proud to have served in the military.”
Gary	veteran	55-64	Always	“I am proad [sic] to have served this great nation even though we have issues and strive to fix them this is still a great nation.”
Anneliese	student veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“It depends on the situation. I have a large network of military and veterans and when interactive [sic] with them I always do, but in professional settings it just depends on the setting and whether or not I feel it is necessary.”
Colbert	veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“No reason...if I feel like identifying or not really has no correlation to anything.”

Pseudonym	Veteran Status	Age	Self-Identify?	Why do you choose to always, sometimes, or never self-identity?
Jethro	student veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“I don’t make it a point to tell people I was in the military, not because I’m not proud of my service, but because I feel it’s unnecessary information, and in certain situations, I feel I would be treated differently should it be known that I was prior military (whether the treatment would be positive or negative is irrelevant). When I do self-identify as military personnel, it is because I feel I have relevant information and experience to provide valid input to the current situation or topic.”
Julie	current military personnel	25-34	Sometimes	“Combination. I don’t want to make a big deal of it—it’s part of who I am, but I am more than that. I do not want to use my social media sites as a platform for politics or to puff myself as some kind of hero—I am an Army lawyer, not a commando.”
Katherine	veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“My military affiliation is not on my profiles, but I do/have posted pictures in uniform that only friends can view. I don’t want the wrong people knowing my affiliation.”
Mackenzie	veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“I view my affiliation as private and do not wish to expose myself to unnecessary political rhetoric or debate.”
Mattheus	student veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“While I am proud of my military service, I don’t feel I need to brag about it. If it comes up during conversation I engage but otherwise I won’t bring it up.”
Randolph	current military personnel	25-34	Sometimes	“Depends on location. I may place where I was stations [sic], as opposed to listing current location.”
Thornton	current military personnel	25-34	Sometimes	“The platform drives my decision to identify or not. For example I never post pictures of my in uniform on Instagram but I have the AF listed as my employer on Facebook.”
Walt	student veteran	25-34	Sometimes	No response.
Zachariah	veteran	25-34	Sometimes	“Depends who I know who [sic] will have access to my profile.”

Pseudonym	Veteran Status	Age	Self-Identify?	Why do you choose to always, sometimes, or never self-identity?
Edison	veteran	35-44	Sometimes	“If it has a place in the profile to add military, I list it.”
Joanie	current military personnel	35-44	Sometimes	No response.
Melanie	veteran	35-44	Sometimes	“I’m proud of my service to our country—I have no reason to hide it.”
Philip	student veteran	35-44	Sometimes	“Dependent on the space and patrons of that space.”
Royce	veteran	35-44	Sometimes	“I don’t think Everyone [sic] should know I served...It’s not a big deal to me.”
Sherwood	veteran	35-44	Sometimes	“When I was in the Army I never posted anything about my service. Since I have retired I post some pictures and small chat with other people I served with.”
Tim	current military personnel	35-44	Sometimes	“Only identify it as an ‘occupation’, keeps opsec [sic] concerns to a minimum.”
Chase	veteran	45-54	Sometimes	“If it asks, I identify as a veteran.”
Griffin	veteran	25-34	Never	“Personal choice, though seemingly a wise one considering proximity to Military [sic] bases and active threats from non-state actors. Further, feelings related to service that are not relevant to the general public/civilians.”
Clifton	current military personnel	35-44	Never	“Risk of jeopardizing my career.”
Ericka	veteran	35-44	Never	”For security purposes.”
Simone	current military personnel	35-44	Never	“I do not want to be a target.”
Oliver	veteran	55-64	Never	“Personal reasons.”

I also argue that the high percentage of participants who answered that they “sometimes” identify as military personnel offers further support for the awareness of audience my participants seem to possess, also indicating that stories like those of Specialist Terry Harrison,

discussed in Chapter Two, are rare. Additionally, among my six student veteran participants, five indicated that they “sometimes” self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces, with only one student veteran indicating that she “always” self-identifies as military personnel. Thus, among my student veteran population, the decision to self-identify was contextual for 83%. Interestingly, none of the student-veteran participants indicated that they “never” self-identify as military personnel, indicating that many student veterans may not share the same ideas as those who choose to “never” self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces. Further, I argue that this data may indicate that student veterans have a more nuanced awareness of audience than their non-student comrades. Five of the six student veterans who participated in my study also fall between the ages of 25-34, landing them squarely in the camp of digital natives, but also pointing to the role that education might have in enabling or encouraging users to think critically about identity presentation in social networking technologies.

The participants who indicated that they “always” self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces mentioned pride and military service as part of their identity as the two most predominant reasons for their self-identification. Beginning with those participants who mention pride, I want to highlight a number of responses here because I think that they are powerful in their own words:

- “I am proud (sic) to have served this great nation even though we have issues and strive to fix them this is still a great nation.”—Gary
- “Proud to have served in the military.”—Driscoll

- “Proud of my military service and the opportunity to represent my country in combat.”—Alden
- “I am proud of what I did and what I stand for by serving my country and would do it again if I could.”—Tiana
- “I am proud of my past and not afraid to show it, regardless of potential attacks.”—Dave
- “Because it’s an honor to have served my country.”—Aiden

In these responses, individuals are upholding the dominant narrative of the U.S. military, which identifies U.S. military personnel as synonymous with pride and honor. In fact, Aiden mentioned honor explicitly, stating that he always self-identifies “because it’s an honor to have served my country.” Additionally, identifying military service as an “opportunity” or something that an individual would happily, or proudly, do again, continues to support the dominant narrative of the U.S. military, representing military personnel as selfless individuals who not only willingly risk their lives to defend the US, but who are thankful for the opportunity to do so.

Other participants explicitly mentioned the role of the military in shaping their identity, also invoking feelings of pride in their responses:

- “Because my service in the military represents a part of my own identity. I feel serving is not something to usually hide or be ashamed of.”—Corey
- “I think because some of my writing deals with the military life. I am not ashamed of my service, even though I would not do it again. The way my life has played out, my service is central to the person I am.”—Johnny
- “It is who I am.”—Ethan
- “I identify myself as pruior (sic) military and now promoting the military.”—Rupert

This final response again returns to the idea of military personnel as a knowledge community, also pointing to the importance of ethos in this community. By identifying as prior military, Rupert's ethos is enhanced, and he is viewed as a credible source of information about the benefits of military service. Additionally, we see the importance of military service as a defining aspect of identity for these participants. While Ethan identified his military service as "who [he] is," potentially reaffirming our societal desire to homogenize military personnel as having identities equanimous with their service, Corey and Johnny both position their military service as a component of their identity, indicating a desire on the part of these two participants to be seen as more than their military service, although they recognize the important role their military service had in shaping their identities.

Five participants, however, did indicate that they never self-identified as military personnel in social networking spaces, with themes of risk and security prevalent in their responses, demonstrating the connection between digital identity and privacy. Clifton, who is a current military officer, indicated the "risk of jeopardizing my career" as his reason for never self-identifying, while Ericka mentioned "security purposes," and Simone indicated that she does "not want to be a target." Two participants, Griffin and Oliver, cited "personal" reasons. Griffin elaborated that his personal choice not to self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces was "seemingly a wise one considering proximity to Military bases and active threats from non-state actors," adding that he has "feelings related to service that are not relevant to the general public/civilians," again reflecting awareness of audience.

As discussed earlier, none of my student-veteran participants indicated that they never self-identified as military personnel in social networking spaces. When comparing the

demographics of those participants who never self-identify as veterans with the demographics of my student-veteran participants, the only category in which a significant difference is noticeable is in age: while five of six student veterans fell in the range of 25-34 years old, with one indicating an age between the ages of 35-44, only one of the non-student participants describing himself as never self-identifying as military personnel indicated an age range of 25-34 years old. Of the remaining participants never self-identifying, three were between the ages of 35-44, while one was between 55-64 years of age.

The student veterans who indicated that they sometimes self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces largely noted that their decision to self-identify was dependent upon, as Philip wrote, “[the] space and the patrons of that space,” again reaffirming an awareness of audience. Philip was able to critically determine, based on the elements of the social networking space and the participants of this space—i.e., the audience—if he felt comfortable self-identifying as military personnel. Not only does this comment reflect audience awareness, it also demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical situation, as does the following statement from another student veteran participant, Anneliese: “It depends on the situation. I have a large network of military and veterans and when interactive [sic] with them I always do, but in professional settings it just depends on the setting and whether or not I feel it is necessary.” The awareness that each situation calls for a unique response—in this case, the decision whether to self-identify as military personnel—is important here, because what we see in cases of social networking faux pas that become large-scale news stories is indeed a *lack* of rhetorical awareness. To briefly return to the case of Specialist Terry Harrison once again, the fact that Harrison’s co-workers—other military personnel—publically disagreed with her

suspension indicates that Harrison lacked an understanding of her rhetorical situation. Jokes that may have been easily dismissed by her co-workers, other military personnel who knew Harrison personally, were not appropriate for the public audience of Instagram. Again, however, cases such as Harrison's are rare, indicating that my participants' awareness of audience and the rhetorical situation is not unique.

A number of my non-student veteran participants also indicated that their decision to self-identify as military personnel "depends," with some participants indicating their decision is dependent on the platform or who will be able to access profile information. Three participants, Thornton, Edison, and Chase, also indicated that they allow the platform itself to determine whether or not they self-identify, stating that if the platform specifically asks about or provides a place to input information about military service, they will provide the information, but omit the information if the platform does not invite its disclosure.

The second major theme running through the responses of those participants who sometimes self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces is the idea that, to them, their military service was "not a big deal." Julie wrote: "I don't want to make a big deal of it—it's part of who I am, but I am more than that. I do not want to use my social media sites as a platform for politics or to puff myself up as some kind of hero—I am an Army lawyer, not a commando." In this single response, Julie not only represents the dominant narrative of military personnel as selfless and humble, she also resists the popular culture trope of veteran as hero, while also accepting the role that the military has played in shaping her identity. The prevalence of the veteran as hero trope is also apparent here: "I do not want to ... puff myself up as some

kind of hero—I am an Army lawyer, not a commando.” Julie is clearly a veteran, but she does not identify as a hero, demonstrating the many veterans excluded by this popular trope.

Two of my student-veteran participants also noted that their former military experience is not a big deal. One student veteran, Mattheus, wrote: “While I am proud of my military service, I don’t feel the need to brag about it. If it comes up during conversation I engage but otherwise I won’t bring it up.” Interestingly, this quote both affirms and subverts the dominant narrative of U.S. military personnel—Mattheus is both proud and humble (doesn’t want to brag), but also resists disclosing his military affiliation, thus slightly subverting the “pride” associated with military service.

Similarly to Mattheus, Jethro’s response evokes feelings of both pride and humility.

Jethro wrote:

I don’t make it a point to tell people that I’m in the military, not because I’m not proud of my service, but because I feel it’s unnecessary information, and in certain situations, I feel I would be treated differently should it be known that I was prior military (whether the treatment would be positive or negative is irrelevant). When I do self-identify as military personnel, it is because I feel I have relevant information and experience to provide valid input to the current situation or topic.

Jethro’s quote points to the predominance of veteran stereotypes—he fears being “treated differently” if people knew that he was former military, and notes that this treatment could be “positive or negative.” While those who view veterans as heroes might treat this participant positively if aware of his military service, those who view veterans as wounded warriors, particularly those who believe all veterans to be psychologically wounded, might treat him

negatively. This participant's intentional resistance to this treatment indicates an unwillingness to be seen as only one portion of his identity.

Conclusion

Viral stories of social media faux pas often demonstrate the real-world consequences caused by issues of context collapse and understandings (or misunderstandings) of privacy settings in social networking technologies. However, many of my participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of issues of audience and privacy as they relate to identity presentation in these social networking spaces. Although some of my participants indicated that they always self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces and some participants never self-identify in these spaces, the vast majority of my participants revealed that their decision whether to self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces was dependent upon several factors, including the social networking platform itself, other users of the platform, and the perceived privacy of the platform. Here, the connection between understandings of privacy and identity presentation is clear: participants who sometimes self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces are more likely to identify as military personnel in social networking spaces that they perceive as private or semi-private. Additionally, these participants mentioned the importance of knowing their audience; in more public social networking spaces, these participants were less likely to self-identify as military personnel. For example, while Thornton indicated that he does self-identify in Facebook, a site in which most users seem to feel confident in their ability to use and control privacy settings, he does not self-identify on Instagram, a platform whose community places a higher value on maintaining a publically searchable and viewable profile.

The nuanced understanding of audience demonstrated by my participants is an important digital literacy practice, with obvious extensions to the writing classroom. As I discuss in Chapter Five, if military service and policies encourage military personnel to consider issues of audience, which are clearly demonstrated in my participants' social networking use, instructors in writing classrooms with student veterans can work to help students transfer this digital literacy practice, an awareness of audience, to writing situations outside of the context of the military and outside of social networking technologies.

CHAPTER 4: CRAFTING DIGITAL IDENTITIES: ONE STUDENT VETERAN'S DIGITAL NARRATIVES

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the role of narrative in social networking spaces, particularly the ways in which the development of narrative in social networking spaces is connected to identity presentation in these digital spaces. In order to better understand my participants' digital narratives, I analyze their purposes for using social networking technologies and choosing to participate in (or avoid participating in) sub-communities within these social networking spaces. I argue that my participants' purpose(s) for using a particular social networking technology affects the narrative that the user develops, which in turn influences the way in which the user presents his or her identity in the space. Examining my participants' participation, or lack thereof, in sub-communities within social networking spaces is also important, as many of my participants craft different narratives and present different aspects of their identities in the sub-communities they participate in than they do in the social networking space as a whole. Finally, I provide the results of an interview and profile tour with one of my student veteran participants, Jethro, as a detailed examination of the ways in which one student veteran constructed digital narratives in both Instagram and Facebook. My analysis of Jethro's digital narratives focused on the ways in which they supported or resisted common tropes of the veteran and/or the dominant narrative of the U.S. military.

As expected, in light of the survey data previously discussed in Chapter Three, Jethro demonstrated a keen sense of audience and found ways to negotiate issues of privacy as well as issues concerning context collapse in ways that worked for his individual needs, demonstrating

an awareness of the rhetorical situation. When viewed holistically, Jethro's digital narratives tell the complex story of a 29-year-old man who is also a veteran. But, as Jethro's digital narratives will reveal, he is much more than a veteran. Jethro is a recent college graduate who values education and the importance of humor. He is a fan of electronic dance music (EDM) who travels the US to attend EDM shows. He takes pride in his appearance, particularly his beard, and he values close relationships with friends and family, among many other things. However, when Jethro's digital narratives are viewed independently, his audience is only given a partial view of his complex identity. More importantly, though, when components of these profiles are viewed independently and decontextualized from the rest of Jethro's digital narrative(s), they can easily be misinterpreted. When viewed independently, there are elements of Jethro's narratives that both support and resist both the trope of the war hero and the trope of the wounded warrior, and there are also elements that support as well as elements that resist the organizational narrative of the military. The diversity of Jethro's digital narratives, and the complex identities that arise from these digital narratives, further allow me to work against the homogenizing view of veterans, while also demonstrating the exclusionary and limiting nature of common tropes of the veteran. Finally, my examination of Jethro's digital narratives provides support for the argument that because digital narratives in social networking technologies create "chains of meaning," viewing decontextualized portions of these narratives is irresponsible and ineffective.

Building Narrative with Social Networking Technologies

Theories of narrative in social networking spaces are closely tied to the development of identity. While many of us may not think of the content that we share in our social networking profiles as telling a story about ourselves, Page (2012) argued, as discussed in Chapter One, that

“these stories are important discursive and social resources that create identities for their tellers and audiences” (p. 1). Individual agency also plays an important role here, as storytelling allows us to chronicle not only our own interactions with the world, but those of others, and even of events occurring in the world that we may not be a part of, but that we are still interested in (Butler, 2005; Cavarero, 2000; Couldry, 2010). The telling and sharing of these narratives of ourselves, others, and the world around us all contribute to the development of our digital identities (and, by extension, our non-digital identities) while also contributing to the development of the digital identities of those people involved in our storytelling. The digital spaces offered by social networking technologies provide users with the agency necessary to tell stories of themselves and of others—stories that influence the development and presentation of identity in these digital spaces. In fact, what I find most interesting about this connection between narrative and identity in social networking spaces is that, in most cases, the user is not solely in control of the narrative that is developed in his or her social networking profile, as discussed in Chapter One with Page’s explanation of the collaborative tellership that is characteristic of digital narratives in social networking spaces.

Take Facebook as an illustrative example. A Facebook user has control over some of the information that makes up his or her narrative—the user can choose what information to include or exclude in the “About Me” section of their profile. Additionally, the user navigates privacy settings to determine who is able to see his or her posts, and the user maintains control over who is a part of his or her social network through the acceptance or denial of friend requests. Finally, the user is in control over the content that he or she posts to his or her wall.

However, it is also important to consider the role that the audience (other users of the social network) has in constructing the user's narrative. For example, does the user choose to make his or her list of connections (friends) publically available, or is this information hidden? If the user chooses not to make this information public, this may lead the audience to believe that the user has something to hide, thus influencing the story that the user is telling. On the other hand, though, if the user makes his or her friends list publically traversable, he or she runs the risk of the audience interpreting his or her identity, in part, by the company he or she keeps, so to speak. Additionally, members of the user's audience have the capability to "tag" the user in posts or to post on the user's timeline. This can be controlled to an extent with privacy settings that allow users to "approve" posts on their timeline before they appear to audience members, but Facebook makes it more difficult to prevent audience members from tagging the user in a post that appears on an audience member's timeline. Instead of allowing the user an option to approve tags on others' timelines, Facebook provides only the option for the user to prevent him or herself from *ever* being tagged on another user's timeline. Additionally, even if the user enables the setting that prevents audience members from tagging him or her in posts, this does not prevent audience members from including the user's name in their posts, which would likely be visible to, at minimum, all of the audience member's connections, some of whom are likely the user's Facebook friends. So, in this way, the user's connections within a particular social network are able to influence the development of the user's narrative. One of my participants, Jethro, explains this tension as follows: "I haven't added my mom on Facebook. Well, she was my friend, but I deleted her. My friends would tag me in something, and I'm like ... I don't want

... I don't want my mom to see that. Yeah, so I deleted my mom. She noticed at some point, so she sent me another request, but I'm just ignoring it.”

Here, Jethro is concerned about the ways in which other Facebook users are able to influence the development of his narrative. When other users tag Jethro in posts that do not align with the aspects of his identity that his mother is privy to, Jethro becomes uncomfortable. It is important to note that Jethro never indicates discomfort with the actual content of the posts, but he is uncomfortable with his mother associating the content of these posts with her son. However, while Jethro is able to successfully redact elements of his own identity to suit all members of his audience, as discussed by Papacharissi and Gibson (2011), he cannot redact elements of his connections' identities. In this situation, Jethro experienced an irreconcilable issue of context collapse—because he cannot prevent what other users post on Facebook, in order to prevent his mother from reading a narrative about her son that contradicts her own narrative of Jethro and understanding of his identity, he chose to exclude his mother from the audience of this narrative.

Participants' Purposes for Using Social Networking Technologies

Before examining Jethro's digital narratives in greater detail, it is first important to understand the purposes for which my participants, including Jethro, most frequently used social networking technologies. As Jethro's struggles with context collapse illustrated, the purposes for which my participants use social networking spaces directly influences the narratives participants choose to craft in these spaces. In the following section, I examine my participants' perceptions of the purposes of social networking technologies, with a particular focus on the ways in which their perceptions might have changed over time and with regard to their military experiences.

In the remainder of this section, I provide data related to my participants' uses of social networking technologies prior to, during, and after their military service, drawing out similarities and differences in use across time. However, although differences in use did emerge over time, as shown in Table 9, such as an increase in use of social networking profiles for educational and professional purposes both during and after military service, this increase in use can likely be at least partially attributed to the increasing ubiquity of social networking technologies over time.

Table 9: For what purposes did/do you use social networking technologies?

	Prior to Military Service	During Military Service	Post-Military Service/Now
Educational Use	4	5	11
Social/Personal Use	16	23	34
Professional Use	2	7	16
Military Use	0	5	5

Prior to Military Service

Overwhelmingly, those participants who used social networking technologies prior to their military service associated these technologies primarily with social uses. Sixteen participants indicated that they did use social networking technologies prior to military service, with all 16 participants indicating they used social networking technologies for social/personal purposes. Additionally, four participants, Aiden, Jethro, Samantha, and Mattheus, indicated that they used social networking technologies for educational purposes. Three of these participants, Jethro, Samantha, and Mattheus, are student veterans, and all four participants are between the ages of 25-34. Age is important here, as it is more likely that participants from this age demographic used Internet technologies for educational purposes during their formative years

and are also more likely to have adopted social networking technologies during their teens. So, it is unsurprising that participants from this demographic used social networking technologies for educational purposes prior to military service.

