DIGITAL BAGGAGE: INFLUENCES ON NEW STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS' SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND DIGITAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

This exploratory embedded case study examined the personal and professional social media use of entry-level student affairs professionals at four campuses from a state university system. Bounded by the profession of student affairs, this study focused on how entry-level student affairs professionals used social media platforms. Findings suggest that most entry-level professionals do not enter student affairs ready or willing to engage university communities on social media platforms and their respective campuses and graduate programs are not preparing them to do so. Study participants largely lacked a professional digital identity and were somewhat reticent about developing a robust professional digital identity. Contributing to their hesitancy, participants described their digital baggage – a collection of social media or social media-connected experiences that consciously or unconsciously influence personal or professional social media use.

Keywords: digital baggage, digital identity, entry-level, social media, social networking, student affairs

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Ninety-six percent of young adults (i.e., 18-29) in the United States use the Internet (Perrin & Duggan, 2015) and have significant exposure to computer-based technology daily. "They [young adults] have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Individuals with at least some college education use social networking sites (SNS) 10% more than individuals who only have a high school education or less (Pew Research Center, 2019), indicating an increased chance that students attending college are using SNS. Lastly, given that college students and those newest to the profession are digital natives (Moran, 2016), it is safe to assume most entry-level professionals, and the students with whom they work, are highly engaged with digital technology, which would include SNS.

Although scholars have studied how students use SNS, less is known about those educators who work closely with students, i.e., entry-level student affairs professionals, who likely use SNS personally and professionally (Dimock, 2019). The entry-level student affairs professional has five or fewer years of full-time work experience (Cilente, et al., 2006; Coleman & Johnson, 1990; Fey, 1991) and is a particularly important group to study due to less experience in the profession and more frequent contact with students (Burkard et al., 2004). Entry-level student affairs professionals hold a number of job titles, including, but not limited to, admissions counselor, residence hall director, student organization advisor, intramural athletics coordinator, and financial aid advisor (Burkard et al., 2004).

The leading associations for the field of student affairs have taken notice of the role technology must play in the lives of professionals. In 2015, members of ACPA-College Student Educators International (ACPA) and NASPA updated their 2010 professional competency areas for student affairs professionals (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). "Technology" was introduced as a new competency, solidifying the importance of integrating technology in student affairs work (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

The technology competency outlined foundational, intermediate, and advanced outcomes in the areas of data use and compliance, online learning environments, technical tools and software, and digital identity and citizenship. The digital identity and citizenship outcomes largely focused on the student affairs professional as a role model for reputation cultivation and professional engagement in virtual spaces (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). These outcomes are most germane to this study, and their addition reflects the need to better understand how professionals are engaging with social media.

Yet, if entry-level student affairs professionals are using SNS regularly, they are navigating social media with little institutional direction. Universities and colleges are slow to implement policies regarding appropriate social media use. In fact, only 17.7% of institutions in the Carnegie Classification data file have accessible social media policies (Pomerantz et al., 2015). Of those with policies, 80.3% had one policy guiding the institution, 11.1% had policies for one or more campus departments within the institution, and 8.6% had policies for both the institution and for one or more campus departments. Further, in cases where there were multiple social media policies, they lacked cohesion at the departmental, divisional, and campus levels (Pomerantz et al., 2015).

Without definitive guidance, campus leaders must consider whether institution-level social media policies are needed, given the implications of social media use and how it may impact the institution. When social media policies and guidelines are unclear or non-existent, staff members tend to post using their own discretion or their own perception of institutional and professional context (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). This can leave staff members vulnerable to disciplinary action or scrutiny from colleagues and other stakeholders

if their perceptions regarding posting guidelines are not in line with those of the institution. Issues are compounded as digital technology, and digital identity are not sufficiently integrated into graduate program curricula and in professional development opportunities within ACPA and NASPA (Cabellon & Junco, 2015).

Because there are so many unanswered questions about digital use among student affairs professionals (Cabellon & Payne-Kirchmeier, 2016), the professional guidance they receive, and the unique positionality of most entry-level student professionals as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), the purpose of this study is to explore entry-level student affairs professionals' digital identity through their social media use. Thus, the primary research question guiding this study is: How do entry-level student affairs professionals describe their digital identity?

