Four	# Didn't We Meet on LinkedIn?

When I was exploring if hiring would be a good research topic, I had a long interview with Tiffany about all she did on LinkedIn as she prepared to graduate from Indiana University. I asked her at the end of the interview if she had any questions for me. "Yes," she said, "how do I use LinkedIn?" I was so confused: "But you just told me how you use LinkedIn." "I know, but how do you *really* use it?" This may have been my first interview that ended with "What is LinkedIn good for?" but I soon got used to being asked this question. The older job seekers I interviewed in the Bay Area were often equally uncertain about LinkedIn. Many talked about how a LinkedIn profile was essential for a job search. LinkedIn's importance was widely acknowledged. But the details about why LinkedIn was in fact so important were often a bit vague, and how to use LinkedIn effectively was often an open question.

Over a decade since LinkedIn's founding, many people are confused about what it is good for. What are you supposed to do with your profile? To what extent is it similar to a resume? To Facebook? And, as importantly, are there ways that you can use LinkedIn that risk offending people inadvertently because you violate a widespread rule of etiquette?

Almost everyone believed there was a LinkedIn etiquette, and part of why someone might attend a workshop on using LinkedIn was to learn what this etiquette might be. But what exactly this eti-

quette is isn't always clear, leaving me to wonder how a new medium acquires widely acknowledged social rules. At the same time, LinkedIn is purposefully designed to reflect the new metaphor of self-as-business; that is, your LinkedIn profile is meant to be a marketing document through which you can not only showcase your skills, your experiences, and your alliances—all part of the self-as-business bundle—but also continually reveal how you are enhancing yourself. LinkedIn effectiveness and LinkedIn etiquette—these were the concerns that dominated the workshops I attended and the conversations I had with job seekers about LinkedIn, concerns that at the same time address the complicated question of how to operate as a self that is also a business.

Engaging with the Newness of a New Medium

When a new medium is introduced, a widespread etiquette doesn't spring up to accompany it out of the blue. It takes time and work. It is often an open question: Who is responsible for deciding what the etiquette should be? Is it the company? Schools? Government organizations? The users? And which users?

LinkedIn doesn't come with a manual, although there are many online and magazine articles that offer guidelines.[1] And LinkedIn will often make etiquette suggestions through its online help articles, or by sending emails that encourage users to congratulate members of their networks—for their work anniversaries, for their new job, for their birthday. Organizations funded by federal and state governments often provide workshops on how to use LinkedIn. And users will sometimes consult with each other about what to do with their profile.

Yet not all online sites get the same kind of attention from job seekers that LinkedIn does, or become the focus of the same kind of anxiety. Facebook doesn't come with a manual either, and even though I asked about Facebook as well in my interviews, no one asked me, "How do you *really* use Facebook?" LinkedIn, the *professional* social media site, seems to have sparked more concerns about effectiveness

and etiquette than Facebook, Twitter, or other sites. When people were worried about Facebook, they mainly discussed their fears that their Facebook presence might be used as a mark against them by those hiring. Job seeking inspires people to delete Facebook photographs or posts, but not much else. In short, different media inspire different types of concerns, even media that are created at almost the same time. And different concerns about media will lead to different kinds of attempts to standardize users' practices.

Every new medium reorganizes the ways that people communicate, changing the participant structure in some way. For example, while emails are often understood in relation to letters, an email's participant structure is different than a letter's in ways that matter. An email indicates who the author of the message is by using an email address that is linked to a password that supposedly isn't shared or hacked. A letter indicates the author through the signature (often handwritten). Obviously, email passwords can be guessed and signatures can be forged. The techniques people use with a particular medium to guarantee that the supposed author is in fact the author can be undercut. An email also circulates differently than a letter does—forwarded instead of mailed or faxed. An email can be sent to others in different ways than a letter can through the functions of reply-all, cc, and bcc. This difference can be significant, as anyone who has had a communication mishap because of reply-all or bcc knows a bit too well. The medium's structure will influence who can be the author or audience for a statement, how many people can be the author or audience, and who is likely to be considered the author or person addressed.

Because each new medium changes a participant structure, a new medium often prompts users to wrestle with the question of how to ensure that everyone uses the medium properly and agrees on what misuse might mean. One of the reasons that this is such a pressing issue is that communication is the result of a complex history of compromises that people have made while trying to share their experiences of the world with others.

Let's take a fundamental example: language. As one linguistic

theorist, Benjamin Whorf, points out, language is a set of agreed-on strategies for trying to describe the world.[2] Those strategies are then handed down to future generations. Linguistic expressions have always been compromises. They were attempts to capture a complex reality in words that other people could comprehend. In the process of creating these compromises, grammar and word definitions started to carve up the world. These ways of carving up the world presuppose that the sentences spoken are describing reality. Every communication offers a description of reality that Whorf argues is always affected by the compromises previous language users have had to make. What kinds of compromises about describing the world does language force people to make? Whorf offers two broad examples. First, language always shapes how people talk about the ways that one event follows another, that is, language contains a theory of time. And different languages can contain different theories. Second, language determines what counts as a stable object by defining some parts of reality as things that can be referred to by nouns as opposed to the parts of reality that can be described as a process by using verbs. Every language contains its own theory of the world. But as language is used, this embedded theory is revised as people try to extend what can be said to discuss new contexts and new experiences.

Each medium too is a set of compromises crystallized into a form of communication that travels across contexts. Media, like language, both enable and challenge users as they try to communicate. Unlike most languages (consciously constructed ones like Esperanto or Klingon being the exceptions), media such as LinkedIn have designers who created certain interfaces as they wrestled both with the limitations of computer code and with interweaving many different perspectives about what the new medium should do and look like. So when LinkedIn was released, it was a composite of many different types of compromises and agreements made by people in the company. As people began to use LinkedIn, they had to become familiar with the social assumptions that were built into the design, and many of these social assumptions came from the self-as-business meta-phor. The experience of people learning how to use a new medium can be similar to that of adults learning a new language: they often stumble while dealing with the new worldview embedded in the language they are trying to figure out how to speak.[3]

Just like language speakers, users can do unpredictable things with the communicative resources a medium offers. There are limits; these unpredictable communicative acts are being evaluated by their audience, and so they shouldn't be so unpredictable and off the wall that they don't count as communication. With media, you might think that this is something that designers can address. But designers never can predict every way in which a communicative technology might be used. Someone or some group often has to recommend (and sometimes enforce) the rules—perhaps the company's public relations people, or educators, government bureaucrats, or the communities of users, or some combination of all these types.

For example, when the telephone was first invented, people were faced with an immediate dilemma. Telephones provided a new participant structure, which included having to signal verbally who was participating in the conversation and when the conversation was beginning or ending. This led to the practical question: how should the person answering the phone indicate that they are available to start a phone conversation? Edison thought that someone picking up the phone should say "hello," but Graham Bell thought they should say "ahoy." Edison's vision dominated in the United States, although for a while this was touch and go. "Hello" was considered vulgar, and linguist Naomi Baron points out that "as recently as the 1940s, social arbiter Millicent Fenwick deemed the word acceptable only under limited circumstances."[4] In the end, Edison's company was more successful at persuading users to use "hello," partially by including instructions in the front pages of phone books.[5]

Not everyone or every group makes the same decision about how to use a new medium. For example, Mr. Burns, Homer Simpson's boss in the television show *The Simpsons*, still sometimes says "ahoy" when answering the phone. But to communicate, people often have to agree about the general parameters for communicating.

