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LIFE FILTERED: SOCIAL MEDIA AND PERCEPTIONS OF SELF

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the social media habits of young people ages 18-25 and how their behaviors on Facebook and Instagram affect their perceptions of self. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate the relationship between time spent viewing friends' photos on Facebook and Instagram, and increased levels of fear of missing out, neuroticism, and decreased levels of self-esteem. A survey was conducted using Amazon's Mechanical Turk in addition to snowball sampling. The study did not find the factors of neuroticism, self-esteem, or fear of missing out to be significant, however, results showed participants took many measures to exercise control over how they were perceived on their Facebook and Instagram pages—filtering the content reflective of their lives both literally and figuratively.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) have evolved in the past decade to become the fastest-growing and most frequented type of website on the Internet (Nielsen-Wire, 2012). SNS are defined as, “virtual collections of user profiles which can be shared with others” (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012). In 2015, 76 percent of Internet-using adults had at least one social media profile, compared to 10 percent in 2005. Seventy-one percent of teens have more than one social media profile (Perrin, 2015). While these networking sites are popular among people of all ages, young adults are more likely to use SNS than any other age demographic, with 90 percent of 18 to 29-year olds having a social media presence (Perrin, 2015).

Madison Holleran: A Case Study on Self-Presentation and Social Media

Social media can easily become a large part of people’s identities—especially for young individuals, where it plays a bigger role in influencing how they feel about their own lives and their relationships. Madison Holleran was everything most young adults aspire to be. Holleran was attending the University of Pennsylvania to run track, a sport she loved and excelled at (Fagan, 2015b). She was smart and beautiful, with a smile that lit up the room (Wilder, 2015). She had a big, loving family with two parents and four siblings who supported her athletic endeavors and adored her (The Madison Holleran Foundation, 2015). Holleran had an Instagram account depicting her seemingly flawless life—filled with photos of her posing with friends, laughing with family, playing soccer, running track, and genuinely appreciating the beauty around her—and it garnered hundreds of “Likes” and comments about how special, talented, and beautiful she was on a regular basis (Fagan, 2015b). Just after dusk on January 17, 2014,

Holleran climbed nine stories of a Philadelphia parking garage and jumped to her death, ending the life she lived and shattering the ideal life she had projected to others for so long (Wilder, 2015).

Holleran used social media as a way to confirm the expectations she felt were set forth for her by others around her—expectations that she was happy, that she was healthy, that she wanted to keep running track, and that she was enjoying her new life in college (Fagan, 2015b). Perhaps the ultimate acknowledgement of this deceit is the picture Holleran posted to Instagram, just moments before leaping to her death. The photo was of charming lights aglow in Rittenhouse Square—picture perfect. Any friend or classmate scrolling through their Instagram feed would see the pleasing photo and maybe “Like” it, but never give a second thought that the person who posted it could be struggling at that very moment (Fagan, 2015a).

Like in Holleran’s case, self-presentation on social media platforms—especially those that emphasize photos, such as Instagram— make it increasingly difficult for close friends and family members to detect negative changes in mood or mental health problems.

“Checking Instagram is like opening a magazine to see a fashion advertisement. Except an ad is branded as what it is: a staged image on glossy paper. Instagram is passed off as real life” (Fagan, 2015b, para. 26-27).

The social media user has such a high control over the content they are posting and filtering. Social media could be compared to the tip of an iceberg. If a person were suffering emotionally and had nine distressing job rejections in a day and one positive job offer, he or she is more likely to post about the one positive event. One may think he or she is getting the entire story when he or she looks at a peer’s social media account, but he or she may just be getting the “tip of the iceberg.”

Social media has changed the way users seek attention from loved ones when they are in emotional distress (Hidy, Porch, Reed, Parish, & Yellowlees, 2013). It is uncommon for users to explicitly make a plea for help or express self-harm in a social media post. It is more likely that users experiencing emotional difficulties will make a cryptic message about their mood, which may need to be deciphered more closely by friends or family (Hidy et al., 2013).

Adolescents and young adults have become highly dependent upon SNS for social interaction, ego boost, and self-esteem fulfillment (Gajanan, 2015). More specifically, some of the ways in which young adults rely on social media for self-verification are through self-presentation, fear of missing out, and monitoring indirect engagement—“Likes,” favorites, retweets, etc.—to measure one’s self worth. The purpose of this study is to examine how young people gain self-validation through “Likes” and filters on social media platforms Facebook and Instagram.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to understand why Internet users behave and think the way they do, it is important to comprehend how they develop their concept of self, which contributes to their self-esteem and the way in which they communicate with others.

Theory of Self-Concept

William James (1890) outlined models of stream of consciousness, habit, emotion, and will. One of his theories, which influenced many other factors in sociology and psychology, was his theory of self. James (1890) first divides the self into two distinct parts: the *I* self, also known as the pure ego, a constant stream of thinking and consciousness that cannot be examined externally; and the *me* self reflects everything about a person and their experiences externally (James, 1890).

The *me* self is subdivided into three more specific categories: the material self, spiritual self, and the social self. James (1890) was particularly interested in how the material self reflected a person's status and worth. It included his or her physical body, but also the clothes on his or her back, his or her possessions, home, and family.

In the theory of social self, James (1890) proposes people have a separate social self for each social group they find themselves interacting in—or groups about whose opinion the person holds value for. “He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups,” (James, 1890, p. 294). James (1890) provides examples, such as a youth swearing and acting recklessly among other young peers, but putting on the highest standards of manners in front of parents and teachers.

In addition, many of these interactions are molded to increase a favorable response. “A man’s social self is the recognition which he gets from his mates. We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind” (James, 1890, p. 293).

