Expanding Conversations: Cultivating an Analytical Approach to Collaborative Composition in Social Online Spaces

by

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“The bay foghorn blows as people I love sleep in attached rooms, and I, in the kitchen, write about things I did miles away and months apart.”

cgerben. 29 July 2011, 2:02 a.m. Tweet.
To my wife and partner, Shannon Plath.

To my family, Jo Anne and Andrew Gerben, and Rebecca Gerben Mehta.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Both implicitly and explicitly, this dissertation is a collaboration between a host of talented, dedicated, and supportive people. I feel fortunate to be able to put my name on the first page and to spend these brief pages here to begin publicly thanking those people. Unless otherwise noted, readers can assume that the mistakes and vagaries of prose are mine while the poetic and profound are theirs. Such attribution—I’m told—is the mark of a good co-author.

First, I thank my committee, all of whom have been supportive, inspiring, and wonderful during the several years that this project took to blossom. Thank you to Anne Ruggles Gere whose leadership brought me back to Ann Arbor, and whose mentorship kept me here. Thank you to Barry Fishman, whose approach to teaching and technology gave me a model that I continue to aspire to in my classes today. Thank you to Lesley Rex, who played the part of Virgil (even over Skype) in leading me through the formal aspects of education curriculum and research. And, thank you to Andrea Lunsford, who took a chance on hiring me at Stanford and who gave me the most convincing push to return to graduate school and begin really exploring the topics that mattered to me most, those that also mattered to her. Finally, thank you to Anne Curzan, who has stepped in as a substitute member of my committee, but who has been a constant inspiration as she convincingly held the English Department Writing Program (EDWP) together.

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My family deserves more than a paragraph for all of the love and encouragement they’ve given me, but in this short space I want to thank them as sincerely as I can. I miss my Nana, whom I lost after only one year back in my home state; however, visiting her gravesite in my final years here has done as much to calm me and put things in perspective as any time I had with her did. I thank my sister, Becky, who added her husband Amit to our family during my time here, and who has always been my fan from the time I hosted a crummy college radio show up to the current day where I’m just a crummy brother from time to time. And, of course, I thank my parents. We nearly lost my Dad, Andrew, after I had only been in Ann Arbor for a month, and his love and friendship has been a constant reminder ever since that life and love are so precious that we can’t waste a single day overlooking them. Likewise I thank my Mom, Jo Anne, whose life as an English teacher continues to be my model and my guide as I follow in her footsteps. My parents are two of my best friends, and I appreciate the opportunity to return to Michigan to fully realize that.

My wife, Shannon Plath, is my one true best friend, the love of my life. She deserves more than thanks. It’s hard to believe that when I started my program I had not yet met her, but by the time I’m finishing she’s my wife and my companion in all of the best and worst of times. Her unending love is something I could not have predicted nor anything that I deserve. Yet she gives it anyway, and therein lies the teaching that makes me always want to remain a student.
I never intended to return to Michigan. Each time I left—to New York, California, and even Indiana—I’d pack up all of my belongings as if the last sight I’d have of my home state would be through my rearview mirror. I always came back, though, as if some sort of Midwestern gravity had a pull on me that no amount of determination could escape. Each time I returned, my family and friends welcomed me back like it had never happened. Like nothing had ever changed. The same was true when I returned from teaching at Stanford in 2007. I came back to my alma mater, all of my possessions in tow. Except this time everything had changed. My family, and most of my friends, had moved away. My boyhood home was no longer mine, and everything that I thought had defined me was suddenly only true in the past tense.

Eventually this feeling of being unmoored faded into the background, and my everyday existence readjusted to this new reality. With one exception. I still would make the 45-minute drive to my hometown, even though no one I knew lived there any more. On more than one occasion I’d drive past my old house, experiencing the bittersweet mix of emotions that brings as much pain as it does satisfaction. Like scratching an itch, or picking a scab. As time went on, though, I’d fall into a routine leading up to these pilgrimages. Instead of driving straight to the house, I’d instead loop the old neighborhood, driving concentric circles that increasingly got me closer to my target, until I’d eventually have nowhere else to go except home. Or, what used to be my home.

It was on one of these missions in autumn 2011 when I saw something that changed everything for me. More precisely, I nearly didn’t see the thing that would shape how I framed my dissertation from then on. A few blocks away from what was once my block, I stopped at a stop sign. As I did so I looked out my open window at two boys on a front lawn playing some sort of stupid game. I say stupid because it immediately reminded me of something that my friends and I would have done decades earlier. The boys were lined about twenty feet from one another. Facing one another, they stood in full body armor (consisting of catchers’ chest-protectors, motocross bike helmets, and
shin guards) holding what looked like the ends of broomsticks, perhaps five feet in length. I watched as at an appointed time the boys ran full-tilt at each other, landed some half-hearted jabs to each others’ chests, and then fell sideways, presumably laughing at their own stupidity. I watched all of this as I was rolling through the intersection, thinking the entire time how much these boys were like me and my experience living in this exact neighborhood only a few years prior.

But as I pulled away I saw something I hadn’t initially noticed: a third boy. Standing a few feet behind the boys he was not only a non-combatant, he was standing, camera phone in hand, documenting the play carnage. As I drove on it suddenly hit me: these boys, and their juvenile violence, were nothing like me. Things had changed in small ways that had changed everything about what it means to be a young boy, to be at play, and to live in a world where I’m no longer an everyday inhabitant. Whereas my friends and I may have played a similar sort of game (I’ll spare the details of some ill-advised fireworks wars) in the same neighborhood, its existence was always singular. We’d do it once, tell our friends, and leave it at that. Our actions were our own, for us only, and as ethereal as a warm fall day.

These boys, though, were not only documenting this action, with the aid of the phone they may well have been publishing it, editing it, or sharing it online. It may have been in response to another video they had seen. It may beget response videos from those who would see it. It could be used as evidence. It could make them more popular. In short, this video—which they essentially co-created—was open to response and interaction as soon as the videographer hit “Send” with his sweaty finger. Everything about the scene I had just witnessed was different than what I knew, not because it lacked analogies, but because its implications were wider than anything I could have possibly imagined.

I open this dissertation with this story not only because it really did happen, and it really did leave an impression on me, but also because it taught me an important lesson about framing. Had I only focused my attention on the battling boys, as I initially did when I came to a stop, I would have felt confident in my assessment about their motives, backgrounds, and behaviors. However, I would have been missing the most crucial factor in their activity: the fact that another boy was literally framing them in his viewfinder. By
acknowledging the whole scene, and reframing what was at first a very familiar scene, I was forced to confront my lack of understanding and the implications that such a lack brings up. It’s not that my understanding of the boys would have been incorrect. It’s that it would have been incomplete, and that by taking in the whole messy scene, I was left with a much richer experience that both reminded me of things I already knew as well as raised questions about what I could really “know” moving forward.

This dissertation is offered as a frame to an ongoing conversation already taking place around us. As students, like these boys, do things that are at once similar—yet different—to what we’ve traditionally done in academic contexts, I invite readers to draw analogies, but open themselves up to difference. As it did for me that day in Riverview, the impact of realizing how much we’re potentially overlooking will shade how we move forward: more nuanced, more open, and more understanding than had we safely stayed close to what we already know.
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ABSTRACT

Social media—such as Facebook, blogs, and comments sections popular on many websites—are widely used by students outside of the classroom as a means of informal communication. Much of this communication requires users to write and co-construct meaning with other users. In formal learning contexts, however, curricular usage of such social media tools may be less prevalent, despite the highly collaborative writing practices present on these sites that reflect writing practices valued by composition scholars. In fact, the discipline of composition and rhetoric predicted the value of some of these practices nearly thirty years ago. This study examines the role that writing plays in social media usage, and explores ways in which writing behaviors may be studied as collaborative in nature by first exploring how online writing reflects previous understandings of collaboration, and then identifying ways it expands these understandings.

To accomplish this, I contribute an original heuristic, the Collaborative Triangle, composed of points addressing authorship (behaviors related to text production), community (behaviors related to interaction), and textuality (the nature and affordances of online text.) I applied this heuristic to interview data and online writing samples, as well as employed methods of rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, and computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) in order to identify and explore writing behaviors that appear to be collaborative in nature. Doing so allowed me to note where online writing practices may inform previous understandings of collaboration and modern pedagogical application.

I identified writing behaviors that mirror previous understandings of collaborative composition including use of evidence to advance an argument and taking responsibility for a text’s creation, as well as twenty behaviors, including identity maintenance of profile photos and attention to temporality and newness, that have not yet been recognized in collaborative composition literature. The study’s contribution is a systematic approach to understanding both the similarities between academic and online
writing, and ways in which online writing can be considered collaborative in nature. These findings have implications for both composition theory and instruction, as well as for fields where interactive technology and communication is valued.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This is a project of threes. In part by design, though in part by synchronicity, the theories, analyses, and conclusions contained within this document construct myriad triads that have led me to deeper thinking about what it means to collaborate and to write digitally in the 21st century. This listing of threes serves not only as a natural heuristic for thinking about the issues I raise here, but also serves to visually demonstrate the interconnectedness of often seemingly disparate ideas and concepts, which—when they come together—create newer and deeper understandings than had we left them as solitary objects of study. In this way, the creation of threes serves as a metaphor for collaboration itself: combining separate ideas to co-construct a singular entity greater than the sum of its parts. What I present here is the combining of three threads into one strand, three voices into one harmony, or three paths converging into a single road. Before outlining the specifics of my study, let me first describe three such paths that have converged to create the road of this study that I will walk with my readers.

1.1.1 AUTHORSHIP

In this study, I offer three categories of behaviors that I believe bridge established and future, expanded, definitions of collaborative composition. The first is authorship, or behaviors and issues related to text production. Such issues were instrumental in determining the setting for my study, both online and in the “real world.” In summer 2007, Newsweek ran a cover story on the then-burgeoning social network site Facebook and its 23-year old founder, Mark Zuckerberg. At the time of story, the social network boasted 100,000 new registrants a day, and was populated by some 35 million active
users\(^1\) (Levy, p. 40). The piece was a kind of “stand up and notice” story, alerting readers not only to Facebook’s rising popularity but also to its existence and projected relevance. Shortly after its publication, I moved from San Francisco to Ann Arbor, and wrote my first doctoral seminar paper on how I believed that the social network might support collaborative writing that could be studied and used for instructional purposes in the classroom. Like the Newsweek piece, my paper not only heralded what I saw as the writing on the wall, but also explained what a Wall\(^2\) on Facebook was. Both my paper and the news story spent nearly as much time explaining what a social network was as how this particular website was poised to have a significant impact on how users communicate and interact with one another at the dawn of the 21\(^{st}\) century.

Exactly three years later, in fall 2010, the website hosted over 500 million active users\(^3\) (Timeline 2011), and its rise to Internet prominence was dramatized in a highly acclaimed film directed by David Fincher, and written by Aaron Sorkin. The movie, The Social Network (2010), followed the rise of Facebook from its 2004 inception in a Harvard dorm room to its global dominance. The filmmakers utilize flashbacks, multiple narrators, and dialogue taken directly from personal blogs and court transcripts in order to tell the story of how a group of teenagers with little money rose to become some of the youngest and most influential billionaires the Internet has ever produced. Though the movie largely follows the narrative of Zuckerberg (played by Jesse Eisenberg), multiple characters provide dramatic and contradictory tales of why they think they deserve to be known as co-founders of the site. Throughout the film, the driving question of the plot seems to be: What does it mean to be the originator of such a social phenomenon as Facebook?

In other words, the film addresses the authorship of Facebook by interrogating its creation: who coded what, who signed the contracts, and who decided its future. Though Zuckerberg, both in the film and in “real life,” is credited as the lone genius of the social

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\(^1\) Facebook considers any user who has visited the site in the past 30 days to be “active.”

\(^2\) Before introducing the personal Timeline feature in 2011, every user’s profile on the site featured a space for users to interact with one another. This “Wall” feature is where the majority of writing on the site took place.

\(^3\) As of July 2011, Facebook hosted over 750 million active users (Facebook Statistics).
network, the film tells the stories of possible influences, co-founders, and collaborators as they debate the site’s origination in college bars, rented apartments, and deposition rooms. Among the several tales the film provides, we hear from Zuckerberg’s friend and dorm-mate Eduardo Saverin, who provides emotional and financial support as the site launches at Harvard, but who is later cut out of the business by Sean Parker, founder of pirated music website Napster, who lures the company to California. Meanwhile, students Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss sue Zuckerberg on charges that he stole their idea for a social network based in an exclusive setting: Harvard. The brothers and Saverin are shown in college-aged flashbacks and in contemporary depositions charging Zuckerberg (to his face) with unduly taking the credit and cash resulting from Facebook’s success. Though no one debates the work that Zuckerberg put into making the website successful, all four of these characters offer compelling reasons for why they too should be considered rightful founders and heirs to the Facebook kingdom. The ambiguous ending—where cash settlements are offered in lieu of attribution—only complicates Zuckerberg’s right to the sole title, even as the camera pans back in the film’s final shot: the solitary CEO sitting alone atop a posh Palo Alto high-rise, implying that the cost of solitary genius is more than monetary. Instead—and as my project will eventually argue—authorship is but one category of an increasingly interconnected ecology of digital writing that relies as much on original contributions as it does on the need to belong, equally and simultaneously, to the roles of author and audience, producer and consumer.

1.1.2 COMMUNITY

This need to belong, that both complements and competes with the desires of an individual writer, is best described as a sense of community, my second category of collaboration. Before the film, and my return to the University of Michigan, I was teaching first-year composition and rhetoric courses at the University of Notre Dame and Stanford University. At Notre Dame in late 2004 I received my first student paper on the subject of friending on Facebook. By the time I began teaching at Stanford the next fall, all of my students were on the site, and either knew people who worked at the company (which was located blocks from campus) or later became employees themselves.
Facebook became not only an undeniable force to discuss alongside more scholarly materials in my courses, it also became a platform that I encouraged students to use for academic purposes. Within weeks of moving to California, my students were friending me and one another, as well as creating online groups to conduct primary research and share their course-related writing. Perhaps because of my relative youth and the technology-influenced zeitgeist of the campus, Facebook became a bridge between my students’ in-class and extracurricular writing lives. I occupied both worlds, just as my students did, and so our experimentation felt co-constructed in a way it never did before.

Despite this, media reports on the dangers of faculty/student interactions and stories—such as Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid? (2008)—about the dumbing down of written discourse (purportedly due, in part, to the rise of online writing) were becoming increasingly popular. Sites like Facebook were the great, new unknown: a site for “them” students, while “us” instructors should have been more concerned with serious pursuits. This false binary joined with others, such as the in-class/extracurricular and online/“real world” divides, to create a low din of distrust reverberating in academic halls nationwide. While I embraced the social network early on in my classroom, my traditional teaching could seemingly not keep up with my embracing of the new, and so I too fell into this either/or trap. Though my need to belong to both communities drove my interest in exploring bridges, my gradual entrance into the academic community of composition and rhetoric scholars seemed to demand that I choose sides.

An early example of this came at Stanford where I began incorporating traditional rhetoric into my assignments for the first time in my teaching career. Aristotle’s rhetorical situation of author, audience, and purpose/text were taught alongside the classic appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos during every major assignment. This centuries-old approach initially comingled nicely with my contemporary focus on students’ social lives online. It was easy for them to analyze how they were the authors of their profiles (imbued with ethos) projecting to the audience of other users, for example. However, as each new paper on the shallowness of online friendship or the politics of maintaining public relationships on social networks rolled in, I reverted back to having students identify single academic audiences, and take on academic voices that clashed with their loose approaches to new media. Instead of appropriating rhetorical language, it
became increasingly clear that I was asking students to appropriate their personal texts. I was rapidly becoming a victim of the false binary: forcing my students to choose between experimental, fluid approaches to text that they were embracing every time they logged on to social websites, and traditional, fixed approaches to texts they were used to encountering in academic contexts. In short, I was asking my students to embrace their new online communities while simultaneously leaving them behind to join the academic community that I—as instructor—represented. Without quite understanding the implications, I was asking students to choose one community or the other, where neither could co-exist and maintain its pure appeal.

In unwittingly embracing these false binaries, I was robbing my students of a sense of belonging, of a sense of community, that is so essential to the popularity of social networks and online writing. In their speech and in their actions, students were demonstrating that they wanted to be online with their peers and that (at least in my experience at Stanford) they had no problem with including their academic roles alongside their personal roles on a site like Facebook. It would take me years to realize that I was chipping away at this enthusiasm by presenting models of writing and interacting that were seen as an “other” in these online spaces, just as their online writing was seen as an “other” in their academic courses outside of our class. As a result, I was subtly asking students to switch roles every time they discussed classical appeals, on one hand, and social technology, on the other. Their communities were vying for attention, and though I saw them as complementary, my pedagogy was enforcing something somewhat different.

1.1.3 TEXTUALITY

The third category of collaboration, textuality, addresses these communities through the nature of the texts my students were producing and sharing: fluid and evolving representations of things like ownership and finality. I was faced with two difficult questions as I moved forward with my research and teaching careers. First, I asked myself, could Internet writing be studied with the same rigor and respect afforded to more traditional print-based practices? Second, and perhaps more interestingly, was: should it? These questions were important, especially as I saw potential resistance on the
part of my students to switch between competing communities and literacies. In these early years of social networking, such interrogation had yet to be done in these drastically new media. As I was grappling with these questions, both as a student and in front of students, the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project released results that cut to the heart of my interests’ exigencies. Culled from a survey of some 700 adolescents, Pew reported that 85% of teens engaged in some kind of electronic communication (including online writing.) Likewise, 93% of the survey participants reported that they wrote for their own personal pleasure in spaces beyond school. (Lenhart, et al., 2008). These numbers, when released in 2008, did not come as a particular surprise to me. If anything with the rise of nearly ubiquitous cell phone and laptop ownership, as well as WiFi signals present in cafés and classrooms alike, I wondered if the 85% figure was, if anything, low. After all, 18-year old students had been bringing such devices to my classrooms for years.

What caught my eye, and gave me assurance that the study of online writing was not only a valid path, but a necessary one (or, to answer my earlier questions, that online writing could and should be studied) was a finding within the study that of the 85% of online teens, a full 60% did not consider their electronic activity as “writing” in the traditional sense. Apparently for them, “Writing” (capitalization mine) was the stuff of classrooms and print publications. Meanwhile, the myriad textual activities of phones and computers—including text messaging, emailing, and posting to social networks—were considered as the diminutive “writing,” if that. This presented a problem of perception. If 85% of teens were online, and 93% wrote for pleasure, then what was the activity that drove their online interactions? It remains virtually impossible for users to interact with one another online without using alphanumeric text to communicate. It was at this point that I realized that my research and teaching interests were not simply about what qualities a text possessed, but also what qualifies as a “text” in the first place.

Teens in the Pew study apparently saw a gap between whatever it was they were doing online and the “writing” that they were asked to do in classrooms. Perhaps these students too had fallen victim to the either/or paradox, where they had determined that

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4 Pew considered “teens” to be between the ages of 12 and 17, thus stopping before the traditional college age of 18.
their online writing was not as worthy of consideration as their academic writing simply because it was an “other.” Or perhaps their instructors had merely never modeled online writing as a textual practice worthy of study. In either case, this perception problem clearly identified a gap between activities that students are engaging in outside of school that looks like writing and the types of activities that we, as instructors, ask them to engage in within school that we consider writing. What should be framed as potential similarities had instead fallen victim to being seen through difference. For me, this problem of perception, and false binary, could only be solved by expanding our view of what gets studied and valued as writing in our classrooms.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The above three exigencies—aligned with the categories of authorship, community, and textuality—form the triad at the heart of my study. In an effort to explore online writing and determine how, and if, it presents moments of literacy skills that we (already or in the future) can value in our writing classrooms, I have focused on the potential collaborative behaviors that seem to permeate the online writing and interaction taking place on popular websites like Facebook. With this hypothesis in mind, I embarked on this study by first constructing an original heuristic—what I am calling a Collaborative Triangle—composed of the above three categories. My goal in doing so was to offer a structured way for instructors and students to think about online writing in ways that identify behaviors that compositionists already value in their classrooms, as well as provide a way for thinking about behaviors that students currently value outside of our classrooms, but have yet to be fully identified or embraced in our evolving study of writing.

The heuristic is meant as a bridge between perceived different types of writing and as a way of expanding the frame through which we view contemporary writing both online and off. On one hand it begins with, and is founded on, the traditional heuristic of the rhetorical triangle (composed of author, audience, and purpose/text) that many beginning composition instructors and students utilize to further understand their writing. Yet it is also designed to be open-ended, with intentionally incomplete and evolving
terms that contemporary instructors and students can take ownership of and add to as they engage with the Collaborative Triangle and their online writing.

As a result, this study is born of a hypothesis and an original heuristic designed first to identify heretofore potential under-examined instances of valuable textual production in online spaces. In other words, this study is first concerned with forming bridges between extracurricular and academic writing practices. Because of this, the study is sympathetic by design in that it seeks to validate online behaviors that confirm some of our previous traditional literature on collaborative writing. However, this study is secondly interested in opening the door to potential dispositions toward, and behaviors of, writing and interaction that may disconfirm previous literature or inform new theories concerning collaborative composition in the digital age. This study, then, is both backward- and forward-looking in how it applies my heuristic to confirm previous behaviors while also explore new ones that may form new theory and pedagogy addressing the ways in which students write online and in-class in both similar and different ways. In this way, the study is recursively theory-driven and theory-producing: it seeks to reflect and expand what we already know about collaborative writing.

Taken together, these assumptions have led me to ask the following questions in order to understand what students are doing when they write online, and in what ways instructors can use this understanding to bridge gaps in perceptions of writing. These questions consist of one primary research question and three secondary research questions that have guided my research throughout the better part of my three-year empirical study:

RQ: In what ways can student-users’ writing in social online spaces be seen as collaborative in nature?

RQ\textsuperscript{2}: In what ways do student-users’ dispositions toward online writing reflect and expand previous discussions about collaborative writing?

RQ\textsuperscript{3}: In what ways do student-users’ behaviors of online writing reflect and expand previous discussions about collaborative writing?
RQ: In what ways does an understanding of student-users’ dispositions toward and behaviors of online writing contribute to future discussions about collaborative writing?

In order to unpack these questions, and to understand the following study, several terms and conditions need to be defined and explained. Table 1.1, below, outlines some of the terms central to this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-User</td>
<td>This study focuses on undergraduate students who are active on the Internet. The term “student-user” is used to capture the duality of their lives as writers in the roles of academic students and Internet users. This duality is not seen as mutually exclusive (i.e. agents must be students or users), but does often entail agents self-consciously switching between the roles of student (espousing academic writing behaviors) and user (enacting perceived informal writing behaviors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Online Space</td>
<td>This term is used as an umbrella description of any website that allows users to create profiles, upload personal content, and interact with other users on a website platform. These sites—including Facebook and blogs—have previously been called “Web 2.0” sites (described later this chapter.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Composition⁵</td>
<td>Generally speaking, collaborative composition can be seen when two or more authors/users co-construct text (or abstract knowledge) to create a new entity, here referred to as a “text.” Within this study this may entail instances of co-authorship or evidence of brainstorming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Rhetoric</td>
<td>Classical rhetoric⁶ as espoused by Aristotle and embodied within the rhetorical situation of (1) author, (2) audience, and (3) purpose/text; and classic appeals of (1) ethos, (2) pathos, and (3) logos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>The accumulated beliefs, motivations, and attitudes that an author/user self-reports towards an interaction and/or text. Within this study, I use the term to describe the expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵ This term will be examined and defined in much greater detail within the Literature Review chapter.

⁶ Though rhetoric has a rich and evolving history, this stripped down view of it as the rhetorical situation and classic appeals is used in my study due to its perceived ubiquity and utility in undergraduate writing courses, where students may be encountering such concepts for the first time. It is meant as one example of a model of rhetorical theory, but not as a stand-in for all rhetorical theories.
of and approaches to writing and interacting that student-users reveal in their discussions (e.g. interviews) about online writing.

| Behavior | The enactment of a disposition; singular actions carried out in directly observable ways. Here, I use the term to describe particular acts of writing or interacting (e.g. using evidence in a conversation or “Liking” another user’s writing) that signal literacy skills and/or actions particular to online media. |
| Categories | In line with Corbin & Strauss (2008), categories are high-level codes that represent phenomena, and here correspond to the three points on the Collaborative Triangle: (1) Authorship, (2) Community, and (3) Textuality.

Table 1.1: Key Terms and Definitions

1.3 THEORETICAL TERRAIN

This is a study addressing collaborative composition and rhetoric through the frame of social media. Though my sources, methodology, and findings all seek to push composition and rhetoric theory into the “new media” realm of writing with computers, the focus remains on exploring how traditional approaches to the study of writing can be expanded in order to more completely understand contemporary and future writing practices. In other words, this study is concerned with providing more sophisticated and complete approaches to studying online writing, but is not proposing that there is necessarily anything that needs to be erased or replaced in how our discipline has studied writing up until this moment. Instead, my hope is that my study can be seen as reifying social behaviors (and not cognitive processes), I consider interview responses as self-reported dispositions.

7 In behavioral sciences, such as psychology, a disposition is “a trait or characteristic that is embedded in temperament and disposes a person toward certain choices and experiences” (Damon, 2007, p. 367). Since my study is interested in outward expression of social behaviors (and not cognitive processes), I consider interview responses as self-reported dispositions.

8 For example, “Liking” something on Facebook is an example of a voting behavior on the site where a user can click a button to let others know that she approves of a particular item. Though “Liking” is not a writing literacy skill per se, it nonetheless is an observable behavior that seems to embody users’ dispositions towards interacting (and possibly collaborating) with other users.

9 These will be described in further detail in the theoretical frame, methods, and findings chapters.
previous approaches that are still salient to the study of online writing while also expanding the lens through which we view writing, so that non-traditional texts and writing behaviors may be entered into our canon and studied in nuanced and systematic ways. For these reasons, I place repeated emphasis on the word expand throughout the following pages as a way to push readers to bridge their previous thoughts of writing with thoughts and actions that we may not be able to foresee at this time. Doing this, I believe, addresses perceptions of false binaries, and directs us not to see things as “others,” but as things that we have not yet considered or analyzed sufficiently. To do this, we must first acknowledge that this study continues work that has been ongoing in the field for decades. My study seeks to synthesize and simplify previous relevant theoretical terrain from the field of computers and writing as it also seeks to contribute new understanding about the state of writing in increasingly social media and writing landscapes.10

Scholars in fields associated with rhetoric and composition have done much to meet the challenges of an increasingly digital writing landscape, and to move us into deeper understandings of the complex writing situations that new technology presents us. Most recently, Collin Brooke’s *Lingua Fracta* (2009) has sought to establish a “rhetoric of new media” that is as much exploratory of new realms as it is indebted to prior scholarship dedicated to challenging binaries of “old” and “new” approaches to writing studies. Brooke accomplish this through an approach to new media framed by the traditional rhetorical canons.11 Though relying on these classic constructs to analyze emerging trends in media usage, he cautions: “our aims as rhetorical scholars must evolve—no single model is likely to prove capable of returning the sorts of stability that are implied (if imperfectly accomplished) by communication triangles or rhetorical situations, and thus we need to begin thinking about goals other than stability” (p. 28). What marks Brooke’s approach as important to our field is that he is interested in writing

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10 Though the literature review chapter has similar aims, it is more concerned with discussing and defining collaborative composition and co-authorship. This brief overview, however, is meant to contextualize the reader specifically within the study of computers and writing.

11 The traditional rhetorical canons of Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery are used by Brooke as a heuristic for thinking about emerging aspects of writing with computers.
in situ, which—on most social websites—means acknowledging that the writing and interactions taking place are fluid, constantly changing, and open-ended. Brooke is interested not only in applying previous approaches to new media, but also in expanding them to meet the challenges and opportunities that such media present.

In other words, Brooke’s approach appears to be getting ahead of technological trends that we endlessly seem to be chasing by creating theoretical frames that both rely on traditional approaches as well as ground new ones (such as the author’s renaming of canons to encompass new ways to consume and produce text.) He is interested in studying the water flow of the river more so than the relatively stable riverbed itself. This, then, is a subtle shift away from composition and rhetoric scholars in the past who merely apply traditional approaches to new media and stop there, or reinforce binaries between “old” and “new” approaches by claiming a paradigmatic shift and thus seek to establish a relative stability. Such attempts tend to quickly age and become irrelevant once the true instability of new media is fully understood. Though influential and intelligent, DeWitt’s Writing Inventions: Identities, Technologies, Pedagogies (2001) is one such case where the author seems more content to stake his ground within the canon of invention than to actively push against its institutionally-established application. His aim is one of awareness as he says, “moments of invention require that writers are aware of the connections that they see while constructing knowledge. Therefore, the more numerous and diverse the connections they make, the richer these moments of invention and our students’ learning experiences will be” (p. 24). There is a subtle hope for stability expressed in this statement that can ultimately never be requited.

Of course there is nothing wrong with DeWitt’s goal of a stable awareness, but as we get deeper into the 21st century and our writing technologies move increasingly away from paper-based analogs, our discipline must do more to lead in demonstrating the connection between our traditional approaches and future ones that we have yet to discover. To do so, again, need not mean that we must pioneer new approaches ignorant of the past. In fact, our field has a rich and growing history of applying our discipline’s knowledge to evolving media. For example, the Computers and Writing Conference has been held annually since 1983, contributing a gathering place for compositionists interested in studying and using technology in their scholarship and teaching; the journal
Computers and Composition began the same year, followed in 1996 by the web-based Computers and Composition Online and closely related born-digital\textsuperscript{12} journal KAIROS, all three interested in advancing the scholarship of rhetoric, composition, and technology; textbooks like Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, and Sirc’s Writing New Media (2004) have given us smart ways of applying our theories in our classrooms; and authors such as Hawisher and Selfe (e.g. Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies, 1999) and McKee and DeVoss (e.g. Digital Writing Research: Technologies, Methodologies, and Ethical Issues, 2007) have advanced our thinking about the ways in which we research and discuss composition and technology in important, myriad ways.

The paths leading from these trailheads are well worn, so the challenge in mapping the terrain of theory related to computers and composition is not one of starting over or declaring grand new discoveries. Instead, what seems to be at stake is creating theory that both builds from our previous literature as well as prepares us for media, practice, and approaches that are yet to come. It is this need to create timely, relevant scholarship that most brightly shines a light on now out-dated tomes barely a decade old. Of course no approach or theory can ever be infinitely safeguarded from becoming obsolete, but recently some scholars similar to Brooke have laid out some ways in which we can expand our body of knowledge in the field by enacting heuristics that may drive the way we think about technology, even as that technology changes by the minute. Such an approach doesn’t so much seek to (artificially) stabilize as it does as it does seek to systematically extend an established trajectory of understanding writing across media and millennia.

In his foreword to Jeff Rice’s The Rhetoric of Cool: Composition Studies and New Media (2006), Gregory Ulmer credits the author with advancing a heuristic—which Ulmer defines as “[using] theory for the generation of new kinds of works, as distinct from hermeneutics, which applies theory to the interpretation of existing texts” (xi)—capable of studying the “unstable” institution of the Internet (xii). Like Brooke, Rice is

\textsuperscript{12} This term is often used to indicate projects and publications that are explicitly made on and/or for digital technology. For example, instead of merely scanning a book and making the images available on a website (the way many online journals convert Word documents to web pages), a born-digital text may be conceived as a fully searchable, media-embedded website from the start.
concerned with the creation of a rhetorical approach to composition and technology capable of getting at why users see literacy acts on the Internet (such as writing on someone’s Facebook Wall) as desirable, or “cool.” This is echoed in Sirc’s (2010) call for “[a] textual goal far more fruitful in the first-year composition class than quality, which…is interest” (p. 71, original emphasis). In contemporary composition theory and practice, then, there is a recent history of needing to understand why students are writing as much as they are, and in beginning to see connections between their extracurricular pursuits and what is asked of them in the writing classroom. However, despite our attempts to understand these desires, our approaches to studying and assigning the texts that express them in our courses can often be seen as insincere or colonizing, in exactly the ways that would make them seem “uncool”—and, hence, unimbued with their original charge of importance—to the very students we are trying to reach.\(^{13}\)

What we need, these authors implicitly argue while this study explicitly argues, are rhetorical approaches that not only appropriate previous methodologies and create heuristics capable of keeping up with a rapidly emerging field, but also a way of placing value on texts and writing practices that are decidedly different from ones we praise in academic contexts. In other words, instead of bringing digital technology into the classroom and either accepting its unexamined associated literacy practices wholesale or attempting to co-opt its “coolness” by forcing traditional academic practices onto it\(^{14}\), we should be looking at online writing through a frame that James Porter refers to as “an economic system of exchange [which] is not always a commercial one, but…an exchange of value that serves as the motivation for the production and circulation of rhetorical

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\(^{13}\) This is exactly what happened to me while at Stanford in the preceding anecdote: I was assigning antiquated assignments and analyses while asking students to interrogate contemporary media. The bridge to successfully do so was unclear, both to instructor and student.

\(^{14}\) A contemporary example of this may be having students blog about an assignment, and requiring them to respond to one another’s contributions. Such an assignment promises a “real” audience while restricting the discourse and obligation of responding only to class members.
objects” (2010, p. 174). Porter’s emphasis on a text’s value\textsuperscript{15} is thus important to how I am approaching my study. Like Sirc’s focus on a student’s interest in a text as opposed to the text’s perceived quality, placing a text’s value ahead of its constituent other properties (such as its [lack of] persuasiveness or grammatical correctness) may address why the Pew Study’s finding that 60% of its surveyed teens do not consider their online textual production as “writing.” There is a perception problem in how online texts are valued, both in students’ own eyes and in their projections of how writing instructors do or do not value them in the classroom. As a result, in order to study and understand the relationship between extracurricular online writing and academic writing, we must place value in why students write and interact as much as they do by first realizing that doing so may force us to confront that their texts may lack readily apparent academic argument, purpose, or style guidelines that we have used as analytic approaches in the past. Just because they are not readily apparent, however, does not mean they are not present, which is why I believe a heuristic for systematic analysis is necessary.

There is a need for this heuristic, if for no other reason, because students are writing and interacting in such increasingly large numbers. As millions of users log on to computers and produce millions of words a day, we—as compositionists and rhetoricians—are in a fortunate position to be able to study and discuss these online writing behaviors in sophisticated and systematic ways. Taking up this responsibility, I join with Brooke and Rice in constructing a heuristic that recognizes our previous literature and expands how we view and value online writing that seems to both reflect our previous approaches and push them in new, heretofore understudied areas. To do so, I offer a heuristic that will be described in more detail in my Theoretical Frame chapter, but that is presented here in Figure 1.1, which can be used to think about, analyze, and discuss texts in ways that seek to understand why people write and interact with one another in ways that co-construct knowledge. This heuristic is an expansion of a well-established heuristic and analytical tool in many composition classrooms: the rhetorical triangle, based in Aristotle’s rhetorical situation of author, audience, and purpose/text.

\textsuperscript{15} Extensively extrapolating Porter’s economic system is beyond the scope of this study, but his emphasis on exchange should be noted for its relevance to student-users’ desires to share texts online and send and receive reciprocating messages on social sites.
This traditional understanding of situations and texts—alongside an understanding of the classical appeals of *ethos, pathos, and logos*—provides an excellent and simple way for instructors and students to understand a text’s nature and appeal, or persuasiveness.

![Figure 1.1: The Collaborative Triangle Heuristic](image)

However, when beginning students or instructors apply a traditional rhetorical analysis to online texts, they may inadvertently assume that the texts contain fairly static entities such as a single author or a singular, clear purpose to appeal to others. In fact, many instances of online writing have multiple authors and possess no overt constructive purpose other than entertaining one another through words\(^\text{16}\). As a result, such an approach (although important and robust for centuries, as well as fully ensconced in many of our classrooms) may leave out important details about the composing and interacting processes taking place in social online spaces. The Collaborative Triangle is cognizant of this, and addresses this need for a more complete view of online writing by *expanding* how we look at and think about online writing in a systematic and transportable manner.

Part of this expansion is our increasing need to recognize that all writing can be seen as collaborative in nature (as will be further discussed in the literature review and theoretical frame chapters), or more specific to this study: as *potentially* collaborative in nature. This adjective, potentially, is intentionally used throughout this study in order to

\(^\text{16}\) As evidenced in a Pew Study published in December 2011 that reported “53% of all the young adults ages 18-29 go online for no particular reason except to have fun or to pass the time” (Rainie, 2011). Of course, however, entertaining other users *is* a type of purpose even if respondents didn’t identify it as such.
fight the either/or and zero sum understanding of collaborative writing that has permeated previously practical How-Tos and “I know it when I see it” analyses of writing as collaborative or not. Likewise, by adding the term “value” to the discussion of collaborative composition, I seek to acknowledge that texts may not be seen as collaborative in nature in their present form, but may be published online in ways that present the potential and possibility of being interacted with, and therefore eventually collaborative in nature, sometime in the future. Since most online texts contain an open textbox or ability to comment on any particular post, this means that all texts are at least potentially collaborative in value. It can also be assumed that most—if not all—of online writers publish their words online so that other users will read and respond back to them. Even the most narcissistic blogger, for example, is composing in a medium that invites others to comment or share her thoughts beyond the original contribution. This inherent affordance of a blog demonstrates a low-level collaborative value to the text.

In these ways, this study contributes needed discussion to understanding the nature of social writing increasingly being exposed and enacted across face-to-face and online environments. Anecdotal and empirical evidence point to students increasingly writing online and interacting with one another on social sites. Meanwhile, composition scholars are advancing theories and pedagogies that seek to understand these writing behaviors in ways that may inform the future of our discipline. By acknowledging our previous mapping of this terrain, and applying my heuristic to contemporary online writing data, I seek to advance our thinking about online writing by constructing bridges between textual worlds that are more similar than different, and more of a continuation than an abrupt shift. This study adds to the chorus mentioned here with a unique voice on what happens when students write and interact in social online spaces.

1.4 THIS STUDY AT A GLANCE

In response to my preceding Research Questions, this study collected and analyzed data on how student-users view and compose online writing. This empirical study took place across three sites: a survey, an interview, and writing and interaction within social online spaces. Specifically related to the final site, this study focused on “Web 2.0” sites, a term coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2005 to describe websites that allow
users to upload their own content and interact with other Internet users, typically through typing into open textboxes. Sites before Web 2.0 tended not to allow this interaction and personalization, and unlike current Web 2.0 sites that allow users to create profiles and store content (such as photos, movies, and text) on their online platform, previous sites required content to be stored locally on users’ personal computers. As murmurs about the future of Web 3.0, or “cloud” computing, continue to surface, the basic level of personalization and interaction that Web 2.0 ushered in remains at the heart of online innovation.

The study I conducted sought to test my heuristic’s ability to confirm previously identified dimensions of collaboration (in the form of dispositions and behaviors) as well as expand dimensions that may point to a “new” conception of collaborative composition across various types of social online spaces. Though the social network Facebook was the most popular site among participants in my initial survey, I also sought subjects who were active on blogs and within comments sections of popular news sites. By targeting these three social online spaces, I aimed to identify and define behaviors for this type of online writing widely embodied in Web 2.0 sites. Though there are certainly unique affordances to each type of site, all three of them supported asynchronous communication among users who housed their personal information in user profiles that they could update and curate within the larger websites in which they were housed.

I likewise sought participants who were undergraduates in one of three representative higher education institutions in the upper Midwest. Though this was partly out of convenience—as I would have to drive to personally interview each of the eventual nine participants in my study—I targeted students in three schools that represented diverse student populations, socio-economic backgrounds, and writing curricula. As a result, my study sought to study dispositions and behaviors from students enrolled in a community college, a regional state university, and a major research university. The goal in doing so was to explore how educational differences may or may not alter how

17 As will be discussed in further detail in my methods chapter, one of the questions I was most interested in asking was whether or not students had studied their online writing in academic contexts before, and what kind of writing instruction (i.e. basic writing, argumentative writing, etc.) the students had been exposed to through their school’s curriculum.
student-users write online. As my surveys and interviews revealed, however, undergraduate students displayed generally comparable dispositions toward, and behaviors of, online writing. Though a few outliers are noted within the methods chapter to follow, students (perhaps surprisingly) tended to provide uniform data across these three settings. As a result, it may be deduced that my nine subjects represent common approaches to online writing by contemporary undergraduates, thus the findings should be able to be extrapolated to student-users beyond these three settings.