And in establishing these parameters, people are often also deciding on what is signaled by communicating in a particular way, both what is signaled by communicating in the widely accepted way and what is signaled by communicating in an idiosyncratic fashion. Mr. Burns is not only letting other people know that he is old or old-fashioned by saying "ahoy"; he is also indicating something about his class background, and, let's face it, ethnicity. What Asian American would answer the phone using "ahoy"—unless he or she was a Simpsons fan? The cartoonists knew that "ahoy" helped signal that Mr. Burns was a white person, probably from old money, continuing Graham Bell's project. All these signals about identity get wrapped up in the one word someone uses to answer the phone because of complex histories emerging from thousands upon thousands of people answering the phone and telling other people how to answer the phone. This is but one example from one medium. Imagine how many choices that we may now take for granted have been standardized in similar ways.

Histories of Standardizing Media Practices

When a new medium is introduced, how do you get everyone to agree on the basic ways to communicate that should accompany the medium? How do you get everyone to agree to say "hello" when answering a phone call, or at least get everyone to agree that people should say "hello" when answering the phone so that "yo" as the opening response becomes a signal of a certain kind of informality instead of unintelligible gibberish? In the early twentieth century, there were large-scale top-down efforts to teach users what to do: companies, schools, and government offices all tried to teach both social and physical ways to use recently introduced technologies, such as stereographs and telephones. Not anymore. Nowadays it isn't clear that companies believe that everyone *should* share the same expectations around new media the companies provide. How media etiquette becomes widespread depends on the historical period.

When telephones were introduced, companies were deeply con-

cerned about how a telephone conversation's participant structure was different from a face-to-face conversation. The companies decided they had to teach people how to use a party line (with a party line, several households were sharing a single telephone line, which allowed anyone on the party line to join or overhear telephone conversations taking place). Claude Fischer writes: "A common concern of Bell companies, independents and rural mutual lines alike was teaching party-line etiquette. They repeatedly cautioned subscribers not to eavesdrop, both for reasons of privacy and to reduce the drain on the electrical current caused by so many open connections. . . . The companies also tried to teach customers to avoid occupying the line with long conversations. They printed notices, had operators intervene, and sent warning letters to particularly talkative customers."[6] Here the company was involved in instructing users on how to deal with a new participant structure in a number of ways. Companies expected telephone operators to monitor party lines to prevent talkative people (often understood to be women) from dominating this shared medium. Telephone operators (almost all of whom were women) had an assigned role of monitoring as a company representative, so the telephone line allowed not only new, primarily silent participants into conversations but also a new type of participant, the operator, to engage in these conversations and assist in standardizing practices. In the early twentieth century, standardizing practices around telephones and other inventions was not left to the individual user—these newly introduced technologies were accompanied by large-scale educational projects ensuring that everyone was using these technologies in the same manner.

We currently live surrounded by media that have different histories of standardization. Telephones are still with us in a variety of forms. We still use email, and schools have historically taught students how to write a formal email, inspired by earlier lesson plans providing guidelines for writing a formal letter. But this is not true for all the media we use regularly. When new technologies are introduced these days, they aren't often accompanied by etiquette guidelines. Users are often supposed to figure out how best to use a new

technology on their own, without much guidance from the company introducing the technology. Contemporary tech companies tend to believe that this encourages users to be more committed to or more involved in using their products.

The contemporary equivalent of telephone operators still accompany new media, but often only as invisible actors making decisions according to a logic of standards that, while they exist, are purposefully kept secret. For example, in early February 2012, the Gawker website posted a leaked copy of Facebook's operation manual for content managers. Facebook had outsourced a task—censoring posted content—to staffing companies like oDesk, who hired freelance workers in Morocco and the Philippines to look at thousands of photographs for a dollar a day. These workers were not told that Facebook was indirectly contracting for their work, but it wasn't hard for them to figure this out. A Moroccan employee leaked the manual he had been given by oDesk, a manual that had been produced by Facebook and that was supposed to help him determine whether a particular photograph was acceptable. The leaked manual was substantially different and more specific than what Facebook publicly claimed were its guidelines at the time. The public version available on Facebook said: "As a trusted community of friends, family, coworkers, and classmates, Facebook is largely self-regulated. People who use Facebook can and do report content that they find questionable or offensive. . . . We have a strict 'no nudity or pornography' policy. Any content that is inappropriately sexual will be removed. Before posting questionable content, be mindful of the consequences for you and your environment." What the operation manual told content managers was forbidden, by contrast, were images of "any OBVIOUS sexual activity, even if naked parts are hidden from view by hands, clothes or other objects," and the manual provided eleven more entries about what might count as a violation of standards.[7] If you only read what Facebook publicly announced about its standards, you would not know that maps of Kurdistan were unwelcome, as were images of earwax, whether real or cartoon, while images of real *and* cartoon snot were acceptable. In short, as a

corporation, Facebook felt obligated to hire freelance content managers to protect its image, but unlike when telephones were invented, today many companies are not in the business of openly instructing users about how best to use their technology.

There can be well-known exceptions to this: for example, Facebook wants online profiles to represent offline people,[8] but this is an exception that supports my larger argument that companies are now treating everyone as though they are a business—in this case, a bundle of information that the company can access through a contract. Facebook provides services (such as the Facebook website), and in exchange, the user provides his or her data. For Facebook, much of the value of providing the site to users derives from the data that users offer in return. When Facebook insists in its statement of rights and responsibilities that users "provide their real names and information" and do not "provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission," the company is doing more than simply encouraging a media belief in which people are supposed to have only one coherent identity online and offline. When Facebook and other social media corporations try to regulate people's media practices nowadays, it is often in the interest of gleaning information that can most smoothly be sold to others. In other words, Facebook is requiring people to provide information that can be most effectively data mined and turned into profit. What, after all, does an advertising company want with detailed profiles of the kinds of movies a thousand Frodo and Bilbo Bagginses like to watch? In 2012, of the forty-nine posted rights and responsibilities for users, thirty-six of these addressed intellectual property or commodified information in some form or another. So when companies try to standardize user practices nowadays, it is to protect the business and keep it profitable, whether this requires anonymous, invisible independent contractors screening content to protect a company's image or rules linking online and offline identities to ensure that posted information is accurate enough to have value for marketers.

While a new medium may always challenge its makers and users

to create some kind of shared understanding of what its use signals, how people tackle this challenge is historically specific. Every new medium may invite users to question how they are extending their already established media ideologies to this new way of configuring the participant structure of a conversation. That is, people may have decided the proper way to compose a letter, and ways to signal whether the letter is more or less formal, meant for a larger audience, or designed for only one reader, and were encouraged to believe this by their teachers in school. When email was introduced, it forced people to rethink all these strategies and decide which strategies used in a letter should transfer to an email and which shouldn't. And so too with more recently invented media: to what extent is a Facebook status update similar to a tweet, and thus subject to the same interpretative expectations?

Because companies, government offices, and schools are no longer as openly involved in instructing people on how to use any new technology, people nowadays often figure this out by talking to their friends, family, and coworkers. For most social tasks, this isn't that much of a problem. If an acquaintance never listens to your voicemails, you may slowly figure this out, and even stop leaving voicemails without deciding that this person is being rude. But there are some tasks that are so highly charged that people pay a lot of attention to what the etiquette might be when new media are involved. Because Americans are surrounded by many technologies in which companies, government offices, and schools have worked for years to establish a widespread etiquette, it isn't that big of a stretch for people to assume that this etiquette does in fact exist, regardless of how new a medium might be, or what the actual efforts to standardize its use might be. Yet historical changes in how etiquette around new media becomes widespread sometimes means that there aren't well-known or uniform rules for how to use some media. This can create an uncomfortable ambiguity for users when these new technologies are part of looking for a job.