Relevant Literature

Digital identity is a method of presenting oneself online through the construction of personal and professional personas conveyed through online digital platforms, including SNS (Ahlquist, 2016). Reflecting a similar notion, Junco (2014) defined self-presentation as "the conscious or unconscious process by which people try to influence the perception of their image, typically through social interactions" (p. 111). The manner in which individuals engage, share, promote, and present themselves online is "intricately connected to their overall identity" (Stoller, 2012, para. 2) and no longer viewed as something separate from their "offline identity."

As mentioned previously, research regarding the technology use of student affairs administrators is limited (Cabellon & Payne-Kirchmeier, 2016). Given the lack of literature in this area, understanding college student technology use and identity matters as it may inform how entry-level student affairs professional use technology given a similar generational orientation and familiarity with social media platforms as the students with whom they serve. Brown's (2016) exploration of college students' conceptualization of self and identity in light of their digital and social media use is an example of research that may inform technology use of entry-level student affairs professionals.

Brown (2016) found that students were heavily curating content for social media platforms, sometimes multiple platforms. When constructing an online identity and posting information on social media, how they believed others would perceive them online influenced their online behavior. In addition, they were selective of the content they posted, depending on the audience of a particular social media platform. Also, they believed that constructing the "perfect" online image involved not posting boring or negative content and thought social media "likes" were very important and served as a sign of external validation (Brown, 2016). To add to the complexity, students sometimes constructed different digital identities for each of the social media platforms they used (Brown, 2016).

Similar to the college students in Brown's (2016) research, Kimmons and Veletsianos's (2014) participants also carefully constructed content for SNS based on how they believed others would perceive them. Kimmons and Veletsianos studied the relationship between teacher educator SNS participation and found that participants only shared certain parts of their identity online based on what the participants believed to be acceptable by the audience. Participants were students in the first semester of their teacher education program and required to participate in an online social media training meant to spark conversation and critical reflection on the topic. What the participants shared online was authentic to their sense of self, but was "a carefully constructed portrait, intended to convey a certain message" (Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2014, p. 295). They theorized that online identities are a "constellation of interconnected fragments or.... acceptable identity fragments

(AIF)" (p. 295).

Conceptual Framework

I used and built upon the model that emerged from the findings of Ahlquist's (2016) study about the digital identity of senior student affairs officers to inform my work focused on entry-level student affairs professionals. Ahlquist's research provided a holistic perspective on the social media use of 16 senior students affairs officers and suggested a "personal yet strategic approach [to social media] for digital identity, relationship building, and digital leadership in student affairs" (p. 36). From the research, she developed a *digital decision-making model*. This model is the guiding proposition of my study and informed my online questionnaire and participant interview questions, which I describe in more detail in the methods section.

The digital decision-making model is designed to help senior student affairs professionals personally explore their digital identity or to help educate others on digital identity (Ahlquist, 2016). The model features a four-pronged approach meant to guide student affairs professionals through a reflection on their digital identity and social media use and includes four guiding questions for each area or "prong:" *technology tools and strategy, user engagement, digital contribution, and intended purpose*.

Technology Tools and Strategies

The purpose of the guiding questions related to technology tools and strategies is to give student affairs professionals the opportunity to reflect upon which social media platform(s) to use, what their posting strategies might be, and where to find guidance when exploring and choosing platform(s). Part of social media strategy is also knowing when to post content to maximize follower engagement. One of Ahlquist's (2016b) guiding questions was, "Can you imagine yourself logging on in the early morning, at lunchtime, or in the evening to engage with your campus community?" (p. 38). I asked a variation of this question in my online questionnaire to gain a better understanding of when entry-level student affairs professionals engaged their campus community online.

User Engagement

The purpose of the user engagement questions is to help professionals identify ways to engage students and other university constituents through various social media platforms. This area has a particular focus on setting boundaries with students and supervisees (Ahlquist, 2016b) including this guiding question, "Who will you connect with, or not connect with, on each social platform? What are the benefits for connecting with those you do allow into your network?" (p. 39). In Ahlquist's (2016b) study, for example, all administrators expressed comfort in connecting with students and other professionals on Twitter. Some professionals were less likely to connect with these groups on Facebook because they chose to keep their connections personal on that particular platform. I utilized all of Ahlquist's guiding questions in the user engagement area using two in the online questionnaire and two in the individual interview. This helped me better understand professional resource utilization, how they balance connecting with current college students, and with whom they will and will not connect with on social media.

