

*Negotiating Adulthood: Establishing an
Adult Identity through Offline and Online
Social Networks*

BY

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Abstract

Many young adults are moving back home, putting off marriage and having fewer children than previous generations as an act of negotiating adulthood in a harsh socioeconomic climate. Social networking sites have increased in users and are spaces for connection and socializing. How are young adults defining adulthood in a context of rapid and complex societal and technological change? I interviewed fifteen young adults between the ages of 22 to 32. From these interviews I determined that young adults have a great amount of freedom in negotiating what markers are of importance and how to achieve them. They experience this type of freedom as a result of their class and the support of their family. Social networking sites are as a space for expression, however this behavior hasn't become common practice.

Introduction

Many media stories have focused on the number of students moving back home due to college debt and how the Great Recession had crippled the job market. The Pew Research Center (2013) found that “In 2012, 36% of the nation’s young adults ages 18 to 31—the so-called Millennial generation—were living in their parents’ home,” a stark contrast to previous generations. College graduates who move back home with their parents have to find a way to live in their childhood home as an adult without feeling or behaving as a child.

Establishing an independent household, graduating from college, getting a job, getting married and having kids are traditional markers of adulthood and they have been ingrained in the minds of young adults as self evident. If you know what you have to achieve then you are halfway there, or so it would seem. One of the first interviews conducted for this study was with Greg, a 31-year old college guidance counselor, who expressed how he still had a difficulty identifying himself as an adult.

I still have a hard time considering myself an adult. You consider the adults that have been in your life and kids look at you as an adult, which is kind of scary. I don’t know, I guess being an adult you have a lot more responsibilities.

As the oldest respondent in the survey, it was surprising to hear him speak with a mix of humor and uncertainty. I received similar responses from many respondents and the more I began to see that this uncertainty was grounded in reality. It wasn’t any perceived failure or dissatisfaction with their lives but a process of identifying and overcoming obstacles. These constraints, whether social or economic, can limit the choices that young

adults make but through these choices they find a new type of freedom. This type of freedom is expressed in how they redefine adulthood.

The Great Recession and student debt have repercussions for young adults who are now challenged with redefining what adulthood means for them but with an added task. Social networking sites (SNS) are the newest mediums through which individuals can interact with each other, maturing along with the Millennial Generation, born between 1982 and 2002. Of adults online aged 18-29, 84% of them used Facebook in 2013 with this figure rising in 2014 to 87%, compared to 60% of adults online aged 50 to 64 in 2013 and 63% in 2014 (Pew Research Center 2014). These statistics show that more young adults are using Facebook than older generations. Not surprisingly, Facebook began as a service aimed at young college students of the Millennial Generation. They have grown up alongside Facebook and similar sites, with the technology adapting to fit their needs while their behavior adjusted to what the technology has to offer. Software applications like Facebook have become customizable places where users can perform their adulthood for their social networks with the specific sites acting as a stage. Seeing how young adults use online social networking sites to discuss their lives provides a key to understanding how they define adulthood as a social process.

Young adults today are going out into a unique social landscape that is being redefined by their cohorts. Discussing these markers with each other offline and online is how they begin to defining adulthood to meet their personal need. In the process, their conversations establish new standards of adult status that in turn may influence how other young people may view what is considered in becoming an adult. This study focused on

identifying how young adults are defining adulthood today, what these standards are, and how they are expressed through online SNS.

Literature Review

How are young adults defining adulthood in a context of rapid and complex societal and technological change? The focus of this section will review previous research on adulthood by first exploring how traditional definitions have been established. Given changes in the job market and college debt, I will then establish how adulthood is being redefined and what the new markers that are associated with achieving adult status. The rise in Internet technologies has brought drastic changes to the social realities of young adults. To establish this change, I will review what the literature has established about the presentation of self in everyday life, and then apply that to what we know about how digital practices that have afforded the self. Connecting the two concepts will show how online-presentations of self can influence one's subjective sense of adulthood.

In his review of the literature of life course studies, Shanahan (2000) identified two specific approaches towards studying the transition to adulthood, the first through historical evidence based on changes in the economy and society and then second through identifying changes that occur between different periods of life (2000).

The historical approach asserts that the traditional markers of adulthood have been established through standardization Shanahan (2000). Standardization can be explained by pointing towards how government provisions of public services have institutionalized age and achievable markers appropriate to them; for example Social Security has set the age for retirement (2000). First and foremost it will be important to

identify traditional markers of adulthood and their place in life course studies. In their study of traditional markers of adulthood, Furstenberg et al. (2004) identified a set of seven criteria and asked adult Americans to identify the importance of each. These criteria were: completing education, achieving financial independence, work full-time, supporting a family, leaving a parent's home, marrying and having a child (Furstenberg et al. 2004). For the sake of this study these seven will be limited to five distinct markers: completing one's education, establishing an independent household, find work, marriage and parenthood. Full-time work and financial independence were closely linked as was taking care of a family and parenthood, which is why they were simplified. Furstenberg et al. (2004) found that older generations had achieved most of the markers at earlier ages than the respondents in their study, citing individualization as the reason, a concept Shanahan finds in his second pattern in the review of life studies (2000).

The second pattern Shanahan identifies is the difference between certain stages in life and how people use their personal biographies to ground their approach (2000). He goes on to explain individualization as rising from "...greater educational attainment, lower infant mortality, greater longevity, and fewer youths in the adult labor market..." which can cause changes to the sequencing of achieving these markers (2000: 670). The variation in the progression from getting a college degree to owning one's home and so forth is based on individual experiences. That being said, standardization still exists and has paved the way for traditional thinking about adulthood. For example, the claim can be made that standardization has led to college being the next step after graduating from high school, but variation and individuation has led to more students taking time off or expanding their college time beyond four years. This evidence supports the argument that

macro level institutions act as catalysts for change in the definition of adulthood but further research has shown that micro level processes also inform the relationship between these external stimuli and internal constructs of adulthood.

In their study of family transitions, Settersten and Hagestad (1996) looked at how respondents identified which ages are associated with which markers of adulthood and what, if any, repercussions exist for failing to achieve them. They reported that “Consequences were seldom perceived for men or women who miss cultural age deadlines in the family sphere. When consequences were perceived, they were usually focused on the developmental impact of missing cultural age deadlines” (Settersten and Hagestad, 1996: 185). This developmental impact is characterized as both a psychological and physical one. Psychological impacts were the adoption of negative behavior traits while physical impacts had to do with age limitations, most notably caring for children at later ages (Settersten and Hagestad 1996).

Social changes have facilitated a varied approach to reaching adulthood. Variation is both the order in which young adults achieve markers of adulthood and which markers they choose. In his study of “emerging adulthood” Jeffrey Arnett (2004) describes the ages of 18 to 25 as a new period of life defined by self-exploration and feeling in-between two different periods (adolescence and adulthood). His findings suggest that adulthood is increasingly flexible and can be defined in alternative ways. Additionally if “emerging adulthood” is the period after adolescence but before becoming an adult, then the actions and attitudes of young people are impacted by preceding and succeeding life roles.

Adding to the concept of adulthood, Waters et al. (2011) proposed three different models of the transition to adulthood. The first model is characterized as an upward slope that emphasizes adulthood being constructed through a gradual rise in accomplishments that compounds feelings of adulthood (Waters et al., 2011). This model aligns with the older model of adulthood, which explains adulthood as achieved by obtaining the traditional markers. The second model is known as the threshold model, characterized by turning points, which finds that after achieving certain markers young adults feel different than they did before (Waters et al., 2011). This can be the experience of having a child or getting married (Silva, 2013; Waters et al., 2011). Furthermore Waters et al. state that these changes occur when getting married or by becoming parent because they “... demand fundamental shifts in both thought and behavior, and solidify one’s status as an adult” (2011: 178). The third model is cyclical in that there are certain moments that can either bring on feelings of adulthood or take them away, such as moving into a parent’s home or getting married (Sassler et al. 2008; Silva 2013; Waters et al. 2011). There is no clear definition of what constitutes adulthood today, which will be discussed at length when looking at the markers of adulthood, but what is important is that achieving these markers is quite variable.

Markers of Adulthood

Educational Attainment

Education is the first and most flexible marker of adulthood because some adults choose not to go to college and for others their time at college can be prolonged (Arnett, 2004). The financial and educational approach towards college can be polarized

depending on an individual's socioeconomic status. Working class adults who have earned a degree but saw no noticeable gains felt cheated (Silva, 2013). Given that education didn't provide them with a step up, respondents felt that it didn't "...equal rituals for adulthood," and this sentiment would probably be felt across class lines given the increasing variability of the education system today (Arnett, 2004; Newman, 2012; Silva, 2013).

Independent Household

"A higher proportion of adult children are living with their parents in the United States now than at any time since the 1950's," which has had a significant effect on the identity and behavior of young adults (Newman, 2012: 43). This "co-residence generation" has to redefine parental-child relationships in order to maintain personal autonomy. (Newman, 2012). For some, returning to the parental home can have negative effects, most notably a regression to their adolescent selves (Sassler et al., 2008). However, it is not only the child's fault if their behavior begins to model previous behavior but rather the degree to which the parents facilitate this regression through their behavior or attitudes (Newman, 2012; Sassler et al. 2008). In fact some studies have found that parents are aware of how strongly they can influence their children's behavior and therefore set up parameters to ensure that their child's growth isn't stunted, such as paying rent or contributing to household duties (Newman, 2012; Sassler et al., 2008). Two of the major areas that could strengthen parental-child relationship are the need for social space and personal opinions (Newman, 2012; Sassler et al., 2008). In their study of adults living at home, Sassler et al. (2008) noted that respondents were mixed about

complying with their parent's need to know their whereabouts and felt it undermined their independence. Other studies found that the ability to have personal space was directly related to positive relations between parents (Newman, 2012). When the parental-child relationship is strong, either through respect or trust, it enables a flow of communication, support and guidance.

Work

Work is another traditional marker emphasizing job stability and financial security. For previous generations work may have been a path taken for the sake of earning a wage but in recent years there is a greater emphasis on the type of work done and the employee's level of satisfaction. It is important to note that this is reserved for only those with financial freedom. In his theory of emerging adulthood, Arnett discusses that it is increasingly acceptable, even encouraged, to take time deciding the type of work that an individual wants based on his or her interests (2004). Furthermore, he goes on to say that focusing on self-interests regardless of the work instability it provides is natural (Arnett, 2004). This approach is problematic in that it ignores the current job market that exists for both higher educated young adults and those without a higher education. Young adults are finding themselves placed in unstable jobs such as internships, forcing them to devote their time and energy to work without any sense of security in return (Newman, 2012). Some young adults are instead choosing to put their own "creative comforts," first in order to ensure that their work is reflective of their creative interests (Newman, 2012). Another study found that respondents' jobs didn't necessarily reflect the degree that they worked so hard to achieve (Silva 2013).

Marriage

Millennials are marrying later or never marrying more than generations before them.

In 1960, some 12% of adults ages 25 to 34 had never been married. After 10 years, when that group was between the ages of 35 and 44, 7% of them still hadn't wed. By 1980, when they were in their mid-40s to -50s, only 5% had still never married. The next cohort starting in 1970 followed a similar trajectory. However, each new cohort of young adults since then has had a higher share of never-married members than the cohort that came before it. If current trends continue, 25% of young adults in the most recent cohort (ages 25 to 34 in 2010) will have never married by 2030. That would be the highest share in modern history (Pew Research Center 2014: 12).

Young adults have a prolonged period of exploration allowing them to discover their compatibility with others and what type, if any, romantic partner they are looking for (Arnett, 2004). Additionally, Furstenberg et al. (2004) found that "For both men and women, these changes can be largely explained by the increasing proportion who go to college and graduate school" (2004: 38). However, in a study of working class adults Silva (2013) found that respondents were more drawn towards nostalgic, traditional marriages. She goes on to further explain that:

They long for enduring relationships, based not solely on personal happiness but also on transcendent roles and obligations that ensure stability overtime. Indeed, many single men and women avoid entering relationships precisely because they would rather be alone than loosely and tentatively attached. (2013: 59).

Those who were nostalgic had yet to achieve what they wanted from a romantic partner and decided to hold onto their ideal thought of marriage than rather working with redefined concepts of marriage.

Young adults who live at home find it can be difficult to juggle a romantic life within the close proximity of their families (Newman, 2012). Some respondents in a

study of co-residency commented that they didn't think living at home would be as appealing to sexual partners while others found that parents could influence romance, with females having greater difficulty than males in establishing an active romantic life without parental scrutiny (Newman, 2012; Waters et al., 2011). This isn't the only way in which parents are influencing their children since the parent is very much an example of adulthood that informs the young adult. Studies have shown that young adults who lived through divorce are hesitant about marriage because they witnessed firsthand conflict and emotional distress (Newman 2012). In a Pew study of Millennials and divorce, about 61% lived with both parents in a nuclear family, while for Gen Xers the figure was 68%, and for the Baby Boomer and Silent Generation this figure was 80% (2010). Other findings suggest that individuals are putting off marriage because of how they view their peers and themselves. Among working class young adults attitudes about marriage and the pathway to obtaining it is dependent on gender. College educated women who were career driven often viewed their male counterparts as unfit potential suitors due to their instability (Silva, 2013). Author Jennifer Silva (2013), however, has argued that this view ignore the institutional reasons for the men's lack of work and instead place emphasis on viewing it as a character flaw. Much of how young adults view adulthood and the markers attributed to it is self-reflexive which coincides with the theory of emerging adulthood already set forth by Arnett. Furthermore, Silva (2013) found that men were nostalgic for traditional views of marriage and gender roles but that this lead to dissatisfaction in their lives. Traditional gender roles provided some with a sense of adulthood and authority while others felt liberated with newer forms of marriage/romance. Evident in the literature is this redefinition of romantic relationships to fit to the individual's own preferences.

