ON DISPLAY: WHITE COLLEGE WOMEN'S GENDER PERFORMANCE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

White college women are the largest user group of social media. Facebook and Instagram are two of the most popular social media platforms. Current research around college students and social media focuses on digital identity development. Through online profiles and in mediated communities through social media, users create their identity from pictures and posts, and this identity portrays their gender performance. The purpose of this research was to explore how these White college women used social media to present their identity and to perform their gender. Using a phenomenological methodology, informed by a cultural feminist perspective, I studied the phenomenon of gender performance of White college women on social media. The participants included eight White, cisgender college women at a large, research university in the Southeast, whose ages ranged from 19 to 22 years old.

The findings indicated that gender performance and identity development of White college women is shaped by the different roles of the social media platforms, the norms of social media use, and the different audiences who consume the gender performance on each of the platforms. Gender performance and identity development through social media is built upon a foundation of physical appearance and presentation. This research contributed to a growing

body of literature surrounding digital identity development, and advanced cultural feminism as a theoretical paradigm in social media research. The current study also promoted further understanding and support of mental health and body image issues that college women face.

INDEX WORDS: Social media; Facebook; Instagram; college students; White women; gender; gender performance; feminism; cultural feminism; identity development

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to other first generation college students. You can go further than anyone told you. You can go further than you ever thought possible. Take a risk, take a shot—take the road less traveled.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

-Robert Frost

…And to the women who came before me, were here with me, and who come after me.

I have chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femininity. And I want to be respected in all my femaleness. Because I deserve to be.

-Chimimanda Ngozi Adiche

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social media is ubiquitous in the college student experience. Traditional-aged college women are among the most frequent users of popular social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015), and White women are the majority users in this population (Duggan et al., 2015). A social media presence is part of a college woman's identity. Through pictures, statuses, and posts, women establish identity and perform gender (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2015).

However, college women face sexism through social media and on college campuses. In Western cultures, Anglo-Saxon or White versions of identity inform societal expectations about gender performance and beauty ideals (Evans & McConnell, 2003). Popular media further influences these expectations; "media content departs from reality in regard to who is represented, and in how groups and situations are represented" (Milke, 1999, p. 190). Society expects women to behave and perform their gender according to these expectations (Fellabaum, 2011; Lorber, 1994; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). The study of women's gender performances reveals societal patterns of inequities and injustices (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Gendered performance manifests in different environments, including social media (Cook & Hasmath, 2014). Social media is also an environment in which identity development occurs. Through this study, I explored how college women perform their gender and establish their identity in the context of social media. "Understanding social forces that have shaped and

continue to shape understandings of culture can sharpen the lenses through which we examine the status of women in higher education and the status of other historically underrepresented groups" (Allan, 2011, p. 3). Social media is and continues to be a social force where culture and the status of women plays out. This is why scholars should continue to explore the phenomenon of gender performance of college women in a social media context.

White College Women

Since the late 1980s, more women enroll in, persist through, and graduate from institutions of higher education than their male counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). The rate of female enrollments continues to grow faster than male enrollments; this trend will likely continue through at least 2025 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, & Korn, 2006; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). In terms of racial demographics, White students (and specifically White women) are the largest majority among college students, although increasing diversity within higher education has lessened this majority (Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Sax, 2008).

College women continue to overcome barriers imposed by societal expectations. For example, more women choose to major in male-dominated science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields than ever before, but these women also face sexism in higher education on their campuses. Women often report a 'chilly climate,' especially in the classroom, where women are subjected to sexually suggestive stories or jokes; male students presume leadership in group projects and are called on and validated more often in classes; and a woman's appearance detracts and distracts from her academic performance (Allan, 2011; Allan & Madden, 2006). Previous research affirmed that campus climates, including the populations

within those environments, perpetuate the differences in stereotypic gender attributes and contribute to the negativity experienced by most women (Allan, 2011; Astin, 1993).

College women face a number of physical challenges and mental health concerns, including sexual violence. Sexual violence reporting has increased on college campuses in the last five years (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). While women are not the sole victims of sexual violence, which includes stalking, voyeurism, physical harassment, or assault, female victims are more likely to report the violence than males (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). College women are also more likely to suffer from mental health issues (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer, & Zivin, 2011a; Henriques, 2014; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010), including low self-esteem (Buchanan, 2012), depression (McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990), eating disorders (Eisenberg, Nicklett, Roeder, & Kirz, 2011b), and perfectionism (Hewitt, Flett, & Edigar, 1995).

Gender bias and discrimination, antiquated social norms, sexual violence, and mental health concerns are a few of the issues that college women face in higher education. Contemporary researchers continue to focus on college women, including women's experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about sexual violence (Christopher & Kisler, 2012; Turchik & Hassija, 2014; Wies, 2015). Scholars are also exploring the facets of gender performativity of college women (Fellabaum, 2011).

Gender Performance

Cultural norms and assumptions, based upon White beauty ideals and stereotypes of gender, dictate how individuals perform gender (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Evans & McConnell, 2003; Lorber, 1994; Sax, 2008). These rules of gender performativity define how men and women speak, act, think, and behave. Yet, there is conflict between gender, which is a

social construction, and sex, which is biologically determined—and how these elements interact with each other and with societal expectations (Lorber, 1994). Gender-conforming individuals perform their gender in ways that align with their sex (Gender Education & Advocacy, Inc., 2001); for example, a woman who is biologically female will perform and enact gender in ways consistent with societal expectations for women. However, conflict exists when individuals perform their gender counter to norms and expectations. Gender is pervasive in our society; we often fail to notice gender signs and signals unless they are missing or ambiguous (Lorber, 1994; Sax, 2008). Gender is "an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself" (Lorber, 1994, p. 1).

When society is responsible for the construction of gender norms and expectations, stereotypes will emerge. These stereotypes are prevalent in and explored through the media, including popular culture websites like Buzzfeed, a social news and entertainment site. One satirical Buzzfeed article describes common stereotypes of women: they are (or should be) domestic, enjoying cooking, cleaning, and homemaking; family should come before a woman's career; there are particular careers which are more acceptable for women; there are certain ways to dress and present one's self (including wearing makeup); woman are often overcome by their emotions; and women are dainty and weak (Yandoli, 2015).

While there are repercussions for individuals who do not conform to society's expectations about gender performance (Butler, 2004; Kellaway & Brydum, 2014; Steinmetz, 2015), eschewing social norms related to gender is becoming more accepted. Campaigns for national name brands, including recent advertisements for Barbie/Mattel, Always, and Verizon,

promote feminist ideals of gender equality (Garber, 2016; Stanley, 2016). Social media also serves feminism:

> Social media democratized feminist activism, opening up participation to anyone with a Twitter account and a desire to fight the patriarchy. By removing the barriers of distance and geography, sites like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram have made activism easier than ever, facilitating public dialogues and creating a platform for awareness and change (Chittal, 2015, para. 3).

In the age of digital activism, where users can demonstrate their support of any cause, social media has helped popularize the ideals of feminism and gender performance.

Social Media

Social media has a profound impact on most Americans' daily lives (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015); platforms like Facebook and Instagram are pervasive in American culture, especially for college students. College-aged individuals are the largest portions of social media users (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015), and White women are the largest subset of this population (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015).

There are hundreds of social media platforms. Facebook is the most popular platform; the site has more than 1.65 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2016a). Facebook is a social media platform where users create a profile and connect with other members of the site (Junco, 2014). College students were the original market for this site; only individuals with a college email address (an .edu address) could register for the site. More than a decade after its creation, college-age individuals continue to be the biggest users of Facebook (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015). Seventy-one percent of all American Internet users, age 18

and up, are on Facebook; among online traditional-age college students (ages 18 to 24), 87% are active on Facebook (Duggan et al., 2015).

Instagram, the photo-sharing social media platform, has more than 400 million active monthly users (Instagram, 2016). The premise of Instagram is that users can take mediocre pictures, and then create artistic masterpieces with the application of a filter (Junco, 2014). Users then share these pictures with their connections on the platform; the connections can *Like* or *Comment* on pictures.

Instagram owes part of its success to its partnership with Facebook. Less than two years after Instagram's initial launch, Facebook acquired the picture-sharing platform in 2012 for over $1 billion (Shontell, 2013). Instagram continues to attract more users; from 2013 to 2014, the percentage of online adults who use the platform increased from 17% to 26% (Duggan et al., 2015). College students continue to be the largest users of Instagram. Out of all traditional college-age Internet users, who fall in the 18-29-age range, 53% are on Instagram (Duggan et al., 2015).

Social media has an influence on college students, particularly college women (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2009; Vitale, 2015). Researchers have explored many connections between college students and social media, including the uses and gratifications of social networking sites (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2010; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015; Ting, Ming, de Run, & Choo, 2014); the relationship between social media use and student engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2012; Vitale, 2009); the impact of social media on students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) and on students' well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006); and the influence of technology on student learning (Kuh & Vesper, 2001). Another vein of research focuses on the idea of social comparison (Chou

& Edge, 2012; Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014), using social media as validation (Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016; Vogel et al., 2014), and students' self-presentation and digital identity (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2015).

Digital identity development, or how users' identities develop through social media, is one research area of growing interest. Scholars and writers have called for continued research in this area (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015). My interest in studying the gender performance of White college women through social media was rooted in a passion about digital identity development. I wanted to explore the phenomenon of gender performance and identity development through social media. To date, no studies examine the relationship between social media, gender performance, and psychosocial identity development, as described in the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993).

Identity Development

The primary task of student development is to establish an identity (Jones & Abes, 2010). Psychosocial identity development focuses on the interaction between an individual and his or her interaction with the external environment (Jones & Abes, 2010). Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined seven vectors, or areas, of psychosocial development, all of which were centered around the development of identity: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Development in each of these areas could happen concurrently.

In Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model, the establishment of identity is its own vector, and all of the other vectors are oriented towards this purpose. Establishment of identity involves

several key steps: comfort with physical appearance, acceptance of gender and sexual orientation, the clarification of the self through various roles and choices, self-esteem, and personal stability (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In this study, I focused specifically on these steps as the main tasks in establishing identity.

My Own Interest in Social Media

In the fall semester of my first year as a college student, I signed up for a new website called 'The Facebook.' College students were the target audience. Early users could connect and communicate with friends from their institution or at another college. The functionality of the early site was limited; users could only upload one picture to the profile and could only share basic demographic information.

The site's popularity increased, more of my friends and family signed up for 'The Facebook' (later shortened to just 'Facebook'), and the site added additional features. As the utility of Facebook increased, so too did my time on the site. Technology expanded, too. First with my Blackberry and then later with an iPhone, I had unlimited access to Facebook (and Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, YikYak) from the palm of my hand. Now, I check my social media accounts, including Facebook and Instagram, multiple times each day.

Before college and Facebook, I had some experience with social media; in high school, I used MySpace and was an avid blogger on LiveJournal. In some form or fashion, I have used social media to chronicle my life since I was 15 years old. College students likely have been using social media since their early adolescent years, as well.

As a graduate student, I became interested in how social media use impacts or influences college students. My previous research explored the use of social media, specifically Facebook, in college students' involvement on campus (Vitale, 2009). I found that Facebook supplements

campus involvement, because it gives student leaders another avenue through which to connect with other leaders and with organizational members, and provided a mechanism by which to advertise the organization, programs, and events (Vitale, 2009).

My more recent research explored how college women constructed their identity as women on Facebook. I also sought to understand the level of congruency between their online identity and their offline identity (Vitale, 2015). I found that women described their gender identity through their pictures and through demographic information. However, the women all agreed that, while their information is completely accurate on Facebook, their profile is not a complete picture of their identity or their life. One participant described her profile as "watered down" and "not very complex" (Vitale, 2015, pg. 23).

My own experiences on social media and my continued research interests led me to conduct this study about the gender performance and the establishment of identity of college women on social media.

Problem, Purpose, and Significance

Society places a certain amount of pressure on women to 'perform' their gender appropriately. Butler (2004) described gender as a social construction. Women perform their gender somewhere along a continuum that ranges from gender conforming (performing their gender in ways which society expects) to gender-non-conforming (performing gender in ways that are in opposition to societal expectations) (Butler, 2004). However, the problem is that society shapes these constructions; "the notion that gender is constructed suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically different bodies" (Butler, 2004, p. 11).

Women in college must navigate their own identity expression as well as societal expectations about gender performativity. Women may adopt filters or façades to adhere to these constructed notions of gender, or adopt self-regulating behaviors that make them appear more in line with society's definition of being a woman (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994; Sax, 2008). This prompts the question of whether college women present their actual identity or an idealized identity in their interactions with higher education professionals. Staff members in student affairs and higher education should be concerned with how and where students explore and express their identity, including gender. Social media is one environment in which the exploration of gendered performance occurs, and can have an impact on the mental health and well-being of its users (Chou & Edge, 2012; Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Fellabaum, 2011; Vogel et al., 2014).

Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are used by more than 71% of all American adults (age 18 and up) on the Internet (Duggan et al., 2015). College women, in particular, are among the most frequent users of these sites, and have had active profiles on these sites since their early teenage years (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Huffington Post, 2012; Lenhart, 2015). Continued research about today's college students reveals the influences of these sites, both positive and negative (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2010; Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2012; Junco, 2014; Kuh & Vesper, 2001; Strayhorn, 2012; Valkenburg et al., 2006; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2009; Vitale, 2015). Today, scholars call for research about the influence of social media on students' identities and development (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015). In this area, researchers explore the intersections of identity development in the context of social media (Junco, 2014;

Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015), but no current research exists which examines the relationship between gender performance on social media and identity development of college students.

Therefore, the goal of this research was to understand how college women perform their gender through the establishment of identity, all within the context of social media. This study contributed to the scholarship about social media and digital identity development, as called for by researchers and authors like Junco (2014) and Stoller (2012; 2015). To address this topic, I employed a phenomenological methodology, influenced by a cultural feminist framework.

Research Questions

In this study, I explored how White college women perform their gender through social media, looking specifically at establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Through this phenomenological study about White college women's gender performance and identity development on social media, I asked the following questions:

1. How do White college women perform their gender through Facebook and Instagram?
2. How do White college women perform their gender on Facebook and Instagram in relation to establishing identity?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explore the literature that informed my study, focusing specifically on White college women, social media, gender performance, and identity development.

I begin with an examination of White college women, who continue to enroll in higher education at an increasing rate (Allan, 2011; Kena et al., 2015; Sax, 2008). These women, who face discrimination and bias in society and on college campuses, must perform society's accepted standards of the female gender and femininity; they face repercussions for eschewing these expectations (Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994). College women use social media to explore their identity, including their gender (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2015). White college-age women are the largest subset of social media users (Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015), and Facebook and Instagram are the two of the most popular social media sites they use (Duggan et al., 2015; Facebook, 2016; Instagram, 2016; Kent & Leaver, 2014; Lenhart, 2015). For the purposes of this research, I narrowed my focus to these two platforms. In addition to White college women's gender performativity through social media, I examined the connections between this gender performance on social media and establishing identity.

White College Women

More than 17.5 million students enrolled in higher education in the United States in 2013 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Since the late 1980s, women have enrolled in higher education in greater numbers than their male counterparts (Kena et al., 2015; Sax, 2008; Snyder & Dillow,

2015). Within the current cohort of college students, women outnumber men on campuses across the country at both the undergraduate and the graduate level (Allan, 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013; Sax, 2008; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Women make up 56% of the undergraduate population—approximately 9.8 million college women (Kena et al., 2015), and more than 60% of all graduate students are women (Allan, 2011; King, 2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Undergraduate female enrollment will continue to rise, increasing by 15% through 2026 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Pryor et al., 2007; Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Demographically, White students comprise the majority of college enrollments in the United States, although this majority continues to decrease (Sax, 2008; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Of the 17.5 million students enrolled, 9.9 million identified as White (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Again, in this group, women are the majority; almost 60% of all college women identify as White (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

These women are part of the millennial generation: the generation born between 1982 and 2003 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials are digital natives; they have had access to computers, the Internet, and cell phones most of their lives (Levine & Dean, 2012). Millennial students tend to be more politically involved (Levine & Dean, 2012), and college women identify as more liberal than men (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Sax, 2008). The millennial generation is described as "more immature, dependent, coddled, and entitled" than previous generations (Levine & Dean, 2012, location 171). The millennial generation, especially current college students, is the most diverse group in the history of American higher education, representing a broader range of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and sexual orientation identities (Levine & Dean, 2012). Yet, despite the increasing diversity of American higher education,

women still face significant challenges in the college environment and battle societal expectations regarding their gender.

Many differences exist between college men and women. Women are more likely to attend college to appease their parents, and are more likely to select an institution that is closer to home (Sax, 2008). These women are also likely to be younger than male college students; boys are more often held back in elementary and secondary school, so they are older when they begin college (Sax, 2008). There is also an economic gender gap between college women and men (Sax, 2008). "Whereas women are the majority of college students nationwide, they are a slight *minority* among students from high-income families (Sax, 2008, p. 18). However, women from lower-income families have enrolled in higher education in increasing numbers (Lindholm, Astin, Choi, & Gutierrez-Zamano, 2002). Perhaps related, women are more likely to have a job—on campus or off—during their college career (Sax, 2008).

Other gender differences exist when examining behavior and experiences in college. The quest for romance is a major experience for some during college. Some college women tend to prioritize romantic relationships over their academics and platonic friendships (Allan, 2011; Gilmartin & Sax, 2002; Holland & Eisenhart, 1992). Despite changes in public opinion and societal expectations, concerns about romantic relationships and marriage are still relevant (Allan, 2011). For example, women (and their parents) still have an anticipation that college is an ideal meeting place for a future husband, preferably one that is financially sound and career-oriented (Hamilton, 2014). This view of higher education "sheds light on how societal gender patterns related to heterosexual romance continue to influence experiences and sometimes limit the aspirations of [college] women" (Allan, 2011, p. 75). These patterns are part of the expectations society imposes on women in the scrutiny of gender performance.

Women's focus on relationships extends into other areas of the college experience. They demonstrate stronger commitments to serving the community and to helping others (Pryor et al., 2006; Sax, 2008). Women are more likely to serve others, influence social values, participate in volunteer opportunities, and promote racial understanding; they rate higher in an understanding of others; and perform volunteer work more often than male college students (Pryor et al., 2006, Sax, 2008). This strong orientation towards others and towards community is explored in the work of several theorists, including Josselson (1987; 1996), Gilligan (1977), and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1997). These theorists detailed the "importance of attachment, connection, and communion with others as central to understanding women's development" (Sax, 2008, p. 42). Josselson (1996), specifically, emphasized the role of connection, communication, and revision; these traits are useful in creating and maintaining mature interpersonal relationships and establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), especially in the context of identity through social media (Vitale, 2015).

Development influences other areas of women's lives, including leadership, academic performance, and professional aspirations. There are gender differences in each of these areas, including leadership style and development. Women's leadership styles tend to be relational, with an emphasis on connectedness, relationship-building, and an orientation of care and concern for others (Dugan, 2006). These traits are consistent with feminine ideals and with traditional female gender roles and behaviors (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Women enter college with less confidence in their leadership skills, and this gender gap increases during women's time in college (Sax, 2008). However, certain opportunities can influence women's leadership development while in college (Astin, 1993). Student involvement is one path to leadership development (Astin, 1999). "Gains in the leader personality are

stronger for students who participate in extracurricular activities such as student government, leadership training, organized demonstrations, fraternities or sororities, and student clubs or groups" (Sax, 2008, p. 99). Living on campus, participating in honors programs, and interacting with faculty and staff are other occasions for involvement and leadership development (Astin, 1999; Sax, 2008). Distance from family is also associated with women's leadership development; the further from home a woman chooses to attend college, the more confidence she builds in her leadership ability and public-speaking skills (Sax, 2008). Choice of major and career field also have an influence on women's leadership development, as well as their academic and professional pursuits.

There are a number of gender differences regarding academic and professional attainment. For example, women are more likely to dedicate time to their academics and to careers where they can serve others (Allan, 2011; Pryor et al., 2006; Sax, 2008). However, college women often underestimate their abilities; they attribute academic success to hard work and dedication rather than inherent intellect (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sax, 2008). "First-year college women rate themselves lower than men on nearly every self-rating related to academic or intellectual confidence" except in the area of writing ability (Sax, 2008, p. 25). Interestingly, though, women are more likely than male students to earn higher GPAs, graduate with a four-year degree, and continue their education in graduate school (Allan, 2011; Hamilton, 2014; Pryor et al., 2006; Sax, 2008).

Even with higher levels of degree aspiration and attainment, women continue to select sex-stereotyped majors and careers, which are often less lucrative than other career paths (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sax, 2008). More women select college majors in education, psychology, and in health-related fields (Sax, 2008), and tend to pursue majors and career paths

in the STEM fields less often (Allan, 2011; National Science Foundation, 2013; Sax, 2008). Although these fields have become more open and accessible, women still face discrimination in the workplace based on their gender (Allan, 2011). Workplace discrimination continues to be a concern for all women, who still make less money, even for the same jobs (Allan, 2011; Lips, 2013; Olsen, 2013). Financial stability has become increasingly important to today's college students, especially women (Sax, 2008), because chilly environments in the classroom and in the workplace often translate to unequal pay structures in society.

Chilly Campus Environments

In 1972, the federal government introduced Title IX of the Education Amendments, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, specifically in educational programs or activities that receive federal funds (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). Despite this legislation, women continue to battle gender bias and gender discrimination in higher education, especially in in the classroom (Allan, 2011; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Hall & Sandler, 1984; Hamilton, 2014). Implicit and explicit inequities—from faculty, staff, and other students—contribute to a chilly environment on campus (Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996). Examples include:

> ...calling on male students more often than women, asking follow-up questions of men and not women, focusing more on a woman's appearance than on her accomplishments, paying more attention when men speak, viewing marriage and parental status differently for men and women, and attributing women's achievements to something other than their abilities (Allan, 2011, p. 68).

Examined in isolation, each of these actions may seem innocuous, but together create a chilling environment, which places women at a disadvantage, subjugating them and their experiences in higher education (Allan, 2011; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996).

College women are not the only victims of a chilled campus climate. Female faculty and staff members are also subject to overt and covert inequalities on campus—underrepresentation in academia, salary inequity, lack of female leadership in top administrative roles, feelings of isolation, limited access to female role models, and having to work harder than their male counterparts to gain credibility and respect (Liang & Bilmoria, 2007; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Sandler & Hall, 1986).

There is evidence that the chilly climate women experience in classrooms is concentrated in certain fields of study. For example, female students faced greater levels of gender bias and discrimination in accounting and engineering classes, than in education or nursing courses (Serex & Townsend, 1999). Examples of bias and discrimination were consistent in the STEM fields—atypical fields of practice for women according to society's standards (Allan, 2011; Morganson, Jones, & Major, 2010; Serex & Townsend, 1999). Nursing and education, on the other hand, are historically female-dominated careers (Serex & Townsend, 1999).

Recently, researchers and authors have adapted the term 'chilly climate' to describe the biases and discriminatory experiences faced by underrepresented populations on campuses, including Black and African American students, Latino/a students, and LGBT students (Gusa, 2010; Morris & Daniel, 2008). Chilly and inhospitable climates lead to negative experiences and influences for all college students, including college women (Allan, 2011; Allan & Madden, 2006; Hall & Sandler, 1982). College environments or climates "preserve and strengthen, rather than reduce and weaken, stereotypic differences between men and women in behavior, personality, aspirations, and achievement" (Astin, 1993, p. 406). Chilly climates can stifle classroom participation, prevent women from requesting help from peers or faculty, suppress cognitive and psychosocial development, dampen career and professional aspirations, and

undermine women's confidence (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Hall & Sandler, 1984). These issues have deeper repercussions than just affecting the college experience; they could contribute to college women's mental health concerns (Sax, 2008).