After identifying potential subjects and settings for study, this study began with a survey of contemporary student-users’ beliefs and activities of online writing. In terms of collaboration, and collaborative writing, survey results revealed that a majority of respondents saw their online writing as imbued with the potential for collaborative activity, thus initially confirming my original hypothesis that collaborative activity is possible (if not prevalent) in social online spaces. As displayed in Figure 1.2 below, when asked how often their online posts resulted in a sustained exchange of responses, respondents’ most popular choice was “Very Often” (51 votes, 30.2%), which came right behind “Nearly Always,” followed closely by “Often” (48 votes, 28.4%). As will be described in the methods chapter, these respondents were identified as possible interview subjects due to the fact that for an online text to be studied as potentially collaborative in nature, it is extremely helpful if it first contains multiple responses from several other users.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly always</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time to time</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never/Almost never</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.2: Survey results for posts resulting in a sustained exchange
Survey respondents also commented on how they saw their online writing relating to (or not) their academic writing. Respondents seemed to be mirroring the aforementioned Pew report by indicating that they were active on the Internet, judged not only by their own activity, but also in their social interaction with others. Despite this, 112 (68.3%) of respondents said that they did not consider their online writing to be similar to the types of writing that they were asked to do at school or at work, as seen in Figure 1.3. Likewise, though perhaps only a correlation, I also asked respondents a follow-up question about whether or not online writing had been discussed and studied in their academic classes. Of those who responded, 132 (79.5%) said it had not. The gap of what was seen as “writing” and “text” was just as large as I had sensed at Stanford and read about in the Pew study. Judging by these initial survey findings, the stakes were clear that online writing was taking place, but we—as a discipline—had yet to fully address its relevance to our coursework and explain to our students any potential similarities between their extracurricular and academic writing.

Figure 1.3: Survey results for similarity between online and academic/professional writing

In addition to survey data, this study is also comprised of interview data. I narrowed down the possible subjects from the survey by choosing three undergraduates from each representative school. I choose subjects who were active on a variety of websites. Like in the survey, student-users tended to give very similar responses to one

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18 Ideally I was hoping to have one student apiece at each school who was active on Facebook, personal blogs, or news sites. However, once I met the subjects in person, several of them notified me that they were more active on a website than they had indicated in their original survey. Due to limited resources, I was then left to study their writing wherever it occurred despite some repeats on how many students per school were on Facebook, for example.
another despite the interviews being conducted in private, one-on-one settings weeks apart from one another. Though a full introduction to the interviews and study subjects will be given in the methods chapter to follow, at least one question asked of each participant garnered similar feelings about Internet use and online writing across all three schools. When asked about their Internet usage, subjects reported that they were “obsessed” with it, had their computers on “always except when I’m not home or I’m in bed,” or were on the Internet “for at least five to ten minutes…ten times a day.” Interacting and communicating online was not just a reality for these students, it was perhaps a more important reality than their interactions in the “real world,” such as those that take place in school and work. The interviews, if nothing else, confirmed the perceived binary between in-school and out, and online and off, that instructors who ignore the importance of online writing may inadvertently overlook should they not recognize the value that student-users place on their extracurricular writing.

Beyond these survey and interview results, this study is attempting to do more than simply acknowledge that people are using the Internet more, that their usage is embodied in writing, and that this writing can sometimes be seen in collaborative terms. Instead, my goal for the study is to explore how compositionists’ perceptions of online writing may be problematic if we overlook similarities in favor of seeing difference. In following the path of inquiry laid out in the above research questions, then, my plan has been to try to marry traditional beliefs and understandings about what is good in collaborative and/or academic writing with what is seen as good (or valued or obsessive) in online writing. The result—I hope—is an ability to look at typical interactions in social online spaces, such as the exchange displayed in Figure 1.4, and be able to analyze and discuss how such interactions are collaborative in nature as a way of highlighting other literacy practices that we may have overlooked until now.
My approach to studying online text, through use of the aforementioned Collaborative Triangle, is exploratory in nature. Its application in this study is designed not only to demonstrate its own utility, but also to expose some inadvertent limitations of previous forms of analysis. For example, a rhetorical analysis of Figure 1.4 may reveal two authors, but raises questions and is complicated by the dozens of other responses not shown here (Are they all authors? Are readers who don’t respond considered authors? Are they audience members?), and the original NPR story that served as the catalyst for the responses in the first place (Should only the original story be considered the text?)

These issues co-mingle with affordances of online media such as temporality (How quickly did users respond?), identity (Are users with photos taken more seriously), and many others. Raising these questions is not meant to diminish a traditional rhetorical approach’s relevance, but simply to highlight some of the important issues about how (and perhaps why) student-users are writing online that we have yet to systematically analyze and discuss. This study, and the Collaborative Triangle, is meant to address this need by providing a new vocabulary that instructors and students can take ownership of from first use.

My approach has also been to identify the problems that either/or binaries often present when discussing new media and academic writing, and to then seek solutions by seeking bridging similarities more than distinct differences. Such goals need a pay-off, however, and so simply acknowledging “new” literacy skills or deeming an online text to be collaborative or not seems to fall short of my goal of bridging extracurricular and
academic writing. Cognizant of this, I offer my heuristic as a way for instructors and students to visualize their online writing in ways that are respectful of their differences with academic writing, but also point to clear similarities. For example, even if a text has no explicit curricular purpose, an expanded view could show how the text’s textuality encompasses sophisticated understanding of temporality and space even in purely extracurricular contexts. This approach puts online writing and academic writing on a level playing field by noting affordances that may not be clear to young writing scholars seeking merely to identify a text’s “purpose,” for example. This is the “pay-off” for instructors and students studying both the nature of a text and the value of that text: an ability to discuss what makes social online writing new, unique, and valuable in systematically constructive and expanded ways. Through the use of my heuristic and methodology, this study seeks to push our discipline’s understanding of online writing in order to create bridges where only chasms of perception existed before.

1.5 A FLUID DOCUMENT

This study is timely and necessary; before it we have only begun to bridge extracurricular and academic online writing, and without it we risk missing many opportunities to expand our understanding of how and why our students write in the ways they do. The chapters that follow take time to identify and analyze local issues of online writing so that we may continue to build a much larger viewing of the types of writing taking place in social online spaces. As a result, this dissertation walks a fine line between being prescriptive while pointing out specific issues and features that I think are important to the study of online and collaborative writing, and providing an approach to studying online and collaborative writing that can grow as new behaviors, media, and student-users emerge. I offer this study, then, as an open-ended, fluid document that I believe points readers in a helpful direction to study online writing, but that ultimately allows for additions and modifications as new textual experiences are encountered. This perceived tension between fixed and fluid views is explored in every chapter to follow, and I believe it is this tension which makes this study productive as readers engage with it to identify and define terms that may not even exist yet. After all, even in studying instability we must rely on relative stable structures of thought to share in the same conversations and recognize from where we started.
Following this introduction, then, the second chapter contains the literature review. This chapter returns to literature relevant to collaborative composition and computer-mediated communication from the past thirty years\(^\text{19}\). Taking a rhetorical, Bakhtinian, and social constructionist approach outlined in the theoretical frame chapter that follows, this literature review catalogues ways in which previous essays and studies may have inadvertently relied on a fixed view of textual production and consumption embodied in analyses such as the traditional rhetorical triangle of author, audience, and purpose/text. In response to these potential limitations, in the third chapter I walk readers through the construction of my Collaborative Triangle, which is offered as an expanded view of the types of writing taking place in social online spaces. This Collaborative Triangle is presented as a way of systematically thinking about not only a text’s nature and quality, but also its value and interest to student-users.

The fourth chapter, on my study’s methods, is followed by a four separate findings chapters. The methods chapter provides an overview of my methodology and a description of how I apply my Collaborative Triangle to data collected through surveys, interviews, and online texts. The fifth chapter, an introduction to my findings, contains an overview of the main take-away findings revealed through analysis of the study data. The three chapters that follow step through the three categories of the Collaborative Triangle: authorship, community, and textuality. In doing so, I attempt to not only further define these categories (and catalogue corresponding lists of behaviors), but also demonstrate how they can be used to think more deeply about online writing that may be collaborative in nature. Analysis of interview data within these sections attempts to address the second research question—In what ways do student-users’ dispositions toward online writing reflect and expand previous discussions about collaborative writing?—by focusing on student-users’ dispositions and motivations for writing and interacting in the ways that they do, while my analysis of directly observable behaviors in online texts addresses the third research question: In what ways do student-users’ behaviors of online writing reflect and expand previous discussions about collaborative writing?

\(^{19}\) As will be discussed in the Literature Review chapter, this timeframe was chosen as the starting point of study due to the rise of personal computer use and the corresponding field of computers and writing.
The ninth chapter that follows, dedicated to stepping through a complete data sample, begins the work of addressing the fourth research question: In what ways does an understanding of student-users’ dispositions toward and behaviors of online writing contribute to future discussions about collaborative writing? The sample analysis contained within this chapter not only reconstructs the categories of collaboration that the preceding three chapters inherently deconstructed, it is also demonstrates the inadvertent limitations of previous forms of analysis (e.g. of definition, persuasion, and argumentation) to uncover the concepts and dimensions revealed through this study.

The ultimate goal of this study is not to determine that online writing is always collaborative or that it is always valuable. The tenth, conclusion, returns to this fact by explaining some of the limitations of this study and offering some future considerations for readers interested in applying this approach to their own writing or writing instruction. I conclude the dissertation within this chapter by highlighting some potential uses for my heuristic and approach that have not yet been discussed in the body of the preceding chapters. In the end, I offer my hope that readers will be able to think more deeply about online writing and interaction as a result of my heuristic, and in so doing be able to bridge false binaries that separate the writing we do online with the writing we do in every other corner of our lives. The result asks us not only to reconsider what we mean by “collaborative writing,” but also what we consider “text” in both what study and produce.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

In “An Historical Perspective on Collaborative Learning,” Lynée Lewis Gaillet (1994) dispels the widely held belief that collaborative learning—and its writing equivalent, collaborative composition—was “created” in the 1970s as a response to the open-admissions movement in the United States. Taking a more global and historic perspective, Gaillet highlights as an example (if not an origin) a University of Glasgow professor’s use of democratic and peer-based pedagogy to prepare nontraditional students for entry into the 19th century British business and science worlds. Over two centuries later, social technology has assumed this role of progressive facilitator by supporting the seemingly collaborative writing dispositions and behaviors of students and users of all backgrounds and prospects. In the same way that Gaillet reached back to uncover collaborative learning’s apparent birth, this literature review addresses the previous discussions and definitions of collaborative composition over the last thirty years as a way of foregrounding the behaviors and issues at play in social online spaces. In doing so, this chapter begins constructing the framework through which I propose we view all online writing in order to understand its potentially collaborative value.

This chapter focuses on literature since the rise of the personal computer (or, approximately 1980), and includes perspectives from rhetoric and composition, education, and English literature studies, as well as social science fields such as communication and information sciences. Looking back on this body of literature, this chapter makes an argument that even as more recent literature has addressed increasingly interactive technologies, discussion and definitions of collaborative composition continue to make assumptions that may inadvertently reflect an antiquated rhetorical situation.

where fixed models of representation (e.g. a published book) still are prominent. In one example addressed below, a common definition of co-authorship references a produced “document,” where the assumption is that the document is an agreed-upon, published product. In this case, multiple comments on a blog post may not be seen as collaborative because the co-authors neither explicitly agreed to collaborate nor agreed upon a final, finished text.

As a result, this review argues that the discipline of composition is in need of an updated approach to discussing and defining collaborative writing that takes into consideration more fluid, dynamic rhetorical instances where rhetorical situations are expressed in behaviors that may still be underrepresented in previous literature on collaborative writing. Within this chapter, I highlight some thematic behaviors that have been at the heart of defining collaborative composition, and begin to explore behaviors that appear to be relevant to these prior approaches, but that have yet to be satisfactorily addressed in the literature. In this way, I address a gap in our literature that has traditionally looked at collaborative composition largely through the frame of fixed, stable writing forms. This chapter concludes with an outline of the categories of behaviors that I believe we need to examine in order to more fully see the potential collaborative value in online texts. This outline is taken up in the following theoretical frame chapter, and used to construct a heuristic that I use to analyze the data collected for this study.

In returning to approaches to collaborative composition, this chapter agrees that “the traditional rhetorical triangle that depicts speaker, audience, and subject as points on that triangle does not adequately represent the utterance as part of an ongoing, complex, interactive web of discourse set within a social context” (Halasek, 1999, p. 26). As a result, even as I return to previous discussions and definitions of collaborative writing, this chapter argues that our applications of these concepts (typically practices in classroom assignments involving rhetorical analyses) in determining what collaborative writing is (or is not) may be too limiting in only identifying writing behaviors that have already been discussed and defined in previous literature.

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21 As will be described in the following sub-section on established definitions of author, audience, and text, the actual concepts of the rhetorical situation are not inherently flawed or inadequate. Instead, this chapter argues that our applications of these concepts (typically practices in classroom assignments involving rhetorical analyses) in determining what collaborative writing is (or is not) may be too limiting in only identifying writing behaviors that have already been discussed and defined in previous literature.
writing rooted in these three constructs, this chapter aims to demonstrate why there is a need for an updated approach to studying online writing that more adequately describes the dynamic collaborative situation present in social online spaces. Assumptions have been made as compositionists apply traditional definitions of collaborative writing and rhetorical analyses to online texts. For example, a simple definition of co-authoring may entail two authors jointly producing one text. However, such a definition could both describe every interaction in social online spaces as well as no interaction. Because of this, this chapter calls for a necessary expanding of approaches, rooted in uncovering contemporary behaviors in online writing that appear to be potentially collaborative in nature.

The problem that this chapter addresses, then, is our reliance on relatively fixed, stable approaches to discuss and define collaborative composition over the past three decades. While such established approaches have worked well to achieve a deeper understanding of collaborative writing, they may be inadvertently limiting how we view new forms of collaborative composition present in online writing. As new forms of writing and interacting have emerged, our discipline has yet to consistently identify expanded approaches to writing that may indicate collaborative composing skills. This chapter first chronicles these established approaches and then seeks to expand our discussion by exploring some categories and behaviors that may be related to these traditional ones. In preparation for discussing and applying my Collaborative Triangle heuristic (in the theoretical frame and findings chapters, respectively), this chapter identifies ways in which we have viewed collaborative writing that may be limiting to future conversations about online writing. In this way, I return to the literature on collaborative composition and begin expanding its breadth by noting literature that portends emerging approaches seemingly analogous to traditional ones.

2.1 ESTABLISHED DEFINITIONS

Approaches to discussing and defining collaborative composition have relied primarily on two constructions: dispositions toward a project, and behaviors apparent in producing it. Studying collaborative composition has mostly transcended the typical process/product divide in writing studies. Classroom practices of brainstorming and peer
review are typically seen as collaborative behaviors, and it could reasonably be argued that such behaviors are also designed to cultivate dispositions toward a social view of writing. Still, the writing process is most visible in final products, such as graded essays or published articles, where evaluators may be wont to trace back the product’s origins through the study of behaviors. Questions such as “Who did the majority of the writing?” or “Who takes credit for this decision?” (perhaps unfairly) put an emphasis on directly observable behaviors. Because of this traditional approach to analysis and assessment, and because studying directly observable behaviors will allow my empirical study to be replicated, I too emphasize behaviors over dispositions despite being convinced that both constitute what I see as an approach to collaborative writing. Established discussions and definitions of collaborative composition, highlighted in the section to follow, show that I am not alone.

In 1994, Jeanette Harris wrote in “Toward a Working Definition of Collaborative Writing,” that the “attitude towards [all] writing as a collaborative act has not resulted in a satisfactory definition of collaborative writing, which we continue to define primarily by what it is not—as the opposite of writing that is individual and independent” (p. 77). In focusing on an approach to collaborative writing that relies on either/or demarcations, Harris’s lament is telling. In order to discuss and define what we mean by collaborative writing, behaviors evident in a text’s final product are often the most readily available pieces of evidence to reveal the (sometimes hidden) writing process. Two names on the title page of book is seen as evidence of a host of collaborative behaviors enacted throughout the writing process: power sharing, negotiation, ownership, etc. Approaching texts in this way allows us to uncover the dispositions toward, and behaviors of, writing that manifest as co-authored texts. In 1994, it can safely be assumed that Harris was addressing mostly complete—if not published—pieces. However, as writing processes have grown to encompass increasing nuances of literacy skills (such as serial blogging or

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22 I use the term “established” here to connote discussions and definitions that have been widely agreed upon (and that are widely still in use.) My study, in most cases, is not interested in dislodging or discrediting these previous approaches, but instead is interested in expanding what we all agree upon as related to collaborative writing. This chapter, however, is interested foremost in categorizing definitions that have already been discussed for the past thirty years.
maintaining a *Twitter* feed) and written products that are less bound by traditional conceptions of text, our approaches to discussing and defining collaborative composition may not have kept up. Studies viewing collaborative writing as a set of either/or approaches (e.g. Leonard, Brady, and Murray Davis, 1994; Speck, et al., 1999; Fontaine & Hunter, 2006) inherently rely on a set of established approaches to discussing and defining collaborative composition set in collection of behaviors that assume many print-centric entities. In not considering an expanding cadre of dispositions and behaviors, studies such as these may be limiting (if not ignoring) what we are able to see.

To make this move from established to expanded approaches, it makes sense to base our exploration in behaviors. Behaviors have dominated traditional definitions of collaborative composition because they are observable and (to a lesser degree) quantifiable. Harris’s observation points to this fact by noting that our previous definitions (even in 1994) could at best describe a text as collaborative or not. Calling a text “collaborative” may have little pay-off. However, identifying behaviors that lead to that text being called collaborative may allow instructors and students to extrapolate their social literacy skills to other writing tasks. Especially as the term “collaborative” is used by every industry and academic discipline to describe any interaction between two or more people, it is important for composition to, in effect, reclaim the term (as it pertains to collaborative composition and co-authorship) by returning to its previous literature and identifying what makes collaborative writing desirable in the first place. Discussing and defining approaches that emulate important social and literacy skills is one way to do that.

Revisiting Harris’s (1994) succinct explanation of why all writing can be deemed collaborative is helpful in this. She argues:

(1) Since we generally assume that writing evolved from speaking and since oral language is always inherently social, then writing too must be viewed as basically a social phenomenon and thus a collaborative act.

(2) Since, as Walter Ong (among others) reminds us, “every text builds on pretext” (162), then everything that is written is essentially a revision of a “prior text.”

(3) Since, according to social constructionists, both language and
knowledge are social constructs, then all texts are obviously also social rather than individual constructs.

(4) Since, as the deconstructionalists and reader-response theorists assert, all texts are completed in the act of reading, then a writer never functions alone to create a text. (p. 78)

Harris’s summary of collaborative writing can be compared to Howard’s (2001) paraphrase of Kenneth Bruffee’s views on collaborative learning to further widen the lens on the ubiquity and inherent nature of group construction of text and knowledge:

(1) Because thought is internalized conversation, thought and conversation tend to work largely in the same way. (Bruffee, 1984, p. 639),

(2) If thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing of all kinds is internalized social talk made public and social again. If thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized. (p. 641),

(3) To learn is to work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers through the process that Richard Rorty calls “socially justifying belief” (p. 646). (Howard, 2001, p. 54)

Both views demonstrate the foundation that collaboration is “inherent in all writing” (Thralls, 1992, p. 65) and apparent in classroom interactions that “no one would think to dissent from” (Trimbur & Braun, 1992, p. 21) in composition studies. Nonetheless, established discussions and definitions of collaboration (herein referred to as collaborative composition or collaborative writing) vary slightly, especially as approaches highlight certain behaviors over others. This is equally true in discussions and definitions correlating to the rhetorical situation of author, audience, and text/purpose present in much pedagogically-minded literature. The following sub-sections briefly review the major threads apparent in these established approaches to collaborative writing before returning to a focus on a larger set of behaviors that appear associated with contemporary collaborative writing.

2.1.1 COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION
For the last thirty years, literature about collaborative composition has largely taken the form of practical How-To guides aimed at teachers and practitioners (e.g., Wolfe, 2010), or (often auto-) ethnographic narratives, typically offering success stories followed by a list of advice or cautions (e.g., Gerlach, 1994). Likewise, though there have been some vocal opponents to the value of collaborative writing (Corder, 1993; Heller, 2003), many more have lauded if not its inherent connection to academic writing (Anson, Brady, & Larson, 1993; Dale, 1997) then its benefits to writing and knowledge construction in literary (Hughes & Lund, 1994), rhetoric (McNenny & Roen, 1992), and composition studies (Blythe & Sweet, 1985; Ronald & Roskelly, 2001).

Regardless of its application, however, two major threads of collaborative composition consistently appear in nearly every definition of the term: (1) it is a constructive (as opposed to individually accumulated) way of thinking and working together; and, (2) it is the joint production of a singular work by multiple people. Woven together, these threads constitute the fabric behind contemporary understandings of collaborative composition, regardless if the activities are deemed co-authorship, collaborative writing, cooperative learning, teamwork, group writing, or variations thereof. By frequently citing the same behaviors and products as part of their discussions and definitions of collaborative writing, both threads rely on previous understandings of stable entities (i.e. author, audience, text) to produce finished and/or published products (e.g. in describing consenting authors working towards a published product.) Both threads also map loosely onto concepts of process and product, or (in the terms used in this study) disposition and behavior. The purpose of returning to them here is not to necessarily point out fallacies in previous thinking about these approaches, but to instead highlight some of the major assumptions that seem to have informed their wide dissemination and acceptance over the past three decades.

The first common thread of collaborative writing foregrounds the constructive process attained through dialogue, often capturing an ethereal sense of synergy, and expressed not only in text, but also in knowledge. Here, dispositions are heavily implied in their observed behavior counterparts. Commonly applied to classroom practice, collaboration here “can be used as a means of social support and as an instructional aid for moving students beyond topic information and into more rhetorical, constructive
thinking” (Higgins, Flower, & Petraglia, 1991, pp. 56-57), and can be used as a scaffold to move students from novice to expert writers and creators of discourse (Rubin, 1988; Dale, 1996). Likewise, “[t]o collaborate means more than reading what another person writes and placing one’s own thoughts into the same space. Collaboration is a concerted pedagogical effort toward the creation of an end product” (Myers-Breslin, 2000, p. 162), which often takes the form of an inquiry-based approach to providing solutions to common problems (Passig & Schwartz, 2007). In such definitions, collaboration is not just a mere accumulation of authors, evidence, or work, but a reciprocal and constructive process that builds towards producing both texts and knowledge, especially in academic contexts. This process can be replicated both outwardly and mentally to eventually cultivate a social view of writing.

In the second thread, many studies of collaborative writing (e.g., Price & Warner, 2005) begin with a working definition of collaboration that assumes a finished product. A commonly cited definition, attributed to Deborah Bosley, describes “two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document” (qtd. in Ede & Lunsford, 1990, p. 15). Surveys of other literature reveal many similar definitions, such as “two (or three) learners [constructing] and [writing] a text together, participating equally in the production, and being equally responsible for achieving the task” (Giroud, 1999, p. 150), and “Thomas Hine’s simple yet comprehensive definition, namely, ‘work artists do together to produce a joint creation’” (Stone & Thompson, 2006, p. 22). In such definitions we see similar recurring attributes: multiple authors, a shared responsibility, and a singular (finished) creation. We also see similar established behaviors: claims of ownership and assigning of tasks, among others. Above all else, though, we see an assumption of collaborative writing being embodied in a finished (and often published) text; collaborators seem to “know” when their task or text is complete.

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23 This definition is returned to throughout this study as representative of common definitions of collaborative composition throughout the last thirty years of scholarship. Doing so is not meant to place the definition above others, or as a straw man for my argument, but simply to illustrate the basic components of a definition of collaborative writing to which most scholars adhere.
Both of these threads inform Ede and Lunsford’s (1990) definition of the term “group writing” (p. 15) from their discipline-leading survey of 1,400 members of various professional associations in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Their term, group writing, is predicted and predated by their 1983 taxonomy of co-authorship as: 1) two writers creating one text—together, 2) two authors contributing separate sections, which are then put together, or 3) group writing (p. 151). In other words, Ede and Lunsford’s taxonomy can roughly be broken down into activities of (1) co-authorship, (2) cooperation, and (3) collaboration. Co-authorship is most recognizable in discussions surrounding responsibility for a text, and a finished product. Projects that contain by-lines or reward systems (such as publication rights or tenure review) easily fall into this category. Partially to avoid this confusion, Ede and Lunsford avoided terms like co-authorship and collaborative writing, and instead opted to describe behaviors like “brainstorming, outlining or note-taking, organizational planning, drafting, revising, and editing” (p. 47) as “group writing,” mainly to highlight the often overlooked dispositions, processes, and everyday behaviors that are often excluded when granting a writer author status.

In between distinctions of co-authorship and collaboration lie more “cooperative” activities that are often termed collaborative despite the terms’ differences. Cooperative activities, often referred to as “team writing” activities (Oakley, et al., 2004), usually involve “individual effort, but [bring] students together in small groups to work on specific, well-defined and well-structured problems and questions, for which there are clear and correct answers or solutions,” and where “the process involves a kind of division of labor [and] learning is regarded as an individual effort that is facilitated by participation in the group” (Dirkx & Smith, 2004, pp. 136-137). This view of cooperative learning (or writing) foregrounds the individual, and lacks the typical “messy” (Hyman & Lazaroff, 2007) nature of collaboration, captured in such behaviors as power struggles and conflict. It nonetheless likewise establishes its constituent behaviors as fixed and requisite, with clear demarcations between author and audience, for example, again pointing to specific roles and things that agents do in order to be seen as writers and authors.
Issues of power run through each level within this three-tiered taxonomy. Highlighting this, Ede and Lunsford (1990) posit two modes of collaboration, hierarchical and dialogic, that further nuance these three closely related types of group writing. Hierarchical collaboration, they argue, is common in the professions, and “is carefully, and often rigidly, structured, driven by highly specific goals, and carried out by people playing clearly defined and delimited roles” (p. 133). Though this type of collaboration is deemed “highly productive” (p. 133) by the authors, their second mode of dialogic collaboration may be more applicable to successful academic projects, and to my current study of collaborative writing in social online spaces, due to its lack of clearly defined goals and roles. As the authors explain, dialogic collaboration “is loosely structured and the roles enacted within it are fluid” (p. 133). Either type of collaboration can be apparent in traditional power structures, such as those present in learning groups (Graham & Misanchuk, 2004) or workplace committees (Yancey & Spooner, 1998), which are often mimicked in classrooms. But dialogic collaboration is worth pausing over due to its subtly different dispositions toward writing. Though it shares the same established behaviors as hierarchical collaboration, agents engaging in dialogic collaboration may see their behaviors differently (i.e. as egalitarian, or co-owned.) As a result, this designation is a viable starting point for considering expanding approaches to collaborative composition in online spaces due to its subtle unmooring from relatively fixed notions used to analyze and discuss the writing process (e.g. using the rhetorical triangle to understand a given writing event; such as identifying one author, one audience, etc.)

Though the study of rhetoric is itself a fluid thing, collaborative writing has traditionally been discussed and defined by fixed contextualized rhetorical situations that have operated to glorify (and reward) individual authors who write to static audiences in well-defined texts (Rafoth, 1988). Perhaps inadvertently, every time a writing instructor assigns a rhetorical analysis comprised of these same components—especially to students encountering the terms for the first time—she may be reinforcing this fixed approach to collaborative composition that values these entities as concrete, unmoving things. However, collaboration—especially in social online spaces—is increasingly understood as a plastic, transient process that supports changing roles, and produces text and
knowledge, that expand established definitions. Literature in the decades following Ede and Lunsford’s study has recognized their call for a dialogic approach to collaborative writing, but often still espoused (and rewarded) relatively fixed entities of lone authors or published texts. To highlight this, I briefly present here some examples from our previous literature that reinforce fixed entities of writing as a way to foreground my expanded approach to studying writing that is embodied in my theoretical framework and Collaborative Triangle. I do so not to construct a straw man of understanding concerning classical rhetoric, but to exhibit ways in which even enlightened views of writing can carry with them assumptions that have been passed on for decades, if not centuries.

2.1.2 AUTHOR

The traditional (or, often referred to as ancient or classic) rhetorical situation draws from Aristotle’s belief that a message has three primary appeals: to the nature of the author (or speaker), to the nature of the audience (or reader), and to the logic of the subject at hand (commonly referred to as the purpose, or text.) This situation, typically represented as the Rhetorical Triangle seen in Figure 2.1, has been useful in describing and analyzing situated exchanges that also take into account a situation’s context within a specific space and time (its kairos.) And though most contemporary rhetoricians would never take the three components literally, the triangle heuristic is often writing students’ first introduction to a systematic understanding of rhetorical principles and writing strategies. In composition classrooms—especially in first-year writing courses—such an approach is invaluable for communicating and visualizing what has widely become the primary way a student understands and analyzes a piece of text.

24 My forthcoming chapter addressing my study’s theoretical frame takes up this dialogic approach through an understanding of Bakhtin’s view of shared discourse.
In the traditional rhetorical triangle, the author is the primary agent, active producer, and creator of discourse. She possesses the motives and intentions expressed in the texts she produces. While literary schools of thought like New Criticism have asked us to pay closer attention to the text, and reader-response critics attend to the receptive audience, writing instructors may (understandably) continue to look at the Author as the initiator and originator of a text. After all, the goal of such instruction is to cultivate skills and knowledge in encouraging better writing, or authoring.

Though a view of Author as an individual entity may appear extreme and outdated at the turn of the 21st century, the fact remains that literary, publishing, legal, and tenure industries often continue to rely (albeit at times subconsciously) on a rhetorical model of a single Author as agent; what has been referred to for decades as the solitary genius (e.g., Stillinger, 1991) behind original and novel works. This focus, which composition instructors may reinforce because of their dual lives within the aforementioned industries, may (inadvertently) privilege outdated views of singular writers using stores of personal information and evidence to construct original ideas.

Throughout this chapter, “Author” is capitalized to connote the historical conceptualization of an author as originator of ideas, who is then solely responsible for its ownership. This hyper-individualized conceptualization is contrasted with “author,” which is not capitalized, to designate the literal individual(s) who produces a text and may or may not benefit from claimed responsibility or ownership.
arguments, and texts without the direct aid of others. While many composition scholars have actively pushed back against this model, the discipline’s literature from the past three decades has rightfully acknowledged this (if nothing else, perceived) established reality as it relates to the role of Author in any rhetorical situation. As a result, the assumption that the concept of the lone Author exists in writing situations is often taken as somewhat of a given for writing students; to learn otherwise they must effectively move past this simplified model.

Examination of the existence of this Author concept, of course, is not new. By now, Barthes’s (1967) “death of the author” and Foucault’s concept of the “author function,” or, the “moment of individualization” (1999, p. 205) of an oeuvre into a single representative Author is widely accepted, both in literary studies and beyond. In the highly gatekept areas of publishing and tenure review this diminishing act makes at least some sense for logistical reasons alone (e.g. there are times where payment is commensurate with amount of work done, such as primary writers or investigators receiving larger pay or promotion even though assistants aided their work.) However, even in visible examples of extraordinary individuals contributing original ideas, collaborations such as those between author and editor, teacher and student, or spouses are overlooked or ignored altogether (Inge, 2001; Stone & Thompson, 2006) by glorifying the individual(ized) Author, and seeing her role as fixed and unique, and comprised of established behaviors of individual writing.

One way of pushing back on this lone Author model is by highlighting the explicit sharing that takes place in academic, online spaces (Cooper & Selfe, 1990), and traditional classrooms (Flannery, 1994). Though a seemingly simple solution, highlighting these activities may raise ethical concerns that could, for example, blur fairly established boundaries between collaboration and plagiarism when such sharing occurs (Howard, 1999; Shamoon & Burns, 1999). In the academy, where ethical considerations such as honor codes often exist to maintain the privilege of the Author, this blurring may be more complicating than productive. However, to ignore the Author’s multiplicity of influences is not only unrealistic, it is also unproductive in modeling the inherent social nature of writing. For example, writing centers—where peers and non-grading faculty can speak with students about their writing—model sharing behaviors ignored in most
conceptions of the Author, and demonstrate an attempt at de-authorized zones of authorship in terms of mediation and traditional models of power (Spigelman, 2001). However, writing centers are not authority-free zones, and students return to these spaces to experience a “good” type of authority, one that provides experience and expertise, but that also allows them to write (or talk) back to the authoritative agent.

Especially on college campuses, interactions like those taking place in writing centers are not uncommon; they explicitly defy the notion of a lone Author operating in hierarchical power structures. However, when a student who has visited a writing center turns in a paper with her name alone atop the title page, the work of the writing center (and any existence of collaboration from other areas, such as peer review) is all but erased for fear that it might transgress to plagiarism. As a result, in relying on a traditional model of authorship we may be reinforcing assumptions related to the traditional concept of the rhetorical Author, and of what it means to collaborate and write in academic contexts.

2.1.3 AUDIENCE

In some ways, the audience equivalent of Barthes’s “death of the author” claim is the fictionalization of a text’s reader, or readers. This sentiment is captured notably in Walter Ong’s analysis of literary audiences in “The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction,” in which he posits, “the writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role [and] the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself [to fulfill this role]” (1975, p. 12). Ong is separating not only the immediacy of audiences present in face-to-face, oral interactions from often abstract, potential text interactions, but also the literal exchange between two tangible entities and the idea of possible exchange. Essentially, he argues for a move to conceptualize author/audience exchange from tangible behavior to a kind of disposition.

This is the same move addressed in Ede and Lunsford’s oft-cited article, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy” (1984). Here, the authors offer a constructive binary to bridge the concepts of actual and imagined audiences in everyday writing. They argue:
The addressed audience, the actual or intended readers of a discourse, exists outside of the text. Writers may analyze these readers’ needs, anticipate their biases, even defer to their wishes. But it is only through the text, through language, that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reading. In so doing, they do not so much create a role for the reader—a phrase which implies that the writer somehow creates a mold to which the reader adapts—as invoke it. (p. 167)

Unlike Ong’s conceptualization of roles, Ede and Lunsford target rhetorical language cues to, in essence, co-construct the idea of an audience. This model relies less on a reciprocal author/audience exchange than it does the disposition of the author to be rhetorically aware of her audience’s potential reception of the text in varied contexts.

Such an act of invocation occurs daily in writing courses, where the expected literal audiences of student texts (typically instructors) are broadened through expectation of larger (often metaphorical) audiences beyond the classroom walls (Lang, 2003; Weiser, Fehler, and Gonzalez, 2009). Likewise, democratic and peer-based courses are not only invoking these global audiences, but modeling engaged audiences that can be addressed within the classroom: students (Fischer, 2002; Gopen, 2004; Gopen, 2005). In many ways, asking students to write toward other students is the embodiment of balancing concepts of audiences addressed and invoked. While the immediate feedback provides a balanced exchange of ideas between author and reader, many student audiences invoke a critical stance in order to approximate the expected instructor’s reception, thus representing many dispositions in a single exchange. However, in approximating an instructor’s critical reading, student audiences may be perpetuating a preference for a direct address of an (known) audience as opposed to any unstable, imaginary invocation; a mimicked teacher’s voice can be confirmed or refuted typically in a matter of days. This kind of instant gratification (and confirmation) is afforded in direct address rather than (sometimes hypothetical) invocation. In other words, typical peer-based collaboration in the classroom may be not only reinforcing a simplified view of a rhetorical situation, it may also be inadvertently attempting to stabilize what is inherently an unstable enterprise in the “real world.”
A classroom audience is typically well defined, and thus fixed over the course of a semester. Students enrolled through a semester may come in with various backgrounds, but over several months of shared discussions and texts, they may become more homogenous in their knowledge, skills, and views. Even in larger classrooms where students do not know each other’s names, or read everyone’s texts, they share common language, texts, and classroom practices that bind them together as a kind of audience community, or discourse community (Porter, 1986; Swales, 1990; Kent, 1991). Though Joseph Harris (1989) cautions against the use of the term “community” as “an empty and sentimental word” (p. 13), it can be accurately used to describe both a collective audience literally being addressed (as in a writing course) and a collective audience invoked (as in a group of readers unknowingly all digesting the same text.) Harris proposes a taxonomy of the term in order to examine discourse, learning, interpretive, and speech communities and identify specific brands of audiences. In applying the term to rhetorical situations, he reveals the multiplicity of audiences available for any given text at any given time. The concept of audience in writing classrooms bound by fixed entities, such as the rhetorical situation, however, may provide a confusing contrast to writers experiencing diverse communities beyond the classroom.

Nonetheless, practitioners of collaborative learning, who are informed by the traditional rhetorical triangle to situate textual and social interaction, seem to see peer-based writing instruction as the most accurate approximation of audience beyond the classroom. Kenneth A. Bruffee’s “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” (1984) is often cited as the genesis of the contemporary collaborative writing movement, in particular because of the author’s focus on the “social context” enacted in classrooms comprised of “a community of knowledgeable peers” (p. 644). Bruffee’s conceptualization of this type of community has far-reaching implications on collaborative learning: everything from experience as evidence to repositioning authority in the classroom is influenced by this concept. However, it is the community of peers’s relation to audience that has been most influential on how compositionists view social, textual interaction.

Communities of peers in writing classrooms can be viewed as fairly consistent entities embodying both audiences addressed and invoked over the course of a semester.
These communities of peers can be desirable because they seek to destabilize perceived hindrances to textual production, such as power issues, issues of comfort, and disparate skill sets often located in a clichéd domineering instructor. Such communities have also been seen to provide alternatives to hierarchical power structures in textual exchange (Belcher, 1990; Rymer, 1993) and a sense of continuity across disciplines and curricula (Kutz, 2004). Outside of curricular contexts, communities have been based around tasks, such as when workers share expertise to accomplish goals in communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002), or share common interests and media, such as in virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993). Communities of peers (i.e. students) in writing classrooms succeed in dislocating power and response solely away from the single entity of the instructor. Just the same, they also carry with them an assumption of individuals who are fixed in their identities and interests. Such assumptions can mostly be accepted in academic contexts where the goal is a student’s individual learning. However, in extracurricular, and online, contexts, such assumptions may provide for a limiting view of what social writing is and how academic literacy skills can be transferred to “the real world.”

This “real world” is the effect of views about proximity, where academic contexts have primarily assumed direct, face-to-face contact between author and audience, student and reader\textsuperscript{26}. Proximity is typically studied in curricular settings\textsuperscript{27} by assessing the face-to-face (F2F)\textsuperscript{28} nature of interaction. Faigley (1999) helped to point out that F2F

\begin{itemize}
\item With expanding efforts to make college courses available exclusively online, or in hybrid fashion, however, these assumptions may be eroding as academic writing takes place on the same devices (e.g. laptops, tablets) that students do their extracurricular writing.
\item Mixing traditional and online learning practices is not a contemporary idea. In fact, writing scholars have tested the waters of everyday curricular practices such as holding conferences (Selfe & Meyer, 1991), facilitating peer review (Tannacitio, 2001; 2004), and supporting co-authored editing (Kaufer & Neuwirth, 1995) via technology for years. Likewise, these hybrid approaches have been studied for their effects on community building (Burow-Flak, 2000) and collaboration in general (Carroli, 1997; Hansen & Frederick, 1997; Eyman, 2000; Reisman, Flores, & Edge, 2003) long before a connection to the Internet became a requirement for most writing classrooms.
\item Studies of F2F interactions cover everything from how such exchanges affect the creation of collaborative communities (Hamilton & Bosworth, 1997) to imbalances of
\end{itemize}
interaction is not only about direct conversation or reading, but also about seeing. Likewise, studies of visual rhetoric (e.g. Hocks, 2003; Wysocki, 2008) have taken up this address of the visual in relation to interaction. Virtual environments—aided by profile pictures and real-time video conferencing software—have aided in this discussion, as F2F interactions increasingly replicate “real world” interactions. Still, as we continue to need quotation marks to demarcate everyday interactions from those occurring online, the actual sharing of space is what most guides discussion of audience in peer-based writing classrooms. As a result, the extracurriculum is sometimes still seen as an “other” in academic contexts.

These discussions may be categorized as less about proximity than about space. “Real world” interactions and audiences often occur in “extracurricular” spaces.

power due to gender (Wolfe, 2005). The study of collaboration as affected by F2F interactions (e.g. Rogers & Horton, 1993) is increasingly shaded by how technology affects such interactions (Horton, et al., 1991; Selfe, 1992; Leander, 2007). To date, even though synchronous online text exchange and video conferencing (e.g., using Skype) have made proximity seem like a luxury more than a necessity for collaborative activity, research continues to argue that “face-to-face discussion has a strong impact on cooperation” (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002, p. 64), and “physical proximity increases the likelihood of collaboration” (Kraut, et al., 2002, p. 138). As a result, compositionists are often asked to experiment with models of instruction that balance F2F and technology-based interactions (Nardi & Whittaker, 2002)

29 Everyday activities such as talk may be viewed as collaborative. Such production often takes place in conversation (Bruffee, 1983; Lunsford & Ede, 1988; Calderonello, Nelson, & Simmons, 1991), which can take place in the pre-writing or writing stages of constructing a text. Though the production of literary works (Brady, 1994) and writing workshops in classrooms (Guyer, Seward, & Green, 1994) often utilize conversation and critique for the eventual benefit of an individual author, authorship outside of class, or in electronic spaces, relies on conversation as the central activity for knowledge and text construction.