Parenthood

Perhaps the last marker in adulthood today is parenthood, as studies have shown that those who have children are more likely to feel they are adults after the parenting process because of how they modify their behavior (Silva, 2013). Having to take care for someone else is a demanding job that requires the individual to devote most of his or her time and energy to another individual (Silva, 2013). The link between parenting and adulthood can be explained by the fact that individuals define themselves through their relationships to one another and, as mentioned before, the parental-child relationship is structured around authority. Silva (2013) found polarized outcomes amongst respondents who had children, some expressed that children added a sense of purpose and stability to their lives while others found parenthood complicated completing a degree or having to work (Silva, 2013). In earlier stages of adulthood, marked by instability, it would be no surprise that some young adults are choosing to hold off on having children because of the added pressure placed upon them (Silva, 2013). Furthermore some adults found that having children was a process rather than a marker through which adulthood is achieved (Waters et al., 2011). Silva (2013) found that there are alternative attitudes about children standing in as markers of adulthood, finding that about half of her respondents expressed that marriage and kids didn't signify adulthood (Silva, 2013). This view may be gaining some traction amongst young adults but the importance is on the way in which respondents in these studies are discussing adulthood. Having the foresight to identify how, when and why they should have kids can even be an action that is considered to be adult in nature.

Evident in previous studies is that the individual has a considerably wider leeway identifying their own sense of adulthood based on interpersonal interactions. The influence of institutional policies and inequalities are present, such as a difficult job market, social policies that reflect traditional forms of adulthood and increased student loans, but can be modified by the influences of the individual and their interactions (Silva, 2013; Waters et al., 2011). The second trend in sociological research that Shanahan (2000) found is an "...adoption of a developmental stance by sociologists as they link the experiences of childhood, adolescence, and the phases of adulthood," which can be seen in the literature discussed earlier in this section (Shanahan, 2000: 675). Several other studies found results that family structure and individual behavior in adolescence affect attitudes about adulthood later on in life (Martison & Wu, 1992; Roisman et al., 2004). Roisman et al. (2004) found that salient tasks in adolescence and young adulthood informed behaviors and patterns in the transition to adulthood. The approach that individuals take towards identifying as adults is reflexive of the self, in that part of the process is looking at how they feel adult. One study reported that respondents felt more like adults when they were at work and with romantic partners and felt less adult when around their parents and peers (Waters et al., 2011).

Self

Presentation of Self

The older markers of adulthood were characterized by material objects individuals could present to one another in order to establish that they have reached adulthood. Engagement rings and homes were tangible markers presented in public spaces. Erving

Goffman's (1959) seminal text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* covers the performance of roles vis-à-vis social interactions. His work on social interactions is important in understanding how young adults define the role of adult, how they identify adulthood and how they enact both. Additionally it will help to ground online social interactions within a sociological discipline which can then be studied. Goffman (1959:22) writes that when we interact with each other in a given setting we provide a performance that he describes as "...all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers." There are several things to understand from this explanation, one being that this activity occurs before a specific set of individuals. Goffman ties the performance with the audience, explaining that you cannot have one without the other. You are only an employee when you are acting out such behavior in front of your colleagues and your boss. This is known as the front, which Goffman (1959:22) further elaborates as being "...that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance." The front, along with the setting and personal front constitute the performance (Goffman, 1959). Additionally those observers are also tied to that specific setting where the performance is most likely to occur, such as the office space. Goffman (1959:22) writes that this setting which involves "Furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within or upon it." When individuals perform their role as employees at work, their performance fits with the setting. However this link between setting and performance is loosened in online social

networking sites where there is no physical location or physical body to elicit a tightly structured performance.

The performer produces impressions that influence the observers to locate the performer's identity within a specific role. So as you perform your role as employee at work, your colleagues are conditioned to see you as an employer. Of course there are certain characteristics of the performer that do not change based on roles and are increasingly a part of the performer. Goffman describes these characteristics as the "personal front," comprised of statuses like age, sex and race, as increasingly linked to the performer (Goffman, 1959). The personal front is certainly evidence in online social networking sites as users are encouraged to create a detailed profile complete with basic information. This basic information rarely changes and will remain accessible to others while the user switches roles on their online profile. Goffman (1959:24) further breaks down the personal front into "appearance and manner," appearance being "those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses" and manner being "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation." Appearance and manner are intended to work together to inform the audience of the role that the performer will take. In addition to offline interaction this can occur online through posts and photos used to elicit an emotive response.

When the individual inhabits these roles, Goffman writes that:

...a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name (1959: 27).

This becomes important when thinking about the role of adulthood and how young adults assume this role and/or they may be redefining it today. The adult role customarily includes those five traditional markers, however that role doesn't include those specific tasks that are common and daily. So while adults may have to pay their own bills, learn how to balance a budget and/or learn to speak up for themselves, these expectations are not necessarily attributed to these standard markers. Furthermore, it is important to note how people negotiate these standards - and any subsequent roles within that larger role, i.e. parent, lover, employee - through online social networking sites.

Goffman further explores how performers act out and naturalize their assumption of specific roles. He begins by explaining how performers take time to maintain their qualification for the role once they have acquired it, writing that:

...performers often foster the impressions that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the role and that it was not necessary to... make any tacitly understood "deals," in order to acquire the role (Goffman 1959: 46).

This impression management is meant to ensure a seamless assimilation into the role without being questioned by their social audience, whether those people are friends, colleagues or family. This can occur for the individual when they are applying to jobs or having children, both roles in which the performer is expected to have the qualifications necessary to carry out the duties and performances tied to that role. This process additionally occurs online through social networking sites, where users can discuss how they fit certain roles in their lives, such as employees on LinkedIn and parents on Facebook. While the performer may create the impression that they are fit for the role that they assume, once it is inhabited they begin a new process of showing the ease with which they achieve this role. Goffman writes that:

Performers may even attempt to give the impression that their present poise and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period (Goffman 1959: 47).

In doing such they downplay the work and hardships that come about through the learning period of the role that they assume. Additionally this helps create the idealized version of said role, for example, when a parent performs their role before others they may omit that the role of parent was filled with mistakes, second chances and compromise. For this study specifically, this may come across when young adults take on the role of college graduate when applying for jobs. They don't include classes missed, poor marks received or classes failed. Furthermore, while social networking sites online can store information similar to a timeline, respondents rarely include errors and mistakes on their online profiles, maintaining a certain impression of adequacy.

Adulthood is nuanced and while it is a role in its own right, it can be broken down into several other roles that can make up the role of the adult. So being a college graduate is one role that signifies adulthood, but so do the roles of parent, homeowner, employee and significant other/partner. It is important to note, that to be an adult not all roles have to be performed nor do they have to be performed concurrently. Goffman (1959) writes about these different roles claiming that:

As both effect and enabling cause of this kind of commitment to the part one is currently performing, we find that "audience segregation" occurs; by audience segregation the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting (1959: 49).

When young adults perform their role as employee they are within their work setting and while they are at home they act out roles applicable to those spaces. This still holds true today, but as young adults find new ways to combining work and their peer group,

audience segregation becomes trickier to maintain. Therefore there are those moments where roles and performances can be acted out in several different settings and be appropriate. Where audience segregation becomes of great importance is in online social networking sites where users can have work, family and friends all viewing an amalgamation of their digital self, which acts as a representation of the offline self. In these instances young adults must navigate their online social profiles with the understanding that they are performing many roles in a space that has no physical location and can be many different settings all at once.

Digital Self

Online social networking sites have enabled users to become connected to their friends, families and colleagues in a cyberspace where face-to-face interactions are replaced by digital communication. In a study of the extended self, Russell Belk (2013) comments that we have a connection to our possessions and that our sense of self is extended onto these possessions. In a more recent study furthering his research, he has commented that because our online self is constructed through mostly artificial means, these material objects begin to take shape and have a greater meaning for us (Belk, 2013). These objects can range from photos to documents to comments, and their importance is in the fact that they symbolize a narrative of the individual (Odom and Zimmerman, 2011; Belk, 2013; Zhao, 2005). In a study of previous literature on the self and the digital world, Zhao (2005) sets the stage for Belk's concept and posits that there exists a digital self that in which one focuses within their self to create a narrative. This online narrative would function to provide guidance and structure in a way that is similar to how Silva

suggested that working class adults use their own narrative to construct their sense of adulthood (Silva, 2013; Zhao, 2005). The importance of both these two concepts is that material objects function to provide a sense of self and that the creation of online narratives are self-reflexive and give the user the freedom to create their own sense of self.

Material objects that exist in the real world enable us to show what we have learned and achieved. In their study of teenagers and their virtual possessions, Odom and Zimmerman (2011) found that these possessions provided a link between the individual and a significant person or event that had happened in their lives. Therefore online representations, such as photos, music and comments, stood to represent larger concepts such as thoughts, beliefs and accomplishments, thus providing a useful presentation of the self to others (Odom and Zimmerman, 2011). These online immaterial objects are not arbitrarily chose but are rather important in that they facilitate socialization. Studies on the use of Facebook among young adults found that the three highest uses of FB were commenting on statuses/comments, writing comments on other's wall and browsing another's profile (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). It may seem obvious that social networking sites (SNS) are used to socialize but these findings suggest that an individual's outward dialogue with others coincides with an inward dialogue of the self. From these findings we might expect that there will be a dialogue through SNS about what constitutes adulthood. Users will not actively seek out the approval or guidance of their peers through direct means, but rather indirect means through browsing someone's wall for evidence of achievements and attitudes. It was previously mentioned that friends and family provided a feedback mechanism for young adult's attitudes of adulthood, and

while those studies reflect offline interaction it can be easily applied to online interaction (Newman, 2012). Additionally socializing online allows for users to connect and form social capital that increases their ability to avail themselves of opportunities for work (Ellison et al., 2007). Certain online profiles are created for different reasons, with Facebook functioning to socialize with family and friends and LinkedIn primarily being used to make connections to work colleagues both current and potential. However the two profiles are not always separate and more recently has Facebook become tied in with one's professional life. In 2006 only 21% of organizations used SNS as a human resources' tool for hiring while in 2008 44% of organizations reported using SNS as a HR tool (Davison et al., 2011). LinkedIn is primarily used to find potential job applicants while Facebook is used as a way to see how those applicants exist outside of work and how current employees exist outside of work (Davison et al., 2011). For further discussion on the way in which professionalism and work exists on SNSs, attention must be paid towards how users are identifying ways in which they can create an online profile that both functions as a social and professional presentation of one's self. Additionally with the increase of LinkedIn users, young adults are using this SNS to provide a way in which they can find work. It will remain to be seen whether or not this provides a bridge towards achieving adulthood and/or shapes their perception of adulthood.

The creation of the digital self allows for the user to be self-reflexive and to craft his or her own narrative through careful consideration about what information is needed to signify a complete digital self. In their study of teenagers and their possessions, Odom and Zimmerman (2011) found that even though the respondents were young, the process through which they curated their tastes online showed that a change had occurred through

their adolescence. Social networking sites afford users huge biographies because the technology allows for the storage of information. Facebook itself even stores this information in a timeline, allowing for the material to automatically create a narrative of the user. The broader implications of this for young adults is that they now have a text through which they can identify who they are based on where they have come from and how they have achieved this, which coincides with thoughts of adulthood that exist offline.

Methodology

Previous literature on the life course has used exploratory studies in order to compile rich qualitative data about how respondents think and feel. When it comes to understanding how young people define adulthood, feeling is as important as acting. The question I want to answer is “how are young adults defining adulthood today and performing adulthood through online social networking sites?” To answer the question I decided to create an exploratory study of how young adults define adulthood and how that behavior translates to their online social networking sites.

To get this rich amount of detail I thought it best to conduct in-depth interviews with respondents. This method of data collection allows for the respondents to provide intimate details about their thoughts and feelings. Such detail would not be achieved in a questionnaire styled approach.

The sample design used for the study was a non-probability purposive sampling in which I looked for respondents who were between the ages of 22 to 32. The age range for the sample was chosen based on two previous studies. First, psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett’s (2004) study of “emerging adulthood” examines how the ages between 18 and 25 are marked by ambiguity and choice. If emerging adulthood precedes adulthood then the argument can be made that this period of growth can lay the foundation for thoughts and behaviors later on in young adulthood. Additionally, those respondents who fall within this age range can give a unique perspective that can act in comparison to older respondents.

Second, in Silva's (2013) study of working class adults she found that personal narratives were equal parts past, present and future experiences. Given these two studies, I decided to expand my study of young adulthood to include the latter ages of emerging adulthood and to potentially show how the respondents' experiences had changed since graduating from college. In addition, I wanted to ensure that there were an adequate number of respondents who were in college when social networking sites were prevalent, specifically Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. It is for these two reasons that I decided to include 26-32 so that my sample ranged in age. The question developed to include a larger age range so that I could get respondents who had experienced different stages and different roles.

I used two strategies of finding participants for the study. The first strategy for identifying contacts was through the Wheaton College Sociology Alumnae Network on LinkedIn. I created a topic on the message board covering the details of the study and my contact information. The second round was a snowball sampling of my social network from my hometown, using the social network to identify others. I sent out an email providing the detail of the survey and my contact information to contacts that knew of individuals who met the criteria for participation.

The interview period was 8 weeks and I obtained a total of 15 participants willing to be interviewed. The age range of the respondents was from 22 to 31 at the time of the interview. There were five male respondents and ten female respondents. All but one respondent had social networking sites, including apps and profiles. Table 1 includes their pseudonym, age, race education attainment and income.

Table 1. List of Respondents

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Living Situation</u>
Erica	22	Bachelors	(2) Roommates
Brian	23	Bachelors	(1) Roommate
Monica	26	Associates	Parents
Linda	25	Bachelors	(1) Roommate
Kelly	23	Bachelors	(1) Roommate
Charlotte	31	Two Masters	Parents/Family
Teresa	26	Bachelors	(1) Roommate
Jennifer	27	Bachelors	Parents
Sarah	23	Bachelors	(2) Roommates
Louis	26	Military	Parents
Paul	27	Associates	Parents
Regina	27	Two Masters	(2) Roommates
Greg	31	Bachelors	Dorm Head
Derrick	25	Enrolled in Doctoral Program	(1) Roommate
Cara	23	Bachelors	(1) Roommate

Once they expressed an interest I sent out a formal email complete with a consent form and a Five-Item Survey. Additional information covering options of how they wanted to conduct the interview was included as well. The Consent Form is provided in the Appendix of this study. The form established the process of conducting the interview, such as setting up a time and location, and then outlines the ways in which I provided confidentiality for the respondents. I recorded the interview on my phone and then transferred it to a locked folder on my desktop, deleting the recording from my phone.