College Women and Mental Health

Mental health issues are an increasing concern in higher education (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2011a; Eisenberg et al., 2011b; Henriques, 2014; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Rising numbers of students enter college with mental health diagnoses, or they develop issues after they enroll in college (Clay, 2013). The current cohort of college students has higher levels of stress, as well as more severe mental health concerns, than any other group in history (Henriques, 2014). For college women, this stress could come from the pressures exerted by society and the expectations of female gender performance (Garner, Olmsted, Polivy, & Garfinkel, 1984; Hewitt et al., 1995; Sax, 2008).

> Many of today's girls succumb to society's messages about the importance of social success and physical attractiveness. If girls buy into this message, they open the door to a whole host of potential consequences, including a loss of self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders (Sax, 2008, p. 32-33).

These three mental health concerns—self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders—can have a profound impact on college women's experiences.

Self-esteem and depression. There are many different types of depression—including major depression, mood dysregulation disorder, persistent depressive disorder, and premenstrual dysphoric disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While depressive disorders differ in terms of duration or timing, there are a few common characteristics: feelings of sadness,

emptiness, or irritability, often coupled with somatic and cognitive changes, which greatly impact an individual's ability to function (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Depressive disorders may be the most prevalent mental health issue for college students (Buchanan, 2012). Depressive disorders have numerous consequences for college students, including declining academic performance (Heiligenstein, Guenther, Hsu, & Herman, 1996; Hysenbegasi, Hass, & Rowland, 2005), escalating alcohol consumption (Miller, Miller, Verhegge, Linville, & Pumariega, 2002; Weitzman, 2004), increasing stress and anxiety (Rawson, Bloomer, & Kendall, 1994), self-injurious behaviors (Serras, Saules, Cranford, & Eisenberg, 2010), suicidal ideation, or even suicide (Arria et al., 2009; Buchanan, 2012; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2004).

Women in college have higher rates of depression, compared to men (McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990). One potential cause is that women often view events as more severe and stressful (Dixon & Robinson Kurpius, 2008; Matud, 2004); negativity compounds these concerns for women (Peden, Hall, Rayens, & Beebe, 2000; Peden, Rayens, Hall, & Beebe, 2001). A low sense of self-esteem is another potential cause of depression among college women (Dixon & Robinson Kurpius, 2008).

> Negative thinking, a common, debilitating symptom of depression, dominates the individual's perceptions and maintains depressed moods. Low self-esteem is a risk factor for developing depression, whereas high self-esteem protects women from depression. In young college women, a lack of social support, low self-esteem, and negative life events have been shown to be associated with depressive symptoms (Peden, Rayens, Hall, & Beebe, 2001, p. 299).

Negative thinking, perceived levels of mattering, and overall self-esteem may contribute to women's development of depressive disorders. Women who are diagnosed with these symptoms and/or depressive disorders are more likely to develop or suffer other mental health issues, including eating disorders.

Perfectionism and disordered eating. Eating disorders are a mental and physical ailment, and often coincide with other mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, or substance abuse (National Institute of Mental Health, 2014). Perfectionism is a factor in many of these mental health concerns, specifically eating disorders (Hewitt et al., 1995; Paulson & Rutledge, 2013). Those that suffer from perfectionism are on a quest to achieve often unattainable and impractical standards for attractiveness and weight (Garner et al., 1984; Hewitt et al., 1995). Three major characteristics describe perfectionism: "the need to appear perfect, the need to avoid appearing imperfect, and the need to avoid disclosure of imperfection" (Hewitt et al., 1995, p. 318).

There are three different facets of perfectionism. The intrapersonal component is self-oriented perfectionism, where standards of perfectionism are self-imposed (Hewitt et al., 1995). Other-oriented perfectionism describes when others impose their own expectations of perfectionism on an individual (Hewitt et al., 1995). Last, socially prescribed perfectionism describes the belief that society has imposed certain standards, and is "particularly relevant to [the diagnoses] of eating disorders" (Hewitt et al., 1995, p. 319).

Eating disorders—anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder—all "involve serious disturbances in eating behavior, such as extreme and unhealthy reduction in food intake or severe overeating, as well as feelings of distress or extreme concern about body shape or weight" (National Institute on Mental Health, 2001, p. 3). Disordered eating habits

including dieting, exercising excessively, use of laxatives, fasting, or binge eating (Walker et al., 2015). Eating disorders affect one in five women (National Institute of Mental Health, 2014).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated that 90% of those with eating disorders are women between 12 and 25 years of age; college women are among those most likely to battle disordered eating (Walker et al., 2015). Rates of college women afflicted with an eating disorder range from 10.9% to 17.1% (Eisenberg et al., 2011b; Hoerr, Bokram, Lugo, Bivens, & Keast, 2002; Paulson & Rutledge, 2013; Prout, Protinsky, & Canady, 2002; Walker et al., 2015). White college women are more likely than men or women of color to be diagnosed with an eating disorder, to report symptoms of disordered eating, and to receive medical treatment for the disorder (Striegel-Moore et al., 2003).

Feminist beliefs may have an influence over the likelihood of college women exhibiting disordered eating habits or developing an eating disorder (Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996).

> Women identifying with feminist values expressed less dissatisfaction with their body weight and overall figure size, less concern about thinness, fewer bulimic tendencies, and fewer feelings of ineffectiveness. The opposite pattern of relationships generally characterized women expressing traditional gender roles (Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996, p. 596-597).

There is also evidence that popular media, including social network use, influences body image concerns through social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors, which can lead to eating disorders (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian 2015; Fellabaum, 2011; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Kim & Chock, 2015). Media is full of digitally altered images of models and celebrities, representing specific beauty ideals—namely, thinness for women (Kim & Chock,

2015). Social comparison related to appearance can contribute to poor body image, and relates to certain behavior motivators, including the worship of thinness (Kim & Chock, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

Some researchers argue that pictures and posts on social media, like Facebook, perpetuate these idealized beauty standards. For example, Facebook users reported more problems with body image than non-Facebook users (Fardouly et al., 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014).

> Facebook provides women with a medium for frequently engaging in appearance-related social comparisons, and can therefore potentially contribute to body image concerns among young women (Fardouly et al., 2015, p. 38).

Social media users can also edit or enhance images and their appearance on these sites (Kim & Chock, 2015; Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008), creating more idealized versions of their appearance.

Social media fuels the socially prescribed quest for perfectionism. This construct of perfectionism directly relates to gender performance; society dictates certain expectations about gender performance, including how individuals should look (Butler, 2004; Fellabaum, 2011; Lorber, 1994).

Gender Performance

To understand the idea of gender performance, one must first define gender. "Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized" (Butler, 2004, p. 42); society shapes and influences these expectations and restrictions. Gender, which is a social construction, is different from sex, which is biologically determined (Lorber, 1994). The performance of gender is "a socially constructed process through which we are compelled to do, or perform, repeated acts based on the gender norm (which is developed

through and regulated by patriarchal and heterosexist ideas)" (Fellabaum, 2011, p. 129). Society's expectations and stereotypes of gender performance dictate these gender norms.

Society's interpretation of gender imposes certain regulations and limitations on women, and bolsters stereotypes of gender. Gender has no basis in biology (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994), but there are societal sanctions for women who do not conform to gender expectations. However, gender does not exist in isolation. Other social identities—such as race, sexual orientation, social class, and religion—have a simultaneous impact on how women enact and understand gender (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Crenshaw, 2003; Nash, 2008); these identities compound the effects of gender as a social construction.

Gender as a Social Construction

Biology determines an individual's sex, but who defines gender and womanhood? The concept of gender is shaped and molded through enculturation (Butler, 1999; Fellabaum, 2011; Lorber, 1994). Gender is a process, and society has created expectations for how women should think, act, talk, and feel (Lorber, 1994). Women's gender identity is "formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance" with certain structures "through limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even 'protection' of individuals" (Butler, 1999, p. 3). Men face similar expectations in the display and enactment of masculinity. This masculine/feminine binary exerts great pressure on men and women alike (Butler, 1999). Psychosocial, cognitive-structural, and identity development and exploration further compound this pressure for college women (Sax, 2008).

The premise of gender as socially constructed is rooted in the categorical difference between sex and gender. For most, doctors and parents determine gender, like sex, at birth; the sex category becomes a gender status through several practices, including naming and dressing

(Lorber, 1994). Biology determines sex, but society determines how men and women *should* enact gender (Butler, 1999). The concepts, however, are inexorably intertwined, despite the independence of one from the other (Butler, 1999). Society dictates that the masculine/feminine binary is the enactment of the assigned sex—that a woman aligns her biological sex with her presentation of gender. Gender, therefore, equates to sameness for individuals, meaning that if an individual looks like a woman and is biologically a woman, societal expectations program her to act like a woman (Lorber, 1994). In the context of society, gender differentiates between men and women—different ways of dress, talk, and behavior (Lorber, 1994).

Media plays an important role in the social construction of how both men and women perform gender. The differences in male and gender performance are easily discernable through popular media, like television, music, and print. For example, magazines like *Seventeen* or *Teen* provide images and information about femininity and womanhood, and offer clues as to how teenage girls should perform their gender (Milke, 1999). In the digital age, social media makes these images and this information more pervasive—it is on computer screens and smart phones, and teenagers and college-age women are its largest consumers (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015).

The social construction of gender implies a practice of determinism regarding women and men's behavior and attitudes; society consigns these practices in the same way as the biological determinism of sex, and is tantamount to cultural law (Butler, 1999).

> When the relevant 'culture' that 'constructs' gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny (Butler, 1999 p. 11).

Through social media and the creation of an online identity, women perform their gender—either in ways that align with their biological sex or that transgress the stereotypic gender markers.

When one's sex and gender align, the individual may identify as cisgender (Steinmetz, 2014). The term cisgender exists as a counterpart to transgender (Steinmetz, 2014). Transgender individuals "have gender identities, expressions, or behaviors not traditionally associated with their birth sex" (Gender Education & Advocacy, Inc., 2001). Between the binary of cis- and trans-, there is a high level of fluidity in gender presentation and performance. For example, an individual may be a woman biologically and also identify as a woman, but perform her gender in a more masculine way (in how she walks, talks, thinks, dresses, or acts). Because of this fluidity, scholars call into the question the very idea 'a woman'; "*women*, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety" (Butler, 1999, p. 4). This fluidity, coupled with the intersections of other identities, challenges the social construction of gender.

Gender and Intersectionality

Butler (1999) argued that the idea of 'woman' is hard to define because it is "not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities" (p. 4). This reinforces the idea that gender is not fixed; it is a fluid category of identity. When exploring the gender performance of women, other identities (for example, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion) may have a compounding effect upon the interpretation of gender both in real life and in an online context.

The notion that gender is fluid and not fixed is consistent with feminist theories that extol gender not as an identity, but as an attribute (Butler, 1999). Gender attributes are different across

cultures; in Western culture, for example, we place a value on men over women, White over Black, and higher social classes over lower ones (Butler, 1999; Lorber, 1994). These values further stratify gender binaries. If men have more value than women, and White has more value than Black, then Black women occupy an inferior position when the dichotomies of gender and race converge (Lorber, 1994). The multiplicity of identities relates to intersectionality.

The concept of the interaction between multiple identities, or intersectionality, emerged from women's studies and feminist literature (Abes et al., 2007; Crenshaw, 2003; Nash, 2008), and describes "how socially constructed identities are experienced simultaneously, not hierarchically" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 2). Intersectionality focuses "attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics" (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 787), and complicates the study of identities (Nash, 2008) by examining the influence of race, class, and gender on women's identities and experiences (Davis, 2008). These identities do not exist in isolation; rather, they mutually construct—or articulate—with each other (Collins 1998).

Intersectionality is a tool typically used to understand the experiences of marginalized populations, such as people of color or LGBT individuals (Nash, 2008). "Examining the dynamics of difference and sameness has played a major role in facilitating consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). One such academic discipline is psychology; scholars can use models based upon the theory of intersectionality as a framework to explore the experiences of White college women and the multiple socially constructed identities of which they are made.

Two such models, the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) and its predecessor, the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI), depict

how these social identities intersect (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, social class, and culture are some of the social identities included in the model (Abes et al., 2007). These identities revolve around the individual's core identity, personal attributes, and characteristics; and are understood in a particular context, grounded in family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and career decisions and life planning (Abes et al., 2007).

One major difference between the MMDI and the RMMDI is the addition of a meaning-making filter in the later model (Abes et al., 2007). The core and the social identities exist within a specific context; contextual influences (including peers, family members, societal norms and expectations, stereotypes, and other sociocultural conditions) influence how individuals enact or perceive their own social identities (Abes et al., 2007). Therefore, the meaning-making filter is a visual reminder within the model to contextualize the understanding of social identities. When examining gender performance of White college women, the societal expectations about gender act as the filter for interpretation.

Gender Norms and Consequences

Social norms, based on stereotypes, are one component of the meaning-making filter in the RMMDI (Abes et al., 2007), and influence the behaviors and attitudes of society (Butler, 2004; Grusky & Weisshar, 2014). Norms about gender emerge as part of the stratification of the gender binary, which ranks men above women of the same race and social class (Grusky & Weisshaar, 2014). Gender norms begin at birth, when biology prescribes babies' names and attire (Lorber, 1994; Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990). These norms influence the color of nurseries, clothes, and toys; for example, girls are more likely to have dolls and toy furniture, and to play with fictional characters (Pomerleau et al., 1990). These gender norms

deepen as children get older, dictating dress, talk, and behavior; they manifest in puberty, where sexual feelings and practices are shaped by societal expectations and norms of gender (Lorber, 1994; Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Gender norms are rooted in societal prescriptions (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). "For example, the stereotypic belief that women are warm and caring is matched by a societal prescription that they should be warm and caring" (Prentice & Carranza, 2002, p. 269). Gender norms closely relate to traditional gender roles, as well (Eagly, 1987; Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Gender norms correlate to traits of desirability for men and women. When some women attempt to heighten their sexuality and to adopt more socially acceptable, idealized body images (through such recourses as dieting, exercising, and cosmetic surgery), they conform to gender norms of Western culture (Rose et al., 2012). Women are also subject to other societal pressures; clothing selection, cosmetics, occupations, and behaviors contribute to women's conformation (Rose et al., 2012). "You have to walk a certain way, you have to talk a certain way, you have to look a certain way. You pretty much have to fit the role society gives you" (Sales, 2016, p. 294).

As men and women enter adulthood, gender norms are fully entrenched in their daily experiences. For example, workplace sexual harassment policies exemplify the stereotypical treatment and subjugation of women (Butler, 2004). Creators of these policies often assume that women are the targets of harassment in the workplace, and heterosexual males are the harasser (Butler, 2004). This kind of assumption propagates the dominance of male heterosexuality, where women are subordinate to men (Butler, 2004; Grusky & Weisshaar, 2014). Many norms of gender reduce women to sexualized, subjugated beings.

Slut-shaming. Another exemplification of female subjugation and gendered stereotyping is slut-shaming, "the practice of maligning women for presumed sexual activity" (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Seeley, 2014, p. 100). It is a practice rooted in sexual inequality and female subordination (Armstrong et al., 2014), but is not limited to male perpetrators; women participate in slut shaming of other women. Female-on-female slut shaming is less about the judgment of promiscuity or sexual activity, and more about class-based boundaries related to sexual behavior and gender identity—that women are more likely to make judgments against those from a lower socio-economic status (Armstrong et al., 2014).

Victim-blaming. Victim-blaming is another type of subordination, and female rape victims are the most common targets. This practice occurs when authorities, friends and family members, medical workers, and others blame the victim for her rape (George & Martinez, 2002; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Victim-blaming is a rape-myth, a false belief that shifts the blame for the rape act to the victim, instead of the perpetrator (Burt, 1980; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). This unsupportive behavior leads to underreporting of rape cases (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Rape and other sexually violent acts are possible repercussions for those who transcend gendered expectations.

Sanctions for non-conforming gender behavior. There are sanctions for men and women who do not conform to the masculine/feminine binary that society expects and demands.

> The social punishments that follow upon transgressions of gender include the surgical correction of intersexed persons, the medical and psychiatric pathologization and criminalization...of 'gender dysphoric' people, the harassment of gender-troubled persons on the street or in the workplace, employment discrimination, and violence (Butler, 2004, p. 55).

Violence against non-conforming gender identities is currently a major concern for transgender individuals, specifically male-to-female (MTF) transgender women. The number of transgender men and women targeted and murdered in 2015 was at a historically high number (Atkinson, 2015; Steinmetz, 2015).

While we have seen increasing acceptance in society and in the media for LGBT rights, the violence against transgender individuals may be an effect of heightened visibility (Steinmetz, 2015), including recent legislation in several states across the country limiting bathroom usage for transgender individuals (Howard, 2016). Social media has been instrumental in bringing awareness to transgender rights and the alarming number of murders and attacks across the country (Kellaway & Brydum, 2015), and raising awareness about transgender individuals, including celebrities like Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner.

Whiteness and Gender Performance

The salience of race is evident in every day life in the United States, and is especially present on college campuses (Gusa, 2010). Race, like gender, is a social construction, and Whiteness is a social category of race (Guess, 2006; Gusa, 2010; Kincheloe, 1999). The study of Whiteness is "intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between White and non-White people" and "is always shifting, always reinscribing itself around changing meanings of race in the larger society" (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 1). Expectations about gender performance, about how women should enact their gender, and about femininity are rooted in White culture, where Whiteness is superior to other racial or ethnic minorities (Evans & McConnell, 2003; Guess, 2006; Kincheloe, 1999).

Research in White studies revolves around the social, political, and economic implications of Whiteness and its connection to racism in society (Guess, 2006). These

implications manifest as White privilege, where the majority consider the characteristics of Whiteness better than other racial or ethnic identities, and as 'proper' or the norm (Kincheloe, 1999). Whiteness is an orientation and a habit, affecting how individuals and society as a whole view the world and the people in it (Ahmed, 2007).

Whiteness manifests in all facets of life in America. In Western society, White beauty standards are mainstream (Evans & McConnell, 2003). White women tend to idealize slender body types with some curves—narrow waists with medium breasts (Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010). These thin body types are an ideal of feminine beauty (Overstreet et al., 2010). The media, along with the expectations and preferences of White men, perpetuate White beauty ideals, especially about body type (Glasser, Robnett, & Feliciano, 2009; Overstreet et al., 2010). When White women compare their appearance to media images of other White women, the standards are often unattainable (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Overstreet et al., 2010), and the consequences most often negative: disordered eating, body image dysmorphia, depression, or other mental health concerns (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Clay, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2011a; Eisenberg et al., 2011b; Garner et al., 1984; Henriques, 2014; Hewitt et al., 1995; Hoerr et al., 2002; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; National Institute of Mental Health, 2014; Paulson & Rutledge, 2013; Prout, Protinsky, & Canady, 2002; Sax, 2008; Walker et al., 2015).

Since beauty standards based on Whiteness are the norm, these standards play a significant role "in sustaining social privilege beyond that which is accorded marginalized others (Guess, 2006, p. 649). However, some scholars have found that these norms and ideals more adversely impacts White women (Overstreet et al., 2010); Black women may have greater flexibility in standards of physical attractiveness, specifically weight and body shapes, because

of differences in Black culture (Celio, Zabinksi, & Wilfley, 2002; Grabe et al., 2008; Overstreet et al., 2010).

Systems and organizations within higher education, like sororities and fraternities, propagate these standards. In 2013, a campus newspaper revealed a deep history of racial segregation within the University of Alabama Greek life system (Crain & Ford, 2013). Other institutions and organizations have faced backlash for emails or memos to members or pledges about clothing, makeup, and hair guidelines; how to behave appropriately around others, especially fraternity men; or even to compare breast size, perpetuating body image issues among college women (Chang, 2015; Crowder, 2010). These standards align with media portrayals of mainstream beauty, which is fixated on Whiteness (Celio et al., 2002; Evans & McConnell, 2003; Guess, 2010; Grabe et al., 2008; Overstreet et al., 2010).

Media images of ideal White bodies inundate White women, highlighting the way these women should dress, act, think, or behave (Celio et al., 2002; Evans & McConnell, 2003; Guess, 2010; Grabe et al., 2008; Overstreet et al., 2010; Vadenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). The images influence women's gender performance because the pictures alter how women try to shape their image and physical appearance. These media images are no longer just on the television or in magazines; they are pictures posted by *Friends* or *Connections* through Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms.

Social Media

Social media has become a pervasive element in our daily lives. Seventy-one percent of all Internet users are on a social network site, the most common of which is Facebook (Duggan et al., 2015). Facebook has 1.65 billion users; Instagram, another of the most popular social media platforms, has above 400 million active users (Facebook, 2016a; Instagram, 2016).

College-age women, specifically White women, are the most frequent users of social media like Facebook and Instagram (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015). These platforms influence how users communicate, how they display their identity, and how they perform their gender. While there are many popular social media outlets, including SnapChat, YikYak, Tumbr, and Pinterest (Lenhart, 2015), I chose to focus on the two most popular: Facebook and Instagram.

Social Network Sites and Social Media

Individuals do not exist in isolation; they interact with others in everyday life. They operate in and are influenced by connections with society and culture. Social networking theory describes and characterizes these interactions and the context in which they occur (Bruggeman, 2008; Wasserman & Faust 1994). Social networks portray communities of people and their interactions with each other, these interrelations "lie at the core of human society" (Bruggeman, 2008, p. 2). The communities are aggregates of social networks. Networks not only list the people or organizations that are connected, but also represent the connections between the people or organizations within a community (Kadushin, 2004). Strengths of relationships provide the foundation for the social network, and are a function of factors, including trust, time spent together, reciprocity, and emotional intensity (Bruggeman, 2008).

Technology and the Internet have changed the way we think about social networking. The practice of social networking takes place in online mediated communities (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999; Szecsi, 2012). Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram promote relationships in these mediated communities online. The users of these various platforms articulate their identity or a version of their identity in the online social network (boyd, 2007).

The origins of online social networking trace back to 1978. The first reported online social network, CBBS (Computerized Bulletin Board System), was a "virtual system where users could post public messages akin to an office corkboard" (Simon, 2009, p. 5). Other online platforms emerged in the years following: Classmates.com and Friendster were early online social network successes (Simon, 2009). Technologies like AOL Instant Messenger (released in 1997) introduced a new form of online communication, which "had no small impact on the proliferation of online communities" (Simon, 2009, p. 7). Today, social network sites, known collectively as social media, boast more users and newer features than early platforms.

Defining social networks. Authors and researchers describe these platforms in different ways: as social networks, as social networking sites, or as social media. For the purposes of this research, I used 'social network site' to describe the individual platforms (i.e.: Facebook is a social network site). I refrained from the use of social networking to differentiate between these sites and the act of developing relationships (boyd, 2007). Additionally, I used the phrase 'social media' to describe these platforms collectively.

Individual social network sites typically attract different users, offer different features, and fill a specific niche in the realm of social media. Most current social media platforms have specific designs and functions that set them apart from other platforms (Junco, 2014). For example, Facebook's primary functions are to connect individual users, to develop and maintain relationships, and to share content (Facebook, 2016a; Junco, 2014).

However, even with the proliferation of platforms, a few characteristics generally describe all social network sites. Social media platforms are:

> 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 (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211).

Junco (2014) described social media as collections of applications, services, or systems that enable users to create and share content with their online community, and to interact with their online connections. These connections link individual users to each other.

Individual profiles allow a user to "type oneself into being" (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Profiles include demographic and personal interest information, where one can list interests, hobbies, activities, or 'favorites' (for example, TV shows, music, movie, and books) (boyd, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Goodings, Locke, & Brown, 2007). On most platforms, users have the ability to personalize their page with supplementary content, including pictures, videos, blog posts, or additional applications.