30 Parsing the subtle differences between space and place lies beyond the scope of this study, but suffice to say that concepts of space, addressed through the study of space theory (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996), are important in determining the dispositions and behaviors of individuals in contextualized places (Keither & Pile, 1993). Specific to composition studies, Reynolds (2004) applies space theory to study “places, whether textual, material, or imaginary, [that] are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices [and] structures of feeling” (p. 2). Reynolds’s study importantly draws attention to “the public-private split” (p. 12) of texts and interactions, where texts are “viewed as having an inside and an outside—with the audience, in
(Applebee, 1974), where students negotiate authority and community in ways that may be different from academic contexts. This is definitely true in online communities (Smith, 1994; Kim, 2000) and social networks where users congregate in virtual spaces to connect through “socially-meaningful relationships” (Wellman, 1997, p. 179) and utilize writing skills that may be subtly different from those they espouse in academic contexts. Anne Ruggles Gere’s seminal article “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition” (1994) identifies some of these differences, but also points toward similarities between the two contexts. In the article, she identifies the extracurriculum of her interest as a “self-sponsored pedagogically oriented writing [activity] outside of the academy” (p. 80). For Gere, the extracurriculum “is constructed by desire, by the aspirations and imaginations of its participants” (p. 80), though is “largely invisible and inaudible” (p. 78) to compositionists. Gere’s extracurricular site of analysis contains similar writing behaviors because the goals are largely analogous to academic contexts: peer-based revision, individual attribution, and production of written (if not published) texts.

Less academic instances of extracurriculum, however, may occur beyond the classroom, and present new (or simply different) writing skills to young writers. In spaces that have come to be known as a “thirdspace” (Oldenburg, 1999), perceptions of authority and desire are uniquely situated to support informal interactions that may have no explicit curricular goals, and value different skills than those currently valued in the academy. In cases such as these (where a blogger posts controversial topics in order to particular as a factor outside” (p. 12). Such recognition foreshadows issues of privacy important to online composition.

31 In the meantime, such extensions begin to address the potentially volatile bridge between extracurricular and academic writing (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000; Beaufort, 2007). However, as students bring laptops into classrooms, and campuses equip increasing space with WiFi connections, these bridges become not only more ubiquitous, but more obligatory. Though the issue of technology in the writing classroom has been discussed for a long time (Hawisher & Selfe, 1991; Kemp, 1994; Lankshear, Snyder, & Green, 2000; Selber, 2004; Roberts, 2005), and in relation to collaboration in particular (Sharples, et al., 1993; Sullivan, 1994; Fey & Sisson, 1996; Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002; Redmond & Lock, 2006), the realities of treating the metaphorical bridge as a binary (with two distinct sides) or a joiner are still being negotiated.
start a debate and gain more followers, for example) underlying assumptions about audiences are slowly giving way to acknowledgement of the need for interaction. Whether in person or online, contemporary writers may be confronted by expectations about skills and behaviors that are valued in one context, but not another. For these writers, social media is forcing them (and us) to see that audience may be more of a disposition than a behavior, and that the ways in which an agent approaches a textual situation may inform whether or how she ultimately acts upon it. Such an approach needs to be increasingly cognizant of the interactive factors that influence these acts.

2.1.4 TEXT/PURPOSE

As noted in the second thread defining collaboration, co-authored pieces are often expected to result in a finished (i.e. published) product, or text. Traditionally, a text has been discussed as a written or composed (through various other media) product embodying a purpose that is relatively stable in its final form. This conceptualization of text can be measured and analyzed, can be catalogued and archived, and can be expected to stay relatively constant over time. This doesn’t just apply to printed text. Even if we consider knowledge as a kind of text, or final product, the desire to see it as a fixed and measurable entity remains a widely held assumption (especially in viewing politicians’ call for students and teacher accountability in high stakes tests that measure memorization more than production). The same can be said of the concept of “purpose,” which, like text, is sometimes also used to describe the third point on the rhetorical triangle. These relatively stable views of text/purpose are contained in assumptions that are being confronted by new dispositions toward intellectual products (and property) and media, where nearly no text is ever considered fixed or final, and a purpose may change line by line as a conversation develops.

One of the assumed distinguishing factors of a traditional text is that it is a bound collection of ideas. This is true not only in terms of content, but also in how the content is grouped. In writing, this grouping takes the form of fixed genres that serve, alongside

32 Though both terms are often used interchangeably, I have chosen to use the term “text” within this study to avoid any confusion between this rhetorical concept and behaviors related to motivation or production that will be discussed later.
other purposes, to limit how we approach and view texts. At a text’s genesis—
traditionally referred to as the invention stage of writing—this is noticeable as both
authors and audience may determine what and how they interact based on often unwritten
rules about the limiting genre. Especially in written contexts, this act of genre awareness
gets engrained in the invention stages of any writing project, because it is here that the
nature of a text is first imbued with dispositions and behaviors that will later transport it
from process to product.

In his book on these subjects, *Genre & The Invention of the Writer*, Anis
Bawarshi (2003) seeks to locate genre theory in the context of invention, and in doing so,
makes a convincing argument for how texts have been (and should be) understood. Citing
popular pedagogical practice, Bawarshi takes issue with “freewriting, brainstorming,
clustering and mapping [which] locate the writer as the primary site and agent of
invention,” and that “contribute to the perception that invention is pre-social” (p. 4).
Despite the view favored in traditional applications of the rhetorical triangle that “the
writer [is] the primary agent of invention,” (p. 50) Bawarshi argues that each component
of the rhetorical situation is an active agent. The audience and the (genre of) text have as
much agency as an author in determining a text’s exigency. As a practice, locating
oneself in a genre means determining what type of text one is composing and what tasks
must be undertaken to fulfill this production. Texts are as much the result of writers’
dispositions and behaviors as genres are the result of texts. In defining what kind of text a
Twitter tweet is in the future, for instance, we are likewise defining what motivated that
behavior and how the behavior and text is ultimately valued (or not) in another context.

Genre’s effects on viewing texts in digital environments can best be viewed as a
debate of scale and inclusion. For example, a traditional conceptualization of a news
story as a text was easily bounded: a report was filed, either on a television newscast or in
a print newspaper. However, as that story is transferred to an online medium that includes
visuals (including potentially irrelevant advertisements) and comments from other
authors (perhaps uninformed Internet users espousing more opinion than fact),
determining where that original news story is bounded becomes increasingly
complicated. Two people viewing the same story at different times of the day may
encounter completely different texts, even if the content of the original story remains the
same. This raises the important question: What should be considered the “text” of this news story? Is it just the objective journalistic writing? Or is it all of the infinite periphery texts that are both informed by and informing the reading of the original story?

Addressing situations like this, Johnson-Eilola (2004) argues that we should see such an accumulation of texts, images, and infinite ideas through the metaphor of a database composed “intertextually from bits and pieces already out there” (p. 200). This view of text relies less on physical, well-defined writing than on a concept of interaction among many texts and authors (Ede, 1989; John-Steiner, 2000; John-Steiner & Meehan, 2000; Lilavati, 2005). His view of text, then, is less about its individual parts than the accumulated composition of all the parts in any one configuration.

This updated view of text is not just an issue of genre and scale, but also of medium. Social technology has provided a space to reconsider what we consider text, and where context may become text. On computers, there are very real differences between how texts are read, written, and adapted for future interactions, an active process referred to as “remediation” of text from print to screen (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Bolter, 2001). Remediated, Internet-based texts rely on different dispositions and behaviors in order to produce and disseminate them. Even though a page of a book may appear nearly identical to a PDF on a website, the invention and delivery of the latter text may be the result of myriad behaviors that have not been addressed in previous literature on (collaborative) writing. Though many readers treat electronic texts as they would print texts, and multiple studies note that technology has negligible effects on one’s writing (e.g. Walsh & Maloney, 2002; Hartley, 2007), how we view and value digital media instead of, and alongside, traditional texts (Condon, 1998; Webb, 2000; Geisler, et al., 2001; O’Gorman, 2006) remains an ongoing investigation that only grows more complex as social technology breaks down previous genres while creating new ones. Genres are not necessarily any more stable than the texts they wish to bind, even though our reliance on them in the writing classroom is often evident in our course titles (e.g. Introduction to the Essay, or How to Write Poetry, etc.) As a result, a focus on the dispositions and behaviors that beget contemporary genres is often a starting point of inquiry and analysis for writing scholars, as it is within this study.
Texts are changing not just in the medium in which we encounter them, but in our conceptions of what we consider a “text.” Today, texts are increasingly seen as knowledge exchange, where conversation (either in-person or online) supports a collection of ideas that may or may not co-construct knowledge in a way that could be viewed as collaborative in nature. When viewing texts as knowledge, Reither and Vipond (1989) are congruous with Ede and Lunsford’s three-pronged taxonomy of collaboration. Reither and Vipond, in turn, identify three realms of collaboration: coauthoring, workshopping, and knowledge making (p. 858). While the importance of coauthoring has already been introduced, and workshopping addresses the process of authors and peers working together, their third category—knowledge making, or the “knowing of those who have preceded us [and making] our meanings not alone, but in relation to others’ meanings, which we come to know through reading, talk, and writing” (p. 862)—foregrounds knowledge-as-text in ways that align with Ede and Lunsford’s designation of “group writing.”

Texts, as expressed in the paratexts and metatexts described in Ede and Lunsford’s group writing, include the knowledge and piecemeal scaffolds that may never be expressed in finished, published texts. In the same way that shadow collaborators often do not appear on by-lines, group writing texts are several layers deep in the unseen palimpsests of many prior pieces. These texts lie at the edge of process and product, and are often only expressed as knowledge, as the ideas that beget future ideas. While many classroom views of text ask us to value finished products, these unseen proto-texts ask us to acknowledge the embodiment of process at the heart of collaboration. This unseen writing process is often expressed as the active inquiry of collaborative composition where “knowledge is created and re-created between people as they bring their personal experience and information derived from other sources to bear on solving some particular problem” (Wells, 2000, p. 67). In this way, knowledge can be seen as a product that is potentially co-created by active agents. This forces us to re-examine our assumptions.

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33 This is not to say that knowledge exchange was not prevalent in existence or literature before today, but that social technology has allowed for the visible archiving of exchange in real time, which may lead us to further acknowledge its existence and constituent behaviors.
about bound texts, and move toward a more fluid understanding of texts as a type of knowledge whether bound or not.

This reimagining of text-as-knowledge, then, must include discussions on how inquiry, reflection, and revision inform collaborative writing (Rose, 1994; Zeni, 1994) and how instructors can effectively assess collaborative activity that produces knowledge (Cramer, 1994). As we continue to explore our changing approaches toward these new conceptions of texts, I examine specific behaviors that have been correlated to traditional understandings (and assumptions) of the rhetorical situation. If we view each component of the rhetorical situation as a kind of disposition (how a writer approaches the concept of authorship, for instance) then we can see how their behaviors enact these ideas. Doing so will help us create a preliminary list of behaviors that have been used to discuss collaborative composition in the past, and will lead the way to discussing how we can study online writing in order to identify and define other behaviors that have not yet been widely discussed in these approaches.

2.2 BEHAVIORS RELATED TO COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION

What has given the traditional rhetorical situation such utility over time has been its ability to universally address deeply singular and contextualized interactions in our writing instruction. While many—if not most—writing instructors rely on this structure only as an introduction to rhetorical thought, we must be conscious of its potential lasting effects on how students come to view academic “writing” as an established concept. In addition to grammatical rules and academic standards, even a modicum of rhetorical instruction may provide students with a framework for thinking about future textual situations. Our use of this traditional heuristic, then, must be a starting point for demonstrating what we already view as our established beliefs and the systematic ways in which we may approach new, emerging textual dispositions and behaviors.

While the previous section addressed the major components of the triangle as representative of approaches that rhetors and rhetoricians may take to analyze a situation, this section begins to address specific behaviors, as enacted dispositions, that we as a discipline have jointly established as the foundation of collaborative composition. Such a list can never be exhaustive, but in outlining the following behaviors that have
traditionally constituted definitions of collaborative writing, I hope to establish broad themes that we can categorize these behaviors into. Doing so will maintain the utility of our previous approaches while also providing a framework for constructing expanded heuristics for studying (especially online) writing where these traditional behaviors may have evolved into as-yet underresearched behaviors.

In the same way that the rhetorical situation is broken down into author, audience, and purpose/text, the past thirty years of collaborative composition have largely discussed and defined collaborative writing by addressing three complementary, yet distinct, categories: (1) textual production (e.g. writing), (2) social interaction, and (3) publishing, or product completion (typically acknowledged in studying the nature of the text.) In stepping through this literature, these categories continually jumped out at me and helped me to construct a coding strategy for looking at online writing. Though this coding strategy will be discussed in the chapters to follow, I bring it up here to point out that these components are nested in hundreds of articles and studies addressing collaborative writing over the past thirty years, and that these components will be used throughout the following study in order to address online writing in ways that have precedent in previous literature. In the sub-sections that follow, I have expanded these three components to address several behaviors traditionally understood as constituting collaborative composition. The behaviors I identify within each component represent those that widely figure into previous literature on collaborative writing, either in frequency or importance (and in some cases, both.)

2.2.1 BEHAVIORS RELATED TO TEXT PRODUCTION

What most defines an author is that she writes, creates, or produces what can be considered a text. Above all other discussions about the Author function or publishing rights, the heart of the author-based component of the rhetorical situation is text production. Within this component, however, there are no less than three concepts of behaviors that inform text production. Among them, authority issues arise visibly in discussion of power and ethos, or credibility. Second, authoring involves issues of expertise, especially as we consider how authors utilize evidence to produce their text or construct their arguments. Third, being an author encompasses language use, specifically
in how language is used to create style and genres that make the writer appear more “author-ly,” or as the traditional concept of an author. These three concepts appear throughout collaborative composition literature’s address of text production, and are highlighted in this section as a way of identifying key behaviors that scholars have historically noted when identifying and analyzing collaborative behavior.

As mentioned in the previous section addressing definitions of collaborative composition, issues of power are important in addressing any potentially collaborative interaction. Though the terms authority and power are closely related (and often conflated), for this study I address authority as an umbrella term that encompasses both issues of power and ethos. Behaviors related to power can be seen as an asserting of control over who can speak, when it can be spoken, and what form it ultimately takes. This side of authority may be exhibited in behaviors of gatekeeping in publishing, curation and facilitating in workshops (e.g., Schneider, 2003), or attention and assessment online (Weisnner, 1997). Authority as ethos, however, is understood in this study as the agency of credibility utilized in speaking, writing, and interacting. Behaviors related to this issue typically involve an appeal to professionalism, such as when writers adhere to formal writing practices (e.g. use of grammar) in order to appear Author-like.

Splitting authority into two parts (power and ethos) only begins to recognize the hierarchical nature of asserted power, though. Further distinctions serve to fruitfully complicate our understandings of how authority informs behaviors related to authorship. Educational researcher Elizabeth Atkinson (2000) identifies four components of authority: (1) authority of power and knowledge, (2) authority of learning, (3) authority of identity, and (4) authority of language. Atkinson’s taxonomy aims to reveal the implicit authority present in (especially academic) social interactions, meaning that all such interactions are informed by an assertion of power. Everything from suggestions of writing style to receiving a grade for an assignment are power-based, though often in implicitly conflicting and confusing ways. However, Andrea Lunsford (2007) points to the more overt nature of power, where “in the West, [authority] has traditionally been to control or to gain power over others” (p. 41). In the classroom, she believes that “unless we can recuperate a positive idea of authority—as a source of knowledge and experience we can and should respect—we may be better off to eschew the term altogether” (p. 37).
These two authors similarly address a very salient paradox of authority. On one hand, admitting that it exists everywhere runs the risk of obfuscating its very tangible, specific effects on knowledge production. However, by privileging previous notions of authority “to autonomous individualism, to a unique, stable, and unified self who creates” (Lunsford, 2007, p. 40), we may also inadvertently continue to promote the idea of solitary genius—the Author—over a more realistic, dynamic, and productive view of dialogic authorship, especially as behaviors related to autonomy—such as using stores of knowledge to write an essay—typically foreground lone authorship over social interaction. This paradox grows naturally more complicated when considering behaviors related to collaborative learning and writing. Though co-authorship was referred to as “group writing” in the previous definitions section, collaborative writing also takes place in writing groups, where individuals share expertise and experience in order to produce their own individual works.

Expertise is a second concept of authorship that is valued in both academic and extracurricular contexts. In writing courses, instructors may require students to cite scholarly texts to warrant their claims. Outside of school, meanwhile, speakers often cite things they’ve read or seen on TV as justification for their beliefs. Both instances point to an agent wishing to advance his textual (both written and spoken in this case) production for others. Behaviors associated with this practice are of course closely related to issues of authority, where individuals are asserting expertise to gain and maintain credibility while also advocating (sometimes implicitly) for their right to produce and speak more.

This is often visible in group writing contexts. Hightberg, Moss, and Nicolas (2004) argue that Ede and Lunsford’s ideas on co-authorship and group writing can “also apply to writing groups where individual writers produce individual texts” (p. 4). Such application exposes specific behaviors exhibited in writing groups, including brainstorming activities, group projects, and peer feedback on individual assignments. Scholarship on behaviors associated with writing groups has a rich and evolving history in composition studies (Harris, 1992; Roskelly, 2000; Roskelly, 2003; Ingram and Hathorn, 2004; Nowacek & del Sol, 2004; Piontek, 2004). Perhaps no account of group writing, though, is as indispensible to the field as Anne Ruggles Gere’s (1987) Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications. In this book, Gere offers a historical view of
writing with others, featuring highlights of Benjamin Franklin’s Junto club of “mutual improvement” in colonial America (p. 32), literary societies operating alongside university courses in the late 18th century (p. 10), the importance of the 1966 Dartmouth Conference that pitted American and British English scholars against each other over the importance of student development (p. 28), and associations like the National Writing Project (p. 30), which could be argued beget contemporary community organizations like 826 Valencia.

Gere spends a considerable amount of time discussing extracurricular writing groups’ often egalitarian views of “knowledge and problem solving,” (p. 49) and contrasts this with the often hierarchical power structures of academic-based writing instruction (echoing Ede & Lunsford’s dialogic and hierarchical modes of collaboration.) In writing groups, Gere argues, “group members simultaneously give and accept authority” (p. 50). Though the meetings are often for the benefit of individual authors, this sharing of work and authority reveals latent acts of collaboration that have sometimes been overlooked in composition’s history:

Collaboration is a necessary but not sufficient condition for collaborative learning. While the democratic give-and-take of collaboration is essential, it does not by itself guarantee that any learning will take place. Participants in collaborative groups learn when they challenge one another with questions, when they use evidence and information available to them, when they develop relationships among issues, when they evaluate their own thinking. In other words, they learn when they assume that knowledge is something they can help create rather than something to be received from someone else. (p. 69)

Gere’s focus on egalitarian, democratic, and often extracurricular writing groups highlights not only authority as ethos, but also some behaviors that allow this ethos to thrive. Gere’s writing groups exist consciously outside of traditional power structures (e.g. schools) and often do not expect members to publish their work beyond the group. Still, in committing to their collective advancement in writing skills, each member can be seen as advancing her expertise of writing, and her ability to produce more in the future.
Gere’s views of group writing have been shared by numerous studies since (Smit, 1989; Janda, 1990; Romano, 1991; Emerson, et al., 1994; Hamilton, 1997). These studies share behaviors that are observable in both academic and extracurricular contexts. This balance of understanding collaboration in both contexts is where scholars such as Price and Warner (2005) assert that students are accustomed to perceiving themselves as consumers, but not necessarily producers, of knowledge; for them, Internet users have been positioned more as readers than writers. This view has been slow to change. However, with the rise of Web 2.0 sites, its existence is threatened. Despite this, and while previous studies have looked at the role of collaborative writing in business (e.g. DeKay, 2007), in the writing classroom (Knox-Quinn, 1990; Mitchell, 1992; Miller, Trimbur, and Wilkes, 1994; Reagan, Fox, and Bleich, 1994; Speck, 2002), and in tenure and professional development (Dillard & Dahl, 1992; Goodburn & Ina, 1994; Hunter, 1995; Gaughan & Khost, 2007), compositionists are still uncovering the full extent that students are writing and interacting (i.e. producing) in increasing numbers outside of our classrooms. One behavior that is not widely reported in either academic and extracurricular contexts, however, is reflection, also taking the form of revision and critical thinking about writing.

Addressing issues of revision and reflection, compositionists describe that even when a lone author pens an individual text, her influences may be as much a component of co-authorship as would an actual co-author. This can be seen vividly when instructors and writing center tutors aid in critical thinking about the writing process. Critical thinking, composed of “1. Recognizing and questioning assumptions, separating fact from opinion; 2. Identifying problems and actively searching for alternatives to solve them; 3. Drawing reasonable conclusions based on evidence” (Davis, 1994, p. 114) is taken up largely in writing contexts when students revise their work (often after consulting with their peers, instructors, or tutors.) Writing centers, in particular, accomplish this, perhaps paradoxically, by allowing students to reconsider authority (Nelson, 1994; Dirkx & Smith, 2004) outside of writing classrooms. Though writing

34 These interactions may lead back to academic contexts, where instructors may scaffold critical thinking (Simpson, 2006) or elicit argument (Veerman & Treasure-Jones, 1999) to further the literacy skills honed in these spaces.
centers address academic pursuits and academic-related writing skills, they may also help students realize their autonomous desire to engage in writing practices like blogging or creating online content that Yancey (2004) asserts “no one is making” students do (2004, p. 298, original emphasis), affinity for discussing popular culture like that found in traditional media (Dolby, 2003), or penchant for presenting oneself so as to appear “cool” and equally desirable to others (Rice, 2007). All of these behaviors inform a view of expertise that entails an author who is self-reflective and self-conscious of her work. Online writers may exhibit these behaviors as well, but it is within academic contexts that they have been most visible to date.

As a result, behaviors that are often hidden from observation in extracurricular contexts (such as revision of a text) are replaced by contextualized behaviors that indicate language usage in order to be seen as an author. In the past this has been enacted in writers and speakers discussing a specific topic (in a debate or forum, for example), or asking questions that provoke others to respond in kind and produce more discourse. Such behaviors often fall into the category of conversation, but when considering how authorship is viewed in 21st century contexts, future analysis of potentially collaborative behaviors may need to pay attention to how writers use language, expertise, and authority in order to mimic and construct new images of an Author.

2.2.2 BEHAVIORS RELATED TO SOCIAL INTERACTION

Audience is a term that can address either a singular individual or a community of participants. In either case, the rhetorical understanding of the term connotes an interaction between agents, typically an author and an audience (member.) This social interaction’s importance to collaborative composition should be self-apparent, where even colloquial understandings of collaboration assume a degree of interaction between agents. In parsing its constituent behaviors, I have identified three concepts related to social interaction that tend to come up in many, if not most, pieces of literature related to collaborative writing. The first group deals with debate, or with the arguments and opinions that transform interaction into co-constructive collaboration. The second concept that appears widely in literature contains behaviors related to negotiation, or the acts of changing perspective and approaching consensus between interested parties.
Behaviors of belonging, which could be described as a sense of community, constitute the third set of interaction-based behaviors. All three address the social behaviors inherent in the co-construction of knowledge and text that is widely referred to as collaborative activity.

Debate addresses issues of argument and opinion. In academic contexts this might take the form of an argumentative paper (using evidence, warrants, etc.) or a spoken debate, while outside of class it might be seen as a differing of perspectives or ideas. Debate need not connote combativeness, as it may entail both conflicting and complementary ideas, but in previous literature about collaborative composition, it is clearly a necessary component that acts as rebuke to charges that collaboration simply means mass agreement, such as groupthink. Debate is often conflated with related issues, such as conflict, that again connote disagreement where difference is actually the main ingredient. Widely discussed behaviors related to debate touch on this idea of difference more than anything else.

Rebecca Burnett (1993) identifies three types of difference, or conflict, in “Decision-Making During the Collaborative Planning of Coauthors.” The first, affective conflict, deals with interpersonal disagreement. Behaviors related to this may include writers who don’t get along, or who possesses ideological differences that prevent them from seeing eye to eye. Procedural conflict, the second, deals with functional, pragmatic concerns. Here, common problems around scheduling, technology use, or different working styles may be exhibited. But the third, substantive conflict, is the only one she defines as not inherently detrimental to collaboration. She defines this type of conflict as focusing on “alternatives and explicit disagreements about content and other rhetorical elements” (p. 133). In other words, this type of conflict encourages process over an eventual product; it is not eager to rush toward agreement, but is instead content to relish the dynamic realm of interaction based in exchange of differing ideas.

This type of substantive, or productive, conflict has been espoused in multiple articles on student collaborative writing (Daiute & Dalton, 1988; Klaris, 1989; Burnett, “Conflict and Consensus”), administrative work involving complex authority issues (Duffey, et al., 2002), and even in choosing pronouns in online discussion (Hewings & Coffin, 2007). But how does one actually engage in productive conflict? Unlike overt
argument—where participants may ultimately walk away having done nothing to change their perspectives—productive conflict is arrived at through negotiation, or active accommodation and compromise (Janangelo, 1996) aimed at constructing solutions, meaning, or knowledge that supersedes ideas produced by one, solitary mind (Leonard & Wharton, 1994). Here, negotiation may entail debate, intense discussion, or decision making that tries to keep an open mind while also reaching for the perceived best shared outcome from multiple perspectives.

Negotiation’s place in collaborative writing may not be to establish one idea over another, but to simply expand an agent’s perspectives, thus opening her up for future collaborative interactions. These behaviors entail changing one’s perspective, and eventually approaching consensus. Negotiation—that term usually associated with these behaviors—is central to most definitions about collaboration. Peter Elbow (1999) has described “strong” collaboration as requiring “agreement or consensus” (p. 10). As opposed to “weak” collaboration, which “is easy and nonstressful because participants don’t have to agree,” (p. 10) Elbow’s former designation is reached through a process of negotiation. However, it would be inaccurate to diminish negotiation behaviors to either a utopian view of consensus or a failure reached by disagreement. Such a view has been the chief critique lobbed against social constructionists and proponents of Bruffee’s community of peers model. Conflict, not consensus, some argue is the engine of successful collaboration, because it is conflict that separates the myth of the Author from the reality of multi-voiced authorship. Clearly, the process of negotiating through conflict can be productive to collaborative writing, regardless if the final product of consensus is reached or not.

Linda Flower claims negotiation occurs “(a) when the process of meaning making is subject to pressure, to converging constraints and options, or to conflict among goals and (b) when writers/interpreters turn their attention at some level of awareness to managing or negotiating this problematic cognitive and rhetorical situation” (1996, p. 67). In other words, negotiation’s role in collaborative writing is to embrace conflict and difference in constructive ways. Roberts-Miller believes “that compositionists evade conflict and that we need a model of teaching that makes conflict not simply a preliminary step towards consensus but a ‘public space where students can begin to form
their own voices as writers and intellectuals’ (Harris 116),” and avoid “mistaking a lively discussion for a place in which people are actually learning about difference” (2003, p. 555). Many in the field seem to agree that consensus, even when reached, can best be arrived at through conflict. The difficulty is that to do so requires a precarious embracing of behaviors of difference that we need to teach ourselves, as well as our students.

In perhaps the most influential article on this embracing of difference in collaborative composition, John Trimbur (1989) identifies the aim of collaborative learning as “reach[ing] consensus through an expanding conversation” (p. 602). This consensus, according to Trimbur, is “not [merely] an agreement that reconciles differences through an ideal conversation, but rather…the desire of humans to live and work together with differences” (p. 615). The key to understanding why Trimbur’s view of difference has taken hold in collaborative learning discussions is that his “desire…to live and work together with differences” takes place in the future perfect. It is not a hurdle to overcome, but a mindset in actively negotiating in the hopes of compromise and accommodation, both in the writing classroom (Elbow, 1983; Holt, 1992) and on the web (Laurinen & Marttunen, 2007). This displays, once again, how collaborative behaviors of negotiation can be best examined in the process—more than the product—of group writing.

All of these behaviors of interaction assume actively engaged agents. In a classroom context, this can be relatively easy to manufacture: assigning students to groups all but ensures that they will encounter issues of debate and negotiation at one time or another. However, especially in extracurricular contexts, there are never any guarantees that agents will have a desire to work together and interact. Such guarantees only happen when agents feel an affinity, or a sense of community for one another that makes them want to interact constructively. This sense of belonging is often assumed in previous literature in collaborative composition, but can be addressed most certainly by constructing writing situations that are “meaningful,” and that “stimulate the learners’ intellectual curiosity, engage them in productive instructional activities, and directly influence their learning” (Woo & Reeves, 2007, p. 16). In other words, behaviors related to belonging and interaction must be open to unstable moments of conflict in authorship, both when that conflict proves a hindrance to collaboration (e.g. Cross, 1990), and a
catalyst to creation. Like the paratexts of publishing work, these processes of debate, negotiation, and belonging are often hidden from view, but essential to understanding the true collaborative nature of writing, both in-person and online.

2.2.3 BEHAVIORS RELATED TO A TEXT’S NATURE

What is even deemed a “text” in contemporary writing studies is often up for debate. While discourse analysts, me included, may view nearly any social production or interaction a type of text worthy of study, there are others who may be bound by previous notions of text as a determining factor. A faculty member who blogs, for example, may not be seen by her tenure committee as a publishing author despite the apparent overlaps. Because of this, behaviors that have traditionally been associated with the value and existence of a text (e.g. publishing, receiving attribution) may determine how contemporary texts are viewed. This section examines some of these more prominent behaviors in previous collaborative composition literature by dividing them into three concepts emerging from the literature. The first, ownership, relates to issues of possession, while the second, responsibility, addresses issues of attribution and identity. While both are closely related, their behaviors often appear as distinct, separate entities. The third concept relates to the purpose and finality of a text, both of which are increasingly thrown into question as more writing is done online where purposes may be less clear and a text may be infinitely open-ended. Together, these concepts address behaviors related to how we discuss and define what a text is in collaborative composition studies.

Ownership as possession has an observable history, especially in regard to tangible products, where a book, for example, can be held and owned in visible ways. Behaviors associated with ownership are increasingly intangible, though, especially as products move from physical property to intellectual property. In these cases, an agent can possess a copyright, trademark, or other legal designation to demarcate their property from someone else’s. Student writers, however, are often not instructed to view their texts through frames of ownership and responsibility in the way that professional authors are. They are implicitly told that they are not Authors, and this message may lead them toward seeing their writing through different gradations of value as evidenced in the Pew
study that began this dissertation. We, as instructors, may be presenting them with confusing models: while, on one hand, academic writing is valued in that we take the time to read and assess it, it nonetheless is not commercially viable in the way published works are (despite the obvious point that even *Twitter* posts are published yet valued even less than coursework.) Likewise, in most classrooms students are seen as plagiarists when they “steal” others’ work, resulting in a substandard view of ownership of their own work (Spigelman, 1999), even when that work is shared in peer groups (Spigelman, 1998; Spigelman, 2000).

These issues of ownership and possession can quickly get confused by issues of publishing and the very nature of text itself (already this section has called into question whether or not a blog post or tweet is as valuable as a published article.) Ownership, after all, is a state or a nature more than an observable behavior. Especially now as texts exist in digital, intangible realms, ownership can be a difficult behavior to observe in collaborative writing, too, where asking an author which words were hers in a co-authored work may be like asking a barber which hair he cut on a patron’s head first. It’s theoretically possible, but practically unlikely. These ideas of ownership are likewise often confused with ideas of responsibility, where the latter is again barely observable in most behaviors. As a result, behaviors dealing with ownership are often conflated with those addressing responsibility, particularly in instances where attribution is awarded, shared, or contested.

Established views of ownership and responsibility have shaded discussions that favor a single Author for reasons as pedestrian and essential as assessment and punishing plagiarism; it is often simply easier to pay someone, for example, when you can isolate how much work she did. In response to such reasons, scholars like Horner (1997) have invited compositionists to join “with our students to investigate writing as social and material practices, confronting and revising those practices that have served to reify the activity of writing into texts and authorship” (p. 526). In other words, writing has long been acknowledged as a social and material practice, but determining a text’s value is often undertaken through a narrow view of authorship that may (over)value concepts such as a lone author. In a writing classroom, Horner’s invitation can be responded to through role-playing or lowering the stakes of responsibility in peer-based activities.
Beyond the discipline of composition, though, such an invitation often remains unanswered specifically because those stakes can be so high.

This apparent difference in how we approach such discussions points to behaviors associated with how we discuss responsibility. Though co-authored products have by now been solidified as an acceptable (if not accepted) assignment practice in composition pedagogy (Lunsford & Ede, 1994; Howard, 2001), issues of responsibility surrounding course curriculum or discourse beg equal attention. For example, in studies of authorship in the sciences, Trimbur and Braun (1992) seek collaboration that will “orchestrate a multiplicity of voices so that students can become the coauthors of the curriculum and of their own learning” (p. 22) even as the authors carefully detail the hierarchy and division of labor that creates responsibility and authorship issues in scientific publishing. Likewise, other essays (e.g. Maloney & Wesley, 2007) extol the possibilities of having students take responsibility for their education even while others explore co-authoring in the academy (Day & Eodice, 2001) and warn that “despite vigorous debates over theories and methods surrounding issues of subjectivity and authorship, ideologies of the individual and the author have remained largely unchallenged in scholarly practice” (Ede & Lunsford, 2001, p. 358) and the academy at large. In other words, confronting responsibility issues in a writing classroom is one thing, but once that conversation permeates the hallways across campus, it could be seen as another. University-wide practices of democratic classrooms or behaviors related to peer groupwork and assessment serve as a small counterbalance to these traditional structures. Instead, they are often relegated to classroom practice divorced from grades or high stakes assessment favored by legislation and bureaucratic structures.

Similarly, some scholars have highlighted the shared responsibility of texts and ideas through supplemental paratexts, such as criticism and response similar to the note taking, etc. categorized as group writing by Ede and Lunsford. Robert Carringer (2001) discusses poststructuralism’s aim to carve out the role of “the author not of individual texts but of textuality, the social meaning of texts” (p. 370) in film criticism, analysis, and idea sharing. Likewise, Michael Schrage makes a convincing argument for collaboration-as-medium, where “the medium of collaboration is shaped by the media of collaboration,” and the “co-evolution of medium and media will fundamentally change
the way readers, writers and critics view the creation of texts” (1994, p. 17). Along these lines, whether viewed as a disposition, writing behavior, or medium, claims of responsibility can be seen as implicit and explicit behaviors that embody dispositions toward production and interaction in ways that both define and complicate views of collaborative writing.

Perhaps the reason the concept of Author still dominates discussions of (academic) rhetorical situations is that one individual traditionally takes responsibility for the creation of new property. Commercially, companies employing thousands of workers are embodied by sole individuals, as Steve Jobs was for Apple. Academically, while dissertations often contain an “acknowledgements” section, everyday essays rarely acknowledge the contributions of peers, parents, tutors, or instructors. At the end of the day, or at the top of the page, a singular name both owns and takes responsibility for the product. In textual creation, this lone Author is traditionally responsible for a text (as in, an author generated the ideas and words through her own efforts), and takes ownership of it once it is a finished product (where the author reaps rewards or punishment—as in the case of plagiarism—by having her name attached.) In the final section of the sourcebook Authorship in Composition Studies (Carrick & Howard, 2006), Tracy Hamler Carrick (2006) addresses the need of attending to previous notions of authorship in order to “enable students to rigorously and playfully access the discourses of ownership as they set out to compose texts within the academy and beyond” (p. 136). Carrick’s focus on students is important because it is to them—the novice authors we seek to instruct—that the mantle of Author is so rarely granted in a beneficial way; while a student can be held responsible for plagiarizing (for example), the ownership of her work is inherently copyrighted, though downplayed as simply a student essay. In a hypothetical scenario, an instructor may think nothing of disseminating the student’s work to others whereas that same instructors may be more wary of making copies of entire published articles for wide

35 Steve Jobs passed away during the writing of this dissertation. Among the resulting eulogies, many marveled at how Jobs had made his name synonymous with his company’s products, even as most consumers would be hard-pressed to name a CEO of many other major companies.
distribution. Such ethical considerations have as much to do with how much value is attached to a student text as any adherence to departmental or institutional guidelines.

Part of the reason behind this may have to do with behaviors related to identity, where a student writer is rarely identified as an author per se. While a student is a specific type of role that identifies a writer, online personae present identities that are less inherent than they are cultivated and maintained. Such maintenance may have a direct effect on how we approach textual interaction, as well as how others approach us.

Writing studies has long helped facilitate the formation and foundation of identities, whether they come from marginalized voices in the academy (Fontaine & Hunter, 1993), novices aspiring to expert ranks (Berenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1991; Burley, 1998), via computers (Wilbur, 1997; Smith 2000), and on the web (Foster, 1997; Sokol, 2004; Jensen & Heilesen, 2005), as what is considered an author, or a writer, is continually changing in the public eye. In practice, consider the small details of how often someone changes her profile photo on a social network, or whether or not a commenter on a blog uses a real or anonymous handle. These subtle behaviors demonstrate not only the creation of an online identity, but also the maintenance of one. This maintenance may or may not change daily, but it nonetheless is a conscious decision that users enact in order to express their identity and imbue their texts with a personal nature much like a byline or author biography on a dust jacket.

Of course what might separate previous discussions of text most from contemporary analogs is determining what kind of product a text is taking. Echoing the discussion of genre from earlier, a text often must embody a type of product for it to be understood and valued (again, is a blog an article? an ongoing book?) The behaviors embodying these questions are likewise concerned with purpose. As will be addressed in the forthcoming theoretical frame chapter, another question could be whether or not student-users can be co-authors of a text even if they did not explicitly set out to be. Kenneth Burke seemingly argues yes, and as we continue to adjust views about open-ended texts that may never reach a true “final” form, the behaviors we identify and analyze may have to branch away from previously understood notions of publishing and attribution that are hidden or inherent in contemporary texts.
2.3 PREVIOUS STUDIES

Before moving on to present my theoretical frame and demonstrate how the above three behavioral groups, or categories of production, interaction, and nature of texts, aided me in constructing my Collaborative Triangle heuristic, I pause here to note several empirical studies that have been influential in approaching my own. Earlier this chapter, I focused primarily on theoretical works from my colleagues in fields directly related to composition and rhetoric. In doing so, I have attempted to identify where their theories have left off and where new ones, including mine, could further our knowledge about collaborative composition and online writing. However, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of empirical studies closely related to these issues that are being undertaken and published outside of writing studies. Here I briefly highlight some of the most relevant ones I have come across so as to provide the reader with context of the larger academic conversation, and to also provide a preface for why I conducted the study I did. In preparing to explain my study, I am careful not to construct straw men out of, or completely dismiss, the essential studies that came before mine. Academic inquiry is inherently collaborative in that only through study of previous research was I able to construct new methods for analyzing contemporary texts.

That being said, my study is indebted to other previous studies even as it sets out to make its own unique contribution. What separates my study from some of the following studies is my focus on writing within everyday technologies. My study is interested in writing that is not necessarily in service to curricular tasks (such as completion of an assignment or completion of a book). Instead, student-user writing in social online spaces may be considered collaborative in nature when users co-construct knowledge of topics ranging from social encounters to political debates. Several studies have informed my thought on argument, information sharing, and community building in online spaces, but have made no explicit claims about collaboration. Among them, Potter (2008) presents a useful fluid model of argumentation using a rhetorical structure theory approach36, and Naaman, Boase, and Lai (2009) discuss how users make themselves

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36 Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) is a linguistic approach of discourse analysis related to coherence of a text and how parts of a text relate to one another. Though an intriguing approach, its methodology had no clear analog to approaches present in composition and
known on the popular microblogging site Twitter\textsuperscript{37}, but neither makes claims about collaborative behavior. Their approaches are useful in thinking about how people seek out interaction (and specifically in identifying the behaviors allowing them to do so), but their omission of co-construction of texts or knowledge ultimately separates their studies from mine. Likewise, Stommel (2008) uses a linguistic-based computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) approach to studying a German forum on eating disorders, and Fauske and Wade (2004) focus on gender in addressing community formation in online forums, though neither focus explicitly on writing nor collaboration. Their approaches were influential in helping me to think about studying asynchronous communication within a set community, and in using CMDA (which will be explained in the methods chapter), but their particular foci were too far afield of my study’s interest in collaboration and rhetorical awareness to be a direct influence\textsuperscript{38}.

Several studies have focused on collaboration, but have based their inquiry in fairly static, fixed communities, many of which are curricular-bound. For example, Amhag and Jakobsson (2009) bring a socio-cultural approach to studying different dialogic levels in students and teachers during an asynchronous online course; Serce, et al. (2010) compare synchronous and asynchronous task completion for teams in an online environment that focuses on group performance over individual performance; and Hewings and Coffin (2007) contribute a look at pronouns in collaborative online forums to address issues related to authorship and identity. Though all of these studies have informed my study by providing unique approaches and coding strategies, their reliance on fixed communities (whether of learners, co-workers, or simply people that are brought rhetoric, and so I deemed it not completely useful in constructing my methodological approach.

\textsuperscript{37} Though using a grounded approach and interested in users soliciting interaction from other users, this study was largely based in a corpus approach to data that was more concerned with word count and occurrence than the quality of the posts, which is what my study was ultimately interested in analyzing.

\textsuperscript{38} That being said, I did use CMDA in my eventual methodology in order to study the specific affordances of online media that are not directly observable through traditional linguistic-based discourse analysis (DA). This decision will be detailed in my methods chapter.
together to accomplish an explicit task) ultimately prevents me from embracing their approaches wholesale. Their assumptions about who is interacting, and why, are predicated on notions of predetermined entities (e.g. teacher, student, etc.) that prevent the possibility of unexpected discovery in behaviors or roles. What makes studying writing and interaction in social online spaces divorced from explicit curricular goals so unique is its necessary address of instability. As a result, these preceding studies contribute helpful approaches, but ultimately are studying vastly different things.