The name of the respondents and any identifying information, such as where they worked, went to school and lived, were changed to provide confidentiality. I also began the interview by stating that they had the choice at any time during the interview to end it and have the data deleted and not put in the study. Additionally they had the choice to decide at any time before, during or after the interview whether or not they wanted their information removed from the study. These procedures were included in my research protocol to the Wheaton College Institutional Review Board, which approved the study.

The Five-Item Survey, provided in the Appendix of the study, included age, income, the educational attainment of both parents, their own educational attainment and their race/ethnicity. These questions were asked in a survey so that I could have this information readily available and to save time and allow me to elaborate on other questions in the interview. It also allowed me have access to data that would otherwise be sensitive to ask outright such as race, ethnicity and earnings.

The interview was conducted in the manner chosen by the respondent, either Skype or in person. I conducted 8 interviews in person and 7 interviews over Skype; in either case only the respondent and I were in the room when the interview took place. Each interview lasted from about 45 minutes to an hour and fifteen minutes. I recorded the interview on my phone and took handwritten notes. These notes were later destroyed after being transcribed on a word document in a password-protected folder.

I first began by asking with general social networking usage by briefly covering how they used it. This helped frame my later questions regarding SNS because I could ask with the understanding of how they used them. I took a deductive approach to creating the questions, using the five traditional markers of adulthood to frame the

conversation. The interview proceeded in covering how the respondents felt about these markers in their lives, whether or not they had achieved them and how they saw them in their future. To conclude with each marker I then asked about how they incorporated these parts of their lives offline. For example, if the respondent lived on his or her own I asked if he or she posted any photos of his or her apartment online. When some of the markers weren't applicable, like marriage or children, I reframed the question to fit the individual's personal situation. For example if they were not parents, I would ask how they felt about parenthood, how they saw it affect their peers and where they saw it in their future. At times, link between the different markers were established, which then enabled conversations to flow back and forth. The way in which the questions were set up were deliberate as well, education followed by work, home, marriage and children. The progression from public to private questions established a sense of trust between the respondent and myself. The markers are also set up in the sequence of how they have are traditionally expected to be achieved, which allowed for the majority of the time to be spent on topics (education, work, home) that would be more applicable to the age range of respondents. The interview was then finished off with a question asking respondents how they define adulthood and whether they felt they had achieved it or not.

When I completed all the interviews I transferred them to my computer, deleted the copy on my phone, and then transcribed selected quotes from the interview into a Word document. After listening to all the interviews I took an inductive approach and looked at the quotes attempting to pull out what issues the respondents were addressing, whether it was about separating friends from coworkers online, deleting inappropriate college photos offline or keeping to a strict work wardrobe. These initial sets of codes

were specific and then I worked from there to simplify the codes into broader themes. For example, when it came to making Facebook private or segregating social networks online these codes were evidence of a broader code of maintaining professionalism. During both rounds the quote, code and pseudonym were in a spreadsheet that was then organized by code. When I wrote my data analysis I referred to this spreadsheet and the transcribed interview.

The study was designed in order to get rich data from respondents regarding how they framed adulthood at this period of their lives. With the inclusion of social networking sites in every aspect of our lives it will be important to see how these digital spaces provide an additional arena for displaying and understanding one's self.

Data Analysis

The traditional markers of adulthood signify progress in the lives of young adults and provide guidance in their transition through adulthood. Recent years have shown a change in how young adults structure and appropriate their life goals. Finding a home, securing a job and looking towards building a family are still valued as benchmarks, but young adults are increasingly finding that these markers are outdated. Charlotte, a thirty-two year old schoolteacher, uses this traditional model of adulthood to define her own life and her own choices.

My idea of from when I was young was that [being] financially stable, owning house, being married, having kids, not really being immature or catty or selfish, and not going out, having early bedtimes, a routine. That's what I pictured an adulthood to be and it's idealistic but it's still something I think [that] may happen for me at one point in my life. And I feel that since I'm not any of those right now, financially stable, house, married and kid, I can still be selfish, catty and immature and I still like to go out on weekends and sleep in. It doesn't feel as if... it's not my ideal definition of adult. It's more an idealistic thing.

Charlotte makes the distinction between the ideal and the reality in her explanation of how she defines her own adulthood. Her ideal definition of adulthood was established in her youth as encompassing the traditional markers. While she admits that she may achieve that ideal definition she also expressed that it's not her definition but grounded within society. The idea of adulthood is idealist in that it sets up goals for young adults to aim for but current economic realities make these goals much more difficult to attain. What Charlotte and all of the other respondents are experiencing is a negotiating process of what adulthood means to them and how they best can assume the role both in image and action.

A definition of adulthood that includes traditional markers is still embraced by a majority of the respondents, however other ways of feeling and behaving like an adult are used to qualify the individual as a young adult. Take for example, Monica, a twenty-seven year old real estate agent, who answered that adulthood wasn't the same for everyone.

No, I don't think so. I think it really depends on where you are at in life. Like if you, you know, some people that really have, you know, great jobs and own their own places when they are 22 years old. I think they would think of themselves as an adult but being that I still live with my parents and I'm not exactly making 6 figures or anything, I just still, I don't have that... I don't identify with an adult that way. I think I'm an adult in the sense that I can have adult conversation and I'm mature and I'm smart as an adult but I think financially, I'm nowhere [near] being an adult.

Monica expressed other ways in which she feels like an adult, showing that the individual negotiates the meaning of adulthood. Prioritizing their self-interests is a common thread that will be explored throughout the data analysis section as young adults balance leaving, college, returning home and finding a romantic partner.

Another point of departure from previous generations is that young adults are now experiencing their lives through digital landscapes. The rise in use of social networking sites has created another space for young adults to construct and express themselves to a broader social network. This has led to blurring social lines between personal and private spaces, encouraging young adults to bring together both spaces online in a combined digital space. Cara, a twenty-two year old social media assistant, expressed that her social networking sites have changed because of her job.

Now because it's part of my job I don't use it that much on a personal level, because I spend so much time of it at the office that I don't care. I still use it to keep people posted, long distance with family, a lot of sharing content with friends. I post a lot of links to other people's walls. It's become a nice platform to

share what I do professionally with my family because they don't understand what my job is so I post this and I'm like I do this and they are like ok.

Family, friends and coworkers can now be brought together through online social networking sites. The importance is that young adults have the choice to combine social groups and social roles into a networked conglomeration. As noted earlier, Goffman (1959) discusses audience segregation as a way in which performers can ensure that their roles and their audiences do not conflict with one another. This becomes harder to maintain when social networking sites encourage users to blend their social circles together. Furthermore, offline social life in general has adapted to fit technological change and offline socialization becomes tied with online socialization. With the blending of professional and personal lives, young adults have to decide how the roles that make up adulthood- employee, friend and/or partner-can exist within the same digital space without interfering with one another. This careful construction of their online profile acts as another step in the process of negotiating how they define and identify as adults. The analysis will look at each traditional marker and how they make sense of its place in adulthood and how it is extended, displayed and replicated online.

Educational Attainment

College is traditionally the next step after graduating high school, beginning the transition into adulthood. In 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics found that “The percentage of students enrolling in college in the fall immediately following high school completion was 66.2 percent” meaning roughly two-thirds of high school graduates will enter college following high school (National Center for Education Statistics 2014). College is a period of increased independence typically coupled with

parental support, so while young adults do have some autonomy in their lives their parents still hold some clout. Nevertheless, young adults benefit from this loosening of control by using this time to explore their interests. There is a performance associated with being a college student, such as choosing one's major, working an internship and studying abroad. College students often use SNS to express themselves through posts, photos and comments on their social media profiles characteristic to college students, such as grad photos and study abroad experiences. While this identity of the college student/ young adult is established, it is only maintained while they are in college, losing importance upon graduation.

All of the respondents have attended college, with fourteen out of fifteen completing their degree. Two had associate degrees, nine had bachelors and three had at least one Master's degree or were enrolled in a doctorate program. Many respondents felt that college was the next natural step for them after high school graduation and actively work towards finding a suitable school to continue their education. Brian, a 22-year-old with a bachelor's degree, expressed that college was a no brainer.

College was always the next step. My dad is a college professor and I was lucky in that it was never a question of if but where. So I knew I had the grades and the financial [support] and the support of [college experience] from my parents

Let's first consider the implications of 'college as the next step,' a belief held by all respondents. Conventional wisdom stipulates that to get a good job you need a college education, and evidence strongly supports that people who have a college education see an eventual payoff for their degree. For respondents with financial support like Brian, this allows them the freedom to find a school that matches their financial needs without sacrificing their creative desires. What occurs for students who take the financial burden

on without much assistance is a constant weighing of the costs against the benefits. Some, like Brian, are able to exercise their “creative comforts,” what Newman describes as putting their interests and passion ahead of potential marketability (Newman, 2013). Many respondents think about their college education as setting them up to be a suitable candidates for the career they want. I asked Brian if he felt disappointed that his current job didn’t reflect his degree and he responded:

I think its great. I think if more people would realize that then a lot of people would get a lot better education and waste a lot less money and rethink the way they think about education. I didn’t go into music because I thought I would make the most money or have the most opportunities. I went into it because I liked it and it made sense to me and that’s what people should do.

Brian doesn’t believe he is taking liberties with his future because he has rationalized his choice to go to college to follow his passion. The support of his parents allows him to think of his degree as reflecting his interests and not preparing him to pay for bills. His criticism about how people approach college belies the commonly held notion that college exists primarily as a stepping-stone for career advancement. This comes across for Louis, a 26-year-old navy veteran, who had to drop out of community college.

It just kind of happened. I don’t remember much of the reaction. . . . I think my family was just surprised but then when I rationalized that I couldn’t afford it if I couldn’t put effort into it, then [I decided] there’s no point right now. As long as I was working and making money they were ok with it.

Louis’ decision to drop out of community college is grounded in the tension between the financial gains and losses of student debt. While not all respondents had to approach college the same way as Louis, they all expressed concern that student loans were a major financial concern after graduating college. Parental resources can influence the way in which respondents approach college. Those whose parents could take on the financial responsibility of college could approach education like Brian while others had to consider

its costs and benefits. The financial feasibility of college remains an important question and stands as the first major decision of adulthood.

Aside from young adult's concerns, their parents also expressed worry about the financial limitation imposed by a rough economy and tough job market. Evident from Brian's comments is this feedback between student needs/concerns and parental support. When young adults begin to build their future towards college, they are adolescent high school students. They have yet to legally become an adult and are still under the care of their parents. Support at the earliest stages of college happen during the application process. Kelly, a 22-year-old with a bachelor's degree, found that her college education process was completely different than her peers. Her father didn't initially want her to go to college and she had little support from her mother. Kelly had to work hard in order to get her parents to assist with her college process, her mother only helping her with the FAFSA.

In reality if we didn't get the FAFSA completed I wouldn't have gotten aid and wouldn't have gotten to college. We did convince my father that it was the right move and he paid for most of my college for me.

Kelly's eventual efforts paid off and she was able to go to college and even get her father to pay. There is a wealth of resources available to students who want to apply to college but Kelly had to actively search for such support from her guidance counselor and even the parents of other peers. The application process, which occurs during adolescence, can shape one's thoughts of college and their identity as a future college student. When I asked Kelly to describe the challenge of applying to college she responded:

It was an annoying process and made college seem like a hard place to get to. I didn't realize how little support I had got until I got to college and heard about the support my peers had received. I viewed it as a challenge that would help me

overcome and would make me seem like a hard worker. I got here and was able to do it on my own but not on my own, other people helped me.

Kelly's experience is indicative of how substantial it can be to have the assistance that students receive prior to becoming a student. Guidance counselors, parents and friends can help high school students during the entire college application process. This type of assistance marks the beginning of a period where parental authority begins to wane. Since it acts as a collective step towards independence, college still remains as the marker most likely achieved first.

Even after becoming a college student, parental support often continues throughout college, from parents sending allowance money to even helping out with tuition and rent. By providing these resources, parents are allowing their children to focus their energy on their education. Regina, a 27-year-old with two masters degrees, lived with her father during the years that she attended community college and after when she was going to graduate school. When I asked about her living situation and subsequent responsibilities she responded that:

My father was cool about the basic stuff, which he took care of. He wanted me to focus on school and to him schooling was my main priority and he always pushed education on myself and my brother.

Her father prioritized schoolwork as the most important aspect of her life by providing her the assistance needed to ensure that her focus was on schoolwork. The benefits of doing such are that the college student's identity is not sublimated by being a tenant or an employee. The importance of parental support is that it influences how the young adult sees himself or herself, not just as a college student, but also as a dependent. Furthermore since the rise in student debt has become an issue for many parents and students, college is often thought of as an accomplishment by both parties. Take Charlotte, a 31-year-old

teacher with two masters degrees who explains that her parents' support during college guided her decisions:

No, my dad paid for my masters. Not for my second one. He said if you want to keep going to school then that's you. And for my apartment. So I was bartending [and] that was my spending money. I'm lucky to have the parents that I have because I'm able to make those choices without worrying about, at the time, finances... If I had to worry about finances that way when I was in college I think the path I chose would have been different. I wouldn't have randomly gone and gotten a masters in English.

Parental support provides freedom and independence to be a college student but then that identity relies on some influence from outside. College could be the best transition from adolescence to young adulthood because responsibility is parceled out. Additionally, since parental support wanes over the years of education it allows for the young adult to ease into becoming autonomous. This could explain why it still remains as the 'next step' after high school and often the first marker of adulthood to be achieved.

Once young adults become college students they shape their lives around their education, taking on duties attributed to the role of student. They interact with peers academically, socially and professionally both offline and online. It has become almost second nature for young adults to use social media as a way to meet college students and brand themselves as college students. When young adults first come to college they are in control of the image that they present to their fellow students. Teresa, a 25-year-old with a bachelor's degree, comments how she altered her Facebook profile to eliminate the reflection of her time at college.

I deleted all the photos tagged of me from [college] like it was basically like partying. I would post stuff like 'going to smoke a blunt' like 'just picked up two bottles who is ready to get fucked up?' stuff like that. You don't post stuff like that. So yeah, at [college] I definitely used it more...for the social aspect of partying and showing off that I get down with everything.