The social self theories researched by James (1890) left the groundwork for further research in how people develop a self-concept. Schlenker (1980) believed people test social hypotheses based off observations from social cues around them. He defined a construct as, “a pattern or template created by the person that serves as a way of looking at the world” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 23). An example could be a college boy who observes the body language of his date to perceive whether she likes him. She is unresponsive and leans away from the conversation, so he hypothesizes she is shy or does not like him. “Constructs give meaning to particular facts, and, by switching constructs, the same set of facts can be given a different appearance” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 23).

People also have self-constructs and these categories of individualization help make up the self-concept. Epstein (1973) defined the self-concept as, “a theory the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual... part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience” (p. 407). A self-concept combines a person’s personality traits—such as intelligence, amicability, and independence— with beliefs about how he or she will interact with others, interpret information, and behave in the world around him or her (Schlenker, 1980). These are all considered self-constructs.

Self-constructs play a role in developing people’s expectations in social interactions, and thus affect how those social interactions play out. Schlenker (1980) provides the following

example. If a roommate wants one to sign a petition for a cause he or she does not support and he or she views him or herself as someone who stands firmly by his or her beliefs, the self-construct of individuality would prevent him or her from signing the petition.

Furthermore, self-efficacy expectations are defined as beliefs, “that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce,” certain results (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Expectations of one’s aspirations play a big role in his or her successful execution and fulfillment. If one has a dream or goal and fully believes he or she has no chance of achieving it, he or she is going to exert minimal effort and may not even attempt it at all.

The phrase, “Fake it ‘til you make it,” has been widely coined in the 21st century and applies greatly to the relationship between self-concept and self-misrepresentation. A person who misrepresents his or her character through dramatized or idealized means can begin to take on the identity he or she expresses, sincerely believing it is his or her true self. Schlenker (1980) states, “performances that were once inaccurate self-reflections can become accurate as the self-concept changes” (p. 40). Additionally, Jones and Wortman (1973) found social reinforcement can change an individual’s self-concepts, traits, and behaviors. A wallflower lacks conversational skills, but her potential suitors perceive her as the “quiet and mysterious” type, thus making her all that more intriguing. With the notice of a long list of suitors, she goes from the wallflower to the prom queen (Schlenker, 1980). Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) state, “our self-evaluations are affected by the evaluations which others have of us, and more importantly, by how we perceive those evaluations” (p. 77).

There are three major functions of the self-concept as outlined by Epstein (1973). The self-concept should (1) “optimize the pleasure/pain balance of the individual over the course of a lifetime,” (2) “organize the data of experience in a manner that can be coped with effectively,”

and (3) enable the “maintenance of self-esteem” (p. 407). A person’s self-concept is developed through the reflection of social cues and interactions, and these developments expanded opportunities for research on self-esteem (Cooley, 1902).

Self-Esteem Theory

Cooley (1902) hypothesized there were three components of the self: the imagination of one’s appearance to another person, the imagination of the other person’s judgment of one’s appearance, and self-feeling that set early groundwork for understanding the idea of self-esteem and the need to protect oneself against negative influences (Wells & Marwell, 1976).

Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as, “the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of the worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself” (p. 4-5).

Heatherton and Polivy (1991) further divided self-esteem into three specific categories: performance self-esteem, social self-esteem, and appearance self-esteem. Those who demonstrate high performance self-esteem have more confidence and greater efficacy. This type is reflected in one’s belief in his or her abilities—whether intellectual, academic, career-related, or overall competence (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). Social self-esteem is specific to how one views his or her public image, such as whether he or she is liked or respected by others. Those who exhibit low social self-esteem are self-conscious in many social settings and may experience social anxiety, with constant fears of social rejection (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). Appearance self-esteem refers to one’s body image and how he or she views his or her own physical attractiveness.

Empirical data has shown individuals with higher self-esteem are recognized as happier and more mentally stable (Branden, 1994; Taylor & Brown, 1988), while individuals with lower self-esteem are found to be more depressed and less psychologically healthy (Tennen & Affleck, 1993; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). When significant characters in people's lives neglect, reject, or degrade them, they are more likely to have lower self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003).

Self-esteem can affect many aspects of a person's life—from his or her personality, behavior, and decision-making to his or her personal interactions, relationships, aspirations, and career (Wells & Marwell, 1976). Self-esteem has a unique cause-effect relationship. In some situations, a change in self-esteem can trigger an event, and in some situations, an event can trigger a change in self-esteem. For example, students' lowered self-esteem could negatively impact their ability to successfully complete an exam, or students could experience a decrease in self-esteem caused by a poor exam score.

Those with low self-esteem in adolescent years are more likely to experience social misfortunes such as drug abuse, acts of violence, criminal behavior, teenage pregnancy, and academic failure (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). Low-self esteem individuals are more likely to lead adult lives with worse physical and psychological health, economic turmoil, and criminal activity (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006).

“Self-esteem functions as a monitor of the likelihood of social exclusion. When people behave in ways that increase the likelihood they will be rejected, they experience a reduction in state self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem serves as a monitor, or sociometer, of social acceptance–rejection” (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003, p. 222). Individuals with low self-esteem have sociometers that detect the high probability of rejection; therefore, they exert great effort in

managing their impressions on others. The opposite can be said about those with high self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003).

Most researchers agree self-esteem is composed of two separate components—competence and worth (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). The competence component is believing one is effective in possessing abilities to accomplish desired goals or behaviors. The worth component is defined as, “the degree to which individuals feel they are persons of value” (Cast & Burke, 2002, p. 1042).