However, several studies have provided great models and typologies of online behavior that still allow for new behaviors to emerge. Mazur (2004) contributes an overview of conversation analysis (CA) in educational contexts. Though her overview focuses on turn-taking in curricular environments, the explanations of CA’s place in interaction analysis and social network analysis begins to demonstrate how texts can be coded even in everyday, extracurricular spaces. In terms of collaboration, Murphy (2004) maps the move from interaction to collaboration in studying the production of artifacts through the use of educational software. For Murphy, mere interaction begins with social presence and sharing of individual views, but collaboration is exhibited in the production and sharing of artifacts. Though both the fixed community of educational software and the product-based views of her model don’t immediately map onto my study of social online spaces outside of school, her mapping of the move from individual to community-constructed materials is helpful in determining when an idea or text can be considered collaborative in nature. More applicable to my study, though still congruent with Mazur and Murphy’s models, is Burnett’s (2000) typology of information exchange in virtual communities. Burnett classifies online behaviors as either non-interactive or interactive, and fills out the latter category by describing collaborative behaviors that are and are not related to information exchange. Taken together, the three approaches provided by Mazur, Murphy, and Burnett have not only informed my approach to this study, they’ve also provided some preliminary ways of thinking about coding and categorizing my data as I seek emergent behaviors that may be considered collaborative in nature.

Along the same lines of mapping behaviors from merely interactive to truly collaborative, the Facebook Data Team released data analyses in late 2010 explaining
what categories of words received the most response comments and “Likes.” This list is represented in Figure 2.2, below, where the image on the left shows words that received the most “Likes” (positive correlations are at the top, in blue, and negative correlations are at the bottom, in red), and the image on the right shows words that received the most comments. The list is a representative corpus approach to studying language on social sites like Facebook. Throughout my study I repeatedly return to the notion of potential or possible collaborative activity to describe scenarios where collaborative writing may take place even after direct observation is complete. The positively correlated words in Figure 2.2 certainly display this potential for collaborative activity—after all, the more voices present in a conversation, the more likely that two or more will coalesce into a co-construction of text or knowledge. Still, the Facebook data does not actually show collaboration taking place. Instead, Figure 2.2 is a kind of predictive tool in that if a user uses words in her online writing that have a positive correlation, she may in fact receive more responses and “Likes.” But it is not an exact science. This is why I return to creating a heuristic as a way to acknowledge this, and to foster thinking about scenarios that may be collaborative in nature, but will not always be. In this way, my heuristics laid out in the next chapter aim to avoid the possible binary that the data in Figure 2.2 might imply. Such data is a great starting point, but ultimately does not show us when—or how—student-users interact and communication collaboratively on a site like Facebook.

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39 As will be explained later, on Facebook a user may “Like” something by clicking a hyperlinked button. This act of “liking” something may indicate simple acknowledgement or actual agreement about a post. In many ways, “liking” may have replaced what were previously text-based acknowledgements and agreements in the past.
Cognizant of the above studies—all of which have influenced my thinking, but have ultimately been mismatched with my goals for this study—I have crafted a unique approach to my data, which will be explained in the forthcoming methods chapter. Two studies in particular have shaped how I have approached my data for the purpose of coding and interpreting the results. In the first, Schrire’s (2006) coarse-grained coding of online knowledge building through an I-R-F approach (posts that Initiate, Respond, or Follow-Up to previous posts) is helpful. Schrire’s contribution happens when she maps follow-up (F) posts as synergistic and that transcend individual responses, and co-construct new knowledge. According to Schrire, posts that avoid simply replying, but instead build new knowledge, can be considered synergistic, and by extension, collaborative because they fall back on behaviors of co-authors producing a new product. I ultimately used a similar process of coding according to the three categories of collaborative composition highlighted in this chapter. Schrire’s study, however, focuses
on doctoral classes, where students are speaking to one another about curricular topics beyond the reach of their teachers is considered synergistic. In my study there are no teachers and student roles, nor are there hierarchies to use Schrire’s same definition of synergy. Still, her approach gave me inspiration in developing my heuristic and determining what behaviors can be seen as collaborative instead of merely interactive.

More appropriate to my study, Lu, Chiu, and Lau’s (2011) insightful study on collaborative argumentation performs a discourse analysis of online discussions. The authors looked at the justifications that students gave (defined as evidence and explanations) to support their claims in online forums. These justifications constituted what the authors considered (good) argument, while their typology of agreements, neutral statements, and disagreements provides a robust set of coding criteria to utilize in determining whether or not online participants are co-constructing knowledge. Such an approach affirmed my belief that the concept of “collaboration” could be arrived at through identifying and defining constituent behaviors of writing. Of course, collaborative composition is not always embodied in argument (which may be predicated on an eventual truth or goal to be reached), and the authors’ focus on students in computer environments is aside from the focus of my study, but their contribution to coding behaviors traditionally valued in collaborative composition (e.g. making claims, justifying beliefs, etc.) is a nice starting point for any study looking to explore expanding behaviors that mirror more established behaviors.

This chapter has looked back on the past thirty years of literature related to collaborative composition in order to reexamine how our previous understandings of rhetoric and group writing have prepared us to discuss and define collaborative writing in the early 21st century. In doing so, I have argued that previous authors have grounded their inquiries in traditional approaches to rhetorical understanding that, while incredibly useful, have relied on a potentially limiting list of assumptions and behaviors related to what it means to be an author, what constitutes an audience, and what is ultimately valued as a text. By inadvertently blinding us to new approaches to collaborative writing, this traditional view based in established behaviors has not prepared us to discover the potential collaborative and co-constructive activities and behaviors taking place in social online spaces. As a result, the next chapter introduces my theoretical frame for
approaching new data and a heuristic based in established behaviors that can be used by future instructors and students to think about their own online writing in ways that are more liberating than limiting.
CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAME

My approach to this study takes place in two separate, yet connected, frameworks. As foregrounded in the previous chapter, the first part is informed by literature related to collaborative composition from the past three decades. The result of this approach is embodied in a heuristic that I have used to construct data collection materials (e.g. survey and interview questions) and data analysis procedures (e.g. identifying and defining key writing behaviors) throughout the study. I call this heuristic a Collaborative Triangle due to its formation by three categories (i.e. production, interaction, and nature) of rhetorically informed collaborative activity. The second approach is formed by three complementary theoretical lenses that inform my view of writing as an inventive, dialogic, and social activity. This approach, which will be detailed later in this chapter, is the theoretical frame that informed how I looked at data collected, and analyzed it for this study. Specifically, the three complementary lenses that I have chosen have allowed me to see all writing as a potentially collaborative behavior, which has, in turn, allowed me to identify and define specific behaviors that appear related to collaborative writing, but may have not yet been identified or fully examined in previous literature. I present both of these approaches in this chapter as a way of extending the conversation started in the literature review, and foregrounding the study’s methodology that will be discussed in the following chapter.

40 This construct is referred to as a heuristic so as to note its utility in allowing me (and future researchers) to think more deeply about issues and behaviors related to key components of collaborative writing that I identified in the literature review. Though this heuristic is not an analytical tool per se, it did aid in organizing my inquiry and analysis in ways that are systematic and tied to previous scholarship. In this way the heuristic both looks forward and backward into new writing behaviors and preceding scholarship, respectively.
3.1 COLLABORATIVE WRITING HEURISTIC

In the preceding literature review, I identified three categories of collaborative composition behaviors that (both in frequency and importance) have appeared regularly in scholarship related to collaborative writing over the past thirty years. As a result, these three categories constitute the three points on my new heuristic, the Collaborative Triangle: (1) authorship (related to textual production and growing from the concept of author within the rhetorical triangle), (2) community (related to social interaction and the concept of audience), and (3) textuality (related to the nature of a text and text/purpose.) Despite what I see as a natural confluence of these three categories into a single entity, I am also mindful of the potentially limiting effect of proposing an approach to online writing that is bound by mostly fixed, stable considerations. In his indispensable work *Lingua Fracta: Toward a Rhetoric of New Media*, Collin Brook cautions: “our aims as rhetorical scholars must evolve—no single model is likely to prove capable of returning the sorts of stability that are implied (if imperfectly accomplished) by communication triangles or rhetorical situations, and thus we need to begin thinking about goals other than stability” (2009, p. 28). My offering of another heuristic to study online writing, however, should not be seen as an attempt to stabilize or fix inherently fluid and dynamic writing behaviors.

Instead, I see the need for the Collaborative Triangle because of its ability to expand previous discussions and definitions of writing that have relied on established behaviors as their criteria for determining the collaborative nature of a text. However, instead of stopping at behaviors that have traditionally been used to describe and define collaborative writing, I offer my three categories of the Collaborative Triangle as large and expandable containers that can point toward new, evolving behaviors. My heuristic attempts to do this by expanding the possible dispositions toward, and behaviors of, collaborative writing that may be present in social online spaces but have yet to be fully addressed or considered in evolving definitions of collaborative writing. The heuristic is based in previous literature on collaborative composition, and in traditional, rhetorical approaches to writing, but is also designed to look forward in addressing new forms of writing and interaction as they arise.
Whereas the components of the previous rhetorical triangle (quite possibly the most widely used heuristic in undergraduate writing courses) were potentially seen as tangible constructs (e.g. author as writer, audience as listener, purpose as published text), the components of my Collaborative Triangle should be seen as concepts, specifically as the dispositions of student-users toward writing, interacting, and deciding the nature of texts within social online spaces. This is a subtle shift, but not a perfunctory one: embracing dynamic, fluid dispositions and behaviors means clustering concepts together so that we can recognize them when we see them. It doesn’t mean, however, that we should try to pin behaviors down to any one category or definition. Previous literature has expertly chronicled the changes taking place in technology and contexts. However, with a change in approaches to textual and social interaction comes a need for a change in language and perspective, especially as we (re)consider what we mean when we refer to such abstract concepts as knowledge and collaboration. The Collaborative Triangle, then, is not meant to replace the rhetorical triangle, nor to trump it, but merely to systematically expand it by adding another layer of understanding, this time with a specific eye to the evolving dispositions and behaviors uniquely taking place in social online spaces.

In other words, in constructing this heuristic from previous literature, I fully acknowledge that contemporary writing is not necessarily any more social or collaborative than it was in the past. However, with the rise of popular social technology that makes everyday textual interactions more transparent (as well as archived and searchable), our approaches to discussing and defining writing must also accurately reflect dispositions and behaviors toward writing that are not only more visible, but also markedly different in sometimes subtle ways. Such an approach must be open to discovering and acknowledging new behaviors that do not fit with the established paradigm of what has or has not been considered collaborative writing in the past. Technology has provided us with the space to identify and analyze these dispositions and behaviors.

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41 For example, the desire to gain my followers on a personal blog is not necessarily a new disposition in and of itself (rhetors have always desired audiences), but the behaviors that enact this disposition (e.g. following other blogs, sharing hyperlinks to other sites, etc.) are not only more transparent, but also subtly different from previously studied collaborative behaviors.
behaviors. My literature review has aimed to map where our scholarship has brought us, so that we can better recognize the space that is opening up for us within these social online spaces. As a result, I propose that the updated view of a rhetorical situation within a potentially collaborative context can best be represented as the triangle present in Figure 3.1:

![Collaborative Triangle](image)

Figure 3.1: The Collaborative Triangle

Presented another way, in Figure 3.2 below, the Collaborative Triangle can be seen as expanding previous notions of the rhetorical triangle. Again, though scholars like Brooke could see such an expansion as an attempt to oversimplify or falsely stabilize fluid situations, I believe this updated understanding can showcase the infinite possibilities of discussing and analyzing texts that take place outside of traditionally studied writing and publishing. It likewise provides ample scaffolding for writing instructors and students to move beyond established approaches to understanding collaborative writing and see how new understandings are merely expanding those approaches (as opposed to perpetuating false binaries of newness or otherness.) Such an expansion may help to address the discrepancy of teens’ opinions cited in the Pew study who noted that what they do online is not considered “writing” by releasing online writing from academic language tied up on conceptions of traditional, print text. Instead, new language to address similar concepts may free up students to see the value of their writing while still using previous academic discourse as a scaffold. This heuristic is designed as a kind of bridge to show a clear link between established (often academic) writing behaviors related to collaborative composition and writing behaviors enacted.
regularly in social online spaces. In this way it places all behaviors on an equal playing field, where they can be determined to be part of collaborative processes to higher or lesser degrees. In so doing, these behaviors can be identified as valuable (or not) to collaborative writing in ways that reject a false binary of academic writing and “other” online writing taking place beyond the classroom.

This Collaborative Triangle is the result of updated dispositions toward, and behaviors of, writing and interacting in what Henry Jenkins (2006) calls a “participatory culture,” where any user is not only invited, but also in many ways expected, to read, write, and interact with other users when online. As briefly mentioned in the introduction chapter, this type of interaction falls under the umbrella of Web 2.0 sites (O’Reilly, 2005) that facilitate fluid, open-ended text creation and sharing. Its three categories typify three approaches to online writing that map onto the established approaches present in the traditional rhetorical triangle, but also provide a heuristic for thinking about emerging dispositions and behaviors unique to writing in social online spaces prevalent today. Here I briefly outline the rough sketches of what I consider each category to entail.

3.1.1 AUTHORSHIP

Authorship is the name I have given to describe the disposition toward text production behaviors identified in the literature review. Though stemming from the traditional rhetorical construct of author, this updated disposition eschews a lone
authorship model of writing that perceives writing as any kind of solitary or individual effort. Instead, this updated disposition accepts text and knowledge creation as a co-construction where individual authors enact behaviors that further textual production beyond their initial posts. Viewed rhetorically, invention under this disposition is not necessarily a starting point, but a meeting place, where users produce text that may join with other texts to co-construct knowledge and often inherently form co-authorship scenarios. Authorship is the locus of production that is most analogous to discussions of behaviors associated with the concepts of authority, expertise, and language use.

These three concepts have been identified as describing categories of behaviors that have appeared in previous collaborative writing scholarship. Compositionists have continually worked to recognize types of collaborative writing that have gone unacknowledged (e.g., Inge, 1994; Hutcheon & Hutcheon, 2001). In constructing the category of authorship out of these three concepts, in some ways I identify collaborative writing itself as a type of technology along the lines of Schendel, Neal, and Hartley’s belief that “[c]ollaboration and online discourse are both technologies. Therefore, when we engage in online collaboration, we are engaging in two technologies simultaneously” (2004, p. 201). Collaboration, when viewed as a technology or a tool, works as an engine to encourage textual production from individual threads; it not only works to combine text producers, it also inherently encourages more textual production. Authorship believes this as well: that the disposition that online writers have toward producing text is not just to put their words into conversation with others, but to also encourage (and expect) text to come back. As this happens, these texts may lead to potentially collaborative scenarios and behaviors.

There is often a disposition toward using this technology, collaborative writing, in social online spaces; few student-users can be expected to write and not receive a response. Few, if any, users write on a blog or a social network to achieve individual authorship (as perceived through the analysis of the author within the traditional rhetorical triangle.) True, many users write online in order to express themselves or for other selfish (if not narcissistic) reasons, but online authorship can be seen as a circuit that is only completed once others react and respond. Until this public acknowledgement takes place—in effect joining the two individual authors into a potentially collaborative
interaction—the initial author is solely writing to and for himself, regardless of utopian views of the public audience of the Internet. Authorship acknowledges the dispositions and motivations behind writing in social online spaces where authors write and expect feedback both to express themselves and to interact with others. To that degree, authorship is writing with an expectation of more writing, regardless if the motivation is persuasion or interest. Behaviors identified within this component can be expected to not just demonstrate individual writing behaviors, but also behaviors enacted in order to receive a response in the form of more writing from others.

3.1.2 COMMUNITY

Community is the category of, and disposition toward, interaction. Unlike the authorship category, which was concerned with textual production and reciprocity, community encompasses all of the dispositions and behaviors that allow student-users to co-exist in virtual spaces. Whereas previous conceptions of audience may imply a reception or consumption of text, community instead is meant to portray the active positioning of agents in order to join and maintain an ongoing (potentially collaborative) conversation. These behaviors were widely seen in previous literature on collaborative composition as related to debate, negotiation, and a sense of community, or “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). This concept of a sense of community is expressed not only in a user’s activity of joining a particular group or sharing similar interests, but a disposition toward wanting to return to the group, and feeling a need to interact with group members further (through text.) Expressed as a need to belong, its behaviors are related to the first two concepts in how users express opinion, reach consensus, and ultimately form communities of discourse or practice.

Though many traditional views of audience and community have focused on the shared experiences and contexts of individuals, a view of community through the Collaborative Triangle seeks to uncover more of the communal nature of sharing and exchange often present in social online spaces, where users are active on a site (such as Facebook) only as much as their community (e.g. friends) are. This interaction-based
view of what a community can provide an individual is what separates potentially obligatory communities that take place in curricular contexts (e.g. Dawson, 2006) from communities that users seek out for individual edification or companionship (e.g. Baym, 1998; Bacon, 2009). In other words, this view of community targets members who want to be there, and who expect others to return in kind. It therefore echoes Kathy Blake Yancey’s CCCC address that student-users are writing and interacting in communities on their own volition; that they want to be there. As a result, this view of community targets users’ interest in both writing and belonging.

Like Kenneth Burke’s undeliberate acts of persuasion (described below as part of my theoretical framework), a sense of community is an enactment of a disposition toward collaborative composition and co-construction of text that may be subconscious and even unintended. Unlike previous notions of group writing that relied on consenting authors to join together according to some predetermined guidelines in order to collaborate, this construct of the Collaborative Triangle is meant to elicit times where users’ experiences and knowledge co-mingle (perhaps unintentionally) to create something greater than the individual interactions taken one by one. This may entail strangers meeting in co-inhabited places or unexpected exchanges based on small overlap of interests, language, or attitude. This also may entail a shared affinity, but not necessarily; community may occur wherever individuals have a desire to return and contribute to ongoing debates, negotiations, and discussions, not necessarily to confirm previous beliefs, but to open themselves up to new ones as well.

3.1.3 TEXTUALITY

Textuality is a disposition toward collaborative writing that accounts for what we ultimately consider text or knowledge in open-ended, digital contexts; it is concerned with the nature of texts in collaborative, digital contexts. It addresses the sense of impermanence and the evolving nature of what is considered “writing” and “text” in digital contexts. It does so by identifying three concepts that have been present in the previous literature of collaborative composition (including many behaviors that, to date, have been enacted strictly in print-based contexts.) Behaviors related to ownership, responsibility, and the purpose (or product) of texts have not only been a major factor in
determining when a text was collaborative in nature or not in the past, they can also guide us toward identifying new behaviors that have not yet been fully understood and studied. For example, social online spaces are defined in part by their inclusion of a textbox that allows audience members to become authors by extending previous texts. As long as that textbox is present, such a text is potentially limitlessly open-ended, and so previous static views of singular texts do not adequately capture dispositions and behaviors of writing within these contexts.

This expanded view of the nature of text and knowledge construction is on display in the democratic spaces of wikis (Kear, et al., 2010), blogs (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Whithaus, et al., 2007), social networks (Boyd, 2007), and in the classroom (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Kitsis, 2008; Gerben, 2009). But it is not just limited to alphanumeric production; it is also offered in order to address non-textual behaviors, such as when users share photos, hyperlinks, or iconic thumbs-up approvals (known as “Likes”) and democratic voting on social networks. These visual representations, too, extend literature on increasingly nuanced styles (Dilger, 2010; Sorapure, 2010) and rhetorical choices (Kress, 2003) made in digital composition. As a result, textuality is a rich view of the nature of text in social online spaces that may include text, visuals, sound, or any combination of multimedia used to convey feelings and thought. It may also include deletion of content and agents. In subtracting content, a student-user deleting an offending post or “defriending” a potential co-author changes the nature of text as much as a student-user who adds content when we consider collaboration through the disposition of textuality. Social online spaces open up these emerging behaviors that have heretofore not been captured in previous dispositions toward writing.

The disposition of textuality seeks to extend Rebecca Moore Howard’s charge from 1995 that “No longer do we have originators… but the collective, always unfinished text. To debate whether this most recent shift… is a ‘good thing’ would be to postulate some sort of pre-discursive reality to textuality. It is sufficient, at least for the moment, to observe that this shift, like its predecessors, reflects and reproduces the social conditions that produced it” (p. 791). While this view was understandable (and applicable to previous applications of the rhetorical triangle’s construct of text/purpose) we are at a point now in writing research that we can identify and define specific behaviors in social
online spaces that not only connote collaborative behavior, but that also construct the very nature of the texts and media in which they are enacted.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Collaborative Triangle is a heuristic constructed from research on scholarship related to collaborative composition over the last thirty years, and is used in the forthcoming methods and findings chapters in order to collect and analyze student-user data for my study. Additionally, my approach to this study (and to its data) was informed by specific theoretical groundings outlined below. I present them here as three distinct lenses that, when put together, construct a framework for how I approached and conducted my study.

In Scott DeWitt’s (relatively) early work on new media and its place in the writing classroom, the author outlines the “polarized views of invention as either a cognitive process or as a social act” (2001, p. 46). On one end, he places cognitivists, represented most prominently by Flower and Hayes, whose work is based in “information processing” and “general knowledge as problem-solving” (pp. 46-47). This side of the binary, argues DeWitt, is concerned with the individual writer following a linear path of discovery, often aided by heuristic procedures. The other end of the binary is occupied by social theorists, who are “concerned with writing in context [and] with community, the influence of social situation, and intertextuality.” For DeWitt, “those who embrace social theories of composing have taken the writer out from the cognitive, individualistic room and broadened the spectrum to include a houseful of the social influences that the writer may experience” (p. 47).

Though DeWitt is careful throughout the rest of his book not to oversimplify this divide (which is itself a kind of heuristic), he wrestles with its participants in order to ultimately argue that new media-enabled views of the rhetorical canon of invention should be seen through a social theory lens as students write and learn more through technology. In 2001 such a proclamation could still be seen as highly debatable. However, ten years later—in a new academic world where social and mobile technologies are all but ubiquitous in many writing classrooms—is it still helpful to engage this theoretical divide? Can technology use in the classroom be seen as anything
but a social approach? My theoretical framework was constructed as a kind of attempt to answer these questions not by choosing sides, but by complicating historical views of theory and rhetoric that ultimately apply to my study of social media’s possible place in the writing classroom, and how instructors and student-users may better understand their extracurricular writing through an academic approach to analysis.

This approach begins by returning to the guiding research question of my study: In what ways can student-user writing in social online spaces be seen as collaborative in nature? As explained in the preceding chapters, the language and analyses that we have relied on to study collaborative writing may be inadvertently limiting the scope of what texts we consider worthy of study, and how we see these texts as important to authors and audiences beyond the classroom. Rooted in traditional rhetorical analyses, writing instruction has often valued quality over interest (Sirc, 2010), and in doing so, may be missing opportunities to study and learn from student-created online texts that are seemingly growing in number and influence beyond the classroom walls. As a result, this study is designed to expand how we view and analyze writing. I do so by taking up James Porter’s (2010) challenge of creating a “broader view [of] rhetoric as requiring a productive and pragmatic knowledge about how to create information products that will matter to people—that is, be usable and useful,” and “[a] broader view of rhetoric [that] would include inquiry procedures (that is, invention tactics) aimed at understanding what motivates people to create, search, and circulate, knowledge” (p. 175). In other words, this study looks to broaden our language and understanding of what constitutes writing by first viewing online textual production through a distinct palimpsest of theoretical lenses.

Because this study is situated within the relatively new and evolving context of social online spaces, perhaps it is best to describe what approaches the study has not taken before explaining the multi-faceted approach the study has undertaken. To start, though the study of writing and interacting in social online spaces is first and foremost interested in text, this study is not interested in a strictly linguistic or socio-linguistic approach. Such an approach may entail a finer grain of analysis at the word level (including word counts, corpus analysis for specific terms, etc.) that seem to indicate the potential for collaborative writing, but remains too minute (in my opinion) to reveal any
larger collaborative structures. This study is likewise related to, though ultimately not pursuing, a cognitive or socio-cognitive approach to writing and decision making in social online spaces (though, like DeWitt, I am not completely discounting its potential contributions.) Though the study of student-user dispositions toward a text does address latent attitudes of writing and interaction, this study's major focus is on discursive markers readily observable in texts (i.e. behaviors, such as citing evidence to build credibility, discussed in the previous chapter.) As a result, a cognitive-based approach is helpful in addressing the motivations behind collaboration, but is less helpful in directing future readers of this study where to look for evidence of collaboration in any analysis of online writing.

Instead, this study's approach is best described as socio-cultural, with a symbiotic view of writing and interacting in social online spaces where both writing and interacting affect and are affected by one another. By socio-cultural, I refer to approaches grounded in the presence and interplay of social and cultural agents on a given situation, such as is embodied in “real world” rhetorical situations everyday. In referring to these situations as symbiotic, I mean to say that writing is a form of social interaction unto itself; just as social interaction is often inherently in the form of writing within social online spaces. This view fits into the socio-cultural approach in acknowledging that writing and interaction take place beyond the self, where communication is defined by its social players and implications. Such a socio-cultural approach (Wells, 1999) is uniquely situated in the disciplines of composition and rhetoric to highlight the beginning stages of writing that bridge oral and written communication, where writers are gatherers of ideas and communicate with others to begin mapping out approaches to inquiry and argument. It acknowledges the process-based nature of writing and knowledge production (Emig, 1971) often occurring in spaces overlooked by traditional education and literacy authorities, or what have been referred to as “new literacies” (Street, 1993). This approach overtly addresses the social nature of writing and the culture of writing and interacting present in social online spaces, especially where users utilize non-alphanumeric behaviors (e.g. “Liking” a post) to interact with one another and produce an evolving definition of what constitutes a text.
This study's socio-cultural approach is divided into three equally informing lenses that comprise the study's theoretical frame. Since this study is ultimately concerned with examining and instructing (collaborative) writing, it is first rooted in rhetorical theory. Beyond acknowledging the Aristotelian appeals to author, audience, and purpose/text, this study is rooted in the rhetorical canon of invention, the first of five principles of rhetoric. This rhetorical lens is important in understanding established textual approaches that my proposed approach stems from. Following this rhetorical framing, the study likewise takes up a Bakhtinian approach to writing and interacting that views these activities as inherently dialogic in nature. According to Bakhtin, an utterance is comprised and completed by other utterances, never existing in isolation. This is important to highlight the implied reciprocity of many textual exchanges in social online spaces. Finally, these rhetorical and Bakhtinian approaches inform the social constructionist lens that expands the social nature of co-construction of knowledge. In other words, this final lens acknowledges that interactions are cumulative and may work to build new knowledge and texts. In the sections that follow, I briefly explain why I believe that each lens is suitable for framing not only my study of social technology, but future similar studies as well.

3.2.1 RHETORICAL LENS

This study is based first in a rhetorical approach as a way of acknowledging the belief that all writing is argumentative in nature; all writing is attempting to persuade an audience. Such a belief is most famously rooted in the teachings of Aristotle, and confirmed nearly ever since in Greek, Roman, Western, and contemporary rhetorical studies. Though nuances of Aristotle's views on rhetoric vis-à-vis these other related fields is beyond the scope of this study, his basic beliefs on appeals to logic (logos) in the situating of an author, an audience, and a purpose or text is central to both how I have approached this inquiry, as well as how the greater field of composition has approached its own inquiries over the past century.

As explained in the introduction chapter, this study is interested in expanding—not replacing—previous language and analyses of writing most taken up by writing instructors espousing classical rhetoric strategies. Classical rhetoric's use of appeals and
heuristics is a wonderful starting point for students to begin analyzing and understanding their writing processes. However, such applications can also be limiting if/when students root their understanding of writing in fairly fixed understandings of concepts of author and text (such as when writers view “author” as a person more so than a set of beliefs and enacted behaviors that constitute what an author is believed to be.) So as to not lose the benefits of these ancient traditions, though, I echo Johnson-Eilola and Selber’s belief that:

a rhetorical stance helps to validate important knowledge that students already possess about how to communicate. Although we can continue to offer them important help in learning how to communicate what we think of as traditional forms of writing, we can also help them to build bridges between what they currently know and what we can help them come to know. (2009, p. 18)

In other words, the use of classical rhetoric in the writing classroom should be used as a scaffold, not as a straw-man, when analyzing new media texts. By bridging the writing that students have interest in outside of the classroom (which Sirc argues is preferable to high quality, yet potentially insincere, texts in the classroom) with commonly accepted academic practices of analysis (such as rhetorical analyses of texts), instructors and students will be able to expand their understandings of writing beyond the potentially limiting views of lone-authoring or print-bound text.

Alongside classic Aristotelian rhetoric, this study is framed by an approach to rhetoric carried out by American literary scholar Kenneth Burke. Burke’s influential A Rhetoric of Motives (1969) is important not only for its reassurance of classical rhetoric’s place in an increasingly postmodern world, but also for his discussion of motives related to agency. One of Burke’s major contributions is his explanation of how classical rhetoric is constituted of deliberate acts, for example when a speaker sets out to persuade an audience to believe his ideas. However, Burke reminds us that persuasion is often subconscious and undeliberate. To Burke, defining rhetoric as the “art of persuasion,” may not even be wholly accurate. He claims such a view of rhetoric is “not an accurate fit, for describing the ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another” (p. xiv). Within my study, this claim is addressed through an equal address of dispositions and behaviors, meaning that both
“ways of…acting” and actual acts are addressed as part of any writing and interaction process.

Burke believes that in attempting to persuade and interact with others, we often are persuading ourselves to enact certain roles and behaviors that are expected of us. This could be the case in some forms of undergraduate writing where instructors may later bemoan students’ lack of interest in (or quality of) persuading their imagined audience of a particular thesis. However, consider the writing that student-users engage in on Facebook as a counterpoint. Though not necessarily deliberately setting out to “persuade” readers of any overt idea, users nonetheless use visuals and writing in order to gain or maintain new friends, or express themselves in ways that will be acknowledged. These are purposeful goals, but may be seen merely as ways of interacting with a technology more so than as an appeal to other users. These successful rhetorical moves, however, may encourage other users to respond and co-construct knowledge together in the informal, interactive social online space, and thus are indeed persuasive for their given goals.

These notions of persuasion are likewise compounded by application of Burke’s (1978) rhetorical pentad, which aims to uncover the motives behind any rhetorical act. The pentad, proposed within Burke’s field of “dramatism” based in literary tradition, contains five components, which can be posed as questions to get at motive: Act (What happened?), Scene (Where did it happen?), Agent (Who is acting?), Agency (How did the agent act?), and Purpose (Why did the agent act?). The pentad’s similarity to journalism’s basic set of questions (Who? What? Where? When? How?) is important in addressing—as objectively as possible—a given rhetorical situation. My study’s address of student-user dispositions in interviews relies heavily—if not implicitly—on this rhetorical approach. Again, studying a text rhetorically need not necessarily hinge on discovering persuasion, it may also simply point toward users’ interest in writing and responding to a textual situation at any given moment. Though rhetorical theory is by no means this limiting, young writers may view it as only applicable to academic texts that often exert specific arguments in ways that their everyday writing seemingly does not. This view is clear in the aforementioned Pew study that found online users seeing their online writing as somehow different from their academic writing.
One area where I am less interested in expanding traditional conceptions of rhetoric than echoing them is in the situating of this study within the rhetorical canon of invention. Of the five rhetorical canons (Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery), the first—invention—is where the concepts of social interaction and co-construction are most engrained in the fabric of collaborative composition. Invention, mirroring Aristotle’s original definition, is still largely seen as “the art of discovering all of the arguments made available by a given rhetorical situation” (Crowley & Hawhee, 2009, p. 51) and “an act of turning inward as it was an act of locating oneself socially, a way of participating in the shared desires, values, and meanings already existing in the world” (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 113). In either case—whether as an origination or situation—invention is most concerned with the beginning stages of persuasion, writing, and/or interacting. Note that these “beginning” stages need not be seen chronologically, as a linear starting point, but more as a point on a map that writers can return to, or use as a point of reference. Here, invention is a point of connection with other points. As a result, this view of invention is the perfect frame for studying writing in social online spaces, where texts are infinitely open and never linear, bounded, or complete.

Nonetheless, many views of invention in composition studies remain thought of as pedestrian getting started, how-to, and brainstorming activities designed to start a project from scratch. Though a valid approach, as students often need scaffolding at this stage (Gebhardt, 1980), this study sees invention as a larger part of the complete writing process, where writing is iterative and constantly changing. Seeing writing as a social practice (Brodkey, 1987) is most lucidly connected to Bawarshi’s aforementioned views of genre-as-invention, and to Karen Burke LeFevre’s Invention as a Social Act, where the author defines invention as “the process of actively creating as well as finding what comes to be known and said in the discourse of any discipline…when individuals interact dialectically with socioculture in a distinctive way to generate something” (1987, p. 33). LeFevre’s views on invention emerged when the blurring of process and product was at times theoretical, or when there was still a clear distinction between class and group notes versus a finished book or turned-in paper. However, with real-time archiving and fully searchable websites now the norm for extracurricular writing, we are seeing a very practical blurring of writing process and product. Though my approach in this study is
one based in the relatively stable language of rhetoric, analyzing online writing through the rhetorical canon of invention (where process outweighs product, and context may be more important than text) provides an open-ended space for generating dispositions and behaviors to be viewed as converging around specific ideas that, when put together, may be seen as collaborative in nature.

3.2.2 BAKHTINIAN LENS

By now it is commonplace to cite Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary scholar, in the theoretical frame to socially-based studies, especially in composition and rhetoric, where seeing writing as social and collaborative is almost a given. However, repeatedly citing Bakhtin doesn’t make his theories on writing and interacting any less potent. True to this point, this study uses Bakhtin’s theories on utterances contained within his collection of essays, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), as a foundational lens to frame this inquiry, stemming largely from Ede and Lunsford’s (1990) designation of “dialogic collaboration” as a desirable form of writing and interaction introduced in the preceding literature review. In selecting dialogue as a starting point for studying writing and interaction, this study—and studies like it—point to Bakhtin’s (1981) notions of “living conversations” in order to highlight the dialogic and open-endedness of online texts. Dialogic discourse “is a constructive activity that leads to a new and heightened understanding,” (p. 4) which forms “a complex network of statement, response, and restatement, one that, among other things, complicates our understanding of audience and acknowledges the inherent ‘addressivity’ of all discourse” (pp. 5-6). In authorship’s address of production and reciprocity, community’s address of social interaction, and textuality’s address of fluid, open-ended texts, Bakhtin’s analog of discourse as conversation is present in every facet of my approach to data collection and analysis.

When scholars cite Bakhtin’s idea of “living conversations” as mirroring social—if not collaborative—writing, they are almost always referring to his chapter/essay, “Discourse in the Novel,” which introduced the world to the term *heteroglossia*. The term, in short, refers to the “primacy of context over text” (p. 428), meaning that no utterance—or text, in the parlance of my study—can exist without other texts to respond
to or address. This multi-voiced approach is essential to studying and understanding writing and interacting in social online spaces, where student-users not only cite and hyperlink to other texts, but also write in expectation of a response. Such an application of heteroglossia reveals not only a social nature of writing, but also a potentially collaborative one, as “[e]very written utterance is a dialogic response to other utterances, making up a collaborative partnership…[a] text is both a response to certain others who have preceded a writer and a response to subsequent utterances that a writer anticipates as possible response reactions” (Thralls, 1992, p. 68). In demonstrating the link between dialogic utterances and collaborative partnerships, Thralls likewise provides implications for my study: that every utterance and response is a potential collaborative partnership. Determining to what degree those partnerships can be valued in other writing contexts (such as studying collaborative writing in a classroom) is where my study finds its site of inquiry.

A Bakhtinian approach is closely related to, but ultimately very different from, approaches aligned with Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, whose Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) have influenced educational theory for decades. Whereas Bakhtin’s dialogic interactions contain no inherent hierarchy (again echoing Ede and Lunsford’s distinction), Vygotsky’s ZPD approach “often involves mentoring provided by more culturally knowledgeable persons, usually elders, who engage in activity with less experienced or knowledgeable persons” (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2). Of course Vygostskian approaches are also more typically aligned with cognitive or socio-cognitive approaches to inquiry, but my study’s interest in peers in extracurricular environments is what ultimately makes a Bakhtinian lens more instantly applicable. I add this note not to reinforce DeWitt’s original binary between cognitivist and social theories, but to merely point out that a Bakhtinian lens of dialogic discourse is important—if for no other reason—for its metaphorical use of language, where writers are seen as not merely trying to persuade an audience, but attempting to express and generate interest in an idea (or ideas) that may be expanded on and returned to.

3.2.3 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST LENS
Finally, this study views texts not only as situated in rhetorical invention, and dialogic in nature, but also as co-constructed realities. As opposed to a simple accumulation of loosely related (if related at all) ideas, this final lens acknowledges that social interaction relies on and begets co-constructed knowledge, which Espen Aarseth sees as enacted when a “user has the ability to transform [a] text into something that the instigator of the text could not foresee or plan for (p. 164)” (qtd. in Brooke, 2009, p. 71). This third lens is known as a social constructionist approach, and is applicable to writing in that “it both reflects and shapes thinking” (Clark, et al., 2003, p. 15). Influenced largely by Richard Rorty’s concepts of socially justified belief\footnote{Rorty is widely seen as a pragmatist in fields related to philosophy. Though a complete review of his beliefs and influences on my approach is beyond the scope of this study, his postmodernistic view of anti-essentialism is highlighted in this chapter in order to give context to the social constructionist movement prominent in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century.} (1979), and taken up most prominently in composition by Kenneth Bruffee in his theories on communities of peers, social constructionism has been an influential factor in the field of composition for some time. According to Thomas Kent, “[t]his philosophical position—the claim that what we know is determined by or is relative to the community in which we live—forms the foundation for what we now designate, following Kenneth Bruffee, as ‘social constructionism’” (1991, p. 426). Kent goes on to explain, “social constructionists endorse the Cartesian notion that a split exists between an ‘in here’—usually thought of as mind or subjectivity—and an ‘out there’—usually thought of as world or objectivity—a split that is mediated by a network of social conventions, mental categories, or simply loosely-held beliefs” (p. 426). Kent’s binary echoes DeWitt’s observation that began this section. Both views of social construction of knowledge rely on the collaborative nature of peers (or agents, users, etc.) to bring ideas together and build something from their respective parts. They construct not only knowledge (or texts) but also the very reality that they operate in, and they do so in actively lived places such as textual communities enabled by social technology.

Social constructionism, however, is often confused with the closely aligned (social) constructivist perspective, which is aligned with cognitive and Vygotskian approaches to knowledge construction. According to Gordon Wells, a social
constructivist approach is “the process of people working together to solve problems that arise in the course of shared activities” (2000, p. 66), which can certainly be collaborative. However the inclusion of the shared goal “to solve problems,” and the implied linear progression of activities, should alert readers to a more product- or goal-oriented approach typical in Vygotskian hierarchies. Likewise, a constructivist approach often highlights the learning of the individual, and sacrifices the importance of context for a final, finished text. Again, we are thrown back into DeWitt’s binary of cognitivist and social theories, and into a potentially limiting view of rhetorical production.

This distinction is important because it is not just a parsing of terms, but a founding of beliefs that have direct implications for how a researcher approaches his study. While constructivist notions favor the (often cognitive) effect on individuals, constructionists are interested more in the social nature that an individual operates within. As a result, the differences in terms determine where a researcher is looking for data and effect. In composition, constructionism and constructivism are often haphazardly conflated, as a CompPile wiki entry on constructivism representatively claims “[f]or the social constructivists, reality and knowledge do not pre-exist their creation, their social ‘invention’” (2011) while alternating between the use of the terms constructivism and constructionism. This study takes this difference seriously, and though a fine-grained nuancing of the terms is beyond the scope of this study, it is still worth pausing briefly to highlight the main differences in the terms and approaches at the start of the 21st century lest we continue a muddled series of misunderstandings that will ultimately prevent us from focusing our attention on differing sites of inquiry. To look at these differences in constructivism and constructionism in the field of composition, I sent out an inquiry to the Writing Program Administrators email listserv (WPA-L43) in July 2009 asking about

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43 The WPA-L is largely seen as the primary mode of email communication for those in fields related to composition and rhetoric interested in writing program administration. WPAs, faculty, students, and visitors are all invited to subscribe and participate. The conversations on the listserv have mostly been focused on theoretical and professional concerns related to writing studies since at least 1993.
these closely related terms\textsuperscript{44}. The authors of my responses have since agreed to allow me to quote them here.