Facebook

Facebook is a social network site where users create a profile and connect with other members of the site (Junco, 2014; Facebook, 2016a). On August 27, 2015, Facebook reached a significant milestone in its climb towards social media dominance; the company announced that one billion users logged on to the site on that one day (Addady, 2015). CEO and Founder Mark Zuckerberg posted the announcement to Facebook, calling the milestone "just the beginning of connecting the whole world" (Zuckerberg, 2015, para. 3). It is the world's most popular social media platform (Kent & Leaver, 2014); as of March 2016, Facebook boasts 1.09 billion daily active users—users that log on to the site each day—and has 1.65 billion monthly users (Facebook, 2016a).

Utility of the site. Facebook's mission is to provide a place for people to connect and share what is important to them (Facebook, 2016a). The purpose of the platform is to allow

users "to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" through the various features and functions of the site (Facebook, 2016a, 'mission').

First, users create a profile. The profile serves as a representation of an individual's online identity. The profile consists of demographic information (boyd & Ellison, 2008), which includes name, birth date and year, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, religion, political views, education, and work experience (Facebook, 2016b). The profile also includes an *About Me* section, where users can share personal stories, favorite quotes, or major life events. Facebook users can also articulate their interests, hobbies, favorite movies, TV shows, musicians, or books (Facebook, 2016a). Users also have an opportunity to post a profile picture to represent the physical aspect of their online identity.

In addition to the profile, Facebook has several key features that distinguish it from other social media platforms. Facebook users can customize and personalize their experience on the site through pictures, video clips, or other multimedia content; users can also post *Status Updates*. "A status update is a message that users can post to Facebook to be displayed to their friends on the site" (Skemp, 2015, p. 1). These posts—both multimedia ones as well as status updates—are archived on a user's *Timeline* (previously referred to as *The Wall*).

On Facebook, users connect with other users. These connections—or *Friends* (written here with a capital F to differentiate it from the colloquial term)—are part of the user's network (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Goodings, Locke, & Brown, 2007). "The public display of connections is a crucial component" of social network sites like Facebook (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 213). *Friends, Followers,* and online connections are like an audience for whom the user creates and shares content, consuming the users' performances of identity.

Content is visible to users through another unique feature of Facebook: the *Newsfeed*. The *Newsfeed* is a central repository for a user to see *Friends'* posts and pictures (Facebook, 2016a). When a user logs on to Facebook, the *Newsfeed* is the first page they see. This page shows *Friends'* posts, *Status Updates*, pictures, and other content. Introduced in 2006 (Facebook, 2016a), the *Newsfeed* changed the way users utilized Facebook; the site went from "a place to view individual pictures or specific profile pages to being the go-to place for all updates from online friends" (Skemp, 2015, p. 3). Users can *Comment* on their Friends' posts, or *Like* them (a way to affirm or agree with the post, or just to say that you enjoyed it).

Facebook also has a messaging feature, first introduced in April 2008 (Facebook, 2016a). This feature employs the same concept as early messaging applications, such as AOL Instant Messenger. Users can instantaneously message their Friends, and have a private (or group) chat.

The features on Facebook continually evolve. Facebook is notorious for their redesigns and updates to the site. True to the mission, Facebook continues to connect individuals across the world with innovations and new features, including *Donate* (where users can contribute to different causes), *Safety Check* (a feature which allows you to check in with—and check on—your *Friends* during a disaster or crisis), *On This Day* (a feature that highlights all of a user's Facebook posts for the same date through the years), video chat in the messaging application, or the ability to stream content online live and share with other users (Facebook, 2016a).

History and use of Facebook. Facebook's popularity owes at least part of its success to MySpace, a website which paved the way for en masse use of social media. MySpace was the first online social network site to appeal to a wide user base. Created in 2003, MySpace competed with other social networking sites like Friendster or Xanga (boyd, 2007). The appeal of MySpace was that users had total control over content, allowing them to create their own

online expressions of identity (Simon, 2009). In 2003, teenagers flocked to the site, prompting MySpace creators to change its policies to allow minors to create profiles, so they could connect with their favorite celebrities and bands, post their own pictures, and build their own network base (Simon, 2009).

Shortly after, Facebook emerged as MySpace's primary competition. In early 2004, Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg and his three roommates—Chris Hughes, Dustin Moskowitz, and Eduardo Saverin—created Facebook as a way to connect with students on Harvard's campus (Simon, 2009). The site's growing popularity soon enabled it to expand to other colleges (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Simon, 2009). Users were required to have a college email address (which ends in .edu). This closed access model reinforced the feeling that Facebook was an intimate, online community (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Another part of the appeal of Facebook was that it was everything MySpace was not; Facebook was "up-market, exclusive, urban, elite, aesthetically pleasing, ad-free and users were verified. MySpace was: scantily dressed, teenaged, middle-America, design chaos and on ad steroids" (Suster, 2010, p. 15).

However, in 2005, Facebook expanded to high school networks—and to the rest of the world in September 2006 (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Simon, 2009). Facebook has grown exponentially since expanding beyond college campuses; the site has since eclipsed MySpace and other early social network sites as the world's most popular social media platform (Kent & Leaver, 2014).

An estimated 76% of all Internet users utilize social media—90% within the 18 to 29-age bracket (Smith & Page, 2015). In general, women continue to use social media more than men (Brenner & Smith, 2013). Demographics within the online Facebook community reflect that trend. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of all women Internet users are on Facebook, compared to

66% of all male Internet users (Duggan et al., 2014). Of the 1.65 billion active monthly users, 58% are women (Huffington Post, 2012).

Additionally, while there is no notable racial difference in social media use across platforms (Smith & Page, 2015), there are racial differences in choice of social network site (Duggan et al., 2015). White women are more likely to use Facebook than any other racial group (Duggan et al., 2015). Despite ongoing concerns about Facebook's popularity fading (Olson, 2015; Sales, 2016), its popularity continues and the site continues to attract users (Facebook, 2016a).

Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform that enables users to share multimedia content, specifically images and videos (Instagram, 2016; Junco, 2014). Users can manipulate the style and quality of a photo or video clip through the application of filters and other photo editing techniques, and post it to their profile. Junco (2014) identified the use of filters as one of most appealing aspects of the platform; "these filters transform the pictures, making poorer-quality mobile phone pictures more interesting and artistic" (p. 26).

Instagram also incorporates social interaction through its platform; members of the Instagram community follow other users, and *Like* and *Comment* on pictures. Users can tag their photos with *hashtags* as part of a common theme (Junco, 2014). *Hashtags* are keywords preceded by the pound symbol (#), and used to collect and index these keywords (Fortunato, 2013; Junco, 2014). Technology expert Chris Messina first tweeted about *hashtags* in 2007 on Twitter, another popular web-based social media platform. The *hashtag* has since become such a popular concept that other social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, have adopted

the practice (Junco, 2014). A popular *hashtag* on Instagram is #selfie, where users post photos of themselves.

Users can share Instagram posts across other social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr (a blog-style platform), and Flickr (an online photo management system) (Instagram, 2016). The platform is primarily an application for smartphones or tablets; however, it is possible to view profiles, or *Like* and *Comment* on pictures from a web browser.

Meteoric rise to popularity. Instagram debuted in October 2010, and has since grown to be one of the largest social media platforms (Duggan et al., 2015; Instagram, 2016; Lenhart, 2015). The number of users has increased dramatically over its first five and a half years. Just two months after its premiere, Instagram had more than 1 million active user profiles; in less than one year, the site had over 10 million active users (Instagram, 2016). The creators and developers of Instagram recently celebrated a significant milestone when they reached 400 million monthly active users (Instagram, 2016; Laurent, 2015). This latest achievement propels the platform past Twitter, a microblogging site, which hosts 316 million active users each month (Chaykowski, 2015; Twitter, 2015).

Instagram's popularity received a boost when Facebook acquired the platform in April 2012 (Instagram, 2016). The collaboration between the two social media platforms not only resulted in increased use, but also new features and applications. For example, after the acquisition, Instagram introduced new functions that allowed further manipulation of a photo beyond adding a filter, including lighting, coloring, and tint adjustment (Cooper, 2015; Hochman & Schwarz, 2012). Instagram, like Facebook, continues to evolve. The platform recently addressed one continued criticism: its adherence to a square-shaped photo. In August 2015, the platform enabled the use of landscape and portrait dimensions (Instagram, 2016).

Instagram users. Early users of Instagram were serious photographers and enthusiasts, but the community has grown to include even the most casual photographers (Trianni & Laurent, 2015). Facebook is the most popular social media platform among all Internet users, but Instagram's popularity has increased significantly since 2013 (when it was used by 17% of all Internet users); now, 26% of all Internet users use Instagram (Duggan et al., 2015). Within this population, traditional college-aged students are the largest percentage; 53% of all Internet users, age 18 to 29, are active on Instagram (Duggan et al., 2015). Women are more likely to use the platform—29% of all female Internet users compared to 22% of all male Internet users (Duggan et al., 2015). Among female Internet users on Instagram, the largest group of users is White women (Duggan et al., 2015).

Much of the recent research about Instagram focuses on motivations for use of the platform. There are five primary motivations for Instagram, including social interaction, archiving personal experiences, self-expression, escapism, and voyeurism (Lee et al., 2015). The popularity of Instagram among traditional-aged college students is based on the platform's superiority regarding photo editing, and the simplicity with which one can share photos (Ting et al., 2014).

Instagram, along with Facebook, presents a version of a users' identity to their *Friends* and connections (Manago et al., 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Valkenburg et al., 2006; Vitale, 2015). Users depict this identity through various means, including profile pictures, cover photos, posts, or statuses (Junco, 2014; Vitale, 2015). These pieces of identity are representations of the gender performance of users (Chou & Edge, 2012; Vitale, 2015).

Gender and Performance on Social Media

Several issues influence the performance of gender through social media. Social media provides a platform for users to create an identity, perform their gender, and receive feedback on that identity (Chou & Edge, 2012; Manago et al., 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Valkenburg et al., 2006). *Likes* and positive *Comments* provide identity validation for social media users (Chou & Edge, 2012). Social media users also face pressure from social comparison—the comparison between the users' life and the people they follow on social media (Fardouly et al., 2015; Sales, 2016). The negative effects of seeking online validation and of social comparison lead to body image issues, the sexualization and subjugation of women, and the pressure for stereotyped gender performance through social media.

Social Comparison

Social comparison theory posits that individuals determine their self worth and abilities based on how they equate to others (Festinger, 1954). Social media, including Facebook and Instagram, provide a mechanism for social comparison functions, including self-evaluation or self-enhancement (Fardouly et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2014). "Social comparison theory would predict that women may compare themselves to societal standards of beauty in order to assess their own level of attractiveness" (Evans & McConnell, 2003, p. 154) because "we tend to compare ourselves with similar others" (Milke, 1999, p. 193).

The media inundates consumers with images of Western beauty ideals—primarily based on Whiteness, White women, and White examples of body image. These race-based examples of gender performance and beauty ideals may have negative consequences for women of color, who often do not see examples of their own race or ethnicity held up as an example of beauty in

society (Evans & McConnell, 2003; Milke, 1999; Overstreet et al., 2010); but these images are also harmful to White women, as well:

> White women…are still harmed by these images because they believe that others find these images important and that others in the local culture, especially boys, evaluate them on the basis of these images" (Milke, 1999, p. 190).

For White women, these images are readily available not just on television screens, but also in *Newsfeeds* and *Timelines* on Facebook and Instagram. Women are particularly susceptible to the dangers of social comparison online, specifically when it comes to body image issues.

There is a positive correlation between social media use and a rise in body image issues among young women (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015). "Physical appearance seems to be the most important predictor of overall self-evaluation in female college and high school students," and comparison of one's appearance to others' physical presentation can precipitate concerns about body image (Evans & McConnell, 2010, p. 153). These issues, including body dissatisfaction and disordered eating illnesses, can manifest when women repeatedly compare their physical appearance to others (Fardouly et al., 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015). Comparing body types and physical appearance is not a new problem for women; media images from magazines and celebrity photos have perpetuated the standards of body idealism for decades (Fardouly et al., 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009). However, comparing appearances with friends or peer groups is more likely to increase women's body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Comparison through social media goes beyond body image and appearance. Women are likely to compare the quality of their life with the perceived quality of someone else's life (Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016). Facebook users who spend more time on the site believe that other

people are happier and have better lives (Chou & Edge, 2012). Additionally, "the more 'friends' people included on their Facebook whom they did not know personally, the stronger they believed that others had better lives than themselves" (Chou & Edge, 2012, p. 119). The argument, though, is that social media depicts idealized versions of life (Sales, 2016). "Of course [social media] isn't real life. Everyone…chooses the highlight reel of their life to present on social media" (Sales, 2016, p. 283). When users share pictures or posts online through social media, they seek positive feedback and validation from their *Friends* and connections (Sales, 2016).

Validation

Validation-seeking is a behavior where one pursues attention as a way to bolster self-worth and self-esteem (Sales, 2016). *Likes* and *Comments* serve as validation on social media (Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016). Validation from *Likes* and *Comments* on posts determines the self worth and self-esteem of some teenage girls, including college women (Sales, 2016). Life on social media is a series of "contrived images and edited clips, ranked against each other. It's a system based on social approval, likes, validation in views, [and] success in followers" (Sales, 2016, p. 281). The more *Likes* and *Comments* on a post, the higher the sense of validation. This feedback effects self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006). Positive feedback, in the form of *Likes* and positive *Comments*, increases self-esteem, while negative feedback can lower self-esteem, and trigger depression or other mental health concerns (Manago et al., 2008). Validation-seeking behaviors, as well as the practice of social comparison, "may serve to intensify the issues of identity development and interpersonal connectedness" through social media (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015, p. 3).

Body Image and Female Sexualization

Feminism and the gender equality movement have gained significant traction with a new generation due to social media; feminists use social media to call attention to social and political injustices (Kasana, 2014). Social media is a space to engage with the many strands of feminism, and offers an opportunity to reclaim and reappropriate gender and sexual orientation expression (Cook & Hasmath, 2014). The performance of gender identities within the context of social media represents a specific portrayal of individual gender expression (Rose et al., 2014). There are two potential outcomes of gendered performance on social media: that individuals have the freedom of expressing a gendered identity that may differ from the one they present offline, or it is a chance to replicate the cultural and societal norms of gender identity (Rose et al., 2014). Cultural feminism, one of the many types of feminist thought, reclaims and embraces these social norms of femininity (Alcoff, 1988; Alcoff, 1995; Echols, 1983).

There are significant differences in how men and women present themselves through social media in terms of attractiveness, desirability, and sentimentality; women rated these traits as higher priorities for the presentation of their gender identity online (Rose et al., 2014). The women who construct their gender identity based on body image may choose to elevate traits that increase their desirability (Rose et al., 2014). "Social media is a place where girls and young women are hypersexualized and feel pressure to sexualize themselves" (Sales, 2016, p. 285). College women could spend hours finding the perfect photo, accentuating thinness and other beauty standards (Sales, 2016). Scholars also link social media to increased instances of body image issues (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015).

Other female social media users depicted their gendered identity to avoid undesirable traits or experiences:

> …through the construction of the self in opposition to negative subject positions, allowing this process to be framed as a navigation of disadvantageous subject positions characterized by overt sexualization (which conveyed an aggressive sexuality), and a lack of sexuality (which jeopardized the sexual desirability of the subject (Cook & Hasmath, 2014, p. 983).

Whether highlighting desirable traits or downplaying undesirable ones, these women create their online identities according to male expectations (Cook & Hasmath, 2014).

Another use of social media is in reclaiming the female body. Women of color face further marginalization because of the combined and intersecting subjugated identities. Yet "social media has provided many women of color the opportunity, and the space in which, to vent their frustrations about how whitewashed and suffocating beauty standards are for them...and provide women with the encouragement they definitely need in times of isolation and dejection" (Kasana, 2014, p. 245).

One vein of research about gendered performance on social media explored ways society sexualizes and subjects women. In particular, women experiment with their sexuality and their sexual identity in online spaces (Manago et al., 2008; Ringrose, 2011). These behaviors correlate to increased pressures for female sexual objectification within our society. Ringrose (2011) defined this sexualized behavior as women performing 'slut.' Within social networking sites and through social media, women face increased pressures to perform their gender in ways through which they are sexually objectified (Ringrose, 2011).

Body image and gendered performance of physical appearance are both two common themes in the research regarding gender performativity of women through social media.

Researchers continue to study this area, but no current research links gendered performance of college women and social media to psychosocial identity development.

Establishing Identity

Student development is one of the primary goals for student affairs educators, and the establishment of identity is one of the fundamental objectives of student development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Broadly, the formation of identity entails acceptance of body appearance, gender, and sexual orientation; the development of self-worth and self-esteem; and the establishment of an individual's sense and clarification of self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). To support the development process, both formal and informal theories inform student affairs professionals' work with students (Jones & Abes, 2011; Reason & Kimball, 2012). Informal theories are "the body of common knowledge that allows us to make implicit connections among events and persons in our environment and upon which we act in everyday life" (Parker, 1997, p. 420). These informal, or implicit, theories are assumptions based upon scholars' experiences, values, and beliefs, as well as their interactions with students (Bensimon, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2011).

More formal student development theories "attempt to explain complex phenomena related to the college student experience" (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 150). Formal theory is "a set of propositions regarding the interrelationship of two or more conceptual variables relevant to some realm of phenomena. It provides a framework for explaining the relationship among variables" (Rodgers, 1980, p. 81). The generation of formal theory is a scholarly practice, and should be validated or verified by ongoing research (Parker, 1997).

Developmental theories are a set of formal theories rooted in psychology and sociology, described as "the organization of increasing complexity" (Sanford, 1967, p. 47). These theories

are a framework through which human behavior is articulated, and they help explain and clarify the content and the process of human development (Jones & Abes, 2011).

History of Theory in Student Affairs

Student development emerged as a foundational principle of student affairs work in the late 1960s (Evans et al., 2010). Increasingly diversifying student populations, including women, students of color, and returning Veterans, characterize this period of higher education history (Evans et al., 2010). Student affairs practitioners sought to understand these students' different needs (Miller & Prince, 1976). Administrators and professionals in higher education drew upon knowledge and scholarship from developmental psychology, counseling psychology, sociology, human development, and organizational behavior to work with students (McEwen, 2003).

Psychologists such as Erikson (1968) and Piaget (1950) greatly influenced the development of a central body of student development theory. Psychology provided higher education with information about human development that would help student affairs practitioners understand the students with whom they worked (Evans et al., 2010). Lewin (1936) and other social psychologists and sociologists contributed to an understanding about group dynamics and the impact of the environment on human development. Eventually, theorists focused explicitly on the experiences of college students (for example, Chickering, 1969; Sanford, 1967).

With the influence of sociological and psychological principles in higher education, student affairs professionals adopted establishing identity as the primary task of college development (Evans et al., 2010). The full potential of students cannot be realized until the emotional and physical well being of students receive the same amount of attention as cognitive development (Miller & Prince, 1976). The philosophical shift to student development-focused

student affairs work created an environment where practitioners could anticipate challenges; student affairs professionals became proactive rather than merely reactive to students (Miller & Prince, 1976).

Student development, together with student learning, continues to be a cornerstone of student affairs in the twenty-first century. Recent and emerging bodies of knowledge, like critical theory, focus more on the holistic individual and the intersections of their identities rather than one facet of a student (Evans et al., 2010). Models such as the RMMDI (Abes et al., 2007) and the Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity (IMMI) (Wijeyesinghe, 2012) demonstrate the importance of examining the individual and his or her intersecting elements of identity in a particular socio-cultural context.

Use of Theory in Student Affairs

The formal theories that describe student development and learning provide a basis for knowledge, expertise, and practice within student affairs; offer a common language for the work professionals do with and for students; explain the complex processes of learning and development; and influence how practitioners understand the process and content of student learning and development (Jones & Abes, 2011; McEwen, 2003).

There are several uses for theory within student affairs work. Theory describes, explains, and predicts behavior; and generates new knowledge (Jones & Abes, 2011; McEwen, 2003). Theory can influence learning and developmental outcomes in student affairs and higher education, and can be an important tool in assessing practice (Jones & Abes, 2011; McEwen, 2003). Student affairs professionals use theory to understand students, institutions, processes, and their interactions (McEwen, 2003). To be useful, theories should be:

> (1) important, not trivial; (2) precise and understandable; (3) comprehensive; (4) simple and parsimonious; (5) able to be operationalized; (6) empirically valid or verifiable; (7) able to generate new research, new knowledge, and new thinking and ideas; and (8) useful to practitioners (McEwen, 2003, p. 166).

While many theories exist which we can utilize in our work, not all theories meet these criteria. Additionally, it is up to the individual practitioner to decide which theory or theories inform his or her work.

Psychosocial Identity Development

Psychosocial theories of identity development are concerned with the content of development, including the growth and clarification of "values, identity, relationships, career and work, and family" (Jones & Abes, 2010, p. 155). The issues addressed through psychosocial theories are "the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationships with others, and what do with their lives (Evans et al., 2010, p. 42).

Theoretical models often place development along a continuum or on a particular trajectory. This development happens in stages, phases, vectors, or statuses—depending on the theoretical model (Jones & Abes, 2010). Generally, developmental models present a series of sequential steps, referred to as developmental tasks, which take place throughout an individual's life. Theories used in student affairs are lifespan models; for example, many students may be past the early stages of a particular model, but may not reach the final stages during their time in college.

The work of Erik Erikson (1959) heavily influenced the generation of psychosocial theories. Erikson acknowledged the influence of the external environment on development

(Evans et al., 2010); psychosocial theories propagated this notion, and focus on the interaction between the individual and the external environment (Jones & Abes, 2010). Erikson's (1959; 1968) notions about development occur in a social, historical, and cultural context. His work relies upon the epigenetic principle—the idea that development has a trajectory from the simple to the complex, which occurs in predictable stages or sequences (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1959; Erikson, 1968). In Erikson's model, the primary task of adolescence is the stabilization of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Other psychosocial theorists expanded this principle, which includes work about challenge and support (Sanford, 1966), vectors or statuses of development (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Marcia, 1966), and women's identity development (Josselson, 1987, 1996).

Seven Vectors of Psychosocial Development

Like Erikson, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model places identity at the forefront of development. It is a comprehensive model that describes the tasks associated with identity development. "As Chickering's theory has been tested and refined over time it has been partly validated, partly revised, and partly reconfigured" to describe a broader range of students (Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, & Barnes, 2005, p. 461).

The Early Model. Chickering's (1969) early work expanded Erikson's idea that establishing identity is the primary task of adolescence. He proposed a series of seven vectors focused on the development of young adults: developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering, 1969). These vectors represent different facets of an individual's central identity (Chickering, 1969). In terms of this original model, "establishing identity depended in part on movement along the first three vectors, since one had to clarify who

one was, apart from others, before interpersonal relationships could be freed from symbiosis" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 23).

However, this earlier model met with much criticism. Critics cited the model's lack of validity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and its inattention to women and minority populations (Valentine & Taub, 1999). The updated model addressed some of these issues—specifically the inclusion of women's experiences and a reevaluation of the content of the vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This later version of the model builds upon twenty years of new research and theory (Foubert et al., 2005). Many of the vectors' descriptions are more detailed; some vectors received new names, and others reordered (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Foubert et al., 2005). However, scholars continue to criticize the theory, even in its updated form, for its lack of specificity and precision, and call for more research to test the validity of the theory (Evans et al., 2010). Yet, despite these ongoing concerns, the seven vectors "remain arguably the most well-known, widely used, and comprehensive model available for understanding and describing the psychosocial development of college students (Valentine & Taub, 1999, p. 166).