Coopersmith (1959) divided self-esteem into his own two categories—subjective expression, which is how an individual perceives himself or herself; and behavioral expression, behavioral manifestations of the individual’s self-esteem that are perceived by others. Significant gender differences have been found in the source from which people validate their self-esteem and how they function from it. Adolescent females were found to more commonly fulfill their self-esteem through the relationships they have developed, while adolescent males were found to be driven by objective measures of self (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). This gender difference held true for males and females, regardless of age (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992).

Impression Management Theory

It is no secret people want to be accepted. People will go to great lengths to seek validation from others—from altering their physical appearances to adapting their behaviors, personalities, and everyday preferences to cater to what they perceive will be well liked. “People’s thought processes are guided by social meanings, and people’s values, attitudes, and beliefs are influenced by others more than they usually care to admit” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 5).

Schlenker (1980) defined impression management as the “conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions” (p. 6). Leary

and Kowalski (1990) emphasize, “most research has dealt with how people control the impressions others form of them (for which both terms are appropriate), we use the terms interchangeably” (p. 34).

Goffman (1959) explains the concept of impression management through the metaphor of a stage performer, comparing the control an actor has over his or her audience to the control one has over how he or she is perceived by others around them. For example, a person may introduce his or her “audience” to a romanticized form of himself or herself in order to be more well-liked by his or her peers (Goffman, 1959). He defines a performance as, “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (p. 15).

There are two categories of performances. Dramatized performances give the audience a clear idea of how the actor views the scenario. For example, a student may be so focused on creating the *impression* that he is focused on the professor’s lecture he is no longer actually paying attention to the lecture. With dramatized performances, “individuals find themselves with the dilemma of expression *versus* action” (Goffman, 1959, p. 33).

Goffman’s (1959) notion of idealized performances conform to fulfill society’s expectations or stereotypes, exaggerate desired qualities, and align with the idea of an individual’s “wishful thinking” about how he or she wishes to appear to his or her audience (Schlenker, 1980). A pianist may express she practices 40 hours per week to convey she is more dedicated, more talented, and more musical when she really only plays for an hour each week. She is performing as an idealized version of herself.

Goffman (1959) noted two radically different types of expressiveness among people, “the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*” (p. 2). Goffman stated people will

interfere with their own lives, essentially setting themselves up, if it will make a good impression. He provides an example of a young girl living with other girls in a dormitory. The more phone calls she receives (or arranges to receive), the more popular she is perceived to be by the other girls.

Goffman (1959) divides people's behaviors into two different regions—the “front region” and the “back region” to which he compares to the likeness of a stage. Goffman (1959) defines the front region as, “the place where the performance is given,” and the setting in which a person “performs” to maintain politeness, decorum, and an overall positive outward appearance to their audience (p. 106-7). People not only want to maintain a positive image of themselves when they are interacting with their audience, but also maintain the most impressive standards of themselves when they are not engaged with their audience.

Goffman's (1959) concept of make-work shows how people perform on cue in the front region. Goffman describes workers in a shipyard who go through a “sudden transformation” of work quality improvement when the supervisor was around, putting on a front that everyone was busy and the ship was in top condition (p. 109). “Pace, personal interest, economy, accuracy, etc.” are all parts of make-work that must be sustained in order to present the outward impression of being busy and invested in the workplace (Goffman, 1959, p. 110). Schlenker (1980) notes how one can put up a front in the workplace in other ways, such as contributing to the setting and décor. Luxury furnishings and the showcasing of any company awards can create the front of authority, affluence, and success to any outside visitors.

While an actor's escalated impressions take form in his or her front region behaviors, certain aspects of his or her appearance, manners, and personality may disrepute the false presentation one hopes to fabricate about his or her has been suppressed (Goffman, 1959). This

is the “back region,” which Goffman parallels with the backstage of a production and defines as, “where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course” (p. 112). The backstage is where an actor can rehearse and come into his or her character. It is where props can be made and stored to create characters and storylines for the stage. The crew makes adaptations to conceal shortcuts taken—such as replacing real fruit with a wax version, or replacing glass with plastic— and to design illusions to deceive the audience. The cast can run through the performance as many times as need be to practice the script and make modifications (Goffman, 1959). All of these concepts directly relate to the way in which a person behaves in the back region.

Depending upon an actor’s scenes, he or she may go back and forth frequently between the stage and the backstage during a performance—switching off and on between character. “In general, of course, the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude” (Goffman, 1959, p. 113).

Another way in which people try to control the way in which they are perceived by others is through personal appearance, which will be defined as a combination of “a person’s physical features, makeup, and wardrobe” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 268). Goffman compared concepts of appearance to those of an actor in a play and the way he or she manipulates parts in the scene around him or her—such as costumes, props, and scenery. The association principle states, “people attempt to control their identities by claiming desirable images and disclaiming undesirable ones” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 268).

In addition to outward appearance, people also try to control the way their character is perceived. Jones (1964) coined the term, ingratiation, which he defines as, “a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of

one's personal qualities" (p. 2). With regards to ingratiation, credibility is key. It is not about how the person actually acts, thinks, or feels, but what he or she is able to convey to his or her audience and make them believe.

One way ingratiators seek acceptance and validation is through complimenting their target to convey the perception they have respect for their target audience. This is a result of people being more likely to think highly of those who reciprocate favorable feelings toward them (Jones, 1964).

Tagiuri and Petrullo (1965) discovered a strong correlation between subjects with favorable reciprocal relationships. Jones, Gergen, and Davis (1962) confirmed these results. Subjects increased attraction to a stimulus person who gave them validation in return. People tend to like those who like them.