Two participants, Mattheus and Rupert, indicated that they used social networking technologies for work-related purposes, and of the 36 participants who completed the survey in full, 21 indicated that, prior to their military service, they viewed social networking technologies as more useful for personal purposes than professional purposes, as shown in Table 10.

However, three participants, Rupert, Johnny, and Driscoll, indicated that they viewed social networking technologies as equally useful for personal and professional purposes. The remaining 12 participants indicated that social networking technologies did not exist or were not widely used prior to their military service, with one participant, Gary, remarking “Social networking was by phone or adds [sic] in news papers [sic] or other publications.” I think Gary’s comment is fascinating because it is easy to forget that our digital social networks have evolved from the existence of social networks in the physical plane, when phone calls and advertisements were the primary mode of networking, in addition to in-person word-of-mouth, of course. Again, Gary’s age is relevant here; as someone between the ages of 55-64, Gary has seen the evolution of the social network from a tightly connected network of friends and family, maintained via face-to-face contact or long-distance phone calls, to the more extensive and less tightly knit digital social networks that are enabled by today’s social networking technologies. Of course, it is important to remember that these loosely connected digital networks also often contain members of the user’s dense physical social network, again adding to the issue of context collapse. However, for those who may be skeptical of the purpose or reason for maintaining digital social networks, I argue

that our online social networks are digital extensions of the social networks that we maintain naturally, as part of the human condition, in line with van Dijk’s (2006) assertion, “social networks are as old as humanity” (p. 21). Concepts of the information society and the network society, both of which rely on the networks of connections made possible by the web and web-based technologies, have emerged from pre-existing models of social networks. Rather than being truly *new*, social networking technologies instead “indicate long-term evolutionary processes of human society” (van Dijk, 2006, p. 21); in this case, a societal evolution made possible through technological advancements and mediation.

Table 10: Are social networking technologies more useful for personal or professional purposes?

	Prior to military service	During military service	Post-military service/now
Personal purposes	21	23	24
Professional purposes	0	2	2
Equally useful for both professional and personal purposes	3	5	9
Useful for neither personal or professional purposes	0	0	1
SNTs did not exist	12	6	0

Social purposes. When given the opportunity to elaborate on their use of social networking technologies prior to their service, eight participants stated that they used social networking technologies to stay in touch or stay connected with friends and family. When analyzing the responses to this question, I expected to see, in accordance with previous literature (Vie, 2008), responses that discussed using social networking technologies to *find old friends*; however, these responses highlighted the ways in which social networking technologies enable

users to *maintain*, rather than to re-establish, contact with friends. Perhaps this is an indication of the increasing ubiquity of social networking technologies, particularly among my participants, all of whom indicated that they currently use social networking technologies.

In other words, I think that it may be possible that many of my participants are experiencing what I think of as old-friend-saturation, or the idea that because a large percentage of the adult population has already adopted social networking technologies, the fewer new users there are, and as a result, the fewer “old friends” there are to find. So, although it still happens once in a while (perhaps more for older generations—my mother just recently became a Facebook user, for example), the function of “finding old friends” has transformed into the function of “maintaining contact” with friends and family. My participants’ focus on maintaining contact with existing friends and family also seems to suggest that my participants do not use social networking technologies to make new friends, but to extend existing connections with people they already know, a finding that is in line with Ellison and boyd’s (2013) conclusion that it is now more common for Facebook users to connect with close friends rather than to make new friends. As a result, I designate these participants’ responses as “staying in touch with friends and family,” a code that emerged as a result of my analysis. It is also important to note here that although I asked my participants to reflect on how they used social networking technologies in the past, their reflections are likely colored by the ways in which they use social networking technologies today. So, while some of my participants may have used social networking technologies prior to their military service to find old friends, the purpose of maintaining contact with existing friends and family members stands out more to my participants.

Additionally, three of my participants, Mattheus, Randolph, and Clifton, wrote about using social networking technologies to “socialize” or “communicate” with friends, with one participant, Katherine, using social networking technologies prior to military service in order to “share pictures with friends on myspace [sic].” Although Katherine does not explicitly mention communication, I argue that the act of sharing pictures is a form of visual communication. As previously stated, eight participants indicated that they used social networking technologies prior to their military service to “stay in touch,” “keep in touch,” “connect,” “stay close,” or “maintain relationships” with friends and family. While “staying in touch” implies communication, my participants likely view the sharing of personal information in social networking technologies in the form of status updates, pictures, etc., as a form of staying in touch. When my participants indicate that they use or used social networking technologies to stay in touch with friends and family, this does not necessarily indicate the presence of direct communication or conversation between the participant and other members of the social network. Instead, staying in touch might indicate reading someone’s status updates or seeing frequent photos of a friend’s children, a topic that I explore in greater depth later in this chapter.

Educational purposes. Very few participants indicated that they used social networking technologies for educational purposes prior to their military service, and only two participants expanded on their use of social networking technologies for educational purposes. Mattheus’ reported educational use of social networking technologies comes in the form of seeking information from Yelp about nearby restaurant options. This might not immediately seem to be educational in nature, but upon examination, using Yelp to read reviews is clearly a process of information gathering in which the user is educating himself about the local culinary scene.

However, Jethro discusses education in more traditional terms, writing: “As far as education, friends would post articles that I previously had not read, and I could then read said article, learning more about a variety of subjects. This would occur on a daily basis.” I find this comment intriguing because, while Jethro was not using his social network to actively seek information on a particular topic, he did view the members of his social network as valuable sources of information, allowing them to teach him “about a variety of subjects.”

Professional purposes. While all of my participants who used social networking technologies prior to military service noted that these technologies were primarily useful for social purposes, two participants did mention professional uses of social networking technologies prior to service. Mattheus referenced his use of LinkedIn for professional networking, and Rupert indicated that he currently uses the net “for recruiting and event planning” in his position as Jr Vice Commandant for a Congressional Marine Corps League, although it is unclear whether social networking technologies are involved in this use, or if this use also occurred prior to his military service.¹¹

During Military Service

In many ways, my participants’ reported uses of social networking technologies during their military service were similar to those prior to service. However, while the majority of participants still viewed social networking technologies as primarily useful for social and/or personal purposes, an increase is shown not only in overall use of social networking technologies, but also in both educational and professional uses. Additionally, two participants

¹¹ Although Mattheus did provide contact information and indicate an interest in participating in a follow-up interview, my attempts to contact him were unsuccessful.

demonstrated an increased concern about the privacy of social networking technologies during their military service.

Overall, 24 participants indicated that they did use social networking technologies during their military service and, similar to my findings related to this use prior to military service, seven of the twelve participants who did not use social networking technologies during their military service stated that these technologies did not exist at this time. Of the remaining five participants, Ericka, Rupert, and Tim did not have access to these technologies. Philip and Griffin, previously discussed in Chapter Three as the two participants who cited concerns about privacy as contributing to their decisions not to use social networking technologies during their service, also both indicated that they had no interest in using social networking technologies. Additionally, Philip noted that he did not have a need to use social networking technologies during his military service, and Griffin noted that he did not have access to social networking technologies during his service.

Using social networking technologies during military service seemed to have minimal, if any, impact on my participants' perception of the usefulness of these technologies, with 23 participants identifying social networking technologies as more useful for personal purposes. Two participants indicated that social networking technologies were most useful for professional purposes, five participants stated that these technologies were equally useful for both personal and professional purposes, and six participants indicated that social networking technologies did not exist at this time. While these results do demonstrate an increase in perceptions of the usefulness of social networking technologies for educational and professional purposes, this

increase is likely attributed to the rising popularity and associated diversity of use of social networking technologies over time.

Social purposes. The 23 participants who indicated that they used social networking technologies for social purposes continued to focus on the role of digital communication in maintaining connections with others, with fifteen participants directly referencing the usefulness of social networking technologies for communicating or staying in touch with friends or family members. Additionally, one participant, Katherine, indicated that she used social networking technologies to “share pictures with family and friends,” which as I argued earlier, falls under the umbrella of communication, resulting in 16 participants (of the 19 responses to this question) using social networking technologies for purposes of communication and staying in touch.

Further, two participants, Edison and Royce, introduced communication practices that were not identified by my participants in their discussions of social networking use prior to military service: meeting new people and playing online social games. Though it may not initially seem as if these two practices are connected, I argue that, at least for my participants, these practices are very similar. Often, military personnel, particularly those who are deployed in combat situations, express the desire to communicate casually with people who do not know that they are combat-deployed military personnel, and both meeting new people through social networking technologies and playing online social games allow the user to communicate casually with strangers, who may or may not eventually become friends.

Edison, who didn't use social networking technologies prior to his military service because they did not exist, began using social networking technologies while in the military to participate in “chat rooms” and to play “games where you could chat while playing. Yahoo Pool

was one of them.” Although Edison did not expound on these answers and did not indicate interest in participating in a follow-up interview, I think that Edison’s responses here are primarily interesting in what they lack—Edison is one of only three participants who did not mention using social networking technologies to communicate or stay in touch with friends and family. Thus, it stands to reason that Edison used social networking technologies during his military service primarily as a form of entertainment, rather than using these technologies to communicate with friends or family, which, while often beneficial for military personnel, can also result in negative stressors, such as the inability to effectively intervene in issues happening at home (Ender & Segal, 1998).

Royce, the participant who indicated that he used social networking technologies during his military service to “meet new people,” also wrote that he used the same technologies to “keep up with friends.” Similarly to Edison, Royce was not available for a follow-up interview, but his response seemed to suggest that staying in touch with friends served a different purpose for Royce than meeting new people. Royce also indicated that, prior to his military service, he had no need for, and no interest in, using social networking technologies. While Royce’s interest and need to use these technologies may be partially influenced by the increasing popularity of these technologies over time, it is also likely that his increased interest and need was, at least in part, also motivated by his military service. Another interesting connection that can be found between Royce and Edison is that these two participants also indicated that they sometimes self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces, but will only provide this information if the profile provides a space for or asks the user to include military status.

Another participant, Johnny, also indicates a desire to use social networking technologies as a release from the imminent present of military service. Johnny wrote: “I supposed [sic] I was trying to maintain a persona separate from my military reality, one with a more long term connection. I was a fool.” Throughout his survey responses, Johnny indicated his distaste for the U.S. military’s focus on control, stating that he “was always aware that the network was controlled by Uncle Sam and he was watching everything.” Johnny went on to say that, “In the old days, you got opened letters. Control. The sacrifice of self made it unappealing. The conformist mask had to be worn, online or not.” Here, Johnny’s response indicated a contradiction that some military personnel may feel in relation to social networking technologies. The tools might be beneficial for communicating with friends and loved ones, but the military is also likely to monitor both digital and print communication from and to military personnel. In a discussion of his current use of social networking technologies, which I discuss later in this chapter, Johnny rebelled against the restriction and control that he associates with his military service by “express[ing his] political opinions and views in an unbridled manor [sic].” However, in spite of his seeming dissatisfaction with military service, Johnny did note, as discussed in Chapter Three, that his “service is central to the person I am.”

Educational purposes. Five participants, Zachariah, Samantha, Randolph, Thornton, and Jethro, used social networking technologies for educational purposes during their military service. While Jethro and Samantha, both student veterans, also used social networking technologies for educational use prior to their military service, Zachariah, Randolph, and Thornton did not. Each of these five participants is between 25-34 years of age and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it is likely that these participants had increased access to social networking

technologies during their youths in comparison to their older counterparts. However, three participants began using social networking technologies for educational purposes during their military service, which might indicate the U.S. military's own efforts to disseminate information via social networking technologies.

Jethro was the only participant to explicitly mention educational purposes when given the opportunity to describe this use within the survey. Jethro wrote: "I was also able to educate myself on a variety of subjects due to posts from friends and family, which made it very easy to want to read because they were in your face/on your feed." Thornton mentioned that he used social networking technologies during his military service as a way to get "answers to questions through unofficial channels," which I classified as educational use. Finally, Clifton, who indicated that he did not use social networking sites for educational purposes during his military service, wrote that he "followed news and friends from home. For work-related purposes, I subscribed to feeds from experts and publications on [sic] my field."

Having the opportunity to conduct interviews and profile tours with both Jethro and Clifton, I learned that education is important to both of these men. Jethro completed his bachelor's degree in May 2016 (shortly after data collection for this project), and prides himself on being knowledgeable. Additionally, Jethro revealed during his profile tour that he makes a point to never offer his opinion on topics about which he is not well-informed. Jethro also seemed to enjoy learning, so it is of no surprise that he is interested in learning more about topics that his friends and family share in their social networking feeds. However, I do wonder to what extent this type of educational use of social networking technologies that consumes the knowledge shared by one's existing connections (as opposed to using social networking

technologies to expose oneself to a wider range of perspectives on a topic of interest) might contribute to the development of the filter bubble, as defined by Eli Pariser (2012). Pariser explained the filter bubble as the result of personalized search algorithms, such as those employed in Facebook's newsfeed or Google's search functions, which help to determine the content users will see first based on their past searching preferences. These algorithms explain why two users can both search the same term in Google's Chrome web browser, yet receive different results. Google tracks our search patterns, and returns the information that the algorithm determines we want. Facebook operates in a similar way, which is why users are more likely to see the posts of people who they interact with in some way (liking, commenting, messaging, etc.) before seeing the posts of those the user does not interact with. If Facebook is already more likely to include information in a user's feed that the user is already likely to be interested in, is the educational use that Jethro is talking about diminished in some way?

In many ways, I believe the answer to this question is dependent upon the user: if you are someone who often interacts in Facebook with others who have differing views, then it is likely that your Facebook newsfeed will depict this variety of thought. Jethro's comments on his educational uses of social networking technologies, both prior to and during his military service, stressed that he learned about a *variety* of subjects through the information that is shared by his connections. Additionally, when providing his feedback on this chapter, Jethro added: "If an article interested me, I would read it, whether I agreed with the subject matter or not. Knowledge is knowledge, and I don't filter/limit myself to only things that please me."

We discussed Jethro's educational use of social networking technologies during his interview, and after some thought, Jethro decided that he encountered an "equal mix" of articles

representing arguments or viewpoints that he agreed with and those that he did not, and went on to state that “someone who only works with subjects she or he is familiar with can’t be expected to learn too much.” Jethro’s comments on this topic seem to indicate that, although unaware of the term filter bubble, Jethro’s diverse connections within social networking technologies help him to resist being trapped in one.

Professional purposes. An increase occurred in participants’ use of social networking technologies for work-related purposes during military service, which again may be an indicator of the military’s own efforts to employ social networking technologies for informational and operational purposes. Of the seven participants who indicated that they used social networking technologies for work-related purposes during their military service, four participants, Samantha, Oliver, Thornton, and Corey, also indicated that they used social networking technologies for purposes related to the military. Additionally, Clifton, who did not indicate that he used social networking technologies during his military service for work-related purposes, did report using social networking technologies during his military service for purposes related to the military. However, when given the opportunity to elaborate on his answer, Clifton wrote “For work-related purposes, I subscribed to feeds from experts and publications on [sic] my field.” After conducting an interview and profile tour with Clifton, it became clear that, as a career military officer with a master’s degree, the military is his job. Clifton did not select both work-related and military purposes because to do so would have been redundant.

Again, the role of a knowledge community in military culture is evident when examining my participants’ responses. Oliver indicated that he used social networking technologies during his military service to troubleshoot equipment. It is unlikely that Oliver, who is between 55-64

and served between 1-4 years in the U.S. military, was using a true social networking technology, however he did demonstrate the importance of accessing information quickly in the military, as well as the role of technology in enabling this access. No other participants explicitly discussed the ways in which they used social networking technologies for purposes related to the military, though Thornton did mention using social networking technologies to “network for employment.”

Post Military Service/Present Day

As expected, the number of participants using social networking technologies today increased from the number of participants who used social networking technologies during their military service. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, at the time of the survey (summer 2015), all 36 participants indicated that they currently used social networking technologies. Although I expected a high rate of use amongst my participants and although much of my participant recruitment occurred in social networking spaces, I did not expect ubiquitous adoption across my participant pool.

Additionally, an increase in using social networking technologies for work-related and educational purposes was evident in the data related to my participants’ current uses of social networking technologies. While 34 of these participants indicated that they used social networking technologies for social and/or personal purposes, 16 participants indicated that they used social networking technologies for work-related purposes, and 11 participants indicated that they used social networking technologies for educational purposes, more than doubling the number of users who used social networking technologies during or prior to their military service. These increases are likely indicative, in part, of the growing number of users of social

networking technologies and the associated diversity of use that emerges from various users having different needs, though these numbers also represent an increasing acceptance of the role of social networking technologies as they apply to both education and the workplace. Although 24 participants still indicated that they view social networking technologies as primarily useful for personal purposes, two participants, Phillip and Ethan, indicated social networking technologies are more useful for professional purposes, and nine participants identified social networking technologies as equally useful for both professional and personal purposes, nearly doubling the number of participants who found this to be true during their military service, as shown in Table 10.

Finally, Colbert indicated that he did not think social networking technologies were useful for personal or professional purposes, responding, “Neither really. Im [sic] not interested in personal or professional gains...” I find this comment particularly interesting since Colbert is a user of several social networking technologies, including Facebook, Foursquare, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Tumblr. However, Colbert’s view is unsurprising when taken along with his other survey answers, which are discussed at various locations in this chapter. Colbert is cynical and views social networking technologies not as communication platforms, but as a form of entertainment and for purposes of humor, both terms that come up repeatedly in his responses. For Colbert, humor and entertainment are not classified as personal or social uses of social networking technologies.

Social purposes. As expected, my participants again focused heavily on the importance of staying in touch with friends, family members, and other military personnel. Each of the 26 participants who responded to this question, with the exception of Colbert, mentioned staying in

touch with friends or family as one reason for using social networking technologies. Further, six of these participants indicated other personal uses of social networking technologies, in addition to staying in touch. As in previous questions, Katherine indicated that she used social networking technologies to share pictures with friends and family. However, personal uses of social networking technologies that were not previously mentioned also emerged here: Clifton wrote that he liked to get/share travel ideas, Randolph used “Pinterest for recipe/food ideas,” Tim used “Reddit/Imgur for funny & interesting stuff,” and Anneliese employed social networking technologies “for certain veteran advocacy projects I have been involved with.” This variation again demonstrates the diversity of social networking technologies, and the ways in which the development of these technologies and the digital needs of our culture grow with and influence one another in a variety of ways.

Colbert again demonstrates his view of social networking as entertainment:

Given that I now view life as a waste of time and mainly a joke, I frequently visit social media sites to post dumb shit or read about other peoples [sic] lives. I find humor in how naive people who have not experienced my version of life are ... It gives me a reason to get out of bed ... just to keep current on other folks [sic] lives.

Here, and in other survey responses, Colbert embodied the pop culture trope of the psychologically wounded warrior. Colbert framed life as “a joke,” and indicated that he finds humor in the naiveté of others and, by assumption, their equally meaningless lives. However, Colbert also added that these mundane lives of others give him a reason to get out of bed, harkening back to the idea of the soldier as living (and dying) for the good of civilians. Here,

Colbert is telling us that, like a “true” soldier, these civilians that he watches (over?) in his social networking profiles are his reason for getting out of bed each day.

Educational purposes. Among my participants, educational uses of social networking technologies more than doubled when examining their current use versus their use during military service, with eleven participants indicating that they used social networking technologies for educational purposes. Interestingly, though, only three of these participants, Jethro, Samantha, and Thornton, also used social networking technologies for educational purposes during their military service. The other two participants, Oliver and Clifton, who indicated that they used social networking technologies for educational purposes during military service did not report the same use currently. However, as previously discussed, it is unlikely that Oliver used a true social networking technology during his service, and for Clifton, education and work go hand-in-hand, as his education directly applies to his career as a military officer. However, as a career military officer, Clifton is careful to now use social networking technologies only for social purposes, such as sharing travel ideas, and refrains from associating his real name or his military affiliation with his social networking profiles.

Two participants, Edison and Chase, explicitly mentioned educational uses of social networking technologies in their surveys. Edison indicated that he uses “LinkedIn for professional and educational purposes,” again drawing a connection between educational and professional deployment of social networking technologies, as in Clifton’s case, discussed above. Chase, however, relies on a different platform, Pinterest, for his educational uses of social networking technologies.

Finally, one participant, Ethan, indicated that he used social networking technologies *only* for educational purposes, and noted that he relied on these technologies to “keep in touch with other like minded [sic] Veterans.” Ethan’s quote again points to the importance of a knowledge community for veterans, not only for the social support provided by a sense of shared experience, but also as a way to access valuable information about, for example, veterans’ services or illnesses known to affect veterans from various wars.

Professional purposes. Similarly, professional uses of social networking technologies more than doubled among my participants between their military service and today, with two participants, Ethan and Philip, reporting that social networking technologies were *more* useful for professional purposes than for social purposes, again pointing to the increasing use of social networking technologies not only in searching for employment, but as a component of one’s professional presence as well. Additionally, nine participants indicated that social networking technologies were equally useful for personal and professional purposes, again demonstrating an increase in my participants’ acceptance of social networking’s usefulness for varied purposes.