Teresa comments that she actively tried to present herself as a student to peers by providing online representations of her offline activity. Posts and photos are the easiest ways of showing peers that you are engaging in college related activities and stand as an example of presenting oneself as a student. Aside from the partying lifestyle, many other respondents expressed other education specific instances where their offline life was reflected online.

Digital objects, such as photos and posts serve to imbue the online profile with characteristics, which presents offline achievements online. Actively engaging with other students online was another way of behaving like a college student, and this existed even before the advent of current social networking sites. Charlotte expressed how instant messengers were the social platforms that college students used when they didn't have Facebook.

It was AIM. It was instant messenger, that's what it was. So we had that little strip on that side and you would have your away message and then underneath you could kinda do a profile. People would write quotes or something and that's what it was. So everyone has a screen name and then there away message and you would talk on AIM. You would have all these boxes on your screen.

What does exist across both platforms and behaviors is the need to control the image of identity so that it both adequately represents individuality while maintaining a part of the whole. College students have an established behavior, which affirms Goffman's (1959) concept of stereotyped performances. The difference now is that this type of stereotyped performance is, and needs, to be portrayed online. This link is a common theme that is present throughout the markers of adulthood. Social networks act as a repository for offline behaviors and achievements. So while being a college student doesn't necessitate the act of posting statuses and pictures online, it does facilitate continued expression.

Furthermore, if it functions as a repository of offline behaviors and achievements then identifying its degree of permanence online suggests its importance in the establishment of adulthood. Teresa already discussed how she deleted online content which new audiences might deem inappropriate but even general posting about college life finds its way to the fringe of online profiles toward the end of college. Respondents began filtering their content before they graduated from college to ensure that they presented an image as good candidates for potential employees in the future. This displacement of the college student online isn't born out of an identity crisis but is in response to the changing nature of identity. It is merely the next step in adulthood, removing one role to provide room for the next.

College students can change their behavior in person and online to reflect their maturity and it would seem natural to do so, even if not to become potential employees in the future. Parents assist college students and it becomes the point of departure for many young adults. They begin working together to get to college and then the parent provides support during college while the young adult gains more independence. When they graduate young adults can still receive support from their parents but what comes next is a period of young adulthood marked by feelings of independence and responsibilities as young professionals.

Independent Household

One marker that has become very challenging to achieve is establishing an independent household, as it is harder to obtain due to increasing student debt and increasing housing costs. With more students in debt following college, young adults

have to negotiate whether rent or a mortgage will fit within their budget. The reality for many young adults leaving college is the return to the parental home. Support coupled with an acute sense of economic pressure has pushed young adults to frame the importance of an independent household against other goals in their lives. It is through prioritizing that young adults have begun to consider whether holding this independence is essential to their definition of adulthood.

60% of the respondents in the survey returned to the parental home for at least three months following graduation. Young adults want to establish their own independent household but find this hard to achieve. They are forced to move home after experiencing moments of independence found in college or through military service. The return home has fundamentally changed the focus on independence and reshaped it from being rigid to a more fluid, encompassing ideas of personal space and privacy. Take for example Louis, who was forced to come back home after having only moved out several months before.

I did some work in landscaping things like that, to get a little income, until I landed a solid job with paperwork and stuff like that...I moved out probably that January or February and rented a room, which wasn't too far. It was nice but it ended up being too expensive so I ended up coming back home. I started planning on moving out somewhere else but the car died. Had to get a new car. So its always setbacks, that type of thing. Still working on it but a little bit tough.

After returning from his military service, Louis got his own place and was working and looking for full time jobs to pay for rent. Ultimately he had to return home because his finances were spread too thin. Notice he doesn't let go of wanting to get his own space, in fact he plans it out, but what happen is that other bills get in the way. His choices are shaped by his capabilities as a young adult in the context of a tight labor marker and declining wages, especially for him and others without higher education.

The young adults' return is not laziness but rather a rational decision chosen with honest intentions. A residential space, be it a condo, apartment or house, is a huge expense that can be held off so young adults can gain financial stability. This emerges when talking to Paul, a 27-year-old special effects make-up artist, who lives with his parents outside of the city where he works.

I'm not really embarrassed by it. It's just easier and professionally it looks better but I've talked to friends who live in the city and they live paycheck to paycheck because they spend so much a month to live with other people. That's asinine, why would I ever do that? You could own your own house or another apartment that's not in the city.

While there are benefits of living closer to his work, perhaps in the city, Paul weighs them against his financial cost and against his future goals. He has already planned on getting his own place outside of the city for much less and is willing to wait until it would be in his best interest. Paul's pragmatic approach is influenced by his peers. He first states that his goals are differently than his peers. Second, he outwardly remarks at how strong this marker still is today by stating that it affects how he feels about himself in a professional setting. The interplay between homeowner and other facets of life are evident throughout the interviews. His admission that his residence affects his work persona complicates the strength of the continued expectation for establishing a residence apart from parents. Given such, it is not surprising that conflict arises between expectations and the harsh realities of independence.

Monica, a 26-year-old real estate agent, recounts that she lives at home with her parents and doesn't share the same responsibilities as other young adults. She attended community college, lived with her parents during attendance and had minimal loans after

graduated. Yet she shares the financial concerns of her peers and finds a level of stress and pressure exerted on her by this conflict between expectations and reality.

I do want to move out so I will definitely need to step up my financial game a little bit...I guess the only thing is I don't want to live with my parents forever. If I had my own way I would be living on my own right now because I am going to be 27. I really do want to get that moving, but that's only because of my own perception of my age. It doesn't have anything to do with my parents because they are great. I would live with them forever because it's really convenient, and I don't have to pay anything. Because I'm older I really feel that I have to leave... I prefer to have my own space other than my bedroom. I prefer to have my own home.

Monica comments that the ideal space for her is a home but that her financial shortcomings are impeding her mobility. As a part of the co-residence generation, Monica has to decide how to deal with both being an adult but living at home (Newman, 2012). Additionally, she shoulders the burden of societal and self-imposed pressures when it comes to addressing her age. She chastises herself for her own shortcomings, much like Settersten and Hagestad (1996) who found that respondents who had missed certain markers felt developmentally disadvantaged. She claims age as a push factor and then fully commits to preferring to live on her own. The importance here isn't that she wants to live with her family but rather the clash of expectations and realities, this time adding at which age she expected to accomplish a goal.

Residential support from family can be described as providing a place to stay, subsidizing rent or paying for it outright. Charlotte, a 31-year-old schoolteacher, has experienced a wide range of living situations following the completion of her undergraduate degree. She relied on the assistance of friends, romantic partners, herself and her parents to pay for her various apartments. Currently, she is living at home with her parents outside of the city where she works to save money. Much like Paul, she

weighs the cost of city living against finances. Like the other respondents she expresses the desire to have her own space but again brings age into the equation.

I want to get another apartment but I want to save money first. I'm going to be a 32 year-old and I don't think the amount of money I have saved, which is almost nothing, is where I should be right now. It's sad. I have been living paycheck to paycheck.

Much like Monica, she feels that she is not where she should be at her age, remarking that her finances are to blame. Failure to achieve the appropriate marker at that specific checkpoint leads to feeling developmentally impacted by missing age deadlines (Settersen and Hagestad, 2000). However, in the case of this study, these young adults question why they feel disadvantaged and instead of focusing on self-blame question what barriers exist in achieving an independent household. Through this process the concept of an independent household has become less stressed as tantamount to identifying as an adult, a point explored at the end of this section.

Residential independence provides space, which at the core gives young adults a sense of freedom and pride. Living with parents is on the rise and the millennial generation is synonymous with the notion of the "co-residence generation," where young adults will have to work with their parents in order to find a new relationship living in a predefined space (Newman 2013). The parental home has already been set with ground rules and exists as a space with finite capabilities. None of the respondents actively discussed the transition of returning home with their parents but they found cohabitation influenced other areas of their lives. Louis, who was forced to move back home because of finances believed that it had impeded his romantic life.

Yes. As far as social life, most of my friends have known me long enough to know it's not by choice and they aren't in too much of a different situation. For a lot of people that I have met, the situation I'm in they're in also...As far as

romantically, it comes off as maybe a hindrance where you can come home but you don't know if you want to come over my parents are here...She would come over and we had our own privacy. To me it takes your confidence out of it.

Louis discusses a real concern that many young adults have to face in this period marked by co-residence, which is the blending of personal life and familial life. In monogamous relationships, couples test out their relationship in various spaces, and sexual and emotional intimacy depend on private space. Louis' hesitation parallels the frustration that respondents expressed in Newman's (2013) study of co-residence between parents and children. Adding in parents and perceived threats to freedom, independence and privacy can disrupt new relationships. Respondents negotiate the meaning of living at home or establishing a residence, and they recognize that this change has affected contemporary adulthood. Further evidence to support such a claim can be found in Paul's earlier discussion of how he felt his living situation would have affected his work life. Both imagine that space is necessary to foster feelings of pride and confidence, in professional and romantic relationships.

Online Representations of an Independent Household

Explaining one's living situation didn't just occur in face-to-face interactions but extends to online displays, either through photos or in the "about me" section of profiles. The way in which respondents identified where they lived belied how they felt about their current living situation. When I asked Linda, a 26-year-old media specialist, about whether her online profile reflected where she lived she responded that she had lied.

Oh so interesting that you say that. It's not really that accurate. I guess three years ago, almost three years ago I moved but I say in Facebook that I am in the city just because I don't want everyone to know where I live. It's not really, I like my place and being here but the image is very family centric so I kind of feel like I'm

not where I want to be completely but because of my circumstances its where I'm going to have to be for a while.

Where young adults are living extends well beyond just a space for exploration and freedom but expresses an additional characteristic or trait for others to use to typify an individual. This comes across for Linda who decided to lie to online until her presentation matches her goals and identity. The perception of where you live matters to how people see and receive you. Brian, a 23-year-old college counselor, expressed pride in where he was living and decided to post about it online.

I posted stuff about moving to [the city]... Probably a status, I know I did an Instagram thing too. Let people know I'm in [the city] there are so many [college] people in the [city] and just thought it was cool. I thought it was exciting to be living in the city.

Both quotes affirm that adult life is still concerned with where people live and how it comes across in other's perception of them. What remains true for both traditional markers of adulthood and redefined ones is that the independent residence exists as a signifier of adulthood. Brian and Linda's comments online affirm Odom and Zimmerman's (2011) finding that digital objects, whether they are photos or comments, can symbolize a narrative of the individual

Given the importance of an independent space coupled with an awareness of economic hardships, more adults need to negotiate the relationship between age and adulthood. When I asked Monica if many of her peers had their own places she responded:

To be honest, no. Which makes me feel a lot better because you know for a while I was really anxious and stressing out that at whatever age... When you are a kid you look at age very differently... When I was six, I thought for sure that by twenty I thought I would be married and having kids because to me 20 seems really old. But then as you get to these ages, these milestones you go "oh I'm not there yet, no where close." So that panicked me for a really long time... Now that

I'm 26 and I talk to other people and realize they are all the same... there are very few people that are my age and have their shit together... It's a lot of societal pressure to be out of the house by 18/19 and if you talk to the older generation maybe that's it for them but if you talk to people nowadays I don't feel its that way. So it makes me feel a little bit more comfortable, knowing that people my age are in the same boat as [I].

Monica admits that these markers were contingent upon age and grounded in her youth, finding that when she reached those ages, society failed to account for the change in economy whereas she and her peers used them to mitigate feelings of loss and failure. By understanding that an independent household is hard given to achieve in the current economic climate, young adults can construct their own goals separate from the ones designed by previous generations. When prompted about why it was so hard to get a place, Monica responded with:

I think it's just the economy and the fact that so few people, no matter what their degree is, can get jobs after college... So therefore if you can't get the job you wanted to get, you are in debt from college so you aren't getting the income you want so you can't move to a house. So you have to move in with a friend or [live in] an apartment.

She explains the major concerns expressed by young adults her age who find trouble acquiring their own space.

The root of the problem lies within the clash between expectations and realities and some young adults are aware of this dilemma. C. Wright Mills (2000:6) writes that "the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society," meaning that by identifying that the course of one's life experiences is situated within history and society as a whole. Many respondents used this concept when thinking about remaining in their parental home while others had an independent household. This acute awareness of the world around them allowed for challenges to what constitutes residential independence and its relation to adulthood. Yes,

space still remains important but that space no longer exists just as a house nor does it have to be acquired early on in adulthood. Its place online is minimal at best and doesn't exhibit the same level of discussion from respondents that the role of student and employee did. This suggests that establishing an independent household has taken the place of home ownership and can be delayed longer than the rest.

Employment

Given the extensive media coverage of the Great Recession and its effect on the unstable job market, many young adults are entering the workforce with a greater degree of uncertainty than previous generations. Overqualified candidates are now filling jobs that were once entry-level positions and the rise in student debt has forced young adults to apply to careers that don't reflect their degree or immediate interests. Most young adults expect to spend a majority of their lives working, especially given the rising age of retirement. In a socioeconomic environment such as this, young adults are often discouraged as they seek to carve out a meaningful career. Work still stands as one of the biggest markers of adulthood because it provides financial independence, a requirement for several of the other markers. Work also encompasses the professional and personal lives of the young adult both offline and online. Furthermore, how young adults identify themselves through social media greatly emphasizes the importance of work, as you have to enter the workforce regardless of whether or not you go to college, move out of your parents house, get married or have children and most of the times these depend on working.

When young adults graduate college, they are expected to enter the workforce and embark on a path towards establishing a stable source of income with relative job security. Employment expectations can vary between young adults but the two notable areas where respondents agreed were the importance of work environment and personal satisfaction. Charlotte, a 31-year-old schoolteacher, got her Masters in Education but decided to work in sales because that's where she thought the money was going to be. She found a problem with the work environment and how it didn't satisfy her.

I wasn't good at it. I didn't like it. I didn't like sales. It's not my personality to push something on to someone who doesn't want to do it. I cannot do it. I am not comfortable doing it and plus I'm not passionate about what I was selling. So I need to be passionate about it to do it... I was looking forward to if a manager wasn't there... The people that were in the company, everyone was out for themselves.