LinkedIn as a company provides some guidance to its users about what the company would like to be the widespread etiquette

for using this medium and does so more than other social media sites. Yet LinkedIn designers do not necessarily know about all the attempts at standardizing its use. That is, while there are a number of attempts to standardize how people use LinkedIn, these are not necessarily coordinated efforts. I realized this when I met with members of LinkedIn's user experience group. I mentioned to them that some of my research involved attending LinkedIn workshops in the area that taught job seekers how to craft their LinkedIn profile. They were surprised to hear that these workshops existed, and in many cases, only five or ten miles from where they worked at company headquarters. Meanwhile, I was surprised that they were surprised—every community organization for job seekers that I know about offers workshops about creating a LinkedIn profile, and many have been doing so since late 2008, soon after the Wall Street crash.

The LinkedIn employees immediately began wondering if there was anything they could do to help clarify how LinkedIn should be used—perhaps by tweaking the interface or publishing more explanatory articles on LinkedIn, but no one suggested coordinating with the people leading these workshops. I left the meeting wondering what would happen. Would LinkedIn employees remain committed to this belief that online design decisions and articles could be enough to shape how people decide to use LinkedIn for complicated social interactions? As Graham Bell found out, it is one thing to come up with the rules for using media, and it is another thing entirely to convince everyone that your rules are the ones that should be followed.

LinkedIn as a company tends to focus its efforts at standardizing users' practices to the way it designs its interface and to making advice available online or in offline publications. Like Facebook and some other sites, it encourages users to fill out their profile as much as possible. Yet LinkedIn takes this a step further by showing a circle gradually filled to indicate the ways in which someone can have a profile operating at "full strength." This graphic can encourage people to fill out as much information as they can on their profiles,

an effective strategy for creating a certain degree of standardized use, or is it? I saw this strategy in action one day when I was observing Ruth, a career counselor, offer a free consultation to Gina, which she did for anyone who wanted to improve their LinkedIn profile. Gina's first concern was how she should fill out the portion of the LinkedIn profile in which she described her job title. She was unemployed, and so she had no job title. But, as she pointed out, to have the LinkedIn Profile Strength meter confirm that her profile was at "All-Star" status (the LinkedIn terminology), she needed to fill out this section. Ruth thought that Gina should not take the LinkedIn Profile Strength meter all that seriously. However, Ruth suggested she could put down something in that space if she found it comforting, and recommended that she put down "actively seeking opportunities in [a specific professional field—in Gina's case, biotech product management]."

These are precisely the conversations by which many social media standards get established. The interface urges the user to behave in one way, yet the actual user's circumstances don't allow him or her to easily or smoothly accede to this suggestion. For example, LinkedIn has an implied user who would fill out the profile completely, but perhaps the actual user doesn't have a job title, as in Gina's case (this is but one of the ways in which the LinkedIn interface tends to presume that its users have jobs). Or, in another example, Don did not want to indicate what year he graduated from college in case that marked him as too old to participate effectively in this particular job market. So the actual users check with friends, coworkers, or a local career counselor to see how to finesse the gap between the implied user and the actual user's context and practical concerns. And as they do this, they come up with solutions that feel appropriate to that group. Over time, this can turn into an agreed-on etiquette for people who are all in a certain profession, or in a certain region of the country, or of a certain class background. Even when LinkedIn's interface strongly recommends a standardized practice, there is no guarantee that users will comply unless it makes sense in terms of how their group communicates about jobs and employment already.
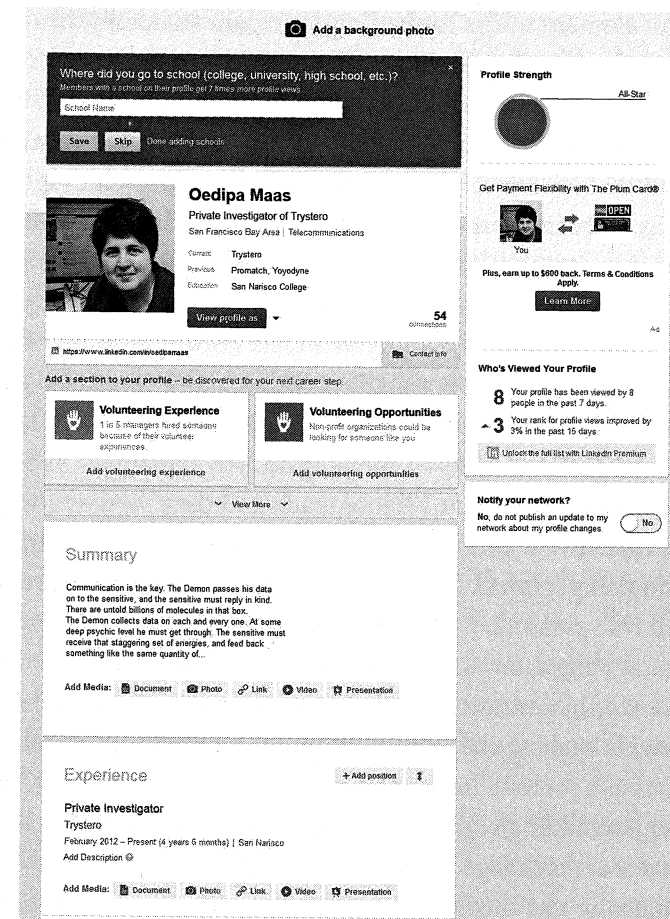

Figure 3.

Unemployed and Connected

Job searching is a social task that, in the United States, is so highly charged that people often worry that there is a clearly defined right and wrong way whenever they communicate with a potential employer. So what are people's common concerns about the right ways to use LinkedIn?

When people first start using LinkedIn, they often are uncertain about how to decide whom to connect to, since a LinkedIn connec-

tion is an element of the LinkedIn participant structure that is specific to LinkedIn. Connecting with someone gives them a certain kind of access to your profile, although the exact degree of access depends on how you set your privacy settings. People commonly talk about only connecting with people they know—although what counts as knowing someone can be quite varied. Some will insist that they have to know the person for a certain amount of time. In a focus group I conducted with job seekers, Thomas explained that now that he is looking for a job, he meets quite a number of other job seekers in various job search workshops and meetings. If they request to connect with him on LinkedIn, he will wait to find out whether he sees and talks to them again. He explained: "There's a bunch of people now that I'll look back and they've sent a request after I met them at one event, it's two months later and I have no clue who this person is. I can see their face and I still don't remember who this person is." For Thomas, LinkedIn connections signal a potential obligation. Someone might ask to be introduced to one of his LinkedIn connections, and he will have to decide if he feels comfortable making the introduction. He wants LinkedIn connections to mean more than simply exchanging business cards. Others, however, see adding someone to their LinkedIn contacts exactly as though it is an exchange of business cards.

People who use this more expansive strategy for connecting are quite clear that their LinkedIn connections are potentially not as useful as those of people who are more discriminating. They have many more contacts, but the people they can contact are less likely to be willing to respond when they ask for a favor. This was a problem that job seekers mentioned frequently about LinkedIn connections—a connection symbolizes potential, but precisely what kind of potential? What will happen if you do in fact ask a favor of someone whom you primarily know through a LinkedIn connection? Will the person do what you ask? If you are willing to connect with anyone who asks, you may have more connections than people who are less inclusive, but they might not be all that valuable as connections. Knowing

someone only or mainly through LinkedIn contacts was seen as a weak tie indeed. It was a pretty common belief that the more contact you had with someone that wasn't mediated through LinkedIn—perhaps in person, by phone, or by email—the more likely that person would be to perform a favor, even if you asked for the favor through LinkedIn.