Digital Contribution

The purpose of the digital contribution questions is to highlight the digital content that student affairs professionals post (Ahlquist, 2016b). In Ahlquist's study senior student affairs officers made various types of posts, including the appreciation and celebration of others, event promotion, holidays, sharing news or information, and replying directly to others. I gathered similar data to discover more about the content that entry-level student affairs professionals post on social media. These guiding questions prompted participants to consider how their personal and professional values play out in a digital space: "Think about the

value you hope to contribute to your campus and profession. How does this live out digitally?" (pp. 39-40).

All four digital contribution questions were important for me to explore in the individual interview. In conjunction with analyzing social media posts of the participants, the answers to these questions provided rich information about how entry-level student affairs professionals describe their digital identity.

Intended Purpose

The intended purpose questions in Ahlquist's (2016b) model encourage student affairs professionals to think deliberately about how to engage on social media. Social media is an opportunity for instant engagement on platforms and for real-time sharing of information with the campus community (Ahlquist, 2016b). Are professionals using their social media platform(s) for marketing, or, as Ahlquist (2016b) found, is social media engagement a significant meaning-making tool by asking, "How does intentionality currently factor into your digital identity? On which platform can you apply a deeper purpose?" (p. 40). Like the digital contribution questions, all four of the intended purpose questions were asked in the individual interview and provided rich information about how entry-level student affairs professionals described their digital identity through their intentional engagement on the platform(s).

Methods

I conducted an exploratory embedded case study (Yin, 2003) to examine a bounded system over time. Individual participants are embedded in the case; that is, they exist to inform the case of the entry-level career student affairs professional at a state university system. More specifically I was interested in the phenomenon of social media use of entry-level student affairs professionals.

Participants

Study participants were entry-level student affairs professionals who worked in the field for five or fewer years at one of the four system institutions. The system collectively serves 75,000 students amongst the four campuses. I used convenience sampling to recruit participants via gatekeepers, institutional colleagues, and direct communication with potential participants. Each of the four campuses were represented in the study.

Five of the respondents self-identified as men and eight identifying as women. One respondent was Black or African American, two Hispanic or Latino/a/x, one Hispanic or Latino/a/x and White, one Native American or Alaskan Native and White, and eight White. All participants work in student affairs at their respective institution with six participants working in career development, three in residential life, one in multicultural affairs, one in wellness initiatives, one in testing and accessibility, and one in campus activities. Each participant decided on their own pseudonym for the study. See Table 1 for more information about the participants.

Data Collection

I used three methods of data collection to triangulate the data sources, including an online questionnaire, individual interviews, and participants' posts on one social media platform. First, I asked study participants to complete an online questionnaire. These data provided descriptive information about the participants to help guide the interview process, as well as initial insights into participant demographics (see Table 1) social media usage, and social media management.

Second, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. Thirteen interviews were conducted via Zoom ranging from 26 minutes to 53 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim. Although Ahlquist's (2016) digital decision-making model reflection questions informed my interview protocol, I used a semi-structured interview protocol so that I had

flexibility in interview question wording, question order, and allowed me to "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

Third, I collected social media posts made by each participant on one predetermined social media platform, with each participant providing consent for me to follow their account. Participants were asked to identify the platform they used most in the questionnaire. I confirmed that platform during the interview and changed five participants' social media platforms based on further conversation about social media use. Nearly half of participant social media engagement happened on LinkedIn, which is not surprising given the number of career development professionals in the study and their charge to engage employers and educate students on the platform.

Data Analysis

I took the following steps to validate the accuracy of the information as described by Creswell (2009) once raw data was collected for all data sources. I created a case record to bring together transcribed interviews and social media posts for analysis (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009). I identified over 200 open codes (Merriam, 2009), which allowed for construction of categories and a description of the participants (Creswell, 2009). I conducted an inductive analysis using emerging codes, but kept the conceptual framework (Ahlquist, 2016) and extant literature in mind to determine what may be relevant to the case record (Creswell, 2009). I constructed a *description*, or detailed rendering of the study participants' social media experience as entry-level student affairs professionals, that allowed for the generation of themes through coding (Creswell, 2009). More specifically, I reviewed all codes and then determined how they were related to each other to determine the themes. Once coding themes emerged, I wrote a narrative to represent the findings that included a detailed discussion of themes with multiple participant perspectives and quotes (Creswell, 2009).