The Seven Vectors. The primary task of student development is establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering (1969) and later Chickering and Reisser (1993) divided identity formation into different developmental tasks, or vectors. These seven vectors—developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity—are "maps to help us determine where students are and which way they are heading" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 34). Chickering deliberately chose to call these areas of development vectors "because each seems to have direction and magnitude"

(Chickering, 1969, p. 8). Each vector is a continuum, and movement along the continuum is qualitatively more developed (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

These vectors do not represent sequential steps; development in one vector can occur concurrently with development in another. However, the first three vectors are foundational, providing the groundwork for establishing identity as well as the remaining vectors (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Foubert et al., 2005; Valentine & Taub, 1999). While Chickering and Reisser shied away from tying the vectors to specific ages, they did assert that the first four vectors—developing competence, managing emotions, moving from autonomy to interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships—more likely to happen in the beginning of college (1993). The last two vectors—developing purpose and integrity—become more prominent during the last two years of college (Valentine & Taub, 1999).

Developing competence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) described competence as that sense of confidence that one can handle tasks and accomplish goals. The development of competence is a three-fold task: intellectual competence, physical or manual competence, and interpersonal competence.

Intellectual competence is the ability to "comprehend, reflect, analyze, synthesize, and interpret" in order to reason, solve problems, compare choices, think critically, and engage in active learning (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 53). Cognitive dissonance triggers the development of intellectual competence when an individual receives information contrary to or conflicting with their existing intellectual structure. The process of reframing characterizes this dissonance, during which students must restructure existing intellectual frameworks to reinterpret both new information and previously acquired knowledge (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Physical and manual competence pertains to the ability to use the body for performance, self-expression, and creativity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The development of physical and manual competence could become a vocation for some, and an avocation for others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The goal of physical and manual competence is for students to learn "to trust their abilities, to do their best, to strive for the goal, to play by the rules, and to respect their opponents" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 67).

Interpersonal competence, a precursor to a later vector about developing mature interpersonal relationships, is related to increasing use of discrete communication skills: participating in dialogues, actively listening, self-disclosing appropriately, asking questions, and accepting and providing feedback through conversation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Interpersonal competence also relates to the ability to collaborate with others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Individuals who can demonstrate interpersonal competence are intentional in their use of communication; they know how to make appropriate decisions about the content of the message and the target of the communication; when to listen and when to speak; and when to communicate verbally, nonverbally, or in writing (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These skills are adapted to all levels and types of interpersonal relationships.

Managing emotions. The first task towards successful management of emotions is to be aware of and acknowledge emotional triggers or signals, to recognize the intensity of these feelings, and to understand whether these feelings are nurturing or toxic (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Toxic feelings—those that interfere with daily routines and academic performance—are the negative results of these triggers. Toxic feelings include anxiety and fear; anger that leads to aggression; depression, guilt, and shame; and maladjusted sexual or romantic attraction (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Development occurs when students can both identity and accept

these feelings as normal behavior, and when they "learn appropriate channels for releasing irritations before they explode, dealing with fears before they mobilize, and healing emotional wounds before they infect other relationships" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46).

Moving through autonomy toward interdependence. More advanced emotional development occurs when students can be self-sufficient, taking responsibility for their decisions and actions, and can separate their thoughts and opinions from others' (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Movement from autonomy to interdependence requires both emotional independence, as well as instrumental independence. Emotional independence depends upon an individual's ability to distance his or herself from the need for reassurance, affection, or approval of others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Instrumental independence, on the other hand, has two major components: self-sufficiency and mobility (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). "Students develop instrumental independence that includes self-direction, problem-solving ability, and mobility" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 67). Students who develop instrumental independence can make their own decisions; they have the ability to plan and organize activities, and to solve their own problems. They are also able to leave one location (such as their home or college) and can function well in a new location (a new town or a new institution).

This vector's culminating task is the recognition that the individual does not exist in isolation. "Greater autonomy enables healthier forms of interdependence" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). Reaching interdependence means respecting the autonomy of others, while working and living cooperatively together.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships. Two factors characterize the development of mature interpersonal relationships: toleration for and appreciation of individual

differences, as well as the capacity for intimacy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A shift from too much dependence or dominance towards a level of interdependence between two individuals differentiates the development of mature relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Women have a greater capacity for developing interpersonal relationships; men often have more difficulty forming platonic friendships, especially with other men because "men are more likely than women to equate warmth and closeness with sex and to look for an erotic component when a strong emotional connection exists" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 170).

Establishing identity. Although establishment of identity is the primary goal of development—and within Chickering & Reisser's (1993) model, all of the vectors are oriented towards this purpose—the fifth vector centers solely on this task. At this point in the model, establishing identity is based upon the development of the previous four vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). However, there are several key elements in the development of identity.

One component in establishing identity is comfort with the body and physical appearance (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). "Development [in this area] comes with increasing awareness of one's body as a vehicle for expression" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 184). Another element of the establishment of identity is comfort with and acceptance of gender and sexual orientation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Establishing identity also involves a "sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context" as well as in response to feedback from others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49). Clarification of the self through roles and lifestyle choices, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability are also steps towards establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010).

Developing purpose. Developing purpose is an "increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and opinions to clarify goals, to make plans and to persist despite obstacles" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 209). Purpose includes intentionality in decision-making and goal setting, the articulation of career plans and aspirations, renewal of personal interests and avocations, and a commitment to relationships and family (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Development of purpose also includes making and following through with decisions and plans, even in the face of adversity (Evans et al., 2010). Purpose can be related to strong commitments about values or beliefs, and are often tied to integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Developing integrity. The final vector is the development of integrity. This vector is closely associated with developing purpose and establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Integrity is the alignment of personal values and beliefs with individual actions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). There are three steps to developing integrity: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010).

All seven vectors—developing competence, managing emotions, moving from autonomy to interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity—are oriented towards one purpose: the development of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). While the most recent model included college women's experiences in the development of the model, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of psychosocial development have informed many other research initiatives, including ones specifically focusing on college women's identity development.

College Women's Identity Development

Over the last three decades, researchers have explored gender differences in relation to the seven vectors (Foubert et al., 2005; Straub & Rodgers, 1986; Taub, 1995). Chickering and Reisser (1993) were also interested in exploring gender differences in their model; for example, in the description of the development of autonomy, Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted differences in how men and women demonstrated autonomy. Women develop individual autonomy in ways that maintain their interpersonal relationships with others, while male students assert their autonomy by pulling away from the group (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Foubert et al., 2005). Specific factors can significantly affect women's development of autonomy, including the quality of interpersonal relationships and parental support, as well as an orientation towards groups rather than the self (Taub, 1995).

There are also gender differences in terms of interpersonal relationships. Women are more likely to develop mature interpersonal relationships earlier than men (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Significant gender differences exist in the development of mature interpersonal relationships, and these differences lead to women's greater capacity for intimacy (Foubert et al., 2005). Additionally, relationships influence women's ability to articulate their purpose, because women more often consult others in their decision-making processes (Taub, 1995).

Foubert et al. (2005) called for continued study of the ways in which college students develop, and the factors that lead to this development. However, there is limited research about the interplay of identity development and gender performance through social media. Therefore, this research examines the intersection of identity development and gender performance through connections to body and appearance, clarification and sense of self, and self-worth (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Identity Development on Social Media

Identity exploration is an area of continued interest in research about social media. "Emerging adults' peer interactions on social networking sites may impact the construction of personal, social, and gender identities" (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkahn, 2008, p. 455). Researchers have explored the many ways that social media could impact identity, including its influence on student engagement on campus (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2012; Vitale, 2009), the reasons for social media use (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2010, Ting et al., 2014); the influence on students' sense of belonging in the college environment (Strayhorn, 2012); the effect of social media use on students' well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2006); and social media's contribution to social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors among online users (Chou & Edge, 2012; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Sales, 2016).

Another popular vein of research surrounding social media is its connection to identity development; scholars continue to explore the connection between college students' social media use and their identity development (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2015). This area of interest is known as digital identity development, which describes how social media users develop online identities (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015).

> Digital identity development may be the next addition to the 'core.' The manner in which we engage, share, promote, and present ourselves online has become a major facet in many of our lives. No longer seen as being separate from ' real life,' an individual's digital identity is intricately connected to their overall identity (Stoller, 2012, para. 1).

Social media users can create their digital identity on their profile through demographic information, pictures, and posts (Junco, 2014; Sales, 2016).

One challenge to digital identity development is the tension between idealized or factual social media presences; researchers debate whether these social media profiles represent idealized versions of individuals' identity or one based on fact. Some postulated that profiles on social media are idealized versions of identity, displaying exaggerated or fictitious characteristics that do not accurately reflect their interests and personalities (Manago et al., 2008). Other researchers asserted that social media profiles are an extension of one's actual identity, through which the individual presents his or her actual personality and characteristics (Back et al., 2010). In a previous study, I found that what college women post on Facebook is entirely accurate; the pictures, the status updates, and demographic information are all true (Vitale, 2015). However, the women are discerning when it comes to *what* they post; the Facebook profiles are less complex than their actual identities (Vitale, 2015).

There is a need for further research regarding social media use and digital identity development (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015), including gender identity and performance. Despite the centrality of social media in college students' lives, very little research explores the complexities of the relationship between social media use and identity development. Junco (2014) called upon scholars to "understand how student behaviors on social media are connected to students' overall development and how to put into practice strategies that help students along their developmental paths" (p. 95-96).

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, I discussed the constructs that inform my study: college women, gender performance, social media, and identity development. White college women are a majority of the enrollees in higher education (Allan, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Society expects these women to perform their gender in certain ways—through

the majors they choose, the way they dress, how they act, and what they think or say (Butler, 2004, Lorber, 1994). The expectations of gender performance extend to women's online presence through social media. Among college women, Facebook and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms (Brenner & Smith, 2013: Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015). Through social media, college women establish their identity through pictures and posts (Sales, 2016; Vitale, 2015). This online version of identity is described through Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model of psychosocial development, where the establishment of identity is characterized by comfort with and acceptance of gender and sexual identity, articulation and clarification of a sense of sense in specific contexts, and an increasing awareness of the body and physical presentation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND DATA ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I explored the literature about White college women, gender performativity, social media, and identity development. These constructs support the purpose of my research: to understand how college women experience the phenomenon of gender performance in the context of social media. I focused on how White college women perform their gender in relation to the establishment of identity. Using a phenomenological approach, I interviewed eight White college women about their experiences with gender and social media. I analyzed our interviews and their social media presences, and then connected my findings to gender performance and the establishment of identity. Through this research, my guiding research questions were:

1. How do White college women perform their gender through Facebook and Instagram?
2. How do White college women perform their gender on Facebook and Instagram in relation to establishing identity?

Although I could have used several different methodologies to answer these questions, I chose to utilize phenomenology to explore gender performance and the establishment of identity through social media. Phenomenology provided an opportunity to unearth the essence of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006)—the meanings that these participants attributed to their experiences of gender performance and establishing identity through social media. This chapter provides an overview of my methodology, including a description of the phenomenological

method, the situating of my philosophical worldview and theoretical framework, and my plan for data gathering and analysis.

Guiding Principles and Frameworks

Four main elements shape the research process: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology describes a researcher's theory of knowledge and answers the question: how do you know what you know (Crotty, 1998). I operate from a constructionist perspective, which helped to determine the type of research methodologies and methods I employed.

The theoretical perspective is a philosophical stance, shaped by a researcher's epistemology, which in turn influences the methodology and the methods (Crotty, 1998). As I went through the process of conducting this research, my theoretical perspective evolved. As I began to analyze my data, I realized that my viewpoint aligned with a critical feminist framework; this paradigm connects to the types of questions I wanted to answer and shaped the lens through which I gathered and interpreted the data.

The methodology is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, p. 2-3). Operating within a constructionist epistemology, I elected to use a phenomenological methodology.

The methods are the tools or techniques utilized in the data gathering and data analysis stages of the research; the type of research and the methodology determine the methods used in the process (Crotty, 1998). Using a qualitative approach through the phenomenological methodology (van Manen, 2014), I employed a combination of phenomenological interviews and

content analysis in my data gathering. For data analysis, I used an inductive method; I began with the data and moved toward themes that connected to specific theories (van Manen, 2014).

My research focused on the experiences of college women and the phenomenon of gender performance, and how that performance influenced the establishment of identity through social media. I used Chickering & Reisser's (1993) model of psychosocial development to frame my understanding of the establishment of identity, including an acceptance of body and appearance, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Then, I connected my findings to the performance of gender and the establishment of identity.

Constructionism as a Guiding Philosophy

When designing any study, a researcher must first acknowledge how her worldview defines and shapes the process of the research. This worldview, or epistemology, "is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). Crotty (1998) described three different epistemological paradigms: objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism. The differences in these worldviews determine the questions a researcher asks, the methodology chosen to answer those questions, and the methods used to carry out that plan.

Objectivist paradigms posit that there is a knowable truth (Crotty, 1998). "Objectivist epistemology holds that meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Subjectivism, on the other hand, relies on the knowledge of the subject to impose meaning on an object; the object takes no part in its own meaning (Crotty, 1998).

I view the world through a constructionist frame. My philosophy directed both my research interest and my methodology. Constructionists reject the idea of an empirical,

objective, knowable truth (Crotty, 1998). In a constructionist paradigm, engagement and interactions with reality shape and influence the meaning of truth (Crotty, 1998). Individuals construct, rather than discover, meaning; since individuals create their own understanding of objects and experiences, different people may interpret these meanings in different ways, even in regards to the same events or phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Since constructionist paradigms explore the meanings of phenomena in our society, "constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing either an objectivist or a subjectivist epistemology" (Crotty, 1998, loc. 268-260).

Constructionism connects to culture and societal expectations because there is the assumption that society indoctrinates individuals to the meanings of cultural laws.

> Each of us is introduced directly to a whole world of meaning. The mélange of cultures and sub-cultures into which we are born provides us with meanings. These meanings we are taught and we learn in a complex and subtle process of enculturation. They establish a tight grip upon us and, by and large, shape our thinking and behaviour throughout our lives (Crotty, 1998, p. 78).

Constructionism, with its connection to the meaning of culture and the process of enculturation, more closely align with phenomenology as a methodology.

As an epistemological stance, constructionism connects to my research because the purpose was to determine how the women's gender performance interacts with social media, in relation to establishing identity and to societal expectations. Gender performance is a socially prescribed set of meanings and expectations; performances of gender and the process of establishing identity are based upon these societal expectations, which are part of the complex process of enculturation. Additionally, several theoretical perspectives embody constructionist

principles, including feminism (Crotty, 1998). I viewed my research—both the purpose and the process—through a cultural feminist theoretical framework.

Cultural Feminist Theory as a Framework

The theoretical framework is the philosophical viewpoint that informs the methodology and provides direction for the research process (Crotty, 1998). For this phenomenological study, I adopted cultural feminism as a theoretical framework to help direct my research process, and to understand the phenomenon of gender performance through social media.

Feminist Thought. There are many facets of feminism and feminist theory (Sarikakis, Rush, Grubb, & Lane, 2008). Most identify feminism as a political movement that prioritizes social equality between women and men (hooks, 2015). "Feminism speaks with one voice in characterizing the world it experiences as a patriarchal world and the culture it inherits as a masculinist culture" (Crotty, 1998, loc. 3257-3258). Tong (2009) refers to the many forms of feminism as topics, categories, labels, views, approaches, perspectives, and frameworks. There are different strands, too—including "liberal, radical, Marxist/socialist, psychoanalytic, care-focused, multicultural/global/colonial, ecofeminist, and postmodern/third wave"; these different types of feminism challenge the patriarchy of society and "shape…explanations for women's oppression and their proposed solutions for its elimination" (Tong, 2009, p. 1).

The primary concern with feminist theory, however, is that it lacks a clear consensus about what feminism is and how scholars define it (hooks, 2015; Sarikakis et al., 2008). Another major issue with feminism is that it "often seems to presuppose that it knows what women truly are" (Alcoff, 1988, p. 405). Misogyny and sexism taint the very definition of woman—what it means to be a woman (Alcoff, 1988; Alcoff, 1995; Lorber, 1994). The dilemma of defining 'woman' has historically divided feminists. Some have claimed that only feminists have the

right to define and assess other women; others reject the idea of defining women at all (Alcoff, 1988; Alcoff, 1995). Cultural feminists believe that the categorization of woman does exist, and characteristics and behaviors define women within society (Alcoff, 1988; Alcoff, 1995).

Cultural Feminism. Cultural feminism, as a subset of feminist theory, "is the ideology of a female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in an effort to revalidate undervalued female attributes" (Alcoff, 1995, p. 408). Originally linked to the lesbian feminist movement in the 1980s, cultural feminism is a point of departure from other feminist perspectives (Alcoff, 1988; Alcoff, 1995; Echols, 1983; Tong, 2000; Tong, 2009). Cultural feminists do not necessarily aim to eradicate the patriarchal society; rather, cultural feminists believe that equality can be achieved even in the midst of patriarchy (Echols, 1983).

Cultural feminists embrace femininity and stereotypically female traits, including community, connection, emotion, and communication, which women have developed through nature and/or nurture (Tong, 2000). These feminine characteristics contrast with the masculine/male traits through the performance of gender (Alcoff, 1988; Butler 1999; Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994). The male traits—independence, autonomy, intellect, dominance, leadership, and the propensity to wage war—are privileged ones in society (Alcoff, 1988; Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994).

> The problem is not femininity in and of itself, but rather the low value that patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities such as 'gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassionateness, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity, unselfishness,' and the high value it assigns to masculine qualities such as 'assertiveness, aggressiveness, hardiness, rationality or the ability to think logically, abstractly and analytically, ability to control emotion.' They claim that if society can learn to value

> ‘feminine’ traits as much as ‘masculine’ traits, women’s oppression will be a bad memory (Tong, 2000, p. 3).

The performance of these traits—female and male—effects the way individuals interact with the world.

Male-dominated models of development, like Kohlberg’s (1975) model of moral development, emphasize these male traits through the male perspective. However, feminist theorists like Gilligan (1977; 1982) have “been very influential in suggesting that women speak ‘in a different voice’ (Crotty, 1998; Sarikakis et al., 2008). “[Gilligan] believes women and men have different ways of perceiving the world and relating to it. Their concept of the self is different” (Crotty, 1988, p. 174). For example, Gilligan rejects the male-dominated models of moral development, and created one that more adequately reflects the way in which women develop morality (Tong, 2000). Josselson’s (1987; 1996) work around women’s identity development is another example of cultural feminism in identity scholarship. The emphasis in these female-centered models, and in cultural feminism, is the idea of connection and communication (Gilligan, 1977; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987; Josselson, 1996; Sarikakis et al., 2008; Tong, 2000; Tong, 2009), two of the main principles of social media (Junco, 2014).

There are, however, ongoing critiques of cultural feminism as a branch of the feminist movement and as a theoretical paradigm. One major critique is that cultural feminism centers on White women’s experiences; writings about cultural feminism tend to exclude the voices or experiences of women of color (Alcoff, 1988; Alcoff, 1995; Echols, 1983). Another major concern about cultural feminism is that it tends towards essentialism and is too homogenous in its delineation of gender and womanhood (Alcoff, 1995, Tong, 2009). Essentialism is the “conviction that men are men and women are women and that there is no way to change either’s

nature"; "essentialist claims about what makes certain groups of people the way they are…are political-philosophical constructs of conservatism" (Tong, 2009, p. 90). These patterns of thought and behavior "entrap women (and men) in rigid roles" when in reality, some women (and some men) do not fit into the restrictive definitions of women and men (Tong, 2009, p. 91). In taking an essentialist view of gender and womanhood, cultural feminism feeds into the perpetuation of stereotypic patterns of gendered performance.

While these critiques potentially devalue cultural feminism as a theoretical perspective for some scholars, others argue against the essentialist claims:

> The insistence on viewing traditional feminine characteristics from a different point of view, to use a 'looking glass' perspective, as a means of engendering a gestalt switch on the body of data we all currently share about women, has had positive effect. After a decade of hearing liberal feminists advising us to wear business suits and enter the male world, it is a helpful corrective to have cultural feminists argue instead that women's world is full of superior virtues and values, to be credited and learned from rather than despised (Alcoff, 1988, p. 414).

In my own research, cultural feminism, with its emphasis on virtues and values of femininity (including appearance and physical presentation), allowed me to situate my research in a way that focuses on the performance of gender through social media as a phenomenon in society.

Reconciling Cultural Feminism and Constructionism. Emerging theoretical perspectives, like critical theory (including feminist scholarship), "may be used to both critique and reconceptualize existing theoretical frameworks" and share a common "interest in problematizing the 'grand narratives'" of power and privilege in society (Jones & Abes, 2010, p. 156). "The connection between meaning and power has been a focus of postmodernist thinkers"

(Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988, p. 455), including feminist scholars. As a body of thought, literature, and activism, feminism and feminist scholars expose truth about gendered power struggles in society (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1983). Often tied to a subjectivist epistemology, feminism relates most closely to a poststructuralist or postmodern perspective, which presumes multiple possibilities for structuring society (Jones & Abes, 2010; Rhoads & Black, 1995). Among these many possibilities is the flexibility of identity; poststructural theories embrace fluidity in identity (Jones & Abes, 2010), including gender identity and performance (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004).

Constructionism, on the other hand, is rooted in the premise that individuals' engagement and interactions with reality and with certain phenomenon construct truth (Crotty, 1998). Individuals do not discover meaning; rather, they construct it through their own understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, the same phenomenon could have different meanings based on the individuals' perspectives (Crotty, 1998). The researcher and the participants co-construct this knowledge about the phenomenon, and the research sheds light upon the participants' meanings about and understandings of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Crotty (1998) links feminism to constructionism, but other scholars may problematize that relationship. I acknowledge the critical perspective of feminism and the structural perspective of constructionism; however, I see the two working in tandem for the purposes of this research. I posit that cultural feminism, out of all of the other strands of feminist thought, is the most relatable to constructionism because it embraces the ideals of femininity and reclaims these ideals as more than stereotypes and expectations. These ideals, however, exist within a constructionist paradigm—they are learned patterns of thought and behavior, passed down

through the process of enculturation and linked to the generation of constructed meanings within constructionism.

Additionally, the processes of the research—the methodology selected and the methods used to collect and analyze data—are rooted in constructionism. There are multiple possibilities in how individuals can ascribe meaning to the phenomenon of gender performance; in my current research, these possibilities centered on the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of gender performance on social media. Yet, the questions I asked and the implications of the research more closely aligned with the poststructuralist nature of cultural feminism. The outcomes of this research call into question the multiple opportunities for structuring society's understandings about gender, especially given the fluidity of identity and gender performance.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology focuses on the study of and experiences with phenomena (Vagle, 2014); these phenomena are rooted in perceptions, beliefs, memories, decisions, emotions, judgments, evaluations, and actions (Schwandt, 2015). Through phenomenology, scholars explore how individuals relate to the world through their daily lives (Vagle, 2014). "Phenomenology is more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived experiences" (Van Manen 2014, loc. 749-750). Put another way, phenomenology is how individuals connect to the everyday experiences that they live in and live through (van Manen, 2014).

Exploring Phenomenology. Within phenomenology, the purpose is to distill the phenomenon to its essence. Phenomenological essences are "a structure of essential meanings

that explicates a phenomenon of interest. The essence or structure is what makes the phenomenon to be that very phenomenon" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11). The essence illuminates the characteristics and facets of the experience of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006). To understand these essences, researchers must set aside their assumptions about the human experience of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology requires researchers to defer their presuppositions; therefore, it is important to focus on new perspectives instead. Crotty (1998) told us to "place our usual understandings in abeyance and have a fresh look at things" (p. 79); Husserl (1931) declared that phenomenologists "set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking . . . to learn to see what stands before our eyes" (p. 43). However, phenomenology requires more than the setting aside of assumptions. It requires a critical, suspicious examination of culture:

> In agreeing that culture is liberating, phenomenologists remain very aware that it is also limiting. It sets us free but at the same time, it sets boundaries. It makes us human but in and through this particular culture, this special system of significant symbols, these meanings...In imposing these meanings, it is excluding others. And we should never lose sight of the fact that the particular set of meanings it imposes has come into being to serve particular interests and will harbour its own forms of oppression, manipulation and other forms of injustice (Crotty, 1998, p. 80).