When I talked to college students about their strategies for connecting to someone on LinkedIn, they often were trying to understand whether to use for their decisions the same criteria they had developed for choosing to connect with people on Facebook. One student, Kate, was debating whether to connect with someone she didn't much care for. If the request had come through Facebook, she definitely would have found some way to avoid connecting. Kate explained that she would refuse to connect with anyone by Facebook with whom she might be ambivalent about sharing personal information. But this request was sent through LinkedIn. She was uncertain how to value a LinkedIn connection, largely because it was on a professional networking site. This person might turn out to be useful in the future—it is hard to tell when you are twenty-one who in your circle of casual acquaintances will turn out to be a connection you want to maintain in the future for professional reasons, regardless of what you think about them at that moment. And, let's face it, some people who are unpleasant at twenty-one may learn to be decent by the time they are twenty-eight.

Leslie, another student, was uncertain whether she should connect with all the people who requested connections with her at the company where she was interning. She had never met many of these people. They were just requesting a LinkedIn connection because they worked at the same place. If these were Facebook requests, Leslie would have turned them down immediately. She wants to at least meet someone in person before connecting on Facebook. But a LinkedIn connection? How should she screen? She was clearly working at a company in which people were connecting without any actual interaction, a local workplace practice that I did not often

come across. Most people whom I spoke with, of all ages, would only connect with people whom they had had some interaction with, even if it was only by email or in a LinkedIn group.

While most people I spoke to tended to be more guarded about their Facebook connections than their LinkedIn connections, I did talk to one woman in her midforties who is far more careful with her LinkedIn connections than her Facebook ones. She, like the others I spoke to, views Facebook as personal. But for her, personal means that she is ready to connect with anyone from her high school, or anyone whom she has some kind of personal connection to, however vaguely defined. She rarely goes on Facebook, so she doesn't value the connections highly. She sees Facebook primarily as a site for broadcast communication, for communicating with as many people as possible at once. She much prefers one-to-one communication for personal interactions. Whenever possible, she talks to people on the phone, and so a Facebook connection is relatively meaningless to her, a polite acknowledgement that there was some kind of personal relationship at some point in the past, even if it was decades old.

But LinkedIn is different. She sees it as a professional site that reflects her reputation. If she connects with someone on LinkedIn, it is a sign that she is willing to recommend that person to someone else if asked, and so she carefully vets her connections. When she first started using LinkedIn, she was only connecting to people she knew through a second job she had as a massage therapist. She felt that as a massage therapist, her recommendations to others in comparable but adjacent professions—acupuncturist or nutritionist, for example—contributed to her own reputation in this line of work. She saw connecting with someone as tacitly recommending them to others and didn't want to connect with people whom she couldn't vouch for. Facebook connections, from her perspective, carry no such endorsement. Yet it is important to keep in mind that the entire time she has been using LinkedIn, she has had a primary and stable job. She has never faced the pressures to change her approach to LinkedIn connections, pressures that job seekers face from the moment they start actively looking for a job.

Searching for a job tends to encourage an approach to LinkedIn connections that is focused on increasing connections that can be used instrumentally, and to inspire many more standardized and widespread strategies for when and how people connect on LinkedIn, much more so than other social media designed these days. Yet just because there is more standardization doesn't mean it happens smoothly, or that LinkedIn as a company gets to decide how it will be done. Actually connecting, in fact, is a moment in which career counselors strongly encourage people to refuse LinkedIn's own efforts to standardize this interaction. LinkedIn provides its own language whenever you want to request a LinkedIn connection with someone. In 2014, the company provided the sentences "Since you are a person I trust, I wanted to invite you to join my network on LinkedIn" or "I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn." By using *I*, each implies that it is a sentence the author of the profile has in fact typed, instead of what the sentence is—a template that LinkedIn provides. Indeed, in the first example, LinkedIn's word choice announces that users actively trust the person they want to link to. With this phrase, LinkedIn is also encouraging users to think about LinkedIn connections as an indication of trust, not potential usefulness.

Counselors believe that to use one of these prepackaged sentences signals that you did not take the time yourself to write a personalized sentence. People will interpret the invite in various ways when they see it couched in language they immediately recognize as supplied by LinkedIn, regardless of the sentence's claims otherwise. Some people genuinely don't care whether someone has personalized a LinkedIn invitation to connect. Other people view this gesture as crass. If they are feeling generous with their time, but don't recognize the person inviting them to connect, they might write back asking for the clarification that they think *should* have accompanied the invitation. With this in mind, career counselors usually encourage people to alter the wording, to signal that the person is attempting to craft a more personal connection by replacing LinkedIn language with language that calls attention to the context in which people first

met or the reasons for requesting this connection. This is an instance of clashing attempts at standardization, with LinkedIn and career counselors guiding people in different directions.

But do these clashing suggestions have any effect on what people actually do? True, some counselors who recommend this didn't follow their own advice when requesting to connect with me on LinkedIn. But others put considerable effort into making sure they supplied their own words in their LinkedIn invites. Yet LinkedIn's interface doesn't always give you the option to change the wording of your invitation. In 2014, it was impossible to personalize a request to connect if you were using the LinkedIn app on your cell phone. In those instances, LinkedIn always supplied the language used to connect; users had no alternative. Some people were aware enough of this as an issue that they refused to connect with someone using the LinkedIn app and waited until they got back to their home or work computer.

How Public Should You Be?

In most workshops on how to use LinkedIn, some new adopter would ask: how public must my profile be? This question is about participant structure—who is the audience of a given profile? LinkedIn, like other social media, allows you to control this to a certain degree. Many in the workshops were already familiar with Facebook and policed their Facebook privacy settings. Yet people teaching LinkedIn classes would strongly recommend that job seekers be as publicly accessible on LinkedIn as possible. Job seekers should want to be found. Although when counselors declare that of course job seekers want to be found, found by whom remains a bit ambiguous. In practice, LinkedIn tends to be a site where job seekers are found by recruiters, but not all jobs are ones that employers hire recruiters to fill. Sometimes, being public on LinkedIn is useful only to signal that you want a job.

People in the LinkedIn classes often expressed significant reservations when told that they ought to be so public with their pro-

files. Some were worried that people they had conflict with in the past—disgruntled coworkers or angry exes—would find them on LinkedIn. I even heard about a woman who refused to go on LinkedIn because she had adopted a child and was now concerned that the birth mother would change her mind and insist on getting her child back. In these instances, people felt pressured to be as public on LinkedIn as possible in order to find a job, but they also were trying to address other social problems in which being too public on the internet might lead to unwelcome social consequences in their daily lives.