Self-monitoring is another concept in social psychology that explains how people adapt their actions and personalities to certain people and social situations around them. Snyder (1974) found, "When persons are made uncertain of their emotional reactions, they look to the behavior of others for cues to define their emotional states and model the emotional expressive behavior of others in the same situation who appear to be behaving appropriately" (p. 527). Snyder (1974) distinguishes self-monitoring from other social behaviors with prominent focus on how a high self-monitor observes others around them and adapts accordingly.

"The self-monitoring individual is one who, out of a concern for social appropriateness, is particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of others in social situations and uses these cues as guidelines for monitoring his own self-presentation" (Snyder, 1974, p. 528). A high self-monitor is more likely to adapt his or her social behaviors to each social setting in which he or she finds themselves in. He or she may behave differently in different settings or

around different groups of friends or peers, acting as a sort of social chameleon (Snyder, 1987). A low self-monitor strives to be true to his or her self-identity regardless of the social situation or presence of others he or she finds himself or herself in. They are perceived as being more authentic than their high self-monitor counterpart (Snyder, 1987).

People put on a different face, or “mask,” for different encounters with different people for whom they are most appropriate—whether they be family, friends, co-workers, bosses, spouses, or enemies. Goffman (1967) defines the sociological term, face as, “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (p. 2).

For each face, there is appropriate behavior. Schlenker (1980) cites the example of a stylish and poised socialite who compromises her grace in an embarrassing breach of etiquette and commits out-of-face behavior when she spills her food and experiences a wardrobe malfunction. Not only does it cause the performer to feel anguish and embarrassment, but also the audience watching. Saving and maintaining face is vital in interpersonal interactions.

One may also adapt the way in which he or she is perceived online through a variety of means. There are several theories that discuss self-presentation and the way people communicate online.

Computer-Mediated Communication Theories

The Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) explains how people form relationships with one another over the Internet, adapting without body language and other nonverbal cues (Walther, 1992). SIPT explains people are motivated to engage and interact with one another to form relationships, no matter what communications medium they are utilizing. In

computer-mediated communication (CMC), Internet users turn to the cues they do have, such as meaningful typographic, contextual, and chronemic indications in online interactions, to facilitate relationships over time (Walther, 1992). Language and writing become crucial when there are no body language or expressions to read (Braithwaite & Schrodt, 2014). According to Walther (1992), CMC is no less effective than face-to-face communication at forming impressions and maintaining relationships, but does require more time since it is only relying on one main subcategory of cues—language.

Social presence theory (SPT) is defined as, “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships” (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976, p. 65). When analyzing SPT, it is important to distinguish what is being measured—the medium of communication being used—rather than the actual communications being expressed. As social presence decreases, the medium becomes less personal (Walther, 1992). SPT examines the degree to which the communication reflects the person’s authenticity. In general, face-to-face communication has a much higher social presence than CMC (Walther, 1992). Face-to-face communication is found to have the highest social presence (Champness, 1973).

Similarly to how Schlenker (1980) discussed the self-concept and how people’s beliefs about themselves can affect their own identity and behavior, ideas about interactions with others can influence how they play out in real time. Imagined interactions are defined as thoughts that reflect a person’s past or future communication encounters, which may range in coherence and completeness (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Imagined interactions have many functions, such as resolving conflict, preserving relationships, and pre-planning interactions. They have been found to reduce anxiety in those who plan for an interaction or rehearse a message before delivering it,

similarly to how those who rank high in neuroticism seek comfort in asynchronous online communication (Allen & Honeycutt, 1997).

Enhanced self-disclosure theory describes how Internet and social media users are likely to disclose more personal information through CMC than through face-to-face interaction (Qiu, Lin, Leung, & Tov, 2012). Because there are no visual or auditory cues, individuals may reveal more intimate information that they wouldn't normally feel comfortable disclosing in a face-to-face interaction. The evolution of social networking has changed the way people communicate with one another, as well as how they exercise control managing impressions of themselves.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

SNS such as Facebook and Instagram allow the user to have great control over what he or she shares with the rest of the world, thus shaping how others view him or her. Through the pictures they carefully choose and the statuses they selectively craft, they are able to literally and figuratively filter their lives. People will strive for positive self-presentation in both online and offline settings with their social interactions (Mehdizadeh, 2010). People with lower self-esteem are more likely to participate in online platforms and social networking that will boost their emotional well-being (Krämer & Winter, 2008). Users seek out positive support and attention through self-promotional posts, status updates, and validation through "Likes." Facebook users take measures to make themselves appear more attractive online, such as uploading profile pictures they feel enhances their personal image, and creating content to enhance and promote themselves to the public, in hopes of garnering more social support (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Users who logged in on Facebook more frequently each day and spent more time on Facebook per session rated significantly lower in self-esteem (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Tufekci (2008) and Mehdizadeh (2010) found Facebook users may be seeking and satisfying the need of

social support through frequent use of the “Like” and comment features, because users can track how many “Likes” and comments a post or picture has accumulated. “Likes” and comments act as a reward system of self-validation.

Even if social media users are lacking self-esteem and seeking social support, most users will not explicitly cry out for help online. Individuals tend to be more ambiguous about self-esteem or mental health struggles (Hidy et al., 2013). Negative emotional disclosure on social media may be frowned upon and reflect poorly on one’s image because positive emotional responses are favored over negative ones (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Negative disclosure can also discredit the individual or come across as lacking self-discipline and control over one’s emotions (Gross, Richards, & John, 2006). Facebook users are more likely to disclose positive emotions through what they share online than negative emotions (Qiu et al., 2012). This can make it increasingly difficult for close friends and family to catch signals of distress when social media is filtered to show a majority of positive posts.