Through this study, I examined whether women are limited and bound in their gender and identity performance through social media. Other perspectives or experiences were perhaps not included, but the findings represent these women's interactions with gender performance, identity development, and social media.

Understanding the essence of a phenomenon and acknowledging the ascribed meanings of these phenomena are two of the biggest considerations in phenomenological research. Another is the idea of intentionality. Phenomenologists use intentionality to describe the interconnectedness between humans and objects (including ideas), and "to signify how we are meaningfully connected to the world" (Vagle, 2014, p. 27). The principle of intentionality not only relates to connectedness, but to distilling the essence of a phenomenon. The essences, illuminated through phenomenological research, are calculated meanings that manifest through individual's lived experiences (Vagle, 2014). Intentionality, at its core, is about individuals and their daily experiences with the phenomenon, and the idea that the meaning of the phenomenon is rooted in the experiences of the individual. The goal of my research was to understand the experiences of White college women's gender performance on social media, to distill these experiences down to their essence, and to explore the intentionality—the connection—between the individual and the experience.

Phenomenology, Constructionism, and Cultural Feminism. The manifestation of gender and identity are phenomenological occurrences in society. Through this study, I explored how a group of White college women navigates these phenomena, specifically within the context of social media. The methodology of phenomenology focuses on the study of how individuals experience and make meaning of the phenomena of daily life (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014).

The phenomenon of gender performance, though, is a social construction. How individuals are expected to perform their gender is based upon prescriptions laid out by society—and it is society that dictates how gender is enacted and that doles out the repercussions for transgressions of that gender performance. If we accept that gender is a social construction and

that the experiences of gender performance is a phenomenon, then we come to understand how phenomenology and gender performance are related.

However, "phenomenology also reminds us that these constructions themselves are always in danger of becoming imperatives…that need to be bracketed, deconstructed, and substituted with more reflective portrayals" (van Manen, 2014, loc. 482-484). Dismantling gender performance relates to cultural feminism as a framework. One of the main goals of the many strands of feminism is to deconstruct the power and privilege surrounding gender within society; cultural feminism enacts this mission by reclaiming and elevating the traits that were deemed stereotypic of women (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1983).

If the traits valued by cultural feminists—communication, connection, emotion, for example—are traits that are typically feminine, then it is society that has shaped the definition of women, and it is a construction that has been adopted by cultural feminists. Therefore, phenomenology could be a method used to explore how women operate within this socially constructed and socially prescribed performances of gender.

Methods of Data Gathering

The data gathering process consisted of three phases: an initial interview with each participant, the collection of data from each participant's social media accounts, and then a follow-up interview with each participant. I used the term data gathering, rather than the traditional qualitative research phrase *data collection* because of what Vagle (2014) described as the "ontological nature of the word 'gathering'" which "feels a bit more free, open, and inviting" (p. 78). The openness of the word fits more closely with the study of a phenomenon because the purpose of phenomenology is to understand the many different meanings and experiences that could be possible.

Initial interview. Data gathering began with an initial interview with each participant. Phenomenological interviews explore and gather "experiential narrative material, stories, or anecdotes that may serve as a resource for phenomenological reflection and thus develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (van Manen, 2014, loc. 7744-7745). Interviews in phenomenological research are an opportunity to learn more about the phenomenon from someone's perspective (Vagle, 2014), and the purpose of the phenomenological interview is to elicit stories about the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 2014).

In this initial interview, I used a semi-structured interview protocol, which outlined certain topics related to the research questions. These interviews covered the following themes: establishing identity, gender identity, gender performance, social media, and gender performance through social media. I recorded each interview with the participants; these interviews lasted anywhere from 29 to 55 minutes.

Prior to the start of each interview, I explained the purpose of my research, offered a brief description of the data gathering process, and detailed the expectations for participation in the study, including the consent process. The initial interview concluded with connecting to the participants, via *Friending* and *Following*, on their social media accounts. Afterwards, I transcribed and reviewed each interview before moving to the second phase of data gathering: examining the social media accounts of the participants.

Please see Appendix B for the participant consent form, and Appendix C for the interview guide for the initial interview.

Social media. The second phase of the data gathering process was to access and explore participants' Facebook and Instagram accounts. Participants had three options for granting me access to their social media: opening their social media profiles to a public setting, *Friending* or

connecting with me via each platform, or downloading the entire contents of their social media platforms. If participants already had their profiles as publically viewable, or if they chose to make their profiles public for the duration of the data gathering process, I planned to alert them to concerns of online safety and privacy. For participants who chose to connect with me instead, I instructed them to add me as a connection on their accounts so that I had access to view their profiles. The last option was to download the content of their profiles. Facebook provides a mechanism through which to download the entire content from a user's profile. With Instagram, users would have had to use an external application entitled Instaport, which saves all of the users' pictures and posts. All eight participants elected to *Friend* or connect with me on Facebook and Instagram.

When exploring the participants' social media accounts, I focused specifically on their profile pictures, pictures they posted, statuses they shared, and information in their *About Me* section of their profile. I took notes about participants' posts: what they wrote or shared with their online community; if their posts reflected important parts of their identity, like religion; how many profile pictures they had; whether these profile pictures featured other individuals; the kinds of pictures they shared in albums, what were they doing in the pictures, and how they looked; and the number of friends in their network. I also noted whether there was congruence between the participants' identities described in the initial interview and their digital identity; for example, if one of the participants listed religion as a major social identity, but religion is missing from their digital presence, this indicated a lack of congruence.

Vagle (2014)'s work influenced my decision to focus solely on pictures and words; "photo-stories become glimpses of how the phenomenon is tentatively and momentarily lived, and equally important is that the visual and linguistic access to the phenomenon deepens what

might be thinkable and possible to learn about the phenomenon" (p. 94). However, I refrained from interpreting the meanings of the pictures or posts at this point because I wanted to hear participants' explanations and stories. I treated these pictures and posts as artifacts during the research process, and used them to structure the final phase of data gathering: the follow-up interview.

While looking at the social media content, I did not look at participants' comments with other users, other users' comments to the participants, or posts shared to the participants *Wall* or *Timeline* by other users; the consent form outlined this expectation. In addition, I did not include material from the social media accounts posted after our initial meeting. Creswell (2014) warned that qualitative researchers must consider that participants may change their behavior if they know researchers are observing their actions. Therefore, if the women knew that I was looking at how they perform their gender, it was possible that they would change the nature of their posts. Additionally, I limited my exploration of social media by gathering only posts from the women's time in college (or, in the situation of one participant, after she turned 18), since the focus of the research was on college women and their gender performance.

Additionally, I did not engage with the participants on social media after we became *Friends* on Facebook or mutual *Followers* on Instagram. I maintained this boundary during the research process to not influence or pressure the participants into engaging with me through social media. It was interesting to note, however, that several of the participants did initiate engagement with me on the platforms; five of the participants *Liked* pictures I posted on Facebook or Instagram during the data gathering process.

Follow-Up interview. The last stage of the data gathering process was a follow-up interview with each participant. I utilized an unstructured interview protocol, which allowed for

greater flexibility in the interview process, and enabled me to elicit the stories from participants. The unstructured interview is the most popular for phenomenological studies because it is the most conversational and open (Vagle, 2014).

I based the questions I asked each participant upon my observations from their social media presences, as well as follow-up questions from the first interview. For each participant, I had a list of topics I wished to address (for example, the criteria they used for selecting profile pictures or posting other pictures). The interviews lasted between 30 and 55 minutes; I recorded and then transcribed them. Since I operate from a constructionist paradigm, and constructionism values the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participant, I sent participants the transcripts of their interviews for confirmation.

Qualitative Limitations. Qualitative interviews have certain limitations in the research process. For example, the researcher filters the narrative and interprets the information from their perspective (Creswell, 2014). To combat this limitation, researchers address issues of credibility and trustworthiness. However, another limitation to qualitative interviews is that participants are not equally articulate or perceptive in their responses. A semi-structured interview protocol allowed for greater flexibility in eliciting information from the participants; as the researcher, I appreciated a flexible protocol if the participant was not as forthcoming with their responses.

Data Analysis

A primary goal of analysis in phenomenological research is to uncover the essence of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to understand the phenomenon—the essence of gendered performance—through online representations of the self and identity within the context of social media. Yet, in phenomenological research, like much of

qualitative research in general, it is difficult to separate data gathering from the analysis (Vagle, 2014). The content from social media and from the participants' narratives informed both the data gathering process and the analysis of the data.

Thematic Analysis Through Transcripts

The transcripts from the participants' interviews were the primary units of analysis. The first interview addressed the participants' gender identity, gender performance, social media use, and gender performance through social media. I based the second interview upon the content from the participants' social media accounts and on information from the first interview. I utilized an inductive thematic analysis approach. "Thematic analysis refers to the process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text" (van Manen, 2014, loc. 7859-7860). In the analysis of these transcripts, I identified patterns, categories, and themes. Themes emerged from the participants' stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), which illuminated the essence of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006). It is important to note that my interpretations are not the sole basis for the essence of the phenomenon; instead, as the researcher, I uncovered the meaning of the phenomenon and its essence through the experiences of the participants and their narratives (Dahlberg, 2006).

Thematic analysis treats the texts of the transcript as sources of meaning, and this meaning comes from three levels: the whole transcript; the separate paragraph; and the level of the sentence, phrase, expression, or word (van Manen, 2014). In the holistic reading approach, a researcher regards the text (or transcript) as a whole document, deciphering meaning or significance from the entirety of the text (van Manen, 2014). During this first step, I read each transcript while listening to the recordings. I wrote my general impressions about the interview

and about each of the constructs in the study: White college women, gender performance, identity development, and social media.

In the second step, the researcher approaches the text through selective reading (van Manen, 2014). The purpose of this step is to highlight fundamental or enlightening statements or phrases about the phenomenon (van Manen 2014). "Next, we may try to capture these phenomenological meanings in thematic expressions or through longer reflective descriptive-interpretive paragraphs" (van Manen, 2014, loc. 7872-7873). During this step, I reread each transcript, and paid particular attention to significant details or ideas in the transcripts. I highlighted these significant details in the text of the transcripts, and marked them as relics of phenomenological essences.

The final step in thematic analysis is a detailed reading (van Manen, 2014). At this stage, the researcher looks at each sentence and asks what it reveals about the phenomenon. This step is to "identify and capture thematic expressions, phrases or narrative paragraphs that increasingly let the phenomenological meaning of the experience show or give itself in the text" (van Manen, 2014, loc. 7876-7877). In this final step, I extracted the main points of each sentence, trying to capture their meaning through a single word or phrase. During the data analysis process, I referred to these single words or phrases as codes.

The connections between each of these steps—the significant words, phrases, or paragraphs—are related. The connections move from codes, to discrete categories, and then finally into themes (van Manen, 2014). These themes are the "tentative manifestations" of the components of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014, p. 99), or as described by Dahlberg (2006), the essence of the phenomenon. This process was inductive, where I worked back and forth between the patterns and the categories until themes (or the essence) emerged; I then filtered this essence

through a cultural feminist lens and connected it to previous literature about White college women, gender performance, identity development, and social media use. The essence represents both the participants' experience with the phenomenon of gender performance through social media, as well as the commonalities and the differences in each of the participants' experiences.

Content Analysis Through Social Media Posts

In the data gathering phase, I viewed and noted pictures and posts from each participant's' social media: profile pictures, status updates, demographic information, and tagged photos on Facebook; pictures and captions on Instagram. I considered these pictures and posts as artifacts of gendered performance on social media. When viewing the participants' social media presences, I did not make any inferences or try to interpret the meaning behind the posts; I wanted the participants to share their perspective. Phenomenology requires researchers to suppress their assumptions about the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014); in this instance, I had to set aside my own preconceptions about gendered performance of women through social media based upon my own experiences as a social media user.

However, once I collected the data, I subjected the pictures and posts to a content analysis. "Formally, content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context"; the purpose of content analysis is to "analyze data within a specific context in view of the meanings someone—a group or a culture—attribute to them" (Krippendorf, 1989, p. 403). Content analysis relies on interpreting the symbolism behind the words or images we see (Krippendorf, 1989). The meanings—or essences—I evoked from these posts were based upon my interpretations as well as the participants' own voices.

Please see Appendix D for a flowchart depicting both the data gathering and data analysis processes of this research, and Appendix E for a chart of the codes, categories, and themes illuminated during the data analysis stage.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Qualitative researchers should be concerned about the issues of trustworthiness and credibility in their research. In phenomenology, trustworthiness concerns the accuracy of the representations of the phenomenon, and the evidence from the data-gathering phase substantiates trustworthiness (Schwandt, 2015). Different methods of triangulation lead to increased levels of trust and credibility in the research process (Schwandt, 2015).

To ensure that my interpretations were appropriate, I adopted a few strategies to give credibility to the data. First, I solicited feedback from the participants through member checking (Schwandt, 2015). As previously mentioned, each participant received a copy of her interview transcripts. I also sent the participants my findings, including themes and initial conclusions regarding the manifestation of the phenomenon of gendered performance on social media. Additionally, I conducted this research in collaboration with a committee of professors and scholars. I consulted with members of the committee throughout the process to maintain the rigor of my research, and to ensure the credibility of my process and conclusions.

I completed one final task in an effort to maintain credibility and trustworthiness of my research. Throughout the process, I engaged in bridling. Bridling is a reflective practice in qualitative research, similar to bracketing (Dahlberg, 2006). Like bracketing, bridling is a process that describes "the restraining of one's pre-understanding in the form of personal beliefs, theories, and other assumptions that otherwise would mislead the understanding of meaning and thus limit the research openness" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16). Bridling departs from bracketing in

that the researcher reflects upon the whole experience in an ongoing process, rather than at the outset of the research process (as in bracketing) (Dahlberg, 2006). Dahlberg (2006) stressed the importance of bridling so that we do not make conclusions too hastily or too carelessly.

Recruitment

To ensure I had a wide applicant pool for participants, I employed a variety of methods for recruitment. My primary means of recruitment was through a college-run research pool, coordinated through a website platform designed to help researchers connect with participants. The research pool allowed researchers with IRB-approved studies to post recruitment information, set up meeting times for interviews, and communicate anonymously with participants. Many students who utilize the research pool through the college are required to participate in studies for class credit. I recruited four of my participants through the research pool.

I also utilized social media as a recruitment tool. I advertised my recruitment materials through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I created specific recruitment materials that were in JPG form (a picture) similar to a flyer. By posting this picture, my *Friends* on Facebook and my Instagram and Twitter *Followers* were able to share these posts with their articulated list of connections. I also distributed recruitment materials through email list-serv announcements. I recruited two participants through social media and email recruitment.

Additionally, I reached out to colleagues on campus who were in positions to share my recruitment materials with the students with whom they work. These colleagues came into direct contact with students and worked within the university. I recruited two more participants through this final method.

Please see Appendix A for recruitment materials.

Participants

This study focused on the gender performance and identity development of White college women through social media. I recruited eight traditional-aged White undergraduate women who have a Facebook and Instagram account, and have been active users of social media for at least four years. The women in the study were active daily users of Facebook and Instagram; they log on to their profiles (to either post content or interact with others through the social network platforms) at least once daily.

Table 1

Participant demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Facebook user since…	Instagram user since…	Salient social identities
Jamie	22	Early high school	Early college	Gender, sexual orientation, social class
Jennifer	22	Early high school	Late high school	Gender, race, class
Georgia	20	Middle school	Early college	Gender, religion
Sally	21	Middle school	Late high school	Gender, religion
Angie	22	Early high school	Late high school	Gender, religion
Robyn	22	Middle school	Mid high school	Gender, religion
Taylor	20	Middle school	Mid high school	Gender, race, religion
Karen	20	Early high school	Mid high school	Gender, sexual orientation, religion

Traditional-age college students typically fall within the range of 18 to 24 years of age (Renn & Reason, 2013); my participants for this study ranged from 19 to 22 years of age. I

recruited only women. It was important to me that the participants self-identified as women. I chose to use the term woman as my identifying characteristic because it allowed for flexibility in social constructions of gender. If I only described my participants as female, this would be too limiting. Female is a scientific term that describes the sex of an individual (Brown, 2015). Secondly, female is an adjective that describes a person (Safire, 2007); using female strips a woman of her identity as a person (Brown, 2015). Therefore, I used the term woman because this embodies the idea that the individual is a human. While I acknowledge that gender is not binary, and that it exits along a continuum, I focused exclusively on cisgender participants, whose biological sex matched their outward appearance (Steinmetz, 2014).

Additionally, I focused on White women in this study because the population reflects the current majority of students in higher education (Allan, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Sax, 2008), as well as the majority of the users of social media, including Facebook and Instagram (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015). While race was not a salient identity for the majority of the participants, they each described other social identities (including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and social class) that do influence their life. The participants were students at a large, public research institution in the southeast, which also potentially influenced their thoughts about gender and gender performance.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of phenomenology is to discover the essences of the phenomenon—to illuminate what makes the phenomenon important to the human experience (Dahlberg, 2006). In this research, I adopted a phenomenological methodology to explore White college women's experiences of gender performance and identity development through social media. I view the world from a constructionist paradigm; this worldview, along with a cultural feminist theoretical

perspective, shaped my research—the questions I asked, the methodology, the process of data gathering, and my data analysis. I employed qualitative interviews and content analysis as my primary sources of data collection, and utilized an inductive approach in a thematic analysis of the data. I addressed issues of trust and credibility in my research through member-checking and bridling activities.

To answer my research questions about how White college women perform their gender and establish their identity on social media, I recruited eight White college women. Their ages ranged from 19 to 22, they all identified as cisgender, and were all daily active users of Facebook and Instagram.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of phenomenological research is to uncover the essence of the phenomenon—the meanings associated with the experiences around the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006). In this research, I attempted to illuminate the essence—the deeper meanings—of White college women's gender performance on Facebook and Instagram. The common themes centered on uses of Facebook and Instagram, norms about social media use, audiences, and presentation and online identity. These themes illuminated the main essence of the phenomenon of gender performance through social media.

Through this research, I learned these women perform their gender through Facebook and Instagram according to specific norms—both for social media use in general, and for posting on specific platforms. I also found that there are differences in how the women use Facebook and Instagram, which influences how they enact their gender on the different platforms. Considerations of gender performance and identity articulation manifest in different ways, depending upon the choice of the social media platform and the viewpoint of the individual participants. The idea of gender is a social construction (Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994), and the participants either adhered to the social constraints of gender or rebelled against the established expectations. The participants who held fast to feminine ideals in their portrayal of identity online did so in ways that were consistent with cultural feminism, reclaiming these stereotypical feminine qualitative and elevating them as desirable.

The different platforms also have different audiences for gender performance; which media source they are using effects how women perform womanhood. Overall, though, the women revealed that the most significant way they perform their gender and establish their online identity is through physical appearance and presentation.

Using Facebook and Instagram

There are a variety of social media platforms, each of which serves a different function (Junco, 2014). Facebook and Instagram are two of the most popular platforms worldwide (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015). While their user bases are diverse, White college-age women are among the largest user groups on each platform (Duggan et al., 2015). Both Facebook and Instagram serve different purposes: Facebook is primarily used as a tool for communication, and Instagram is to share pictures and visual media (Junco, 2014).

Generally, the participants' social media use aligned with popular opinion: Facebook for communication and Instagram for sharing the details of everyday life. Georgia said that Facebook and Instagram "call for different things." The women described Facebook as an opportunity to present a polished and professional image, and use it for collecting information about others. One participant described it as more voyeuristic, because she browsed her *Newsfeed* to see what her friends and connections are doing. Instagram, more widely used by the participants (in terms of posting, not browsing), was more "fun" and more "personal."

The 'Really Big Stuff"

Some of the participants, Taylor for example, rarely posted on social media; they used it primarily to stay in connection with others. However, when they did post, it was the 'really big stuff': major life events, jobs and internship announcements, programs and special events, and

travel. Jamie described how she used Facebook and Instagram differently to capture her life on social media:

> I think Facebook tends to be like the really big stuff, and then Instagram is like, highlights… the pictures that I post on Instagram are going to be like a little bit more, like, not personal, but, like, just what my everyday life is like.

Karen's posting habits were "more sporadic and big things that have happened." Robyn posted an entire album of pictures on Facebook from her engagement and the subsequent engagement party. Angie recently posted pictures from a graduation photo shoot on Facebook. Sally's Facebook and Instagram posts were mostly about Student Government and other organizations in which she is involved. Several of the participants shared photos from sorority events like date nights and formals.

The content the participants shared through their social media related to their definitions of being a woman and influenced the performance of their gender. The prominence and importance of the "really big stuff" on their social media showed the priorities within their lives: relationships and connections with others (Josselson, 1996), the establishment of their identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and their individual construction of their gender identity (Butler, 2007). These traits aligned with characteristics that are valued in a cultural feminist paradigm and related to how the women portrayed their identity; the "really big stuff" highlighted the participants' articulation and clarification of their senses of self as women in different social and cultural contexts (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Social media is one way to capture and document these priorities, but there were differences in how the participants accomplish this feat. The participants discussed growing

discernment in their social media posts, especially on Facebook. For example, the frequency of the participants' posts have changed:

> When I first started using [social media], I was like, every day I was posting something so you could see, but now I would say I'm definitely more towards the ideal because I'm only going to post something if it was like, really cool because I realized no one really cares to see what you're doing every day…but you kind of want to make them a little jealous.

Several of the participants talked about how they post "really big things" because it makes others jealous.

This goal of making others jealous has potentially negative consequences for the participants, who are *Friends* and *Followers* within vast online communities. For some of the women in this study, these "really big" posts precipitated serious issues regarding women's mental health. If the goal of social media posts is to make people jealous, then the repercussions could be higher rates of depression, eating disorders, and body image issues (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg, 2011a; Eisenberg, 2011b; Garner et al., 1984; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Sax, 2008). Consumers of social media may also experience feelings of inadequacy, isolation, or oppression (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015). For example, Jennifer, a 20-year-old transfer student, felt left out when she saw friends and connections post about big nights out with groups of friends.

> I feel like I get on to social media just like, a lot of girls post pictures of them and, like, their big group of girlfriends, like, going out and stuff, and sometimes I might be in on a Friday night, like, doing nothing, and I get on Facebook and see that, and think, 'Man, this makes me feel like I need to be out with some friends right now,' you know?

Feelings of jealousy relate to social comparison when individuals (through social media) measure their self worth against others (Festinger, 1954).

"Digital Scrapbooking"

Instagram's platform is a mobile-based platform primarily used for photo editing and manipulation, and instantly sharing photos (Junco, 2014; Ting et al., 2014). In all of the interviews with the participants, there was an emphasis on the importance of images rather than words. While some of the participants discussed the significance of the captions with the images, all recognized the implications of the photos they shared. "The sharing of images rather than words alone has made communication with friends and broader groups of users who share similar interests more ideal, convenient, and fascinating" (Ting et al., 2014, p. 18). The other women echoed Jamie's description of Instagram as a "highlights" reel. Angie said that while these pictures show her life, they are not necessarily "day to day life":

> It's probably more idealized, you know? …I want it to be what I think is the funnest or the cutest…it's only the snazzy things or the things that seem worthy of being captured by a picture.

Angie's selection of posts reflected a carefully constructed version of her identity, which reflected the meanings and interpretations of her life she wanted to share with her articulated list of connections.

Some of the participants described Instagram as a collection of the highlights of their lives, like a giant photo album. Georgia likened Instagram to scrapbooking:

> I just really love photography and for me, it's almost like digital scrapbooking, and I don't really care if people like what I post because it's just like 'I really value this' and if it's a memory or like, something silly or whatever it is….as well as going back to the

> inspiration, cause I feel like that's also something. Sometimes you just need to [see] something hopeful, so yeah.