The problem extended well beyond work and into other areas of Charlotte's life. She discusses her current place of employment and how she enjoys working there.

So, one of our values, and that is why I feel so comfortable with our school and not at a place like [a sales job], is we are a professional learning community. So we believe that we need to continue to educate ourselves and grow. So that could be by getting another Masters, or it can just be going to workshops or taking other classes, reading development texts around education, stuff like that... My entire school believes that.

Charlotte has two master's degrees and identifies learning as a substantial part of her life, and finds work an outlet for expressing this interest. Furthermore, she places her identity not within her role just a schoolteacher but as a cog within the wheel of this academic learning community. There is this engagement beyond working *for* but working *with* employees and employers to establish beneficial environments that can be rewarding.

Cara, a 22-year-old social media assistant, knew the type of work she was looking for but

found her experience was improved when additional systems of support and collaboration were in place.

It's a very collaborative environment, and even though jobs overlap in responsibility, even though we have distinct jobs within the social team there is a lot of room for brainstorming together. A lot of room for collaboration and improvement and room for supporting each other.

Understanding your passion and finding the right work environment can be tricky and the path to doing such is unclear. When searching for the right job, young adults or applicants in general have to weigh interests, financial responsibilities, and a multitude of other factors.

Young adults try to find ways to incorporate work into their personal lives. One of the easiest ways of facilitating blending personal and professional lives is by fostering a sense of community. Through mutual respect and careful consideration of boundaries, young adults are able to navigate the boundaries of coworkers and friends. Expanding on her work, Cara expressed that the work environment epitomizes this blending of worlds.

We do all of those things. We have other friends and we aren't together all the time but we have date nights planned. We go to happy hour as a team. We have company functions together; our holiday party was an amazing thing to go to. A big push is for us to enjoy each other's company in professional and non-professional contexts because they want everyone to feel like apart of a team.

Work can be tough on social lives and coworkers can supplement the socializing that is lost to hectic schedules. By connecting with your coworkers you can find friends and further enjoy where you work. Monica, a 26-year-old real estate agent, found a sense of pride through having a good relationship between her coworkers and her friends. When I asked about how she liked her new job she expressed great enthusiasm.

Its fun! I only work with one other person and my boss who also works in the office. They are really cool; we go out for drinks and stuff... We have a really good relationship... It definitely carries over. I've never had that with a boss

before, I've never been comfortable doing that but I am comfortable with my boss now.... I like other people knowing that I have a really good relationship with my coworkers.

Monica shared both an offline and online life with her coworkers that existed outside of the office. Her admission that she liked other people to know that she has a good relationship with her coworkers suggested a sense of pride found in her place of work that she shared with her online social network. In fact, all of the young adults expressed socializing with their coworkers in general, with about five out of fifteen stating there was a substantial amount of time shared outside of work and online. But if she wants people to see how close she is with her coworkers then it suggests that she sees similar digital content on the walls of her online social network. I asked Monica if there was any awkwardness or hesitation on posting photos of her coworkers and she responded that there was none because they were friends over coworkers.

Workspaces Online

The inevitability of work and personal life blending is apparent and was apparent before the digital age. Technology affords instant sharing of photos and statuses across devices, wherever the individual is located. There are potentially negative effects of this blending of personal and professional lives, most notably around concerns regarding professionalism and marketability. Cara always wanted to ensure her own marketability so she presented herself as a professional well before she started the job hunt by tailoring her content in college.

I wanted to be strong candidate in the field that I loved and I understood that being reckless offline could affect how they took me online and that's just how you find people now. You Google them, you go through their Instagram and

Pinterest, see what kind of eye they have, how they treat other people on the Internet. I never wanted that to get in the way of my life and my future.

Cara's attention to her online profiles are warranted given the fact that more organizations are using these sites when it comes to hiring potential employees (Davison et al., 2011). All respondents who had social networking sites, 14 out of 15 of them felt the need to modify their content in order to ensure that their online profile would not prevent them from getting hired or remaining employed. They did this by changing privacy settings, deleting content that was deemed inappropriate and selecting which personal information they wanted to share with their social network.

For some, taking control of their online content provided an extra level of job security. Any career requires that the individual exhibit a level of understanding in said position. For Monica, a realtor, understanding home ownerships loan rates and the general flow of the housing market qualifies her as competent in her job. Her life outside of work has little bearing on her client-employer relationship. While some respondents welcome their work life into their personal life online, others expressed apprehension about its role in their life. Teresa, a 25-year-old social worker, knows her online life could affect the relationship she has established with her clients. Her job as a social worker requires a level of respect and confidentiality. Therefore she changed how she is found on Facebook.

I abbreviated my last name because of that. A lot of my clients, well not a lot, but some of them are around my age. I have been hit on by my clients, obviously you have to be professional and set boundaries and a lot of them [pull] back and get that you are there to work for them. You know damn well that most folks between 20 and 30 have Facebook and that last thing I want is for one of my folks to find me on Facebook...

Teresa is aware of two distinct issues surrounding her role as a professional and works towards mitigating them in an attempt to maintain her job performance. First, she identifies her role as a social worker and sets boundaries during sessions with her patients. While this process takes time to achieve, constant assertion of boundaries establishes her capability to provide both trust and respect for employees. She knows that once they have trusted her and accepted the boundaries, then she can begin working with them on their issues. All respondents actively tried to remain competent in their work. Second, she identifies that she inhabits not just the role as social worker but also as a friend, partner, neighbor, etc, that exists outside of work. She takes several precautions with her social media sites to ensure that boundaries exist outside of sessions with her clients. This easiest way to do this is by changing how she is found on Facebook, a privacy feature that has become more widely adapted by professionals.

Another example is Derrick, a 25-year old graduate student, who is also not accessible by his last name on Facebook.

When I started doing my social work, I was much more cognizant of my Facebook privacy settings because I was working with kids and teens and they all had Internet access, they all had Facebook. While it never was an issue, I wanted to make sure it stayed not an issue. I made sure my privacy settings were such that if you did search for me you couldn't see anything.

Both respondents felt that their ability to do their job effectively was contingent upon maintaining the specific roles they had between themselves and their clients. In this regard social networking sites were seen as a potential hindrance to their job performance.

Some respondents found that online profiles could act as pseudo personal accounts, even when they were intended for professional use, affirming the findings of

Ellison et al. (2007) who remarked that online socialization amongst high school and college students could allow for social capital building later on in life. Adults who use their profiles in the same manner can utilize it to reach out to individuals, engage in topics related to their discipline or career or keep up with daily duties. I asked Kelly, a 22-year-old community outreach liaison, about her personal Facebook profile, and she remarked that she has stopped using it in a personal way.

This year I have just continued not to use it. I guess you can say, in a way it makes me want to use it more and in a professional way. So, basically, in the same way that I would use LinkedIn I would like to use my Facebook... I'm always reading these articles that are related to my field and I feel like I should be posting them and I am not and I don't know how to start.

Sarah, a 23-year-old freelance writer for the arts, uses her profile in the same way.

I think it's an interesting balance. I was just talking to my partner and he recently found out that his boss suggested that people make second accounts for professional stuff. You meet people through your jobs, I always do. I am always getting calls from new people and they look me up on LinkedIn and they look me up on Facebook. It can be really convenient to stay in contact with clients and stay up to date with their career. It's also useful in that people can fact check. I sent emails to random people who don't know my company or me and they can just easily look us up on Facebook.

The ease of online access isn't just limited to Facebook but also to LinkedIn and some respondents remarked about the benefits of being searchable online. For Sarah, LinkedIn provides her with a sense of credibility when working with individuals for the first time. This type of credibility that she describes is evidence of a fostered impression, which Goffman (1959) remarks as providing performers with the ease of inhabiting a certain role without limited question of credentials. LinkedIn or Facebook as the 'first place' to look was also expressed by Brian who doesn't have a LinkedIn but feels that he should get it.

I definitely get invites all the time... I guess in the professional world, though I'm new, I guess that's where potential employers would look. To see your work history and see what you put up there. I honestly, haven't explored LinkedIn and the day may come where I have to do that. I can see why it is important if you want to network professionally.

Out of the 11 respondents who did have LinkedIn, none had used it to get a job, but many, like Brian, found that it was becoming an industry standard for potential employers. The amount of detail expected to be included varied between the respondents, but there was the need to constantly update their LinkedIn or at least be up to date. While LinkedIn appears much like a resume it functions more like a social networking tool, which has changed how individuals think about their work and their work history.

Taken as a whole, work is the most important marker of adulthood. Young adults want satisfying work that meets financial goals and has a suitable work environment. Socializing at work occurs both offline and online further expanding the social network of the employee. Relationships that start between coworkers often become redefined as relationships between friends. Online photos provide evidence of socializing and cannot be categorized as strictly work or personal but rather an amalgamation of both. Some respondents reacted to this blending of personal and professional lives by ensuring that their online content was either not searchable or edited to be appropriate. Others used profiles as digital workspaces. Work moved online and they began framing their profiles to function that way. Lastly, LinkedIn has risen as a new social networking site that enables the employee to not only craft a history of their work but for the sake of continuing this role as the worker and pushes the young adult to think about work as a constant in their lives.

Reiterating an earlier claim, the displacement of the college student online isn't born out of an identity crisis but rather is inherent given that online profiles act as repositories. When young adults become workers they chose to inhabit the role in its entirety and in doing such they must push aside any identification that they have as a college student. If these two roles are in conflict with one another, then the mere fact that work affects a drastic change stands to prove its importance. The attention to detail in fleshing out their role as a worker is impressed upon every aspect of their life, through their goals and with their social network offline and online.

Relationships & Marriage

Relationships

Social commentary on marriage and dating patterns has enabled individuals to explore their sexuality and relationships in new ways. A study of millennials found that the percentage married between age 18 and 32 is "...just 26%..." while "...36% of Generation X, 48% of Baby Boomers and 65% of the members of the Silent Generation were married," at that age (Pew Research Center, 2014). Additionally "Most unmarried Millennials (69%) say they would like to marry, but many, especially those with lower levels of income and education, lack what they deem to be a necessary prerequisite—a solid economic foundation," further complicating relationship patterns of young adults (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Appropriate sexual and romantic behaviors are being redefined as young adults respond to prolonged exploration and new technological advancements. There is a preference for engagement without commitment that frees young adults from the

consequences of emotional attachment. Social networking sites have provided a new space for exploring sexuality and relationships, affording young adults both detached engagement and romantic behaviors. The presentation of said romantic behaviors were exemplified through photos and posts signifying marriage and commitment.

Quintessential “ring photos” and online relationship statuses extend the performances of couples online, often replicating offline behavior like wedding announcements and other public declaration.

Ambiguity is one of the best ways to describe how respondents discussed their current romantic life. Teresa, a 25-year-old, describes her relationship status by assigning redefined labels.

Single but dating. I’m not like in a monogamous relationship with anyone but I’m dating. The one guy I am talking to right now. We have been talking for a month and it’s getting serious and I don’t want it to get serious because I’m new in a city and want to meet new people.

In her opinion single but dating are not contradictory but complementary, on one hand providing her a relationship to explore and on the other the freedom to meet new people.

When prompted as to what was making it serious, she responded saying:

Well he slept over the past six nights and we’ve hooked up and you can use your discretion for hooking up. I slept with him. He’s calling me those nicknames, telling me he misses me and how he doesn’t want to lose me.

Seriousness is tied with commitment and emotional attachment, things Teresa has stated that she doesn’t want at the moment. Sexual intimacy, emotional attachment and cohabitation are all typical characteristics of romantic relationship, and while Teresa doesn’t want a relationship, for all intents and purposes she has created one. Other respondents held similar sentiments about dating and seeing people. Jennifer, a 27-year-

old, expresses that she is ‘seeing’ a guy but would go on a date with someone else if asked.

Yeah, totally. If there were another guy out here who wanted to go on a date I wouldn’t say no. I would still go out. I guess I’m not out there to look but I’m not opposed to anyone asking me out because we are not together.

Jennifer’s remarks along with Teresa’s stress the ambiguity about relationships and how defining relationships has changed for young adults. Additionally the structure or linear progressions of relationships have changed, with hooking up or going on dates and chatting marking a period of ‘seeing’ each other. It is important to note that while hooking up allows for detached engagement it can provide the foundation for a relationship later on and often functions that way. Kelly has been in a committed relationship with her boyfriend for about five years and states that her relationship started this way in college.

The end of the year. The hook up thing, we hooked up at the end of the year and we decided to be in a relationship and we have been in one since...Two weeks after, pretty instantaneous, I would say.

The romantic behaviors of the respondents further elucidated the points about detached engagement, which goes against Silva’s (2013) findings of relationships for working class adults. She found they preferred older models to newer ones because they were more defined and less ambiguous. The respondents in my study were middle class and may feel less pressure than working class individuals to find a partner that could support them or whom they had to support. It provides them the chance to get to know someone but also the ability to get to know other people as well.

The role of technology in how young adults live their lives has been at the crux of this study. New mobile technologies afford new ways for young adults to present

themselves and socialize online, wherever and whenever they chose. A 2013 study found that “One in ten Americans have used an online dating site or mobile dating app themselves, and many people now know someone else who uses online dating or who has found a spouse or long-term partner via online dating...some 22% of 25-34 olds...are online daters,” (Pew Research Center, 2014). These findings support the need for research about web and mobile dating as it has become pertinent to how young adults interact romantically. I asked whether or not respondents had used dating apps and half of respondents that they had or saw them as a great benefit to dating. When discussing how he felt using online dating sites, Louis, a single 26-year-old, commented that:

At first I would say I was a little self-conscious about it but I think it’s becoming more accepted. When online dating came out there was a big stigma about it. But this day in age, technology just shrinks everything so as I got older and tried it out, it became less weird and I wasn’t so self-conscious about it. I was like maybe they are like me. Maybe they are more comfortable doing it that way.

Louis’ initial hesitation to admit that he had used online dating sites dissipated suggesting the change in how dating sites are now socially received. They were once expected to be reserved for the desperate, lonely few, however, such is not the case in a digital age where we spend a good amount of time on our phones.

Brian, a single 22-year-old, has been vocal about his use of mobile dating apps with his family and friends.