Positionality

Most of my visible identities (White, male, able-bodied) are in the majority and had the potential to influence how participants saw me as a researcher, as they may have identified differently. I worked in student affairs for approximately 7 years, and most recently, worked seven years in career development. I have personally and professionally been active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Because some of my study participants also worked at the same institution, I personally knew three of the participants. I did not exclude these individuals from the participant pool but acknowledge including them in the study presents potential for me to interpret their data differently.

Trustworthiness

To enhance trustworthiness, Gibbs (2007) suggested extensive documentation of case study procedures, including a detailed case study protocol and the creation of a database. In this spirit, I kept a methodological journal to document my procedures. I triangulated data sources, as noted previously, which strengthened the credibility and dependability of my findings. I also utilized member checking to make sure that I accurately portrayed participant findings. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcript during a 2-week period after the transcription was available.

Findings

My study uncovered a critical consideration for the social media use of entry-level student affairs professional that leads to *digital baggage*. Digital baggage is a collection of social media or social media-connected experiences that consciously or unconsciously influence personal or professional social media use. While the term "baggage" is

largely considered negative when used to describe emotional impact, positive experiences (i.e., baggage) can also influence social media use. These experiences could include past high school or college experiences, past or current job roles, self-reflection, self-teaching, or the potential impact on current and future career. More external social media influencers may include the perceptions of family, scare tactics aimed at limiting or stopping social media use, professional social media policies or guidelines (or lack thereof), community, cultural influence, and/or campus climate. These influencers of social media use and digital identity are further detailed below.

Out of the 13 participants, only six had a professional social media presence. All of them were on LinkedIn and worked in career development. When reviewing participant social media posts, only Quincy consistently posted, commented, shared, and reacted to others' content related to his position in student affairs. Chris, Tibet, and Kali were consistently active on Twitter and Facebook, but did not engage as professionals in the field. The rest of the participants rarely or never shared their own content, but Alex and Vega "liked" posts quite often. Dana identified LinkedIn as the social media platform she used most frequently, but did not have any interactions on the platform during the 7-month timeframe social media posts were collected. Carlitos did not participate in any social media platforms personally or professionally.

For those who communicated with students via LinkedIn, they tended to share campus resources, recognize student accomplishments, promote student organization events, model appropriate social media use, and engage with students to positively reinforce their use of platforms like LinkedIn. However, only two participants reported daily social media interactions with students and one participant reported weekly social media interactions (2-3 days per week). Most participants reported much less frequent interaction.

Lack of Formal Training and Guidance

Overall, participants were aware that their institution and departments had social media guidelines but only Carlitos and Tibet, both in Residential Life, could cite one specifically. The majority of participants did not receive social media training for their position nor had they reviewed the university's social media guidelines. When asked about institutional guidelines for appropriate social media use, Dana, who has worked in student affairs for a year, said, "I'm sure there are [guidelines], but if there are, I haven't really read them or seen them yet."

Only two participants learned about technology or social media as a professional competency in college. Laura learned about social media from her undergraduate program that had an emphasis in strategic communications. She shared: "Junior and senior year is when we really focused on the professionalism of social media and how what you can say can be either a deterrent for your job or it can definitely help with your job." Chris learned about technology during his student affairs graduate program but admitted learning was a "little foggy" and did not remember the context in which he learned about the competencies. Without much professional or institutional direction, participants discussed other factors that influenced their decisions regarding social media use.

Learning from Experience

Participants learned about personal and professional social media use through previous college and work experience, on the job, and from self and others. Previous college and work experience greatly influenced most participants' use of social media and how they engaged as an entry-level career professional. Learning about social media on the job was specific to a job role that required using social media for a particular function (e.g., training or teaching students about LinkedIn, promoting events on social media). Learning from self and others including self-reflection, self-teaching, and the perceptions of others, also influenced social media use.

Past is prologue. Participants came to their current positions with many other life experiences. Those experiences informed how they approached social media in their current jobs. In the online questionnaire, all participants identified students as a main audience with whom they want to generally engage in their position. All but two respondents reported being "very comfortable" the remaining reported being "somewhat comfortable" when engaging students in their position and profession. However, when asked about the frequency in which they interact with students on social media, over half of the participants said "never" with only two participants reporting "daily" social media interactions with students. Four participants reported not using social media as a part of their professional role.