In short, when asked the difference between constructivism and constructionism, the general consensus seemed to be that the latter term was more appropriate to the “social” prefix, whereas the former was much more concerned with an individual’s learning or meaning making. Charles Bazerman cites Joseph Petraglia’s \textit{Reality By Design: The Rhetoric and Technology of Authenticity in Education} (1998) in pointing out the perceived contradictions “between Social Constructionism (from sociology of scientific knowledge and critical theory, construed as a group phenomenon) and Psychological Constructivism (from Educational Psychology, construed as individual learning)” in an early email. In a follow-up email—sent after several others publicly responded to the list—Bazerman elaborates:

Educational Constructivism is sometimes presented and enacted as though the laws of nature are to be found by each student (or small group of students) with enough of the right sort of experiences. That is, knowledge is assumed to be pretty stable and can be found without a lot of social guidance and scaffolding from pre-existing formulations. Social constructionism presents knowledge as the result of social processes, and neophytes can only find it through engagement with the collective inheritance rather than through idiosyncratic adventures of experience. Social constructionism, in its most extreme forms, does not allow much place for individual experience and discovery, although it does destabilize the warrant of knowledge as always there to be discovered rather than invented. (C. Bazerman, personal email to WPA-L, July 27, 2009)

Later, Gerald Nelms contributed what he saw as the recent history of constructivism: constructivism is a learning theory whose history we can follow way back but which really got its name and philosophical bearings from the philosophy of Nelson Goodman, especially his books \textit{Ways of

\textsuperscript{44} I present this brief tangent not to delay the exegesis of my theoretical frame, but to demonstrate the power of co-construction of knowledge (or collaboration) through the contemporary medium of e-mail.}
Worldmaking (Hackett, 1978) and Of Mind and Other Matters (Harvard UP, 1984). Jerome Bruner discusses Goodman and constructivism at length in Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (Harvard UP, 1987). Goodman argues that we create world versions with every decision we make and that while we can change our world versions and do so all the time, as they collide with other people’s world versions, still we are bound to worldmaking. We always see the world through our world version, which is inevitably affected by others. Early on, Janet Emig became a constructivist, and in the 1980s, labeled herself as such. (G. Nelms, personal email to WPA-L, July 27, 2009)

He later contrasts this with his view of constructionism, which he claims “is a newer term for what originally was called ‘social construction.’” According to Nelms, “[s]ocial construction really came into its own, as best I can tell, in the late 1960s in sociology with the publication of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman’s Social Construction of Reality (Anchor, 1967), which argued that reality is always socially constructed—that is, each individual is a social construction” (G. Nelms, personal email to WPA-L, July 27, 2009). The take away from these emails seems to be the foregrounding of the social community surrounding an activity as opposed to the benefits of an individual. Bazerman and Nelms represent not only clear voices in the discipline’s understanding of these terms, their stature (and frequency) in our literature likewise confirms their voices are representative of how compositionists view the difference between constructivism and constructionism (if they view a difference at all.)

The purpose of presenting these email responses is not only to point out the relative consensus within this community, but to also draw attention to how minute the differences appear to be between the terms, and how recently the discipline of composition has taken them up. In one of the most telling emails sent to the listserv, one member admitted that most people—even leading scholars in the field—would not be able to parse the differences if pushed. My study—again—is not interested in making a large argument for doing so, but is simply drawing attention to the fact that its orientation is self-consciously social constructionist by design, aligning itself with a socio-cultural and rhetorical approach to viewing writing and interaction online, in very social and
multi-voiced spaces. This statement is designed not to place my study on any polarized binary, but to—again—place a thumbtack in the map of composition, noting where I am starting my exploration (in this case, on the social context of writing and interaction), and where it may (or may not) ultimately return to. As I present my methodology in the next chapter, I offer up this theoretical framework as an entry point into how and why my study was conducted in the way it was. As much as previous scholarship begat my Collaborative Triangle heuristic, previous theoretical foundations have framed my approach to data collection and analysis in very distinct ways.
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODS

Because my research questions seek to both understand how online dispositions and behaviors reflect previous approaches to collaborative composition as well as to understand how they expand previous approaches, I constructed a study that looked backward as well as forward. The study I conducted, then, is equally informed by previous scholarship on collaborative composition as well as contemporary student-users’ interests and activities in social online spaces. Based in the previous scholarship outlined in the literature review, the three stages of my study form a recursive conversation that (in data collection and analysis) seeks to expand and refine previous discussions and definitions of collaborative writing as we move to studying writing done in online contexts. These three stages are the focus of this chapter. Below, I explain not only how each one built upon the one previous, but also how they all culminated in a data set that begat a deeper understanding of the types of writing and interaction that are valued as collaborative by the student-users I studied. The result is a theory-driven study that looks to build new theory.

4.1 STUDY DESIGN

This study looks to inform composition instructors and researchers who are interested in the role that collaborative composition can play in their practice and theory. With this audience in mind, I targeted undergraduate students who are also active Internet users (hence, the term “student-user.”) Because student-users’ writing and interaction activities take place across physical and virtual sites, I constructed a three-pronged approach to studying their behaviors that bridged face-to-face and online data collection and analysis. The results of this approach are three stages of the study that were part of a linear progression from general ideas and behaviors to very targeted ideas and behaviors.
This progression is outlined in the table below, where each stage of the study is described by the actions I took within each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA COLLECTION STAGE</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Survey**            | • Constructed 20-question survey  
                          • Posted survey to website *SurveyMonkey.com*  
                          • Targeted undergraduate students at three post-secondary institutions within a 10-minute radius of one another  
                          • Collected survey results for 20 days (194 subjects began the survey)  
                          • Analyzed survey results to capture snapshot of Internet usage and writing habits of respondents  
                          • Analyzed survey results to filter our ineligible participants (188 were deemed eligible)  
                          • Analyzed results to choose nine participants for interview stage |
| **Interviews**        | • Constructed interview protocol of questions relating to text production, interaction, and nature of online texts (i.e. related to three categories of Collaborative Triangle)  
                          • Conducted nine individual face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 45-minutes apiece  
                          • Asked open-ended, conversational interview questions  
                          • Recorded and later transcribed each interview  
                          • Analyzed, coded, and placed behaviors into three concepts for each category (e.g. authorship, expertise, and language for the authorship category)  
                          • Analyzed and coded once for dispositions and behaviors related to traditional approaches to collaborative composition (i.e. those noted in the literature review)  
                          • Analyzed and coded a second time for dispositions and behaviors that seemed understudied, new, or important to subjects; these were noted as “expanded” behaviors  
                          • Asked each subject to identify one website where he/she contributed the most online writing |
| **Online Texts**      | • Tracked each subject’s online writing of their self-reported most frequented website (e.g. *Facebook*) for two weeks apiece  
                          • Used screen capture software to take electronic snapshots of users’ activities twice a day  
                          • Analyzed and coded for traditional dispositions and behaviors noted in the interviews |
• Analyzed and coded for expanded dispositions and behaviors noted in the interview
• Analyzed and coded for expanded dispositions and behaviors not noted in the interviews, but apparent in these social online spaces

Table 4.1: Study Design

The above table can be read as a chronological timeline of the actions that comprised this study. Surveys begat interviews which begat online texts. Each stage of the process was necessary to continue to the next (e.g. the survey was necessary to identify strong interview candidates, and the interviews were necessary to identify writing behaviors that may not be directly observable in the online texts.) Likewise, each stage of the study was informed by knowledge of previous scholarship on collaborative composition, which allowed me to identify behaviors that have been discussed in the past versus those that have not.

As described above, the survey served primarily as a filter. It determined which participants were eligible subjects, and removed ineligible participants. In so doing, I was also able to take a snapshot of subjects’ Internet and writing activities that informed the types of questions I was preparing to ask in the interview stage. Once in those interviews, nine subjects (three from each of the three schools targeted) were asked open-ended questions designed to encourage them to discuss how they approach and enact writing and interaction in social online spaces. After these interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed I conducted two passes of analysis over the data. The first was conducted in order to look for dispositions and behaviors identified in prior scholarship as related to collaborative composition. With these identified (according to the categories of the Collaborative Triangle) I was able to refine my coding strategy by composing three concepts for each category. With this refinement in place, I conducted a second pass of the data, looking for dispositions and behaviors that (through their frequency or emphasis) appeared to be understudied or new, and seemingly related to collaborative writing in online contexts. At the end of the interview stage, then, I had identified several dozen established and “expanded” behaviors that subjects noted as related to collaborative writing and to their online experiences.

With this list in place, I followed a website for each subject over the course of two weeks. Subjects knew about this approach, but were not informed of when I would be
doing this, which ensured that my silent observation would not interfere with their normal routines as much as possible. Over the course of two weeks apiece, I took screen shots and collected hundreds of images of subjects’ online activities. In analysis, I again coded for traditional dispositions and behaviors identified in the literature review and interviews that were present in these visuals. I then coded for the expanded behaviors noted in the interview. After this, I conducted a final pass of the online text data, looking for behaviors that were frequent and seemingly important, but were not identified in the interview. As a result of these three passes, I was able to further refine and expand the list of behaviors identified in the interview stage as related to collaborative composition. At the conclusion of this analysis, I was able to construct the tables of behaviors described in the forthcoming findings chapters, and able to argue that these behaviors seem indicative of potential collaborative activity that should inform future conversations about what constitutes collaborative writing in social online spaces.

4.2 WHY THIS STUDY?

What separates this study from previous studies on online writing and interaction (such as the oft-cited Pew studies) is that this study specifically addresses the link between extracurricular and academic writing behaviors. In so doing, I interrogated how student-users are writing and interacting, specifically with an eye toward how they are writing and interacting in ways that may be valuable to composition theory and practice. The study is framed through a lens that is interested in bridging traditional approaches and analyses to collaborative writing and expanded notions of what it might mean to be collaborating in contemporary non-print environments, such as those present in social online spaces.

Similar studies may be conducted to look for other aspects of online activity (e.g. issues of identity, roles of gender, cognitive beliefs, etc.), but this study is explicitly interested in the behaviors that students-users enact when online that appear similar or related to writing behaviors that have long been valued in the composition classroom. This study is well suited to do so because it is founded in previous literature on collaborative composition and is cognizant of the implications that findings may have toward expanding this literature for future understanding of the similarities and
differences in academic and online writing. However, the interviews and online texts are presented by foregrounding what is important to the actual student-users. Instead of basing my data collection and analysis explicitly on its connection to academic contexts and behaviors, I instead aim to honor what subjects’ identified as important, and to then present these findings in light of previous academic scholarship on collaborative writing, and extrapolate how these subjects’ approaches and behaviors may expand this scholarship.

To do so, this study sought data that occurred naturally in widely popular social media, where the majority of potentially collaborative writing is likely to take place. Following a survey of the most popular social media in use by my potential subjects (discussed below), I identified types of social online spaces (i.e. websites) that seem to potentially support writing and interaction that may be collaborative in nature. My research questions, which preceded the three stages of the study, are based on a hypothesis that collaborative writing is taking place within these social online spaces. To test this hypothesis I sought data that had a baseline of conditions that I deemed conducive to potential collaboration. Though discussed in more detail below, these conditions included websites where the main form of interaction is the entering of alphanumeric text (i.e. online writing) and student-users interacted through personal profiles that contained at least some personal information and implied at least some degree of ownership of their materials contained within those profiles (e.g. posting personal photos.) Together, these conditions presented data that is in line with the very basic conditions of traditional collaborative writing: two or more authors working together to produce a joint text. Since most interactions in social online spaces are archived, any online interactions could fulfill this last condition of a joint text.

4.3 SETTING

Because this study focuses on student-users interacting within social online spaces, the setting of this study bridges physical and virtual sites. Physically, students were selected from three higher education institutions\(^45\) in the upper Midwest located

\(^{45}\) All school names are pseudonyms.
within a ten-mile radius of one another. These schools were chosen primarily because of proximity and convenience, but also as a way to represent students from relatively diverse educational backgrounds ranging from basic writers seeking associates degrees to advanced writers seeking bachelor degrees. An attempt was made to represent each school with an equal number of participants (with the goal of eventually selecting nine study participants, three from each school\textsuperscript{46}.) However, as can be seen in the right-hand column labeled “Other Factors,” there were significantly more potential subjects from Huron University (HU) than the other two schools\textsuperscript{47}. Despite this, each school was ultimately represented by three subjects apiece. School profiles are provided in Table 4.2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>DEGREES GRANTED</th>
<th>ENROLLED</th>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
<th>OTHER FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crystal Community College (CCC)</td>
<td>Associate and Certificates</td>
<td>20,000+</td>
<td>• 30% minorities</td>
<td>• Exclusively commuter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Average age is 29</td>
<td>• Writing housed in English Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Represented 6% of total survey respondents (11 students)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rouge University (RU)</td>
<td>Bachelor, Master, and Certificates</td>
<td>23,000+</td>
<td>• 31% minorities</td>
<td>• Commuter and residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Average age is 24</td>
<td>• Writing housed in a First-Year Writing program within English Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Represented 17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{46} Nine was a somewhat arbitrary starting point at first: only one or two students from each school seemed too insignificant. However, after conducting the first four interviews, the same dispositions and behaviors were repeatedly coming up, which indicated to me that a total of nine subjects would be sufficient to represent each school equally and identify behaviors that appeared common among several otherwise diverse undergraduates subjects.

\textsuperscript{47} This could be due to a number of factors, including that HU students are typically of traditional college-age (18-21), go to school full-time, and primarily live on-campus, thus potentially leaving them more time to access the Internet\textsuperscript{47} and volunteer for studies such as this one.
For virtual settings, this study aimed to sample a breadth of social online spaces so as to not limit its analysis and findings to a specific medium (e.g., limited to just Facebook.) As a result, in addition to seeking, and interviewing, representative participants from each of the three schools mentioned above, I also selected participants that self-reported being active on three major types of Web 2.0 websites: social networks, blogging sites, and news sites that provide the ability to comment on stories. These three types of websites represent a breadth of platforms that are representative of most other social online spaces (in allowing users to construct profiles, upload materials, and interact with others.) Though participants often reported writing actively on multiple platforms, I sought student-users who identified one of these three types as their primary site of online writing. The sites that were eventually studied were submitted by potential participants\(^\text{48}\), and are summarized in Table 4.3 below.

\(^{48}\) In other words, I did not pre-select which sites would be studied. Had survey respondents noted a social network that they were more interested in than Facebook, for example, I gladly would have included it in this study. However, there was wide uniformity in regard to popular websites that will be described in the survey description listed below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEBSITE</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th># USERS</th>
<th>PUBLIC/PRIVATE</th>
<th>ANONYMITY</th>
<th>OTHER FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td>750 million</td>
<td>Public with optional privacy settings</td>
<td>Anonymous profiles are prohibited</td>
<td>• Most popular site on survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>20 million</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anonymity is allowed</td>
<td>• Most popular blogging site on survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Largely based in visual media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Public Radio (NPR.com)</td>
<td>News site</td>
<td>N/A (26.8 million weekly listeners)</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anonymity is allowed through use of screen names</td>
<td>• Website for radio broadcasting network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw Student</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anonymity is allowed through use of screen names</td>
<td>• Focused on higher education scholarships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Profiles of social online spaces analyzed in study

As can be seen here, the social networking site *Facebook* contains by far the most users of any site considered for this study. As will be described in the survey section below, it was also the most popular website among respondents. A study of this one particular site would surely yield findings that not only apply to a majority of undergraduates surveyed, but could also be applied generally to other websites. The goal of this study, though, is to identify and analyze approaches to online writing that take place across multiple platforms, not just the most popular. Though there are dispositions and behaviors that are unique to each of these types of sites, I have tried to aggregate observable behaviors that take place across all three. As a result, settings beyond the most popular (i.e. *Facebook*) were necessary in order to confirm similarities between individual websites that can collectively be described as social online spaces.

4.4 PARTICIPANTS
This study sought to investigate the online writing of currently enrolled undergraduates who consider themselves “active Internet users\(^{49}\)” in social online spaces, with the goal of comparing their online and academic writing and literacy skills. To find these subjects, the participant pool was collected through an online survey administered on a popular polling website, *SurveyMonkey.com*. Though the survey was open to the public, it could only be found by word of mouth or through a series of advertisements that I posted on the social networking site *Facebook*. This assured, to a reasonable degree, that my participant pool would be comprised of Internet users who were already active in at least one type of social online space.

As will be described further in the Data Collection section below, my survey was designed to collect a participant pool by weeding out ineligible or undesirable candidates. In addition to asking if respondents were active Internet users, I also asked for the respondent’s approximate age range. Anyone above the age of 18 was considered eligible. I also asked which school the respondent was currently enrolled in, with the aforementioned three schools listed as choices. In addition to those, I listed options for “Other” or “I don’t attend school.” If respondents selected these options, they were deemed ineligible. I also asked respondents what type of degree they were pursuing. Respondents who clicked “Undergraduate” were kept in the pool, while those who clicked “Graduate” or “Other” were removed. In all, 194 potential subjects began the survey. Two were removed because they did not attend one of the three target schools, and an additional four were removed because they identified themselves as graduate students.

Of the remaining 188 possible study participants who completed the survey, I chose nine that represented the three aforementioned schools, the three aforementioned types of social online spaces\(^{50}\), and a variety of other factors, including the subjects’ self-

\(^{49}\) I never explicitly defined this term for potential participants; instead it was listed as a yes/no question on the survey, with only those participants who clicked “yes” being considered for a follow-up interview.

\(^{50}\) Though initially I had hoped to represent one of each social online space type (social network, blog, and comment section) from each school, several participants changed their response to where they wrote the most once we conducted in-person interviews. Instead
reporting that their online posts typically garnered responses from other users. This last
criterion ensured that participants were active within their social online spaces and
displayed a modicum of correlation to traditional definitions of collaborative composition
describing two or more co-authors working on a text together. The subjects also
represented a diverse range in their responses to other relevant data, such as whether or
not they considered their online writing to be similar to writing they did in schools. As
noted in a footnote earlier, after interviewing four of the nine subjects, patterns began to
emerge (e.g. the same dispositions and behaviors being identified as important), which
led me to believe that choosing only nine subjects would ensure equity across the three
settings, but also a data set that was corroborated by a majority of the subjects. The
resulting participant profiles are summarized in Table 4.4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>PRIMARY MEDIUM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>OTHER FACTORS*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Transferred from HU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Indicated in survey that she commented on news sites, but later said she did not in interview (hence I collected Facebook data from her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Primary use to &quot;communicate with others&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Had never discussed online writing in a college writing course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Considers online writing similar to school writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octavia</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>24-29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Primary use to &quot;communicate with others&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Had never discussed online writing in a college writing course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does not consider online writing similar to school writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Primary use is &quot;procrastination&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Had discussed online writing in a college writing course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Considers online writing similar to school writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James#</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Has attempted to transfer to HU several times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Indicated in survey that he commented on news sites, but later said he did not in interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of dismissing them, I kept the original nine, but have made every attempt to generalize
across the reported sites.

51 Additionally, aggregated survey responses are provided in the Appendix.

52 All participant names are pseudonyms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>RU</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>21-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>HU</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>HU</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernest</td>
<td>HU</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Catherine**
  - Primary use is to “access new information”
  - Had never discussed online writing in a college writing course
  - Considers online writing similar to school writing
  - Described her online writing as “how [she makes] her living”

- **Ann**
  - Primary use is to “communicate with others”
  - Had discussed online writing in a college writing course
  - Considers online writing similar to school writing

- **Frank**
  - Primary use is for “entertainment”
  - Had discussed online writing in a college writing course
  - Considers online writing similar to school writing

- **Rob**
  - Indicated in survey that he commented on news sites, but later said he did not in interview
  - Primary use is for “procrastination”
  - Had never discussed online writing in a college writing course
  - Does not consider online writing similar to school writing

- **Ernest**
  - Primary use is for “personal expression”
  - Had never discussed online writing in a college writing course
  - Considers online writing similar to school writing

### Table 4.4: Profiles of student-users

*All participants indicated that they are undergraduates and “active Internet user[s]”*

# Nearly half of James’s interview transcript was lost due to technical difficulties. As a result, his responses are less frequently featured in data analysis.

As can be seen in Table 4.4, I only asked for relative age ranges in my survey. The majority (91.3%) of respondents to the survey were traditional college-age, 18-23. Because of this relatively uniformity, and since my study is ultimately not concerned with the specific demographics of participants, I did not ask for more information than an age-range in the interview, as asking for more detailed responses did not seem relevant or necessary. As will be described in the Data Collection section to follow, on the survey each participant identified one site where he or she did the majority of his/her online
writing. Subjects provided me with the URL of their self-reported most active social online space that I could visit after our interview\(^{53}\). Because of privacy settings on Facebook, several of the participants were asked to “friend” me (the term given to acknowledged acquaintances on the social network) so that I could view their interactions. Regardless of this, the one-hour interview was the only personal contact I had with each participant. Selecting the participants in the ways detailed above ensured that I would collect interview and writing data that represented a diverse range of participant backgrounds, interests, and behaviors. This commitment to diversity was important to the study so that any findings can be applied to other student-users with similar backgrounds, interests, and behaviors.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected across three stages, two of which were online. The first was an electronic survey designed to collect a participant pool and some initial quantitative data on Internet use. The second was a round of in-person interviews with nine selected participants who provided rich\(^{54}\) survey responses and agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. The third, and final, round of data collection occurred within a two-week period on a social online space. Within this third round, I took screenshots of student-users’ online writing. The study was approved by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) in mid-summer 2010, and was conducted in its entirety between September and December 2010. What follows is a more detailed account of each stage of data collection and further explanation for how each stage related to the other two.

4.5.1 SURVEYS

In late August 2010 I created an account on a popular polling website, SurveyMonkey.com, which enabled me to create surveys with as many questions as I

\(^{53}\) Though students consented to allowing me access to their site, and knew that I would be visiting it after the interview, they did not know when, or for how long, I would be visiting and taking screenshots. Because of this, I hope that my observations had as little impact as possible on their everyday activity.

\(^{54}\) By “rich” I mean to say responses that indicated that these students are not only active users of social media, but have also given its usage some introspective thought.
wanted, sort and filter results, and add logic to questions (e.g. if respondents noted that they were not undergraduates or were under 18, they were automatically directed to the end of the survey.) The survey was designed mainly as a filter: I wanted to filter out respondents who weren’t eligible (e.g. under 18, or not a current undergraduate at CCC, RU, and HU), or weren’t relevant to the study (e.g. self-reported that they weren’t active Internet users.) However, I also wanted to collect participants so that I would have a near-equal distribution of students from each of the three schools. I was aiming for approximately three subjects from each school to interview in the next stage of data collection.

SurveyMonkey.com is a popular website familiar to many Internet users, so I could be sure that accessing and navigating the survey questions would not be a major concern. Because of these reasons, I felt confident that a survey conducted through this website would not only be accurate, but also functional and equitable as well. There were twenty questions on the survey\(^55\), ranging from basic participant information (e.g. How old are you?) to nuanced questions about writing (e.g. Do you consider the writing you do online to be similar to the writing you do in school?) The link to the survey was advertised and opened to the public beginning at 3pm (EST) on Wednesday, September 1\(^{st}\) 2010, and remained live until 3pm (EST) on Monday, September 20\(^{th}\) 2010.

Several users who found the survey did not begin and/or complete the survey. Only completed surveys were included in my totals, so these incomplete responses were discarded before analysis. During the twenty-day collection period, the survey was only advertised on Facebook and by word of mouth by respondents. The survey was advertised via five individual and different ads run on Facebook. All five ads targeted my desired subject populations with specific copy and geographical targeting\(^56\), as can be seen on the right-hand side of Figure 4.1, below. This targeting ensured that I advertised only to potential participants with the target geographical location I had chosen.

\(^{55}\) The full survey questions and responses are reproduced in the Appendix.

\(^{56}\) For example, I was able to produce ads that only targeted students at CCC who were 18 years old and above and lived within 10 miles of my residence. Since the survey was public, anyone could ultimately take it, but this initial ad targeting ensured that most of my original respondents were potentially eligible.
I closed the survey to participants on September 20th 2010 and downloaded the results. I coded the spreadsheet so that I could determine respondents from CCC, RU, and HU. It was at this point that I eliminated entries from ineligible respondents (e.g. graduate students, respondents not currently in school.) Though I kept their quantitative data, I also eliminated respondents who indicated that they were not interested in being interviewed from the potential pool of study participants.

In addition to a distribution across schools and only seeking potential interviewees who were active on the Internet, I was also filtering for distribution among sites that the participants identified they used the most. As a result, I identified five “rich” questions that formed the rubric for how I selected which participants to interview. Listed below are the questions in order of importance (most important first) and my rationale for using each. For a respondent to be selected for an interview, he/she had to fit most of these criteria, with weight given to the first questions.

1. Q 2.3 “Of the following applications/websites, which do you use most often?”
   - I was looking for an equal distribution of Facebook, blogs, and news sites; ideally with one each for each school. I also considered Twitter and other sites, but since the aforementioned three were the most popular, I focused on them.

2. Q 4.3 “How often do your posts result in a sustained exchange..?”
• Though I aimed to choose respondents who selected “Nearly Always,” I also considered “Very Often” and “Often” as desirable. The point of this question was to make sure that respondents encountered a lot of textual interaction due to their posts, and weren’t simply post one-line entries without comments from others.

3. Q 4.4 “How often do you feel that your views or opinions change after posting or receiving feedback from others on your online posts?”

• Again, I aimed to choose respondents who selected “Nearly Always,” I also considered “Very Often” and “Often” as desirable. Just as the previous question looked for interaction, this one looked for potential active negotiation, construction of new ideas, or consideration of others’ ideas—all behaviors contained within traditional definitions of collaborative composition.

4. Q 4.1 “What are your primary purposes for WRITING on social networks, blogs, or comments sections?”

• Ideally, I was looking for responses of “Engage in debate” or “View others’ opinions” in order to gauge the level of interaction and active negotiation/construction described above. These two responses were the only ones listed that explicitly targeted respondents’ need for others’ comments in order to use the site(s) in ways they identified.

5. Q 5.2 “Do you consider the writing you do on social networks, blogs, and/or comments sections to be similar to the writing you do at school or work?”

• Though there was an overwhelming response of “No” to this question, I aimed to strike, if not a balance, then a representative number of “Yes” and “No” responses in order to see where and why respondents’ saw this gap.

The manner in which I conducted this survey was essential to my ability to find relevant study subjects for the following two stages of data collection. By advertising and conducting the survey online, it assured (to a reasonable doubt) that subjects were active Internet users. By asking questions that aligned with previous, traditional approaches to collaborative writing (e.g. asking subjects how often their posts result in responses), it
likewise assured that subjects could confirm some aspects of previous discussion and definitions of collaborative writing.

4.5.2 INTERVIEWS

Unlike the survey, whose purpose was to solicit as many participants as possible and filter them for potential follow-up sessions, the interview stage was designed to answer a specific research question: In what ways do student-users’ dispositions toward online writing reflect and expand previous discussions about collaborative writing? The interviews, then, were designed to collect data from participants who exhibited rich and interesting dispositions toward writing and Internet use based on their responses to the surveys. The interviews were an opportunity to delve deeper into these dispositions by situating them in specific social online contexts and around questions informed by the three categories of the Collaborative Triangle. The interviews mark the first time the Collaborative Triangle heuristic was used (unbeknownst to the subjects) in order to arrange questions according to traditional collaborative behaviors: text production, interaction, and cognizance of the nature of a text. To this degree, asking questions based on the three categories of the Collaborative Triangle allowed me to begin identifying potential collaborative behaviors for the final stage of data collection.

After closing the survey, I sifted through results from each school, looking for the ideal responses referenced above. My goal was to contact nine students\(^\text{57}\), representing all three schools, and who reported activity across Facebook, blogs, and comments sections, for follow-up interviews. Each interview was conducted in-person, audio taped, and later transcribed\(^\text{58}\). The interviews were conducted so as to be conversational and open-ended,

\(^\text{57}\) I contacted nine potential participants initially, inviting them to do an online interview (via Skype) or in-person interview based on their previous desire to participate. Of the original nine that I emailed, three never responded. For each of these, I selected a back-up student to contact instead. The other six responded in the affirmative and each was interviewed. I then contacted an additional three candidates from the list and set up interviews with them as well.

\(^\text{58}\) The interviews took place in private rooms of public places including a local city library, the school libraries at Rouge University and Crystal Community College, and my personal office located in a school building. The interviews were scheduled at student-
and guided by a question protocol (see Appendix.) The interview questions were designed to address traditional, established dispositions toward collaboration, but also ask open-ended questions about dispositions within social online spaces that I hypothesized may relate to previous dispositions and approaches. The protocol contained seven distinct categories of questions. Though I always began with the first two sections, and ended with the final, seventh, category, the middle questions arose naturally through conversation with each subject. Below are the categories for each of the question sections, followed by a brief explanation of my goals in asking each:

1. Questions about survey responses.
   - These questions began each interview and allowed the subject to reflect on their responses that they may have given weeks in advance. It also allowed me to follow up on why they responded the way they did. One example, which I began every interview with, was “Why did you mark that you are an active Internet user? What did you think that question meant?” This was also meant as a way to ensure that students provided sincere representations of themselves and/or had not changed their minds about their responses.

2. Questions about writing in general.
   - These questions, too, were designed to get the subject to reflect on his/her prior writing experiences in an open way. Questions such as “What makes your online writing different (or similar) to your academic writing?” were meant to push the subject to reflect on specific instances and contexts of writing in both established academic and emerging social online spaces. These questions were largely asked to (dis)confirm established approaches to collaborative writing discussed in the literature review of this study.

3. Questions about a specific social online space.
   - Going into each interview I had identified each interviewee as either a Facebook user, a blogger, or a commenter on news sites. The questions in this category were specific to these sites (e.g. “When did you start your first blog?

users’ convenience beginning the first week of October and running until the first week of November 2010.
Why?”) However, these questions unexpectedly turned into a filter when several subjects admitted that though they self-identified as bloggers, for example, they felt that they did the majority of their writing on Facebook. As a result, my final count was not as representative across media as I had initially intended. Nonetheless these questions were asked in order to allow subjects to narrow down their introspection of online writing to a very specific medium and set of associated dispositions and behaviors.

4. Questions related to text production.
   - These questions fell under the category of authorship, discussed and defined in the literature review. Questions addressed issues of authority, ownership, senses of public/private space, and solicitation of feedback that were seen as expanding established dispositions and behaviors related to the author construct of the traditional rhetorical triangle. Questions such as “Do you ever use evidence as a way to strengthen an argument?” aimed to identify dispositions that student-users exhibited in approaching their online writing that might both confirm established approaches but that might also present emerging approaches unique to social online spaces. These questions helped to identify established behaviors related to collaborative composition, and pointed towards emerging behaviors, some of which were hypothesized in my literature review and some of which were novel (e.g. using formal grammar in order to establish credibility.)

5. Questions related to social interaction.
   - Questions in this category addressed issues of audience, proximity, and affect in writing and interacting with others on the blog. Whereas the authorship questions focused on the individual as initiator of writing, these questions dealt more with interaction and stemmed from established approaches related to the audience construct of the traditional rhetorical situation. Student-users were asked questions such as “How does it make you feel when someone responds to your posts?” as a way to evoke dispositions that would make a user want to write more, less, or differently. Like the authorship questions,
these were also asked as a way to begin identifying emerging behaviors indicative of collaborative activity.

6. Questions related to the nature of texts.
   - Of the three categories of the Collaborative Triangle, textuality is best addressed through interviews about dispositions. Textuality may address issues of temporality, visual design, and identity. It is positioned as an expansion of the text/purpose construct of the traditional rhetorical triangle. Expanded issues related to textuality may not always be easily observed in online behaviors, so questions such as “Do you feel that your blog accurately depicts you as a person?” are necessary to delve deeper. Nonetheless, these questions were asked in order to begin determining how subjects view and interact with online texts similarly and/or differently than they do with established, print-based ones.

7. Remaining questions.
   - The final category of interview related to asking participants what they had learned through writing online, or what they would stress if they were able to teach a course about online writing. Like the first two categories of questions, these questions were meant to allow subjects to reflect on their activity as a valued literacy practice. These questions were asked in order to provoke responses related to established and expanded views of collaborative and/or online writing.

All nine subjects\textsuperscript{59} successfully completed their individual interviews, with each interview taking approximately 45 minutes to an hour to complete. At the conclusion of each interview, subjects were asked to identify one website where they did the majority

\textsuperscript{59} For their participation, each subject was given a $50 gift card and was invited to view the interview transcripts once they were completed. Subjects also signed a consent form, reproduced within the Appendix, informing them that all collected data would be written up for this study, that no identifying information would be contained within the study, and that they could leave the study at any time. No subjects objected to signing the form, no subjects followed up on requesting their interview transcript, and no one left the study prematurely.
of their online writing. They were informed that I would be observing their writing
during the online text stage of the study, but they were not informed when this would
take place.

4.5.3 ONLINE TEXT OBSERVATION

The preceding interviews were important not only for identifying dispositions in
how student-users approach online writing and interaction, they also identified where to
look in student-users’ online texts for behaviors\(^{60}\) that may be potentially collaborative.
In the interviews, subjects identified one website in which they self-reported producing
the majority of their online text. For each subject, I followed these sites for two weeks,
taking screenshots once a day on all of their activity. Since comments on most social
online spaces are archived and displayed publicly, even this once-a-day collection
ensured that I would capture most, if not all, of the subjects’ online activities. On the blog
this simply meant noting what was written. On Facebook this entailed following all of the
subjects’ activity: not only what they wrote on their profile, but what they wrote on
others’ profiles, etc. Within “comments” sections, I would revisit the commented-on
story several times until it went fallow or was shut down, as NPR does after seven days
on all of their articles\(^{61}\).

Texts were captured via free screenshot technology located on my computer. I
utilized a free program called Aviary, which allowed me to capture an (often long) entire
webpage, not just what was seen on my screen at any given time. This seemingly small
detail was important because it allowed me to get a macro-view of interactions captured
in one file\(^{62}\). Capturing so much interaction on each screenshot often entailed

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\(^{60}\) For example, several participants noted that they changed their profile photos often,
which was an expression of their online identity, and which they felt gave other users
incentive to check back often in order to view their evolving profile. This online
behavior, changing a profile photo, then becomes a potential behavior linked to
collaborative composition despite no precedent in previous, established literature.

\(^{61}\) Though archived and publicly on display, these latter comments sections can no longer
be commented on after this period.

\(^{62}\) Interestingly, reproducing these (often long) visuals is difficult to do within the
traditional 8.5”x11” portrait format of this dissertation, so forthcoming figures are
inadvertently capturing non-participants’ activity as well. Since they did not consent to joining the study (and to track all of them down would have entailed contacting literally thousands of users) I have simply opted to remove and/or blur their identifying information (including names and photos) as I did for the subjects in my study. This approach seems to guarantee the best balance between accuracy and privacy. Once all of the subjects’ activity was captured in digital screenshots, I began the process of choosing rich instances of textual activity in order to analyze each post according to categories and concepts of my heuristic.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Using a conceptual approach to data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I began data analysis of the interviews and online texts with the Collaborative Triangle providing three categories of collaborative activity based in prior scholarship. These categories, reproduced in Table 4.5, provided the framework for all of the following analysis; every discussed and observed behavior would be initially coded according to one of these three categories. Underneath these higher-level concepts, I eventually grouped lower-level concepts which allowed for a finer-grain of analysis, and which ultimately led to analyzing dimensions of these concepts that I identified as behaviors related to collaborative composition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorship</th>
<th>Behaviors related to text production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Behaviors related to social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textuality</td>
<td>Behaviors related to the nature of a text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Collaboration composition categories and related behavior dimensions

Guided by these categories, interviews were coded first. Upon analyzing the interview data for each of these three higher-level categories, I began to identify concepts typically only snippets of much larger files. The implications of this limitation on scale is briefly mentioned, but mostly beyond the scope of this study.

63 Even though, technically, IRB considers any activity taking place online as public in nature.

64 Rich behaviors, here, were considered ones that (dis)confirmed established ones discussed in the literature review, emerging ones hypothesized by the Collaborative Triangle, or heretofore unmentioned ones that were discussed in the interviews as enactments of dispositions.
that were related to the categories, and that identified properties of the dispositions and behaviors that students were discussing. As a result, with these higher-level categories and lower-level concepts in place, online texts were analyzed next, using the same coding strategies, in search of specific dimensions of the concepts, which I later identified as observable behaviors. Below is a brief explanation of how I moved from categories to concepts, and from concepts to behaviors by applying the Collaborative Triangle to analysis of my data.

4.6.1 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

In an attempt to answer RQ2 (In what ways do student-users’ dispositions toward online writing reflect and expand previous discussions about collaborative writing?), I conducted interviews and analyzed them first according to the three major categories present in the Collaborative Triangle. This approach to analysis follows Corbin & Strauss’s definition of categories as “[h]igher level concepts under which analysts group lower-level concepts according to shared properties…[t]hey represent relevant phenomena and enable the analyst to reduce and combine data” (2008, p. 159). Since the categories of the Collaborative Triangle are derived from previous scholarship on collaborative composition, this approach to analysis also fits the label of “theory-based sampling” (Patton, 2001), which finds “manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to elaborate and examine the construct and its variations” (p. 243).

As a result, during the first pass of the interview transcripts, I identified sections of text (typically responses to a singular question) that fell into these initial three categories. For example, on CCC student Marina’s survey, she indentified that she “often” changed her mind as a result of online conversation. During the interview I asked her to explain why this was the case, to which she gave the following response:

I don’t generally go in with an opinion already in mind, and so generally, at the end of the day, I see which side makes more sense and you know, eventually, it’s cumulative and I see which one’s starting to win, but, every now and then like there’s, there’s something that someone will say that’ll just make a lot of sense in one way or another and the other side doesn’t really have a good way to refute it.
Upon analyzing this excerpt the first time, I identified it with the category of community, or behaviors related to social interaction. This excerpt was not discussing textual production (authorship) nor the nature of the text (textuality), so the category of community seemed best suited to describe the nature of her response. Her follow-up response in the interview (not seen here) dealt with knowing when a conversation was over, which seemed to me like a distinctly different concept and behavior. As a result, this large excerpt became one section of data that was initially coded as community-related.

After such an analysis of data as described above, I conducted a second pass of the data, in search of lower-level concepts that appeared related to the higher-level categories, but that represented varying ideas. Because of this second pass of the interview data, three concepts (originally identified in the literature review) emerged under each of the three categories. These are displayed in Table 4.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>BRIEF EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUTHORSHIP</td>
<td>Issues of text production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authority</td>
<td>• Issues of power and <em>ethos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expertise</td>
<td>• Issues of evidence use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language</td>
<td>• Issues of writing style and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY</td>
<td>Issues of social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Debate</td>
<td>• Issues of argument and opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiation</td>
<td>• Issues of consensus and changing perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of Community/Affect</td>
<td>• Issues of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXTUALITY</td>
<td>Issues of the nature of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ownership</td>
<td>• Issues of possession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
<td>• Issues of attribution and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Product</td>
<td>• Issues of purpose and finality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Categories and concepts identified in interview data

According to Corbin & Strauss, concepts are “words that stand for ideas contained in data. Concepts are interpretations, the products of analysis” (2008, p. 159). Therefore, after two passes of the interview data, I had identified three categories and nine concepts that I believed were related to collaborative composition. They occurred (to varying degree) in each of the nine interviews. Returning to Marina’s transcript, I was faced with interpreting her community-related response as most related to the concepts of debate, negotiation, or a sense of community. After reading all nine subjects’ transcripts,
the concept of debate emerged as relating most to argument and opinion, specifically in when and how subjects felt like offering such content advanced their cause (or refuted others’ causes.) Marina reports, however, that she doesn’t approach most online conversations “with an opinion already in mind,” and never discusses how she offers her own opinions or arguments. As a result, the concept of debate—though closely related—didn’t seem to satisfactorily address her ideas. Likewise, Marina consistently speaks as an individual throughout this excerpt (using the pronoun “I”), and never seems to discuss a sense of belonging, community, or affinity, thus making that concept not quite accurate in describing her dispositions. Instead, Marina’s response describes her mental processes of changing (or not) her mind based on what a conversation presents. In line with previous scholarship on collaborative composition, such a mental process is typically conceived of as a concept of negotiation, where agents decide how (or if) to change their minds and form consensus around an idea. As a result, this excerpt was coded first as under the category of community, and second as related to the concept of negotiation.

My third, and final, pass of the interview data was designed to achieve an even greater degree of specificity in understanding the data. I conducted this pass in order to identify dispositions and behaviors that could serve as dimensions to the concepts I arrived at after the second reading of the interviews. These dimensions (or dispositions and behaviors) would then be grouped in a process Corbin & Strauss identify as axial coding, or “[c]rosscutting or relating concepts to each other” (p. 195). In Marina’s case, this became the disposition (and closely related behavior) of changing her mind or perspective on something when she reports: “I see which side makes more sense,” which implicitly gives us insight into how she makes such decisions. In analysis of the online texts, in the next section, I then sought out directly observable behaviors related to this disposition. The interview analysis, however, was designed to first identify the types of dispositions and behaviors that I may encounter.

The three phases of interview analysis, then, were a way of winnowing large sections of data into smaller, fine-grained identifiable dispositions and behaviors that could be categorized and used as conceptual codes for the next round of data analysis involving online texts. In this way, the interview analysis was informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in that dispositions and behaviors were not pre-
determined, but allowed to rise from the data. With the preceding sets of categories, concepts, and dimensions in hand, the next phase of data analysis was approached as a way to confirm and supplement these findings in online texts.