In discussing the issue of publicness on the web, those leading classes on social media and LinkedIn often made the argument that this was an issue of control—that there is a tremendous amount of information about you available on the web by now, and it is best to be in control of that information. Posting information yourself was supposed to ensure that you were in control of what people could find out about you on the web, as I discussed in the context of personal branding.[9] And while I heard this claim that you could have control often enough in workshops, I have to admit that this logic baffled me. It does seem to be based on a fairly typical way that Americans understand how the meaning of a statement is determined—that what the author wants the statement to mean will dominate how the statement is received. That is, if you are in an argument and someone shows you a text, tweet, or email you wrote, and you claim "that is not what I meant to say," then your intention when writing should determine what that text, tweet, or email meant. But anyone who has gotten into an argument over what a text message actually meant, or whether a sentence was sarcastic, knows that in practice, the author of an utterance tends not to have much control over how it gets interpreted. And how often on the internet does someone get to clarify? Job seekers don't often have opportunities to talk about their intentions with the recruiters or people in HR who are looking at and interpreting their LinkedIn profile or history of tweets. I was not the only one not entirely convinced by the energized claims that actively choosing to be public was giving you control. While those

teaching the classes were often quite enthusiastic about the control you can have over your self-image, those in the classes were not so easily convinced. Given what they said in response, they didn't seem to experience circulating information on the web as a liberating moment in which they have complete license to shape their image however they want.[10]

People are now expected to be public job seekers in a way that they had never been until online job boards such as CareerBuilder and Monster emerged in the mid-1990s. Yes, people from the eighteenth century onward might have placed newspaper ads announcing that they were looking for work.[11] But these job ads contained very little information about who the job seeker was. Online job boards changed this, turning resumes from being a document with a limited and predictable circulation into a document that circulates unpredictably and very publicly. Until online job boards, people would only send resumes to companies. Job seekers understood that this meant a certain loss of control over how resumes circulated. Companies might keep the resumes on file, and the candidate couldn't know who precisely at the company would look at the resume. HR would probably be involved, as would a hiring manager, but the job applicant might not know the names of anyone who had looked at his or her resume until the job interview. Even then, the resume could have circulated more widely within the company than the applicant realized. Yet there was still a relatively limited audience for any resume. Online job boards changed this. Resumes became public documents accessible to anyone who stumbled upon the document online. The process of looking for a job encouraged people to reevaluate how they understood a resume might circulate. People became resigned to making their work histories widely known. LinkedIn continued this practice, and in the process, it created a database of resumes that recruiters have found very useful as they search for likely candidates for job requisitions they hope to fill.

While Monster and other job boards might have helped people get accustomed to having public resumes, resumes on job boards and LinkedIn's profiles are different enough from traditional resumes that new social dilemmas arise from having a public resume or a public LinkedIn profile when looking for a job. One of the issues that any job seeker who isn't a recent graduate struggles with is how public you should be on LinkedIn about the fact that you are looking for a job. People with a job aren't always comfortable letting their boss or coworkers know that they are looking for a job, and they tend not to mention it on their public profiles. While posting your resume on a job board indicates that you are looking for a job, having a LinkedIn profile does not automatically mean that you are looking. It is an ambiguous signal. Although one of the implications of the self-as-business metaphor is that you are always potentially on the verge of leaving your job, there are still professional consequences for indicating this publicly.

People who are unemployed also often are ambivalent about whether they want everyone to know they are looking for a job. Does it help their chances of getting a job to have everyone know that they could start immediately? Or is the prejudice against unemployed people so great that it will hurt their chances of getting a job? There are two main places on your LinkedIn profile where this is an issue: in your headline (the first four or five words that appear directly under your name on your profile) and where you identify your current place of employment. Some people won't announce publicly on LinkedIn that they are no longer at their former place of employment. Some people will create consulting companies, literally claiming to be businesses themselves, so that they have a company name to put in that slot. Others are certain that availability will make them much more attractive to recruiters, and signal this with phrases like "looking for new opportunities."

Some people view the public nature of LinkedIn as an opportunity to tantalize recruiters with just enough information to persuade the recruiter to contact them, but not enough information to get the recruiter to quickly dismiss them. People occasionally discussed writing a LinkedIn profile with just the right balance of information

so that recruiters weren't sure whether they would be a good match for the job. Mario, who had gotten a job recently, explained: "One of the challenges is making sure you don't get eliminated based on what someone reads. You should only have enough information there that they reach out to you. You want to open up a dialogue rather than making someone think that they've already read everything about you." Mario thought that recruiters were just as likely to use too much online information to screen out applicants as they were to become interested. Others would tell me that they believed too much information about all the jobs they had would be confusing and would lead the recruiter to believe that they did not have the necessary skills when they in fact did. To address this, Mario and others tried to write profiles that enticed but did not inform. This was a careful guessing game in which you had to predict how much would intrigue an unknown recruiter to think you might be a possibility, without giving away too much information. Here the LinkedIn profile is being used to anticipate one particular type of audience—recruiters—and, unlike what LinkedIn designers believe, users intend to create a profile through the careful art of concealment and omission in the hopes that withholding information will inspire recruiters to request offline revelation.[12] Because LinkedIn profiles are so public, these users have developed a new set of strategies for this genre different from those they use for offline resumes.

While many people I knew carefully omitted some of their work history on LinkedIn, I did hear a recruiter in a workshop enthusiastically recommend listing every job. She thought everyone should try to place as much historical information on LinkedIn as possible and be more circumspect with the resume. This recruiter's logic was that since LinkedIn is a public profile for creating as big a professional network as possible, you want to let everyone from your past know how to find you. If you worked someplace in 1993 and you don't mention it on your LinkedIn profile, your coworkers from that period have less of a chance of finding you through LinkedIn. Not everyone has the same take on what a LinkedIn profile does or how others will interpret information on a profile.

Endorsements and Recommendations

Endorsements are a feature of LinkedIn that manages to condense many of the social quandaries that this new participant structure offers users. Users are asked by LinkedIn to endorse other users' skills by clicking on a button to affirm that, say, Robert is a good public speaker. Endorsements were an adaptation of a trending database that LinkedIn offered so that users could figure out what words describing skills were most popular in the jobs they were interested in that month. They could track how the mention of certain words increased or decreased.[13] In 2012, LinkedIn decided to transform this "skill" database into a lightweight recommendation system—one-click endorsements. They provide an unqualified positive affirmation of people's skills. There is no way to discuss how good you are at something, just that you can do it. I might be able to create a PowerPoint presentation, but not a compelling or memorable one. On LinkedIn, people can testify that I can in fact produce a PowerPoint presentation when called on to do so, but the endorsements don't allow them to nuance this claim. I could be a PowerPoint drudge or grandmaster—LinkedIn endorsements only indicate the presence of a skill.

Anyone can endorse a profile for a skill. Tony explained to me with great energy how frustrated he was by his well-meaning relatives who kept endorsing him for skills on LinkedIn. His aunt Mary was terribly worried about him, and she kept endorsing him on LinkedIn even though she had no idea what he did as a product engineer or what the skills actually referred to. Tony wanted endorsements to be legitimate. He believed that the person clicking an affirmation that someone possesses a certain skill should have some previous knowledge of the ways that person has demonstrated this skill. Tony kept having to monitor his LinkedIn profile, and delete endorsements, because his well-meaning relative's endorsements couldn't possibly signal substantive knowledge. For many people, endorsements seemed a bit suspect, a signal, yes, but a fuzzy one and not necessarily a legitimate one.