Emma's approach to social media was influenced by her experiences as an undergraduate student athlete, graduate assistant in athletics, and full-time professional who worked with college student athletes. As an undergraduate student athlete, Emma's coach required her to report teammates who posted about alcohol:

> When I was team captain for 2 years, if any of my teammates would post [photos with alcohol in them] I would have to tell coach immediately and it would be taken down, like complete scare tactic. And now I'm thinking like nothing would have happened, but it, yeah, it, it was scary at the time and definitely hurt some relationships at the time having to do that.

As a graduate assistant in athletics, there were rules against Emma friending college student athletes on social media platforms until she or the student graduated. She took a similar approach when moving into her professional roles in athletics and career services by not connecting with student athletes on Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. She did, however, begin to connect with them on social media platforms that she identified as "professional accounts" including Twitter and LinkedIn.

Given the confidential nature of her past role as a victim advocate, Kali could not post about specific client interactions nor share personally identifiable information on social media; these critical limitations made her hesitant to use social media in other ways, which eliminated the opportunity to directly engage with a population with which she worked so closely. Kali also discussed intentionally not interacting with clients that sent direct messages to their office social media accounts. She described this non-interaction as a line that should not be crossed and seemed to allude to the importance of a separation between work and home life.

Kali's past experiences regarding social media informed how she participated in social media in her current position working in wellness initiatives. In the online questionnaire, Kali shared that she never interacted with supervisors or students on social media. However, when asked about her social media connections during her interview, she shared that she is now connected with her supervisor on Facebook, but not with students, "I do have her on Facebook now so that doesn't really bother me, but students, clients, I would not want to, I would generally avoid that".

Rachel reported being comfortable connecting with students, colleagues, and campus leadership on professional social media platforms like LinkedIn. However, much like Kali, Rachel was not as comfortable connecting with those groups on social media accounts like Instagram or Facebook. She is a trained counselor and shared this perspective: "I've been just trained to be very private and not disclos[e] a lot of information, just for potential clients who might be trying to find me on social media. So that's kind of informed sort of keeping them separate".

Dana, who was once active-duty military and has a spouse who is still active-duty, said the military frowned upon connecting with other soldiers on social media, particularly with the soldiers you led. This mindset has stuck with her but caused

her to question connecting with the students with whom she works:

> I do have student workers with me. I've got 10 of them. And so it is weird trying to like figure out how, what is acceptable here? You know what I mean? Like, are they friends, but I see them as like "Nope," I'm still [in] that military mentality of we're not supposed to be friends, so I try and keep it professional, and I don't always see social media as being a platform for professionalism.

Finally, Vega shared that because she grew up with social media and worked in corporate human resources, she knew that employers looked at candidates' social media accounts. This experience influenced her approach to social media. She shared that there are certain things that you can and cannot say on social media, it is important to use inclusive language, and messaging should be understood by and not offensive to diverse student and employer populations.

On the job training. Participants came to their student affairs role with several experiences that influenced their approach to social media use within the profession. Current institutional roles also influenced their approach to social media. Before working in career development, Alex was not very active on LinkedIn and described her profile as "bare bones." She became more active on LinkedIn and had to learn more about it to educate students. Additionally in this new role, she began to connect with work colleagues on Facebook when she had not previously done so. She began to think more deliberately about what she posted on Facebook and paid closer attention to what others tagged her in. Alex maintains that Instagram is her most personal social media account. Her settings for this platform are private meaning only approved followers can see her content. On Instagram, she does not connect with co-workers and only connects with select family members. Alex used a varied approach to each platform: professional (LinkedIn), personal (Instagram), and a blended approach (Facebook). Rachel intentionally connected with students on LinkedIn in her role as the instructor of a career explorations course so she can grade their use of LinkedIn for an assignment.

In testing services, Dana worked with students with disabilities. She said she would not be comfortable engaging this student population on social media. She explained that if her department created a Facebook page and tried to engage students on the platform, it could potentially violate student privacy. Having a positive graduate student and employee experience at her institution, Vega enjoyed posting about her campus on social media, "I started going to school at [the institution], and I started working at [the institution] and now I'm like, oh [the institution], everything is great. Yes, let's post about this cuz its great."