### 4.6.2 ONLINE TEXT ANALYSIS

Observable behaviors, which were often first discussed in interviews (sometimes in the form of dispositions, such as Marina’s earlier thought process on when to change her mind), were further identified and analyzed within the online text analysis stage of research. Whereas the interview stage primarily addressed self-reported dispositions, the online text analysis sought to identify both established and expanded behaviors related to collaborative composition through direct observation. This stage of research is in direct response to RQ3 (In what ways do student-users’ behaviors of online writing reflect and expand previous discussions of collaborative writing?) Though still based in a largely theory-driven approach to data analysis, this final stage of analysis employed axial-coding and discourse analysis approaches that allowed me to explore both established and expanded behaviors that have not yet been fully studied in relation to collaborative writing within social online spaces.

Similar to the three passes I made on the interview data, I made two complementary passes on the online text data. Whereas the scale of the interview excerpts were determined primarily by category (i.e. community), online text excerpts were determined by post. This means that every time a user began or entered into a conversation (a grouping of online texts all directed toward the same conversation thread), I followed that group of text and noted it as an excerpt worthy of study. Because of this, some excerpts may contain several categories and concepts (e.g. both authorship and community.) As a result, the online text analysis was geared toward identifying the presence of categories, concepts, and dimensions and analyzing them in light of the dispositions and behaviors noted in the preceding interview analysis; though still informed by grounded theory, it was largely seeking to confirm findings from the interview stage of analysis.

Throughout analysis, I employed a discourse analysis approach (Stillar, 1998; Johnstone, 2002; Gee, 2005) that treated online utterances (e.g. status updates, written
comments, notes, etc.) as texts worthy of study and that paid particular attention to the affordances of online media. In other words, my analysis was not concentrated simply on the alphanumeric text contained within the posts, but also the visuals, hyperlinks, and interactive capabilities that shaded the nature of these texts. Such an approach is identified as computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2004). CMDA is a text-based approach much like other discourse analysis approaches. The large difference, however, is that CMDA recognizes that:

computer-mediated discourse may be, but is not inevitably, shaped by the technological features of computer-mediated communication systems. It is a matter for empirical investigation in what ways, to what extent, and under what circumstances CMC [computer-mediated communication] technologies shape the communication that takes place through them. (p. 343)

In other words, CMDA is a “set of methods” (p. 342) useful for looking at how online communication and interaction shapes and is shaped by language use within social online spaces. My application of CMDA focused not only on the alphanumeric texts shared by users, but also the affordances and hindrances of the interactive media that shape these texts.

Following the categories, concepts, and dimensions (e.g. dispositions and behaviors) identified in the interviews, I conducted a first pass of the online text data by looking for behaviors that appeared significant or important. For example, Figure 4.2 represents a sample of online writing widely present in posts shared on Facebook. For illustrative purposes I have shortened the excerpt shown here (in actual analysis the size of this excerpt was doubled as posts before and after the ones shown here added to the complete text.)

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Significant" behaviors were ones that appeared noticeable or prevalent, whereas "important" behaviors were ones noted by subjects in their interviews and/or appeared essential to functioning within the social online space.
The first behaviors that I looked for in such posts were ones that reflected the concepts and dimensions in the interviews. In other words, the first pass of the data was to look for what has been considered established behaviors alongside some expanded ones that the subjects brought up as important to their online activity. Though behaviors related to every category of collaborative composition can be seen in the above Figure, here I only concentrate on those related to textuality (or the nature of the text) in order to illustrate my analysis methodology.

In analyzing such a text, I first looked for the concepts related to the category of textuality. Here, then, we can see behaviors related to ownership (e.g. this post occurred on Ernest’s Wall, giving him the power to delete others’ posts) and responsibility (e.g. each users’ profile photo connotes a degree of responsibility for their words a la a byline.) During the first pass of this excerpt, I didn’t immediately identify any product-based behaviors that related to established, traditional definitions of collaborative composition.

However, I conducted a second pass of the data looking for expanded behaviors that may have been overlooked. This pass of the data is where CMDA came most into play, because it was here that behaviors specifically related to the affordances of Internet technology could be considered as part of the nature of the text. Specifically in Figure 4.2, this is where I began to identify specific product-based behaviors that were often...
mentioned in the interviews, but only illustrated here. For instance, the conversation in Figure 4.2 is one guided primarily by temporality: the entire conversation ran its course in roughly two hours since it was initially posted. This valuing of newness is a behavior that is co-dependent on sites’ user-interface (i.e. website design), that often archives posts as they become older. If the conversation seen here was at the top of the page at the beginning of the day, it may have been at the bottom, or on another archived page, by the end of the day. Therefore, in addition to Ernest and his friends being predisposed to interacting only with new material (as he revealed in a disposition within his interview), the website also asks them to value the newest material by making it harder to look for relatively older content. Just the same, the conversation still contains a text-box at the end, which makes the conversation open-ended, and therefore infinitely able to be interacted with further. Such observable behaviors represent an expanded list of dimensions related to the category of textuality and concept of product that may not have been visible with merely previous analyses of persuasion, argumentation, or definition.

The result of these two passes of analysis is that I was able to confirm the presence of the categories and concepts I identified within the interviews. I was also able to confirm many of the dimensions identified as dispositions and behaviors within that previous data as well. However, primarily because of the second pass over the online texts, I was able to identify several more dimensions that had not been reported within the interviews. Through the aforementioned process of axial coding, I was able to relate these dimensions to similar ones even though many of them had no clear precedent in previous scholarship on collaborative composition. The findings chapters that follow are a result of these analyses, and present a complete list of identified dimensions related to the categories of collaborative writing identified as part of the Collaborative Triangle.
CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS OVERVIEW

In applying my aforementioned methodology to the study’s data, two significant findings were revealed through analysis: (1) Subjects confirmed (both in speech and action) that their online writing behaviors reflect previous, traditional behaviors associated with (academic) collaborative composition, and (2) Subjects discussed and exhibited online writing behaviors that do not appear widely in previous scholarship on collaborative composition, but appear related to their traditional counterparts. Extrapolating this second finding, I argue that these “new” behaviors effectively expand our understanding of what potential collaborative activity may look like in social online spaces. The purpose of this overview chapter, then, is to introduce readers to key moments of data analysis that demonstrated these areas of reflection and expansion.

To do so, I first present findings from the survey data, which revealed where subjects were enacting their online writing and what some of their motivations for doing so were. Second, I present findings from interview and online text data, which here takes the form of lists of behaviors that were discussed or observed in each stage. While the following three findings chapters (on authorship, community, and textuality) will expand on these findings by providing fine-grained analysis of actual data, this chapter focuses primarily on providing an overview to the types of potentially collaborative behaviors that were revealed upon interrogating student-users’ dispositions toward, and behaviors of, online writing.

5.1 SURVEY FINDINGS

This study’s online survey was successfully completed by 194 participants (178 of whom were considered eligible\textsuperscript{66} participants for the remaining two stages of the

\textsuperscript{66} As previously noted, 194 total users took the survey. To be eligible for follow-up interviews and text collection, however, I only considered participants who were at least
These participants’ responses represent quantitative data that both narrowed down the potential pool of participants for the remaining two stages of study and provided context for the nature of online writing that this study sought to expose. Below are some highlights that are relevant to answering the study’s research questions of how student-users dispositions toward, and behaviors of, online writing are (or are not) different from similar behaviors in academic contexts. The full list of survey questions and aggregated results are reproduced in the Appendix.

The demographics of the survey participants included 137 (70.6%) students self-identifying as enrolled at Huron University (HU), 42 (21.6%) students enrolled at Rouge University (RU), and 11 (5.7%) students enrolled at Crystal Community College (CCC). 177 reported that they were pursuing an undergraduate degree. In terms of age, 121 (62.4%) reported as falling into the 18-20 year old age range. Following this majority, 56 (28.9%) reported as being in the 21-23 year old age range, 11 (5.7%) reported falling into the 24-29 year old age range, and six (3.1%) self-reported as being 30 years old or over.

Student attributes, including gender, were never asked of the participants. Despite this, during the interview stage I identified four subjects who appeared to be female, with the remaining five subjects appearing to be male. The result was a subject pool that equally represented three undergraduate writing programs, both genders, and ages that favored traditional college age (i.e. 18-23), but that contained several non-traditional ages as well. This pool represents what can be considered an average student-user across my setting.

Questions regarding Internet use proved to be revealing in the overall dispositions of student-users toward the ubiquity of online activity in their lives. Of 176 participants who responded to a question regarding Internet use, 175 (99.4%) self-identified as “active” Internet users. Only one person responded in the negative. This finding is worthy of consideration for the second two stages of data collection.

18 years old, enrolled in one of three schools, and pursuing an undergraduate degree. Four users indicated that they were not enrolled in one of the three eligible schools, and twelve indicated that they were not pursuing an undergraduate degree. These sixteen users were included in the survey’s quantitative results, but were eliminated from consideration for the second two stages of data collection.

As described in the methods chapter, an early configuration error allowed users to skip questions during the first day of the survey. This error was quickly identified and fixed, yet several questions were skipped, as 18 did in this particular question. All percentage figures only refer to participants who answered the question(s).
of noting because at no point was an “active Internet user” ever defined for participants. Likewise, since this survey was advertised exclusively on the social network Facebook, this finding may be corroborated by each participant’s apparent presence within a social online space. The follow-up question asked participants which Internet websites they used most often. The results are highlighted in Figure 5.1 below.

As can be seen, participants were allowed to click on as many websites as they wanted, as well as type in other websites not included on this list (many of which were niche sites that were comparable to the ones listed.) All but one participant (175) selected the social network Facebook as one of their most frequented websites. Perhaps surprisingly, personal email came in second with 172 participants indicating regular usage. The popular video website YouTube was a distant third, with 104 participants indicating frequent usage. The follow-up question, which provided the same list of websites minus email asked participants to choose only one website/app that they identify as using the most often, yielded affirming evidence: 140 participants (79.5%) indicated that Facebook was their most trafficked site. These numbers were surprising to me, but
confirmed recent reports (e.g. Jones and Fox, 2009) of the increasing popularity of social networking and mobile technology (i.e. texting or instant messaging via cell phones) that appears to be replacing frequent email use. In other words, students reported using sites that require social writing more than sites that are geared more toward passive consumption (i.e. reading-only sites.) The significance of this is that student-users appeared to be potentially collaborating by writing and interacting with one another as frequently as they do.

In terms of reasons why participants visit social online spaces, the most popular response was to “communicate with others” (91 participants, 51.7%) followed by “procrastination” as the second most popular response (31 participants, 17.6%). These numbers seemed to confirm my initial hypothesis that student-users are engaging in potentially collaborative behavior due to the fact that their communication could be seen as co-constructing knowledge (even seemingly procrastination-based behaviors may be seen as constructive due to their reliance on production and interaction.) Also, no participants selected “meeting people” as a primary reason for visiting social websites, which could be seen as users’ ongoing familiarity with other users and the potential co-construction of texts that that may beget.

Along these same lines, 82 participants (46.9%) reported that they write online (either through posts to their personal spaces or in response to other users) “multiple times a day,” the survey’s highest option. This, too, seemed to indicate potential collaborative activity as the amount of produced text increased the likelihood of some of the behaviors being collaborative in nature. A later question asking participants to identify the primary purpose of most of their online writing also yielded the top result “stay in touch with family and friends” (134 participants, 79.3%), which furthered my hypothesis that users were going online in order to share and produce text for inter-social reasons, not merely to express themselves or passively consume text.

When asked about behaviors related to established approaches to collaborative composition, participants continued to indicate potential for collaborative activity. Relating to identity, 94% of participants (158) reported that they use their real names and photos at least part of the time when writing online. As will be described in a forthcoming chapter on textuality, this lack of anonymity could be seen as an implicit
precursor to taking ownership or responsibility for a text. Figure 5.2, below, likewise displays how often users write texts that result in a follow-up dialogue. A majority of users (70.4%) responded in at least an “Often” response, again indicating high probability of collaborative behavior based on the category of community to be discussed later.

| 16. How often do your posts result in a sustained exchange (e.g. a Facebook Wall conversation with at least one response from two or more people, a blog/website comment that engages the author and/or other commenters, etc.)? |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| **Response** | **Percent** | **Count** |
| Nearly always | 11.8% | 20 |
| Very often | 30.2% | 51 |
| Often | 28.4% | 48 |
| From time to time | 24.3% | 41 |
| Never/April never | 5.3% | 9 |

Figure 5.2: Conversations that result in follow-up

The only responses that seemed to counter these hints at collaborative activity came in the follow-up question to the one above. When asked how often their views or opinions changed as a result of exchanging text with other users, 102 participants (60.4%) responded only “From time to time,” followed in second by the lowest possible response, “Almost never” with 40 participants (23.7%) selecting this response. Since negotiation and consensus are two common, established behaviors related to collaborative composition, these responses indicated that online writing may adhere less to previous established definitions of collaborative writing, or may not be considered collaborative in nature at all. These results were noted as possible disconfirming evidence, but findings from interviews and online text data (discussed below and in the following three chapters) proved that this was not necessarily the case.

The final two questions of the survey yielded the most striking results in terms of hinting at how student-users view their online writing vis-à-vis academic writing. The questions, though separate, appear to be correlated and indicative of student-users’ dispositions toward valuing (or not) their online writing. When asked whether or not they see their online writing as similar to the writing they do in school or work, 68.3% (112
participants) responded “No,” meaning that they did not see them as similar. The follow-up question—“Has Internet writing ever been studied or assigned in an English/writing course you’ve taken?”—received 79.5% (132 participants) answering “No.” In other words, there appears to be a positive correlation between students not seeing their online writing as similar to their academic writing and students and instructors not discussing their online writing in academic contexts. This finding, above all others in the survey, seemed to confirm my hypothesis stated in the introduction chapter that student-users may view their online writing as an “other” when compared to their academic writing. It likewise seems to confirm the Pew finding mentioned in the introduction that 60% of adolescent Internet users did not consider their online writing to be “writing” in the academic sense. This perception gap led to the need for analysis of actual online writing in order to explore instances where student-users may be approaching and enacting online writing in ways that have previously not been seen as academically valuable or collaborative in nature. That analysis is featured in the section and chapters to follow.

5.2 INTERVIEW AND ONLINE TEXT FINDINGS

Roughly speaking, the approaches and enactment discussed above relate to the dispositions and behaviors addressed in my research questions, and correspond to data from interviews and online text observation. Though dispositions will be discussed in the following analysis, my primary focus in presenting these findings is on behaviors, because it is these acts that have typically constituted traditional definitions and discussions of collaborative writing. As a result, identifying potentially “new” behaviors may require compositionists to revise their previous definitions by expanding what can be considered collaborative. Upon analyzing interview and online texts, my study confirmed several traditional behaviors associated with collaborative composition, but also pointed toward some expanded behaviors that have yet to be fully addressed in previous scholarship on collaborative writing. This section identifies all of these behaviors by walking readers through a recursive coding and analysis process that revealed this reflection and expansion of previous conceptions of collaborative writing.

The following three chapters will focus specifically on discussing the expanded behaviors revealed through this study. Though they are mentioned here, the focus within
this overview is to demonstrate how my open-coding strategy (by way of the Collaborative Triangle heuristic) identified these behaviors by moving from coarse-grained to fine-grained analysis. As previously discussed, the highest level of codes corresponds directly to the three categories of my Collaborative Triangle that I constructed before reviewing my data: authorship, community, and textuality. These codes have analogs to previously discussed literature and collaborative behaviors. The lower level of codes (e.g. authority, expertise, and language for authorship) correspond to smaller issues within these categories that were revealed in interviews with my nine subjects. I reproduce these codes in Table 5.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>BRIEF EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTHORSHIP</strong></td>
<td>Issues of text production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authority</td>
<td>• Issues of power and ethos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expertise</td>
<td>• Issues of evidence use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language</td>
<td>• Issues of writing style and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td>Issues of social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Debate</td>
<td>• Issues of argument and opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiation</td>
<td>• Issues of consensus and changing perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of Community/Affinity</td>
<td>• Issues of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEXTUALITY</strong></td>
<td>Issues of the nature of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ownership</td>
<td>• Issues of possession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
<td>• Issues of attribution and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Product</td>
<td>• Issues of purpose and finality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Coding labels

The codes displayed here are a direct result of using the Collaborative Triangle to guide discussion within my interviews. These issues arose, in one form or another, in every single interview and observation of online text from each of the nine student-user subjects. As I sought finer grained analysis for each category, however, I also found corresponding behaviors related to each that varied more widely from subject to subject. For some, the variation was how they described their disposition toward a given behavior. For others, however, I simply didn’t observe a given behavior even though it was brought up in interviews. In any case, applying a broad heuristic like mine to a sample set of data revealed that there are behaviors that student-users are undertaking that reflect previously discussed collaborative writing behaviors (e.g. using evidence to support a claim) and behaviors that have not previously been studied as collaborative in
nature (e.g. using proper grammar to appear more expert-like) but that nonetheless are reported as salient by subjects. Because of this, the heuristic was helpful in revealing approaches to online writing that both reflected previous understandings, and exposed new understandings, of collaborative composition.

In the paragraphs and tables that follow, I briefly step through the frequency of behaviors that application of the heuristic revealed in the interview and online text data. I maintain my division of behaviors by the three primary categories of my heuristic in order to maintain clarity, not to arbitrarily label any set of behaviors as somehow different (or more important) than another. My goal in presenting the following data is to demonstrate how the Collaborative Triangle led me to concept codes in the interview data, and to identification of behaviors in the online text data. Together, this data represents approaches to potential collaborative composition in social online spaces that both reflects and expands traditional approaches. In the tables that follow, I present all of the observed behaviors, while in the three chapters to follow this one, I focus only on the expanded behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Direct expression of power/ethos (e.g. “I’m an authority on this”)</td>
<td>7 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Indirect expression of power/ethos (e.g. use of formal grammar, use of proper/academic writing style, hyperbolic speech, professionalism)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Gatekeeping (e.g. deciding who has right to speak or interact)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Decision of active role (e.g. an active author versus a passive reader)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Turn-taking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Online Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Resisting authority</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Citing external evidence (e.g. direct quotes, sharing hyperlinks)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Citing personal experience as evidence (e.g. anecdotes, opinions)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2: Authorship behaviors

Table 5.2 showcases behaviors related to authorship, the category of the Collaborative Triangle related to production of text. The concepts of authority, expertise, and language appeared in each interview and online text that I collected and analyzed. The variance between subjects came in the actual behaviors. All of the behaviors shown here were observed during the study, but some occurred only in interviews, and some only in online texts. Above, I provide examples of behaviors found in the study, give the frequency counts of each, and provide a description of the data source from which they came. Behaviors are anecdotally arranged in descending order in relation to their occurrence in previous literature on collaborative composition. Behaviors toward the bottom of each column have either been cited infrequently in past studies or have yet to be widely discussed. In the chapters to follow, I further illuminate how these expanded behaviors were identified and defined in the data (and how they appear related to previous discussions of collaborative composition.)

In cases where only one data source is given (e.g. “Interviews” for the first behavior related to the explicit claim of power), either no data was found in the other source or there was no way of seeing that data in the other source. For example: subjects only discussed gatekeeping, role of being an author, resisting authority, and critical reflection in their interviews because direct observation of such behaviors in an online text would be difficult, if not impossible, via screenshots. The only exception was the direct address of authority. While I found no evidence of students explicitly claiming authority/ethos within their online texts, seven of the nine subjects brought up asserting authority online, either by using that term or similar language of “expertise” or even
"earning respect" for their posts within their interviews. Likewise, while turn-taking was never brought up in any of the interviews, seven subjects exhibited it online, with the other two operating in blogs where such behavior is sometimes more difficult.

Of the remaining behaviors related to authorship, several were unanimously observed across all nine subjects, both in interviews and online texts. All nine subjects both discussed and enacted behaviors related to indirect assertions of power related to language and professionalism, citing external and personal evidence, providing prompts for response, being conscious of the amount of writing they did and how frequently they did it, and where they were posting (i.e. on their own Wall or someone else’s.) While all of the subjects reported and enacted behaviors of prompting others to write, only three reported in interviews (and five enacted in online texts) using direct questions to do so. Likewise, the use of controversy to prompt others was reported in two interviews and enacted in seven online texts.

Of all of the authorship-related behaviors noted in this table, three stood out as expanded behaviors that occurred frequently in data collection, were noted as significant to the subjects, but that have not been featured prominently (if at all) in previous literature on collaborative writing. I have identified these behaviors (turn-taking, using personal experience as evidence, and producing a large amount of writing) as contextually situated in online writing and as promoting more writing and interacting that may be collaborative in nature. While none of these behaviors are exclusive to social online spaces, their occurrence and importance is on a scale worthy of note. As a result, I return to these behaviors in a following chapter on authorship as a way of positing that they deserve a larger place in future discussions of collaborative writing occurring in social online spaces. These behaviors, I argue, are visible to this degree because of the approach I utilized via my heuristic.

In addition to authorship behaviors, my analysis also revealed behaviors related to community, which are displayed below in Table 5.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exchanging conflicting and/or complementary ideas (e.g. advancing a conversation without end goal in mind)</td>
<td>9 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Argument (e.g. opposing viewpoints without end goal in mind)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining a “good” debate (e.g. one worth continuing)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-expression vs. conversation (e.g. a personal post vs. responding to others)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exchange and progression of ideas (e.g. advancing a conversation with end goal in mind)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Online Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working toward (or reaching) consensus and/or agreement (e.g. attempts at understanding others’ views)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviews Online Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing opinion/perspective</td>
<td>8 (of 8)</td>
<td>Interviews Online Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of finality to a conversation (i.e. implicit or explicit)</td>
<td>6 (of 6)</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Targeting a primary audience</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling of affinity and sense of belonging (e.g. desire to return to site)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling when receiving a response (i.e. affect)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others’ influences on one’s writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playfulness and joking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social presence (e.g. “Liking”)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like-mindedness (i.e. agreement, sharing of similar views)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring others and others’ comments</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation of writing back (or not)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively seeking out more followers or “friends”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Community behaviors

The behaviors related to community, or interaction, show an increase in the number of behaviors subjects discussed and enacted. This may be due to the fact that student-users have more ways to interact than merely writing and speaking with one another in social online spaces. In addition to previous notions of audience reception behaviors, these community-related behaviors demonstrated the active interplay between users that subjects noted as important. This Table also demonstrates a turning point in studying online writing in that some behaviors can only be revealed through interview and discussion. Interview-only behaviors such as defining a “good” debate, self-expression vis-à-vis conversation, feeling when receiving a response, others’ influence on one’s writing, targeting a primary audience, forming virtual relationships, feeling obligated to write back, and actively seeking new “friends” were sometimes widely discussed, but would be difficult to capture in online text observation. Likewise, concepts such as progressing ideas with a goal in mind can be observed, but was never brought up in those terms by subjects during interviews.

There were many behaviors that were unanimous in both, though. They all related to a sense of community, and included: playfulness, a sense of belonging, and seeking out like-minded users. Even behaviors that had differing returns between interview and online text data appeared in similar numbers. Behaviors related to debate and argument were closely matched and nearly unanimous, while those related to negotiation were more often demonstrated in online texts than they were discussed in those terms within
interviews. The idea of social presence (or letting other users know that you are actively following, even if not producing text) was high for both sources of data, but was obviously more readily observed online where the presence of voting or “Like” buttons are nearly ubiquitous.

As in the authorship behaviors, there were no less than seven behaviors noted in analysis (self-expression, finality, playfulness, sense of belonging, social presence, ignoring others, and seeking more friends/followers) that appear especially salient to subjects writing and interacting in social online spaces, yet are not prominent in prior scholarship on collaborative writing. These expanded behaviors will be the focus of a later chapter on community that looks to note how the Collaborative Triangle was able to reveal these behaviors, and how they may enter into future discussions and definitions of what is considered collaborative composition. In addition to these behaviors, there is a final set of behaviors related to textuality, or the nature of texts, that will be discussed, and are seen in Table 5.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTUALITY</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Explicit claim of ownership (e.g. “This is mine”)</td>
<td>9 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implicit claim of ownership (e.g. deleting of objectionable material)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archiving material</td>
<td>1 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews, Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing material (e.g. sharing links to others’ materials)</td>
<td>4 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews, Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Explicit claim of responsibility (e.g. “That was my idea”)</td>
<td>9 (of 1)</td>
<td>Interview, Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implicit claim of responsibility (i.e. attribution via presence of a profile photo and/or hyperlinked profile name)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance of identity (e.g. changing profile photos)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>Defriending other users</td>
<td>Not having an explicit text-producing goal/product in mind</td>
<td>Decision to post text or visuals in order to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Textuality behaviors

This Table continues more of the trends exhibited in the behaviors related to community. Specifically, many behaviors could be discussed in interviews but less easily observed in online text. These included: explicitly or implicitly claiming ownership, defriending other users, responding to the visual design of a site, and not having an explicit text-producing goal in mind when writing. With enough background information and time, such behaviors may be more observable, but within the scope of this study, they were more easily identified within interviews. Still, some behaviors were unanimous across both sites, allowing for discussion and observation. These included: implicit claims of ownership and identity maintenance, privacy settings, posting with either texts or visuals, and valuing newness. With the exception of ownership issues, all of these behaviors seem to be unique to writing in social online spaces. The valuing of newness, in particular, was a popular topic in interviews and could be seen as playing a major role in online texts where most conversations began and ended within a very narrow timeframe. Where there were discrepancies in frequency between data sources, it was
clear that behaviors could be more easily seen than discussed (archiving materials and sharing materials), or discussed than seen (explicitly claims of responsibility.) Future research should keep this in mind.

Until then, this examination of textuality-related behaviors revealed no less than ten distinct behaviors (implicit claim of ownership, archiving, sharing materials, responsibility/attribution, identity maintenance, defriending, newness/temporality, keeping content current, maintaining privacy, and the open-ended nature of texts) that appeared to be significant in frequency and importance to collaborative writing, as reported by the study subjects. These will be the focus of the forthcoming textuality chapter. For these behaviors, as in the expanded ones identified in the authorship and community sections, I highlight only those behaviors that occurred frequently (a majority of subjects, or at least five out of nine) and that have not appeared widely in previous scholarship on collaborative writing. The significance for doing so is to show that online writing has demonstrated reflections of previous, traditional collaborative composition behaviors, but that it has also demonstrated expanded behaviors that may serve to expand our notions of what collaborative composition is in social online spaces. Such an expanded list may also serve as a bridge between the writing behaviors that are currently valued in extracurricular contexts and those that are (and can be) valued in academic ones.
CHAPTER SIX
AUTHORSHIP FINDINGS

Following the previous findings overview, this chapter begins the first of three looking at the expanded behaviors revealed through analysis of interview and online text data as a result of applying the Collaborative Triangle heuristic. Analysis utilizing this heuristic revealed three concepts related to the primary category of authorship, or behaviors related to text production: (1) authority issues describing behaviors related to power and *ethos*, (2) expertise issues describing behaviors related to evidence use, and (3) language issues describing behaviors related to writing style. These three concepts were identified through analysis of interview data, and largely confirm traditional behaviors indentified in collaborative composition scholarship. Using these concepts as fine-grained coding strategy revealed no less than 13 distinct behaviors related to the category of authorship in interviews and online texts. These behaviors are listed in Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorship Concept</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Direct expression of power/ethos (e.g. “I’m an authority on this,” length of posts)</td>
<td>7 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect expression of power/ethos (e.g. use of formal grammar, use of proper/academic writing style, hyperbolic speech, professionalism, where writing occurs)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gatekeeping (e.g. deciding who has right to speak or interact)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision of active role (e.g. an active author versus a passive reader)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn-taking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Online Text</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resisting authority</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citing external evidence (e.g. direct quotes, sharing hyperlinks)</td>
<td>Providing prompts for response</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citing personal experience as evidence (e.g. anecdotes, opinions)</td>
<td>Asking direct questions of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical reflection and self-editing</td>
<td>Being controversial (e.g. Devil’s advocate)</td>
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<td>Amount of total writing (e.g. number of responses)</td>
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<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Online Text</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Online Text</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
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Table 6.1: Authorship-related behaviors with expanded behaviors highlighted

Of the 13 behaviors listed here, seven have an established precedent in previous literature as indicating collaborative behavior (direct expression of power, indirect expression of power, gatekeeping, citing external evidence, providing prompts, asking direct questions, and being controversial.) Of the remaining six “expanded” behaviors that do not widely appear in previous literature (decision of active role, turn-taking, resisting authority, citing personal experience, critical reflection, and amount of writing), I have identified three—in yellow—that appeared in the majority of subject’s data (at least five of the nine subjects in either interview or online text data.) These three expanded behaviors (turn-taking, citing personal experience, and amount of total writing) are the focus of this chapter. By highlighting their relation to previous collaborative behaviors, and their frequency and importance to subjects, I argue that these behaviors should be considered as being indicative of potentially collaborative activity and should be considered in evolving discussions and definitions of collaborative composition in social online spaces.

6.1 TURN TAKING

Turn-taking was one of six behaviors observed in relation to the concept of authority, or issues dealing with power and ethos. Nearly every piece of scholarship on collaborative composition discussed in the literature review addressed these issues,
whether they were categorized by democratic sharing of power or posturing for professional credibility. So, too, did every interview and online text address these issues. Of the eventual six behaviors identified through analysis of data, an indirect expression of power or *ethos* (typically through the imitation of professional or academic behaviors, such as using proper grammar) was the only one unanimously observed in both interviews and online text. Four (direct expression of power, gatekeeping, choosing the role of author, and resisting authority) were only revealed in interviews, and only one (turn-taking) was observed in online text. Of these, only turn-taking occurred frequently (seven times in online texts) and does not appear in the literature previously surveyed for this study.

Turn-taking appeared to be directly related to an expanded view of what subjects saw as encouraging collaborative writing and interaction. This is demonstrated in the following figure.

![Figure 6.1: Example of turn-taking on Facebook](image)

**Figure 6.1: Example of turn-taking on Facebook**
Figure 6.1, above, displays an occurrence of turn-taking in online conversation. The activity is so mundane and taken for granted that it didn’t come up once in the interviews (largely also because there was no initial relation to the Collaborative Triangle at the time.) However, as I began analyzing online texts, it became apparent that turn-taking is not only commonplace, but also seemingly very important to the progression of online conversation, and to understanding issues of authorship that may yield collaborative activity. It was observed in seven of the nine subjects’ online texts (the remaining two were blogs where such turn-taking is inherently less common.)

Understanding the reasons behind turn-taking in social online spaces—including the implications of power and authority related to authorship dispositions—requires a semantic approach that is highly contextualized. Even so, a brief analysis of an online conversation reveals insights into why turn-taking could be considered as a catalyst for collaborative activity.

The text in Figure 6.1 comes from Ronald. An undergraduate student at Crystal Community College (CCC), Ronald is over 30 years old\textsuperscript{68} and indicated in his survey that he did the majority of his online writing (at least once a day) on Facebook. According to his responses, his primary purposes for writing online are for personal expression and to stay in touch with family and friends. He also noted on the survey that his posts “nearly always” result in a sustained exchange, indicating that he is not only active online, but also posts content that engages others to interact with him as well. Though he said his primary reason for using Facebook was for “procrastination,” he revealed in his interview that he takes his writing very seriously on the social network, which he believes affords him a certain degree of credibility, or authority.

On his Wall, Ronald merely writes the title of a popular Dire Straits song, “Sultans of Swing.” Over the next twenty hours this post collects nine responses from five different individuals (including Ronald.) Why Ronald posted this, or what he hoped to accomplish with it, is not clear. However, one hint is contained within the second post, where Ronald elaborates on the initial post. In it, Ronald can be seen telling another user that he “knew [she’d] like that title.” At the time of posting this second post, the user

\textsuperscript{68}All ages are approximate. The survey, where this age data was collected, provided the following categories for subjects to choose from: 13-17, 18-20, 21-23, 24-29, and 30+.
Ronald refers to has “Liked” the original post, but does not add any text to the following conversation. What this means, potentially, is that Ronald was targeting this other user as an audience, and had done so in hopes of receiving a response from her (or other users like her.) What takes place following this call and response is a series of text production that is distributed equally among several users. No one user dominates the conversation for a period of time.

In the seven subsequent posts following, each time a user responds with something new, Ronald replies back to that user. Only in the penultimate post do we have two users responding back to back before Ronald has the opportunity to respond. This turn-taking seems to indicate an open forum where users were cognizant that if they responded, they would get a direct response from the original author. Power is equally distributed in who has the ability to speak and who can expect a response. This idea of reciprocity came up often in the interviews and text collection as a key to potential collaboration. Whether it’s a feeling of obligation or the satisfaction of being acknowledged when posting in social online spaces, users tend to write more (and by extension, share more ideas) when they are assured responses from others who share authority, or power to contribute, with them.

Turn-taking advances the conversation captured in Figure 6.1. No individual post displays an argumentative, persuasive, or overtly collaborative quality. However, from an original post that merely named a song title to users debating the merits of the band and their own personal favorite songs, this conversation thread displays definite potential for collaboration, in part, because each user is given an equal opportunity to respond and be responded to by the initiator. Authority, in this instance, is shared amongst users in that each has the ability comment and each is validated by the initiator (Ronald) in turn. By sharing the forum with others (the Wall is “owned” by Ronald, after all), the subject encourages an active dialogue that implies that Ronald is not interested merely in self-expression, but in a continuing give and take that may beget future interactions. In this way, Ronald is modeling ideal collaborative behavior or contributing new ideas while also receiving from others before responding back. Doing so seems to indicate behavior that could be seen as collaborative in nature even though none of the previously discussed analyses would have revealed it as such.
6.2 CITING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS EVIDENCE

From brainstorming activities to the personal essay, citing personal experience as a type of evidence has a rich tradition both in previous pedagogy and literature related to writing and collaboration. Therefore, it’s necessarily a “new” set of behaviors. However, behaviors related to this concept are uniquely situated within writing and interacting in social online spaces due to these spaces’ context of decidedly non-academic discourse. Online, personal experience is less a catalyst to further argument than it is (often) the entirety of users’ interactions with one another. In other words, whereas personal experience is valued in academic contexts as a type of evidence that is empirically less sound than more researched evidence, in online contexts it may constitute the only available means of evidence meant to convey expertise. Whereas argumentative analyses (i.e. Toulmin analysis) of online texts may reveal these occurrences, it is only upon combining them with their reported importance in subjects’ interview data that we can see how salient these behaviors are to encouraging users to continue interacting and co-constructing together in potentially collaborative ways.

Citing experience as evidence takes places within the concept of expertise, which relates to behaviors dealing with use of evidence to advance a textual conversation (and, in turn, to produce more text.) Not surprisingly, using evidence to co-construct knowledge appears in most previous literature on collaborative composition. It was likewise unanimously observed in interviews and online texts, both through the use of external evidence (such as citing a source or sharing a hyperlinked website) and personal evidence (which was typically a personal experience or anecdote shared in order to add validity to a claim.)

All nine subjects discussed this latter behavior and enacted it in their online texts. Sharing anecdotes or personal beliefs can devolve into unsupported opinion, but it may also provide credibility in advancing a conversation or debate. Ann, a 21-23 year old undergraduate at Rouge University (RU), supports this, and reports that a majority of her writing takes place within the comments sections of news sites. Below, she employs personal experience as a way of extending an ongoing conversation. Figure 6.2 shows a portion of a comments section on a U.S. News & World Report story reporting that
parents are often responsible for paying for students’ college tuition. Here, Ann goes by the screenname of “shadowtale,” and titles her post “Unbalanced.”

Unbalanced
I wish there was a way to express to the financial aid office this exact situation. The formulas that calculate what you will be given for aid expect parents to be helping their children. For students from families that make decent money, there’s often no aid for you... as they expect your parents to be able to cover it... even if they’re not willing too. Its very unfair, as there’s nothing the student can really do at that point but take out loans with high interest rates. as there’s only so much federal loans will cover... and the parents who won’t help pay for school surely won’t be eager to consign that big loan to make the rates lower. There’s also the option of working, but going to school full time while working enough to even try to pay for school is a superhuman feat. You have to be full time to qualify for any decent aid, and must keep a decent GPA... which means only so many work hours can distract from studies. As for the realistic comment... even state schools these days are often out of the price range of many middle-income families. My state school is right around $20,000 a year. Most people don’t have that sort of cash laying around... and good luck getting a full ride on grants and scholarships... unless you’re a superstar in one way or another... loans will own your soul.

Not realistic???
Mr. Realistic, who commented on 14 Dec mustn’t have gone to a good university. If he had a degree at all. He has no idea how much more opportunities a better university offers, nor just in terms of future career (best employers only recruit in certain schools), but also in terms of social network and skills acquired. I attended a second tier university for bachelors and an Ivy league for masters. There is a stunning difference in general student quality (knowledge, analytical skills, eloquence, self-confidence, etc) and depth of materials taught. The alumni support is also much higher amongst Ivy leaguers.

The success of a few lucky and talented individuals who manage to become successful despite a much lower starting point has no relevance for the vast majority of people, which includes you and me.

Be realistic
This article is not realistic. There are thousands of colleges in America, they don’t have to go to a college that cost 50K. America needs to stop putting a figure on any and everything if they want to move forward. There are choices and if students choose to apply and attend a college.

Responding a week after the initial story (not shown here) was published, Ann’s comment is one of 11. She is responding with personal experience (Ann talked throughout the interview about her struggle to pay for her own tuition at RU) to both the story as well as a comment three days prior where a user accused the initial article of not being realistic. This user’s comment seemed to imply that poor students should only go to schools that they can afford. Ann responds to this earlier comment late in her post by bringing up her experience at RU where tuition is “right around $20,000 a year,” and grants and scholarships are apparently difficult to come by. Her preceding commentary on the article likewise draws on personal experience in citing her parents’ inability (or
unwillingness) to help with tuition, and her inability (or unwillingness) to work full-time while a student. Though Ann never claims overtly that these examples are her own, her argument implies personal experience due to the fact that she seems knowledgeable and passionate, and her inclusion of the approximate tuition cost at RU likewise provides evidence that other users could talk from. Instead of vagaries and opinions, such as ones referred to in the “Be realistic” post she responds to, Ann is bringing up logical points that rely approximately on personal experience as a kind of evidence. She is offering personal evidence as a way of continuing a conversation, not as a way of shutting the conversation down. She alternates between personal pronouns (I, my, etc.) and projected audiences (e.g. the student, you, etc.) that show that she is offering her experience as a way of justifying her opinion, not as a way of providing a definitive (or conclusive) opinion. In this way, she is asserting her ethos but is also sharing the platform with others who would doubt her. She is, in effect, inviting others to interact with her post not to argue, but to continue a discussion based in logic and evidence: what could be seen as expertise that leads to further potentially collaborative text production.

Personal experience was seen as a kind of ad hoc expertise for subjects in the interviews, where even prior exposure to a topic in an academic course could be seen as a reasonable justification for a claim. For example, Ronald relayed a story of how he combines strong personal feelings with academic research to inform his online activity:

Ronald: I guess the things, you know, the things that I actually post on are the ones that I have strong feelings about and so, you know, I’ve done a couple of, you know, even, I’ve written a couple papers here for school. One of them was on abortion and I did a lot of, you know, I did some interviewing and some, some digging for that one and, and in that, throughout that whole process, my viewpoint on abortion actually did change.

CG: Oh.

Ronald: You know I went in thinking, you know, but I didn’t have a real strong viewpoint going in.

CG: Right.
Ronald: And so at the end, I was like no, you know, this is the way I feel about it now and this is the way that I feel, you know. So usually the things that I’m going to chime in on [online] are the things that I know, that I have a really firm belief of the way that I think that is.

Without this interview data we may have no idea that Ronald’s strong beliefs—in this case on the topic of abortion—were informed by previous experience. He reveals at the end, though, that he tends to only write about subjects that he has experience with and a “really firm belief” on in his online posts. Such an approach reveals Ronald’s underlying relative expertise as well as reveals the motivations behind his behaviors of citing personal experience as evidence. A consistent approach like this, over time, may invite other student-users to interact and collaborate with Ronald because of his apparent cache of evidence and beliefs that are fodder for rich, constructive conversations that avoid the potential dead ends of conversations based in opinion alone. In other words, it is significant that Ronald posts personal expertise to encourage more text production, not to shut it down. Such behaviors inherently encourage potentially collaborative activity.

Similarly, Huron University (HU) student Rob discussed in an interview the topic of using his prior research on a band’s lyrics to inform his online writing. Rob, who is between 18 and 20 years old, indicated on his survey that he does the majority of his online writing on Facebook for the purpose of procrastination. His survey also revealed that in addition to personal expression and staying in touch with family and friends, he uses social networks to access new information, engage in debate, and view others’ opinions. The latter activity can be seen in the interview excerpt below, where after viewing others’ opinions, Rob uses his prior experience as a way of interacting with others.

Rob: [T]here’s like a lyrics website that has like song lyric meanings and, I don’t know, I’m a fan of [the band] Red Hot Chili Peppers and there was, people that were, there were people saying stuff that was way not right. And then I kind of came in and started talking to them about like what the actual history behind the song was.

CG: Okay, so you actually had, like, evidence.
Rob: Yeah.