Part of the task of collecting a digital scrapbook through social media is capturing the moments and objects that are of importance. Some of these moments may be mundane to *Friends* or *Followers*, but they had particular meanings for the participants and helped to illuminate their digital identities.

Societal expectations also dictated the importance of these moments and objects. There are trends on social media—users consider certain types of pictures or posts to be "cool." Sally identified some recent Instagram trends:

> Now there's like trends of, like, posting cool pictures, like food, or a lot of people now, which I really, really like will post pictures of other people and be like 'This persons means so much to me.'

Other trends the participants identified include nature or travel locations, pets and other animals, and quotes of inspiration.

The majority of the participants observed that their Instagram *Followers* tend to be other women. Sally explained why Instagram is more popular with girls:

> It's like, 'Oh let's take a picture, like, now that we're dressed.' …I would say this is something I think a lot of girls go through, is like, sometimes, 'Oh we must take pictures, pictures, pictures' and a lot of these are just like, it so happened…or just like documenting or different things like that.

The participants' observations about gender differences through social media aligned with recent literature and research. Social media tends to be more popular with women across almost all social media platforms (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Huffington Post, 2015;

Lenhart, 2015). On Instagram, the largest group of users is college-aged women (Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015).

"Major Communicator"

While Instagram is like a "highlight" reel or a "digital scrapbook," displaying pictures of the participants' lives, the women shared that they use Facebook primarily to communicate with others. Sally said that Facebook is "a major communicator" tool because she can share events with her online community, read other peoples' posts in various Facebook groups, send messages via *Facebook Messenger,* or re-blog poignant posts:

> Facebook is very much a tool to like, get the word out, so like um, you think of organizations…and things that are raising money. Those, I mean, my whole timeline right now, which is incredible and awesome, is like, GoFundMe for [charity groups], which is great. And that, and then like sharing events, like, inviting people to things, are really predominant.

Angie determined that Facebook is a way "to casually catch up on what is going on" in others' lives. The participants' use of Facebook was a way to engage their social community. There is a positive relationship between the use of Facebook and student engagement; frequent and heavy social media users have higher rates of participation in campus organizations and are more likely to interact with others offline (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2014; Vitale, 2009).

The participants in this study utilized various methods and applications within the Facebook platform to stay informed and to maintain connections with other users, including *Facebook Messenger*, *Facebook Events*, *Facebook Groups*, or *Photo Albums*. *Facebook Messenger* is an instant messaging application designed specifically for users through the Facebook platform (Facebook, 2016a). *Facebook Messenger* was one of the most popular

applications among the participants in the study. For example, Georgia used *Facebook Messenger* to keep in touch with family while she is away in college. Several participants, including Sally, communicated through the application if they did not have an individual's telephone number:

> It's a really good way to initially contact someone. Like *Messenger*, for example, like, I just set up two coffee dates with girls that I really want to get to know better…and I was like 'Message them on Facebook, when I don't have their number.'

The participants described feeling less of a barrier when initiating conversation through *Facebook Messenger* rather than through a phone call, text message, or with in-person communication.

The participants also employed pictures and visual media as a communication tool, especially on Facebook. Jennifer used *Photo Albums* on Facebook to keep her family and friends informed about her life in college:

> I feel like that's what I use Facebook for, is, um, keeping in touch with family now that I don't live at home anymore. I remember last year when I came here [to school], I made an album like, my first year at [this school]. And I mainly put it on there for family…I did it so that…my grandmother, my mother, my aunt could see what my dorm room looked like and…see what I ate for breakfast, what the dining hall food looked like, and that kind of stuff.

In addition to *Facebook Messenger* and *Photo Albums*, participants also utilized additional Facebook add-on features, such as *Facebook Events* and *Facebook Groups,* as methods of communication with *Friends* and other online connections. These tools highlighted the utility of Facebook as a way to communicate with others.

All About the Pictures

Although there are some elementary differences between Facebook and Instagram as social media platforms, the participants did agree on an important fact: pictures were the most important part of their social media presence. The ways in which participants used pictures on the different platforms was where Facebook and Instagram diverge. Robyn elaborated on the differences between the two platforms:

> Facebook is where you post, like, a bunch of pictures at the same time, like photo albums. Sometimes, for people to look at them, but sometimes it's just so I can, like, see them later…And then Instagram is, like, you know, I would pick one picture that I like and post it. Always with, like, a good caption.

Users carefully considered and filtered the pictures and updates they shared with their network before posting. The participants constructed their own identity, infusing the profile with meaning. All of the participants agreed that Facebook represented a more "polished" and "professional" version of their identity, while Instagram was the more "fun, college version" of their lives.

Norms of Facebook and Instagram

Facebook and Instagram fulfill different needs for social media users, who must also adhere to each platform's implicit set of rules, which govern participation on the platforms. "Quite often, [social media users] respond to what they perceive to be the norms of a particular service" (boyd, 2014, p. 38). For example, Facebook users identify by their actual name, but may have a whimsical login name on Instagram (boyd, 2014). The participants described other norms of Facebook and Instagram use, which the they learned through social constructions: their experiences of posting, observations of others' posts, and "trial and error"—what works, what

does not work, and how often to post. The participants specifically addressed norms surrounding the time of day, the frequency, and the selectivity of their posts. Whether the participants follow these norms or not affect their gender performance on social media—influencing how they appear on the site and what they share with their audience.

Words are Irrelevant

One interesting trend and social norm on Facebook is the decline of the *Status Update*. "A *Facebook Status* [italics added] is an update feature which allows users to discuss their thoughts, whereabouts, or important information with their *Friends*" and is similar in nature to a *Tweet* on Twitter (Rouse, 2010, para. 1). The *Status Update* feature is different from other types of posts because there is no accompanying media (pictures or video) or external link (to a website or article, for example). Some participants, like Taylor, just did not know what to use the *Status Update* for:

> [It's] not really been my thing. I just don't really know what to say.

Robyn objected to the use of *Statuses* as well:

> I would never post a status on Facebook, because no one does that anymore. But I would post pictures.

Angie felt that the *Status Updates* were superfluous:

> I don't ever even think about making a status…because I don't care that people know what I'm doing every moment of every day…It seems like that's the trend now is people don't care about statuses, now it's more of [pictures]. Words are becoming more irrelevant and pictures are becoming way more relevant.

The participants mainly considered *Facebook Statuses* too revealing, preferring instead to vent their feelings in ways that are more appropriate or through individual communications.

The participants linked the decline of the *Status Update* to their increasing maturity in how they share or articulate emotions. Appropriately managing emotions is an integral part of establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The participants, as they have developed in their lives and online, have become "more adept at identifying feelings and giving them appropriate expression" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 84). For most participants, online was not considered an appropriate place to vent and share feelings—especially if those feelings were frustration, disappointment, or sadness.

However, the participants admitted to posting *Statuses* in the past. These old posts revealed the mundane details of everyday life ("Two tests down, one to go!" or "Today sucked and boys are stupid!"), song lyrics, or inspirational quotes. As the participants have aged, though, their propensity to share these details has declined. The inclination to share feelings and acknowledge emotion is a feminine trait (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1983; Tong, 2000; Tong, 2009), but the ability to find appropriate venues to channel these emotions is a sign of psychosocial maturity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Falling into disuse, along with the *Status Update*, is writing on *Friends' Walls* or *Timelines*. Previously, the women described how writing on the *Wall* or *Timeline* of a friend was a way to communicate. Angie laughed at the idea of writing on someone's *Wall:*

> That was much more of a thing a couple years ago, and again, now pictures are the thing. People don't care about words…And it makes sense…like why would you want the rest of the Facebook world to know your answer to the question, 'How are you?' Can't you just text them that?

Rather than writing on the *Wall* or *Timeline* of a *Friend*, the participants used the *Facebook Messenger* application on the site and on their phones. *Facebook Messenger* is similar to text

messaging on a phone or to the old AOL Instant Messenger application. *Facebook Messenger* contributes to the role of Facebook as a communication tool. All of these tools help build and strengthen relationships.

"Facebook Official"

Social media—and specifically Facebook—have become so ubiquitous in our society that it permeates many aspects of our lives, including our relationships with others. Relationships have a "profound impact on students' lives" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 145). The articulation of relationships and the capacity for intimacy are two components in the development of mature interpersonal relationships; these are vital elements in the establishment of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and are valuable traits from a cultural feminist perspective (Tong, 2009). Platforms like Facebook and Instagram help users to express their identity in various ways, including through connections and *Friends.* In fact, several of the participants talked about how Facebook grants legitimacy to relationships. This idea of being "Facebook official" applies to friendships or intimate relationships—"you're not really in a relationship until it's on Facebook." Sally described this idea of friendship legitimacy through Facebook:

> It's like, 'we met in passing, we're gonna be Facebook friends now.' [So now] it's Facebook official.

"Facebook official" can also pertain to major life events, like posting about a job or internship opportunity, upcoming graduation, or engagements. When information is "Facebook official," participants expected others to notice and to engage via *Likes* and *Comments.*

Considerations in Posting

The formation of mature interpersonal relationships is one task of development and identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Through social media, users can articulate these relationships in different ways: through their *Friends* or *Followers*, their interactions with individuals on social media, and pictures and posts. For example, with shared pictures and profile pictures, having other people in the picture greatly influenced the attention it received on social media:

> I would only post pictures with people that I'm, like, super close to, you know, because you're kind of identifying them as like one of your lifelong friends by putting them in your profile picture.

Jennifer preferred to only post solo profile pictures:

> I like to just have me in the picture because it's my Facebook—my name is [Jennifer] and I think the picture should be of me, at least that's how I am nowadays.

While many of the findings in this study were undisputed and unanimous across the participants, this particular point was one of the most contentious—about half of them preferred to have their profile pictures with friends, and the other half only wanted their own picture.

When the participants do post pictures with others, there is a complicated formula for who can *Like* or *Comment* on pictures. Robyn explained the elaborate criteria:

> If you post a picture of yourself, just you, you'll probably capture most of your audiences, because everybody that's following you knows you. But if I post a picture with someone who is in my sorority, I can pretty much count on everyone in my sorority to like it and maybe a couple outside, but then if I post someone who is not in my sorority, who is random, sometimes, people in my sorority won't like it because they don't know who that

> is. [But] that wouldn't matter if I post something with my finance; [he's] definitely gonna get a lot of likes, because he's universal. But it, so it definitely depends.

However, when they do not receive the amount of feedback they expect from their audience, they analyzed the reasons. Was their post "weird" or "offensive"? Was the post uninteresting?

These questions indicated the insecurities the participants battled through their social media posts. Seeking validation through *Likes* or *Comments* is an indication of a lack of self-acceptance and self-esteem, and calls into question the participants' sense of self in response to feedback from others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016; Valkenburg et al., 2006). The participants constructed their identity in relation to the feedback they received from their *Friends* and *Followers* online. "We define who we are in part by discovering who we respect, how they feel about us, and how to deal with reactions that do not confirm our self-image" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 198). The participants were not immune to the feedback they received—whether it was positive, negative, or non-existent. The participants admitted to lowering their self-worth if the feedback was not consistent with their expectations.

Another question the participants asked themselves is whether they posted at the wrong time of day. For Jamie, receiving her average number of *Likes* on a post was validation. However, when she received fewer *Likes* than expected, she questioned her own self-worth:

> It's like 'Huh, you know, like, *x* number of people liked it; cool. I'm a cool person; that's a cool picture of me, like, yeah.' Whereas if like, [only] two people like it, then I'm like what did I do wrong? Is it the time of day I posted, or do I just suck?

This reaction to below-average *Likes* was common among the participants. Sally, who expected 500 to 600 *Likes* on her Facebook or Instagram posts, explained what happens when she received less than her average number:

> If I get like, now, like 300 or 200 I'm like, 'What happened to me?' Nothing, nothing happened. Maybe it was a weird time of day; maybe your photo was weird, like it doesn't matter. It's—it's honestly something that we think about way too much.

When their posts do not receive enough attention, several of the participants admitted to deleting the post because it was "embarrassing" or there was "obviously something wrong with it." The posts that users share online are directed towards connections and *Friends*—the audience who consumes the performance of identity and gender on social media.

Audiences and Performances

Just as there are different uses of and purposes for Facebook and Instagram, there are also different audiences—the types of users the participants connect with differs depending on the platform. "Facebook is one crowd of people and Instagram is another," Angie noted. "I feel like Instagram is more friends that I've made in college…whereas a lot of times I associate Facebook with high school."

The women performed their gender and established their identity in distinctive ways on Facebook and Instagram. They chose what to filter based upon the audience (or social media platform) to which they are performing. This was a demonstration of managing emotions and developing mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, the need and desire for validation, as well as the idea of social comparison, were among the consequences of gender performance and identity establishment on social media.

Audiences

The participants' connections through social media were a factor in how the participants perform their gender and how they establish their identity. Part of development is shaping identity in response to feedback from others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and this feedback came in the form of *Likes* or *Comments* from the users' *Friends* or *Followers*. Audiences—in this case, *Friends*, *Followers*, and other social media connections—observed the participants' performances of gender. These audiences provided feedback about the participants' performance. Social media is the stage upon which the participants perform gender.

Facebook and Instagram have different audiences when the participants perform their gender and display their identity online. Facebook is a way to maintain connections and relationships with people from "before college"—high school friends, family, and "adults" in their lives. Instagram is the present—college friends and new acquaintances.

Filtered. The women described how they filter certain aspects of their lives on Facebook because of whom they associated with through the site. While Instagram more closely aligned with their college identity and their college friends, Facebook connected them to their high school friends and "adults." These "adults" include parents, family members, family friends, and even teachers. Angie explained:

> In recent years, Facebook, more and more, like, adults, parents, and grandparents have been joining Facebook and now I feel like that's what I use Facebook for, is keeping in touch with family now that I don't live at home anymore…Facebook nowadays is definitely more geared towards pleasing family members, seeing what family members have going on.

Sally's sentiments echoed Angie's thoughts:

> Facebook I would say is more broad than Instagram. Facebook [has] a lot of adults, so I'm friends with some of my high school teachers on Facebook now, a lot of my friends' parents, obviously my parents, my aunts, uncles…both my grandmas have Facebook. So my audience I'd say is more broad, and Instagram is very my age group, so anywhere between like maybe 15 to 25 is probably my primary Instagrammers.

The target audience of each platform was part of the cultural context, and dictated how the participants performed their gender and established their identity on the site. Understanding the differences in the characteristics of their audiences, the participants navigated their gender and identity in the specific cultural and social contexts (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tong, 2000; Tong, 2009) of Facebook and Instagram.

Several of the participants noted that Facebook's audience was older. Karen said that her Facebook audience is primarily "adults and parents and aunts and uncles...and everyone else has moved to SnapChat or Instagram." How she portrayed herself to those audiences differs, as well:

> If I post something on Instagram, it's normally just friends so I feel like I'm less filtered on there. And then on Facebook, I really have to think before I post something. I'm like, 'Okay, all these people are going to see it, [so] is it acceptable to put on there?'

The process of filtering certain aspects of their lives or identity on Facebook has come with age. Several of the participants talked about how their Facebook presence has evolved. They "used to post silly stuff" or "really dumb things" like emotional song lyrics or confessional-style posts. As their audience has grown to include parents and other adults on Facebook, these types of post have given way to a more filtered, professional, "polished" image.

Unfiltered. Some users—including the participants—cannot always control the audiences who may see their pictures and posts. "In theory, privacy settings allow [users] to limit their expressions to the people they intend to reach by restricting who can see what" (boyd, 2014, p. 32). Instagram's privacy control is relatively simple—either your posts are public (open to anyone) or they are visible only to your connections. Facebook's privacy settings are more complex (boyd, 2014); there are levels of privacy—what your *Friends* can see, what your *Friends' Friends* can view, or what is open to the public. Jamie, along with several other participants, felt more comfortable posting on Instagram because she can restrict access easily:

> I use Instagram more than I use Facebook for the most part. I think the privacy on it is a little bit more secure than Facebook's, so I feel a little bit more comfortable sharing on it.

The participants demonstrated that the platform's privacy settings have an impact on how they use the site.

While some social media users have strict privacy settings, others maintain public profiles; they want to be accessible to their peers (boyd, 2014). Seven out of eight participants had public Instagram profiles. The participants discussed the dangers of having public profiles: getting unwanted attention or receiving comments or *Likes* from strangers or *Friends* of their Facebook *Friends*:

> Sometimes if you post something on Facebook, and like other people can see it, then like that really weird, like, uncle of somebody who's not even really tagged in the picture, but you vaguely know who they are, like comments and it's like 'I don't know how to respond to that.' Stop.

However, even restricted profiles could be subject to public views through screen captures of posts or saved pictures.

This is a critique of social media, and Facebook in particular: that users cannot be sure of who will see their posts. "When people are chatting and sharing photos with friends via social media, it's often hard to remember that viewers who aren't commenting might also be watching" (boyd, 2014, p. 33). It is also possible on Facebook for users to see the posts of individuals with whom they are not *Friends*; when a mutual *Friend* interacts with a post (through a *Like* or *Comment*), it is possible that a user can see the post, even if they are not connected to the initial individual poster.

These invisible audience members, though, tended not to influence the content of posts; they only became a concern if the participants had to deal with unwanted attention or comments. The audience members that the participants considered are the ones to whom the participants performed their gender, seeking validation through *Likes* and *Comments*.

Validation

Validation and self-comparison are two unhealthy behaviors that affect identity development and relate to mental health issues, including body image issues (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Vogel et al., 2014). Through social media, validation comes in the form of *Likes* and *Comments* on pictures and posts (Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016). Validation is tied to users' self worth (Valkenburg et al., 2006), and is related to individuals' sense of self, motivation, and mental health (Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016). Receiving validation in the form of *Likes* and *Comments* was part of the appeal of social media for the participants in this study.

While many of the participants described how social media fuels their search for validation, Sally expressed her dismay with validation through social media:

> My generation puts a lot of self worth in social media. People will find worth in *Likes*, straight up, I'll say I'm guilty of it too, which I hate, but I am.

More *Likes* and *Comments* equate to a higher sense of validation and higher levels of self-esteem (Manago et al., 2008; Valkenburg et al., 2006).

Self-worth and validation manifested in different ways depending on the type of posts and the choice of social media platform. Robyn explained different expectations for the kinds of posts one shares on social media:

> I would say on Facebook, [*Likes* are] not as important. It depends what I'm posting. Like, if I post multiple pictures at a time, it wouldn't surprise me to only get a couple of *Likes* on them, and then that's it. If I do post [only] one picture that I really liked on Facebook, I would expect to get, you know, [more] *Likes*.

However, Instagram has different expectations because it serves a different purpose and appeals to a different audience:

> But on Instagram, if I, like, because you know, everyone has their average number of *Likes*, they get around a certain number. And if I get, if I would get under my average number of *Likes*, kind of like, 'Ew this is awkward,' you know, then, like, I would consider deleting it.

Several participants discussed the practice of deleting pictures that did not "perform" up to their average number of *Likes*, which were often in the hundreds.

There are different reasons for not reaching an average number of *Likes*, besides being an "awkward" picture. The time of day an individual shares a post could have a positive or an adverse affect on the average number of *Likes* for the post. Some participants talked about posting too many of the same kind of picture—for example, too many pictures of a pet or too

many pictures of food. Who is in the picture with the primary user may also affect the number of *Likes* on a post, as Robyn described. These norms helped to shape a particular image or version of the participants' identity, and demonstrated how even identity is socially constructed. The idealized version of someone's social media presence and their contrived image contributes to social comparison.

Comparison

Social comparison describes the process of individuals determining their self-worth based upon how they compare socially to others in their network (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison theory foretells how women compare their identity or their physical appearance based on these societal standards of beauty (Evans & McConnell, 2003). The problem of social comparison is a very real threat for college-age women, especially those that use social media (Fardouly et al., 2015; Nesi, & Prinstein, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009: Vogel et al., 2014). Social comparison has an influence on many facets of college women's lives, including mental health and body image (Fardouly et al., 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Vogel et al., 2014). Robyn noted, "You cannot be on social media and not have that influence you at all."

Social comparison is a roadblock in identity development. Negative comparisons, where individuals rank their self-worth low in comparison to their peers, impacts self-acceptance, self-esteem, and may hinder the development of a positive self-concept (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Chou & Edge, 2012; Myers & Crowther, 2009). Maintaining a positive self-concept is important in identity development because it can "be a comforting response to the anxiety and pressure that characterize many college environments" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 194). When students have higher internal personal standards, they are less likely to fall victim to social comparisons. However, social media has brought the problem of social comparison into sharp focus; social

media makes social comparison easier by prominently displaying pictures and posts on a computer or phone screen.

The participants all described their experiences with the threat of social comparison. Angie is one of the participants most affected by social comparison:

> It is kind of like after you look at theirs, you decide to take a look at yours, and wonder, 'Okay, how do I compare in that way?'…I wish I could say that *Likes* have no importance. And I wish I could say that it didn't effect me either…it has a huge thing of comparison of 'Oh, my picture's not good. I'm not as cool as somebody else. I don't have as many friends, and I'm not as liked.' All from a simple double-tap.

All of the participants described how problematic social comparison is in their experiences through social media.

Despite the ongoing comparison, many of the participants were well aware they are only seeing a version of an individual's identity. Taylor explained:

> I do compare myself, but I know that when, on Instagram and on Facebook, people are portraying their life a certain way, so I shouldn't be comparing it to the certain way they're portraying their life…Especially when sometimes we portray a life that's not the way it really is or how we feel.

Although, the participants were aware of the idealized version of others' online social media presence, they continued to compare. However, the participants shared that they are more likely to contrast their lives with others if they are not close friends.

While Facebook requires users to accept a *Friend Request* and mutually follow each other, Instagram allows users to follow others without that person or account following back. Many of the accounts that the participants follow on Instagram are businesses and bloggers, who

highlight perfection as part of branding and marketing campaigns (Ting et al., 2014). Part of the danger then, on Instagram specifically, is that individuals may not personally know everyone they follow. Robyn explained:

> I don't have…as hard of a time with people that I know, because when I see their stuff, I'm like 'I know you,' you know, so…it doesn't fool me as much, cause then I'm like, you know, 'Oh I know you're having fun, but also know sometimes you don't have fun, or I know, you know, whatever.' But when it's like, people you don't know, that's when you look at it and you're like, 'Wow your life must be perfect, you must never have any problems, and all these things.'

This is consistent with previous research, which found that users who included more people among their online connections who they do not personally know are more likely to think that other people had better or happier lives (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Presentation and Online Identity

In college, "appearance…becomes a matter for conscious concern and decision" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 183). In the digital age, one's appearance and physical presentation is the articulation of online identity on social media—how one *appears* through social media. For many college women and high school students, physical appearance is the most important factor in their identity (Evans & McConnell, 2003); similarly, physical presentation and online identity were perhaps the most important aspect of the participants' social media usage. As Angie explained, words are irrelevant on social media, but pictures are important. How an individual looks, who she is with in the picture, and what she is doing all have an impact on gender performance and the establishment of online identity.

Comfort with one's body and appearance is a fundamental task of the establishment of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The physical presentation of the individuals contributes to the performance of gender through social media because it is through the images where the individuals can express their idea of femininity and womanhood. In most cases, the participants' performance of their gender was limited to pictures; their other posts (like external links, *Status Updates*, or shared posts) revealed more about their personalities or interests rather than gender identity. Physical presentation further relates to gender performance in American society because of the expectation of alignment between physical presentation and biological sex (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994: Steinmetz, 2014). Overall, the display of femininity and feminine traits through the photos demonstrated an appreciation for and reclaiming of women's gender identity, consistent with a cultural feminist paradigm. These traits, though, emphasized the importance of Whiteness and White beauty ideals in women's physical appearance (Celio et al., 2002; Grabe et al., 2008; Glasser et al., 2009; Overstreet et al., 2010).