Participation in Online Communities of/for Military Personnel

When designing this study, I anticipated that online communities within larger social networking spaces might be especially relevant for my participants. While the privacy of social networking spaces at large is limited, I expected that many of my participants would realize this and, as a result, would be interested in seeking out and participating in sub-communities, such as Facebook Groups, that were intended as spaces for or in support of military personnel. I anticipated that those who participated in such spaces were interested in both the shared experience of military personnel, one that civilians cannot truly imagine or understand, as well as

the ability to tap into the knowledge community created by current, former, and future military personnel in online spaces. My data reaffirmed my expectations; those participants who sought out and/or interacted in online communities of/for military personnel predominantly cited an interest in communicating with others who had shared military experience and gathering information related to military service or veteran concerns as reasons for participating in these spaces, reaffirming Grohowski's (2015) conclusion that military personnel tended to interact in online communities only when these communities filled a perceived need on the part of the veteran.

Reasons for Seeking Online Communities of/for Military Personnel

My survey included several questions aimed at developing a better understanding of how and why military personnel seek out online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel. Twenty participants indicated that they do or have used social networking technologies to seek out online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel, with 16 participants indicating that they did not seek out online communities of/for military personnel. Interestingly, however, in a separate question appearing later in the survey, 23 participants indicated that they do or have used social networking technologies to interact with online communities of/for military personnel, with only 13 participants denying interaction in online communities of/for military personnel.

When designing these questions, I expected that more participants would seek out online communities of/for military personnel than would interact in these communities. In other words, I anticipated that more participants would find and lurk in online communities for military personnel, while fewer would take the next step to interact within these communities. However,

my survey participants' responses suggest that my assumption was incorrect, and seemed to indicate that participants might interact within online communities of/for military personnel without actively seeking these communities out. The higher rate of interaction might indicate that these communities are well known and well advertised, or it might indicate that engagement with these communities is often initiated by someone within the community reaching out to invite interaction.

Participants identified a variety of reasons for seeking out online communities of of/for military personnel. As seen earlier in this chapter, seven participants noted the importance of staying in touch with friends and former co-workers, with two participants mentioning the role of their former military employment as instrumental in forming and joining these online communities. Randolph explained that he sought out online communities of/for military personnel to “stay connected with friends that served in the same career field,” and Dave explained that “I have created or joined groups with similar jobs. For example, the company that I deployed with [in] Afghanistan has a private FB page where we all can talk and share stories.” This particular quote is interesting because it brings several things to light. In addition to identifying shared experience as an important reason for military personnel to seek out online communities of/for military personnel, the participant also notes the importance of privacy, particularly as it related to communication and narrative.

Similarly, Anneliese demonstrated an interest in shared experience, although her interest was based not only on military service, but on gender as well: “Primarily I seek out veteran communities on Facebook and twitter [sic]. Linking up with other women veterans is really ggreat [sic]. It helps to find others with shared experiences for social support and also for finding

services.” As a woman veteran, it is unsurprising that Anneliese is interested in connecting with other women veterans. Women veterans face a unique set of circumstances as military personnel, and it is likely that only other women veterans can truly understand their experiences. However, Anneleise not only points to the relevance of shared experience for military personnel, she also identifies military personnel as members of a knowledge community, whose members help one another to locate and navigate services and resources for veterans, among other information, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Additionally, Colbert points to the role of shared experience for not only social support, but for psychological health. Colbert wrote:

Its [sic] nice to joke with others that served and also have no fucks to give...I suppose its [sic] a form of therapy, but more like knowing that there are other people, who have caused and watched life disappear from someones [sic] eyes as a direct result of decisions they made, that havent [sic] killed themselves with drugs or other methods...knowing they are there too is calming.

Colbert’s words are a harsh reminder of the cost of life associate with military service, as a result of both war and suicide. Rates of suicide among veterans have been reported to be 50% higher than the rate of suicide among civilians (Bare, 2015); however, Junger (2015) argued that these commonly reported figures are exaggerated and stated “it was only in 2008 for the first time in decades, that the U.S. Army veteran suicide rate, though enormously tragic, surpassed the civilian rate in America” (n.p.). And, contrary to popular belief, the suicide rate among veterans is slightly higher among those veterans who were *not* combat deployed (Bare, 2015). These statistics suggest that there is more leading to this high rate of suicide than the trauma of war

alone; in fact, as Bare suggested, it is likely that difficulties related to reintegration and accessing effective social and medical services are significant factors in the high suicide rate among veterans, with survivor's guilt likely functioning as a contributing factor as well. Similarly, Junger (2015) argued that "lack of social support" is a good predictor of PTSD, and also listed other strong predictors of PTSD, including having a learning disability, being female, having a low I.Q., or being a victim of child abuse (n.p.). However, Junger (2015) identified losing a friend in combat as the "most distressing thing that can possibly happen in battle," arguing that this experience "serves as a trigger for psychological breakdowns on the battlefield and readjustment difficulties after the soldier has returned home" (n.p.).

Junger (2015) also argued that reentry to society is a more significant problem for veterans than the trauma of the battlefield, in part because of the military-civilian gap, and in part because military personnel have often been reported to miss the camaraderie, trust, and closeness of community that they experienced during their military service, particularly during times of war. For Colbert, interacting in veterans' communities within Facebook offers valuable support for him, reminding him that others have shared his, or similar, experiences, and in spite of those experiences and their effects, have managed to avoid turning to drug abuse or suicide as a form of escape. More than any other participant, Colbert noted the therapeutic nature of social networking technologies, Facebook in particular, while also demonstrating most clearly the significant effects of the military-civilian gap in terms of shared experience and the understanding (or lack thereof) that emerges.

Looking again to Dave's discussion of his former company's private Facebook page, it stands to reason that the creators, and likely the members, were able to understand and manage

the privacy settings of this social networking technology. That the privacy of this page enables the participants to “talk and share stories” indicates that the communication and sharing of narratives that happens in this space would likely not occur in a public forum. Not only does this demonstrate audience awareness, it is also an additional indication of the need/desire for military personnel to interact with others who have shared their experiences, with the added qualification that these interactions should not be privy to civilians. Again, the finding that veterans who participate in online communities of/for veterans do so out of a perceived need is in line with the findings of Hart and Grohowski (2014) and Grohowski (2015), indicating that online communities are valuable places for outreach to military personnel who are likely to perceive a need for support or services.

Interestingly, questions about participating in online communities for veterans are the only place in the survey where participants indicated an interest in using social networking technologies for the purposes of “finding old friends.” Melanie explained that she is “mostly connected to former military friends/co-workers through fb [sic]. I’ve reconnected to many I’ve served with, including some I went to basic training with,” while Sherwood stated that he is “always trying to track down people I served with.” Similarly, Tiana wrote: “I just look up the names of the people I worked with in the military to see if they are on facebook [sic] to reconnect with them.” However, these are the only three mentions of finding old friends in my participants’ survey responses, further supporting my earlier argument that my research participants use social networking technologies more to stay in touch with friends and family than they do to find old friends.

To return to the role of military employment in seeking out online communities of/for military personnel, several participants mentioned the role of such communities in career development. Corey noted “I have sought out these communities for professional advice in my military career,” while Thornton explained, “I am transitioning from enlisted to officer so I sought out forums of people who have done this already to figure out how they succeedd [sic].” Online communities also allow military personnel to “seek out new military policies and procedures,” as Alden explained, pointing to the military’s acceptance and employment of social networking technologies for the purposes of information dissemination. These comments also indicate a willingness on the part of the established or former military personnel to mentor current military personnel interested in advancing their military careers, pointing to the tight-knit community that is formed through military service.

Of course, those participants who use online communities of/for military personnel for the purposes of seeking career advice are also, more broadly, finding information, a purpose indicated by several other participants as well. In addition to the information-seeking acts previously discussed, including finding services and gathering information related to military career advancement or current military policies and procedures, other participants indicated that they used online communities of/for military personnel to find a variety of information. Ethan relies on communities for veterans within social networking spaces “to get answers to questions of [sic] other Veterans that are sick from Gulf War 1.” Julie noted that she “read[s] vet-related websites,” adding the caveat “but I don’t comment or anything.” While these responses again support the argument that online communities of military personnel operate as knowledge communities, they also suggest the distinction between finding information and communicating

with others. Ethan, who is seeking information about the health issues faced by Gulf War veterans, may be communicating with participants in a social networking space, but communication is not Ethan's primary goal—finding information is. The same is true for Julie, who reads but does not comment on websites for veterans, although Julie is clearly seeking information without communicating at all with other users of the site.

Reasons for Interacting in Online Communities of/for Military Personnel

Those participants who indicated that they interacted with online communities of/for military personnel mentioned similar reasons to those offered for seeking out these online communities: staying in touch with former military co-workers, sharing stories and information with others who shared the experience of military service, and for professional/career development purposes. As expected, a significant portion of the participants (9 out of 20) who responded to this question identified staying in touch with former friends or co-workers from the military as a reason for interacting in online communities of/for military personnel. Additionally, two participants who indicated the desire for shared experience as a reason for interacting in these online communities pointed to the need for humor. Colbert described his interaction in these communities as “for comedic value,” and Clinton indicated “Marine Corps humor” as his reason for interacting in online communities of/for military personnel.

The discussion of humor strengthens the argument for the importance of online communities in which military personnel can connect with others who share the experience of military service, and the concept of military humor existing within groups, or niche communities within the larger community of the social networking technology in which the group operates, again points to my participants' awareness of audience. That my participants interact in groups

with the intent of sharing military-related humor with, as Colbert puts it, “types that have similar views as my own,” indicates an assumption that civilians may not understand or appreciate the type of humor being shared in these niche communities. While a joke falling flat on a social networking platform is certainly nothing new, where the military is concerned, an ill-received joke has the potential to result in public outrage, as discussed in Chapter Two with the case of Specialist Terry Harrison. Thus, recognizing the need for military humor as a healthy and normal outlet for maintaining psychological health while also understanding the possible high-stakes involved with this type of humor make niche online communities a valuable resource for military personnel interested in interacting with others who have shared the experience of military service.

Reasons for Not Seeking For or Interacting in Online Communities of/for Military Personnel

The 16 participants who indicated that they did not seek out online communities of/for military personnel and the 13 participants who indicated that they did not interact with these online communities predominately identified a lack of interest, but did not provide additional details about why they lacked interest in seeking out online communities of/for military personnel. However, Jethro wrote: “I personally rarely feel the need to seek communities of any kind, military or not, simply because I don’t feel a need for them. My friends and family provide me with all the support I could possibly need.” Here, Jethro points to the need for support (either psychological or physical, such as by providing information or resources) when seeking for or interacting with online communities of/for military personnel. Royce echoed this notion, stating, “I have people around me that I can talk to about anything.” Although Jethro and Royce are able

to garner support from their circles of family and friends, many military personnel do not feel this way, again indicating the importance of these online communities.

Other participants indicated that they only use social networking technologies to stay in touch with friends and people they already know, suggesting that these participants do not use social networking technologies for the purposes of making new friends. Finally, Clifton, a military officer, stated, “I see enough military personnel at work. I don’t need to seek them out during my spare time, too.” Clifton’s response, in light of earlier discussions related to professional development and these online communities, might indicate that while online communities of/for military personnel might be useful for purposes of professional development, professional networking, and career advancement for current military personnel, outside of these purposes, online communities might be more beneficial for former or future military personnel, who may not have connections with other military personnel on a regular basis.

Two Digital Narratives: The Digital Identities of One Student Veteran

In this section, I pull from the data collected from my interview and profile tour with one student veteran, Jethro, in order to demonstrate the ways in which Jethro carefully crafts distinct narratives representing various aspects of his identity in distinct social networking spaces. After presenting the digital narratives that Jethro has crafted in both Instagram and Facebook, I discuss the ways in which these narratives support and/or resist commonplace tropes of the veteran in American society, as well as the ways in which these narratives enable Jethro to present distinct aspects of his identity.

Jethro

Jethro is a 29-year-old white male who served four years in the Army after enlisting when he was 18. At the time of data collection (2015) for this project, Jethro was enrolled in a four-year, public university and used his post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to cover his tuition. In May 2016, Jethro graduated from the same university with a B.S. in Biomedical Sciences. Jethro uses social networking technologies for both educational and social purposes, and maintains accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. In his survey responses, Jethro indicated that he sometimes identifies as military personnel in social networking spaces; however, when we discussed the four social networking accounts that Jethro does maintain, he stated, “I don’t identify as a veteran on any. I wouldn’t go out of my way to do that. The extent of that would be I might like somebody’s post that is related to the military. I might like it or comment something that’s never specific to me.”

It soon became apparent that Jethro and I had different ideas of what it might mean to self-identify as a veteran in social networking spaces. I understood self-identification as something that could happen in many ways, either through including military affiliation in personal details or work experience, by belonging to subcommunities within the social networking site that are for current or former military personnel, or by posting pictures or sharing memories from one’s military experience. However, for Jethro, self-identifying meant to explicitly state one’s status as military personnel or veteran. I discovered this by asking about Jethro’s Facebook photos. After inquiring as to whether he had any photos on Facebook from his time in the military, Jethro replied: “Yes, I do have a few. But I don’t really remember what they are. I think there’s one [of me] laying on the ground next to my friend. It’s kind of a funny thing

... and one of me sitting in my truck.” At this point, I reminded Jethro of his previous statement that he did not self-identity as a veteran in Facebook, and asked him if people looking through his photos could determine that he was a veteran. Jethro responded: “They would have to look through my stuff. There might only be three pictures of me in uniform.” Here, Jethro seemed to be implying that since his profile is only open to friends (a point we had discussed previously in the interview), if one of his friends is willing to “look through his stuff” (in other words, to perform the now mundane activity of “Facebook stalking”), then it is okay for that person to learn that Jethro is a veteran. However, Jethro does not wish to actively provide that information to anyone who is not looking (or who is looking for the wrong reasons, perhaps).

At that point, I prompted Jethro to tell me more about why he doesn’t want to self-identify as a veteran. Jethro responded:

It goes back to me wanting to keep things bundled up. I’m not a showy person. In other respects I would be ... as far as my personality, I can be outgoing sometimes and a lot of times I can not be [outgoing]. As far as the veteran thing, I don’t like just announcing that to people, cause [sic] it could change their attitude; it could change their actions. A lot of things can change when people find out you were in the military. I was in McDonalds [sic] one time ... and I asked if they did military discounts. She said no, and I already had my veteran’s card out, but I just said, “OK, cool.” The guy behind me heard and said, “I’d like to pay for your meal. Thank you. Thank you.” I said “No, thanks, I appreciate it.” I’ll take the military discount but I’m not going to take somebody paying for my meal.

Here, Jethro expressed a tension that many current and former military personnel experience. While Jethro was proud of his service, he did not consider himself a hero, nor did he wish to be thanked for his service or treated differently as a result of a service, a sentiment common among veterans (Richtel, 2015). Jethro even took issue with the term service, telling me, “I consider the military a job, not a service. I guess you can thank the guy that’s making your hamburger as much as thanking a guy who decided to do a different job than he did.” Jethro is echoing the idea, discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, that military service is not a heroic act, but a mundane job that is “no big deal.” Jethro went on to offer his own thoughts on heroism:

Most people that pull people out of fires are considered heroes too. When they’re really just doing normal human things, whether you’re the firefighter or the neighbor. I don’t mean to say that there’s no such thing as a hero. But I would consider the neighbor pulling a person from a fire to be more heroic than the firefighter, and that’s with all due respect to both people in this situation. The firefighter is doing a job he knowingly signed up to do, while the neighbor is simply doing the inherently (I would hope) good thing.

Jethro’s Instagram Identity

During my tour of Jethro’s Instagram page, he told me that he primarily used Instagram as a place to curate photographs, and that he “doesn’t really post things on here for people to get a reaction.” However, he went on to highlight a number of posts that he referred to as funny, and told me that he is “a light-hearted person” and that “being comedic has always been a part of my life.” In addition to humorous content, Jethro’s Instagram features several images from concerts and other events, such as a medical conference in New Orleans that Jethro attended as a part of a pre-medical student organization. I asked Jethro why he chose to curate the photos in Instagram,

where his profile is completely public, as opposed to Facebook, a space in which I know that he uses privacy settings. Jethro stated: “I guess I use Facebook more maturely. I use it more seriously. It’s definitely easier to get things up and out there than Instagram. I guess I use Facebook more for things that are happening in my life. It’s more personal than Instagram.” Jethro went on to explain this conception of Facebook as more personal than Instagram as related to both privacy settings and audience. Not only does Jethro maintain his privacy controls in Facebook, making content available to friends only, he also approves each and every one of his Facebook friends. On Instagram, however, Jethro’s profile is public, and anyone can choose to “follow” him, individuals and companies alike.

“Ok,” Jethro says. “Let’s start at the beginning” (Figures 5 and 6).¹²



Figure 5. Jethro’s inaugural Instagram post.

¹² All quoted material in the remainder of this section includes words spoken by Jethro during our profile tour. I chose not to repeatedly identify Jethro as the speaker in this section because to do so interrupts the retelling of Jethro’s Instagram narrative.



Figure 6. Comments associated with Jethro’s inaugural Instagram post, shown in Figure 5.

“As you can see by the comment [as shown in Figure 6]—‘Oh my god! You put up a picture’—I was pretty inactive. So yeah, I put it up, a picture. So, it started off me, just myself and some friends [Figures 7 and 8], my nephew [Figures 9 and 10].”



Figure 7. Jethro and a female friend.

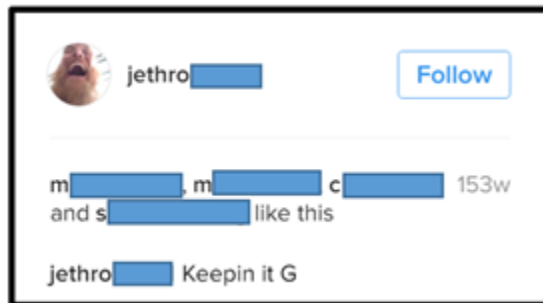


Figure 8. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and a friend, shown in Figure 7.



Figure 9. Jethro and his nephew.



Figure 10. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and his nephew, shown in Figure 9.



Figure 11. Jethro in a tank top.



Figure 12. Comments associated with the image of Jethro in a tank top, shown in Figure 11.



Figure 13. Comments associated with the image of Jethro in a tank top, shown in Figure 11, continued.

From the first four images on Jethro's Instagram, we can already begin to understand him as a particular individual. Each of these images carries a light-hearted and inviting aura, and although Jethro is clearly displaying masculinity, in both his dress and his ever-present beard, he also wears a long, wavy wig and sports a black tank top full of what, at first glance, appeared to be adorable cats (Figures 11, 12, and 13). However, when providing his feedback on this chapter, Jethro pointed out that adorable may not be the best way to describe an image in which "one cat has an eye patch, one is wearing a gold chain, and one is smoking a cigarette," a comment that brings to light the importance of perception. From these four images (Figures 5-13), we can infer that not only are family and friends important to Jethro, so is humor. The humorous nature of Jethro's identity is also evident in his profile picture on Instagram, which can be seen in Figures 6, 8, 10, and 12. This close-up image of Jethro in a full beard, with a full, open-mouthed smile/laugh, along with the four posts examined above, firmly position Jethro as a jokester.

"I like to post funny stuff" (Figures 14 and 15).



Figure 14. Whale cartoon.



Figure 15. Comments associated with the whale cartoon, shown in Figure 14.

“Like these ones, where I’m making fun of a friend” (Figures 16-23).



Figure 16. Jethro and a male friend after drinking.



Figure 17. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and a male friend after drinking, shown in Figure 16.



Figure 18. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and a male friend after drinking, shown in Figure 16, continued.



Figure 19. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and a male friend after drinking, shown in Figure 16, continued 2.



Figure 20. Jethro and a group of friends.



Figure 21. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and a group of friends, shown in Figure 20.