Though Rob, like Ronald, provided no explicit external evidence in his online writing, his informed beliefs indicated not only his willingness to participate in the conversation thread, but also encouraged others to continue and/or debate him on his points. Rob’s may have appeared to be one more uninformed opinion in this online conversation, but his belief that his expertise came from a prior source granted him a feeling of expertise that may have led others to see and interact with him as a trustworthy source on the subject. However, we can also see that unlike Ann, Rob appears more intent on ending a debate than encouraging one. Obviously this could be the difference between ending a conversation and continuing one (and, hence, deciding if an activity is ultimately collaborative in behavior or not.) Still, my point in bringing this behavior up here is to recognize that though rhetorical and argumentative analyses may reveal such behaviors as existing in social online spaces, discussing student-users’ dispositions toward them in light of collaborative behavior may inform our future discussions and definitions of what impact they have in social online spaces.

6.3 AMOUNT OF TOTAL WRITING

Of the expanded behaviors related to authorship that may be related to collaborative activity, perhaps none are as specific to writing and interacting in social online spaces as analyzing the amount of writing done by users, particularly in analyzing the number of responses that any given post receives. This behavior is associated with the language concept, which addresses behaviors related to writing style and mechanics. Though the authority concept addressed the proper use of grammar as an expression of *ethos*, the language concept is more concerned with the generic conventions of language use to spur conversation and interaction. What this means, exactly, is that certain language enacts certain functions such as encouraging others to talk more, asking direct questions, or continuing a conversation. These language functions are different, if only subtly, from language used to assert authority. Still, they are different, and are brought up in this final sub-section.

Three behaviors were observed as related to this language concept. Among these, two have been discussed widely in previous literature: providing a prompt and using
controversy to encourage responses. Prompting is not only a common behavior found in traditional collaborative composition literature, it was also unanimously observed in interviews and online texts. Related to this, subjects exhibited behaviors of asking questions and raising controversial topics in both sources of data (though they were observed more in online texts than they were discussed in interviews.) Finally, the amount of responses produced in social online spaces was also unanimously brought up in interviews and online texts.

It is this final behavior (i.e. receiving a lot of feedback and increasing the amount of total writing) that does not appear often in previous collaborative writing literature, and may be unique to contexts of online writing where brevity is the norm, and longer posts are often rewarded with more feedback. The number of responses a post receives is one of the first telltale signs of whether or not collaboration and knowledge production has taken place (or will) in online writing. It is also the subject of a survey question that I used to screen potential subjects (“How often do your posts result in a sustained exchange?”), where only those who answered often, very often, or nearly always (the top three choices) were considered. Likewise, in collecting data from online texts I only took screenshots of conversations that had two or more responses so that I wasn’t analyzing a simple give-and-take exchange between two users. This is not to say that two users cannot be considered to collaborate by speaking to one another. However, in my attempt to only include “rich” data samples, I left them out of analysis here in order to highlight instances where multiple users perhaps inadvertently co-construct with one another.

All nine subjects discussed the number of responses as indicative of furthering text production. The subjects’ online texts also demonstrated instances where many responses occurred in response to a particular text, which could be seen as indicative of co-constructive activities. A conversation thread that contains many responses is more likely to be potentially collaborative in nature as more ideas are exchanged and more voices are added. Likewise, with omnipresent textboxes in social online spaces always inviting users to contribute more to conversations, even a student-user’s previously observed textual interactions could be ongoing at this point in time.

Though the number of responses increases the likelihood of collaborative behavior, it does not necessarily guarantee it. For example, Ann reports that the majority
of her writing takes place within the comments sections of popular new sites, such as CNN, Yahoo! News, and NPR. NPR, in particular, shuts down the ability to comment on their stories after five days. Even so, during the time that I collected online writing from Ann, she participated in several discussions that contained over one hundred comments, including comments on a story about Wikileaks\textsuperscript{69} that held nearly 200 comments. The large numbers can be seen as much as a hindrance as an affordance to possible collaboration, though. As comments grow, users may be less likely to read through all of them, or find particular comments that they would like to engage with. In Ann’s case, over my two-week observation window there were only a handful of times when other users directly responded to her comments, and in those cases it was within a relatively short window of time. In other words, when her comments appeared as the first or last comment on a page people tended to respond to them more. As they were buried among dozens of others, though, she seemed to receive fewer comments. Still, though she personally did not collaborate with others, her comments could be seen as enlarging the ongoing conversation about the initial prompts; and so taken from a “macro” view, she could be seen as a co-author of this newly expanded text.

The problem of (potentially) too many responses is offset by the presence of too few. Rob, the HU student who does the majority of his writing on Facebook, demonstrates this latter problem in Figure 4.3. Here, are three posts organized in reverse-chronological order (newer first) on his Wall\textsuperscript{70}. No analysis for collaboration, argumentation, or persuasion would reveal much about this series of posts. His posts not only failed to garner significant responses, they can hardly be seen as co-constructing any knowledge. It is important to remember that the number of responses is not a behavior in and of itself. However, the expectation of responses, and the behaviors used to enact that expectation are. For Rob, his posts did little to invite users to interact with him. Perhaps he did not expect follow-up interaction.

\textsuperscript{69} Wikileaks was an international phenomenon in 2010 when it was revealed that the website (wikileaks.org) possessed and was willing to reveal classified diplomatic and banking secrets.

\textsuperscript{70} Note that unlike earlier Facebook threads that were screenshots of just one conversation, this is actually three separate conversations, or stories.
We can analyze Rob’s posts in relation to number of responses by noting the computer-mediated attributes of his posts. The upper-most post appears to be an inspirational quote that a quick Internet search reveals may be a lyric in a popular song. The post, though, is unattributed and devoid of context or comment (thus not enacting the established behaviors of evidence use discussed above.) Three people have used Facebook’s “Like” feature to acknowledge the quote, but it is not clear whether they are acknowledging that they approve of the quote, know where the quote is from, or are simply appreciating its sentiment. Meanwhile the post below it is from another user who writes on Rob’s Wall. The post, though written on a public space, is directed only to Rob, and the sentiment is one of friendly gratitude (“thanks for everything” and the use of multiple exclamation points.) Below the post, Rob “Likes” it and writes to acknowledge the post, thus completing the exchange. Unless another topic is brought up, the conversation thread is completed and unable to really create any further knowledge. Finally, the third post is common on social networks that are integrated with other applications. In this case, Rob is playing a game, Tetris, and his accomplishment within the game is posted to his Wall. Rob more than likely had the option to allow this posting or not. There are several of these posts on his Wall (not shown here), none of which have any comments following. This may be due to the fact that only fellow gamers would
appreciate his progress, or because the posts are a sign of personal accomplishment only. There is no invitation for further interaction, and thus really no possibility of collaboration, even when analyzed through CMDA-influenced approaches.

Again and again in interviews, though, other subjects discussed their disappointment when some of their posts did not result in a number of responses, regardless if other users utilized digital affordances such as “Liking.” Some theorized why (including Rob, who attributed his lack of responses due to the fact that he posts so often that other users can’t possibly find the time to respond to everything on his Facebook Wall.) Others, such as Ronald, gave careful thought to what they were posting and what they expected the responses to be. Proving that online writing, interaction, and collaboration is more of a happenstance art than a science, though, Ronald explained in his interview how his postings on Facebook sometimes not only failed to garner responses, but also left him curious—if not hurt—why no one would respond. In response to my question “Can you think of any specific times where you’ve posted something explicitly to solicit feedback…where you post it and were kind of really hoping someone was going to respond?” Ronald immediately relayed a story of when he didn’t get any responses to what he thought would be a sure thing. He said:

Well actually last week I was at Best Buy [and] I saw a “Buy American” bumper sticker on there in the parking lot and so you know immediately what popped in my head is how come you have a “Buy American” bumper sticker in your car and you’re at Best Buy? Like there’s nothing you know that’s made in the United States and so I was like “I’m putting it on my Facebook when I get home, doing it.” And I’m like people are going to love this. And so I put that on there. I put you know, saw this bumper sticker, I was at Best Buy and then I thought, and then I said, I wonder what they aren’t buying in there…And then, and I thought that people would just love it and nobody said anything about it. No, no comment; nothing…I left it up there for two days and I was like wow, like nobody had anything to say? And it’s not that I guess maybe that’s something where you know, somebody would have to have an opinion on it, a pretty strong opinion, to say something about that on there. On, you
know, maybe you know maybe I was expecting somebody to at least like it, you know?

Ronald’s story is not unique. Subjects repeatedly noted how they felt excited or affirmed when others responded to their online writing, and disappointment or dismay when they did not. Authorship is apparently expressed not only in the ability to write something online (returning, again, to the mantra of “everyone’s an author on the Internet”) but also in the ability to engage others through text. In the above three examples, we see how too many posts (as in Ann’s example), too few (in Rob’s examples), and apparently uninteresting posts can fail to solicit responses from others that beget collaborative activity. The point in displaying these (failed) examples is to demonstrate how previous literature and analyses had no easy way of demonstrating how number of responses or amount of total writing factor into determining a situation’s collaborative potential. As a result, through reflecting on online writing and interacting as a factor of authorship, subjects reveal the importance that receiving feedback has on their decision whether or not to write and engage more with others.

6.4 SUMMARY OF EXPANDED AUTHORSHIP BEHAVIORS

In the three highlighted behaviors above we can see how student-users write and interact in social online spaces not only as a way of producing more text, but as a way of encouraging others to produce more text in response. Literacy skills in social online spaces appear to hinge on both a user’s ability to navigate the space and her ability to maintain ongoing conversations. This was true in each of the data samples I included in this chapter. In sharing authority through turn-taking, users are balancing their voice with others, where any imbalance may discourage users from producing more text. In citing personal experience as a type of expertise, users are likewise encouraging increased text production by elevating potentially vapid (and opinion-driven) conversation into informed co-construction that in many ways mimics evidence-based claims valued in academic contexts. And in valuing the amount of writing a particular post garners, student-users reveal their motivation for coming back to produce text in a social online space.
This final set of behaviors (or more appropriately, disposition toward behaviors) leads directly into student-users’ valuing of interaction. Text production and user interaction are symbiotic categories of activity in social online space, where too much of one or not enough of the other effectively determines whether or not a text (or an experience) is both worthy of returning to and potentially collaborative in nature. As the next chapter will demonstrate, there are interaction-related behaviors that seem to indicate this, despite their apparent omission from previous scholarship on collaborative writing. As I detail these expanded community behaviors, I remind readers to recognize how they implicitly work with the behaviors noted in this chapter to create an online textual experience that is ultimately described in the forthcoming chapter on textuality.
CHAPTER SEVEN
COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Whereas text production behaviors were addressed in the preceding authorship chapter, behaviors related to interaction correspond to the community category of the Collaborative Triangle, and are the focus of this chapter. Analysis of interview and online text revealed 19 such behaviors that fell into three concepts: (1) debate issues describing use of argument and opinion, (2) negotiation issues describing consensus and changing of opinion, and (3) issues describing a sense of community, or affinity, that revealed behaviors related to belonging or a need to return to a given space. All nine of my subjects discussed and exhibited behaviors related to these concepts in both their interviews and online text. Their interaction-based behaviors are not necessarily unique to online writing, but are often made more explicit by interaction-encouraging features such as the presence of ubiquitous text boxes and archiving of previous conversations present in online contexts. As in the previous chapter, the highlighted behaviors listed in Table 7.1 below were noted as frequent and important by subjects discussing collaborative writing in social online spaces.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Concept</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>Exchanging conflicting and/or complementary ideas (e.g. advancing a conversation without explicit end goal in mind)</td>
<td>9 (of 9)  8</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Argument (e.g. opposing viewpoints without explicit end goal in mind)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining a “good” debate (e.g. one worth continuing)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression vs. conversation (e.g. a personal post vs. responding to others)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange and progression of ideas (e.g. advancing a conversation with explicit end goal in mind)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Online Texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working toward (or reaching) consensus and/or agreement (e.g. attempts at understanding others’ views)</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Interviews &amp; Online Texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing opinion/perspective</td>
<td>8 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Interviews &amp; Online Texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of finality to a conversation (i.e. implicit or explicit)</td>
<td>6 &amp; 1</td>
<td>Interviews &amp; Online Texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting a primary audience</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of affinity and sense of belonging (e.g. desire to return to site)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling when receiving a response (i.e. affect)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others’ influences on one’s writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playfulness and joking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social presence (e.g. “Liking”)</td>
<td>6 &amp; 9</td>
<td>Interviews &amp; Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like-mindedness (i.e. agreement, sharing of similar views)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring others and others’ comments</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation of writing back (or not)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively seeking out more followers or “friends”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1: Community-related behaviors with expanded behaviors highlighted
The seven highlighted behaviors shown here represent expanded behaviors that appear relevant to the discussion and definition of collaborative composition in online writing. Behaviors that are not highlighted, though still relevant and important, have been noted as essential to collaborative writing in previous literature and/or did not occur frequently enough to be noted as significant at this time\textsuperscript{71}. There were two behaviors (feeling when receiving a response and like-mindedness) related to the sense of community concept that were frequently observed in the data, but that are not analyzed further below. In brief, the reasoning is that the feeling of receiving a response is closely related to the feeling of affect, which is a disposition and set of behaviors already highlighted here. In the interest of space, I have combined their analysis while still noting their subtle differences in the above table. Likewise, the disposition of like-mindedness is closely related to previous, traditional scholarship on groupthink. Even though I believe its enactment in online behaviors is slightly different from previous understandings, I’m hesitant to include it in a list of expanded behaviors until more data is available to separate the two. What follows below are analyses of the seven expanded behaviors I have noted as related to interaction, or community.

7.1 SELF-EXPRESSION

Behaviors of self-expression fall under a concept I have identified as debate, which relates to issues dealing with argument and opinion. Though not a necessary component of collaborative composition \textit{per se}, debate and argument are near constant components of discussions about collaborative writing in previous literature due to the fact that so much of academic and professional writing is measured by how argumentative and persuasive a text is. In my study, all nine subjects unanimously discussed debate as a prominent behavior in their online writing. Of the four behaviors I have identified as related to debate, two (exchanging conflicting or complementary ideas and argument) were near-unanimous in both interviews and online text (the only user to not exhibit these behaviors online was Rob, who tended to only post innocuous materials on his \textit{Facebook Wall}. Three users discussed what they viewed as a “good” debate in

\textsuperscript{71} Again, each behavior (even those that were observed infrequently) is discussed analyzed in the Appendix. Only the most frequent ones are explicated within this chapter.
their interviews, and five users discussed their dispositions toward enacting self-expression versus conversation as a way of engaging others in debate. Only this last behavior, self-expression, seemed indicative of an expanded behavior both related to collaborative writing and uniquely situated within social online spaces. Part of this is because so many anecdotal assaults on social media’s relative worth in textual studies is aimed at users who seemingly only post self-interested, narcissistic comments about themselves. My data collection and analysis indicated that this was not the case for a majority of my subjects.

The decision to write for purposes of self-expression versus writing to engage others in ongoing conversation was expressed as a conscious choice by five subjects (though it can be assumed that nearly every student-user makes conscious decisions along these lines from time to time.) Though I would argue that the two behaviors (self-expression or conversation) are not mutually exclusive, when asked, five subjects felt the urge to designate their writing as decidedly not self-expressive, such as Huron University (HU) student Frank, who is active on the popular blogging site Tumblr. In his interview, he reported, “I feel like I’m writing for myself but with the interest of entertaining other people.” For Frank, just writing for himself would constitute a kind of selfish self-expression with no utility beyond personal satisfaction. Adding that he was interested in “entertaining other people” made the behavior somehow more valuable to him, in part, because it opened up the conversation for more interaction and potential collaboration.

Frank’s response is interesting to note because were readers to simply observe his online writing they may not be able to discern whether or not he was trying to reach out to “other people.” In fact, through use of personal pronouns and subjects that are relevant to his interests, we may wrongly ascertain that he is not interested in reaching an audience. However, by analyzing his dispositions toward “entertaining” a continuing community of readers, we can see that he is interested in promoting conversation that may be potentially co-constructive in nature.

This was also true for Catherine, an undergraduate student at Rouge University (RU) who spoke about her blogging activity in an interview. Catherine, aged 18-20, writes on both a personal blog as well as on several sites dedicated to finding and discussing financial aid and scholarships, which she repeatedly stated that she needed in
order to maintain enrollment at RU. She wavered in her response to a question about self-expression, perhaps confusing her own point:

I target more towards other people because the main part of my site is like the scholarship competitions I’m in, and I need books for this and I need assistance for that. So I try to, I guess in the end it’s for me because if I win, that’s my win. But I try to craft it to appeal towards others so it doesn’t sound like week after week, this egocentrical [sic] thing.

Both Frank and Catherine try to have it both ways: writing for themselves, though (self-) conscious of their readership. Catherine, however, begins her response with a clear eye “towards other people,” but then switches to a personal pronoun to declare that her writing is “for [her]” before admitting her goal of “craft[ing] it to appeal towards others.” In other words, Catherine demonstrates the shifting role that self-expression and audience awareness plays in online writing for subjects in this study. For her the audience is both addressed and invoked. This is the nature of writing in social online spaces that makes it appear so inherently collaborative in nature: even when a user writes mundane hyper-personal text, there is always the opportunity for others to respond and to co-construct new meaning from an individual thought. Though it does not always happen, the possibility should be enough to fend off naysayers who believe online writing can only be one, selfish thing. There appears to always be a low collaborative value as long as texts can be responded to, debated, or expanded in ways that have not yet been invented. In highlighting the potential for debate and interaction, five subjects from my survey point to an audience awareness that elevates even their most potentially selfish posts to something potentially collaborative.

7.2 SENSE OF FINALITY

Clearly a sense of finality is more of a disposition than a directly observable behavior. However, as expressed within the concept of negotiation, this sense can be outwardly expressed as knowing when to continue interacting with others versus knowing when to walk away. Negotiation is concerned with the interaction that begets users changing perspectives and reaching consensus. Consensus is a prominent, if not necessary, behavior brought up in previous literature on collaborative composition
because it is here that co-authors reach agreement and co-construct text and ideas. In social online spaces, however, such consensus may be subtler since the text has effectively already been published. Of the four behaviors identified in my study as related to negotiation, only an exchange of ideas with an explicit end goal in mind were viewable in online texts, but not in interviews. Though users discussed co-constructing knowledge in their interviews, the actual process was never discussed, though it was seen in three pieces of online text. The remaining three behaviors (working toward consensus, changing opinion, and a sense of finality) were exhibited in both interviews and online text. Only the last behavior, having a sense of finality, was not viewed in equal numbers in both data sources: it was brought up much more in interviews, more than likely due to that fact that most online texts continue to contain an textbox that marks them as open-ended and never quite finished. The only “finished” text observed for my study was one in which users agreed that they had reached an end point.

Negotiation and finality is most concerned with changing of opinions. This was evidenced in interview data supplied by Marina, a 21-23 year old Crystal Community College (CCC) student who, citing financial reasons, had recently transferred from Huron University. Marina indicated on her survey that her responses “very often” resulted in a sustained exchange. In her interview she described her thought process in deciding whether or not to change her opinion as the result of debate:

> generally, at the end of the day, I see which side makes more sense and you know, eventually, it’s cumulative and I see which one’s starting to win, but, every now and then like there’s, there’s something that someone will say that’ll just make a lot of sense in one way or another and the other side doesn’t really have a good way to refute it.

Marina’s decision-making process starts with personal opinion, if not logic, when she sides with “which side makes more sense.” Yet we can also see the issue that a presence of community plays when she admits to also siding with “which one’s starting to win.” Marina seems eager to enter the fray of differing opinions. For Marina, the presence of others’ voices reifies her own in the presence of debate; she looks for others who share her predetermined beliefs first, if those users appear weak then she changes her perspective to be more sympathetic with the other side. For her, a presence of multiple
voices seems to influence how she feels about their given topics. Her willingness to change her opinions based on the ideas of others opens the door to potential future collaboration in that other users may observe her willingness to incorporate others’ ideas into her own. Over time, such observations may lead to more interactions with Marina, which may in turn lead to more potential collaborative situations.

The final reaching of consensus, or agreement, was noted in six of the interviews as a behavior of sensing finality, or knowing that a given exchange was done. While the inherent open-endedness will be a behavior discussed within the textuality chapter, deciding when something is done in this current context means that users feel cognitively satisfied with things leaving off, especially in debate where users feel that they have reached in impasse or have agreed as much as they possibly can. These were the issues brought up by Marina in discussing how she knows a conversion has reached a relative finality, especially when other users are goading her on. She says, “I just stop engaging because they’ll keep going. If, if you say, you know, ‘I’m done’ they’ll be like, ‘Oh, you’re quitting, you, no, you’re wrong.’” For Marina, as well as for several other subjects, knowing when to walk away from an exchange of ideas is a behavior indicative of collaborative activity if for no other reason than abandoning failed negotiations frees up time to interact, negotiate, and co-construct elsewhere.

7.3 SENSE OF AFFINITY OR BELONGING

A sense of community (or an affinity for writing and interacting with one another) is something that subjects seem to want, but can’t necessarily articulate as one particular thing. It does, however, appear to be a very real thing, and something that subjects unanimously cited as crucial to interaction (and potential collaboration) in online writing because it encompasses not only shared interests (e.g. an affinity group) and a shared language (e.g. a discourse community), but also a strong desire to return, which users commented on again and again in their interviews as a kind of belonging that they couldn’t find elsewhere. In one way, subjects’ self-reported daily usage of social media is already evidence of their need to belong to these online communities.

This sense of belonging, like the next four behaviors to be discussed, fall into the concept of a sense of community, or a feeling of affinity, which is itself more of an
internal feeling than an observable behavior. This is exhibited in how many of the behaviors I’ve listed in this category were only captured in interviews. However, it is these feelings that bring users back to a text and to a textual situation in order to write and interact more. Because of this, these behaviors are essential to potential collaborative activity because they embody users’ desires to write and interact more with other users. Only two of the 11 behaviors within this concept were unanimously captured in interview and online text data: both playfulness and joking, and an explicit sense of affinity were behaviors leading to increased interaction. Though subjects discussed their dispositions of a sense of affinity within the interviews, for the latter behavior, their continued usage of online texts could be seen as an embodied and enacted desire to interact more. The remaining nine behaviors were viewed primarily in interviews, with the exception of social presence (a computer interaction term that indicates when a user is actively following a conversation), which was discussed in interviews and enacted in online texts in all nine subjects.

Throughout the interviews, subjects described dispositions toward wanting to return to a given site over and over. This was true of RU student Ann, who noted this in describing her activity on NPR’s comments boards:

There’s cool people on there to talk to. They’ll talk, they’ll respond back to you with interesting, interesting cool things that you didn’t think of yourself, often. Ninety percent of the time. You don’t get the off-hand, racial slurs and all that kind of thing happening. Everyone’s pretty respectful of each other. It’s a cool place for intellectual discussion… I think people go there for similar reasons because you see a lot of the same people. They know that they’re getting a similar group of people. Usually it’s people that have a little bit more education, who make a little bit more broader [sic] worldview than you might get at another news site. I, I feel respected when you go there. Like somewhere else, you might go post something a little bit controversial and people will attack you. And there, people will be like well, that’s really bizarre, but I can kind of understand points X, Y and Z. And then there’ll be a discussion, which is cool.
There is a distinct feeling in this excerpt that Ann wants more than affirmation and agreement, but a real community that she can rely on for consistent reception and responses. Her notes about what she doesn’t see in the community (i.e. “off-hand, racial slurs and all that”) are telling in that they pave the way for potential respectful debate, negotiation, and the changing of opinions. More relevant to collaboration, though, she references “intellectual discussion” as a type of behavior that this social online space affords, and also creates as a feeling of belonging.

7.4 PLAYFULNESS

Playfulness and its relation to collaboration are not unique to social online spaces. After all, each time a team plays together to win a game they are both playing and collaborating together in a sense. However, playfulness can be expressed in unique ways in social online spaces. All nine subjects could be seen as treating online writing as a kind of game, a playful navigation of a virtual world where users take on various personas, and different rules apply to writing and interacting. Seen through a collaborative writing lens, the purpose of such a game would be to garner responses, engage others, and ultimately co-construct something new, be it knowledge or strings of text related to various topics or ideas. One such example is visible in Figure 7.1, below. Here, we see users engaging in a series of good-hearted barbs toward one another. In other examples, subjects exhibited playful dispositions that took many forms, including wordplay, use of humor, and even flirting. In each of the nine interviews and online texts, humor could be observed as the most popular form of playfulness observed in social online spaces, especially on platforms like Facebook and Twitter that encourage users to interact with one another through famously short bursts of text. Users could be seen using sarcasm or wordplay to both engage one another as well as create a kind of in-crowd within the larger community who “gets” the humor being displayed. It can be seen as another form of social presence or as a way of extending a sense of community that brings users back to interact again and again. The example below comes from James, an 18-20 year old student at Rouge University (RU) who reports being most active on Facebook.
Figure 7.1: Playful behaviors on Facebook

Figure 7.1 features a light-hearted interplay between James and several of his friends on Facebook. Within this figure, an initial user posts a prompt, perhaps asking about the origin of his name just to see what kinds of responses he will get, or in a reference to some off-screen joke or conversation that outsiders are not privy to. In either case, James responds by mimicking dictionary language to provide an etymology of his friend’s name. The response is apparently popular, as three people “Like” it. The definition not only succeeds in mimicking formal language, but in also providing some insider jokes about skipping class or sleeping in a car. To insiders these details may ring especially true, but even to outsiders—such as me—this exchange is clearly meant as lighthearted playfulness between friends. When the original user responds with a further joke (“Are you hitting on me…?”), James again responds that the user “misinterpreted” his response and that he “wants [the user] to die.” Within the context of this thread, it is clear that James is not sincere in his threat; it’s meant as a joke. This comment, too, garnered four “Likes,” the most of any post within the thread. The result of such a game is to get users to return to one another’s profiles more often and to write more text, which James clearly does, returning no less than twice to interact. The resulting interaction may
be non-constructive, as it essentially is here, but it may also lead to further discussions about other topics, which could ultimately be seen as co-constructive and a direct result of this initial wordplay.

According to traditionally analyses of collaboration, argumentation, and persuasion, James’s text in Figure 7.1 would be seen only as banter. No new knowledge is co-constructed, and any appeals between the various authors are only enacted in order to entertain one another. However, viewed through the lens of community, we can see behaviors of like-mindedness (friends sharing a similar sense of humor), social presence (multiple “Likes”), and playfulness (mimicking academic language in order to poke fun.) Taken together, it becomes clear that these users are constructing a sense of community for one another that makes their textual interactions desirable and valuable (at least to them.) Because of this, users may be more likely to check back on one another, and to interact as a group when one or two are publicly interacting later on. Though not a collaborative behavior unto itself, this exchange increases the amount of user interaction for this community, which may aid in furthering potential collaborative activity down the line.

7.5 SOCIAL PRESENCE

Though none of the subjects used the term specifically, social presence is a way for users to interact in subtle, yet noted ways in social online spaces. Quiet users are often referred to as “lurkers,” who may log in every day, but rarely let their presence be known. However, lurkers occasionally let their presence be known through written text, “Liking,” or simply referencing something from earlier that shows that they are cognizant of ongoing activity. No matter what form it takes, behaviors related to social presence can be seen as related to potential collaborative activity because such behaviors expand feelings of community by letting users know that there is always a potential interaction waiting in response to a given post. Not all users feel this way, though. Frank revealed in his interview that though social presence behaviors are accepted functions within online communities, they might be seen as selfish behaviors, antithetical to collaboration. He said:
The reason I go back to the site is often to explore other people’s content. The reason I keep contributing is I feel it’s a community in a way and if you’re not being active in the community, then I feel like you’re getting less out of it. Because like when I post things about Star Wars, sometimes my other Star Wars related blogs will come back and say, oh yeah, I really like that, or, oh you should read this book, too, so I’m getting content back sometimes from the content I post.

Frank frames his social presence as an obligatory move towards community by not only referring to the collection of blogs as a community, but later noting that other users appreciate his posts. Interestingly, though, Frank’s ultimate reason for asserting his social presence (exploring others’ content and self-consciously contributing) seems to be partly selfish. He says users “get less out of” communities when they aren’t active, and that “I’m getting content back…from the content I post.” These quotes indicate a sense of reciprocity; it’s not just that Frank wants to contribute to the community, he wants the community to contribute to him. In the form of follow-up posts to his blog, these contributions may increase the potential for collaborative activity.

In addition to reciprocity, there is a sense of connectedness that came up throughout the interviews with all nine subjects that may or may not be related to subtle forms of social presence behaviors. Ernest, another HU student who is 18-20 and actively writes on Facebook, revealed social anxiety when he is not letting his presence be known on the social network. In a telling portion of our interview, he explained:

There’s like, there’s a definite anxiety about connectedness that I feel like if people say they feel naked without their cell phones. That’s definitely true for me and I think it’s the same thing with Facebook is that it’s like I, I sort of have the feeling when I’m not on the website that people are talking behind my back. Like there’s like a conversation that I’m not engaged in that I could be engaged in. Even though when I’m on a site, very little happens, when you think about it. I’ll maybe make like two or three comments in the space of a day, or probably more than that, but I’ll make like a few comments. It’s not very much, per hour, it’s not very much activity. But it’s just like watching and it’s like, it’s sort of akin to
sitting in a mall and like people watching. You know you see all these things going on around you. And there’s just an anxiety about not having a presence. It’s like a, it’s like not being able to see behind you or something like that.

Ernest’s anxiety about social presence undoubtedly relates to his attempt to connect with other users on a social level. However, Ernest does not necessarily seem to be interacting in order to construct new knowledge; he seems to simply want his presence to be known. In this way, Ernest is participating in the online community by “actively listening” the way students do in classrooms. Instead of receiving participation points, though, the possible reward seems to be that users may eventually interact with Ernest in ways that will be personally fulfilling (such as responding to one of his status messages) or that Ernest’s fears of missing out can be assuaged by constantly monitoring others’ activities that he may eventually join. In banking and anticipating future interactions like this, Ernest is undoubtedly increasing the probability that collaborative behaviors may ensue. This is evidenced, also, in Figure 7.2, below.

![Facebook conversation thread](image)

**Figure 7.2: Social presence behaviors on Facebook**

Social presence can take place at any time, so there is no way to predict its enactment or to necessarily quantify what effect it has on ongoing conversations. Take, for example, the conversation thread in the figure above where Ernest posts a link to a music video that he wishes would “play really loudly whenever [he] walked anywhere.”
Though the link garnered no textual responses, at least one user, “J,” did “Like” the post, which on Facebook is a way of demonstrating social presence by acknowledging someone’s post without actually contributing any new content. Interestingly, though, the top image of Figure 7.2 (the more recent of the two, as Facebook posts are arranged in reverse-chronological order) continues the conversation begun below, with the user who “Liked” the original post admitting to Ernest that she had never heard the song before. He then responds that he has more music to share with her. Whether this brief exchange begets social interaction off the screen, or future conversations that may be collaborative within Facebook, is beyond the scope of this study. Still, one can see how such social presence behaviors may beget further conversation: what started as a “Like” here, turned into a brief online conversation, and promises to inspire future interactions about music. In so doing, these behaviors increase probability of collaborative behaviors, and are uniquely situated within social online spaces such as Facebook.

7.6 IGNORING OTHERS

The corollary to users seeking out community may be users choosing to ignore other users, in effect creating community through subtraction. In the study, all nine subjects reported doing this. Unlike face-to-face encounters where social awkwardness alone may dictate how and if people interact with one another, online asynchronous discourse makes no such guarantees. Across the interviews, participants mostly agreed that familiarity with the other user is the determining factor of whether or not they want to respond. RU student, and blogger, Catherine, put it this way:

It depends like if it’s a first-time commenter, I try to respond right away. I guess it’s a bell curve type of thing. And if it’s someone I’ve known for quite a while and I either know them in real life or I know them from other sites or they comment on my blog a lot, I try to respond to them right away. But in the middle when it’s, they’re in between the stages, I somewhat sit back and try to formulate my response because I’m trying to

72 Similar tools exist on other sites, such as voting for posts, rating approval of posts, or simply giving posts a “thumbs up” as the “Liking” feature here graphically imitates.
keep them into my blog. Where as if it’s a newbie, they’re automatically, I feel they’re automatically going to see that I responded to their response. What’s most interesting about Catherine’s response is that in her chosen social online spaces of blogs she is much more likely to encounter complete strangers to her work and comments than if she were on a relatively closed platform such as Facebook, where users mostly interact with friends. In identifying a bell curve of responses (where she immediately responds to some users but chooses to ignore others altogether), Catherine reveals a feeling of reciprocity between users that could ultimately inform greater discussions about community, moving them beyond limiting understandings about addressed and invoked audiences and instead to a fuller understanding of the behaviors that may provoke reciprocal interactions.

Catherine appears unconcerned that if she ignores certain users’ comments that she will lose her place in an online community. In fact, the other eight subjects reported similar responses: the more familiar they were with users, the more likely they were to ignore their comments and/or not respond. The reported logic was that these users were already their friends, so ignoring their comments would not significantly impact their ongoing relationships. As a result, choosing to ignore (or not) others’ comments is a way to maintain one’s place in a community in which one is either deeply or tentatively invested. In this way, users may be more likely to write and interact as ways to both be a part of the community and co-construct ideas with others.

7.7 SEEKING MORE FRIENDS AND FOLLOWERS

Increasing one’s friends or followers within a given social online spaces is like the earlier-noted behavior of writing and responding more in order to increase collaborative potential. Five of the subjects explicitly noted this behavior in their interviews, but the practice is so common on places like Facebook and Twitter that it may have been omitted only because it is a given that many users desire more online connections. It is common practice for users to “friend” as many people as they can on certain platforms as a way of increasing their social network’s reach. On the professional site LinkedIn, this may lead to more job opportunities, while on a blog it may lead to more followers. On sites like Facebook, it may simply lead to more interactions.
On Facebook, interestingly, Ernest noted that he likes to keep his friend count at exactly 500, partly for aesthetic reasons but also partly to know that he can make a personal connection to all of his online friends. This was a unique take on friending, but also indicative of how little most users think about the behavior (the reason Ernest’s behaviors sticks out is because of its peculiarity.) This self-consciousness of limiting friends was not the case for Frank, who may be indicative of bloggers who judge their success as writers by garnering more followers. He noted that he “always [likes] to see more followers” because it makes him feel “good” and because it means that he is promised more interaction. For users like Frank, writing in social online spaces is not just a selfish activity, it is a nuanced set of behaviors designed to communication, interact, and hopefully co-construct an experience with other users. Though Frank used affective words to describe his desire to increase his followers, within the context of community it can be extrapolated that he wants to increase his audience so that they will write back to him and increase his potential production. As discussed earlier, Frank is not just writing for himself, he is also hoping to entertain others and receive responses in return. As a result, actively seeking out friends can be viewed as an outward expression of a student-user actively seeking out potential collaborators who will write and interact with them on a consistent basis.

7.8 SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS

As mentioned in the preceding chapter on authorship, text production and interaction are two sides of the same coin in social online spaces. However, behaviors related to interaction, such as those highlighted here, may be more widely recognized as being collaborative in nature due to their explicit interplay of two or more agents working together on a given text. Traditional behaviors, such as debate, were observed within the interview and online text data, and could be readily observed through previous analyses. The expanded behaviors presented in this chapter, however, reveal something that would be difficult to observe through previous analyses of argument or persuasion alone.

Specifically, behaviors related to self-expression, finality, and affinity are all largely based in dispositions, or how a student-user approaches a text with the intent of interacting in potentially co-constructive ways. Because of this, behaviors related to these
dispositions are best discovered in interviews. However, even the directly observable behaviors of playfulness, social presence, ignoring others, and soliciting more friends address how users seek out (or eschew) interaction with others in ways that both appear potentially collaborative but also elude discovery through prior traditional definitions and analyses of collaborative writing. This is partly due to the nature of online texts, which will be the focus of the next chapter on textuality. While ignoring someone in face-to-face communication may make a potential co-author simply difficult to deal with, for example, in social online spaces such behaviors are difficult—if not impossible—to observe without an address of dispositions and behaviors related to interaction. My Collaborative Triangle is presented to provide this systematic approach to this discovery, and was essential to noting it as an expanded behavior, among the six others, in this chapter.
CHAPTER EIGHT
TEXTUALITY FINDINGS

In addressing the third category of the Collaborative Triangle, textuality (addressing the nature of texts in online writing), readers will no doubt now see the symbiotic, recursive nature of the other two categories alongside this one. For instance, while authorship addressed text production, it also relied on production’s effect on interaction between users. The same was likewise true of community, or interaction, where such behaviors were made explicit due to the affordances of social technology (such as archiving of posts) that make interaction visible and more likely. Textuality likewise addresses these affordances, but focuses primarily on how they force users (and researchers) to potentially redefine what is considered (1) ownership, (2) responsibility, and (3) a product or text when composing is done entirely online with no explicit text-producing end goal potentially in sight. These three issues are also the concepts that I identified in my coding strategies looking for behaviors related to textuality. As a result of using them to code my data, I identified no less than 16 distinct behaviors related to the nature of text that were observed in interviews and online texts. These three concepts and unique behaviors are listed below in Table 8.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTUALITY</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Explicit claim of ownership (e.g. “This is mine”)</td>
<td>9 (of 9)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implicit claim of ownership (e.g. deleting of objectionable material)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archiving material</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing material (e.g. sharing links to others’ materials)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit claim of responsibility (e.g. “That was my idea”)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interview Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit claim of responsibility (i.e. attribution via presence of a profile photo and/or hyperlinked profile name)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of identity (e.g. changing profile photos)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defriending other users</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having an explicit text-producing goal/product in mind</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to post text or visuals in order to communicate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to visual design of a site</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing newness and temporality</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping personal content current</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interviews Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy settings (or lack there of)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended nature of conversations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Online Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1: Textuality-related behaviors with expanded behaviors highlighted

As in the preceding tables chronicling potentially collaborative behaviors, this one is organized according to traditional and expanded behaviors, where the latter are highlighted in yellow to indicate their existence in the data as new entities in our expanding definitions of collaborative composition. These ten expanded behaviors are detailed below, with one exception: keeping personal content current. While all nine subjects demonstrated behaviors of keeping their online content up to date, the basic factor behind these activities is closely enough related to temporality and newness that (in the interest of space) I conflate the two in the analysis below. I maintain their separation.
in the table above because I believe that they are distinct in how they are approached and enacted, but in terms of analyzing them via the Collaborative Triangle, the similarities should be self-evident below.

In addition to this, the only expanded behavior that was observed during this study that is not analyzed below is anonymity. Because only three subjects (in both interviews and online text) noted it, its frequency could not match up to what its importance may actually be. As a result, I included discussion of its importance within the behaviors of identity maintenance, which was a frequently cited behavior, and is clearly related to roles that anonymity may play. Likewise, though two behaviors (decision to post text or visuals and response to user interface) were noted as both frequent and important to users, I do not analyze them further below simply due to the fact that visual design (and closely related visual rhetoric) is equally important in non-online spaces, and deserves exegesis that positions it more clearly as an extension of prior scholarship, not as a potentially “new” behavior.

8.1 IMPLICIT CLAIM OF OWNERSHIP

The concept of ownership relates to issues concerning possession. As will be described, though all nine subjects discussed ownership of ideas and words within their interviews, they also—sometimes in the same sentence—would conflate with them ideas of responsibility. For me, responsibility connotes control, attribution, and issues around identity. Though I will attempt to parse this out further in the section below on the concept of responsibility, I mention it here to note two things: (1) All nine subjects reported behaviors about both ownership and responsibility, and (2) Though they sometimes failed to differentiate the two, I believe they are worth analyzing separately here so as to provide researchers with a clearer blueprint for future exploration. It should also be noted that since both sets of behaviors occur within the larger category of textuality, any resulting analysis will be within the same general framework regardless.

Of all the major media represented in this study—Facebook, Tumblr, NPR.com, etc.—none charge a fee for their users to create profiles, post content, and archive their interactions. Because of this, the subjects appear to consider their experiences in these social online spaces as somehow a given right, with no legalistic sharing or handing over
of rights implied in the posting of personal information on the servers of private corporations. No one brought up these issues of corporate ownership in interviews or within online text. However, all nine subjects did apply ownership to abstract things: such as declaring “my information” or “my website.” This situation is both unique to these online spaces as well as a continuation of intellectual and property right debates that have been ongoing in the publishing industries for decades, if not centuries. If we look at websites as publishers—which is accurate, yet still only one component of their business models—then we can put users’ feelings of ownership over their text into clearer context, and we may be able to put these perceived new feelings into conversation with previous debates about collaboration between other authors, publishers, editors, etc.

Eight of the nine subjects reported in interviews an implied sense of ownership, less related to their own words than those of others. For them, this was expressed when asked about text that other users have posted on “their” personally owned spaces, specifically when content that they deemed as objectionable was posted. For example, both Marina and Rob commented on deleting others’ comments because they were afraid that they might offend their other friends. These users did not feel conflicted at all about deleting someone else’s content. Their rationale was that since the other user had contributed the offending text on the user’s personal space, they were free to do with it what they wished. Interestingly, all discussion about deletion of content within the interviews dealt with deleting others’ comments within the personal space of the interviewed user. No interview addressed asking others to delete content, for instance. Such behaviors have implications not only for how student-users view ownership and deletion, but also for how collaboration can be seen as jointly constructed in constantly evolving contexts like social online spaces, where texts are almost never fixed and finite.