Less Complex or Idealized Identities?

In my previous research, I found that women's online identity is not an idealized version of her real life identity; rather, identity on social media is a "watered down" and "less complex version of women's identity"—but still entirely accurate and factual (Vitale, 2015, p. 17). In the current research, what the participants suggested is that while their social identity and personality is accurate online, the physical presentation of their identity was more idealized. In regards to physical representation of online identity, Angie said:

> Showing up on social media, you have to be put together and kind of either at your best or doing something that's cool…it's a more glorified version of myself [than] in real life.

Creating an idealized physical identity through social media influenced the pictures that the participants posted, specifically profile pictures.

Many of the participants only posted profile pictures where they "look good," "cute," "pretty" or "thin." Karen described how she selects her profile pictures:

> I mean it has to be a decent picture of myself first. I'm not going to put one of me not wearing makeup or with my hair not done…. [Also] I have like two smiles, a fake smile and then a real smile, so I need to make sure it's like a real smile. So like one where I'm actually like really happy and it shows. And then my eyes are really big so I want to make sure they don't look like crazy; little things like that.

The participants were reluctant to describe the representation of their physical identity as idealized; rather, they claimed that they just wanted to "represent the best possible version" of their physical selves.

Through the popular media, political ideology, and historical precedent, society shapes physical standards for beauty (Evans & McConnell, 2003; Guess, 2003; Milke, 1999; Overstreet et al., 2010); these standards are evident in how the participants represent the "best possible versions" of their physical appearance. Beauty standards are rooted in the social construction of Whiteness, based on the premise that White is beautiful, normal, and mainstream (Evans & McConnell, 2003; Guess, 2003; Milke, 1999; Overstreet et al., 2010). Women learn these standards through the process of enculturation. In wanting to portray the "best" version of their online identity, though, the participants neglected to focus on other feminine traits that make society deems inherently *woman*—traits such as empathy, communication, and connection (Tong, 2000).

One way that the participants can display the best possible versions of their physical identities is to edit pictures. Angie created a "glorified version" of her identity through selectivity in choosing a picture and the process of editing:

> I think spending a long time figuring out the specific filter you want. I mean, yeah…and all [of] things that make it glossy and pretty…you want to make sure it stands out, but you have to have a filter that makes you look tanner. And something that makes your eyes pop, and I think I conform in that way to what society tells you looks good and as long as you're tan and sparkly and it's a good angle, then it's a good picture.

The ability to edit photos—adding filters, for example—was a common theme in the conversations with all of the women. Photo editing and manipulation are elements within Instagram's platform that makes it so popular (Junco, 2014).

There is continued conversation around the problem of idealization on social media (Back et al., 2010; Manago et al., 2008). Staged pictures are evidence that social media, and in particular Instagram, promotes idealized identities. According to the participants, staging photos involves posing; taking dozens (or even hundreds) of photos; and finding the right angle, the right lighting, and the perfect placement of objects. While none of the participants personally admitted to staging their photos for either Facebook or Instagram, they shared this common narrative. For example, Robyn's *Friends* and *Followers* are prone to staging their photos:

> I literally know people who will, like, put on outfits and dress up just for a picture and then they will take it off and they will just go back to whatever they were doing. Or, or you know, you're at the beach and so you, like, take a hundred pictures to get that one like, picture where you look skinny and cute.

Staging photos is about presenting a calculated version of an individual's identity, constructed in such as a way as to be acceptable within society's framework of gendered performance. The majority of the participants were concerned more with their physical identity online rather than their social identity; others, however, were more focused on living out their lives online authentically, true to who they are "in real life" and offline.

"Be Yourself, Not Someone Else"

The establishment of identity includes the articulation and clarification of the self and an appreciation of and comfort with the body (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The majority of the participants described the significance of physical appearance as part of a social media presence. They expressed the need to be "put together," and stressed the importance of makeup, hair, and clothing in their profile pictures or other picture posts. Sally and Taylor, though, were the two that differed from the other participants. Sally's posts focused more on her involvement, showing her having fun, and "looking like [she] does in every day life":

> I'm confident in the person I am and everything about me, and what I look like. There's a lot of pictures of me without makeup on there and a lot of pictures where I'm not like posed or perfect or put together, and I think that's awesome. I think that's where, in my honest opinion, true beauty comes from.

Taylor, too, eschewed a "polished" online version of her identity because that's not "who [she] is in real life":

> Um, well I'm not really huge into makeup or anything like that. I'll wear mascara, but that's just not been like a huge thing for me. Um, I mean, I, when I do, like, get dressed up, like, it does make me feel like more like a woman. Like, I don't always get dressed up, but when I do, I find it, find that like, I like it more than I think I would.

The fact that Taylor "feel[s] more like a woman" when she is wearing makeup or is dressed up, however, is a testament to the social construction of gender and the value society places on physical appearance. Our society's expectations for women are that they *look* like women, that they wear feminine clothing, and act like women (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Lorber, 1994; Tong, 2000; Tong, 2009).

While Sally and Taylor certainly did dress according to feminine expectations, their online physical presence represents the "real life version" of their identities, and centers on their leadership roles or their hobbies and interests. Their physical appearances were certainly not masculine, but their digital identities were less stereotypically feminine than their counterparts. These two women were not afraid to rebel against the masculine/feminine binary created through society and learned through the process of enculturation. The problem is not with devaluing femininity, though; the issue is with the value society places on men enacting masculinity rather than women adopting masculine traits (Tong, 2000; Tong, 2009).

Cultural norms and traditions—including societal expectations about gender—shape individuals' identities (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Lorber, 1994). Developing a sense of self in different social, historical, and cultural contexts is one of the tasks in the establishment of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). How an individual situates their identity in terms of societal expectations, whether adhering to or rebelling against performance expectations of gender, will influence overall sense of self. The societal expectations of gender did not tether Sally and Taylor. In many ways, their gender performance conflicted with how society has constructed conceptions of womanhood. Instead, they worked to "undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" (Butler, 2004, p. 1). Through physical representation online—in presenting a less "polished," less "glamorous" version of their

identity—and in promoting leadership and service to others, these two women declare their femininity in ways contrary to the social construction of gender.

For some of the participants, there are further differences in the representation of their identities (both social identities, as well as physical identities) depending on the choice of the social media platform. Since the participants used Facebook and Instagram for different purposes and in different ways, it is not surprising that platform selection influenced the articulation of online identity. Jennifer's experiences with Facebook and Instagram caused her to make this observation:

> It's like people have two different identities. For Facebook and Instagram…some people definitely portray themselves differently [on Facebook] that they do on Instagram"

The identities are not discretely separate, however; elements of the users' identities overlap between the different media. The participants may post the same pictures on both Facebook and Instagram, for example. Rather, the participants' identities on Facebook and Instagram were contextual. "While [users] move between different social contexts—including mediated ones like those produced by networked publics and unmediated ones like those constructed at school—they manage social dynamics differently" (boyd, 2014, p. 39). The setting and the audience affected this shifting context (boyd, 2014), and shaped how the participants perform their gender and their identity online.

Being "Basic"

Sally and Taylor differed from the other participants; their emphasis was less on physical presentation and more on their identity—who they are as individuals and who they are as women. Sally eschewed the hyper-feminization of her sorority sisters, and opted for comfort

rather than fashion. Her hair was often in a ponytail, and she rarely has visible makeup on in her pictures.

The majority of Taylor's pictures, too, showed an active individual, after races or outdoor events, without makeup or styled hair, and without the benefit of filters that make her "eyes pop." She strayed from those stereotypes, which she called "basic":

> I don't want to be portrayed as, like, the 'basic White girl' on Instagram, if I'm being honest, because, like, I don't think that's who I am, you know what I mean? So I don't know, I'm just not really big into selfies, or like posting this scene and doing this this deep, inspirational quote unless I'm actually feeling that…I just feel like it's kind of superficial to always be feeling that certain type of way.

The idea of being a "basic White girl," which Taylor narrated, relates to stereotypic notions of White femininity.

Being a "basic White girl" is a popular descriptor in the lexicon of the millennial generation. According to Urban Dictionary (2016), a 'basic White girl' is:

> A female who conforms to her surroundings and claims she is unique. She often drinks Starbucks [coffee], wears Ugg [brand] boots in August, and posts selfies on social networking sites every. single. day. Also uses hashtags that don't have anything to do with the picture itself" (def. 2).

The definition of 'basic' embodies the stereotypes of White femininity, traits upheld as 'normal' or 'mainstream' in society (Celio et al., 2002; Grabe et al., 2008; Glasser et al., 2009; Overstreet et al., 2010).

As a group, the women found the term "basic" derogatory and demeaning, because the term connotes normality, a cookie-cutter image of a White women. The description of a 'basic

White woman' distills an entire identity into overly simplified descriptors. This notion illustrates the most substantial criticism about cultural feminism: that the adoption of cultural feminist thought essentializes and simplifies what it means to be a woman (Alcoff, 1988). The effect of cultural feminism is that:

> Reflect and reproduce dominant cultural assumptions about women, which not only fail to represent the variety in women's lives but promote unrealistic expectations about 'normal' female behavior that most of us cannot satisfy (Alcoff, 1988, p. 413).

Despite the fact that some of the participants do post pictures of their lattés or share their selfies with their social media connections, practices that were deemed 'basic,' they also use social media to celebrate their femininity, as well as their uniqueness and individuality.

These pictures showed their feminine appreciation of nature and beauty. All of the participants wanted their *Followers* and their *Friends* to know that they had a "great life," that they had "fun," and that relationships were important. For Taylor, the physical image she portrayed is not as important as the impressions of her life and her relationships:

> I mean, honestly, the way that I think I portray myself, I would want you to think that I was put together, like, had a normal life…what I would really want for you to see is that I do, like, have friendships with family, [my] boyfriend, friends that are really, like, that I do care about…[and that I] invest in those relationships.

The participants' pictures—the ones that followers of Buzzfeed and Urban Dictionary would consider 'basic,' like coffees or shoes or sunrises or selfies with inspirational quotes—are not a movement and are not examples of conformity. Rather, they are artistic expressions of their daily lives and captured moments that embrace feminine ideals.

Chapter Summary

The primary task of student development is the establishment of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In an online context, identity is pieced together through pictures and posts—snapshots and vignettes of the user's life. These posts capture performances of gender; the women either embraced their cultural expectations of womanhood or railed against the "restrictions" of their gender. Several factors influenced users' gender performance and identity development online, including differences in how the platforms are used, the rules and norms of a social media presence, and the target audience of the platform.

There are differences in how users operationalize Facebook and Instagram; the platforms serve different purposes—Facebook for communication and Instagram for pictures. The participants described the rules and norms that govern their social media use, and how these rules restrict or enable the performance of gender and the establishment of identity. An audience consumes these performances of gender and identity, based upon physical appearance and presentation, and offers validation to the users. However, the most important part of gender performance and identity development is the physical appearance of the user, primarily displayed through pictures.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Social media is a major part of American culture, and is a stage for the performance of gender and the establishment of identity. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of White college women's gender performance through Facebook and Instagram, and how the performance relates to the establishment of identity. The goal of phenomenological research is to illuminate the essence—the ideas or experiences—that encapsulate the phenomenon. In this study, I interviewed each participant twice to learn more about their experience with gender performance through social media. The participants' stories and experiences revealed the essence of the phenomenon: Facebook and Instagram serve different purposes in gender performance and in establishing identity, and have different audiences for which the participants perform; gender performance is restrained by norms that govern social media use; and the most important part of establishing identity and gender performance online is physical presentation and appearance.

Discussion

My goal with this research was to answer two central research questions: how do White college women perform their gender through Facebook and Instagram, and how do these same students perform their gender through social media in relation to establishing identity?

The ways in which an individual enacts their gender expression shapes the performance of gender (Fellabaum, 2011). Gender performance is a socially constructed process, rooted in societal expectations through enculturation (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004; Fellabaum, 2011;

Lorber, 1994). Through social media, most of the participants in this study performed their gender—womanhood—in ways that are consistent with societal expectations of Western culture. They want to look "good" or "pretty" and to appear "thin" and "perfect." The primary means of communicating their gender performance was through physical presentation and appearance.

Audiences—*Friends* and connections online—consumed participants' gender performances on social media mostly through pictures and other visual media. Physical presentation and appearance were transmitted through the pictures they posted—photos shared in albums or as their profile pictures. These pictures emphasized feminine characteristics valued in a society that dictates gender performance; however, these traits are also esteemed within the cultural feminist perspective, which reclaims the patriarchal stereotypes created through the social construction of gender. Through Facebook and Instagram, certain rules and norms of use restricted gender performance, including when to post, what to post, and how often to post.

Individuals piece together their identity in an online context through demographic information, but mostly by what the participants shared with their connections. Social media users express identity, including gender performance, not for the sake of self-expression, but for their audience members: the *Friends* and *Followers* on social media.

The participants articulated gender and identity to the *Friends* and *Followers* as much by what was shared on social media as it by what was missing from online profiles. Sexual orientation and religion, specifically, were major identity markers for each of the participants. However, these markers were missing from the participants' online identities; individuals did not always overtly express all of the salient pieces of their identity online. For example, a participant did not list their religion, but would share photos from their time as a church camp counselor. Overall, though, gender performance was based upon the participants' physical presentation and

appearance, displayed through photos and visual media, and they performed their gender on social media in relation to establishing identity by sharing parts of this identity with their articulated list of *Friends* and *Followers* online.

Revisiting Researcher Positionality

One of the main reasons I was—and still continue to be—interested in research and scholarship around college students' social media use is that I am an avid social media user myself. Facebook's inception coincided with my first year as a college student, and I have continued to expand my social media usage. I primarily use Facebook and Instagram, but also engage with others through Twitter, Pinterest, YikYak, and YouTube. Since I have had a social media presence since I was a freshman in college, I certainly had some ideas about college women's gender performance online. I present my identity in a calculated and selective manner, paying particular attention to the content I post, the pictures I share, and the words I write. I ask myself, "How do I look in this picture?" or "How will my *Friends* receive this post?"

Yet, as a qualitative researcher undertaking a phenomenological study, it was imperative that I set aside my assumptions about women's gender performance. Instead, I focused on the participants' narratives, learning about their experiences on social media. A cultural feminist framework influenced my process; this theoretical paradigm shaped the questions I asked and the methods I used to interpret my data.

Cultural feminism calls for a broad interpretation of gender and equality, and embraces "ways of being, thinking, and speaking that allow[s] for openness, diversity, and difference" (Sarikakis et al., 2008, p. 506). Feminist scholarship is concerned about the definition of a woman:

> The concept and category of woman is the necessary point of departure for any feminist theory and feminist politics, predicated as these are on the transformation of women's lived experience in contemporary culture and the reevalatuion of social theory and practice from women's point of view (Alcoff, 1995, p. 434).

As a particular strand of feminist thought, cultural feminism reappropriates the stereotypic notions of femininity, and—rather than denouncing those societal expectations—places value on and embraces them (Alcoff, 1988, Echols, 1983; Tong, 2009).

These values emerged through this research as the "essence" of the phenomenon, especially the importance of physical appearance, which is consistent with American society's values of appearance and presentation. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the missing parts of the participants' narratives and the incongruences among the participants' experiences. I also explore the implications of this research and offer suggestions for future research about gender performance and social media.

Missing Pieces

The participants' narratives were fundamental in the process of illuminating the essences of the phenomenon of gender performance. However, equally as interesting were the topics or experiences the participants did *not* address. Many of the participants avoided or understated their identities of sexual orientation, religion, and politics as part of their social media experience. These missing pieces related to how the participants establish their identity because, even though participants did not discuss or present these identities on social media, their importance in the participants' lives indicated that they were areas of power and privilege that shaped gender performance and identity.

Sexual orientation. The women acknowledged the importance or prominence of three social identities—sexual orientation, religion, and politics—in their personal lives. Yet, among the participants, only Jamie disclosed her sexual orientation unprompted. She shared that she is bisexual, although her sexual orientation is a secret from many people in her life:

> I'm bisexual, but I'm sort of in the closet still, because there's not a whole lot of acceptance. Because everybody's like 'Oh it's a phase' and 'Well, you've always dated guys.' And I'm just like, 'Well, yeah, but maybe that's cause it's just the way it's worked out so far.'

For Jamie, while this was not missing from her narrative, this part of her identity was missing from her social media presence. She has nothing (by her admission, and from my own evaluation of her social media accounts) that would indicate her sexual orientation as anything other than heterosexual.

A few of the other participants listed that they are "Interested in Men" in their *About* section on Facebook, but some did not. With the other seven participants, I had to overtly ask them to describe the importance of their sexual orientation. Some of the women became nervous or uncomfortable as they replied that they were "straight" or that they "like[d] guys." As a privileged identity, their heterosexuality did not consume a lot of thought or significance on either Facebook or Instagram.

Religion. Religion was another area of privilege for the participants; all of the women identified as Christian. Several of the participants discussed the eminence of religion in their daily lives, but only Jennifer and Jamie did not name religion as one of the largest parts of their identity. Christianity and the lessons of the Bible shaped how Robyn viewed her relationship with her fiancé. Catholicism helped Georgia overcome bullying in high school. For Sally, her

religion has been a constant reminder to be a positive role model in others' lives. Religion has shaped these women's definitions of womanhood and has been influential in the establishment of their identity and the performance of their gender.

The participants also talked about how their religion (and Christianity specifically) shaped their identities as women. Taylor looked to the Bible for a depiction of the "characteristics of what a Godly woman is supposed to look like." In Georgia's experiences, religion emphasized the feminine virtues of communication, caring, and empathy—traits valued in cultural feminism, as well. Other participants noted that religion influenced their gender performance in real life because of the focus on family and serving others. Religion also informed the participants' thoughts and perspectives about sexual orientation. Karen described how her Christianity continued to shape her feelings about her own sexual identity, including what is "right and wrong."

The majority of the participants spoke passionately about the role of religion in their lives, but few post about it on social media. Georgia is one of the participants who *will* post about her religion on Facebook and Instagram. She often posted Bible verses as captions to her pictures, citing them as sources of inspiration for others. However, most of the women agreed that religion did not have a place on social media. Four out of eight participants do not list their religion in their *About* section on Facebook, and six out of the eight do not share posts (pictures, *Status Updates*, or external links) about their religion or religion in general. The participants cited various reasons: they would rather talk about religion with people face to face; they prefer to only talk about religion with close friends; or they want to avoid getting into debates with people about religion through social media.

Politics. Politics were another element missing from the women's experiences on social media. In the period when I conducted this research, the 2016 Presidential election was on the forefront of people's minds. The Presidential Primary elections were just beginning, and for many in America, social media was (and continues to be) a way to voice their perspectives and offer support for candidates. However, the participants tended to be less politically motivated and more hesitant to share their political ideology with their *Friends* or *Followers*. For example, Georgia explained:

> I don't like talking about politics on Facebook at all honestly because I feel like, you know, I'm 20 years old and I'm not going to pretend that I know half the stuff that I need to know to make an appropriate assumption or conclusion about a thought, and you see so many people who get on Facebook and they're like just screaming their opinions, and it's like, have you studied this at all?

Jennifer also avoids politics on her social media accounts because she does not "want to start anything" with anyone:

> I don't voice my, like, political opinion online…I don't want to start anything and I mean, is it really important [to post something], like, if I have to say anything bad about Donald Trump?

Other participants expressed similar concerns; they did want to engage with "ignorant" people through comments or they felt that they did not have enough knowledge to engage with others through social media.

Incongruences Within the Stories

Among the participants, the importance of online physical appearance and presentation was a consistent theme. Yet, there seemed to be some incongruence between the "real life"

version of the participants and their "online" persona. For example, Karen talked extensively about how she selects only the best pictures of herself: she must be wearing makeup and she has to be dressed up and "looking pretty." When Karen showed up for both interviews, she was almost unrecognizable from the Facebook and Instagram version of her physical appearance; she was wearing yoga pants and a t-shirt, no makeup, and hair in a ponytail. This version of Karen, sitting across from me in our interview, offered an entirely incongruent appearance when compared to her social media presence.

Similarly, some of the participants eschewed the importance of physical appearance and presentation online. Georgia and Sally both described their criteria for posting pictures, and the specifications did not include a standard of beauty or presentation. Yet, when you scroll through their *Timelines*, many of the pictures they post are more polished or "made up" than they described. For example, Georgia stresses that the circumstances of the posts (the location of the picture or the occasion/event) are paramount, but the majority of her pictures seem to accentuate the physical features she likes most about herself: her hair and her eyes.

For many of the participants, their depictions of physical appearance and presentation were incongruent. Of all of the participants, I felt that only Jennifer and Angie's physical appearance in real life matched the version that they presented online through their Facebook profile and Instagram posts.

Limitations of the Study

While this study answered the call for more research surrounding identity and development on social media (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015), it was limited in its scope. I only selected two social media platforms—Facebook and Instagram—as the context for this study. While these two are certainly the most widely used social media platforms (Brenner

& Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015), college students—and women in particular—use a variety of platforms, including Snap Chat, YikYak, Tumblr, Tinder, Pinterest, and LinkedIn (Lenhart, 2015).

Additionally, the criteria for participation were restrictive, though this was done intentionally to target the most frequent users of social media: White college women, ages 18 to 24, who identified as cisgender. While this study captured the stories and experiences of the women and their gender performance through social media, it was also limited in size and scope. The results of this study are not generalizable; they can only represent the experiences of these eight women. However, this research does generate implications for the field of student affairs and higher education.

Implications

One of the purposes of research in higher education and student affairs is to generate new knowledge and to inform practice (Jones & Abes, 2010; McEwen, 2003). The implications of research describe the significance to the field and provide a rationale for its importance (Creswell, 2014). The current research has implications for higher education and student affairs practice because of its contribution to an understanding of digital identity development, its advancement of cultural feminism as a viable theoretical framework, and its potential impact on understanding new dimensions of mental health and body image issues of college women.

Pictures Over Words

The millennial generation is characterized by their technological literacy; they have been described as "digital natives" who have been surrounded by technology and who have grown up using the Internet on increasingly fast computers or in the palm of their hand on a smartphone (Levine & Dean, 2014, loc. 144). "One consequence of digital communication has been a

growing expectation of immediacy—instant information, immediate contact, and split second responses" (Levine & Dean, 2012, loc. 1375-1376). Millennial students seek out information and want answers instantaneously (Levine & Dean, 2012).

The participants in this study were millennials. They, too, were digital natives, as well as avid social media users. These women spent most of their adolescence and teenage years on social media. Several of the women created their Facebook before they started high school, and some even had an active MySpace account before Facebook's popularity eclipsed the site. These students have grown up with cell phones or smartphones, both of which have cameras. Therefore, these women were used to taking, saving, storing, and sharing pictures with friends and social media connections.

Photos can transmit so much information—events, feelings, moments, or even pieces of an individual's identity. Pictures are a major element in social media use; indeed, Instagram's premise relies upon photo sharing and photo manipulation (Junco, 2014). However, one of the more interesting findings in this research was the participants' insistence that pictures are more important than words. Angie was the only participant to unequivocally state that words have become irrelevant, but it was a sentiment that the other participants shared. With expectations for fast information transmission and instant gratification, it is no wonder that these women prefer pictures to words: it is easier and less time consuming for college students to *Like* a picture than it is to read a post.

Higher education and student affairs professionals must be prepared for the implications of increasing emphasis on visual media. Pictures can be a powerful mode of communication, but in the age of social media, they are paramount. Visual communication, the practice of

communicating information through pictures and media, has become an important skill (Kitschke, 2015).

> The way people consume their information is changing dramatically each and every day. With the rise in mediums such as blogging, live-tweeting, and video streaming, the way you reach your audience is never going to be the same again…. But people aren't just turning to social media to share pictures of their lunch, complain about train times or boast about their latest workout (because if you didn't tweet it, it didn't happen, right?) Instead, they're using their feeds to gain access to the news that matters to them (Kitschke, 2015, para. 2-4).