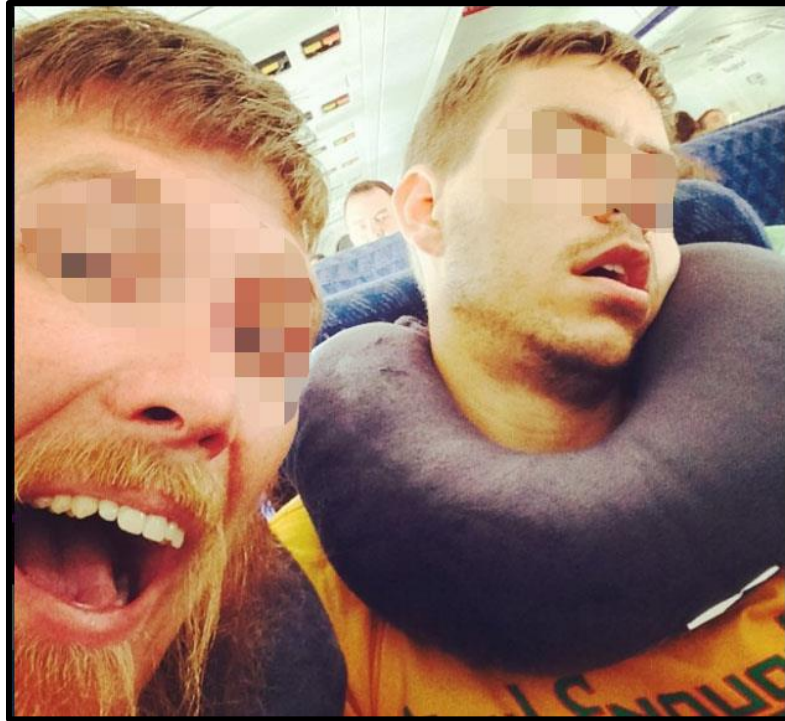


Figure 22. Jethro and a sleeping friend.



Figure 23. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and a sleeping friend, shown in Figure 22.

In Figures 16–23, Jethro is making the fun of the same friend, “w.” In Figure 16, “w” is bent over a toilet clearly ill after an evening of drinking. However, in Figure 20, Jethro is making fun of the face his friend is making in a group photograph, and in Figure 22, Jethro teases “w” for falling asleep on an airplane back home from Vegas. Again, not only do these posts demonstrate Jethro’s light-hearted, jokester identity, they also reflect his dedication to cultivating and maintaining close relationships with few individuals. Someone who was not a close friend would likely not appreciate or join in the joking as “w” did in the comments associated with these posts.

“I’m a light-hearted person. Comedy—I guess to me being comedic has always been a part of my life” (Figures 24 and 25).



Figure 24. Jethro and The Flash do EDM.

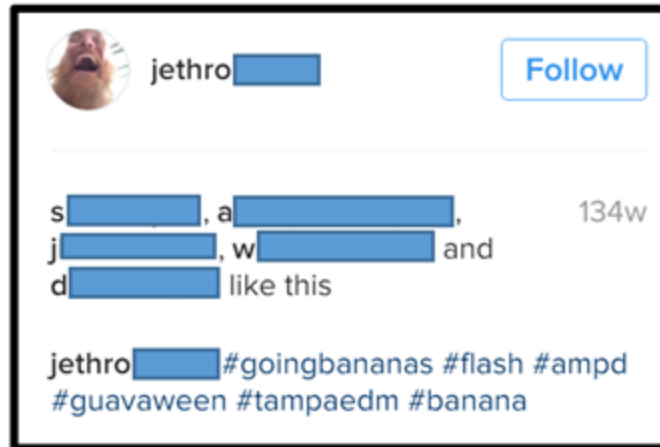


Figure 25. Comments associated with the image of Jethro and The Flash do EDM, shown in Figure 24.

In addition to his love for humor, Jethro demonstrates a penchant for electronic dance music (EDM) performances at nightclubs and festivals. In Figures 24 and 26, we can see that Jethro doesn't lose his sense of humor when attending these shows. Instead, he embraces it, and wears a banana suit. And here, we see that Jethro has the ability to laugh at himself as well.

“Here I was at a show. Up in the balcony. There are a lot of shows” (Figures 26-31).



Figure 26. Jethro in a banana costume.



Figure 27. Comments associated with the image of Jethro in a banana costume, shown in Figure 26.

jethro [redacted] @g [redacted] #imdownforedc
jethro [redacted] #edcorlando #dadalife
jethro [redacted] @st [redacted]

Figure 28: Comments associated with the image of Jethro in a banana costume, continued.



Figure 29. View of Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC), Orlando.



Figure 30. Comments associated with the image of a view of EDC Orlando, shown in Figure 28.



Figure 31. Comments associated with the image of a view of EDC Orlando, continued.

In Figure 30, Jethro uses the hashtag #hydrateordie in a post about EDC, Orlando. Although this phrase was not meaningful to me, when he provided feedback on this chapter, Jethro told me about the significance of this phrase: “Hydrate or die. That was a staple in the military...hydrate or die, make sure you drink water. So that was a way I subtly hinted toward my military past.” So, while this phrase did not hold meaning for me, it is likely that it may be meaningful for military-affiliated audience members, who may more readily associate this phrase with military service.

“I thought this guy was cool. That was at another show where you threw down all these glowsticks. He just put them all over him. I just thought he looked pretty cool” (Figures 32 and 33).



Figure 32. Glowstick collector.



Figure 33. Comments associated with the image of the glowstick collector, shown in Figure 32.

While it is not uncommon to associate raves and EDM festivals with recreational drug use (Duca, 2014; Knopper, 2013; “Tips for Parents,” n.d.), the post shown in Figures 34-36 seems to suggest that this association holds true for Jethro as well. The post (Figure 34) depicts a hand-made bracelet with the phrase “MDMAZING,” referencing the drug methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), also known as ecstasy or molly. Even more interesting, though, is the commentary (Figures 35 and 36) from the maker of the bracelet, who stated that making the bracelet was the least she “could do for someone who saved my life lol.” And, true to his identification of heroism as a normal human characteristic, Jethro responded: “All in a day’s work homie. Stay classy.”



Figure 34. MDMAzing bracelet.



Figure 35. Comments associated with the image of the MDMAzing bracelet, shown in Figure 34.

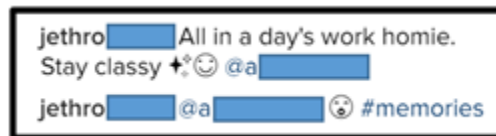


Figure 36. Comments associated with the image of the MDMAzing bracelet, continued.

At this point, Jethro transitioned into a discussion of education, beginning with a medical conference that he attended in New Orleans as part of a student association. However, what I found most interesting about these posts (Figures 37-43) are not the images themselves, but the accompanying text from Jethro. In the first of these posts, shown in Figures 37-39, we learn that it is Jethro's first day at the conference and that he has had one hour of sleep. But, later that evening, in the second post, Jethro is on Bourbon Street, looking for "some trouble" (Figures 40 and 41). The next day, Jethro is back in his suit and bow tie, at the conference and proudly representing #teamnosleep (Figures 42 and 43).

“This is in New Orleans at a medical conference. So, Bourbon Street. You got [sic] to put that up cause [sic] that’s Bourbon Street” (Figures 37-43).

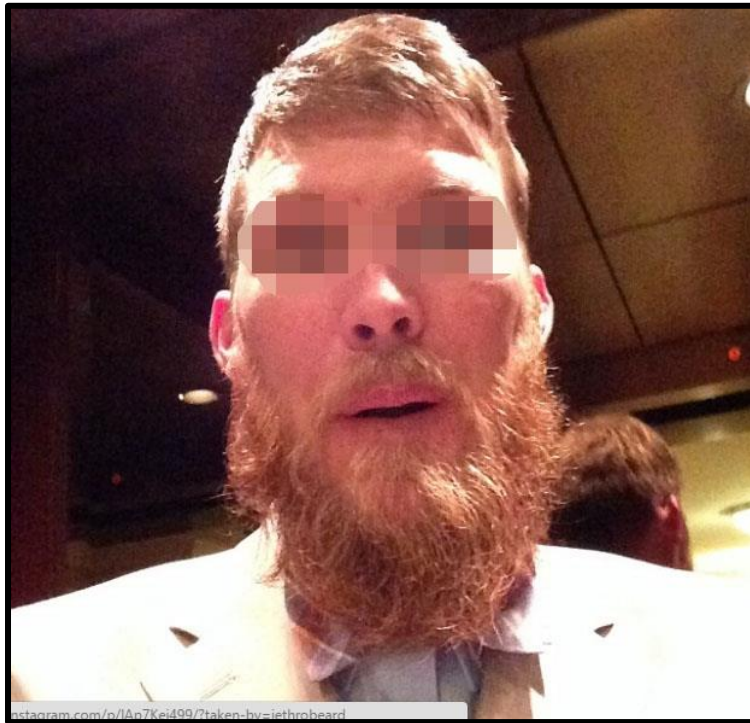


Figure 37. Jethro at a medical conference: Day one.



Figure 38. Comments associated with the image of Jethro at a medical conference: Day one, shown in Figure 37.

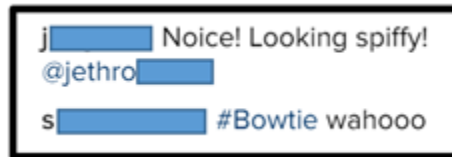


Figure 39. Comments associated with the image of Jethro at a medical conference: day one, continued.



Figure 40. Bourbon Street.



Figure 41. Comments associated with the image of Bourbon Street, shown in Figure 40.

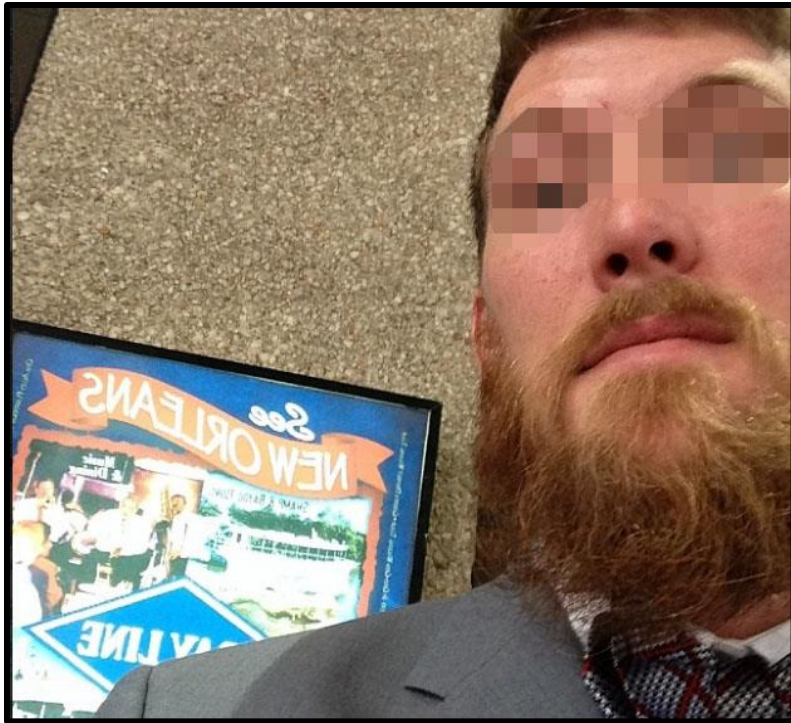


Figure 42. Jethro at a medical conference: Day two.



Figure 43. Comments associated with the image of Jethro at a medical conference: Day two, shown in Figure 42.

When Jethro presented information associated with his student identity on Instagram, it was always with humor, and as an audience member, it was difficult to determine whether Jethro takes his education seriously. In addition to his posts from the AMSA conference, which focuses little attention on the conference itself, instead prioritizing the conference's location in New Orleans and Jethro's conference attire, particularly his bow tie, Jethro's profile includes other posts referencing his education, as shown in Figures 44-47. Again, though, these posts are couched in humor, often minimizing Jethro's identity as a student.



Figure 44. Jethro's classmates.



Figure 45. Comments associated with the image of Jethro's classmates, shown in Figure 44.

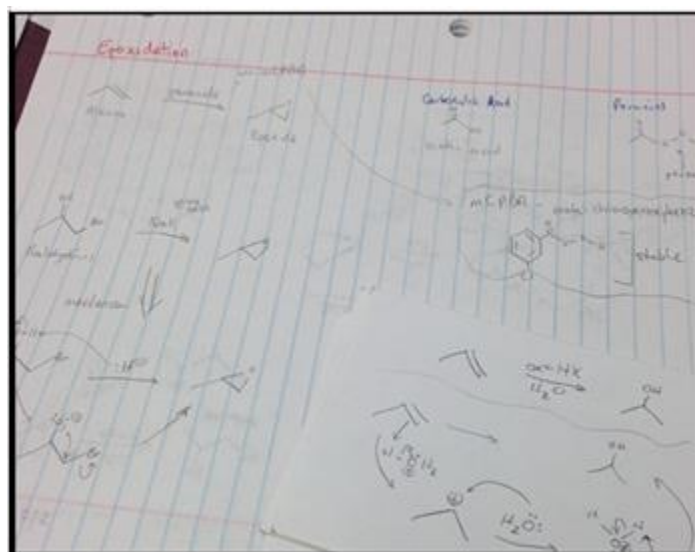


Figure 46. Jethro's class notes.



Figure 47. Comments associated with the image of Jethro's class notes, shown in Figure 46.

In the two previous posts (Figures 44-47), Jethro not only used hashtags to tell the reader that he hasn't learned anything at the university he attended (Figure 45), he also made a direct connection between his identity as a student and his identity as an EDM fan with the hashtag “#educationpaysforaves” (Figure 47), which seemingly privileges his interest in raves over his interest in education.

As previously discussed, in Jethro's survey responses, he indicated that he sometimes self-identifies as a veteran in social networking spaces. Early on in our interview, before our profile tour, Jethro stated, “I don't identify as a veteran on any [social networking site]. I wouldn't go out of my way to do that. The extent of that would be I might like somebody's post that is related to the military. I might like it or comment, something that's never specific to me.” And then, just as we were preparing to conclude the Instagram portion of the profile tour, I saw the following image (Figure 48):



Figure 48. Jethro in uniform.



Figure 49. Comments associated with the image of Jethro in uniform, shown in Figure 48.



Figure 50. Comments associated with the image of Jethro in uniform, continued.

Not only does this image (Figure 48) clearly depict Jethro in his Army uniform, Jethro also posted this picture in honor of Veteran’s Day, as we see in the comments (Figures 49-50). Interestingly, this is one of the only photographs of Jethro on his social networking profiles in which he does not have a beard—a fact he notes in his own comment on the post, “A rare glimpse under the beard” (Figure 49) Then, Jethro gives the reader an additional clue: “It’s hard to believe this was 7 years ago. Cray.” With this post, Jethro told his audience that he is not a traditionally-aged college undergraduate. If Jethro’s military service ended seven years ago, even if his service lasted for only one day, Jethro must be at least 25 years old. Given that the traditional length of military service in the Army is four years, it stands to reason that Jethro is approximately 29 years old. But, I think that this message is counteracted, in part, by Jethro’s use of the slang “cray,” meaning crazy—a term that is lexically associated with teenagers.

Additionally, we see a commenter providing the obligatory “thank you for your service” remark, which research demonstrated often makes veterans uncomfortable (Richtel, 2013) and which Jethro himself, earlier in the interview, indicated that he disliked. However, Jethro responded here in the way society often expects military personnel to respond: “thank you so much, much appreciated.” Even more telling is the civilian’s response to this: “No @jethro thank you” (Figure 50). It seems that what is important here is not only that Jethro accepts this civilian’s gratitude, but also that the civilian must position himself as *more* thankful than Jethro. Although it seems very clear from the image above that Jethro served in the U.S. military, as discussed above, Jethro does not view the inclusion of this image in his Instagram profile as identifying him as a veteran.

Jethro also posted frequently about going to the beach, a popular activity in the Bay area, particularly for college students, but he didn't discuss these posts during our profile tour. Jethro also posted about traveling, connecting his travel both to education, as shown above, as well as to his love for EDM, as he chronicled trips to shows both in and out of the state of Florida, with the longest being a road trip to attend an EDM festival in Las Vegas, followed by a brief detour to California. However, Jethro didn't explicitly address these posts in our profile tour, either.

As we continued to talk, I learned more about the audience differences Jethro sees between Instagram and Facebook. Primarily, Instagram users, or at least the ones that connect with Jethro, are in his general age demographic or younger. As a result, Jethro is not as concerned about how his actions in this space might affect the way important people in his life, such as his mother, or other older family members and friends of family, understand Jethro's identity. Additionally, as previously discusses, much of Jethro's Instagram audience consists of strangers, companies, and organizations, further enabling Jethro to worry less about how his audience might interpret his actions. For Jethro, the perceptions of his strong ties are more important than those of his weak ties or those of the public. While this seems to suggest, then, that in Instagram, Jethro is able to perform a more realistic version of himself, I would argue that this is not necessarily true. Instead, I argue that Jethro is crafting a very particular identity in Instagram: one of the traditionally-aged white male college student attending a public university. In fact, the one post of himself in uniform seems to be the only post on Jethro's Instagram that disrupts this narrative, and it is Jethro's reference to his military service occurring seven years ago, and not his military service itself, that causes this disruption.

From previous conversations, I have come to know Jethro as intelligent and astute. I know that Jethro takes his education seriously, and I know that he is grateful for the post-9/11 GI Bill benefits that have allowed him to afford higher education. However, in his Instagram profile, although Jethro does make several references to his education, he does so in a way that pokes fun at his educational pursuits, allowing him to craft a narrative that encompasses components of his student identity in ways that do not threaten his identity among the EDM community. In many ways, I view Jethro's Instagram profile as an attempt to pass as a traditionally aged college student. Jethro is a 29-year-old college undergraduate, but unlike many other non-traditional students, he does not have a spouse, children, or full-time employment and can physically pass as a traditionally-aged student. Through his Instagram profile, featuring humor, EDM music, travel, days at the beach, references to alcohol and drug use, and comments on the ineffectiveness of his current college education, Jethro crafts a narrative that again, with the exception of the inclusion of one photo of himself in uniform, positions him as a traditionally-aged undergraduate male who enjoys EDM music, traveling, and going to the beach, among other activities often associated with college students, such as social drinking and drug use.

And while Jethro might not associate his Instagram identity with his veteran identity, I argue that, in many ways, Jethro's identity on Instagram upholds the dominant narrative of the military and also supports common tropes of the veteran. First, Jethro's Instagram narrative portrays him as masculine, a trait clearly associated with the military. Humility is also present, not only in the post featuring Jethro in uniform, but also in the post in which a woman is thanking Jethro for saving her life. In both of these posts, Jethro accepts praise graciously, and allows himself to be positioned as a hero, thus upholding the veteran as hero narrative. Jethro

might not make it a point to tell people that he is a veteran, but the inclusion of a picture of himself in uniform suggests that he is not uncomfortable with people knowing that he is a veteran. Additionally, and in connection to the humility Jethro's digital narrative portrayed, the importance of relationships, in particular the positioning of others over the self, was a consistent theme in Jethro's digital narrative in Instagram and is also a theme that carried over to Jethro's Facebook profile, which I discuss later in this chapter.

The references to drug use, alcohol abuse, and partying at EDM festivals are interesting, because while at first glance they might seem to resist traditional tropes of the veteran, I instead argue that these characteristics support the trope of the wounded warrior. The psychologically wounded warrior often abuses alcohol, and while the images on Jethro's Instagram profile referencing alcohol abuse highlight the alcohol consumption of his friends rather than himself, these posts imply that Jethro might also be consuming alcohol irresponsibly. Additionally, the passing references to drug use can easily be interpreted as markers of an inability or resistance to successful reintegration into civilian life. But, it is important to note that Jethro has reintegrated successfully, perhaps in large part because of his humor, although perhaps not as society or the military may have expected him to. Jethro's sense of humor seems to have played a primary role in his successful transition and reintegration, pointing again to the value of shared humor for military personnel, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Jethro's Facebook Identity

Jethro uses Facebook primarily to maintain "contact with people from high school, from many years ago. Not that I talk to them every day but, just to have them within reach." With this statement, Jethro began to confirm my understanding of "staying in touch." Discussing this topic

further, Jethro told me that while he does not directly message his Facebook contacts, when he does, it is primarily to contact people that he communicates with on a semi-regular basis and in other venues. While he does not directly communicate with the majority of his Facebook “friends,” Jethro does consider himself “in touch” with his Facebook friends, arguing that he maintains contact with the majority of his Facebook friends by viewing their pictures and reading their status updates. Although he himself is an infrequent poster, Jethro saw his status updates as filling a similar purpose, enabling others to stay in touch with him without maintaining a direct line of communication.

Although it was important to Jethro to “start at the beginning” when we toured his Instagram profile, the same urge did not apply to Facebook. Instead, Jethro began his Facebook tour with the “About Me” section, where we immediately made an interesting discovery: on Facebook, Jethro does indeed self-identify as a former member of the U.S. military by listing the U.S. Army as a previous employer (Figure 51).

“Ok, so I do have that I was in the military.”-Jethro (J)

“So, does this mean that you do self-identify as a veteran?”-Sandy (S)

“Yeah, but I mean, honestly, I don’t...I didn’t ever remember putting that in there. So, maybe I did that right when I got in there in the military. You know, yeah, super excited I’m in the military. Let me tell people. And then I guess I updated it when I got out.”-J¹³

¹³ In this section, I include some dialogue between Jethro and myself. In the remainder of this section, I will indicate Jethro’s dialogue with a “J” and will indicate my own words with an “S.”