Some people would use endorsements simply to spread goodwill in the world. Luke explained to me that he would endorse anyone whom LinkedIn suggested he endorse, operating by the philosophy that he would accept people at face value unless he was actively forced to confront their lack of ability. Of course, this is LinkedIn's assertion of face value, not something the people themselves actively claim. Luke explained to me the logic he used to decide whether to endorse people after I asked him why he had decided to endorse me. We had met briefly at a workshop and connected on LinkedIn, and he immediately endorsed me for university teaching. I was puzzled; he had never seen me teach. This was even before we met for an interview, and I was just beginning to learn that people had different views about endorsements. Luke explained his take: "My basic philosophy is, you put your hand out to shake hands. I'm gonna shake your hand. I'm certainly not gonna bite it off. To me, endorsements are like that. I'll give out endorsements freely to people. You tell me that you're an experienced professor, in anthropology, I believe you. OK, you're an honest good person. You tell me you're ethical, I believe you. And that's what endorsements are to me." In his attempt to spread goodwill, Luke would get on LinkedIn every day and spend ten or fifteen minutes endorsing the people whom LinkedIn recommended. Luke was such a prolific endorser in job-seeking circles that other people would occasionally mention him to me as an example of an endorser gone wild. Will, a fellow job seeker, mentioned: "I ran into him last Saturday and he goes, 'Excuse me, have we met?' I'm like, 'You endorsed me five times.'" In this instance, neither Will nor Luke thought endorsements were consequential, but Luke saw the endorsement as fundamentally about reminding people of your goodwill toward them. And Will was amused that Luke's use of endorsements didn't mean Luke would be able to remember anyone he endorsed when he met them in person.

At the time of my fieldwork, LinkedIn's interface encouraged people to act like Luke and to endorse as a game-ified form of connection. When you first logged on to LinkedIn, the interface would present you with the opportunity to endorse four people you are connected to through LinkedIn, and it also suggested the skills that you should endorse them for. Once you clicked an agreement to endorse all four, you would be presented with another four, and so on until you decided to stop endorsing people. LinkedIn would prompt you to endorse people for specific skills; you tended not to decide on your own (for example, "Oh, I should really endorse this person for public speaking").[14] For many of the people I spoke to, this aspect made endorsements suspect.

To endorse someone was to give information that seemed to have little value and only contributed to LinkedIn's ability to keep people engaged on the site for a bit longer. How and when people were invited by the site to become an endorser shaped how they evaluated what being an endorser meant and how seriously they interpreted other people's acts of endorsement. In short, a LinkedIn endorsement is an illustrative example of a new technology offering a new participant structure, which results in the accompanying social dilemmas people face with any change in participant structures, namely, of how to evaluate this new version of authorship, content, and audience. And in job searches, many people wish there were clear and widespread ways of interpreting something like an endorsement, a standardization which Whorf might point out takes work on many people's parts to achieve.

In addition to endorsements, recommendations turn out to be a relatively charged aspect of LinkedIn. In 2006, LinkedIn changed its interface so that your LinkedIn connections could post a couple of sentences attesting to how good you were at doing your job. Yet just because it is possible to have recommendations on your profile doesn't mean that they are easy to accumulate. When job seekers and career counselors are talking about LinkedIn recommendations, they are often focusing on how to most effectively and politely request a recommendation. People often discussed writing their own recommendations, or sketching what they would like to see in the recommendation, and then asking their former coworkers or bosses to fill out the sketch. So job seekers see getting recommendations as a complicated enough social request that they consult with

others about the best way to go about getting them, and they worry about controlling the wording. But their strategies also mean that the authorship of a recommendation may be a bit more up for grabs than LinkedIn's interface implies. While LinkedIn's interface clearly states who the author of the recommendation is, this doesn't always mean that this is the actual author. Time and time again, I heard about situations in which authorship in practice was not so clear—about instances in which the person receiving the recommendation had at minimum initiated the post through a request, and often had written it. Sometimes people were faced with very busy possible recommenders. Sometimes they were concerned about how fluent their potential recommender was in English. In sum, the actual participant structure shaping a LinkedIn recommendation is not necessarily the implied participant structure.

Even in instances when people write LinkedIn recommendations for others out of the blue, there is often an instrumental logic behind this. And this can lead to clashes in interpretation. Job seekers will occasionally begin writing recommendations for their former coworkers in the hopes that this will inspire them to reciprocate. Indeed, this form of recommendation implied a social reciprocity for many people. One woman, Maia, who had a job as a software engineer, explained to me that she would never ask someone to write a LinkedIn recommendation for her if she wasn't positive that she would be willing to write one for them. Yet I also talked to Susan, a recruiter who actively screened out candidates who had recommendations that reflected this form of exchange: "I look at how many recommendations you have. And more important is: are they wimpy or are they reciprocal? If I have a suspicion, you know, if all of them are kind of wishy-washy, and I can see that they are all reciprocal, you know that with this person, something is wrong. You can have one or two, we can both really respect each other, but when all the referrals are reciprocal, that's a huge red flag." Susan wanted some way to determine whether a recommendation was genuine, and she saw mutual exchange of recommendations as a signal that the recommendation itself might be suspect. While for Maia this exchange was

a sign of mutual respect, for Susan it was a sign of an inappropriate and suspicious quid pro quo exchange. Here Maia and Susan simply interpreted the participant structure they saw revealed through LinkedIn recommendations differently. This tension over different ways of interpreting participant structure was a relatively invisible concern socially—Maia and Susan were unlikely to be in a position to encounter each other and experience this clash. But almost every other dilemma I heard about LinkedIn revolved around people's openly voiced concerns over perceived ways that LinkedIn might be affecting the participant structure of communication, concerns that were mainly raised in workshops on LinkedIn or in my interviews.

LinkedIn and Offline Social Ties

There are not only ambiguities about how to use the participant structures LinkedIn offers. There are also challenges in figuring out how and when LinkedIn reflects the ways people organize themselves offline. Part of what LinkedIn offers is a way to connect with people solely on the basis that the two of you were part of the same organization at some point or another—that you worked for the same company or graduated from the same college or were part of the same sorority. But what does this commonality actually indicate? One recent college graduate I interviewed told me how difficult she found it to connect with others who had been a member of her sorority on another campus. I was surprised, as sororities are supposed to be ideal organizations for creating the networking ties that so many job seekers want to establish. She explained that each sorority has its own character on a college campus, and that the reputation of a sorority might be specific to that campus: "With different sororities from campus to campus, they could be a top house there and just a really weird house there. It kind of varies, and so to say that I would have a connection with this woman because she is in my sorority does not mean anything." Here it is a question of what kind of tacit information is conveyed when she connects with a sorority mem-

ber: what stereotype might she unwittingly be engaging with? This might seem to be a problem limited to only fraternities and sororities, but company offices in different parts of the country have their own workplace-specific dynamics, as do international branches. Being part of PayPal in the United States might signal something very different than being part of PayPal in Spain. For that matter, a recruiter explained to me that the years you were hired at a particular company might also convey additional information to others. She said that one company had a reputation for making terrible hiring decisions between 2002 and 2005. If you had been hired at the company beforehand, other companies would be happy to poach you. But having been hired during the bad years at the company could be a mark against you, even though working at that company in general would not be. Institutional reputations, from sororities to corporations, can be complex and require considerable background knowledge. While LinkedIn offers a way to search for people who at some point or another have all participated in similar institutions, it turns out that how similar these institutions are in practice might be crucial (and sometimes worryingly unknown) for people as they decide to connect and exchange with each other.

The specificity of a workplace can cause problems for LinkedIn users in other ways too. For example, the playful connections you are supposed to enjoy in Silicon Valley workplaces don't travel well onto your LinkedIn profile. I came across one example early on in my fieldwork, in which I interviewed someone at a start-up company where every worker had a goofy and nondescript job title such as flight leader. Two days after I heard Sean describe these job titles, the *New York Times* published an article discussing how members of start-up companies had begun to harm their chances at job transitions by using job titles that were too quirky on their LinkedIn profiles. Apparently, if recruiters happened to come across their profiles, the job titles were so opaque that recruiters would simply go to the next potential candidate.