Self and others. Self-reflection on life experience, self-teaching, and the perceptions of others also influenced social media use. Alex reported the most formidable influences were becoming more open-minded as one got older, having children, and wanting to grow as a professional. Quincy would post daily about *what* he was doing (e.g., eating, going to the park) and now posts more about the essence of *who* he is as a person and professional, "I am a Latino person. I worked with diversity. I'm also a part of the LGBTQ community, so that's how I decide to shar[e] stuff that reflects who I am."

Both Emma and Willow taught themselves how to use social media. Emma learned about LinkedIn so she could host workshops for students.

> I think I was pretty much all self-taught when it came to LinkedIn and running workshops on how to update your LinkedIn. Everything was kind of through my own time…but I've never sat in a workshop on this is how you do this and would present it to students.

Willow spoke about social media learning more broadly over time. It started in high school when she got her first smart phone. She began using Facebook and then Instagram and other platforms, and through experience over time, she became knowledgeable about how to use them. In addition to learning from personal use, she used YouTube videos, online articles, and even started an online course about social media use. Despite her experiential knowledge, Willow struggled with the idea of connecting with students on social media, given their closeness in age and being a recent college graduate herself. She was wary about students seeing her curse on social media or posting a personal photo wearing a bathing suit or crop top and shorts in the summer. She shared, "I just feel like it's just too close for them to feel like I'm not maybe an authority figure or they will lose professional respect for me or something along those lines."

Community

Community meant different things to different people and for this study, community was important. Living in a small community, Alex did not want to be the "talk of the town" for something she posted on social media, as she saw it happen to others. She noted that professionally, this could be detrimental to a future job search in the area as "people talk" and remember when these things happen.

Depending on the people she connected with on a given platform, Alex was more comfortable posting her personal opinions:

> I think I am more open to sharing my personal opinions on stuff on Instagram. Just a little bit more than I am on Facebook just because I have a lot of family members who are, just, have a very different mindset. I have such a mix of people with different mindsets, and I don't want to offend anyone or anything like that. So on Facebook, I don't share as much personal opinions. Where Instagram I'm more willing to share more of my personal opinion.

This approach is not surprising, given Alex's views on relationship building: "building relationships is really, really important for growing your professional career, but I want to build them professionally in every area of my life, rather than letting more of a personal matter, kind of come into it."

Quincy used social media to serve as a digital mentor and cultural advocate for the Latinx community on campus. He believed it was important for students to see a Latino professional still "tied to its roots, to its language" by posting content in Spanish, speaking Spanish in live videos, showcasing the culture through food and music, and even showing emotion regarding the treatment of immigrants at the southern border of the United States. Quincy shared a specific example:

> The other day I share a video of me making a flour tortilla with avocado, which is something that it's really cultural, but I don't think any normal, regular person will know that in Mexico, we like to eat a tortilla with avocado inside. That's it, and I would like to believe that the students would appreciate that, "Hey, he's just like us. He's eating a tortilla with avocado."

Campus climate. Several professionals spoke about the negative environment surrounding social media use on their campuses. While Rachel was not on Twitter, she heard that colleagues' social media posts were being monitored by campus administration. This sense of being watched contributed to a decreased comfort in posting, "I've been at [my institution] for 4 years and particularly in the last 2, just given the climate has felt particularly like… [the] comfort level has gone down even further." Participants mentioned campus politics, being reprimanded, getting "in trouble," being in "hot water," being asked to bite their tongue, feeling the "pressures" of posting, and

posting personal opinions that might impact work as risks or feelings associated with posting about campus happenings on social media.

On one campus, the campus community members were engaged around a highly contested, long-standing statue. A participant shared that they received guidance from institutional leadership on how to speak about and respond to questions regarding the statue. The participant disagreed with the institution's approach and was comfortable re-sharing information on social media if it was factual, even if it went against university talking points:

> I would be very comfortable in doing that because it's true. At one point I was a student here at [institution]. Twice. So it's like, yes, I definitely understand what you're saying and it puts me in a difficult position because I work for the university, but I'm definitely not going to let it stop my voice.

Emma felt more constrained with her social media communication because she was asked to remove a post about George Floyd from her personal social media account until the director of the department came out with a statement. She understood why she was asked to wait but felt that not posting anything about the situation went against her personal beliefs, especially since she posted from a personal social media account not attached to a university account.