I don’t feel shame about discussions on it with friends or family and I have talked to my family about it. My parents were like ‘that’s not how you should meet people. It used to be so much simpler.’ That nostalgic perspective...is to be expected. I agree in a way. But it’s there and its not going to hurt anybody, but I would rather meet [someone] face to face rather than forced texting.

If there exists a stigma surrounding web and mobile dating apps then it is grounded in the gap between expectations and the reality of ritual dating practices. Brian’s parents lament

the loss of “traditional” forms of dating, and he agrees. Labeling their approach as “traditional” connotes the superiority of face-to-face dating and its place in society over the years. His parents’ beliefs and Brian’s admission of holding onto such beliefs speaks to how rooted they are. Brian goes on to comment about how this change has happened amongst his peer group.

I haven’t been using [them] for that long but I have talked to a few people but it hasn’t turned into anything. My roommate told me about it and he met someone through it. I got it mostly out of curiosity. The story of ‘oh we met online’ has become more common lately. So you just get curious of what’s going on and it’s interesting to see people who are available and seeing people who are putting themselves online.

In regards to dating rituals there is a pattern of peer influence and discussion allowing for respondents to work out how to use dating sites and how they fit into their lives. These conversations range from discussing the type of people they meet to the affordances of specific sites. While some use them for hooking up, others use them to fill social voids that exist in their lives. While acceptable social practices for these sites were ambiguous, there were minimal negative ramifications for the respondents who had used them. The most common issues users describe were interactions where their interpretations of socially acceptable dating site practices were different than the users with whom they connected. Teresa expressed using her dating apps in a variety of ways and has experienced some awkward moments.

I knew about it because my coworker got Tinder and started meeting people, friends and guys, and now she’s engaged to guy she met off Tinder. So I thought it was a way to meet people like a social networking site. I didn’t know it was a hookup site. So I heard from her and she was like ‘you’re new to the city you can get on it and meet so many friends,’ was like it sounds cool. Then you start getting “how long would it take to get my dick inside you,” and I was like, ok what is this place. But you definitely meet some people. I used it to meet people and so far I have had a good experience. Some messages are obviously graphic and disgusting but the dates I’ve been on, they have been regular guys.”

Her comments further drive the point that these dating sites are fashioned to work for the user. They have as much agency in meeting up with people as they do in removing the app from their phone. Ambiguous dating rituals typically involved a period of seeing before dating best characterized by a lack of emotional attachment and commitment. Many respondents spoke with their peers about how and when the dating process starts. Erica discusses how she got introduced to dating apps and how the dating process has changed.

A lot of my friends used online dating and that's why I started. Where I was always skeptical and wanted someone to meet in real life and right in front of me... My friends were like 'yeah, like you're going to meet the love of your life in a coffee shop,' and I was always like, 'why not?' In your head, and especially in college, you think that's easy, people do that all the time, they meet strangers. And then you leave and you realize that's not as easy as it seems.

Erica's reasons for joining dating sites are similar to other respondents in that they came into her life through her peers. Peer influence takes dating, which is essentially a self-involved process, and expands it to a population well beyond the dynamics of a dyad. I made an earlier claim that dating due to hookup culture has enabled young adults to take a detached engagement with each other but also to engage in the dating community as a whole. Dating sites further provide support for this claim as friends and peers discuss romantic partners with each other, sharing and debating acceptable dating behaviors, in this way functioning as an engagement with the dating community as a whole. Furthermore, young adults are now involved in normalizing dating sites, making them more mainstream and removing the stigma that was once attached to dating sites.

Marriage

Dating rituals have changed due to the direct influence of peer networks but this does not carry over to marriage, whether conceptualizing it and understanding its place in one's life. The prevalence of engagements, subsequent weddings and divorce within the respondent's social network influenced their thinking process. This influence is internalized and serves as one voice in the internal dialogue that young adults had about marriage. While respondents were willing to discuss dating with their peers, marriage was a more self-involved dialogue that wasn't as openly discussed with peers. The actions of her peers have caused Monica to think about how marriage will fit in her own life.

Maybe it was like that in other generations. For me it seems a little silly. I don't think anyone is really thinking ahead and putting it in perspective and how big it is. They kind of assume 'oh I'm going to get married because I really like this person or whatever' but I really don't think they are putting a lot into it. I think they should consider, how well you know the person, where are you at in your relationship pre-marriage, how long have you been dating because if you are still in the honeymoon phase that could be a detriment to the longevity of your marriage because you haven't experienced any downsides in your relationship. Consider what are these person's real values. When you have kids are you going to agree on a lot of those things? Do you live together before you get married? I think those things are important. You should live with someone so you get to know them on a similar level.

Monica contrasts her own approach to marriage with her peers. Goffman (1959:59)

wrote:

...when we ask whether a fostered impression is true or false we really mean to ask whether or not the performer is authorized to give the performance in question and are not primarily concerned with the actual performance itself.

Monica and many other respondents do make this judgment on their peers and in doing such identify why they are not authorized to give such performances. In earlier comments she identified two important approaches towards marriage that other respondents

identified as well. First, there is this question of longevity characterized by stability and commitment. In this regard, it functions to provide a space for couples to explore their life together with a greater emotional ante. Erica, whose parents are divorced, found herself skeptical of marriage.

I don't know. I'm really skeptical about marriage itself. Humans themselves, more so than marriage. The concept is beautiful... And so for me relationships, permanent as many of them have been, people are so quick to change their mind and that's a frightening concept to me. You know your grandparents hated each other for 10 years but they're still married versus now. It's like oh, it's really not working out, I'm just going to get a divorce and then start online dating and find somebody else. For me it's the commitment thing, knowing its not permanent is the problem I have with the marriage itself. Because people take it... not saying people take it as a joke and I'm not knocking it, I'm saying people, our generation in particular, has a problem with follow through.

She finds the concept of marriage appealing but rather the individuals who enter into this union to be misguided in that they disregard the future. Longevity of relationships and the lasting bonds of marriage are important to young adults as much as compatibility. Young adults understand the reality of marriage and the place that divorce has in society nowadays. Therefore some respondents respond to this react by taking a hard look at who they want their partner to be. Teresa broke up with her boyfriend of two years and remarked that he was a good boyfriend but found something missing in their relationship.

When I questioned what was missing she responded saying:

A lot. There is so much more of the world I have to see, so much more self-exploration of myself. I don't think I have truly found who I am yet. I want to be fully secure with who I am before I can be fully secure with someone else. I want to be financially stable. Those are the main things. I work to travel and that is my whole life.

Her ex-boyfriend's interests didn't match up with some of her own, specifically her desire to travel. The lack of compatibility was how she rationalized the decision to break

up with him. This process of self-discovery helped her frame what she wanted in her future partner.

Respondents didn't see marriage as an institution that would force them to oppress their own sense of self but rather one in which they complemented their partner's interests and goals. Cara, a 22-year-old in a committed relationship for almost ten years, has considered marriage.

It's a fairly recent development for me as a child of divorce and who prides herself on being a strong independent woman. [The] last six months have been huge for us. It has been so much fun to have him around. Living together and building a life together. He wants to go to med school and I am a full supporter of that and want to help him through that. He wants to then go to the Navy and that is respectful, exciting and [a] financially sound decision. I expect that that will be hard if he is on deployment and I can't go with him. We are at a point where we are committed and really happy and I can see marriage.

Commitment, emotional attachment and mutual support were necessary for a strong marital foundation. All respondents stressed these values and they are a constant that is expressed across generations. However, entering into marriage has changed from previous generations in so far as the progression from dating to marriage has changed. Hooking up and dating apps have changed how young adults explore their sexuality and romantic relationships. The influence of digital technologies extends beyond exploration into representation, specifically online.

Digital Relationships & Marriage

Relationships could be expressed online through a variety of ways, most notably through posts, photos and relationship statuses. Cara has allowed her relationship with her boyfriend to be public for her online social network.

Yeah. I think our relationship is public on Facebook. There are tons of photos of us... I post on his more than he does, but I spend way more time on FB than he does. He has always been very cute about that and wants people to know we are together and we are not available. We are Facebook official.

By presenting their relationship online they are displaying their commitment to their online network highlighting how social networking sites are becoming spaces to experience and explore relationships. Common practices have quickly become accepted practices. Brian, a single 22-year-old, has come to expect an online display of offline romantic behavior.

That's an obligation, at least the relationship I have been in and the ones I have observed. That if you have a significant other and you aren't taking pictures and putting them online 'what are you doing?' I don't whip out my phone it is usually the girl, that's the expectation. You are going to showcase your relationship online.

Respondents felt an obligation to present themselves online with this expectation extending towards their romantic life. You have to show how you and your significant other are dating, and how you define that behavior. From this we have to ask, what photos do you have to post online? Kelly expressed excitement when her relationship had moved online because for her it confirmed a deeper level of commitment.

Definitely communicating via messages, writing 'I love you' publicly on the wall once we got to that point. That was a big step, right. Hearts on each other's profiles... There are photos of us together our sophomore year of college and random posts from years ago or hearts on our walls to show that we are strong. I don't know why it feels special.

This behavior however was towards the beginning of her relationship with her boyfriend, and she further commented that this behavior doesn't exist anymore and that she now feels mixed about it. What happened to that special feeling that Kelly had? Perhaps it provided validation in her relationship but as their commitment got deeper she no longer needed an online outlet. Aside from providing context for relationships, photos can also

function to show others that a relationship has begun. Other respondents expressed their reluctance to post specifically about their relationship status online, through wall posts and relationship status updates, because they felt photographic evidence would act as a way to symbolize the narrative of the user to their social network much like Odom and Zimmerman (2011) found among teenage respondents.

The argument can be made that the reason young adults don't want to become Facebook Official is that there is the chance that their relationship doesn't last and then they have to explain the change in their profile to their online social network. Sarah, a 23-year-old in a committed relationship, cites this embarrassment as her reasons for not posting about her relationship.

The number one reason I am against it. I just remember before I had a serious relationship...a really close friend of mine had been dating this guy for six years. When they broke up I found out because of Facebook. Of course everybody found out because they changed their status to single. It was actually really traumatic. People were like 'Really? Is this a joke?' and the girl had to be 'No, its not a joke' and on the guys status like 'everybody watch out he's on the prowl'... I just remember seeing the dichotomy of how people dealt with that and I never wanted my personal life to be that public where people either had to be sorrowful or make jokes.

She safeguarded her image by not sharing her relationship status online. If she never posts about their relationship then she can avoid embarrassment should they break up.

Privacy provides a level of security and freedom for respondents affording them space to figure out their relationship without judgment from their greater social network.

Earlier analysis discussed how respondents identified longevity, emotional attachment and mutual support as necessary for marriage. These same characteristics were necessary for exploring relationships online. When it came to marriage, young adults now find themselves having to navigate new matrimonial rituals that have become

commonplace in the digital age. When I asked Monica, a 27-year-old in a two-year relationship, about how she would handle her engagement and subsequent marriage online she responded how it has expanded engagement duties.

.... I kind of think about it myself when the time comes for me to get engaged. It has gone through my mind as to how I am going to go through it and put in out there to my social network... The quintessential way of knowing someone is engaged is the posting of the ring on Instagram or like... So I always think to myself 'what did people do before social networking to announce their engagement? What did you have to send carrier pigeon?' because like everybody, as soon as they are proposed to they take a photo with the ring. It's very immediate. So I definitely think it's a trend. I feel like people wait to get engaged just to put it on social network. I think that has become part of the excitement of getting engaged.

The extension of our lives in digital spaces has changed how and why we choose to express ourselves. Monica addressed two issues with marriage and social networking sites, primarily the sense of expectation and immediacy. She expressed how the expectation of the engagement announcement has been extended online, much like they used to through mail, phone calls or the newspaper offline. This online announcement is a new step in engagements and marriage alongside the bridal shower and wedding dress. This expectation that respondents express occurs when they take on this new role and find that it has already been established for them (Goffman 1959). Furthermore, the engagement ring has now become an extremely important digital object presented online. This material object signifies the union of a couple offline and has become an immaterial, digitized object online that signifies the union of a couple. Regina, a single 26-year-old, expresses posting about her engagement and marriage for similar reasons.

We are in a digital age now where it's not you pulling out the wedding album as you are having the wedding album online. It's more reaching as many people at the same time. As long as my partner is ok with it I would do it.

She understands that digital technologies have changed marriage and embraces them for her own benefit. Engagements and marriage haven't lost any importance among young adults, evident from their careful consideration of choosing a suitable partner to date. If the importance remains the same and digital technologies enable faster, easier dispersal of engagements announcements then people will adapt this to suit their needs. In doing so, they will naturalize this behavior making it more mainstream and expected in online representations of marriage. If marriage is one of the ways in which adulthood is achieved and the presentation of marriage is online then the presentation of adulthood through marriage has found its way into digital spaces, validated not through digital communication but the immaterial display of material objects.

All respondents remarked that they would share their engagement and wedding photos online to varying degrees. This returns us to the second issue that Monica addressed in her earlier comment: immediacy. She jokingly remarks about not knowing how adults were able to announce their engagement for their social network in the past without posting online. Similarly, Erica sees this sense of immediacy tied with instant gratification and praise that Monica earlier attributed as reasons for posting. Erica states:

Waiting on the bus and a couple got engaged in front of me and she was like 'take a picture for me.' So I am taking a picture of her on her phone and had it been on my phone I could have done it. That's how public it was...Engagement photo is very mainstream because everyone wants to relish in their glory and have everyone be like I'm happy and proud for you. I don't know why you would be proud for someone.

She expresses her belief that marriage has become linked with achievements and this harkens back to what respondents had addressed earlier in relation to dating and marriage. There is this feeling among the respondents that their peers are presenting their relationships online with the intention of proving to their social network that they have

reached a milestone in their lives making them distinct from other young adults which confirms Odom and Zimmerman's (2011) finding that these digital objects stood to represent larger concepts. These digital objects presented online are used to provide rich detail for an online self that posits the offline self as a more formed, more established adult. This is to be expected though as young adults have prolonged exploring romantic relationships. It's not unachievable for them, and they want to get married, but they believe it's not something that should be entered into lightly. Commitment, emotional attachment and mutual support were necessary and took time to establish. So it shouldn't be a surprise that young adults want to use this achievement as a way to establish their adulthood.