A few weeks later I was speaking with Sean again. He had decided that it was time to quit, and he was describing how he was prepar-

ing to look for a new job. So I asked him how he was changing his LinkedIn profile in anticipation of this. He immediately mentioned changing his job title, so I brought up the *New York Times* article. Sean responded: "If you go to my LinkedIn right now, I don't put any of that gobbledy gook. Because it's confusing, it screws up the algorithm for LinkedIn based on how it curates and helps people search and find you. . . . Most people asked me what a Flight Leader is, which was the first red flag. Second red flag, because you get an email from LinkedIn if you sign up for it with weekly jobs that are related to you, I was getting stuff from Boeing."

Sean initially used the job title on his LinkedIn profile to address his coworkers, to signal an inside joke, and he was not trying to present himself in a way that made sense to a more generically professional audience. As he began to reorient himself away from his coworkers and toward an audience that might help him find his next job, he edited his LinkedIn profile to make it more legible for that potential audience. He started to exert control over how he represented himself that signaled his individual future plans, not his connections to others at work. In short, he changed the audience being addressed by his profile in part by his choice of job title, and in doing so, he changed the participant structure called up by his LinkedIn profile. In this instance, Sean was responding to the signals he was getting from both LinkedIn and casual conversations about how these audiences might interpret his statements.

Second-Order Information

Part of what people were concerned about is not what was actually said on LinkedIn but what was implied by using LinkedIn in a particular way. When a new medium is introduced, one element that is often up for grabs is how its form affects the message. This was particularly true in job searches. Most of what I have been describing throughout this chapter is anxiety about the second-order information that a message can convey. Second-order information is information that the medium, or form of the message, conveys on top of

the actual words or images used in the message, information that changes as the medium's use changes. For example, a cell phone's area code can provide information about where someone was living when they first got that cell phone, but this is not the same information as a landline's area code, which indicates the general geographical location where the phone call is in fact being made. The second-order information you learn from a cell phone's area code is part of the caller's geographical history. You can believe that this information indicates quite a bit about someone's behavior or style of interaction, or you can believe that it indicates very little. You might think that anyone who has lived in New York City talks quickly and drives aggressively. Or you could believe that the only thing that you learn from discovering that someone has a cell phone number with a New York City area code is that they lived in New York City at some point in their life.

Time and time again, I was struck by how often job seekers worried that employers would reject them based on what I considered second-order information—that is, that employers would reject them based not on the actual content of the application but on the form of the message. One example that was occasionally discussed in the workshops I attended was that having an email address with an old domain name such as "aol" or "hotmail" could be grounds for rejection. These domain names supposedly marked an applicant as out of date. Career counselors would recommend having a Gmail account to indicate that you are adopting the more current technology. True, while I heard this advice often enough, I never met anyone who admitted to me that they screened job applicants based on their email account.[15] But this anxiety was indicative of how everyone in the process understood that job applications were not only evaluated by what was said; they were also evaluated by the second-order information accompanying the various genres submitted for evaluation. Job evaluators will take aspects of how people are using a medium and what medium they are using as indications of what kind of worker they will be—although I want to stress that they won't

pay attention to the same things or interpret the same second-order information consistently.

I came across plenty of other instances in which hiring managers or HR managers admitted that they screened people for how they used media to communicate. One woman in HR told me that she would check people's Facebook profiles regularly to see how they presented themselves. She did not care whether they drank alcohol, but she did think twice if she saw too many photographs of the person drinking. For her, this was an important glimpse into the kinds of social judgment this person exhibited. She did not want to hire someone who was too careless about their self-presentation, and she saw Facebook photographs of a person drinking or wearing risqué clothes as a warning sign that he or she might behave indiscreetly in other contexts as well. She also believed that the decisions people made in setting up their Facebook privacy settings provided valuable insights into someone's discretion, and she would notice this as well. I also heard people complain about the fact that their coworkers would take *anything* about an applicant's Facebook profile as a reason to reject a job candidate. Since not everyone agreed on what posting something on Facebook indicated, this could become an obstacle as people tried to come to a hiring decision together.

This is part of the frustration of job searching. People are using second-order information constantly to evaluate job candidates, but it is difficult to predict which aspect will matter, especially given the wide range of second-order information that every applicant is submitting with every job application. A tremendous amount of job-seeking advice is aimed precisely at suggesting ways to standardize the signals you might be sending through your choices. Following this advice homogenizes your applications, making it more difficult for an evaluator to select your application for rejection.

But this standardization is a double-edged sword. It also makes it more difficult for your application to seem distinctive, and thus to be selected. This is why, despite all the advice they receive, job applicants will try to do something unusual, like using infographics on a

resume. They are trying to find the right balance between being so clearly competent at the genres of a job application that they won't be rejected and distinctive enough that they will be noticed.

Hiring managers are aware that they are often making very quick decisions based on this second-order information. One explained to me how he dealt with the large number of resumes he received for one job posting:

> So we got three hundred resumes. I can have someone filter through them, but I go through them myself. . . . I get a pile of them and I look for a reason to reject them. And as soon as I find it, I can go on to the next one. And it's like a relief. . . . And then if I can't *immediately* find a reason to reject them, then suddenly a switch turns in my head and I'm looking for a reason that I want them because I want the whole miserable process to be over.

He understood that he was not reading resumes in a generous light, or trying to see the potential in every candidate. Instead, he was primarily reading to say no—and these noes often depended on quick judgments about how people represented themselves based on relatively little information. But in this case, generosity was only a few seconds away.

Hiring managers recognize that all the information they have is already prepackaged to put the applicant in the best possible light. And some candidates will look more plausible than others, even with only a quick glance at the resume. In short, on the hiring side, anyone evaluating applicants is trying to narrow down, on average, fifty to three hundred job applications to the two or three most promising candidates. The work of going through a pile of applications is not trying to figure out the best in each candidate. It is weeding out the rejects as quickly as possible.

When a new technology that people might use for hiring is introduced, job seekers immediately start worrying about how to use it so that they don't get rejected. When they worry, they are acknowledging that hiring is a social activity in which people can easily get rejected because of employers' unpredictable interpretations of second-order information. One career counselor told me that a client discovered he hadn't gotten a job as a sales manager because he had only 100 LinkedIn connections. The hiring manager believed that anyone in sales should have at least 250 connections.[16] The hiring manager had decided that the number of LinkedIn connections someone has indicates their skill as a salesperson, although readers can probably come up with several reasons why this wouldn't be an accurate indicator, including the possibility that the salesperson found other ways of staying in touch with potential customers to be far more effective. In short, new technologies introduce many new opportunities to circulate second-order information, and in hiring situations, this means introducing many new reasons to accept or reject a possible candidate. If you use these technologies in nonstandard ways, you risk being rejected. But how do you determine what is the standard way for media that are new? Or what happens when new technologies have too many uses, say, shifting at unpredictable moments from being used for social reasons to being used for hiring purposes, as many worry happens with Facebook?