Students consume information—about friends and family, but also about current events and news—through pictures and other visual media. Visual media—pictures more than words—helps to educate our students and serve as a means of communication for millennial students. Student affairs professionals must continue to challenge students about current events, and should encourage students to be smart consumers of information through the development of cognitive thinking skills.

Digital Identity Development

Over the last decade, scholars have studied the interaction between college students and social media use in different situations and contexts, including the relationship between social media use and student engagement on campus (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2012; Vitale, 2009) and students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012); the reasons for and gratifications of social media use (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2010, Ting et al., 2014); and the impact of social media use on students' well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2006).

Scholars have also explored the impact of social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors between online users (Chou & Edge, 2012; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Sales, 2016); and the connection between college students' social media use and their identity development (Back et al., 2010; Birnbaum, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vitale, 2015).

This research contributed to a growing area of interest known as digital identity development, which describes how social media users develop online identities (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012).

> Critical development is taking place and higher education needs to be incorporating proactive digital identity development opportunities. Institutions should be teaching students about the importance of context in online communications, the fluidity of privacy, awareness of nuance, and the power of community-building through social media (Stoller, 2012, para. 3).

Broadly, this research provided further understanding about social media's role in identity development (or digital identity development), as well as the gender performance of White millennial college women. Research that centers on digital identity development is a call for student affairs professionals to create and support programs on campuses about social media literacy; for example, career services educates students about harnessing social media as a personal branding tool and using it as a career development tool.

The findings in this research affirmed my previous work, which asserted that college women do not present idealized versions of their identity; rather, they are selective about what they share with their connections online (Vitale, 2015). Where these women come dangerously close to idealism in their online identity is through their physical presentation and appearance.

Mental Health Concerns and Body Image Disorders

While the summation of the users' profiles (for example, on Facebook: the *About* section, demographic information, pictures, and posts to the *Timeline*) provided an overall sense of the users' identities online, the participants' experiences and their narratives suggested that the most important factor in establishing their digital identity is the physical appearance and presentation. This is consistent with previous research regarding women and social comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). The participants' digital identity, based solely on appearance, was the amalgamation of all of the pictures—posted by the user, as well as by other social media connections.

One of the concerns of digital identity solely based upon physical appearance is the connection to social comparison and validation. Individuals determine their self-worth and appraise their lives based on how they compare to others in their social circle (Festinger, 1954). In an online context, social media users compare their lives and their appearance to other connections—*Friends* or *Followers*. With validation-seeking behavior, social media users find self-worth and boost their self-esteem through the *Likes* and positive *Comments* received from *Friends* or *Followers.* Both social comparison and validation are predictors of depression, body image issues, and other mental health concerns (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

As student affairs and higher education professionals, our work centers on the development and learning of our students, and theories of student development guide our work (Evans et al., 2010). One important component of identity development is to accept body image and appearance (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). With an increase in mental health concerns on college campuses, including body image disorders and issues (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg et al.,

2011a; Eisenberg et al., 2011b; Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; McGrath et al., 1990), higher education has an obligation to all students to encourage positive body images and promote healthy habits over physical appearance. College women are especially susceptible to body image disorders, depression, and mental health concerns (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2011a; Eisenberg et al., 2011b; McGrath et al., 1990). In addition, an overwhelming majority of college women are active social media users, often utilizing multiple platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, and YouTube (Lenhart, 2015); the reliance on social media means that these women are more prone to social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors.

Women are the majority of college attendees (Allan, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Snyder & Dillow, 2013), and are more likely to battle mental health concerns or body image issues than other populations (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2011a; Eisenberg et al., 2011b). Functional areas like Greek life, Housing and Residence Life, and Women's Centers can effect positive change through education, programming, and partnerships across campus. These areas, which have access to large populations of college women, could lead campus efforts focusing on promoting positive body image and healthy lifestyle choices for women. Campus health and counseling centers could be collaborators in these efforts, sharing the knowledge and experience of specially trained healthcare professionals. Examples of these efforts could include workshops about healthy eating and nutrition, promoting active lifestyles, and programming about the dangers of social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors through social media use.

Advancing Cultural Feminism in Higher Education Research

Positive body image and appreciation of feminine qualities tie into cultural feminism, the theoretical paradigm that shaped my research through this process. Cultural feminism has

historically been linked to the lesbian feminist movement (Echols, 1983; Alcoff, 1988), but it is applicable to any research about women, including the phenomenon of gender performance. Cultural feminism reclaims and reaffirms feminine traits that historically subverted in favor of masculine traits. These feminine traits, like communication, empathy, and connection are already central elements in research about women and women's development. Theorists like Gilligan (1977; 1982) and Josselson (1987; 1996) have threads of cultural feminism woven through their models of women's development.

No research currently links cultural feminism as a theoretical paradigm to gender performativity through social media. Therefore, this research could help to advance cultural feminist thought as a different lens for research about social media and today's college women

Suggestions for Future Research

As social media use rose among all populations in the United States (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015), scholars increased their research efforts about social media and its effects and influences. There is a growing body of knowledge about social media and it's impact on college students. The purpose of this research was to learn more about these women's experiences of gender performance and identity development through social media use.

Gender Performance

Gender performance is central to understanding many of the complexities in our society today; several political issues during this 2016 Presidential election cycle center on issues of gender and identity, including "pay equity, equal rights for women, increasing affordability of and access to child care, family leave, education, and raising the minimum wage—and making these concerns part of a wider agenda of promoting the middle class" (Walsh, 2016, para. 6). This upcoming electing also centers on issues of gender identity and expression, including LGBT

rights, same-sex marriage, transgender rights, and the continued fight for equality across all levels of identity.

Higher education administrators and student affairs professionals are mechanisms of support for women and the processes of gender performance and identity development; professionals should continue to develop literacy regarding gender equality and expression, as well as an understanding of women's issues. Therefore, scholars and practitioners should continue to explore women's gender performance in different contexts and among different populations.

Digital Identity Development

In the current research, I examined gender performance and identity within the particular context of social media. Through these online, mediated communities, users still interact with individuals—their *Friends*, *Followers*, and connections. Stoller (2012) called social media "the dominant set of interactional spheres where digital identities are made manifest" (para. 3). Digital identity centers on the representation of an individual's identity in online contexts (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015). Digital identity development is a growing area of scholarship around the process of creating and maintaining a digital identity in the context of an online environment.

Digital identity behaves in similar ways to psychosocial or cognitive-structural development. "When students transition into higher education[,] it is often the case that their digital identity will also be in a state of transition" (Stoller, 2015, para. 2). There remains a lot of contention about digital identity development (Junco, 2014), and I believe that the ultimate goal would be to create a model or theory that describes the process of development in an online context, similar to other models of development utilized in higher education and in student

affairs. However, to date, no model or theory exists that captures or describes this process of development in online contexts. Therefore, like Junco (2014) and Stoller (2012; 2015) before me, I advocate for the continued exploration of social media's influence and impact on identity development and gender performance. Continued research in this area will shape how student affairs professionals and higher education administrators understand and work with students on college campuses.

Exploring Digital Identity of Other Populations

The eight participants in this study were White college women. Society places certain expectations of gender performance on women—how to maintain their physical appearance, what clothes to wear, how to behave, what to think, and even what jobs to do (Butler, 1999; Butler, 2004). Further, race and ethnicity complicates these expectations, adding an additional layer of complexity to individual's gender performance (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Additionally, the norms surrounding online presentation and digital identity relay societal expectations about physical appearance. In Western society, Whiteness and White culture define and perpetuate beauty standards of women. College women of color or college women from different ethnic backgrounds likely have different experiences of gender performance through social media.

Future research could address several questions about women of different racial or ethnic identities: What are the experiences of college women of color? What role does cultural or ethnic background play in the social expectations of gender performance through social media?

Additionally, all of the participants in this study were cisgender (Steinmetz, 2014); we know that we have students on our college campuses that identify as transgender or as gender fluid (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012). What are the differences or similarities between the

participants in this study and transgender college women's gender performance through social media?

Just as society holds certain expectations about women, so too are there expectations about men and male gender performance. Men should be dominant, independent, emotion-free, logical, strong—masculine traits are highly valued in leaders (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Tong, 2009). Yet, men do not use social media as frequently as women; they tend to post less and use fewer platform types (Duggan et al., 2015). Future research could address the differences (or similarities) in male and female gender performance, and whether the definitions of male and female gender performance blur because of social media.

Chapter Summary

My own experiences as a White college woman and social media user led to my interest in exploring the gender performance and establishment of identity of this group of women on Facebook and Instagram. These two social media platforms are the most popular (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lenhart, 2015). Most college women utilize Facebook, and Instagram's largest user group is 18-24 year old women (Duggan et al., 2013; Sales, 2016). In this phenomenological study, the women shared their experiences with gender performance and identity development online. Physical representation is a significant part of participants' online identity, or their digital identity. In an online context, posted pictures, carefully selected and edited to present the best version possible, represent participants' physical appearance.

There seemed to be omissions within the participants' narratives or on their social media, including sexual orientation, religion, and politics. For most of the women, sexual orientation was not a salient identity; they identified as cisgender, heterosexual women. Since our society privileges these identities, there was no need for the participants to proclaim their sexual

orientation on their social media accounts in overt ways; it was done subtly, in pictures with their boyfriends or quotes about finding the perfect husband. Religion was an incredibly important part in most of the participants' lives, but was often missing from their social media presence. They rarely posted about religion because it was such a deeply personal topic, and they did not feel the need to proclaim their religion on Facebook. Most participants excluded politics from social media, despite the prevalence of political propaganda in the 2016 Presidential election cycle. Most avoided sharing politically charged posts because they wanted to avoid confrontation with others online.

There were also some incongruence among the participants' narratives, mostly with physical appearance and presentation. Some of the women stressed the importance of presenting an ideal physical version of their identity; yet in person, their physical appearance was not as "polished" or "put together" as their photos online. Other women emphasized the presentation of their "real self"—how they look every day; but even these women's photos highlighted their best physical features, such as hair or eyes.

Despite some of the limitations of this study, including the small sample population and the limited scope of social media accounts, this study could have an impact on higher education and student affairs practice. This research contributes to the growing body of literature concerning digital identity development, especially of college students. Additionally, this research advances the use of cultural feminism as a theoretical perspective in student affairs and higher education scholarship and in research about gender performance. Future scholars could also use the results of this research to advocate for more intentional programming and interventions about mental health and positive body image for women on college campuses. Another possible ramification of this study is that there is a clear need for more research

surrounding digital identity development and gender performance—for women, women of color, men, and for transgender students.

Conclusion

In the last two decades, women have become the majority of enrolled students in higher education (Allan, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Within this population, White women are the majority (Allan, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Sax, 2008; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Today's college students have grown up as "digital natives" (Levine & Dean, 2012, loc. 144), surrounded by technology. Part of being a digital native includes an active presence on social media. Platforms for social media use, like Facebook and Instagram, bring together online communities of people; *Friends* and *Followers* can interact with each other through social media. White college women are among the largest users of social media (Duggan et al., 2015).

One of the concerns of social media use is the impact of social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors. Active social media use increases women's behavior of comparing their lives to others, and evaluating their self-worth based on these comparisons (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Sales, 2016; Vogel et al., 2014). Validation, which can increase self-esteem, is the practice of using *Likes* or positive *Comments* to promote self-worth (Chou & Edge, 2012; Sales, 2016). Body image issues and other mental health concerns correlate to these behaviors (Clay, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2011a; Eisenberg et al., 2011b; McGrath et al., 1990; Sax, 2008).

Scholars have continued to explore the intersection of social media and identity development. This area of research centers on digital identity development (Junco, 2014; Stoller, 2012; Stoller, 2015), and examines the impact of social media on identity development and

establishing identity. The study outlined in this dissertation contributes to this growing body of research.

The goal of this research was to determine how White college women perform their gender and establish their identity in online, mediated communities like Facebook and Instagram. Through this phenomenological study, I employed qualitative interviews and document analysis to determine the essences of the phenomenon of gender performance through social media. The eight participants were cisgender White college women, between the ages of 19 and 22, who have all been active social media users since they were in high school.

This research incorporated a constructionist epistemology, coupled with a cultural feminist paradigm. Constructionism centers on the idea that individuals' interactions with reality construct their understandings of truth and meaning (Crotty, 1998). Cultural feminism is a movement that reclaims marginalized feminine traits and defines women by the presence of these attributes (Tong, 2000). Together, constructionism and cultural feminism built the foundation for my research—my choice as phenomenology as a methodology, the processes used to gather data, and the steps of data analysis.

In conducting this research, I learned that these women adhered to specific rules for use on social media—when to post, what to post, and how to post. These rules helped the women craft their online identities, which are projected to their audience: their connections, *Friends*, and *Followers* on social media. There were different audiences for each platform; connections on Facebook were primarily high school friends and adults (family and family friends), whereas *Followers* on Instagram were mostly college friends. The women received feedback from their *Friends* and *Followers* in the form of *Likes* and *Comments*; this feedback was a source of validation for the women, and when positive, contributed to positive evaluations of self-worth

and self-esteem. The participants identified a drawback of social media use, though: the propensity to compare their lives and their physical appearances to others with whom they are connected.

Physical appearance and presentation were the main sources of social comparison online; it was also the primary mode of identity transmission through Facebook and Instagram. The women selected their pictures, specifically their profile pictures, to best reflect their physical identity. They paid particular attention to what they are wearing, the lighting, their hair and makeup, and in general, how they appeared physically. Physical presentation on Facebook, Instagram, and on other social media platforms, was more important to these women than how they portray the rest of their identity—race, religion, gender, and ethnicity. Through physical appearance and presentation, these women performed their gender and established their identity.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Participant Recruitment Email

Hello,
My name is Danielle Vitale and I am a PhD student working under the supervision of Dr. Diane L. Cooper in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this study is to understand how college women demonstrate their gender on Facebook and Instagram. We are currently seeking participants for this study.

Participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a currently enrolled student at the University of Georgia
- Identify as a woman
- Have an active Facebook and Instagram account
- Log on to Facebook and Instagram at least once on a daily basis
- Have been active users of social media for at least four years

Participation in this study involves two interviews with the researcher, each approximately forty-five (45) minutes. You will be asked questions about your gender identity, as well as your Facebook use. You will also be asked to share your Facebook and Instagram profiles, either by connecting with the researcher, or by having a public profile. You may also download your activity from Facebook and Instagram, instead.

If you are interested in participating or have further questions regarding the study or participation, please contact me at *daniv@uga.edu*. I will then send a follow-up email confirming that you meet the criteria for the study. We will then schedule a time for our first interview.

Sincerely,

Danielle T. Vitale
Doctoral Student, College Student Affairs Administration

Participant recruitment flyer

Figure 1: *Participant recruitment flyer*

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
COLLEGE WOMEN'S GENDER PERFORMANCE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigators: Danielle T. Vitale
Counseling and Human Development
daniv@uga.edu
954-646-0621

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to understand how college women demonstrate their gender on Facebook and Instagram.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- You will be asked to participate in two interviews with the primary researcher; each interview will last about forty-five minutes
- You will be asked a series of questions about your identity, as well as your Facebook and Instagram use
- These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed
- You will also be asked to share access to your Facebook and Instagram. You have three options for this:
    - Connect with the primary researcher (for example, you can "friend" the researcher on Facebook, or "follow" the researcher on Instagram)
    - Maintain public profiles on Facebook and Instagram, where the researcher does not have to be your "friend" or "follower"
    - Download the content of your social media accounts and share the downloaded files with the researcher

- The focus will be on profile pictures, your pictures, and your statuses. Your interactions with other users, including comments or posts to or from other users, will not be part of the analysis.
- After the two interviews, the researcher will ask you to review the transcriptions and any initial themes identified
- All names will be changed, and each participant will be listed under a pseudonym
- Your total time commitment should not be longer than two (2) hours combined

Risks and discomforts
I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits
The information in this study may help to identify how college women use Facebook during their college experience, and may help college staff to better understand how college women explore their identity.

Audio/Video Recording
Audio recording devices will be used in the interview process. This will be an important part of the process. The researcher will use these audio recordings to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptions, however, will be the primary means of analysis—the researcher will use this information to answer the research questions. The recordings will be archived after transcription.

Additionally, Facebook or Instagram pictures may be used beyond the research analysis (for example, in publications or presentations. Please provide initials below if you agree to have your posts printed as part of publication or presentation. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the posts shared beyond the research analysis.

_____I do not want to have my pictures shared.
_____I am willing to have my pictures shared.

Privacy/Confidentiality
The data collected during the recruitment process and the interview process may identify you directly as a participant. For the purposes of this study, all identifying names will be changed and you will be given a pseudonym during the transcription process. This will help maintain the confidentiality of each participant.

The Researcher will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking Part is Voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Danielle T. Vitale, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. This research will be conducted under the guidance of Dr. Diane L. Cooper, professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development.

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Danielle T. Vitale at daniv@uga.edu or at 954-646-0621. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Since I utilized an unstructured interview process for the initial interviews, I created a list of topics that I discussed with each participant. The unstructured interview process followed a more conversational route, and was generally unscripted (Vagle, 2014).

Interview Topic Guide

- Gender identity
  - Example: How do you describe yourself as a woman?
- Gender performance
  - Example: What are some ways that you conform to how society thinks women should act?
- Competence, emotions, and interpersonal relationships
  - Example: Describe your relationships with others.
- Other facets of identity
  - Example: What are other parts of your identity that are important to you?
- Facebook use
  - Example: How do you use Facebook?
  - Example: How does your gender show up on Facebook?
- Instagram use
  - Example: Why do you use Instagram?
  - Example: How does your gender show up on Instagram?
- Gender performance on social media
  - Example: Through social media, how do you think you conform society's expectations of women should act?

Final Interview

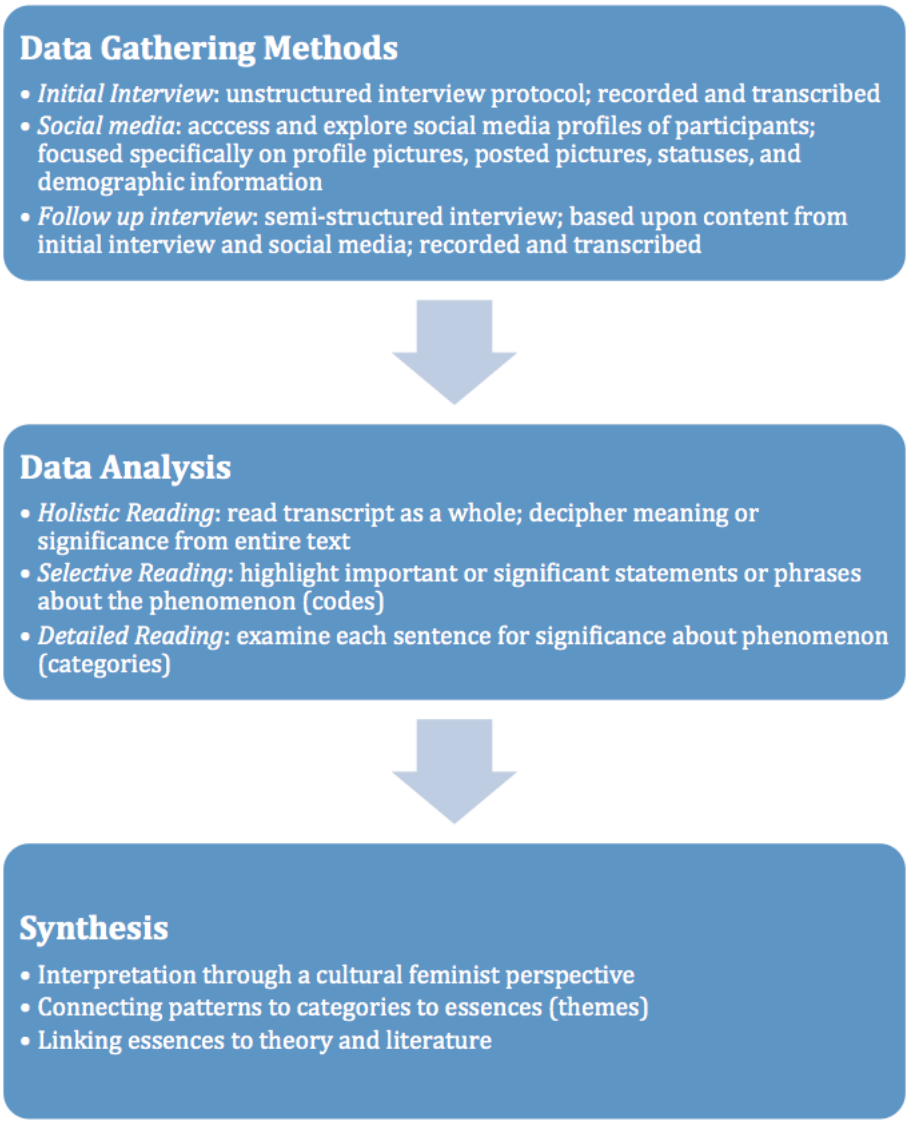
The interview protocols for each participant's second interview were based upon the content analysis from the Facebook and Instagram profiles. Each interview protocol was different.

APPENDIX D

DATA GATHERING AND DATA ANALYSIS

The following is a chart depicting the process of data gathering and data analysis.

Figure 1: *The process of data gathering, data analysis, and synthesis*



APPENDIX E

THEMS, CATEGORIES, AND CODES FROM DATA ANALYSIS

A table representing the thematic analysis process from data analysis is provided on the next page. Within the table, essences are in bold font, categories are italicized, and codes are in standard font.

Table 2

Development of themes, categories, and codes from data analysis

Essence 1: Using Facebook and Instagram	*The Really Big Stuff:* Major Events; life event; really big stuff; jobs; announcements; programs; special events; big things; engagements; graduation; relationships; connections with others; comparing to others; seeking validation	*All About Pictures/Digital Scrapbooking*: more idealized; most fun; prettiest; snazzy; worthy; captured; day to day; collected; photo album; digital scrapbook; moments; picture trends; major events; identity	*Major Communicator*: communication; tool; Facebook messenger; community; posts; read; Timeline; Newsfeed; sharing; events; invites; catching up; engaging; relationships; groups
Essence 2: Norms of Facebook and Instagram	*Words are irrelevant*: status updates; tweets; thoughts; feelings; superfluous; updates; emotions; appropriate; pictures important; mundane details; lyrics; quotes; inspirational; writing on Walls; Facebook Messenger	*Facebook 'Official'*: relationships; articulating relationships; connections; Friends; significant others; legitimacy; major events	*Considerations about posting*: relationships; interactions; pictures, profile pictures; other people; time of day; solo pictures; likes/comments; feedback; average numbers; expectations; deleting posts

Essence 3: Audiences and performances	*Audiences;* Filtered/unfiltered: Friends; followers; observation; consumers; before college; during college; adults; college friends; parents; family; friends; high school friends; broader audience; limited audience; professional; polished; privacy settings; restrictions	*Validation*: likes, comments; self-worth; self concept; positive; feedback; expectations; average number of likes; deleting pictures; time of day; awkward	*Comparison*: comparing others; influence; negativity; self-worth; self-esteem; pressure; pictures; easy to do; most affected; not as cool; not as good; not as many friends; questioning; portrayal; idealized; branding/marketing; people you know/don't know
Essence 4: Presentation and online identity	*Idealized identities*: more polished; more fun; professional; online identity; broader; physical presentation; image; idealized; put together; at your best; cool; glorified; pretty; thin; decent; best version; filters; stands out; lighting; staging photos; makeup	*Being yourself*: involvement; having fun; every day life; no makeup; not posed/staged; not polished; real life; identity; comfort	*Basic White Girls*: staging photos; sorority girls; makeup; inspirational quotes; photo trends; hashtags; derogatory; demeaning; impressions; conformity