Parenthood

Parenthood takes the individual and positions him or her as a person of authority over another, imbuing him or her with responsibility. Previous literature finds that there are conflicting views on the causal relationship between parenthood and adulthood. In a study of working class adults, Silva (2013) found that some respondents believed that they had entered adulthood through parenthood because having the added responsibilities of taking care of a child forced them to become adults. Half of the Silva's (2013) respondents in the study stressed that they didn't see parenthood as a signifier of adulthood. None of the respondents in my study have children, however a majority expressed that they had peers and siblings who did have children. Furthermore, they all discussed the way in which they thought about parenthood and how it had changed in the digital age with social media posts of parents and children.

Young adults prepare for their future by establishing goals for themselves that will benefit them later on in life. These goals of financial stability and job security also served as prerequisites for parenthood. These characteristics provide the young adult with the means to embody the caregiver role, which acts as a model respondents use to assess their readiness for parenthood. A caregiver provides the necessary financial, emotional and social support needed for an adequate life. Regina, a single 26-year-old finds that how she handles her own needs is telling where she is in life.

Right now the idea of me having a kid, is in my head, this preposterous notion because I can barely force myself to go to bed at a time that is reasonable let alone have responsibility of making [sure] this little child doesn't get itself killed by sticking something in an electrical socket. I'm in that zone where I am trying to figure the day to day of keeping myself alive let alone having to keep another being alive. I have my cat but he is pretty self-sufficient.

Regina's reasons for postponing children reveal the multilayered role of the caregiver.

You must first care for yourself before you can care for another. Self-discipline is one of the aspects that Regina identified as being a prerequisite for parenthood. Many respondents addressed fulfilling their own goals, or having their own challenges, that needed to be addressed before becoming a parent. Erica, a 22-year-old aunt of six, loves children but comments that the lack of stability in her life is ill fitting for parenthood:

I love kids. I love them. I adore them. They are hilarious. Do I see myself with kids? No... I don't know. Kids are a permanent thing. I like traveling and I like being able to uproot myself. And [with] kids you can't do that. My parents did that to me, and granted I was a stronger mental person than most people because I know other people tend to go in a different direction... Some kids, like myself will adapt and get over it, others it'll be traumatic. You'll ruin them... It's really hard to do that to a child. And *I* would [end up doing] that to a child.

Erica, much like Regina, examines how she would fit into being a parent, ultimately deciding that she doesn't match up. She identifies that acceptable parental behavior calls for placing the needs of the child ahead of the wants of the adult. In doing such, she

reveals the importance of permanence and selflessness in parenthood. Erica has identified her desire to travel and expresses that such behavior would prove disruptive to the child's life. The approaches that the respondents take reconceptualize parenthood as something to be entered only when exactly ready, finding that it wouldn't fit their lives. Teresa, a 25-year-old, is reluctant to adjust her life to having children:

Maybe it was the time frame or maybe I don't want kids. I have friends having babies and I go see them in the hospital and I hate holding the babies it scares me, I don't like it, I'm like I don't ever want to do this. I don't know I think that thought is going to change since I'm not that ready right now but as of right now, kids are something I don't want. I think I'm just selfish, like I enjoy my life and I don't want to think about anybody else.

Teresa links parenthood with behavior and feeling, believing that feeling ready for parenthood will affect the change in her. Regina doesn't think that she behaves how a parent should and therefore doesn't feel ready for parenthood. While all three respondents have different explanations for their own situation they are fundamentally the same on one aspect, the needs of the child must always come first for parents. The reluctance for young adults to become parents and to postpone this marker of adulthood confirms Silva's (2013) findings that respondents imagined parenthood as a disruption in their daily lives. This disruption is best described as a change to routine, conflicting goals and a modification of behavior. Erica comments on how adults change when they become parents because the focal point of attention is no longer on themselves but their children:

You do notice that parents get in rhythms, routines, certain things they don't do, say. But for the most part the thing about being a parent is that a lot of people see it as the death of people... You can't just do things anymore; it's not just about you anymore.

The role of parent subsumes most other roles that adults embody, placing the needs of the child over the needs of the parents. The change in behavior could be a reason why some

respondents are hesitant to consider children in their future. It is important to note that the disruption of children can be beneficial and fits into how another group of Silva's (2013) respondents felt about parenthood. She found that some felt it provided stability and a sense of purpose. Erica noticed a change in her sister's behavior after having a child.

There is definitely a change... My other sister changed. She wasn't the best at life choices and having a child reminds her that she has someone else beside herself to look out for...

Louis' sister has children, with whom he has spent a great amount of time, and finds that she did change after having kids.

Well her maturity level...skyrocketed. She used to be all laid back and chilled out and then she had kids. She went into like supermom mode where she is like this very high standard person now. Very...She's not like she was in high school... Now she's very fitness oriented, very. She's very proper and prim now. It kind of shaped her up a bit.

Louis' has made it clear that his sister changed given his description of her behavior before becoming a mother and after. What is important to note is the way in which he characterizes her change, noting her maturity and her "supermom" mode. Becoming a mother changed her much like Erica's sister changed. Louis' sister changed roles and he notices the difference between the two, her role as a high school student and as a mother. His sister has been several years out of college and has had some time to live her life in between then and now, suggesting she has inhabited several roles including wife, worker, and friend. Pinpointing her actions in one period of time and comparing it to now further supports the importance of the role of a parent or at least its all-encompassing nature.

Respondents discussed the change that would happen with parenthood and whether or not it would fit in their lives, their behavior or their goals. One constant was the importance of identifying qualities inherent to parenthood. Some respondents in

committed relationships found that they had taken time to discuss parenthood with one another. Cara, a 22-year-old in a committed relationship of at least ten years, felt prepared to raise a child now:

My experience with kids has made me feel more comfortable around kids of all ages. I know how to hold a baby and how to put them down... There are experiences that I have had that I really value and will come in use down the line. And say I was to get pregnant now it wouldn't be the end of the world. It would be hard and not what I had in mind but I think we would be able to handle it. I'm confident [my boyfriend] would be incredible with that.

She cites specific qualities and skills that have provided her with an understanding of child rearing. Her previous experiences with childcare gives her a sense of ease of her transition into parenthood. Cara's discussion of parenthood is akin to how Kelly approached discussing characteristics of parenthood with her boyfriend of about five years:

...the disciplinary stuff because that's taking it to the next step... I just think there are some things he could improve upon that would make him a better role model for our child. We will go back and forth and he will say... We do comment on things of each other.

She has established a dialogue with her boyfriend about childrearing, identifying each other's own strengths and weaknesses in order to explore the possibility of parenthood. She assumed childcare roles previously by providing rides for her siblings during school. She elaborated further about her role when she discussed the support, or lack of, that she gave her brother during the college application process.

When he was a Junior I tried to get him to sit down and be like "write your college essay," and I feel like I missed a couple of months and he...veered off course... It's not the end of the world right? Plumbing pays well... It's ok but I know what he is passionate about and I know he's not passionate about this... I was devastated and felt like he was misdirected and I felt that I wasn't there enough for him. I felt really guilty about that...

Providing support and care is natural to any sibling relationship but the one Kelly has with her siblings is unique in that they look to each other because their parents are lacking. Earlier in the analysis she identified the college application process as an area where parents typically provide support and where her parents provided none. When her brother got to that point in the college process, she assumed the duty of a parent in keeping him on track. While she may have not met her own expectations she had a model of parenthood that she used to frame her approach.

To reiterate, a caregiver provides financial, emotional and social needs adequate for a fully functional life. None of the respondents were caregivers for children, however a number expressed fulfilling a caregiver role, most commonly for a pet. They perform a greater level of responsibility and care than one's self. Teresa said she didn't think she was ready to have children but felt differently about having a dog:

If you were to ask me this question in 10 years I would have a different response but my 25-year-old self is "I'm content with taking care of a dog." Because a dog you have to wake up in the morning, they wake you up at the frickin crack ass of dawn, you have to go, they are licking your face they are all excited, they want to play, they're wide awake just like a baby. They want to go outside and they want to be walked, they have to use the bathroom you have to clean up after them. Grab their shit just like you are wiping a diaper. They get into stuff... You really have to care for them like a child; they are dependent on you just like a child is. Its like having a kid, I know having a human being is probably exponentially more intense but having a dog is a huge responsibility.

First she changes her opinion on children for the future after thinking about how she cares for her own dog. Second, she moves on to discuss the similarities that caring for a dog has with caring for a child. She is taking a more responsible role gradually which makes her earlier statement of "asking the question in 10 years" all the more natural. Instead of ruling out parenthood she is perhaps preparing for it in the future by first satisfying her own goals and learning to care for another being.

Not only do pets up the stakes when it comes to care but they also function as representations of the caregiver role. Teresa already established how she presents herself as caregiver through roles and actions performed in her home for her dog and this social role exists online as well. Photos of dogs and dog related activities have become more common alongside photos of children, specifically online. Monica, a 26-year-old in a committed relationship, chides parents for posting too much about their children only to confess moments later that she has posted about her dogs online:

I try to kind of think about it like the way I feel about my dogs. My dogs are similar to how I feel people probably feel about their children. I am so proud of my dogs and I think my dogs are the most beautiful things in the world and I want everyone to see them... When my boyfriend and I move in together I absolutely want to get a pet before I have a child and I think that that is a good thing to do because it will really prepare you for the responsibilities of having a child.

She is actively presenting her role as a dog owner online through the posts of her dogs. She even expands on the responsibilities of having a pet and purports that it will provide her and her boyfriend the necessary experience for raising a child. In many ways the respondents are testing the waters for parenthood later on in life. They provide care for dogs much like they would have to for children and then post about their dogs online much like parents do.

Many of the earlier respondents had addressed either their hesitation to become parents because it would change them or that they witnessed a change with those who became parents. Parenting and subsequent expectations have expanded to include digitized evidence displayed through online social networks. These digital objects are consumed online and provide young adults and parents a platform to discuss parenting etiquette. Parenthood involves constructing one's approach towards childrearing and has

plenty to do with the influence of one's external social network. By seeing how others handle parenthood, young adults begin to shape their own ideals, which Erica found in how her parents had uprooted her. This indirect interaction between parents and young adults with no children does occur in face-to-face interaction but is now supplemented by online mediated interaction. Much like wedding photos, respondents addressed the rise in baby photos online. Erica, the 22-year-old aunt of six, remarks that she finds herself posting photos of her nieces and nephews on social networking sites:

I think I post more of their kids on Facebook and Instagram... It wasn't necessarily the first walk but her attempts at it. So people will comment on that being like 'oh my god I can't believe she's almost walking or talking.' That's definitely more common now.... Which I get, when you're a parent that's your main focus because if you weren't...if your main focus isn't your kids people still call into question what kind of parent are you. Even through Facebook because people will be like 'she never talks about her kids.' There's no picture of her kids so people are kind of naturally surveying you no matter what you do. If you don't talk about your kids people they are going to find that weird and if you talk about your kids too much people will find that annoying.

Much like marriage, photos and anecdotes of children provide rich evidence into the role of the parent on social networking sites. These digital objects stand in for parenting methods, skill and enthusiasm. Earlier Erica had commented that she wasn't ready for kids because she would put herself before them when it came to relocating. Her admission that parenthood is showcased online and judged online further supports that there exists this digital space, much like with marriage, where digital parenthood is defined. The reason that it is not redefined is that the expectations of what it means to be a parent has existed offline and what is now occurring online is in not a disavowal of parenting methods but rather a replication. Examples of such are the photos that Louis' sister and Charlotte's friends take and spread online. Respondents expressed that what parents posted about themselves was also called into question. Linda, a 25 year-old in a

committed three-year relationship, found herself questioning the parenting of her cousin after viewing her online profile:

I think she's a great mom but I don't think she... I don't know what the word is. For example, she feeds herself really good food really nutritious food, and she posts a lot about that. And before she had kids she didn't really post much of anything, to be honest. And now that she had kids she posts everything about what they are doing and this and that. But what's interesting is, just knowing her, she doesn't feed her own kids good food. She'll just let them have McDonalds or candy or whatever. Whatever they want to have at the moment is what they'll have for dinner. Which is ugh. I don't know how you do that.

The importance here is two-fold: one, the actions of adults with kids were now categorized as the actions of parents and two, there are common standards for parenthood and they are used to judge. Linda questions the health choices that her cousin makes, which would suggest that a healthy lifestyle is a quality she hopes to instill in her children. It is natural to doubt the performance of the other, in fact "so common is this doubt that, as suggested, we often give special attention to features of the performance that cannot be readily manipulated," (Goffman, 1959:58). Parenthood online has further implications if society begins to perceive photos of children online as a stand in for parental adequacy because online mediated artifacts can easily be manipulated, so scrutiny is doubled.

Parenthood still remains one of the more important markers of adulthood, the reasons being its magnitude in the lives of young adults. I earlier discussed how work and the role of the professional necessitated a reconstructing of the self both offline and online. Parenthood functions the same way. Louis' sister began changing her etiquette either to present herself as a parent or act as an example to her children. Linda's cousin started posting more photos of her children online to show her social network that they are an important aspect of her life. Furthermore, "digital parenthood" provides a space

where parents can discuss what constitutes a good parent through behaviors exhibited through posts and photos. Another finding is that a majority of the comments regarding judging on Facebook were of mothers not fathers. While some male respondents expressed putting up a photo of their child, this behavior was more prevalent among female respondents, suggesting that digital parenthood holds greater importance for mothers and their construct of motherhood.

Parenthood doesn't act as the be all end all of adulthood but rather exists as a role of choice for young adults. The question of whether parenthood begets true adulthood or vice versa becomes tricky to answer. Substantial attention is paid towards becoming a parent, such addressing financial needs and parenting skills. However, there are also large number of adults reacting to having become a parent, such as the posting of photos online or changing their behavior to provide structure for the child. The data doesn't provide a clear answer but perhaps suggests that, much like work, parenthood exists before it even happens. This occurs when talking to partners about parenting techniques and beginning to craft parenthood through judging another's performance.