Qiu et al. (2012) found college students were more likely to disclose more positive emotions than negative emotions on Facebook than in real life. Qiu et al. (2012) asked college students to assess their friends’ happiness on a seven-point scale—first in real life and then after viewing their Facebook profiles for two minutes. They were also asked to rate how frequently the friend experienced positive and negative emotions, on a similar scale. Results indicated college students felt their friends seemed happier based off their Facebook profiles than based off their real life interactions (Qiu et al., 2012), supporting the notion young people manage impressions to present a more idealized version of themselves online.

Gonzales and Hancock (2011) conducted a study where participants were either exposed to their own image in a mirror, their own Facebook profile, or no stimulus. Participants then

completed the Rosenberg self-esteem scale. The study found those who viewed their own image had lower self-esteem than those who viewed their Facebook profile (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). The mirror reflects the truthful, realistic self-image—flaws included— while the personal Facebook profile reflects only what the user decides. They are able to selectively design how they wish to appear through self-presentation, catering content and photos to their desired audience. Thus, by viewing how they appear on their own Facebook profile, users had higher self-esteem than looking in the mirror (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Gonzales and Hancock (2011) also found participants who left their own profile to look at other users' profiles during the study had lower self-esteem than those who exclusively spent time viewing or editing their own Facebook profiles. The current study asks the following research questions and posits the first hypothesis:

RQ1: Does gender predict one taking a photo just to post it on social media?

RQ2: Why do people alter Instagram photos?

RQ3: a) Why do people untag themselves in Facebook photos? **b)** How do they select a profile photo?

H1: Participants who spend more time looking at pictures of their Facebook friends and Instagram followers will score lower on self-esteem.

Dominick (1999) identified five components of self-presentation in face-to-face interaction: ingratiation, self-promotion, intimidation, supplication, and exemplification., Dominick (1999) also found these five aspects of self-presentation held true over CMC, indicating people who demonstrate self-presentation behaviors in person will also demonstrate them online.

Similarly, much can be revealed about personality through one's social media habits. Those who are extroverted normally have more Facebook friends than users who identify as introverted (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010). Tosun and Lajunen (2010) found extroverted people are more likely to utilize SNS (including Facebook) as a means of extending pre-existing relationships.

Those who rank high on a narcissism scale have been shown to use Facebook to highlight and showcase their personal achievements (Mehdizadeh, 2010). This is likely attributed to self-promoting behaviors such as posting life updates and pictures of oneself. Facebook users were found to show higher levels of narcissism and exhibitionism than non-users (Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Ryan and Xenos (2011) also found people who rank high in loneliness tend to spend more time on Facebook.

Stopfer, Egloff, Nestler, and Back (2014) studied how accurately people can judge others' personalities by viewing their SNS profile. Participants made judgments of German-based SNS profiles similar to Facebook based on big five personality traits—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience—mostly through profile pictures, and sometimes through contextual forms of expression (i.e. interests or groups). Participants accurately judged the profiles for four of the big five personality traits—all except for neuroticism. Those who ranked high on a neuroticism scale were also found to prefer the Facebook Wall—and asynchronous communication in general—over face-to-face communication (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009).

Because participants were unable to accurately judge levels of neuroticism based off individuals' SNS profiles, this is further evidence that because of self-presenting and self-monitoring behaviors, SNS profiles do not accurately reflect negative or distressing emotions.

H2: Participants who spend more time looking at pictures of their Facebook friends and Instagram followers will score higher on neuroticism.

Self-esteem and neuroticism are not the only afflicting effects that social media users can experience. Another phenomenon is *fear of missing out*, commonly coined as FoMo. Fomo is defined as, “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al., 2013). Those who experience FoMo wish to consistently remain connected to their social circle and keep up with what activities their peers are engaging in. More than 75 percent of young adults have claimed to experience FoMo at some time (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Those with FoMo gravitate towards social media to channel feelings of connectedness with those from whom they are apart—sometimes to an extent that it becomes unhealthy (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMo has been associated with general unhappiness as well as depressed moods, because it makes people doubt the social decisions they have made (Przybylski et al., 2013). Those who scored high on the FoMo scale were more likely to give into temptations to check social media at inappropriate times, such as during class or while driving. Those experiencing low levels of need satisfaction, overall life satisfaction, and mood sought out social media in order to remedy feelings of disconnectedness—but only when experiencing high levels of FoMo (Przybylski et al., 2013). This supports evidence users who spend more time on social media will experience higher levels of FoMo.

H3: Participants who spend more time looking at pictures of their Facebook friends and Instagram followers will score higher on FoMo.

Chapter 3

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine how individuals' social media use impacted their perceptions of self. In order to do that, a survey was distributed online using Amazon's Mechanical Turk and through a snowball sample. Institutional Review Board approval was gained (Appendix A).

Participants

Participants were between 18 – 25 years of age or older ($N = 75$). They implied consent and then were able to start the experiment. More than 80 percent of participants were women (86.7%). The average age was 21.80 with a standard deviation of 1.83 and a range of 18 to 25 years of age. More than three-fourths of participants were Caucasian (86.%), 5.3% were African-American, 4.0% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4.0% were Hispanic/Latino.

Procedures

A “hit” was generated on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Once the “hit” was published, anyone between the ages of 18 and 25 who was living in the United States could take the study for a payment of \$.20 (20 cents). After consenting to take the survey, participants answered questions measuring their social media use habits and several psychological variable scales. Snowball sampling was also utilized through online recruiting at Penn State University.