Laura was a new professional on campus but also familiar with the institution as a recent graduate. This "newness" came with a discomfort when considering whether to post on social media about race relations on campus given her past and present position on campus:

> I feel like I don't necessarily want to say a whole bunch on that subject because I can see how the administration is working for it, but then I can also see how there's not been as much action taken. So like that I just don't feel as comfortable posting about, but I do see the validity of posting on it. But I don't feel as personally comfortable about it because I'm so new into the job and just being on the other side of it.

There was a particular race-related topic that Laura was compelled to share on social media but was unsure how to best word a message encouraging others to read about the Black student experience. It was not until a senior administrator in student affairs re-tweeted the hashtag with a message of support, that she was comfortable doing the same.

Other participants felt positive about the environment surrounding social media on their campus. Willow found her campus to be particularly supportive and collaborative on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. She shared that her institution was active on social media with the marketing and communications office posting through the "big institution accounts" often and re-sharing other department's content. She also noticed increased social media use by departments, student organizations, and associations given the lack of in-person interaction and on campus operations limited by the pandemic. Ultimately, all participants assessed the temperature of the climate related to social media and determined whether posting was worth the professional personal risk and reward.

Discussion

In this study, I sought to understand how entry-level student affairs professionals described their digital identity. Study findings highlighted several factors that influenced social media use including lack of formal training and guidance, learning from experience, and community. I originally assumed that entry-level professionals would come to the field with substantial exposure to experience with social media growing up with digital and social technologies. Given this history with technology, I anticipated entry-level professionals

would have a robust, professional social media presence and would be more likely to connect with students on social media given this similar generational orientation (Dimock, 2019). However, I found that most entry-level professionals were not ready or willing to engage university communities on social media platforms. In fact, previous experiences, both lived and observed, deterred some professionals from doing so. They largely lacked a professional digital identity as they began their first student affairs position, and were somewhat reticent about developing a robust professional digital identity. Once I discovered that my initial assumptions about entry-level career professionals' proficiency with social media was inaccurate, I added an additional set of interview questions for participants who indicated (on the online questionnaire) that they did not use social media as a part of their professional roles.

For most entry-level student affairs professionals in this study, digital baggage appeared to result in low-to-no professional social media use. Thus, if technological competency, including social media competency, is necessary in the field, entry-level student affairs professionals should reflect upon how their digital baggage influences their digital identity and assess or reassess how entry-level career professional social media use can impact their career.

For participants, social media training at work was sporadic, at best, and typically took place for job-related functions that required specific social media knowledge only like learning about LinkedIn to educate students. Participants indicated that learning about social media primarily took place on the job or it was self-taught. They also tended not to review their campus social media policy or guidelines. This is not surprising given the lack of training, guidance, and policy at the system, campus, and departmental levels and seems to signal either a gap in the espoused value of technology as a student affairs competency or an assumption that entry-level professionals already have the necessary competencies.

Participants are acutely aware of the consequences and risks associated with social media use growing up in a time when society viewed teenager social media use negatively (Boyd, 2014). Junco (2014) attributed this negativity to how social media use was portrayed by mainstream media as a detriment to the development of young people and further defined this view as an *adult normative perspective*, or a view that does not take into consideration the perspective youth have on social media. This is important to note as the profession attempts to provide guidance on social media use, particularly if this guidance is relying heavily on the knowledge and expertise of more senior student affairs professionals who may have less exposure to or an inherently negative view of social media. Additionally, Dana mentioned the possibility of violating student privacy by creating a Facebook page for the testing center, signaling the *potential* for risk would deter her from using social media for her office.

Much like the senior student affairs officers in Ahlquist's (2016) study, some entry-level professionals were comfortable connecting with students and other professionals on social media while some were less likely to connect with these groups to keep their social media connections personal. When engaging professionally on social media, entry-level professionals engaged with students similarly to how senior student affairs officers did including the appreciation and celebration of others, event promotion, sharing news or information, and replying directly to social media comments or posts (Ahlquist, 2016).