Defining Adulthood

Young adults navigate their lives with a sense of purpose and a desire for fulfillment, much like generations before them. However, rising student debt combined with the Great Recession have created barriers to achieving traditional markers of adulthood. Given social and economic changes, this study was conducted to find how young adults are defining adulthood, how traditional markers of adulthood play a role in this life transition, and to what degree this definition was shaped or expressed through

online social networking sites. When it came to defining adulthood in their terms many respondents, like Paul, provided responses that were surprising:

There is more responsibility but more freedom. It's just kind of the chance that you get to do what you want with your life and make yourself who you want to be so at adulthood you get free reins over your life. You can do whatever you want to do and whatever you feel needs to be done and that's it. You are also responsible for whatever consequences that may bring.

Paul makes the point that many of the other respondents echo, your life is your life. You get to decide what is important and the decision whether or not you want to buy a house, move, get married, have children or even just sleep in late, is up to you. This is remarkably different than previous generations because the transition from being provided for by your parents to being the provider for a spouse or a child can be prolonged. This greater sense of agency is the point of departure from previous generations because young adults can shift the weight of importance for markers. Greg expresses that he likes that he has some hesitation with feeling like an adult, finding frustration with the previously defined and rigid expectations that he felt were in place for older generations:

I like it. I feel like adults become stiff and feel obligated to do certain things that I don't want to do. Get married at a certain age. You have to be married by the time you are thirty, why? I just feel like people are so pressured into doing things. As an adult that is unfair.

Adults today, young adults especially, are redefining how to approach achieving these markers, evident from new dating practices and putting off home ownership.

Respondents respond by finding other ways of identifying as adults and embodying adulthood. Louis sees adulthood play out through his interactions with others in his social network.

I think something would be the way maybe a boss or a supervisor would talk to you. So much like their demeanor to you, where they can ask you to do something but the way they do it is not like a teacher...almost saying you can do this where they ask you to do it and you get it done and that's it. The responsibility is a little bigger... To me, moments like that [are] when you feel like an adult. Little small things...filling out insurance and registration for [your] own car. When you start signing these things that have massive responsibility or when you start doing your own taxes. To me [those] feel like adult things, not depending on your parents for stuff. I don't ask my parents for a lot of things anymore because I can accomplish them by myself. To me that's part of growing up and being an adult.

Louis states that having a position at work where he commands respect and attention further strengthens his adulthood, suggesting that adulthood can be a whole made up of fragmented parts.

Communication was a key process through which respondents were able to express adulthood rather than through accomplishments. Charlotte expressed certain ways in which she didn't feel like an adult because she was going out late and didn't have children but later found some aspect of her life she attributed to being an adult:

The one thing I like about adulthood is that I'm not afraid to be honest, admit things that... I don't do things if they aren't good for me in terms of relationships and work and etc. A little bit more level headed and I pay my own bills.

Before switching over to the way in which adulthood played out online, the importance of noting finances should be discussed. When I asked respondents how they would define adulthood, most of them responded much like Louis and Charlotte did, emphasizing responsibility and maturity. Immediately after, all respondents added that bills were an important part of their adulthood. Finances and independence were linked together suggesting that this was the most important part of adulthood. Evidence to support this claim can be found in how much energy they put into folding work into the fabric of their lives, whether offline and/or online. They made their primary social network their coworkers and they carefully started filtering their online content well before they

became workers. Respondents had decided to hide, remove or at least set aside their identification as a college student in order to make room for their role as an employable worker. This change, which can occur offline, found its way online and was an integral step in the bridge from college graduate to employee.

Social networking sites by nature encourage connection and communication, using digital objects as stand-ins for offline achievements, thoughts and experiences. When it came to the translation of offline life to online life, the three main areas where respondents provided rich, detailed evidence of their lives was work, marriage and children. Photos from work functioned as a way in which users could further flesh out their online life, suggesting the importance of work to how they thought of themselves. Many respondents described socializing with their coworkers and found ways to bridge their personal and professional lives together. This could be presented through digital objects like photos or through appropriating social networking sites as extended workspaces. Furthermore, respondents removed or changed their SNS profiles to reflect their most current identity, that of a worker, choosing to separate themselves from their education online much before getting their first job.

When it came to marriage, respondents were mixed about becoming Facebook official but expressed that they would post an engagement or wedding announcement online. A photo of the couple, the ring and a status are among the most common ways that online users can announce their engagement to their online social network. Only one respondent had previously announced his engagement online, but nearly all stated that they would at least put up a status, further providing another layer of detail to their online lives.

None of the respondents had any children but talked at length about parenthood online and how they saw themselves fitting that role. Many of the respondents had peers or siblings who had children and witnessed them or others in their online social network posting photos of their children. These photographs covered daily and major life events. Once again, many of the respondents again approached posting photos of their children online like they had with wedding photos, brief yet substantial enough to provide some detail to their offline lives. However, some respondents commented further in that they looked at parenthood online as being a reflection of offline capabilities, much like online representations of work reflected an offline social-professional life.

It is important to note that even offline these three areas were major points of discussion when it came to the young adults' self-identification. Paul's quote best sums this up:

Yeah I think so. I guess when I started making decisions on my own that started to shape my future I don't know what age that would have been you are slowly working into it, you are always becoming more and adult even as you are old because your responsibilities change and what is important to you changes and you change as a person and what you perceive as adulthood is always changing.

The nature of adulthood is changing by expansion; once you reach a certain point your responsibilities change to encompass other duties, which would go along with the second model of adulthood that Waters et al. (2011) had proposed known as the threshold model in which adulthood changed its meaning once one marker was achieved or when one assumed a new role. The respondents in Silva's (2013) study were nostalgic for traditional markers, fitting the model of the upward slope outlined by Waters et al. (2011), which found adulthood to be increased by each new achievement. This study finds that as young adults age and their priorities change, what constitutes adulthood for

them will shift and the way it is represented online will adapt to these changes. Silva (2013) is critical of Arnett's (2004) theory that emerging adulthood is an "age of possibilities," writing:

The data tell the opposite story; in a competitive, bewildering, and precarious labor market, where racial inequality is perpetuated through hiring decisions and housing costs and families are subordinated to work growing up mean coming to terms with an impending sense of constraint towards their adult identities and futures. (35)

She argued that the lives of working class adults are filled with constraints instead of possibilities, citing the same societal and economic factors that many respondents in this study brought up. Their financial standing may allow them to embrace these changes and this new definition of adulthood, suggesting that constraints and possibilities are cut across socioeconomic lines.

Conclusion

This study aimed to show how young adults are thinking about the traditional markers of adulthood and how they choose to adapt them to their own lives both offline and online through social networking sites. Today young adults are given greater agency in defining their own adulthood and how they fit that role. The main two factors that have brought about this change are social and economic hardships and new social networking technologies. The Great Recession and the unstable job market have forced young adults back home to negotiate adulthood in new ways. Finances are a major concern for young adults who cannot afford to establish their own independent residence or have a large amount of student debt. SNS allow for users to create their narrative with greater control than before, especially for future displays to their online social network. They can choose which photos to use, what they want to communicate to their network and what information they want to include on their profiles. More importantly they can edit their social network online and limit what it reveals to ensure that friends, family and peers are the only ones to see their information.

The study did have some limitations that could be explored in further research. An overwhelming majority of the respondents identified as Caucasian and heterosexual. It is important for future research to see how non-heterosexual identifying individuals fit marriage and children into adulthood given historical social barriers to marriage. Furthermore, none of the young adults in the study were married or had children, which made their answers more about their future plans. Given that some had expressed a

change in their siblings, the respondents themselves may experience that change and this study wasn't able to directly ask a young adult who had experienced that change.

Additionally, most of the respondents were middle class and had at least marginal support from their parents, which meant that the voice of young adults who don't or can't get a college education was not included. With social commentary in the media stressing the importance of a college education, it will be important to see how non-college graduates conceptualize their adulthood and how they compare it with their educated counterparts. The findings of this study, when compared to Silva's (2013) study show how one's class can affect the negotiation process of adulthood today. The respondents in this study were able to see this negotiation process as providing them with the agency to establish their own adulthood and therefore their own self-worth and success. The freedom they exhibited was produced in part by the support that they received from their families but their perceived loose construction of adulthood. Silva's (2013) respondents were constrained by the current social climate and the lack of support. In the face of these hardships they chose a nostalgic reading of the markers of adulthood because they did not have the time or resources to renegotiate it's definition. The working class respondents in Silva's study didn't have the same family support to fall back on so not aiming to achieve the traditional markers of adulthood essentially meant failure and potentially ending up homeless and unfed.

While I did ask respondents about their online content, the variances between how they report behaving and how they behave are two different things. Future research should consider content analysis of young adult profiles on Facebook and LinkedIn, as those two sites are the most important to young adults.

One of the affordances of online social networking sites is that they serve as an archive for digital objects, whether or not they are photos, comments or posts. Young adults can create a biography of their lives online for display with mixed results. On one hand they can see photos of themselves over the years and build a narrative by seeing growth. On the other hand they have information from earlier stages of their lives that may conflict with the stage that they are in.

In closing, the most important point of this study that should be further explored and discussed is the level of freedom provided by class. The degree of agency that respondents experienced was contingent upon their socioeconomic class. While constraints did exist for the respondents in this study, notably the cost of housing and college debt, they were framed less as obstacles and more as possibilities. Through these perceived possibilities respondents were able to choose which markers they wanted to achieve and how they fit that into identifying as adults.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your daily life?
2. How does social media usage fit into your daily life?
3. What social networking sites do you regularly use and why?
4. Can you describe your online audience/social network? Who do you connect with the most within that network?

EDUC

5. What is your current level of education?
 - a. If respondent answers online college ask:
 - i. Can you describe how you incorporated online classes into your life?
6. What was it like completing your education?
7. Does your online profile include your current education?
8. Did you post any photos of your college life? Graduation photos?
9. If you maintain regular contact with your peers, what is the content of your communication?

WORK

10. Can you describe your current employment situation?
11. Does your online profile include your current job or profession?
12. Can you describe how you balance socializing with your coworkers as well as socializing with your friends and family on your SNS?
 - a. Have you ever felt the need to monitor your online content because of the scrutiny of your coworkers or superiors?
13. Can you describe the job search process that led to this position?
 - a. If respondents mentions using LinkedIn:

- i. Ask about how they came about using it and why

14. Is your income sufficient for the lifestyle that you want to live? If not, why?

HOME

15. Can you describe your current form of residence?

- a. If respondent is living away from home ask:
 - i. How did you find your place of residence?
- b. If respondent is living at home ask:
 - i. How do you feel living at home?

16. Do you post any content about your house or home? For example meals you've made, items you've bought or renovations you have done?

17. When was the last time you took a vacation? Did you post pictures of this trip?

RELATIONSHIP

18. Are you currently in a relationship?

- a. Do you currently live together

19. Can you describe how you met your significant other/partner/spouse?

- a. If respondent is single ask:
 - i. Do you use SNS to meet people?
 - ii. What are your attitudes about meeting through a dating website?
- b. If respondent found significant other through a dating website/app ask:
 - i. What were your reasons for using a dating website/app?
 - ii. Could you describe the dating process through a dating website/app
 - iii. What were the reactions from your family/friends, if any?

20. Does your online profile include your current relationships status?

- a. If respondent is single ask:
 - i. Do you
- b. If respondent is dating ask:
 - i. Does your online profile include your relationship status?
 - ii. Can you describe relationships in the context of online profiles?
 - iii. Can you describe the reaction you've received from your social network in regards to your relationship?
- c. If respondent is married ask:
 - i. Does your online profile include that you are married?
 - ii. Did you post photos of your rings, wedding, and anniversaries online?
 - iii. What are your reasons for posting this information online?

- iv. What is the reaction that you receive from your social network?
 - d. If respondent is divorced ask:
 - i. How do you navigate romantic relationships in your online profile?
 - ii. How did you alter your profile to include your divorce?
 - 1. Can you describe how you felt changing your profile?
 - 2. What was the reaction, if any, that you received from your social network?
21. Can you describe the types of interactions you and your significant other share on SNS?
22. Do you have any children?
23. How do you feel they have or they would change your lifestyle and sense of self?
- a. No kids:
 - i. How would you say your friends changed after having children?
 - b. Kids:
 - i. Would you say your thoughts of parenthood changed after having kids? If so how?
24. What types of posts or pictures are on your profile of your kids?
- a. What were your reasons for posting about your children?
 - b. What reaction have you received from your social network in regards to these posts?
25. What types of post or pictures do you see others in your social networking posting about their own children?
- a. What are your thoughts and reactions to these posts?
26. Can you describe positive and/or negative reactions that you have had towards the content that individuals in your social network chose to share online?
- a. Why did you feel that way?

ADULT

27. Can you define adulthood in your own words?
28. Do you believe that this view of adulthood is universally held?
29. Would you say you have achieved adulthood? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Survey Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. What is the educational attainment of your father?
4. What is the educational attainment of your mother?
5. What is your current level of education?
6. What is your approximate income? Circle one
 - a. Under \$24,999
 - b. Between \$25,000 and \$49,999
 - c. Between \$50,000 and \$99,999
 - d. \$100,000 or higher

Appendix C

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in this study of young adult behavior on social networking sites that I am conducting for my Honor's thesis at Wheaton College.

If you agree to participate, the interview will be conducted either in person or over Skype, should last approximately forty-five minutes, and will cover your online behavior and how it reflects your work, family and personal life. Additionally, I will request that you will fill out a 6-item survey.

I will record the interview on my phone then transfer the recording to my computer and delete the recording from my phone. Both recordings will be password-protected. The survey will also be transferred to the computer and I will shred the hard copy. All computer files will be password protected and will be deleted at the conclusion of the study. Any identifying information in the recordings will be deleted to ensure confidentiality.

Participation in this study is not expected to pose any risk to you or to provide you with any benefit. At any time during the interview, you have the right to decline questions or end the interview. Should you have any questions regarding the study, contact me at hurley_dylan@wheatoncollege.edu. Additionally you may contact Joel Relihan, the Research Compliance Officer, at jrelihan@wheatoncollege.edu or by phone at 508.286.3662

By signing this consent form you acknowledge that you are aware of the procedures that will be done during the interview process. You have the right to decline participation in this study.

Interviewee:

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer:

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____