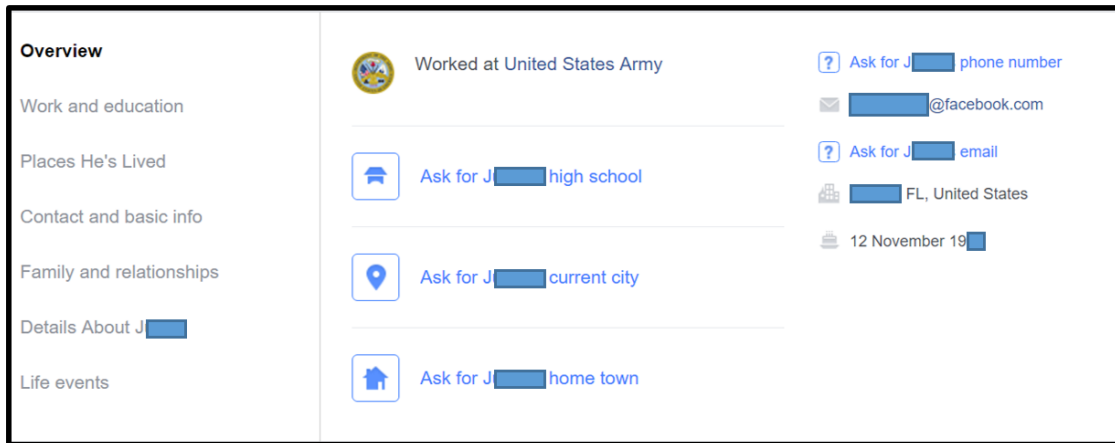


Figure 51. Jethro's Facebook "About Me."

As previously discussed, Jethro views his military service not as a service, but as a job. Because of this, and because of the mundaneness that Jethro associates with employment, it is unsurprising that Jethro does not recall sharing this information in his “About Me” section. Additionally, I do not think that what Jethro is experiencing here is unique. First, it is possible that Jethro is experiencing the false sense of security that McCormick (2014) described, as discussed in Chapter Three, that can develop when a user believes that he or she has full control of (and mastery of) the privacy settings in a digital space. Additionally, though, social networking platforms also invite the user to fill out varying amounts of personal information when *setting up* one’s profile: Facebook, as seen in the image above, asks the user for information about education, work experiences, and life events, while also collecting data about the user’s previous areas of residence, information about the user’s family members and relationships, and the user’s contact information. With the exception of a few required fields, though, the level of detail provided in Facebook’s “About Me” section is at the discretion of the user. However, social networking profiles, with the notable exception of LinkedIn, do not

typically invite the user to update their profile information regularly. Jethro established his Facebook in 2006, and I invited him to reflect on his profile in 2015, nine years later. After some thought, Jethro revealed that he believes his sister set up the profile for him after he joined the Army (in June 2005), and that the only information he recalled updating in his “About Me” section was related to his relationship status. Like many others, Jethro’s Facebook profile has catalogued his relationship history: since the creation of his profile in 2006, Jethro has moved from single, to engaged, to married, to single, to in a relationship, and recently, back to single.

At the time of our interview, Jethro’s profile indicated that he was “in a relationship.” (Figure 51 shows a more recent screen grab and does not reflect this relationship status.) Immediately after concluding our discussion of his previous employment with the Army, Jethro gestured toward the screen.

“That wasn’t my decision.”-J

“What wasn’t your decision?”-S

“Let’s just say, putting I was in a relationship wasn’t my decision. She added it. Like, we were together for six months before she finally realized, ‘OH, NO! We’re not Facebook official.’ I didn’t care at all.”-J

Based on the lack of other personal information in his Facebook “About Me” section, it is unsurprising that Jethro is not concerned with disclosing his relationship status. At the time of this writing, although Jethro still remains in the same relationship he was in when we conducted the profile tour, his Facebook profile now lists him as “single.” However, what I also found fascinating here is that, with the exception of updating his relationship status, the only voluntary information Jethro included in his “About Me” section is about his military affiliation. Jethro did

disclose both his birth date and area of residence, but these are fields that Facebook users are required to fill in when signing up for an account.

Jethro is equally discriminating regarding the information he shares about his Facebook friends. Facebook provides users with the options of making their list of connections viewable by other users or hidden from other users. Jethro chose to only display his mutual connections with other users. In other words, although Jethro has 341 Facebook friends, if he and I are connected on Facebook but only have three friends in common, I cannot see the remaining 338 of Jethro's friends.

“Tell me why you haven't populated your “About Me” section very much.”-S

Interesting choice of words there. I would argue that the word populate comes from the same place as popular. And I don't care about being popular. I don't care if people know that I work at this restaurant or that I began a relationship with this person. I don't care about that at all. Not online or offline. I mean, I'm not going to deny being in a relationship, but I don't care if you know where I work. I don't really care to know where you work. It's information I just don't need. I'm not a private person, really, but I'm not going to volunteer information, either. Other people can. I'm not going to tell them, ‘Hey, I don't care where you work.’ If they tell me, okay, cool, now I know that about you. But it's not information I care about. I mean, 98% of the people on my Facebook don't know where I work. (Jethro)

Although Jethro does not consider himself a “private person” and, by his own admission, displays both extroverted and introverted personality characteristics, Jethro is not and does not ever seem to have been a frequent poster in the social networking technologies that he uses. With

this observation, in concert with Jethro's lack of personal information in the "About Me" section, I anticipated that Jethro did make use of the privacy settings in Facebook. To summarize, Jethro makes his content available only to "friends" that he is connected with in Facebook, rather than making his content "publicly available" or available to "friends of friends." Only Jethro and his Facebook friends can post on his timeline, and Jethro has enabled the option to review posts on his timeline that friends have "tagged" him in before the posts are visible on his own timeline. However, as previously mentioned, Facebook does not allow users to review posts in which they are tagged if they appear on another user's wall. Facebook does allow users to prevent themselves from being tagged at all, and also allows the user to completely prevent any other users from posting on one's timeline at all, but Jethro chose not to employ these features.

I made the decision to review the posts I was tagged in because I was tagged in something ... I don't remember what it was ... it was something that, like, had a sexual reference to it. This was during a time ... even now, I have aunts and uncles, I've got little cousins, I've got family members. I don't know who sees that. I don't know how often they're gonna check their feed. 'Oh, there, Jethro was mentioned somewhere. What is this?' You know. So that's why I changed that, so I can be the person who says this is okay for me. (Jethro)

Although it is important to Jethro that the information associated with him on Facebook is appropriate for a diverse audience, his timelines, both historically and currently, predominantly consists of posts from other users, rather than of his own creation. In fact, the inaugural post on his Facebook timeline is from another user (Figure 52).



Figure 52. Inaugural post on Jethro's Facebook wall.

From this post (Figure 52), it is clear that prior to posting himself, Jethro made use of Facebook's "poking" feature. The first post for his timeline that Jethro composed himself appeared ten days later and is in the form of two photos without any accompanying text (Figures 53 and 54).

"Oh, goodness. That was on my base in Germany [Figure 53]. There was a company there that sold and rented cars, and they brought out a Harley vendor one weekend to try and sell. That was actually, like, my third week there, I think. So, I just sat on that one because I liked the color. That was all."-J



Figure 53. Jethro on a motorcycle.



Figure 54. Architecture in Germany.

Jethro does not reveal on Facebook that these photos were taken out of the country, though it is likely that many users could deduce that the second photo (Figure 54) was not taken in the US. The presentation of these images without text to provide context seems to align with Jethro's overall view on revealing information via social networking systems: although he provides minimal information, if another user is willing to do the necessary investigation to piece together the clues he leaves about himself to deduce additional information, then that is fine, but he will not go out of his way to make such information available to his social networking contacts.

With the exception of a brief mention of the two images above, Jethro spent little time discussing the first several years of his Facebook timeline. As Jethro scrolled quickly through this portion of his digital narrative, I was struck by two things. First, I was struck by the ways in which social networking technologies and the increased speed of information in the digital age

have affected how we, as a society, understand and engage with our own histories. Rather than saving images and keepsakes in physical photo albums, which invite infrequent yet leisurely trips down memory lane, the digital photo albums maintained in spaces like Facebook and Instagram, always at the ready, instead invite users to scroll quickly through their pasts, searching for a particular memory without lingering in the past for too long.

Second, I was struck by just how much of Jethro's narrative was authored by other users. Although Jethro posted several times in 2007, none of the posts on his timeline from 2008 or 2009 were created by him. However, Jethro was in Iraq on deployment until late 2008, which he said "probably had a lot to do with not posting." I knew that Jethro was an infrequent poster, but I was surprised with the amount of posts on his timeline that were from other Facebook users. I believe that, in this way, social networking technologies mirror real-world interactions. Although we might wish to believe that, in all situations, we are, as individuals, completely in control of the development and presentation of our own narrative and identities, we are not. Others understand our identities and our stories not based solely on our own behaviors and personalities, but also on the actions and attitudes of those we associate with, as well as the stories that other people tell about us. In fact, in many cases, the stories that others tell about us can be more influential to another's perception of us than are the stories we tell about ourselves. Harkening back to Jethro's decision to review the posts that appear on his timeline, it seems that Jethro was aware of the power of other's narratives to influence how others understand his own.

Jethro scrolled quickly through the next several years of his timeline and indicated that none of his posts during this time were memorable or important. However, in 2010, Jethro's own activity on his timeline begins to increase, achieving an almost equal balance between Jethro's

own posts and the posts of others appearing on his timeline. Interestingly, Jethro separated from the Army in November of 2009, and told me that “this may be why my activity increased noticeably ... I was back ‘in the real world,’ per se.” Similarly to his Instagram profile, Jethro’s Facebook posts are often light-hearted and humorous in nature. Yet, several components of Jethro’s Facebook identity stood out to me as distinctly different from the digital narrative Jethro crafted in Instagram. In Facebook, Jethro interacted more with family members, as he indicated above as one of his motivations for approving any posts that he is tagged in before the posts appear on his timeline. However, Jethro’s Facebook profile also contains more references to his military service than we see in Instagram. Although Jethro did not remember identifying as a veteran in Facebook or Instagram, since Jethro does view Facebook as more private than Instagram, combined with Jethro’s admission that Facebook is the social network that he uses to connect with family, it is not surprising that Jethro feels more comfortable including information about his former employment with the U.S. military than he would in Instagram. The following two posts, shown in Figures 55-58, while not overtly identifying Jethro as a veteran, certainly indicate Jethro’s military affiliation.



Figure 55. Celebrities versus veterans repost.



Figure 56. Contracting companies in Iraq.



Figure 57. Contracting companies in Iraq, continued.



Figure 58. Contracting companies in Iraq, continued 2.

The post shown in Figure 55 seems to be the type of post that Jethro referenced earlier in the interview when discussing whether or not he self-identifies as a veteran in social networking spaces. In this post, while Jethro is clearly supporting the military, it is not evident that he is a veteran. Although Jethro does not overtly mention his military service in the second post (Figure 56) either, it is clear from this post, for anyone familiar with military terminology, that Jethro is knowledgeable about the military. His mention of “contracting companies in Iraq” is an additional clue that Jethro is particularly familiar with military operations in Iraq. But what is perhaps most interesting about this post is that Jethro, who spent a total of 15 months deployed to Iraq, can only remember the name of one military contracting company that operated in Iraq during his deployments. Jethro’s Facebook friend (“C” in Figure 56-58), who served with Jethro in Iraq, noted that he had a “10-page list” of military contracting companies from their time together in Iraq, further highlighting that Jethro was only able to remember one. However, this is not the only instance in which Jethro has had trouble remembering details, and we had spoken about his memory problems in the past. When I asked Jethro if his problems with memory loss began after his service, he stated,

My memory issues definitely became noticeable to me after the military. I was involved in an explosion and had numerous head-to-roof contacts in my vehicle. Because the suspensions were so shitty, every little bump was like going over a huge speedbump. So yes, I would absolutely say my memory issues are due to the military. And yes, I did always have a helmet on while driving, but the contacts were pretty severe, to the point where I received back injuries from it.

It is also important to note here that Jethro provided me with this information along with his feedback on this chapter; although we talked at depth about his military service, Jethro had not previously told me that he was involved in an explosion, or that he was injured during his service. However, we had spoken previously about friends he had lost in combat, thus reinforcing Junger's (2015) assertion that losing a friend on the battlefield is a significant trauma, more so than receiving an injury of one's own. Additionally, Jethro's experiences with memory loss shed additional light on his inability to remember information included in the "About Me" section of his Facebook profile.

Jethro and "C" were deployed to Iraq together, served together for 15 months, and ended their deployments together. "C"'s interactions with Jethro in Facebook are plentiful, and some are included later in this chapter. The bond between Jethro and "C" is evident; there are many jokes between these two men, some of which are very obviously "inside" jokes that most onlookers are not intended to understand, but they also clearly care for one another, highlighting the importance Jethro places on maintaining a few close relationships rather than many superficial ones, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Jethro also painted a much different picture of his education in Facebook than he did in Instagram. While Jethro's Instagram narrative makes it unclear if Jethro values his education, Jethro's Facebook narrative represents an individual who is excited about and proud of his academic achievements, as shown in Figures 59-63.



Figure 59. Sociology test.

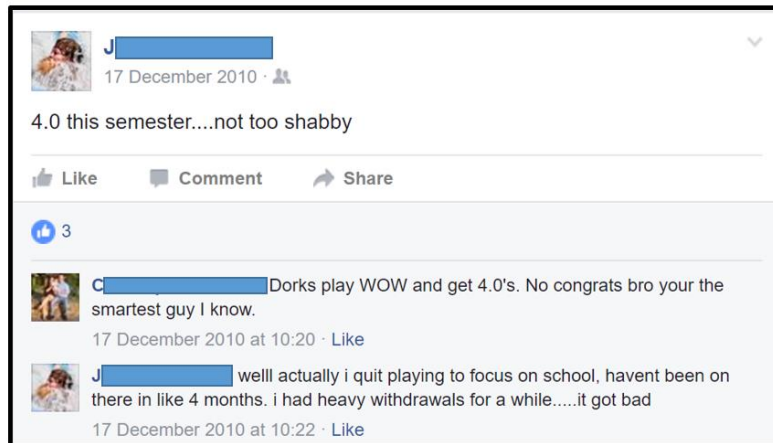


Figure 60. 4.0 semester.



Figure 61. 4.0 semester continued.



Figure 62. 4.0 semester continued 2.



Figure 63. 4.0 semester continued 3.

Themes of family and educational success, in combination with humorous, light-hearted posts, continue to dominate Jethro’s timeline over the next several years and into the present. Although Jethro is a much more frequent poster now, his timeline still consists of more posts from his Facebook friends than himself. Additionally, Jethro continued to post occasional photos of himself from his military service and, in each of these images, Jethro upholds the narrative of the combat deployed war hero.

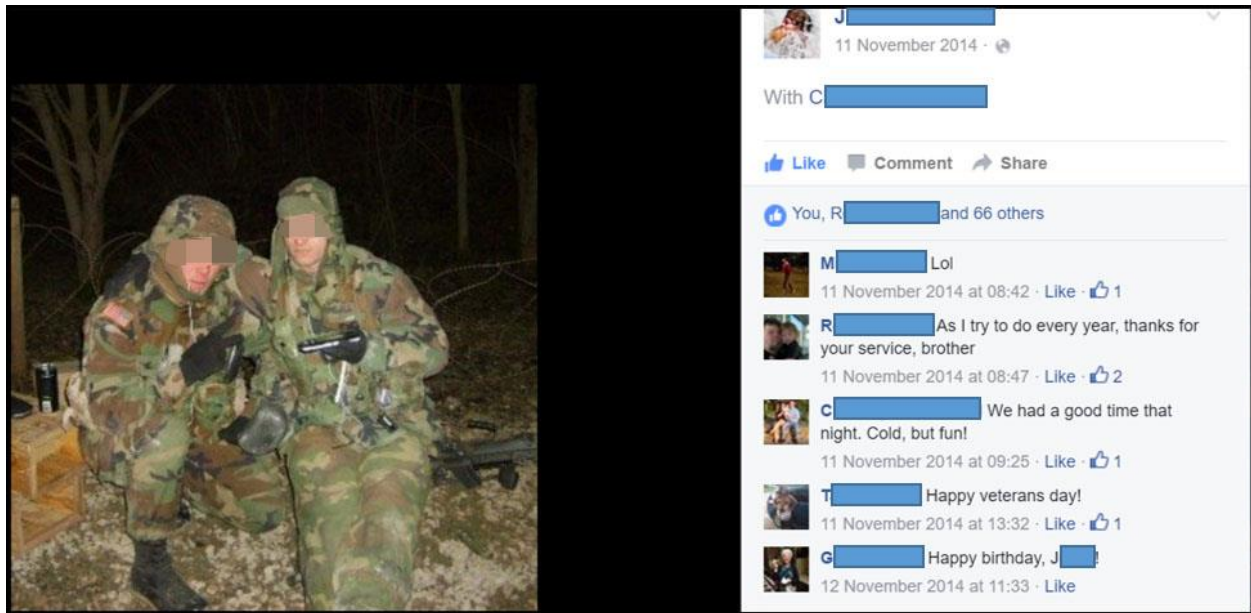


Figure 64. Jethro and “C” in uniform.

The day before Veteran’s Day 2014, Jethro posted the image shown in Figure 64, which pictures Jethro alongside another soldier (“C”, discussed earlier), both wearing combat fatigues and holding weapons. Following this post, which clearly identified Jethro as a veteran of the U.S. military, friends of Jethro began to tag him in posts intended to honor U.S. veterans (Figures 65-78).

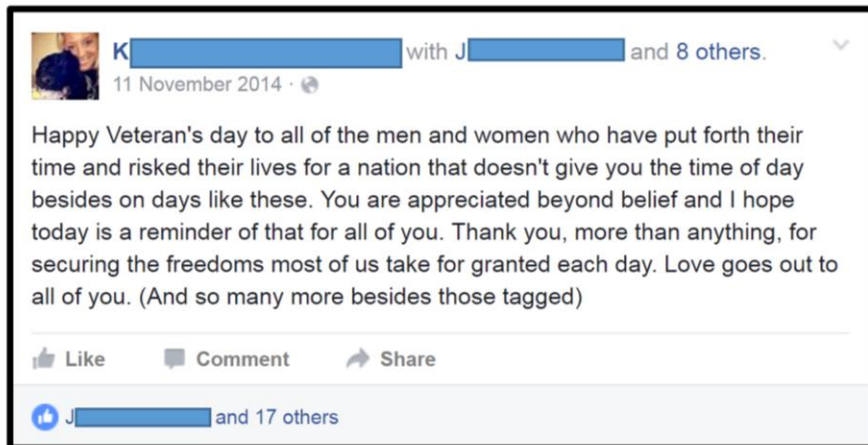


Figure 65. Happy Veteran's Day.



Figure 66. To be a veteran.



Figure 67. To be a veteran, continued.



Figure 68. Thank you for your service.



Figure 69. Thank you for your service, continued.



Figure 70. A Veteran is someone who.



Figure 71. A Veteran is someone who, continued.

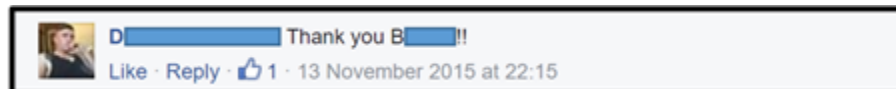


Figure 72. A Veteran is someone who, continued 2.



Figure 73. To my military family.



Figure 74. To my military family, continued.

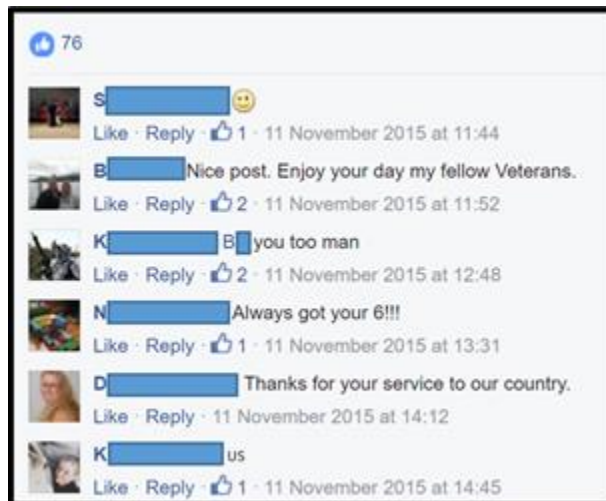


Figure 75. To my military family, continued 2.



Figure 76. To my military family, continued 3.



Figure 77. To my military family, continued 4.



Figure 78. To my military family, continued 5.

These posts, from both veterans and civilians, while intended to honor veterans in respect of Veterans’ Day, are very similar to those face-to-face situations discussed earlier in this chapter, in which veterans are thanked for their service or offered meals by strangers who learn of their service, or are honored in front of large crowds at sporting events or concerts. However, it is this post from Jethro’s sister, shown in Figures 79-83, that stands out from the rest:



Figure 79. My brother, the veteran, and more.