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study demonstrate the need for entry-level student affairs professionals to further explore their digital identity and how to incorporate social media into their role in student affairs. Given their low-to-no professional engagement on social media, most participants are not meeting the foundational outcome proficiency

standards in the digital identity area of the technology competency as outlined by the *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Once entry-level student affairs professionals have mastered competency in these areas, they should continue to intermediate and advanced outcomes aimed at cultivating a digital identity presence and training students and colleagues to do the same (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Findings provide empirical evidence that graduate preparation programs can use to educate future professionals about technology competencies. I recommend that graduate curriculum, either in formal coursework or within assistantship and internship experiences, consider asking students to participate in the following: conducting a self-assessment of proficiency in technology competency (ACPA & NASPA, 2015); using Alquist's (2016) digital decision-making model to reflect on digital identity; completing an assignment that addresses the factors that influence the social media use of student affairs professionals; and developing skills to interpret university policy surrounding social media or to appropriately engage in social media as a professional. With the increasing rate that technology integrates into higher education, the curricula should be scholarly and relevant for a course on current issues in higher education or a on leadership in higher education, particularly if the existing curriculum had a focus on digital leadership or the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies. For those already in the profession who have not earned a graduate degree or have come from graduate programs without an emphasis on social media use, professional development at conferences becomes important and the study findings can inform conference presentations on navigating social media as an entry-level professional and professional development workshops on creating or assessing their digital identity in the profession. While most participants earned a master's degree, only three participants attended a HESA master's program. This further notes the importance of professional development for entry-level professionals and discredits the idea that all entry-level student affairs professionals attend HESA master's programs.

With the addition of the technology competency to the Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators (ACPA & NASPA, 2015), the profession has required those in the field to have the skills and knowledge to integrate technology into their work. Social media policy and guidelines for the participants in this study were non-existent and only one campus directly addressed personal use of social media. Each campus does have guidelines for employees who administer university social media accounts, but these professionals are engaging students differently as a university, department, or office. There is an opportunity for the system, each campus, or division of student affairs to provide guidelines and training for individual employees who have or want to have a professional presence on social media. Guidelines and policy should not only outline what *should not* be done on social media but should also include what *could* be done with resources and examples. Training could include relevant policy and guidelines (Pasquini, 2014), a digital identity exercise (Ahlquist, 2016), identification of goals for professional social media use, types of social media content to share based on functional area, how to approach social media and controversial topics, and an in-depth training on LinkedIn for those who are still considering a social media platform.

Recommendations For Future Research

Ahlquist's (2016) digital decision-making model was designed to help professionals explore their digital identity. This study confirmed that Ahlquist's model did allow for participants to explore their identities, which was the goal of the study. The digital identity of two career stages in the field of student affairs have now been examined: the entry-level and senior student affairs professional (Ahlquist, 2016). This framework should

continue to be examined with other student affairs professionals including mid-career professionals or in certain functional areas (e.g., residential life professionals, Greek life professionals). Additionally, deeper exploration regarding the digital identity of particular populations is also warranted, including intersections of identity. Lastly, future researchers can build on my work and the concept of digital baggage—as this study is the first of its kind, it can inform future studies to expand the knowledge of this topic.

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Table 1

Participant Information

Participant Pseudonym & Pronouns	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Student Affairs Functional Area	Time in Student Affairs	Social Media Platform Analyzed
Willow S. (she/her/hers)	Woman	White	Career Development	3 years	Instagram
Vega T. (she/her/hers)	Woman	Hispanic or Latino/a/x, White	Career Development	3 years	LinkedIn
Chris B. (he/him/his)	Man	Black or African American	Residential Life	2 years	Twitter
Laura T. (she/her/hers)	Woman	White	Campus Activities	0-12 months	Twitter
Quincy J. (he/him/his)	Man	Hispanic or Latino/a/x	Multicultural Affairs	2 years	LinkedIn
Rachel D. (she/her/hers)	Woman	White	Career Development	1 year	LinkedIn
Kali H. (she/her)	Woman	White	Wellness Initiatives	0-12 months	Facebook
Carlitos C. (he/him/his)	Man	Hispanic or Latino/a/x	Residential Life	5 years	No Social Media Platform Analyzed
Alex S. (she/her/hers)	Woman	White	Career Development	2 years	LinkedIn
Emma S. (she/her/hers)	Woman	White	Career Development	0-12 months	LinkedIn
Tibet S. (he/him/his)	Man	White	Residential Life	3 years	Facebook
Phillip F. (he/him/his)	Man	White	Career Development	2 years	LinkedIn
Dana W. (she/her/hers)	Woman	Native American or Alaska Native, White	Testing Services	1 year	LinkedIn (No posts found)