Measures

Social media usage. Social media usage—specifically the amount of time that users spent looking at their friends' and followers' photos—was assessed by the following questions: “How many HOURS per week do you spend looking at friends' pictures on Facebook?” “How

many HOURS per week do you spend looking at friends' pictures on Instagram?" Participants averaged 6.56 hours per week on Facebook and 6.81 hours a week on Instagram looking at friends' photos. Thirty percent (30.7%) of participants post photos to Instagram once a month, whereas 44.0% of participants never post photos to Facebook. More than half of participants (61.3%) have never deleted a photo on social media because it did not get enough "Likes." Around 62.7% have staged a photo for social media. Thirty-six percent (36%) of participants use editing applications (e.g., Afterlight, Pic Stitch, Photoshop Express). More than 65.3% have applied filters when posting photos on Instagram. A majority of participants (86.7%) have untagged themselves in a Facebook photo.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the Current Thoughts Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). This scale measures state self-esteem on three dimensions: performance self-esteem, social self-esteem, and appearance self-esteem. Participants described how true 20 questions were for them at that moment, based on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely). The seven items measuring **performance self-esteem** were: I feel confident about my abilities; I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance; I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read; I feel as smart as others; I feel confident that I understand things; I feel that I have less scholastic ability right now than others; and I feel like I'm not doing well.

The seven items measuring **social self-esteem** were: I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure; I feel self-conscious; I feel displeased with myself; I am worried about what other people think of me; I feel inferior to others at this moment; I feel concerned about the impression I am making; and I am worried about looking foolish.

The six items measuring **appearance self-esteem** were: I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now; I feel that others respect and admire me; I am dissatisfied with my weight;

I feel good about myself; I am pleased with my appearance now; and I feel unattractive. Self-esteem was not examined by dimension because the predictions did not call for it; therefore, an overall self-esteem score was used for analysis ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 3.13$, $SD = .43$). (Appendix B)

Neuroticism. Neuroticism was measured through the Neuroticism Scale of the Short-Form Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQR-S) (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985). Participants responded YES or NO to a series of 12 behavioral questions, with YES indicating that the behavior does apply to them and NO indicating that the behavior does not. The questions were: Does your mood often go up and down?; Do you ever feel ‘just miserable’ for no reason?; Are you an irritable person?; Are your feelings easily hurt?; Do you often feel ‘fed-up’?; Would you call yourself a nervous person?; Are you a worrier?; Would you call yourself tense or ‘highly strung’?; Do you worry too long after an embarrassing experience?; Do you suffer from ‘nerves’?; Do you often feel lonely?; and Are you often troubled about feelings of guilt? Participants were given a higher neuroticism score based on the more YES answers they provided. ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 5.75$, $SD = 3.85$). (Appendix B)

Fear of missing out. Fear of missing out was evaluated through the Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) Scale (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). Participants responded to 10 statements on a Likert-style scale, from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (Extremely true of me). The statements were: I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me; I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences than me; I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me; I get anxious when I don’t know what my friends are up to; It is important that I understand my friends “in jokes;” Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on; It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends; When I

have a good time it is important for me to share the details online (e.g. updating status); When I miss out on a planned get-together, it bothers me; and When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 2.68$, $SD = .78$). (Appendix B)

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine participants' use of social media and the impact social media has on perceptions of self. An online survey was employed.

Research Question 1 asked if there were gender differences when posting on social media. A linear regression was run with gender as the predictor variable and the question "did you ever do something just to take a picture of it to post on social media?" as the criterion variable. Results indicate gender was a good predictor of *doing something just to post a photo* ($\beta = -2.53, p = .01$). Forty-five percent (45%) of participants admitted to taking a photo just to post it on a social media account. Women were more likely to do this.

Descriptive statistics were used to answer Research Question 2. Research Question 2 asked why participants would use a filter on their Instagram photos. Results indicate the major reason individuals apply Instagram filters is to "improve their appearance and attractiveness" (38.8%). They also used filters to: improve the appearance of the location (24.5%), to make the photo artistic (22.4%), to compensate for physical flaws (4.1%), add vintage quality to the photo (4.1%), other reasons (4.1%).

Descriptive statistics were used to answer Research Question 3. Research Question 3a asked why people "untag" themselves in Facebook photos. The main reason participants untagged themselves in Facebook photos was because they did not look attractive in the photo (40%). Additional reasons people "untag" themselves is because they appeared intoxicated or inappropriate in the photo (26.2%), they felt the photo compromised their professional image

with employers (12.3%), the photo was spam (10.8%), the photo made them seem uncool (6.2%), or it threatened personal relationships (4.6%).

Research Question 3b asked how participants selected a Facebook profile photo. Results indicate participants select a Facebook profile photo because it makes them look attractive (26.7%). Facebook profile photos are also selected because: it commemorates an important moment in their lives (18.7%), they felt good about the way they looked in the photo (17.3%), their friends or family accompany them in the photo (13.3%), the photo exhibits an exciting location or scenery (12.0%), the photos shows an interesting activity (5.3%), and the photo honors someone (4.0%).

Hypothesis 1 predicted participants who spent more time looking at pictures of their Facebook friends and Instagram followers would score lower on self-esteem. A linear regression was run with an additive measure of time spent on Facebook and Instagram as the predictor variable and self esteem as the criterion variable. Results indicate social media use was not a good predictor of *self esteem* ($\beta = -.15, p = .21$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted participants who spent more time looking at pictures of their Facebook friends and Instagram followers would score higher on *neuroticism*. A linear regression was run with an additive measure of time spent on Facebook and Instagram as the predictor variable and self esteem as the criterion variable. Results indicate social media use was not a good predictor of *neuroticism* ($\beta = .14, p = .22$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted participants who spend more time looking at pictures of their Facebook friends and Instagram followers would score higher on FoMo. A linear regression was

run with an additive measure of time spent on Facebook and Instagram as the predictor variable and fear of missing out as the criterion variable. Results indicate social media use was not a good predictor of *fear of missing out* ($\beta = .18, p = .11$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Chapter 5

Discussion

A survey was designed to assess participants' use of social media and the impact social media has on self-esteem, neuroticism, and fear of missing out.