Figure 80. My brother, the veteran, and more, continued.



Figure 81. My brother, the veteran, and more, continued 2.

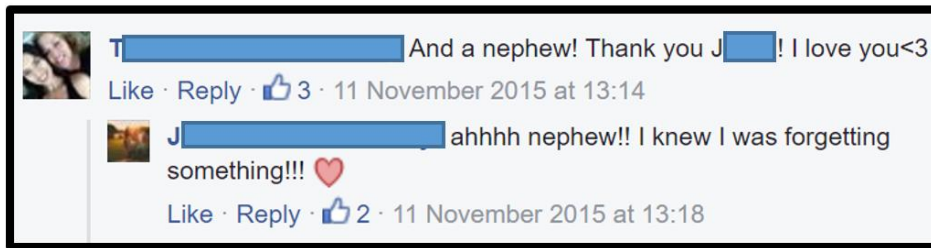


Figure 82. My brother, the veteran, and more, continued 3.



Figure 83. My brother, the veteran, and more, continued 4.

In this post, Jethro’s sister actively worked to recognize Jethro as a veteran while *also* recognizing him as “so much more” than a veteran, honoring Jethro’s identities as “a son, a brother, an uncle, a cousin, a grandson, a friend, a goofball, a romantic, a comedian, a Christian, a student, a hard worker, and a kind-hearted-thoughtful-generous-loving man.” Here, Jethro’s sister has not only clearly articulated the many facets of Jethro’s identity, some of which are developed in his digital narratives and some that are not, while also touching on the problematic nature of digital advocacy. It is so easy to share a post honoring a veteran on Veterans Day, but what is not easy is to consider the lived situation for many U.S. veterans as they struggle with reintegration, finding employment, or returning to the college classroom. However, with civilians such as Jethro’s sister encouraging us to remember that our veterans, while certainly affected by their military service, are *more than* their veteran identity, society can continue to move toward a better understanding as veterans as heterogeneous, unique individuals, bonded together, and separated from civilians, by their shared experience of military service.

Although Jethro does not consider himself as someone who self-identifies as a veteran in social networking spaces, the digital narratives that he crafted in both Instagram and Facebook make his former military service evident. On Instagram, there is only one image indicating Jethro's military service, while there are many such images on Facebook, posted both by Jethro and his friends and family members. This minimal identification as a veteran in Instagram allowed Jethro to position himself as a traditionally-aged college undergraduate. However, the inclusion of this Instagram photo that identifies Jethro as a veteran works to position other components of Jethro's digital narrative as support for the traditional tropes of war hero and wounded warrior, as discussed above.

Alternately, because Jethro's Facebook is more family friendly, contains numerous images and posts referencing Jethro's military service, and privileges his educational success over his EDM interests, the identity that Jethro crafted in Facebook upholds both the dominant narrative of the military and the trope of war hero. Jethro's Facebook profile depicts a family man who is proud of his military service, who displays humility when thanked for his service, and who values the opportunities that his service has provided for him, such as the ability to attend college, and graduate, on the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Of course, Jethro is just one example of a student-veteran using social networking technologies to compose digital narratives that allow him to present various aspects of his identity. However, I argue that the ways in which Jethro thinks about identity are especially interesting. Although Jethro initially indicated that he sometimes self-identified as a veteran in social networking spaces, when asked specifically about his Instagram and Facebook profiles, Jethro indicated that he did not self-identify as a veteran. However, in both Instagram and

Facebook, Jethro has uploaded photos of himself in his Army uniform, and in Facebook, other users clearly identify Jethro as a veteran by tagging him in posts. Finally, Jethro lists the U.S. Army as his former employer on his Facebook profile. However, throughout our interview and profile tour, Jethro continually returned to the idea that in spite of these posts, pictures, and information, he does not self-identify as a veteran, highlighting the need for continued research into veteran identities.

“See, I just don’t consider any of that as self-identifying. It’s not like I’m saying that I’m a veteran—I’m not throwing it in anyone’s face. I just post some pictures of a job I used to do with some coworkers that I became really close with.”—J

CHAPTER 5: RESISTING VETERAN TROPES: PEDAGOGICAL AND PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

To conclude, I want to return to where I began—with a discussion of the importance of recognizing common tropes and stereotypes of the veteran, in both popular culture and academia. We must consider ways in which we, as writing instructors and contributing members to the development of writing programs and the discipline at large, can begin to offer resistance to these tropes and stereotypes in the classroom and within our departments and institutions. Projects such as this dissertation, which works to highlight student veterans as individuals that are members of a heterogeneous population, while also recognizing the myriad of digital literacy practices veterans are currently making use of in social networking technologies, can contribute to the continued development of scholarship in the area of veterans studies in writing research. Additionally, though, this dissertation makes a valuable contribution to digital literacy research in writing studies, adding to the body of work that recognizes social networking sites not only as sites in which digital literacy practices are employed, but also as spaces in which users have the potential to develop critical digital literacy practices that can be transferred to other contexts for other purposes.

As discussed in the opening chapter of this dissertation, public support of the military remains high—higher, in fact, than public support of education (Pew, 2013, para 2). In light of the high numbers of student veterans and other military-affiliated students who have, are, and will continue to populate our institutions and enroll in our writing classes, our practice as pedagogues and as administrators should reflect our support of our student veterans' successful

transition and reintegration into society and the college classroom. For many student veterans, the process of transition and reintegration into society is accompanied by transitioning to the college classroom, requiring student veterans to negotiate their new identities as students while already negotiating their renewed identities as citizens. Again, I want to stress here that regardless of the ways in which we, as individual citizens, feel about the morals of war, I argue that it is our responsibility as educators to respond to all of our students, of which student veterans are a part, in ethical and equitable ways, an argument that is supported by Resolution 3 of the “2003 CCCC Resolutions,” which implores writing instructors “to engage students and others in learning and debate about the issues and implications of the Iraqi war and any other acts of war perpetrated by the United States of America.”

In this dissertation, I have argued that it is important to investigate the ways in which student veterans communicate, share and craft their own narratives, and present their identities in social networking spaces in order to better respond to student veterans in the writing classroom. Further, I have argued that in order to aid our students in both transition and reintegration, we must provide student veterans with the opportunity to develop their identities as both writers and citizens, and to do this we must understand in what ways student veterans are already doing this work in online spaces, particularly in social networking spaces. My research responds to this need by collecting valuable information about how and why individual student and non-student veterans use social networking technologies. Each of my participants reported using social networking technologies, and I have identified a significant number of digital literacy practices that my participants employed when using social networking technologies. Becoming familiar with the digital literacy practices of our students will better enable writing instructors to

encourage and facilitate the transfer of these practices to the context of the writing classroom and, by extension, to other writing situations. Through analysis of the digital literacy practices used by my participants, and by building upon existing veterans studies research in the field of writing studies, my research has allowed me to make pedagogical and programmatic recommendations for writing instructors and writing program administrators who are interested in making their classrooms and programs more veteran-friendly.

In this chapter, I conclude this dissertation by first returning to my research questions and addressing how my data provides insight to each of these questions. Following this discussion, I provide both pedagogical and programmatic recommendations for writing instructors and writing departments interested in making the writing classroom and writing programs more accessible for student veterans. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this research study, followed with recommendations for further research.

Research Questions

Here, I return to the research questions that I identified in Chapter One and offer a discussion of what the data discussed in Chapters Three and Four tell us about these questions.

- *In what ways do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies for personal, professional, and academic purposes?*
- *How did post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies during previous service and prior to service? What are the similarities and differences in how post-9/11 era student veterans currently use social networking technologies in comparison with how they used social networking technologies while serving in the U.S. military?*

For the majority of my participants, social networking technologies have and continue to be used for predominantly social purposes. The most frequently mentioned purpose for using social networking technologies—before, during, and after service—was to stay in touch with friends and family. Additionally, it is likely that for many of my participants, staying in touch with friends and family does not necessarily imply direct, one-to-one communication between the user and a particular friend or family member. Instead, staying in touch likely implies knowing a bit about what is going on in the lives of the members of one’s social network by reading posts appearing in the social networking technology’s feed. Jethro put this nicely, affirming that he stays in touch with friends and family members by reading their posts, and that even though he does not send direct messages to the majority of the people he is connected with through social networking technologies, Jethro asserted, “it is nice to have them within reach.”

While it is not news that social networking technologies are used for primarily social purposes, my participants revealed important information about how communication happens in social networking technologies. As discussed in Chapter One, while each social networking technology has individual guidelines that govern communication, there are also some general communicative functions of social networking technologies. Social networking technologies allow for many-to-many communication to occur, but they also allow for one-to-one communication to occur. However, in Jethro’s case, one-to-one communication through a social networking technology typically occurred only with individuals who Jethro directly communicated with in his offline life as well, thus invoking Granovetter’s (1973) theory of strong and weak ties, which positions strong ties as friends and weak ties as acquaintances. Like Jethro, individuals are likely to have fewer strong than weak ties and tend to communicate and

interact more with strong ties. However, strong ties are also more likely to be similar and, as a result, strong ties can increase the chance of an individual being caught in the filter bubble, as discussed in Chapter Four (Pariser, 2012). Maintaining a number of weak ties, though, can not only increase mobility, but also increases the individual's chances of being exposed to viewpoints different from their own. Again, this idea is illustrated in Jethro's profile tour; although he communicates directly primarily with those who are his strong ties, in the process of staying in touch with his weak ties by reading their feeds, Jethro is exposed to a variety of information from people with a variety of viewpoints. Other participants suggested similar uses, indicating that they often used social networking technologies to stay in touch with friends and family members through their status updates and, as a user of social networking technologies, I imagine that many of us use social networking technologies in similar way.

Although my participants used social networking technologies for primarily social purposes, they viewed social networking technologies as valuable for professional and academic purposes as well. The number of participants who viewed social networking technologies as professionally and academically useful increased both during and after service, but the data collected does not determine if this increased acceptance of use is a result of military service or if it is simply indicative of the development, increased acceptance, and diversity of use of social networking technologies that have developed over time. Additionally, my student veteran participants were more likely than non-student participants to use or have used social networking technologies for educational purposes, indicating that student veterans might be comfortable using social networking technologies for educational purposes in the classroom, assuming that their needs for privacy can be accommodated.

- *How are digital literacy practices being employed by student veterans during these uses of social networking technologies?*

My participants reported a wide range of digital literacy practices, which, following Lankshear and Knobel (2008 and as discussed in Chapter One, I defined as the social, communicative, and information gathering practices that take place in digital spaces and involve digital texts. After analyzing the data collected from my participants' surveys, interviews, and profile tours, I determined that my participants engaged in a number of digital literacy practices when using social networking technologies. I have listed and categorized these digital literacy practices here, followed by a discussion of the categorization:

Navigation and Functional Use

- Locating various social networking sites
- Constructing and maintaining a profile (or profiles) within a social networking site (or sites) (Buck, 2012b)
- Making use of the site's privacy settings (or purposefully *not* using privacy settings) (Shepherd, 2015)

Information Seeking and Sharing Practices

- Navigating a social networking site to find information
- Sharing information within a social networking site
- Gaining access to and participating within relevant knowledge communities within a social networking site
- Engaging in digital advocacy

Communicative Practices

- Staying in touch with friends and family
- Creating and sharing original content within a social networking site
- Presenting an identity and creating one's self (Buck, 2012b)
- Constructing a narrative, or "chains of activity that create meaning when viewed in concert, rather than as discrete elements" (Buck, 2012b, p. 24)

Networking Practices

- Making and navigating connections within a social networking site
- Dating
- Professional networking
- Recruiting
- Event planning

Rhetorical Practices

- Demonstrating audience awareness (Buck, 2012b; Shepherd, 2015)
- Negotiating issues of context collapse
- Demonstrating attention to the rhetorical situation (Shepherd, 2015)

Entertainment

- Finding/sharing humor
- Playing online social games

When I began the process of categorizing these digital literacy practices, it became immediately apparent that, regardless of how I grouped these practices, some practices could belong in more than one group. The categories above emerged not simply from the digital literacy practices listed, but also with consideration of how and for what purposes my

participants reported using these digital literacy practices. As an example, although I have categorized sharing information within a social networking site as an information seeking and sharing practice, this digital literacy practice could also be easily interpreted as a communicative practice. However, because several of my participants distinguished between the practices of seeking or sharing information and other communicative functions that are strictly intended for social purposes, I created a category for information seeking and sharing practices. This is not to suggest that information seeking and sharing does not have a communicative function, but that in the context of this study and for my participants, communicative practices were distinct from information seeking and sharing practices. Additionally, because the categorization above does not account for the dynamic nature of my participants' digital literacy practices, I have created a visual representation, shown in Figure 84, that better demonstrates the relationships between and among my participants' digital literacy practices, as well as the fluidity of the categories listed above.

I began the categorization process by creating the Practices for Functional Use category for those digital literacy practices essential for making effective use of a social networking site: locating the site, constructing/maintaining a profile, and understanding how to use privacy settings. I argue that these practices are functional digital literacies for the use of social networking technologies and are necessary practices for users to possess.

As briefly mentioned above, the categories of Information Seeking and Sharing Practices and Communicative Practices are connected, with several practices serving both communicative *and* information seeking/sharing practices. However, because my participants often distinguished between practices designed for seeking information and those designed for communication, I

chose to distinguish the seeking and sharing of information from the creation and sharing of content. Here, not only is the content of the post relevant, but the purpose of the post is as well. For example, a Vietnam veteran seeking information about the side effects of Agent Orange might join a sub-community in Facebook of/for Vietnam veterans who have experienced side effects from Agent Orange. While it is likely that this Vietnam veteran will communicate, either passively or actively, with a number of other members of the community, this communication is in the service of the process of seeking information. However, an individual who frequently shares status updates about his children, while certainly engaged in the process of sharing information, is doing so for the purposes of communicating with his social networking audience.

The category Rhetorical Practices emerged naturally from the nuanced understanding of audience demonstrated by a number of my participants, and the Entertainment category emerged from some of my participants' discussions of the importance of humor in their use of social networking technologies. It was not until this point that I was able to see the connection between the remaining practices, which were all a form of networking. Professional networking and making and navigating connections within social networking sites are clearly networking practices, but recruiting also relies heavily on the process of networking. In order for recruitment to be successful, the recruiter must network in order to identify new membership prospects. Similarly, event planning requires a significant amount of networking as well. Finally, I argue that dating, and in particular online dating, is a form of networking. Typically, individuals turn to online dating only if/when their immediate network of friends and family (and these individuals immediate network) has been exhausted. So, when an individual makes the decision to try online dating services, she is working to widen her network.

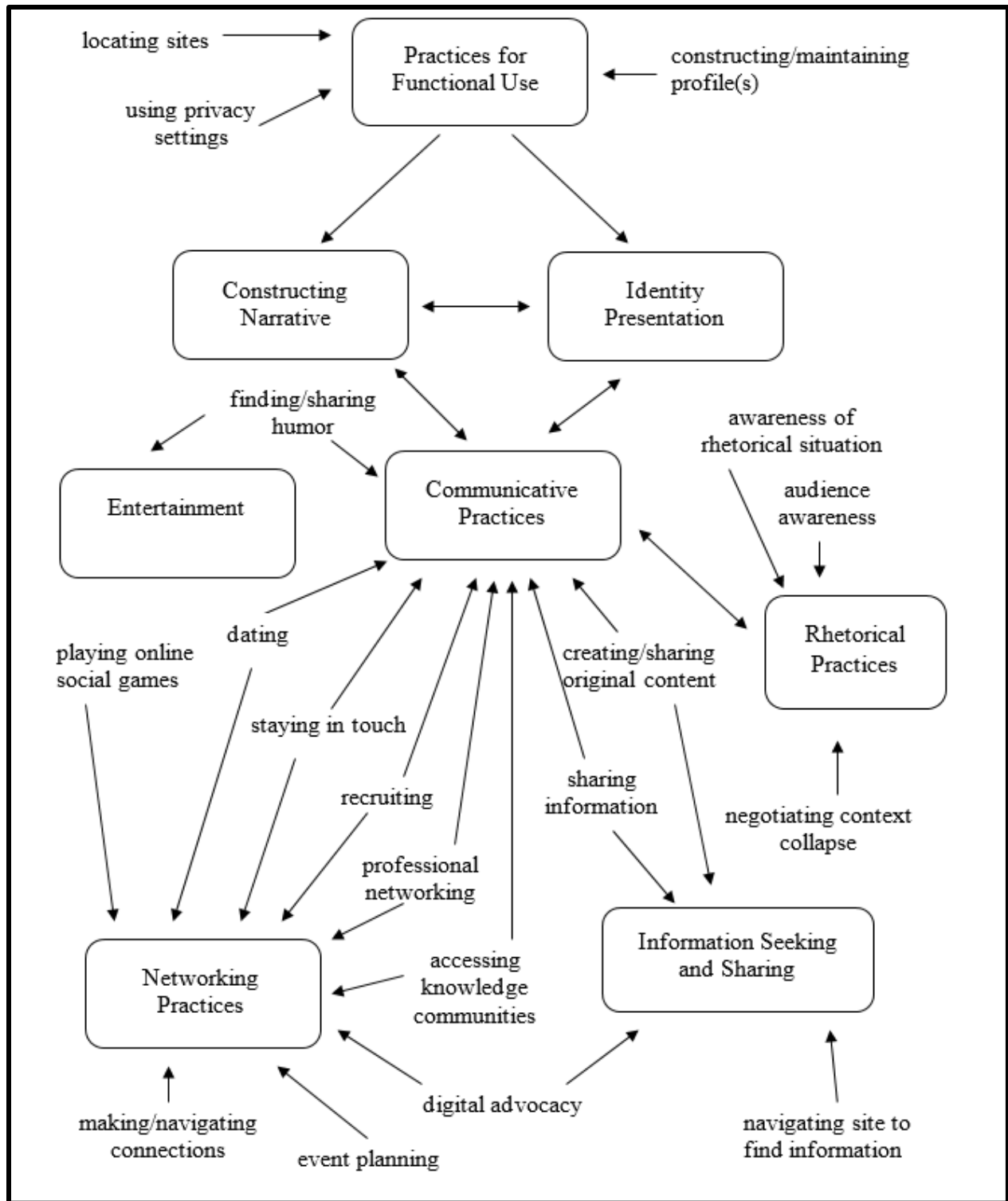


Figure 84: Visual representation of participants' digital literacy practices.

Examining this wide range of digital literacy practices used by my participants allows writing faculty to better understand the variety of experiences that our students might have with using social networking technologies prior to entering the college classroom. Additionally, the awareness of audience demonstrated by my participants suggests that students with military experience might be more critical users of social networking technologies than their civilian counterparts. Some of my participants indicated that they used social networking technologies solely for the purpose of staying in touch with friends and family members. But, this practice alone requires that the user also be able to, at minimum, locate the social networking site and construct and maintain a profile within the social networking site. So, these users are engaged in meaningful digital literacy practices while staying in touch with friends and family, practices which can be transferred and made use of in the writing classroom, a topic that I discuss later in this chapter. And, while some students will likely use social networking technologies solely for staying in touch with friends and family, writing instructors will also encounter students who, like some of my participants, value professional and educational uses of social networking technologies, thus employing different digital literacy practices than students who make use of social networking technologies for purely social purposes. However, both types of users also share some digital literacy practices, such as the functional digital literacy practices of locating the site and constructing and maintaining a profile within the site. Recognizing this diversity of experiences with social networking technologies outside of the classroom can help us, as writing instructors, to create assignments that value this diversity of experience in the classroom.

- *In what ways do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies to negotiate their veteran identities in online spaces? In what ways do these digital narratives support or resist traditional veteran narratives?*

As I have demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, the development of a narrative is vital to the practice of identity presentation in social networking spaces. Jethro's profile tour clearly highlights what Buck (2012b) referred to as "the chains of activity that create meaning when viewed in concert, rather than as discrete elements" (p. 24). Viewing one, or even a few, of Jethro's decontextualized Instagram or Facebook posts would not have allowed me to develop the same understanding of Jethro's identity in these two spaces. Additionally, my understanding of Jethro's digital narratives and, by extension, his digital identities, was greatly enhanced not only by my initial conversation with him, but also when he provided me with feedback on my discussion and analysis of his survey, interview, and profile tour responses, hearkening back to Spinuzzi's (2005) discussion of participatory design's interest in participants' perspectives and interpretation of research results, as discussed in Chapter One. Even after speaking with Jethro at length about a number of his posts during our profile tour, there were nuances that I missed and information that I did not pick up on until receiving Jethro's written feedback on my work. Prior to receiving Jethro's feedback, though, and in addition to the time spent in our interview and profile tour, I spent a significant amount of time viewing Jethro's social networking profiles and thinking critically about the similarities and differences in Jethro's narratives across these spaces. I felt that I knew Jethro intimately, and I was confident in my ability to read Jethro's narrative accurately. However, my experiences as a scholar and researcher also enabled me to know that, regardless of how well I felt that I knew Jethro, my analysis of his digital identities would never

be complete without his feedback. In many ways, Jethro's feedback gave my research clarity, reaffirming my interpretations in some cases, adding to them in others, and providing alternate understandings in others still. Additionally, though, this experience allows me to make a larger point about how digital narratives are often interpreted.