Because hiring managers and recruiters all too often are looking through resumes trying to winnow down their list of possible candidates, job seekers will become anxious about the right way to use a new genre or medium for presenting themselves as hirable. Every new technology shifts the ways in which second-order information is circulated. In situations in which every detail has the potential to be scrutinized, any small shift in the second-order information circulated could matter far too much. For example, LinkedIn profiles suggest you list contact information. Do you list your email address? Molly Wendell, in her advice book on job searching, strongly recommends that no one list their email address, because this signals that they are too eager to be reached by anyone who happens upon their profile.[17] Yet other career counselors will just as strongly advise people to list their email address so that they are easy to contact— why put obstacles in the paths of interested recruiters? Job seekers who don't want to announce too clearly on LinkedIn that they are

looking for a job might make their email public to encourage recruiters to think that they could be tempted by the right offer. Companies tend to hide their employees' emails online so that they can't be poached by other companies. To list or not to list? The question is not about the actual email address but the second-order information signaled by listing. Providing your email indicates a willingness to be contacted. The disagreement lies in what that willingness implies. If everyone automatically put their email addresses on their LinkedIn profiles, not having your email address would be a different statement, one about your willingness to conform. Without a standardized etiquette, the question becomes how people will interpret your willingness to be accessible by email.

For other new media, such as Facebook, this problem is more acute. To a certain degree, because LinkedIn is understood to be a professional medium, users borrow more closely from other previously standardized forms, such as the resume. As companies, both Facebook and Twitter provide far less overt instruction than LinkedIn does. Of course, they are also being used to accomplish a much broader range of social tasks. Job seekers are addressing a number of different audiences on Facebook, Twitter, and other similar social media—they are interacting with their many different kinds of friends and family at the same time that they are trying to anticipate how a potential employer might interpret their Facebook or Twitter communiqués. Not surprisingly, nowadays many college students begin to concentrate on cleaning up their Facebook profiles when they are seniors and starting to think about getting jobs. But they don't always know what to delete and what to keep. Gail, a senior at Indiana University, explained to me that she was removing all the photographs on her Facebook profile that might potentially be viewed as a sign of poor judgment, including her Halloween photos in which she dressed as a Teletubby. A Teletubby is by no means a risqué costume, but Gail was worried that she might seem too quirky. She wasn't sure what exactly she should be concerned about, so she ended up worrying about every sign on her Facebook

that she might be marching to the beat of a different drummer. I interviewed a significant number of people who had this generalized anxiety, in part because the only guidelines they found for using particular media came from talking to friends and family, or coming across news stories about people who got fired for a Facebook post. Companies and governments aren't involved in creating standardized practices around the introduction of new media as they have been in the past, and so figuring out how to use these new media is even more confusing than previously.

As people develop techniques for using and interpreting LinkedIn's participant structure, they are often borrowing from the other genres that LinkedIn profiles resemble. People might describe LinkedIn profiles by pointing out how they differ from resumes. Career counselors would explain that LinkedIn profiles, for example, are supposed to be spaces where people narrate the history of their work experiences with the first-person singular; unlike resumes, LinkedIn profiles are supposed to be filled with sentences that begin with *I*. What a LinkedIn profile is supposed to look like is determined in part by what it resembles but is not—similar to a resume, but not; similar to Facebook, but not. In describing what LinkedIn profile photographs should look like, people were constantly tacitly or openly comparing these photographs to Facebook profile photographs. One man explained to me his view of what an acceptable LinkedIn photo was:

> The biggest mistake people have is they have a nonprofessional photo in their LinkedIn Profile. I've got a folder that I call bad LinkedIn photos that I just acquire as I run across these people. I've got pictures of a dude wrestling an alligator. I've got pictures of a PWC consultant barefoot skiing. I've got a picture of a guy with his two kids climbing over his head like he's a jungle gym and they are climbing over his head. My point to those people is that LinkedIn is where you do business. If you were going to make a big sales presentation to Wells Fargo about their back-end banking employment system and you were going to walk into the boardroom

with the board of Wells Fargo sitting there, would you let your three-year-old kid climb up to your head with a bunch of chocolate pudding dripping down your shirt? Because that's the picture you've got on LinkedIn.

These comparisons also allow people to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of what kind of second-order information is being circulated by the different media. When you learn how to interpret a resume or a Facebook profile, you bring these techniques to a LinkedIn profile. In the process, you often begin to notice whether LinkedIn's interface reveals the same kind of information as the other media you use, and begin to distinguish how you use different media.

At the same time, when you interpret a LinkedIn profile, you are doing this in the context of the other ways a person is representing him- or herself as a desirable worker. And the contrast can define how a profile is interpreted. If you are comparing a LinkedIn profile to a resume, you will notice different things than if you are comparing that profile to a Facebook profile. How you interpret a genre is influenced by the rest of the genre repertoire available, and thus implicitly, those other histories of standardization.

More people have asked me what LinkedIn is good for than have ever asked me what Facebook is good for, or what email is good for. Part of the problem with answering that question is that it separates the social from the technological. What LinkedIn is good for is what people performing a social task with you find it good for, and how they, and you, evaluate the communication that happens through LinkedIn. If you are a recruiter, you might find LinkedIn good for looking for people who use the keywords that also appear in the job requisition that you are trying to fill. If you are a job applicant trying to find someone you know in a company you are applying for, and if people in that company answer LinkedIn requests (and that is a big "if"), then LinkedIn can be a good way to contact someone. If you are a job applicant researching a company, trying to understand who is in a company and what they do, and you look at people's profiles,

you are often reading profiles written for another audience. These are profiles that are often written for recruiters or future employers who might want to consider hiring the person when he or she wants to leave the company. So the profiles are written as generally as possible, with an eye to the next step in someone's career. In those moments, you will have to interpret the profile imaginatively to figure out the information that you care about. In short, what LinkedIn is good for depends on how different communities use it.

Figuring out how to use LinkedIn when you are searching for a job condenses many of the issues faced by anyone using new media for a highly charged social task. You have to learn how the medium you are using relates to the other media used for similar tasks, such as resumes or business cards. You also have to learn how the medium is unlike other media that might appear similar, such as Facebook or Twitter. In learning how this particular medium is distinctive, you are figuring out the ways in which that medium configures participant structures—the kinds of roles it enables, the ways authorship and audience are shaped by the medium's structure, and how people interpret information gleaned through the medium.

Yet there are aspects about figuring out how to use LinkedIn "properly" that revolve around LinkedIn specifically, and especially the ways in which LinkedIn is meant to be a certain kind of solution to a gap in job seekers' genre repertoires. LinkedIn, after all, provides a new genre to this repertoire when no new genre has been added for decades. And it does so in part because the older forms of representing your self as employable all are infused with the logic of the self-as-property metaphor. LinkedIn allows you to display your self as a business, a marketing document in which you can present your self as a bundle of unweighted skills (endorsements), unweighted relationships (connections), and experiences. This is a bundle that LinkedIn would like users to believe they must constantly manage and enhance—especially since social media companies measure their success to a certain degree by how often they are used. Part of the second-order information that the LinkedIn interface reveals is how effective users are at adopting this model of the self, of present-

ing themselves as an ever-expanding businesslike bundle of skills, experiences, and connections.[18]

At the same time, users' struggles with LinkedIn also reveal some problems that emerge when you try to implement this model of self-as-business. The LinkedIn version of the self-as-business consistently errs on the side of being context free. You can see this in the ways endorsements are unequivocal: you either have a skill or you don't, but how you learned the skill, when you demonstrated it, and to what degree you might possess it—all of these things are unknowns to anyone trying to interpret your LinkedIn endorsements section. It is the same with LinkedIn connections. It is unclear to anyone looking at a profile how well the profile owner knows those he or she is connected to. I have described some of the etiquette issues that arise for users when they are dealing with a genre that tends to signal quantity instead of quality, especially when they are looking for a job or a potential employee, a moment when the context matters tremendously. As LinkedIn provides a platform for representing your self as a business, it errs on the side of being more of a marketing document than an evaluation, enabling formulaic ways of expressing your self as a bundle instead of enabling you to provide nuance or context.