Hypothesis 1 posited participants who spent more time online viewing friends' pictures on Facebook and Instagram would have lower self-esteem. Surprisingly, results did not show evidence to support this hypothesis. This was inconsistent with previous findings (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Hypothesis 2 predicted participants who spent more time viewing friends' photos on Instagram and Facebook would score higher in neuroticism. Results did not support this hypothesis. Stopfer et al. (2014) found neuroticism to be the only trait of the big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and conscientiousness) that was not judged accurately through users' SNS profiles. They suggested neuroticism would be positively correlated with high Facebook and Instagram use. Because Stopfer et al. (2014) were not able to measure neuroticism and the current study did not find any support for this personality trait either, Neuroticism may be more difficult to measure than the other big five personality traits.

Hypothesis 3 stated participants who spent more time viewing friends' pictures on Facebook and Instagram would experience greater FoMo. The current study found no support for this hypothesis. This was one of the most surprising findings, as more than three-fourths of young adults have claimed to experience FoMo at some time (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Research Question 1 examined gender differences in the way that participants post on social media. Forty-five percent (45%) of participants claimed to have done something just so they could take a picture of it for social media. Because 86 percent of the participants in this study were female, further research is needed.

Research Question 2 asked why participants utilized Instagram filters to edit their photos. The top two reasons participants selected primarily dealt with enhancing the appearance and attractiveness—either of themselves or the location they are capturing. Of the participants, 38.8 percent said they filter Instagram photos to make themselves appear more attractive, and 24.5 percent used them to make the location or scenery more attractive. More than 65.3 percent of participants admitted to using filters on their Instagram photos.

Research Question 3a asked why participants “untag” themselves from Facebook photos. This question was unique because unlike the others that ask about habits of posting and editing new or existing content, this question reflects the habits of SNS users and how they exercise control to sensor out unfavorable content. The current study found the primary reason participants “untagged” themselves in Facebook photos was because they did not look attractive in the photo (40 percent). The second most popular reason was because the participant appeared intoxicated or inappropriate in the photo (26.2 percent). This further supports the idea SNS users practice impression management to emphasize certain personality traits and share photos that convey the best outward image of themselves (Wong, 2012).

Research Question 3b examined how participants select a Facebook profile picture. Results were consistent with previous research with participants favoring reasons focusing on appearance, sharing positive “snapshots” of their lives, and making their lives appear more attractive as a whole online. The top three most popular reasons for selecting a profile picture

were that it made the participant look attractive, it commemorated an important moment in their lives, and they felt good about the way they looked in the photo.

Limitations

The greatest limitation this study faced was the sample—both for lack of variety and overall number surveyed. Only 75 subjects completed the survey—86.7 percent of participants were female and 86 percent were Caucasian. A larger, more diverse (gender and ethnicity) sample was needed to truly test the hypotheses.

The mean age was 21.8. Many studies examining social media use and the impact on self-perceptions reflected participants under the age of 18. Those who are constantly surrounded by social pressure and peers of their own age are more likely to rely on the social support—“Likes” and comments—on SNS. As more adults join Facebook, more young people flock to Instagram and Snapchat—both photo-based SNS (Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015). If the study had surveyed a broader age range, or a younger sample of participants, results may have been more significant.

In a study of girls ages 14-17, 74 percent of girls agreed that, “most girls my age use social networking sites to make themselves look cooler than they really are” (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2010).

Additionally, the current study recruited participants using a snowball sampling method as well as through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Very few M-Turk workers completed the study because they were over the age of 25 and did not have both a Facebook and Instagram account.

Future Directions

Future studies of a similar nature could be conducted with a sample that includes more diversity. It may also be worth pursuing to see how results may differ if the study were replicated

only examining the impact of Facebook or Instagram—rather than both. Popular SNS Twitter was not examined in this study because it does not place an emphasis on visual, photo-based user content. While Snapchat does focus on “self-destructing” photos sent between friends or posted on a “Snap Story,” research on the SNS, which launched in 2011, was too limited to be included in this study. There is great potential for exploring this area of SNS, especially in relation to FoMo, since Snapcat highlights fun things that friends are doing in real time.

To take this study one step further, research on the relationship between online social support, reward systems, and dopamine in the brain could be explored. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in the brain that has systems activated when the human encounters stimuli they perceive as rewards—food, sex, addictive drugs, and even video games (Berridge & Robinson, 1998). Newer evidence shows those with Internet addictions may be predisposed to abnormalities in the dopaminergic brain system (Kim, Baik, Park, Kim, Choi, & Kim, 2011). Studies of those who seek rewards and validation through an obsession or addiction with the Internet open doorways to study the way that people do the same on social media—and how people obsess over the constant flow of social support they receive, such as “Likes” and comments.

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

Date: February 13, 2016

From: Philip Frum, IRB Analyst

To: Michel Haigh

Type of Submission:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Social Media and Perceptions of Self
Principal Investigator:	Michel Haigh/ Emily Duke
Study ID:	STUDY00004452
Submission ID:	STUDY00004452
Funding:	Not Applicable
Documents Approved:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods Section 2.0.docx (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument • Duke_HR-591.pdf (2), Category: IRB Protocol

The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.

Continuing Progress Reports are **not** required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.

Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.

Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual ([HRP-103](#)), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (<http://irb.psu.edu>). This correspondence should be maintained with your records.