I want to return once again to the story of Specialist Terri Harrison, introduced in Chapter Two and discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Harrison's Instagram posts making light of her Honor Guard duties were viewed by many as disrespectful, inappropriate, and dishonorable—characteristics that are not valued by the U.S. military. However, I think it is telling that those who came to Harrison's defense were her coworkers—other military personnel who understood Harrison's posts not as disrespectful or dishonorable, but as an attempt to relieve a serious situation with humor. In fact, one of Harrison's fellow Honor Guard members, Sergeant Luis Jimenez, offered some support for Harrison on Instagram, writing “These practice sessions are very long. It's good to let loose a little when your job constantly asks you to be serious” (Mintz, 2014). However, Jimenez' support of Harrison's actions resulted in his suspension as well, further illustrating the importance of identity presentation and audience awareness in social networking spaces. From this perspective, it might be argued that Harrison's mistake was not in what she posted, but in misunderstanding her audience. Posts that, if sent via text to a coworker rather than shared publically via a social networking platform, might have been understood as a joke between friends, resulted in Harrison's discharge from the military. While I do not defend Harrison's actions, her story and those of others who have been publicly shamed in social networking spaces, in combination with an understanding of social networking narratives as “chains of activity that create meaning” (Buck, 2012b, p. 24) when viewed together, rather than

independently, make it evident that making decisions about someone based on the interpretation of a decontextualized post on a social networking site is not effective. Instead, speaking to an individual about their intentions can greatly enhance one's understanding of the individual's digital narrative and identity.

My research also suggests that student veterans and active duty military personnel are most likely to sometimes self-identify as military personnel in social networking spaces, rather than never or always self-identifying. However, my non-student veteran participants were more likely to either always or sometimes self-identify as affiliated with the military, as discussed in Chapter Three, again suggesting the impact of military service on understandings of online privacy and the control of information. Additionally, my student veteran participants were least likely to never self-identify as military personnel, offering support for the argument that, as a society, we tend to support our military personnel, in stark contrast to previous eras.

Additionally, the data collected from Jethro's interview and profile tour indicates that understandings of what it means to self-identify in social networking spaces might differ. As discussed in Chapter Four, I interpreted self-identification as the inclusion of any information that directly tied Jethro to the military, including photographs of Jethro in uniform, background information that referenced military service, or posts by Jethro referencing his former military affiliation. However, not only did Jethro forget that he listed the Army as his former employer in Facebook's "About Me" section, he also did not view the inclusion of that information, nor images of himself in uniform, as self-identification. For Jethro, self-identification as a veteran would consist of an outward declaration in which he announced his status as a veteran. Since he does not do this, he does not believe that he has self-identified as a veteran. However, further

research is needed to determine if Jethro's understanding of self-identification is unique, or if other military personnel maintain similar perspectives.

Finally, in line with Grohowski's (2015) findings, many of my participants reported using social networking technologies to distance themselves from their veteran identities, often choosing whether or not to self-identify as a veteran based on the social networking spaces as well as fellow users of these technologies. In interfaces in which users feel that they have a good understanding of and ability to use privacy controls, such as Facebook, my participants were more likely to be comfortable self-identifying as a veteran than in spaces that are often perceived as more public, such as Twitter or Instagram.

My participants demonstrated both support for and resistance to the common tropes of the veteran as war hero or wounded warrior. I argue that social networking sites are an important place to work against simplistic and exclusionary tropes because of social networking's limited barriers to access and widespread use among American adolescents, teen, and adults. While 90% of young adults (ages 18-29) used some form of social media in 2015, social media use among senior citizens has tripled since 2010, with 35% of senior citizens using social media in 2010, an increase from just 2% in 2005 (Pew, 2015). As a result of this widespread use and the ease with which information can be shared in social networking technologies, complex narratives that demonstrate the ways in which veterans identities are shaped by much more than their service can begin to combat more exclusionary, stereotypical views of veterans. My participants' complex digital narratives allowed me to demonstrate the ways in which the narratives of one participant, Jethro, encompass portions of both war hero and wounded warrior tropes, while also establishing his identity as student, EDM fan, and jokester. In my examination of Jethro's

Instagram profile in Chapter Four, I argued that Jethro's narrative in this space supports both the wounded warrior trope and the hero trope. First, Jethro's Instagram profile displays masculinity, a trait that reinforces both tropes, and the tropes of wounded warrior and war hero are both dependent upon the societal perception of the veteran as both male and combat-deployed, as discussed in Chapter One. Jethro also displays both humility and pride in his narrative, again demonstrating traits that are commonly associated with heroes. However, Jethro's narrative does not offer direct resistance to the hero trope.

In addition to supporting the trope of the hero, Jethro's narrative also presents characteristics that support the trope of the wounded warrior. For example, abuse of drugs and alcohol is often a characteristic associated with the wounded warrior trope, in connection with the idea that the wounded warrior has difficulty re-assimilating into society. So, while Jethro's Instagram narrative does reference the use of drugs and alcohol, his narrative also makes it evident that Jethro *has* reintegrated successfully. In this way, Jethro's complete digital narrative is able to offer some resistance to the trope of the wounded warrior, demonstrating that reintegration can happen in very different ways for individual veterans. Again, as veterans are a heterogeneous population, we cannot expect reintegration to look the same for every veteran.

Additionally, many of my participants discussed emotions like pride and honor as associated with their service, thus reinforcing the societal conception of military personnel as proud and honorable, traits often associated with the hero archetype. Several participants also displayed traits that might be associated with the trope of the wounded warrior, such as a demonstration of disdain for the military or the description of civilians as naïve individuals leading meaningless lives. However, it is important to remember that, even if an individual does

identify as a war hero or a wounded warrior, this is only one aspect of an individual's identity, and the examination of the complex digital narratives that unfold in social networking spaces can help us, as writing instructors and researchers, to avoid making decisions based on homogenizing stereotypes. Thus, paying greater attention to social networking spaces in writing courses, particularly those writing courses with high numbers of student veterans, might be an instrumental way for instructors to confront and offer resistance to the common tropes of the veteran as war hero or wounded warrior.

- *For what purposes do post-9/11 era student veterans use social networking technologies to seek out online communities of other veterans or communities that offer support to veterans?*

In line with Grohowski's (2015) findings, my research indicates that veterans participated in subcommunities for/of current and/or former military personnel within social networking technologies only when there was a perceived need to communicate with others who have shared the experience of military service or when searching for information that can be best supplied by a knowledge community of current and/or former military personnel. Primarily, my participants sought out such subcommunities for the purposes of staying connected to other servicemembers, seeking informal therapy, and having a space for communication that is not inhabited by civilians. Overwhelmingly, those participants who indicated that they did not participate in or seek out subcommunities of/for current or former military personnel had "no need" for these communities, with several participants reiterating that they did *not* need these communities *because* of the comprehensive support received from their friends and family members, which seems to suggest that those veterans without significant external systems of support might be

more likely to seek out and participate in online subcommunities of/for student veterans than their peers who possess significant external support, reinforcing Junger (2015) and Bare's (2015) arguments for the importance of social support to aid veterans in the process of transition and reintegration to society. Moreover, these online communities can be especially relevant for current military personnel as well, particularly those who are interested in professional development, professional networking, or career advancement. However, outside of these purposes, sub-communities of/for current and former military personnel may be more beneficial for future and former military personnel than for current military personnel, as claimed by Hart (2011) in her examination of online mentoring programs for women military personnel.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Since Marilyn Valentino's 2010 call for writing instructors to react responsibly and ethically to the increasing number of student veterans entering the university, scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition has begun to discuss ways in which writing instructors and writing programs can better respond to the needs of student veterans. While scholarship in this area continues to grow, work such as this dissertation is vital for continuing to develop ways for writing instructors to better respond to student veterans in the classroom. Further, the pedagogical recommendations that follow are applicable for all students, not only student veterans.

Resisting Common Tropes in the Writing Classroom

First, I think that it is important to consider that, just as it is unfair to position students from other populations as representatives of the groups to which they belong, it is unfair to position student veterans as representatives of the military-industrial complex. Even when a

student veteran self-identifies to the class and the instructor and freely expresses his or her opinions on sensitive topics discussed in class, it is important for both instructors and students to remember that this person is an individual that is expressing his or her personal views and should not be viewed as the mouthpiece for the U.S. military (even if their views *do* represent or reinforce stereotypical views of veterans).

Additionally, developing an awareness of the common tropes of veteran as hero or wounded warrior is an important step in resisting these stereotypes in the classroom, as discussed by Doe & Langstraat (2014). Viewing student veterans through the hero trope can encourage the positioning of student veterans as representatives of the military-industrial complex, and viewing students as wounded warriors contributes to the deficit model and fails to acknowledge veterans' existing digital literacy practices. Rather than approaching student veterans from the deficit model, which focuses on student veterans as problematic additions to the classroom, we should respect and enable transfer of our student veterans' existing literacy practices, both print and digital. Similarly to other non-traditional students, many of whom return to the academy with valuable workplace literacy practices, our student veterans have valuable and transferable literacy practices that they have developed during their military service and that can be transferred to the writing classroom, such as the nuanced understanding of audience awareness demonstrated by many of my participants.

Resisting Forced Self-Identification of Veterans in the Writing Classroom

Writing classrooms, because of their typically smaller class size along with the personal nature often involved in the sharing of writing, should be places where students feel comfortable expressing their views on topics discussed in class. Additionally, critical examination of a variety

of viewpoints on topics of discussion should be encouraged in the writing classroom, particularly in the freshman composition classroom, which is so often not only a student's first introduction to writing in the university, but also the student's first introduction to advanced critical thinking. The writing classroom is a place where, in my opinion, students should feel free to disagree with one another's viewpoints, and should be guided in how to do so in a respectful and productive way. However, in order for our student veterans and other military-affiliated students to feel comfortable in our classrooms, we must be careful when expressing our own political viewpoints in the classroom, doing so only when critical to our pedagogy and in such a way that does not inhibit or discourage our student from presenting opposing political stances. We must also be sure not to force student veterans or other military-affiliated students to self-identify, either in office hours, the classroom, in peer-to-peer interactions, or in a writing assignment.

In line with Hart and Thompson (2013a), the data collected in this dissertation supports the conclusion that student veterans should not be forced into self-identification. Hart and Thompson noted the prolific personal essay of the composition classroom as a particular danger, asserting that, when assigned personal essay prompts that encourage students to reflect on particularly important or meaningful details in their past, student veterans or other military-affiliated students may feel pressured to write about their military experiences. And, although writing can certainly be therapeutic, instructors and classmates in a composition classroom may not be prepared to respond appropriately to writing about military experiences, particularly those that contain details of trauma. Additionally, if the student felt pressured to discuss his or her experience as a result of an assignment prompt, the student may not be prepared to respond appropriately to feedback on his or her composition. Hart and Thompson recommended the

literacy narrative as a more appropriate replacement for the personal essay, and encouraged students to reflect specifically on their experiences with literacy. As an extension of this recommendation, I also argue that for student veterans, the technology literacy narrative in particular can be a vital step in encouraging them to identify their existing digital literacy practices, and can also encourage students and instructors to consider how these practices might be successfully transferred to the college classroom, writing or otherwise.

While Hart and Thompson provided specific recommendations for recrafting assignments in the composition classroom with student veterans in mind, I also want to bring attention here to the professional and technical communication classroom. Often, an employment project is taught in the professional and technical communication classroom that requires students to compose, at minimum, résumés and cover letters. Because of the nature of the employment project, it is highly likely for student veterans to be forced into self-identification as military personnel simply by virtue of completing this assignment. I do not want to suggest that the employment project be removed from professional and technical communication classrooms; the employment project provides students with valuable experience in composing employment documents. However, I do think that it is important to consider the ways in which we can approach the employment project with a sensitivity to student veterans who may be uncomfortable disclosing a previous military affiliation.

One way in which instructors can *minimize* discomfort for student veterans who do not wish to self-identify as veterans is to allow students to opt out of the peer review process if they are veterans who do not wish to disclose their veteran status to classmates. While this does not eliminate the student veteran's disclosure of veteran status to the instructor, this can eliminate

other students from learning of the individual's military affiliation. However, the downfall of this approach is that the student veteran will then miss out on the many potential benefits involved in the peer review process. Alternatively, the instructor might ask student veterans who do not wish for their classmates to learn of their military affiliation to have their employment documents reviewed by a friend or family member, someone who already knows about the student's prior military affiliation. Or, in a course with more than one student veteran, instructors might ask if these students are more comfortable disclosing their military affiliation to other veterans, with the possibility of creating a peer review group consisting only of student veterans/military-affiliated students.

Instructors might also take the opportunity to discuss with the class as a whole how to present information on a resume that might evoke strong responses from a potential employer, such as previous military experience, religious volunteer work or employment, or long gaps in employment. Though this approach will not prevent self-identification, it can allow student veterans to learn valuable approaches for talking about their service experiences in the context of searching for employment. The translation of military experience to terms that make sense in civilian resumes is a complex rhetorical act, as evidenced by the presence of the "Military Skills Translator" on military.com, which allows the user to input their branch of service and military job title. In response, the site generates a list of civilian skills associated with this military position and links the user to a list of "equivalent civilian jobs." For example, when inputting the Branch of Service as "Army" and the Military Job Title as "11A-Infantry (Army-Officer)," the site generated 456 equivalent civilian jobs and generated the following list of civilian skills: blueprints/technical diagrams, classified information and materials security, firearm handling and

maintenance, message processing procedures, process analysis and improvement, project/program management, and surveillance techniques. I have not analyzed the accuracy or usefulness of this system, but its existence, in combination with national programs such as IHeartRadio's "Show Your Stripes" Campaign, dedicated to matching veterans searching for employment with veteran-friendly employers who are actively hiring, is evidence of the need for veterans to think carefully about how to present their military experience and associated skill sets in language that civilian employers will recognize.

Clearly Define an Audience for all Writing Assignments

Throughout the research process, and as discussed in Chapters Three and Four, my participants presented a nuanced understanding of audience, with many of them noting the importance of having the ability to communicate with one another in semi-private digital spaces about topics that civilians may not fully understand. The concept of audience is also important in military writing; when military personnel are crafting reports, they know exactly who their audience is and will prepare the report according to the expectations and needs of that audience. By clearly defining an audience *other than the instructor* for high-stakes writing assignments, writing instructors can aid student veterans, as well as other students, in the process of transferring their already developed literacy practice of audience awareness to a new writing situation. Additionally, defining a particular audience can not only encourage audience analysis, an important part of the writing process, but it can also encourage student veterans to think more broadly about the rhetorical situation. When an audience is not defined for a writing assignment, students can be expected to envision the instructor as the audience, which might encourage student veterans, who may be used to writing assignments in the military that were accompanied

by clear and explicit instructions for completion and who crave the same level of detail in their college writing assignments (Hinton, 2013), to expect the instructor to tell them exactly what to write and in what order, rather than thinking critically about the content and organization that might best suit the particular rhetorical situation surrounding the writing prompt.

Clearly Articulate Purpose(s) of Use and Expectations for Communication when Using Social Networking Technologies in the Writing Classroom

When using social networking technologies in the writing classroom, instructors should be sure to clearly articulate the purpose of using this particular social networking technology in the particular course in which it is situated, not only for their own pedagogical benefit, but in order to aid students' critical understanding of the social networking site. Not only is it likely that an instructor's intended pedagogical use differs from the primary use their students associate with the social networking technology, expectations of communication within the site might also differ as well. So, for example, an assignment might ask students to "communicate" or "stay in touch" with one another via a specific social networking technology. However, as discussed in Chapter Four, these directives might not imply direct messaging between members of the group. Additionally, Internet shorthand is common in social networking technologies, but instructors may expect students to avoid Internet shorthand when using social networking technologies for class-related purposes. Thus, it is important for instructors to work with their students to ensure that the purpose for using the social networking technology and expectations for communication within the site is clear.

Also, it is important for instructors to be wary of issues of context collapse when using social networking technologies in the classroom. Instructors might encourage students to create

new accounts or to thoroughly review their existing accounts before connecting with classmates or the instructor for the purposes of the course. As evidenced in Chapter Four by Jethro's forgetfulness regarding listing the Army as his former employer in Facebook's "About Me" section, many of our students may have information on their social networking sites that they do not remember posting. Thus, encouraging this critical evaluation of existing profiles or the crafting of new, more professional profiles might prevent students from facing uncomfortable issues of context collapse when connecting with their instructors and classmates, while also encouraging them to think critically about issues of audience as they apply to social networking communication.

Programmatic Recommendations

Along with the pedagogical recommendations above, my research has allowed me to develop several programmatic recommendations as well. These recommendations are aimed at writing programs interested in developing strategies for better serving student veterans and other military affiliated personnel, although these recommendations could easily be adapted to suit the needs of other programs or departments on campus.

Make Resources Known

As previously discussed, military personnel form a valuable knowledge community, and many of my participants reported using social networking technologies for the purposes of gaining valuable information from other veterans and active-duty military personnel. However, my research also supports Grohowski's (2015) conclusion that student veterans will seek out online communities of/for veterans only when there is a perceived need for some sort of support that can be best offered by others with military experience. In line with this conclusion, while it

may be easy to assume that student veterans are well informed of the services on campus that are available to them, this is not always the case. Therefore, just as instructors should be informed about student services on campus (e.g., counseling or disabilities services) and sometimes are required to include service-related information on syllabi, instructors should also be made aware of services on campus for student veterans and for other military-affiliated personnel. Program administrators must ensure that their faculty and staff are well informed of such important services on campus so that they can, in turn, directly inform students about these services and direct them to services when appropriate.

This recommendation is intended to accompany the recommendation of Hart and Thompson (2013), who argued that including a syllabus statement specifically for student veterans is an important way to make the classroom more accessible to student veterans. Hart and Thompson offered the following syllabus statement, composed by Katt Blackwell-Starnes, which positions the instructor as someone who is aware of and understands many of the complications student veterans might face, as an example:

I recognize the complexities of being a student veteran. If you are a student veteran, please inform me if you need special accommodations. Drill schedules, calls to active duty, complications with GI Bill disbursement, and other unforeseen military and veteran-related developments can complicate your academic life. If you make me aware of a complication, I will do everything I can to assist you or put you in contact with university staff who are trained to assist you. (Hart and Thompson, 2013a)

A syllabus statement such as this one is an important way for instructors not only to identify themselves and their classrooms as veteran-friendly, but also serves to inform students that the

instructor is aware of the some of the challenges that student veterans can face when attending college. However, if the instructor is not actually aware of veterans services on campus, the syllabus statement is unsupported. In other words, a student veteran might feel comfortable approaching an instructor with a veteran-friendly syllabus statement for advice regarding services on campus, but if the instructor is not actually familiar with these services, the student veteran might become frustrated and might interpret the syllabus statement as insincere.

Partner with Existing Services or Programs for Student Veterans on Campus

After becoming aware of and informing faculty, staff, and students about important services for veterans on campus, writing program administrators should consider partnering with existing services or programs designed to support veteran success in higher education. A program such as Got Your 6 (discussed in Chapter One), for example, partners with educational institutions to educate faculty about common stereotypes of veterans and provides certification for members of the faculty and staff that become “6 Certified.” Faculty and staff can then display evidence of this certification as a way to inform student veterans that they are veteran-friendly and that their offices are safe spaces for student veterans.

Consider Positioning Professional and Technical Communication Courses as Transitional Spaces for Student Veterans Entering the Academy

As evidenced in my research, my participants indicated a nuanced understanding of audience and the importance of the rhetorical situation, literacy practices that are valuable in any writing course. However, I propose that, rather than first-year composition as the entry point to writing in the academy, the professional or technical writing classroom might be a more effective transitional space for student veterans, and might allow for a more effective transfer of skills.

Many military personnel write in the context of their military careers. The type of workplace writing that happens in the military is very structured and military personnel often receive explicit directives for completing the writing task. Additionally, writing in the military shares some of the hallmarks of professional and technical communication, such as concision and directness. Both professional and technical writing classrooms could allow student veterans to make more direct connections between their existing workplaces literacies and writing in the academy. Additionally, encouraging student veterans to enroll in a professional or technical communication course prior to enrolling in first-year composition might also better prepare student veterans to more effectively respond to the writing and opinions of other college students, as research indicates that student veterans can often become frustrated by the naïveté of their traditionally-college-aged classmates.