Appendix B

Survey Scales

Current Thoughts Scale

Answer the questions using the following scale for what is true for you at this moment:

1 – Not at all 2 – A little bit 3 – Somewhat 4 – Very much 5 – Extremely

Measuring Performance Self-Esteem:

I feel confident about my abilities.

I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance.

I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read.

I feel as smart as others.

I feel confident that I understand things.

I feel that I have less scholastic ability right now than others.

I feel like I'm not doing well.

Measuring Social Self-Esteem:

I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure.

I feel self-conscious.

I feel displeased with myself.

I am worried about what other people think of me.

I feel inferior to others at this moment.

I feel concerned about the impression I am making.

I am worried about looking foolish.

Measuring Appearance Self-Esteem:

I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.

I feel that others respect and admire me.

I am dissatisfied with my weight.

I feel good about myself.

I am pleased with my appearance now.

I feel unattractive.

Neuroticism Scale

The Short-Form Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQR-S)

Please answer the following with:

YES

NO

Does your mood often go up and down?

Do you ever feel 'just miserable' for no reason?

Are you an irritable person?

Are your feelings easily hurt?

Do you often feel 'fed-up'?

Would you call yourself a nervous person?

Are you a worrier?

Would you call yourself tense or 'highly strung'?

Do you worry too long after an embarrassing experience?

Do you suffer from 'nerves'?

Do you often feel lonely?

Are you often troubled about feelings of guilt?

N (neuroticism) score = number of YES answers

Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) Scale

Please rate the following statements on the scale:

- 1 – Not at all true of me
- 2 – Slightly true of me
- 3 – Moderately true of me
- 4 – Very true of me
- 5 – Extremely true of me

I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me.

I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences than me.

I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me.

I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to.

It is important that I understand my friends "in jokes".

Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on.

It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends.

When I have a good time it is important for me to share the details online (e.g. updating status)

When I miss out on a planned get-together, it bothers me.

When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing.

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ACADEMIC VITA

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University | The Schreyer Honors College
The College of Communications | Bachelor of Arts in Advertising and Public Relations

Class of May 2016
Psychology Minor

EVENT PLANNING EXPERIENCE

Red Frog Events – Warrior Dash Mud Run 5K (~5,000-10,000 competitors avg.) **North America**
Operations Event Coordinator *May 2015 – October 2015*

❖ Traveled from site to site with Red Frog Events, assisting in all aspects of event set-up, execution, innovation, & teardown operations; Served as a liaison to onsite vendors, sponsors, and suppliers.

Red Frog Events – Firefly Music Festival (100,000 attendees) & Big Barrel Festival (30,000 attendees) **Dover, DE**
TOMS Attraction Manager/Kids and Family Event Manager *June 2015*

❖ Managed staffing, training, and supervision of approximately 25 volunteers and 30 artists in order to efficiently run various tasks ; Coordinated creative design, inventory, setup, and teardown of tent layout and materials for both festivals
❖ Sold nearly 600 pairs of TOMS shoes, contributing to the equivalent number of shoes being donated to children in need
❖ Oversaw the planning and execution of children's and family events, games, and crafts in the family area of Big Barrel

Metrospect Events **Philadelphia, PA**
Public Relations and Special Events Intern *May 2014 – August 2014*

❖ Conducted research of venues, acts, catering, partnerships, etc. for club and private events, weddings, and a black tie gala; Increased Twitter engagement by over 40% through creating marketing campaigns for event packages and DJ services

LEADERSHIP & SERVICE EXPERIENCE

The Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon (THON) *September 2015 – Present*
Special Events – Road to THON Celebration Captain

❖ Planning all aspects of the annual Road to THON Celebration Dinner at the Penn Stater Conference Center, a \$28,000 budget event, including invitations, menu, programs, timeline, speakers, video production, event design/décor, and setup/teardown responsibilities

Lion Ambassadors: The Penn State Student Alumni Corps *Jan. 2013 – Present*

❖ Organizes campus-wide events to commemorate the history and traditions of Penn State. Strengthens pride in past, present, and future students through alumni relations events and networking as a student Ambassador and representative of the university; Volunteers as a campus tour guide to provide in-depth admissions tours

State of State (www.psustateofstate.com): *Operations Director* *April 2014 – April 2015*

❖ Oversaw all aspects of venue acquisition, contract negotiations, and reservation management for both reception and conference events and served as a liaison with university event staff. Planned menu selection and catering orders for pre-conference and day-of
❖ Worked with Galaxy Event Production to design staging/lighting, audio/visual, draping, screens, décor, seating and floor plans; Coordinated registration for 400+ attendees, increased attendance by 42%; directed set-up and teardown

SKILLS & EVENT CERTIFICATION

Certified Wedding Planner- *The Bridal Society* *October 2014 – Present*

Computer Skills: 120WPM typist. **Software:** Mastery of utilizing Google Drive and Microsoft Office Suite software for business. **Editing:** Proficient using Adobe Photoshop Suite, InDesign, Final Cut Pro, and iMovie editing software.

Blogging/Webdesign: Knowledgeable about Wix, Wordpress, Pinterest, Weebly, Blogger, and Tumblr. **Event Analytics:** Experienced using event management platforms for event registration and analytics, such as EventBrite, Eventsprout, and Cvent. **Social Media:** Advanced-level use of social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) for marketing and branding, as well as Hootsuite, Klout and other functions of analytics. Able to work with multiple operating systems including Mac OSX and Windows.

Foreign Languages: Conversational working proficiency in Spanish

Floral Design: Designs for the Penn Stater Conference Center, Nittany Lion Inn, Penn State Career Services Center, and other events