Finally, because the type of writing that happens in the military is rife with jargon, professional and technical communication classes can also provide student veterans with valuable information about how to translate technical information to an audience of laypeople. Additionally, the employment project that is often a component of introductory professional and technical communication courses can further reinforce the importance of effectively translating their military experience when communicating with civilians, whether in the context of employment opportunities or social situations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, a common barrier for veterans seeking employment is the disconnect between military jargon and comparable civilian experiences, and a common barrier to reintegration is a lack of social support, attributed in part to the military-civilian gap, as discussed in Chapters One and Four. Further, as it is likely that student veterans will work during their pursuit of higher education,

having the experience of completing the employment project early on in their academic career can help to alleviate some of the stress student veterans experience when transitioning from the military to their civilian and student identities.

Limitations of the Study

Although I believe that my project was successful, there are several limitations of my research. An important component of critical research methods, as discussed in Chapter Two, is the ability and willingness of the researcher to critique and reflect on the research design throughout the course of the study, while also considering his or her own positionality in relation to the research. While adhering to critical research methods enabled me to make valuable changes to my survey and interview questions throughout the research process, allowing my participants' feedback to influence the design of my study in valuable ways, it is also important to note the ways in which an adherence to critical research methods complicated my research. For example, my stance as a critical researcher is intimately connected to my understanding of the writing that happens in social networking spaces as communicative acts composed by a person as part of the process of writing one's identity rather than as texts composed by an author. In order to uphold the idea of social networking texts as communicative acts that are part of the user's identity, I made the decision to only use images from my participants' social networking sites with the express permission of my participants, which limited the data available to me. Additionally, I made the decision to redact any names or screen names and to blur any faces that appeared in the images I used in this dissertation to protect the identities of my participants and my participants' social networking connections. So, even when these images and all of their components were publically searchable and available, such as Jethro's Instagram images in

Chapter Four, I have obtained express permission to use these images and have taken care to protect the identities of anyone pictured in, commenting on, or liking the image. In some cases, redacting this information has limited my analysis of the image, as interesting information can often be present in screen names.

Participant selection and engagement also proved to be a limitation of my research. First, when developing the survey, although I provided options for current, future, and former military personnel, I did not provide the option for military-affiliated individuals, such as military spouses or military dependents, who might be interested in taking the survey. A number of participants who did not identify as current, former, or future military personnel, and I discarded these results because I had no way to determine if these responses came from military-affiliated participants or not. However, in part because of the allowance for transfer of G.I. Bill benefits to military spouses or dependents, percentages of military-affiliated students are also growing in the university. Thus, failing to collect valuable information from this population was a significant limitation of my study, but sets the stage for much-needed research on military-affiliated students in the writing classroom.

Additionally, my survey also yielded few student veteran participants. While the diversity of responses I received is certainly a benefit of my study, the small number of student veterans who participated in the survey is a limitation. I believe the low rate of student veteran participation can be attributed in part to the timing of the survey, which was conducted primarily in the summer of 2015, when many students, including many student veterans, are away from the university. Further, I was unable to connect with the veterans' affairs office on my campus in

order to gain assistance in promoting my survey, which would have certainly helped me to reach my target audience of student veterans more effectively.

I also failed to make the most effective use of my own social networks when distributing my survey. As discussed in Chapter Two, I shared the call for participation in my survey through my personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. However, because the majority of my contacts on Twitter are academic in nature, and because it requires one click to “retweet” a post in Twitter, sharing information about my research on Twitter (both leading up to and while requesting participation in my survey) may have helped to convince more of my academic contacts to share my call for participation with their networks, and so forth. Additionally, although I did ask my personal academic contacts to share my call for research participants, I did not make use of any listservs to do this work, which would have widened my reach. Finally, as discussed in Chapter Two, as a result of a negative reaction from a user early on in my research study, I did not share the call for participation in any social networking sub-communities for or in support of veterans. I believe this was a good decision for me, and enabled me to stay true to my stance as a critical researcher. However, choosing not to posts in these spaces not only limited my potential pool of participants, but also limited any potential engagement between me and members of these communities.

The final set of limitations that I have noted are related to the design of my survey. First, I experienced a high dropout rate, with nearly 50% of participants failing to complete the survey in full. After analyzing the data, I believe that the high dropout rate was, at least in part, in response to perceived repetition in the survey. As visible in Appendix A, I asked participants a series of questions to gain information about the ways in which my participants used social

networking technologies before, during, and after service (Questions 9-14, 18-23, and 27-32). However, because I did not make it evident to my participants that I was attempting to collect information about how their use of social networking technologies may have evolved as a result of their service, some participants may not have noticed the nuances in these questions, instead interpreting the survey as asking the same set of questions three times in a row.

Finally, my survey design failed to collect data on the race of my participants, nor did I collect precise information about my participants' ages. Race is important here for a number of reasons; not only is the military an increasingly diverse employer, the military also has a troubling history in terms of respecting and fairly representing this diversity. Also, though, it is important to recognize that although issues of access have been heavily mitigated by the increasing availability and affordability of digital mobile technology, race and socioeconomic status can still be significant predictors of a lack of access to or agency over technology. Representing a racially diverse research population is also important in working against homogenizing views of the veterans, and by failing to collect data about my participants' race, I missed the opportunity to offer my audience the perspectives of a racially diverse pool of participants. Additionally, although I collected information on the age range of my participants, collecting my participants' exact ages and the exact years of my participants' service would have aided my analysis of the ways in which military culture may have influenced my participants' use and understanding of social networking technologies. For example, I could have more easily determined the likelihood of participants having access to social networking technologies prior to, during, and post-service if I had collected data on my participants' exact ages and years of service.

Recommendations for Future Research

While social networking technologies are reportedly used in many writing classrooms, in order to encourage critical uses of social networking technologies, both in and out of the classroom, it is important to understand the sophisticated ways in which our students, of which student veterans are a particular sample, are using social networking technologies. This dissertation has only examined particular uses of social networking technologies in depth, with a focus on identity and narrative development. Further research that examines how various student populations employ digital literacy practices when using social networking technologies is needed in order to not only identify additional digital literacy practices, but also to consider how these digital literacy practices can be transferred to other contexts, such as the writing classroom.

Additionally, more research is needed to investigate the ways in which military service, encompassing military training and culture, influence military personnel's understanding of the purposes of social networking technologies and/or the ways in which military personnel use social networking technologies, particularly in relation to privacy, before, during, and after military service. This will allow us to better understand how military service might affect how military personnel use social networking technologies for educational and professional purposes. Additionally, more research is needed to determine the ways in which operational security (OPSEC) measures, specifically, affect military personnel's understandings of concepts such as audience and privacy.

I have strived to ensure that my research is beneficial to my research participants as well as to the disciplines of rhetoric and composition and professional and technical communication. Not only has my research allowed me to develop both pedagogical and programmatic

recommendations for writing instructors and departments interested in making the writing classroom a welcoming and equitable space for student veterans and other military-affiliated students, I hope that it also allows veterans, both those who participated in my study and those who may read this dissertation later, to recognize their own valuable digital literacy practices and the value of transferring these practices to new contexts.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you a current, former, or future member of the US Armed Forces?
 - a. Yes; Current member [Respondent will be directed to Question 2.]
 - b. Yes; Former Member [Respondent will be directed to Question 2.]
 - c. Yes; Future Member [Respondent will be directed to Question 5.]
 - d. No [Respondent will be directed to Question 5.]
2. In which branches of the military have you served? Select all that apply.
 - a. Army
 - b. Navy
 - c. Marines
 - d. Air Force
 - e. National Guard/Reserves
 - f. Coast Guard
 - g. ROTC
 - h. Other; Please specify
3. How many years have you served in the U.S. Armed Forces?
 - a. 1-4
 - b. 5-8
 - c. 9-12
 - d. Other, Please specify
4. What was your rank at the end of your military service?
5. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Male to female transgender
 - d. Female to male transgender
 - e. Gender Neutral
 - f. Gender nonconforming
 - g. Decline to answer
 - h. Other
6. Are you a currently enrolled student?
 - a. Yes [Respondent will be directed to Question 7.]
 - b. No [Respondent will be directed to Question 8.]
7. You indicated that you are a currently enrolled student. Please select the type of institution that you are attending:
 - a. 2-year college
 - b. 4-year public university
 - c. 4-year private university
 - d. Private online-only university
 - e. Public online-only university

- f. Trade school
 - g. Other
8. What is your current age?
- a. 18-24 years old
 - b. 25-34 years old
 - c. 35-44 years old
 - d. 45-54 years old
 - e. 55-64 years old
 - f. 65-74 years old
 - g. 75 years or older
9. Before entering military service, did you use social networking technologies? (For the purposes of this survey, social networking technologies are defined as online spaces in which users have individual profiles; can make connections that can be viewed by other users; can view, create, or interact with user generated content provided by their connections; and can manage privacy settings if desired. Some examples of social networking technologies are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Yelp, Tumblr, WordPress, Reddit, etc.)
- a. Yes [Respondent will be directed to question 11.]
 - b. No [Respondent will be directed to question 10.]
10. You indicated that you did not use social networking prior to military service. Why not? [After answering this question, respondent will be directed to question 13.]
- a. No interest
 - b. No need
 - c. No access
 - d. Concerns about privacy
 - e. Social networking technologies did not exist at this time
 - f. Other; Please specify
11. You indicated that you did use social networking technologies prior to military service. Which social networking sites did you use? Choose all that apply.
- a. Academia.edu
 - b. Blogger
 - c. Classmates.com
 - d. Facebook
 - e. Flickr
 - f. Foursquare
 - g. Goodreads
 - h. Instagram
 - i. LinkedIn
 - j. LiveJournal

- k. Meetup
 - l. MySpace
 - m. Pinterest
 - n. RallyPoint
 - o. Reddit
 - p. StumbleUpon
 - q. Together We Served
 - r. Tumblr
 - s. Twitter
 - t. VetFriends
 - u. WordPress
 - v. Yelp
 - w. Other; Please specify
12. For what purposes did you use social networking technologies prior to military service?
Choose all that apply.
- a. Educational Purposes
 - b. Social Purposes
 - c. Work-Related Purposes
 - d. Purposes related to the military
 - e. Other; Please specify
13. Can you tell me more about how you used social networking technologies for the purposes indicated in the previous question? For example, did you use different sites for particular purposes? How so? What types of educational, social, or work-related activities did you perform with social networking technologies?
14. Prior to your military service, did you view social networking technologies as more useful for personal or professional purposes?
- a. Personal
 - b. Professional
 - c. Both equally
 - d. Other
15. During your military service, what types of digital communication technologies were available to you?
- a. Cellphone without smart features
 - b. Smartphone
 - c. Tablet
 - d. E-reader
 - e. Laptop Computer without Internet Access
 - f. Desktop Computer without Internet Access
 - g. Laptop Computer with Internet Access

- h. Desktop Computer with Internet Access
 - i. Web Camera
 - j. Gaming Console
 - k. Other
16. Were you deployed during your military service?
- a. Yes [Respondent will be directed to Question 17.]
 - b. No [Respondent will be directed to Question 18.]
17. During your military deployment(s), what types of digital communication technologies were available to you?
- a. Cellphone without smart features
 - b. Smartphone
 - c. Tablet
 - d. E-reader
 - e. Laptop Computer without Internet Access
 - f. Desktop Computer without Internet Access
 - g. Laptop Computer with Internet Access
 - h. Desktop Computer with Internet Access
 - i. Web Camera
 - j. Gaming Console
 - k. Other
18. During your military service, did you use social networking technologies?
- a. Yes [Respondent will be directed to Question 20.]
 - b. No [Respondent will be directed to Question 19.]
19. You indicated that you did not use social networking technologies during your military service. Why not? (After answering this question, respondent will be directed to Question 22.)
- a. No interest
 - b. No need
 - c. No access
 - d. Concerns about privacy
 - e. Social media did not exist at this time
 - f. Other; Please specify
20. You indicated that you did use social networking technologies during your military service. Which social networking technologies did you use?
- a. Academia.edu
 - b. Blogger
 - c. Classmates.com
 - d. Facebook
 - e. Flickr

- f. Foursquare
 - g. Goodreads
 - h. Instagram
 - i. LinkedIn
 - j. LiveJournal
 - k. Meetup
 - l. MySpace
 - m. Pinterest
 - n. RallyPoint
 - o. Reddit
 - p. StumbleUpon
 - q. Together We Served
 - r. Tumblr
 - s. Twitter
 - t. Vet Friends
 - u. WordPress
 - v. Yelp
 - w. Other; Please specify
21. For what purposes did you use social networking technologies during your military service?
- a. Educational Purposes
 - b. Social Purposes
 - c. Work-Related Purposes
 - d. Purposes related to the military
 - e. Other; Please specify
22. Can you tell me more about how you used social networking technologies for the purposes indicated in the previous question? For example, did you use different sites for particular purposes? How so? What types of educational, social, or work-related activities did you perform with social networking technologies?
23. During your military service, did you view social networking technologies as more useful for personal or professional purposes?
- a. Personal
 - b. Professional
 - c. Other
24. To what extent did Operational Security affect your decision to use and/or the ways in which you used social networking technologies during your military service while stateside?

25. If you were deployed, to what extent did Operational Security affect your decisions to use and/or the ways in which you used social networking technologies during your deployment(s)?
26. During your military service, did you receive any training materials that explained the military's regulations regarding the use of social networking technologies by military personnel? Select all that apply.
- a. U.S. Army Social Media E-Learning Program
 - b. U.S. Army Social Media Handbook
 - c. U.S. Navy Social Media Landscape Overview
 - d. Navigating the Social Network: The Air Force Guide to Effective Social Media Use
 - e. Social Media Cyber Security Awareness Briefing
 - f. Other; Please Specify None
27. Do you currently use social networking technologies?
- a. Yes (If yes, participant will be directed to question 29.)
 - b. No (If no, participant will be directed to question 28.)
28. You indicated that you do not currently use social networking technologies. Why not? (After answering this question, responded will be directed to question 31.)
- a. No interest
 - b. No need
 - c. No access
 - d. Concerns about privacy
 - e. Other; Please specify
29. You indicated that you currently use social networking technologies. Which social networking technologies do you use?
- a. Academia.edu
 - b. Blogger
 - c. Classmates.com
 - d. Facebook
 - e. Flickr
 - f. Foursquare
 - g. Goodreads
 - h. Instagram
 - i. LinkedIn
 - j. LiveJournal
 - k. Meetup
 - l. MySpace
 - m. Pinterest
 - n. RallyPoint
 - o. Reddit

- p. StumbleUpon
 - q. Together We Served
 - r. Tumblr
 - s. Twitter
 - t. VetFriends
 - u. WordPress
 - v. Yelp
 - w. Other; Please specify
30. For what purposes do you use social networking technologies now?
- a. Educational Purposes
 - b. Social/Personal Purposes
 - c. Work-Related Purposes
 - d. Purposes related to the military
 - e. Other; Please specify
31. Can you tell me more about how you used social networking technologies for the purposes indicated in the previous question? For example, do you use different sites for particular purposes? How so? What types of educational, social, or work-related activities did you perform with social networking technologies?
32. Do you currently view social networking technologies as more useful for personal or professional purposes?
- a. Personal
 - b. Professional
 - c. Other
33. Within the social networking sites you participate in, do you self-identify as serving/having served/intending to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces? In other words, does your profile information or do your posts indicate your affiliation with the military?
- a. Yes; always [Respondent will be directed to Question 34]
 - b. No; never [Respondent will be directed to Question 35]
 - c. Sometimes [Respondent will be directed to Question 36]
34. You indicated that, within the social networking sites you participate in, you always self-identify as serving/having served/intending to serve in U.S. Armed Forces. Why do you choose to self-identify as military personnel?
35. You indicated that, within the social networking sites you participate in, you never self-identify as serving/having served/intending to serve in U.S. Armed Forces. Why do you choose not to self-identify as military personnel?
36. You indicated that, within the social networking sites you participate in, you never self-identify as serving/having served/intending to serve in U.S. Armed Forces. Why do you choose not to self-identify as military personnel?

37. Do you use, or have you used, social networking technologies to seek out online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel?
 - a. Yes [Go to Question 38]
 - b. No [Go to Question 39]
38. You indicated that you have used social networking technologies to seek out online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel. What can you tell me about these communities? What types of online communities did you seek out, and why?
39. You indicated that you have not used social networking technologies to seek out online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel. Why not?
40. Do you use, or have you used, social networking technologies to interact with online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel?
 - a. Yes [Go to Question 41]
 - b. No [Go to Question 42]
41. You indicated that you have used social networking technologies to interact with online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel. What can you tell me about your interaction within these communities? What types of communities did/do you interact with, and why? What is the nature of these interactions?
42. You indicated that you have not used social networking technologies to interact with online communities of/for former, current, or future military personnel. Why not?
43. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview about your social networking use?
 - a. Yes (Go to Question 44)
 - b. No (Go to Question 45)
44. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Please provide your name and an email address or phone number here:
45. Do you have any additional comments regarding your use of social networking technologies before, during, or after your military enlistment?
46. Do you have any feedback regarding this survey?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, and included the following questions:

1. Do you use social networking technologies? Why or why not?
 - a. If so, which social networking technologies do you use?
2. For what purposes do you use the social networking technologies you identified?
 - a. If you use more than one social networking technology, do you use them all for the same purposes or does each interface have a unique purpose?
 - b. Do you use social networking technologies to maintain social ties? To whom? Why?
 - c. Do you use social networking technologies for professional/work-related purposes (i.e. establishing a professional presence, job seeking, etc.)?
 - d. Do you use social networking technologies for academic purposes, either as a course requirement or on your own?
3. Tell me about your online identity(ies) within the social networking technologies you use. How do you identify yourself within these spaces? How do you want to portray yourself?
 - a. For example, think about the information you provide to your audience and what that information tells your audience about who you are (i.e. gender; marital status; identifying as a veteran, student, professional, parent, etc.; likes and dislikes; content of posts; group affiliations).
4. Do you identify as a veteran within the social networking technologies that you use? Why or why not?
5. Do you participate in/belong to any subcommunities/groups within the social networking technologies you use? Can you tell me about these groups?
 - a. Are the groups open or closed?
 - b. What does the group do/what is its purpose?
 - c. Do you participate in the group actively?
 - d. Do you communicate differently in this group than you do in the social networking technology of which it is a part? If so, how so and why?
 - e. Do you identify yourself differently in this group than you do in the social networking technology of which it is a part? If so, how so and why?
 - f. Do you know of/participate in any groups that are for or in support of veterans?
 - g. Do you know of/participate in any groups that are for student veterans, specifically?
6. Did you use social networking technologies during your enlistment? Why or why not?
 - a. If so, which ones and for what purposes?
 - b. When did you serve?
7. To what extent did the rules and regulations of the military, such as OPSEC and the UMCJ, affect your use of social networking technologies during your enlistment?
 - a. Do you think these rules influence how you use social networking technologies now? Why or why not? If so, how?
8. Did you use social networking technologies before you enlisted? Why or why not?
 - a. If so, which ones and for what purposes?
9. If you did use social networking technologies before enlistment, did being in the military change the way you thought about/used social networking technologies?

APPENDIX C: PROFILE TOUR PROMPT

After completing each interview, I asked participants to take me on a profile tour of any social networking technologies that they used actively. I introduced the profile tour to my participants with this script:

At this point, I'd like to ask you to show me around your social networking profiles. I want you to think of this as if you are giving me a tour of your home, but in this case, we're visiting one of your digital homes. I'm interested in hearing about the features of your profile that you think are the most important or interesting. I'm interested in what information you share with your audience, why you choose to share that information, and how that information contributes to the development of your online identity. I'd like for you to lead the tour as much as possible, but I will jump in to ask questions if I see something that I would like to know more about. And if you get stuck and aren't sure what to talk about or show me, I have some prompts to help.

At this point, my participants began to lead the profile tour. However, I used these prompts to prompt sharing when needed:

- Show me your “About” page (or its equivalent, depending on the interface). Talk about this page with me. Tell me about the information you've included here. Why is it important? Why did you choose to include this information? What information have you chosen to exclude? Why?
- Show me your main profile page. Talk to me about the content we see here. What content have you posted and why? What message do you want to send to your audience? What content is on your profile that is posted by your friends? What do these posts tell us about you?
- Let's look at your photos. Tell me about them. Why did you choose to include these photos? What photos have you chosen to exclude?
- Let's talk about your privacy choices. Is your profile publically available, or private? Do you use group settings within the social networking technology to share certain information with only certain people? Why or why not?
- Talk to me about your interactions with others within this site. Who are these people? Are your interactions with them usually public or private, as relative to the site? Do you interact with these people in face to face settings?

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL OF HUMAN RESEARCH



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Cassandra A. Branham:**

Date: **August 12, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 08/12/2015 the IRB approved the following minor modifications to human participant research until 06/08/2016 inclusive:

Type of Review: IRB Addendum and Modification Request Form
Modification Type: A revised survey was uploaded and approved for use.
Project Title: A Study of the Digital Literacy Practices Employed by Student Veterans through Social Networking Technologies
Investigator: Cassandra A. Branham
IRB Number: SBE-15-11320
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 06/08/2016, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Kanille Chap

IRB Coordinator

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