In describing these deletion behaviors, Octavia offered the most vivid description of her thought process behind deleting others’ comments. Octavia, a 24-29 year old Crystal Community College (CCC) student who does the majority of her online writing on the blogging service Tumblr, discusses not only deleting someone else’s comments, but hers along with it in order to start fresh:

[We] brought someone into our little core and unfortunately, towards the end of that summer, this girl we brought in started getting a little bawdy
and was constantly, like, starting arguments, or there would end up being arguments in the comment section of livejournal and it got to a point where I said, “I’m not feeding into this any more.” Delete, delete, delete, delete (taps fingers on table). It’s like I’m deleting everyone’s comments including mine. Or in some cases, two best, further back, two best friends who absolutely hated each other starting to have arguments on my MySpace in the comments [and] again, delete, delete, delete, delete. I’m, like, getting rid of everybody’s comments including mine because this is getting ridiculous. You guys want to fight? Go elsewhere. You are not using my Internet property (chuckles).

Here, we see behaviors related to implied ownership as she describes her personal profiles on various social networks as “my Internet property” (emphasis mine.) For Octavia, and others like her, deleting content seems to be a way to foster more open, inviting community. She felt offended by the content she deleted and felt like it was affecting her own writing, or as she says, “feeding into” it. As a result, though deletion of content is a behavior that ultimately takes content away from social online spaces, it may help to cultivate a healthier ecosystem of contribution if and when offending content poisons the writing space. While no previous discussions of collaboration or argumentation would view such behaviors as necessarily constructive (after all, this is wholesale deleting, not selective editing), it is clear that through the lens of textuality, users like Octavia feel that by taking content away, they are freed up to create new content in its place.

8.2 ARCHIVING

Nearly any text entered in social online spaces is instantly archived for future reference. As a result, this behavior is the only one noted in this study that could not be actively enacted by a subject. Instead, I was interested more in how subjects viewed this feeling of permanence in regard to their online writing, and how it affected their view of potentially collaborative behavior. All nine subjects’ texts viewed during this study are still searchable and findable on their respective sites, so it is all archived. Of the interviews, only Octavia brought up this behavior of noticing and utilizing the archiving
feature on her blog. She appreciates the perception that her data will be archived forever so as to serve as “a good frame of reference” for trying to think back about an event in her life. Octavia highlights her personal reasons for liking archived material, but she says nothing of others’ ability to seek out her previous words and interact with them.

This fact exposes the personal nature of archiving that functions much like a diary in print analogs. However, the reverse could also be viewed as a potential detriment to collaboration: should one of these Internet companies ever delete users’ content, any intangibly owned texts would be lost, possibly forever. Cognizance of this fact may have far-reaching implications for how future users consider online collaboration, and for how future researchers archive their own analyzed content. Though no previous forms of analysis would adequately expose the permeating sense of permanence in online writing (which is a bit of a paradox since so much online writing can be seen as disposable and temporary), when viewed through textuality, it is clear that online writing behaviors are affected by sites’ ability to archive writing and interaction. How this function significantly affects feelings of collaboration is evolving, but its function’s existence and relevance to the nature of online texts was unanimously viewed in this study.

8.3 SHARING MATERIALS

Similar to the archiving features present in most social online spaces, websites also typically allow for ubiquitous sharing of materials, often taking place in the circulating of hyperlinks to other websites. In analysis of online texts, all nine subjects either shared or had their content shared via their chosen medium. Facebook features a “Share” button on their posts, and blog sites like Tumblr often allow users to “reblog” a post to others. These behaviors will be discussed in more detail below in terms of behaviors related to responsibility and attribution. Their relation to the concept of ownership is that although every subject enacted sharing behaviors, less than half brought them up in interviews. The implications may be that student-users are so used to the easy flow of information across users and platforms that sharing (and closely related behaviors of citation, acknowledgement, and payment) is seen as a nearly sub-conscious behavior that is not only a given, but is enacting collaborative activity even when the users are not fully aware of it. I do not believe that users neglected to bring up sharing behaviors in
their interviews because they did not see them as important, but instead did not bring them up because they are so ubiquitous. As a result, though rhetorical or argumentative analyses may not highlight the circulation of text and ideas explicitly, a collaborative analysis such as I’m proposing here through the lens of textuality takes it as a given that all information entered into a social online space can be easily and readily shared with others, which can aid in co-constructing ideas far away from any original intent.

8.4 IMPLICIT CLAIM OF RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility, as noted earlier, differs from ownership in that it refers to control over a text. Just the same, all nine subjects conflate the two terms, often interchanging them within a single interview response. In the visually rich context of social online spaces, responsibility often takes the form of identity-related attributes that accompany a text. Attribution, both in the interviews and in the online texts, is the most visible expression of responsibility over a text, according to the study’s subjects. Specifically, attribution is often granted by forwarding a user’s profile photo or hyperlinking to her profile page via a click on her user name. For this study, this is how responsibility differs from ownership: even if a user doesn’t “own” the text that she has contributed to, she is still responsible—in part—for it as long as her identity is linked to it.

Both explicitly and implicitly, all nine subjects revealed in their interviews and online texts that attribution is a major consideration for feeling a sense of responsibility for texts that may be shared beyond their initial context. Many sites allow users to easily explain where their shared texts come from. For example, Facebook allows users to hyperlink to the source of their shared texts, which is seen as “User X shared via User Y” where the users’ names are linked to their profiles. Social blogs, like Tumblr, prominently display this action as well, as seen in Figure 8.1, taken from Frank’s blog. In it, we witness three people engaged in a conversation. Frank’s information is listed at the bottom (beginning with “Um Chloe…”), and is actually the third, and final, contribution to this conversation. Clare, the second user, added commentary to Chloe’s initial comments (which, in turn, is an apparent response to an earlier post by Frank.) In his interview, Frank acknowledged how he appreciated the blogging site’s ability to account for responsibility in personal posts: “Tumblr is good in that…it sort of automatically
credits who you [are], like if you re-blog something, it’ll say ‘I re-blogged this from somebody else.’”

Figure 8.1: Attribution on blogging site Tumblr

Looking at Figure 8.1 reveals attribution techniques enlisted by many social online spaces. First, each user’s screen name accompanies his/her text. The presence of a colon after the name mimics how written and spoken speech is typically attributed. Perhaps more importantly, though, each screen name is hyperlinked so that by clicking it, we can travel to that user’s profile, and back to where he/she entered the conversation. Tumblr also indents quotes in conversations like these so that the oldest posts are the furthest indented to the right, and the more recent ones are flush with the left-hand side of the screen. This creates a left to right reading motion that privileges the most recent information over older information. This formatting put texts into an order that not only attributes work, but also acknowledges original context, thus preserving a sense of responsibility, as well as puts it on public display, which traditional publishing methods rarely did. Previous analyses of responsibility and attribution may look for a by-line, use of quotation marks, or parenthetical citation to note attribution. Details like the ones provided in Figure 8.1, however, demonstrate how users are enacting behaviors related to responsibility that go beyond these established norms.

The implication here is that users enact responsibility and attribution behaviors without necessarily thinking about them. Most sites build attribution into the design of the functionality. As a result, future online collaboration may be seen as less of a choice
and more of an inherent fact, leading future researchers and instructors to be responsible for showing students how they are already collaborating without necessarily knowing it. Previous literature on power in collaborative composition reveals that the consideration of proper attribution and responsibility over a text can hinder dispositions and behaviors of collaborative writing (e.g. when a senior researcher is the first name listed on a report carried out primarily by junior colleagues.) The fact that many social online sites build attribution directly into their user-interface (i.e. it is a default, not a choice) means that this potential hindrance may be overcome, if not eradicated altogether.

8.5 IDENTITY MAINTENANCE

Identity maintenance is the name I have given to a host of behaviors that appear related to responsibility in social online spaces. They were also brought up unanimously by all nine subjects as perhaps the thing that separates face-to-face from online writing: the belief that a person can have an “other” self on the Internet that can be created and curated. As previously noted, whereas a person’s order in byline once connoted the ownership/responsibility associated with the project, a hyperlinked name and profile photo now accompany most texts. These names and photos represent real people, and these people express their identities in social online spaces that have real impacts on how they—and others—view the texts they are circulating throughout the Internet. Relevant to studying how these texts may be viewed as collaborative in nature, all of the student-users interviewed for this study thought that their online profiles not only represented their “real” identity off-line, they mostly all thought that by updating their identifying information (i.e. profile photos, “About Me” information, background templates, etc.) over time, other users may be more likely to interact with them and their texts.

In the interviews, participants argued against the perception of a difference between online and off-line identities. When asked whether or not they thought their online personas reflected their “real world” identities, interviewees uniformly responded in the affirmative. Marina said that her Facebook profile “does a pretty good job of

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73 Though only three subjects discussed anonymity as one of these behaviors, I am including it in this analysis as a counterweight to the sincere posting of personal information contained within other examples.
personifying me,” while Rob noted, “almost every area of [his] life is represented in some form on Facebook.” These two users weren’t alone, as every interviewee noted how self-conscious he or she was about maintaining an identity that was not only an extension of themselves, but also an invitation to others to check back in often and interact with potentially new texts. No user captured this more passionately than Ernest who said of his Facebook profile:

I, more than anybody else that I know has like, I have like a lot of quotes in my, my information thing because every time I like read something, I’ll like throw up like a quote from Macbeth or like something from I don’t know, it’s from movies and things like that. And I’ve got like a very, I’ve got like a quilt work of, of like philosophical and like, just like passing quotes on humanity and things like that. There’s like a, there’s like a cynicism to my profile. It’s very, like if you, you could peg who I was as a person pretty easily just by going through my profile and I don’t think that you could do that for a lot of people. But I have a lot of, a lot of like artistic and like literary expressions of myself that I put up on there and I don’t know, I feel like, I feel like maybe it’s the, the my sense of social anxiety or my like, like need for personal expression. Like I want to maintain this Wall as a sort of like, an extension of my psyche...
Contrary to Ernest’s beliefs, he is not unique in believing his profile “pegs” him as a particular type of person. Though he explains the textual ways that he maintains a profile by editing his “About Me” section, he also demonstrated visually how he updates his online identity as I observed his profile across two weeks. Figure 8.2, above, is a screen shot of Ernest’s profile photo taken on November 21. In it, Ernest displays a photo of a young boy dressed in a *Star Wars* costume standing on a pedestrian bridge. The photo appears to be contemporary, and so more than likely is not a photograph of Ernest. Figure 8.3, below, displays Ernest’s profile photo taken as a screenshot on November 29, roughly a week after the first screenshot. Here, Ernest displays a photo of a small monkey, possibly a pygmy marmoset. Finally, in Figure 8.4, next page, Ernest has again changed his profile photo as of December 5th, this time to an approximated illustration of a young man who resembles Ernest in real life.

![Facebook profile photo](image)

Figure 8.3: *Facebook* profile photo

What stands out across all three of these figures is that they occupy the place on a *Facebook* profile where users typically display a photograph of themselves. Since *Facebook* does not allow anonymous users, photos tend to be—though need not be—headshots of the users that reflect what they look like in “real life.” Though Figure 8.4 resembles Ernest in a cartoonish kind of way, Figures 8.2 and 8.3 are less apparent. Users unfamiliar with Ernest may assume that Figure 8.2 is of him as a young child. From this they may infer any number of things, including his apparent affinity for the movie *Star*
Wars. Figure 8.3, of the monkey, lends itself to no such confusion. The photo serves as a placeholder where a typical sincere photograph of the user should be. In updating his profile photographs so often—no less than three times in two weeks—and by inserting non-traditional images where users would expect pictures of the user to appear, Ernest is providing a new view of his profile each time a user interacts with it. It was his belief that users may check back on his profile more often to see what image he has prominently displayed on his page this week. Though such cosmetic changes may not connote responsibility and attribution in the way a standard photograph would, they do seem to express Ernest’s quirky identity, and may lead to future interactions from users more frequently checking in.

Figure 8.4: Facebook profile photo

A similar analysis could be made of Frank’s blogging template, which he also changed three times over the course of my two-week observation. On Tumblr, users can select backgrounds from thousands of options. Typically, users select backgrounds that others have designed—though there is the possibility that a user could design his or her own background—because designing a background template requires advanced knowledge of design and programming. Figure 8.5 displays Frank’s initial background that he used on the site when I began data collection. In his interview Frank said of his background, “right now I think [it] is just like a, a wood desk with like, the text is on
sheets of paper...because I feel like it reflects who I am when I’m blogging because when I’m blogging, I typically am sitting at my desk just writing.” Interestingly, though, the images in Figure 8.5 are from a print-based world full of material details such as a pen and a phone depicted as haphazardly laid on a wooden desk. Below it, college-ruled notebook paper is shown crumpled and stapled into the desk, while the blog’s main posts appear to be paper-clipped to backing paper. Of course Frank uses none of these items to blog, but he felt that they represented his identity perhaps because they connote what “real” writing is, or was, offline. In this way, Frank is projecting a traditional (if not idealized) view of what an author is, thereby extending these dispositions toward his online persona.

A week after taking this screenshot, though, Frank’s background changed to the image seen in Figure 8.6, below. Here, we see a black background with the navigation menu in white on the left-hand side of the screen. This minimalist design seems to highlight the purpose of the blog to present and archive text. The left-hand menu also features a new option for users to “Ask Me Anything,” meaning that by clicking on the hyperlink, they will be given an open textbox to interact directly with Frank. This option marks Frank’s online identity suddenly open to interaction beyond his personal expression displayed in the previous wooden desk background. By changing backgrounds, Frank also added functionality and essentially opened up his identity to be
interacted with more easily by others. He thus changed the nature of his online text by selecting a more interactive design to represent his online identity and allow others to see him as a ready collaborator. Of course, like Ernest, by changing his backgrounds he also gives users incentive to return to his blog often in order to explore the new aesthetic that Frank has chosen.

One of the more unique affordances of identity in social online spaces is that users can publish material readily without revealing their identity at all. Many sites—especially news sites that feature comments sections—allow users to be anonymous, either by creating screen names that may not be linked to their real identities, or by simply not entering any identifying information at all. Three subjects reported that even though they use anonymous screen names on blogs, once (and if) they meet fellow users offline, their identities become mingled more and more, so the anonymous handles are less about being hidden from view by others than they are taking on an alternate identity for writing with specific purposes on particular sites. For example, blogger Octavia says that if she posts on a site anonymously, she’s “trolling…[she’s] going onto a board with a specific purpose to piss people off.” This view of anonymity is not uncommon, though it seems
limited to sites where users are not required to enter any information at all, or sites where a user can create a temporary screen name, but not be tied to it in future interactions.

Ann (Shadowtale) wrote:
Truthfully, I’m excited for Tron just for the sweet special effects. You can get around a lot of bland dialogue when you have light bikes... but I understand why many fans of the original would be feeling a bit let off that the film doesn’t live up to their expectations.
Fri Dec 17 23:28:09 2010
Recommend (2) Report abuse

Figure 8.7: Use of name and screenname within a comments section

Figure 8.7 displays an interesting case of identity maintenance in terms of anonymity from Ann’s behaviors on NPR.com. We can see both her real name as well as her screen name (Shadowtale) that she reports using on other sites. Her name is also accompanied by a photograph of a watermelon that obviously does not depict her actual likeness. Ann noted in her interview, and in the preceding section on community, that she posts regularly to this website because she feels a sense of community with the other users. This may be one reason why she feels freed up to provide her real name. Her inclusion of a handle, though, is partly because NPR.com asks users to do so, but it also serves to cross-reference Ann/Shadowtale’s posts on other news sites that users may come across. By associating Ann’s name with the screen name, Ann expands her online community on her own terms: she reveals her true identity on a site where she feels safe and supported (i.e. NPR), and only provides a screen name on sites where she may be attacked or less understood (i.e. sites she visits less frequently.) This duality of identity allows Ann to maintain ownership of her texts across multiple media, but also affords her the ability to only claim responsibility to ones attached to her name if she so chooses. This emerging assertion of identity thus takes on the purposes of ownership and responsibility that allow the user to enter into collaboration only when she consciously chooses to do so.

8.6 DE Friending
The behavior of defriending⁷⁴, or unfriending, is the ultimate act of claiming control over a text by essentially controlling rights to content. Because of the hidden nature of this behavior (on blogs it is also known as “blocking” another user), it was not observed in any online texts. However, the topic came up in all nine interviews as a very real, if seldom utilized, behavior that could control the nature of online texts. In defriending, a student-user severs all ties with another user, not only by blocking their ability to interact with the user (and her text), but typically also by blocking the ability to read the other user’s future texts. In essence, in defriending, a user manipulates the population of her social network. Though a person in the “real world” could avoid another person by disassociating oneself from their shared friends and locations, chance encounters are always still possible. Whereas Web 2.0 sites are unique in their ability to always keep a text open-ended, the act of defriending someone is finite and ultimate in how it instructs a website to block any existence of the other user. Though such a behavior blocks collaborative potential between the two affected users, it may also help to foster a more fertile ecosystem (as in Octavia’s earlier example) if and when a defriending user feels offenders are out of the way.

Perhaps sensing the gravity of this behavior, most of the interviewees reported rarely defriending other users. When they did, they seemed to have extraordinary circumstances, and did so with great deliberation. On Facebook the defriending seemed to occur when users were terminating their social ties in “real life,” as Rob put it in his interview. However, there are specific strategies associated with defriending, such as Marina’s insistence that she write the person an email notifying them that she had defriended them, or James’s tactic of friending anyone who asks of it (including “snooping” family members) and later defriending them so as to maintain his privacy. There are also pragmatic approaches to defriending, such as Ernest’s admission that he “defriends people all the time just because” he feels that many users try to accumulate massive numbers of friends without actually cultivating the relationships that go with

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⁷⁴ This behavior is so commonly understood that the New Oxford American Dictionary named “unfriend” as their word of the year in 2009. They defined it as “To remove someone as a ‘friend’ on a social networking site such as Facebook.” For the purpose of this study “defriend” means the same as “unfriend,” though I prefer the former term and used it in my interviews. No interviewees appeared confused by this choice.
them. Viewed this way, we can see how Ernest’s strategy—as well as the others who seem to be sweeping their social networks clean of offending presences—could actually support closer user relationships, which may in turn support views of textuality that are more meaningful and potentially collaborative in nature. Though no previous literature or analyses could take into account the impact of defriending users, viewed through textuality, it is clear that taking potential co-authors out of conversation may have a very salient effect on potential collaborative value of a text.

8.7 ATTENTION TO NEWNESS AND TEMPORALITY

All nine subjects discussed and enacted behaviors that were directly related to valuing the newness (or temporality) of a text. Though there were three popular behaviors above this one in the concept of product-related behaviors that are related to online writing (not having an explicit text-producing goal, posting in visuals or text, or responding to a site’s visual component), valuing newness was seen as the most frequent and salient specific to understanding the nature of texts exclusively in social online spaces. For lack of a better term, the concept of product refers to the purpose or form a text takes in social online spaces. Previous literature about collaborative composition largely foregrounded (and assumed) a final, published text that usually took the form of printed material. However, online texts are not only intangible, they are often only relatively ever finished; as long as a text box exists at the bottom, it can be edited and added to in ways that may change its nature. All nine subjects commented on this fact. When coupled with websites’ design choice of displaying new information at the top or bottom of a screen (or archived on a different page), this fact becomes even more important in analyzing what can be collaborated with, and when.

The issue of temporality and newness is innately related to design considerations of most social online websites. Many sites feature content in reverse chronological order, meaning that new texts appear at the top and “older” texts are moved to the bottom of the screen or are archived on other pages. These minimal hindrances to

75 Due to obvious overlap of subject matter, I am also including behaviors within this section that relate to keeping content current; though separate within the above table, due to space constraints, they can be considered as closely related here.
interacting with them may promote less interaction and potential collaboration. This exact observation was noted in all nine of the interviews and all nine of the online texts, where specific threads rarely had a shelf life of more than a day to be interacted with, and then were left to grow fallow. While this may not necessarily be a new issue—after all, new newspapers, magazines, and books likewise receive more readers and commentary than old editions—the fact that texts’ lifespans are accelerating due to the user interfaces of popular websites is something that is not only readily apparent through observation of online writing, it is also a self-conscious note brought up in all of the interviews, including comments such as CCC student Ronald’s that Facebook “should be more of a...current events kind of thing.”

![Facebook Wall demonstrating temporal behaviors](image)

**Figure 8.8: Facebook Wall demonstrating temporal behaviors**

To view how time—and more appropriately, newness—may affect the nature of writing and interaction, we need to look at the big and small pictures of texts in social online spaces. On Facebook this can be done by first analyzing a user’s profile, which can be seen in Figure 8.8, above, where I reproduce Marina’s profile from November 2010. Facebook’s user interface is organized in reverse-chronological order, which
means that users encounter (and potentially first interact with) newer items at the top of the screen while older items are displayed at the bottom of the screen. Eventually as new items populate a user’s profile, older items are archived and only accessible by clicking links to “View older posts.” Figure 8.8 represents what we would have seen had we visited Marina’s profile in November 2010. Following Kress’s (2003) reading path, a typical user would read this profile from left to right and top to bottom. Doing so here would only move us through four posts made on Marina’s Wall, three by her and one by another person. Her profile, though, contains hundreds of posts beneath this one. Beyond merely scrolling down to views these older posts, we may have to click hyperlinks to take us back to previous conversations. Though these actions may not seem particularly burdensome, they may be extraneous to casual users who often check into the site to view others’ activity with only minutes, or seconds, to devote to each activity. As a result, older texts are far less likely to be interacted with and potentially collaborated with once they are moved to the bottom of a page.

*Figure 8.9: Facebook conversation displaying temporal behaviors*

This latter point—amount of time devoted to any particular interaction—is the focus of Figure 8.9, which is a screen shot of a particular conversation that Marina posted on another user’s Wall. Marina asks the other user a series of questions beginning at 1:43 pm. The timestamp accompanying the text is fairly standard on nearly any online written text.
Here it shows how Marina received a response within three minutes. Though another user enters the conversation just a few minutes later, the conversation grows silent after only 18 minutes. This quick timeframe appeared typical in observations of other subjects as well on Facebook. Marina received her response, but the following conversation provided some information while leaving new questions open and stating that answers would not be had until the users visited an office or website on campus. The fact that Marina received a direct response to her question, followed by some complicating information from a third user essentially complicates her simple questions by adding more information and a task to be completed later. It could be assumed that all, or some, of the users involved in this conversation will complete this task away from Facebook.

Judging by just the text of the above scenario alone, though, this conversation is unlikely to be taken up again in the future as the opening was completed, and new information was brought forth. Awareness of newness was an important behavior brought up by all of the subjects in this study. They were all incredibly savvy about knowing when a post should be published to get the most responses and how long they should expect it to be interacted with before it goes dead. Though all nine reported that they would have no problem interacted with a months’ or even year old text, their online texts nonetheless displayed behaviors that indicated that they were more attentive to, and more active with, current texts. In no instances did I observe one of the nine subjects interact with a text that was more than a day old; they only write new text in response to other new texts, which may mean that potential collaborative activities have a very short window of opportunity to be interacted with. Once that window is closed, collaboration is still possible, but much less probable.

8.8 PRIVACY

Like attention to temporality, subjects unanimously brought up privacy-related behaviors as a feature of online texts that determine whether or not they will interact or collaborate with others. All nine reported adjusting privacy settings so that only particular information is shown to the public. Also, all nine subjects supposedly gave me full access to their online content. However, they very easily could have blocked access to particular information without my knowledge. I bring this up only to highlight that privacy settings
are a behavior not easily observed by outsiders (or by prior traditional analyses); they often require advance knowledge of the user’s activity beyond what is publically viewable. Despite not directly observing privacy-setting behaviors, their presence was very salient for subjects within the interviews, and ultimately affected how they view, produce, and circulate texts with one another in social online spaces.

Judging by news reports and anecdotes about sites like Facebook, privacy is a major concern for users who chose to use the site. In fact, the issue of privacy was brought up in every interview in a serious, if not grave, tone. Typically, the users I spoke with mentioned privacy as a way of keeping particular information that they may find embarrassing or incriminating from particular people. Several interviewees mentioned putting up privacy guards against family members and employers as a way of expressing themselves away from potentially judgmental gazes. Subjects also referenced how they viewed privacy as different in different media, as Marina did in comparing blogs to Facebook:

To me, a blog is more about venting things. It’s kind of a way to go through a day-to-day process, like whatever you’re thinking, feeling, whatever you want to talk about, you can just write it out in any way because with a blog, you can either make it private, you know, you don’t have to tell people about it. No one has to know that it’s there. And so you can say anything…whereas Facebook is so, it’s so social that anything you put on there, anyone can instantly see. It’s drawing attention to it. It’s sort of an attention-grabbing thing whereas a blog, I feel, is more a way to just express yourself.

What is interesting about Marina’s dichotomy of privacy on these two sites is how she ties them to the traditional notion of purpose. For her, blogs can be considered more private because they serve the purpose of self-expression. It seems to her that blogs cannot only be held more privately, they almost seem to have a right to privacy in ways that “attention-grabbing” posts of Facebook do not. Because of this, who can be seen as a potential collaborator on her texts is closely related to who has access to her texts in the first place. Here, it is clear that she views Facebook as inherently more collaborative.
because more people can view it and interact with the more publicly expressed texts there.

Several interviewees nuanced this view by demonstrating potential changes to how they view privacy as more and more of their interactions take place online. For users like CCC student Ronald, the issue of privacy is not necessarily either/or. He said, “probably like three or four years ago I just said, ‘You know what? It’s not even worth it. Like, put your information down.’ It’s not like I’m putting my phone number out there [or] my social security number. I mean, it’s just my name…and that’s usually it.” Whether others want to consider such a view naïve or not is up for future discussion. Users like Ernest, though—who is some ten years younger than Ronald—not only agree with this cavalier approach to privacy, they also believe that change is just a natural development of living more of our lives online. In his interview, Ernest elaborated:

I think more than anything though, the thing that I like, that interests me most about the whole Facebook thing is the, the transition from there’s like a sort of nakedness to it. [Facebook] has all this access to all this information and I can’t help wondering if there’s a difference between like if that’s just the next transition, like a lot of people are afraid of their information privacy but maybe that’s just a wall that hasn’t broken down which is that we have to be willing to like, just say like okay, I’m going to give access to this part of my information. Like, it’s like wearing, like you know the phase when you’re very young and you like, you’re very afraid to like take off clothing, things like that and then like there’s like a sort of, that social anxiety sort of wanes as you get older. Like it’s the same thing as privacy, like information privacy [has] to wane as we get more involved in this Internet, you know, lifestyle.

Ernest, referring to his online activity as a “lifestyle,” indicates the freedom he apparently feels in putting whatever information he chooses to post or not online. Though Facebook, in particular, has increased users’ ability to make information private on their website, users that I spoke to seem to think the right to privacy has less to do with clicking Internet settings than being smart about what they publish in the first place. Though there may be some students who believe that they have a right to privacy when interacting online, all of
the students I interviewed acknowledged opening themselves up to public scrutiny as soon as they friended other users. This, in turn, has implications for how they view openness to collaboration. All nine reported that if their text is available online, it is fair game to be interacted with. As a result, whether self-conscious chosen or not, behaviors related to privacy may have a direct effect on who or what can be seen as potentially collaborative in nature in ways that were invisible or overlooked in previous literature and analyses.

8.9 OPEN-ENDED NATURE OF TEXTS

Though no subjects used the term “open-ended” to describe their online writing, this exact concept could be seen in every online text I observed for the study. Whether by turning in a paper or producing a book, established behaviors associated with the creation of a text have a degree of finality attached to them through material considerations and restrictions. These behaviors certainly still exist, but online writing puts publishing not only at a different scale, it also makes it instantaneous. As a result, student-users may see online texts as somehow inherently incomplete, or not as worthy of further consideration, compared to traditionally published texts. This may lead to some texts being interacted with less frequently, or may act as a subtle cue that users are no longer interested in pursuing the ideas contained within.

This latter instance may be apparent in Figure 8.10, below, which shows a sample post from HU student and Facebook user Rob. Though he has published this piece on his profile, the lack of responses after a period of time indicates that its potential for being interacted with further is all but gone. Rob boasts his skills for a Tetris game by adding the text “won 17 games in a row- still yet to lose” with no further commentary. One user, “F,” can be seen to have “Liked” it, but no further interaction was captured. Though this particular post failed to garner initial excitement, it does contain several affordances that may open it up (however unlikely) to future interaction in order to make it a more highly collaborative and valuable text. To start, this post—and others on most

76 The only exception was Ann’s activity on NPR, where the site shuts off the ability to comment after one week. All of the posts are archived and still public, but after one week no new comments can be entered.
websites—is permanently archived and searchable, even years after its production. Likewise, the post contains the ubiquitous open textbox underneath it, inviting users to “Write a comment…” Such an explicit invitation opens up any text to future interaction, as does the ability to click on the blue hyperlinked “Like” or “Comment” commands that will not only extend the text, but also alert the author that another user has interacted with his previous texts. All of these affordances give rise to potential future interaction, even after a text is published and considered “done” in a traditional sense. Therefore, even though this post by Rob cannot yet be considered very collaborative, the fact that it can perpetually be found and interacted with in the future at least retains the possibility that future interaction and co-construction of knowledge is possible. Even perceived finality (seen here) is not absolute finality as it may have been in prior conceptions of text and publishing. The consequence is that users, such as Rob, may produce innocuous (or even vapid) content that may be taken up and interacted with at a later time. As a result, collaboration can be seen over a long period of time within social online spaces, especially when compounded with behaviors associated with archiving brought up earlier.

![Facebook post](Image)

**Figure 8.10: Facebook post**

Quantitatively, interview subjects talked more about how they close a conversation than about how they keep them open. This default disposition toward finality over a text may be a shadow of previous print-based views of texts. It may also, however, simply be a practical disposition toward the tremendous volume of text that is composed and published each day in social online spaces. Though nearly all posts are still open for future conversation, as demonstrated above, student-users report being very self-conscious about when, how, and why they would let a previous published text go fallow.
For instance, CCC student Marina states that she gives up on Facebook threads when others become “childish or angry.” At that point she stops contributing because it’s “pointless to argue anymore because they’ve set their mind and...you can’t change that in any way.” Also on Facebook, HU student Rob stops “responding if I feel like I personally can’t add anything more,” while CCC student Ronald knows conversations are done when he can no longer remember them. To him, “if I don’t remember about it, then I don’t think it’s really worth it...then I just let it go.” No matter the reason, student-users appeared incredibly self-conscious about when they would stop interacting with another’s text, whether they were committed to increasing the interactions and constructing new knowledge or realizing that nothing new could be created. This attention to the lifespan of a text, though not necessarily new, is undoubtedly important to the perpetual interactions afforded in social online spaces. Online texts may be undervalued by student-users because of their lack of finality, even if that open-endedness is the nature of online texts that opens them up to collaborative activity. Because of this, finality and open-endedness is a perceived phenomenon influencing student-users’ writing behaviors even though the nature of online texts all but makes finality impossible.

8.10 SUMMARY OF TEXTUALITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS

Part of what makes a study like mine necessary is that what gets defined as a “text” worthy of study is a continually evolving debate. Whether or not a Facebook post, for example, is a text unto itself is one aspect of that. Others include issues of scale (as in, is a text just one post? one conversation? an entire profile?) and specific behaviors. The above ten behaviors are important to consider because of how they affect how student-users think about and work with text. They may look for things (e.g. where a comment box is on a website) in social online spaces that currently don’t factor into traditional print texts. However, they may express themselves (e.g. identity maintenance and separation of public/private personas) that have real ramifications for how their work is taken seriously, shared, or owned.

As a result, as we continue to reevaluate what we mean by (collaborative) writing in traditionally academic and print contexts, we as instructors and researchers must remain cognizant that new paradigms of process are affecting the product. While this
study never makes the claim that all online writing is created equal (either across social online spaces or in comparison to academic writing), it obviously does make the case for it being an expanded iteration of things that we already value in our academic work. Textuality is an example of this in that behaviors related to the concept of ownership address possession of texts that are increasingly, and inherently, co-owned. Despite this, the myth of the lone genius persists as individuals operate from their personal profile and feel propriety for the content they maintain there. Likewise, the concept of responsibility, addressing attribution and identity, works with these feelings of ownership in how student-users see themselves as writers, co-authors, and potential scholars. These sets of behaviors are all related closely to writing processes that are the heart of composition studies. The final set of behaviors, related to the concept of products, is an ideal place to leave my analysis of online writing because it is here where the very existence of a finished product is called into question.

Although I was able to interview students in a specific time and space, and capture their online writing at a distinct moment in time, their archived writing continues to be open for manipulation. Such openness to change and fluidity ensures that any interrogation of online writing behaviors will be a recursive one, asking researchers to return back to the categories of text production and user interaction that preceded this chapter. In the following chapters I demonstrate how these three categories can be applied to a single piece of text, and conclude my study with a discussion of implications for a field of inquiry that, like online texts, has limitless open-ended questions ahead.
While the preceding three chapters have attempted to parse out analysis of data that ultimately identified no less than 48 distinct behaviors potentially related to collaborative composition, it could be claimed that in doing so, I’ve artificially partitioned off each set of behaviors as somehow uniquely different from one another. Nothing could be further from the truth. Though I identified each set of behaviors as a different chapter (and as a corresponding side to the Collaborative Triangle heuristic), they are interactive, recursive, and all related—in some form—to the potential to increase and maintain collaborative writing. In order to demonstrate this, this chapter presents a culmination of results and analysis that identifies the expanded behaviors revealed as a result of this study. These expanded behaviors are listed below in Table 9.1. While the preceding findings chapters could be seen as a deconstruction of the concept of collaborative composition, this chapter begins the work of re-constructing what it means to collaborate in social online spaces. The remainder of this chapter walks readers through how the expanded behaviors seen below may have been overlooked by previous studies, where they can be revealed as a result of the approach I undertook, and how their identification may inform future approaches to discussing and defining collaborative writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Concept</th>
<th>Expanded Behavior</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTHORSHIP</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Turn-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Citing personal experience as evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Amount of total writing/responses</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>Self-expression vs. conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>Sense of finality to a conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td>Feeling of affinity/ Sense of belonging</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playfulness and joking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social presence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ignoring others and others’ comments
Actively seeking out more followers or “friends”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTUALITY</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implicit claim of ownership</td>
<td>Implicit claim of responsibility</td>
<td>Valuing newness and temporality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archiving of material</td>
<td>Maintenance of identity</td>
<td>Keeping personal content current</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sharing material</td>
<td>Defriending other users</td>
<td>Privacy settings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Open-ended nature of conversations</td>
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</table>

Table 9.1: Collaborative Triangle categories, concepts, and expanded behaviors

Among the 48 total behaviors observed as part of this study, the 20 listed above were noted as frequent and important expanded behaviors indicative of potential collaborative activity. While no text analyzed as part of this study observed all 20 in any given exchange, presence of several of them may indicate a potentially collaborative situation that could help to redefine what collaborative writing is seen as in social online spaces. As illustrated in the section below, these behaviors may have been missed in previous traditional analyses without the aid of this study’s proposed heuristic.

9.1 LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS ANALYSES AND SAMPLE TEXT ANALYSIS

As this study has argued, previous approaches to collaborative composition may inadvertently limit our discussions and definitions of collaborative writing by only reinforcing already established behaviors seen as indicative of collaborative composition. To illustrate this, I step through three established approaches to the study of collaborative composition in order to demonstrate their affordances and limitations⁷⁷. These three approaches—(1) definition analysis of collaborative composition, (2) Toulmin analysis of argumentation, and (3) rhetorical analysis of persuasion—are applied to a sample piece of

⁷⁷ As noted earlier: presenting these analyses as “traditional” is not meant to convey their uselessness, or to present them as straw men to my argument. Instead, I have identified three of what I consider the most common approaches to textual analysis carried out in undergraduate writing courses. All nine of my subjects reported performing analyses such as these in their writing courses, so I present them here simply as a way of modeling the types of behaviors already present in common classrooms.
text in the same way that they might be if studied in a writing classroom. Following these demonstrations, I apply my CMDA-informed approach to the same sample text, and highlight ways in which it has been used alongside my Collaborative Triangle to reveal potential collaborative behaviors that were overlooked in these previous analyses.

Consider, then, the sample piece of online writing reproduced here in Figure 9.1, below. The text is an excerpt from Ernest’s Facebook Wall, and represents a conversation between him and three other student-users in response to a hyperlinked news story that Ernest posted to his Wall. If such a piece of text were to be analyzed in an academic setting, the first consideration might pertain to scale: the academic debate of what is relevant to this piece of data versus what is not could significantly impact how we analyze it. For example, this conversation represents only one piece of many populating Ernest’s Facebook profile. His personal information (including profile photo and “About Me” information) as well as the other posts that he and other users have made beside this text are divorced from this particular conversation, even though their influence may have been important to the text’s evolution. I have likewise excerpted the text seen here since the original post is very long and contains many behaviors that repeat the ones shown here. Because of all of these considerations, we are immediately confronted with a “micro” (or small) view of the text if and when we divorce it from the site’s corresponding “macro” (or larger) context. The implication may be that future analyses of online writing need to adhere to similar scales of analysis. In this case, my textual analysis consists of looking at one conversation thread regardless of the contextual material that I am choosing to overlook.
Returning to Deborah Bosley’s definition of collaboration cited elsewhere in this dissertation—“two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document”—we can see that at face value this Wall conversation appears to be collaborative in nature: there are no less than three participants, their individual contributions have co-constructed this one piece of text, and the fact that they have not deleted their posts, and link their words to their individual profiles (via profile photos and hyperlinked names), all seems to point to the presence of a collaborative text. However, there are assumptions underlying Bosley’s definition to which these student-users may not be held. Primarily, Bosley’s end product of a “written document” can be presumed to be entered into with an understanding by the authors that their goal is producing a single document. The student-users in the Wall conversation, however, may have seen their contribution as much more individualized than this. Likewise, Bosley’s “document” could be assumed to be represented as a finished product. Unlike the analog of a book, however, the above Wall conversation is not only virtual, it is also infinitely incomplete as the final open text box invites new users to “Write a comment…” This means that the text could change significantly should users decide to further alter it. In other words, this piece of text both potentially does and does not suit a widely established definition of collaboration.
Applying such an analysis may get student-users to think more deeply about their online writing, but it ultimately lacks a clear pay-off because it does not illuminate the text’s potential value in an academic context. Like many definitions of collaborative composition cited in the literature review, such analysis as the one outlined above comes down to an either/or decision that does little to advance students’ understanding of what makes a text collaborative in nature or how to replicate it elsewhere. It likewise overlooks key behaviors associated with collaborative writing.

Such behaviors are more visible in a second type of analysis, shown below in Figure 9.2. In addition to identifying a text’s nature (e.g. collaborative or of a specific genre), one of the common ways that compositionists often analyze a text’s value in writing classrooms is by analyzing it for argumentative structures, such as those espoused by the basic Toulmin analysis for argumentation. Though at heart a sophisticated approach to understanding argumentation, Stephen Toulmin’s approach to studying argument is often described in classrooms as consisting of three primary parts: a claim, evidence, and warrants. Applying such an analysis to our sample text yields the items circled in yellow in below.

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78 Where a claim forms the basis of an argument, evidence asserts the claims validity, and a warrant justifies the evidence’s proper relation to the claim. Such analysis is often used in writing classrooms to analyze sound arguments vis-à-vis potentially uninformed opinions.
Stepping through the analysis above, the upper-most circle reveals student-user “E”’s attempt at providing evidence and a warrant to correct Ernest’s apparent earlier claim. In doing so, “E” also admits to being “misleading,” which could be seen as further warranting his claim. The second and third circles show Ernest offering another warrant to his earlier claim, and a reassertion of this claim in regard to a life form’s use of arsenic to build cells, respectively. These arguments are in direct response to “E” and a continuation (or correction) to his earlier claims. He is elaborating on his initial remarks because of “E”’s intervention. In the bottom yellow circle, we see “E” making a claim that said life form is extraterrestrial in nature, in response to Ernest.

Though out of order, this text does seem to contain the basic components of an argument co-constructed by Ernest and “E”. However, most writing instructors would probably not consider this a particularly “good,” or convincing, argument due to its haphazard organization and mix of scientific and unsubstantiated personal evidence. In order to analyze the persuasiveness of this text (or how “good” it actually is), we would more than likely perform a basic rhetorical analysis of identifying the interplay of author, audience, and purpose/text (as well as a description of relevant appeals at play), which is often an introductory assignment in writing classrooms.
Figure 9.3: Facebook text analyzed for persuasion

Figure 9.3 demonstrates the results of such a rhetorical analysis. The figure displays rhetorical components, circled in blue, that can be identified through application of the traditional rhetorical triangle and search for the classic appeals. Here we could argue that Ernest, circled in the upper-left hand corner, is the main author of this text while users such as “R,” circled directly below, represent an audience. After all, it was Ernest who initially posted the prompt on his Wall, and he is ultimately in control of what posts he deletes or keeps. Immediately, however, we see the fallacy of this type of analysis since “R” could equally be seen as a co-author. Likewise, there may be dozens, if not hundreds, of other users (presumably identified as audience members) who saw this conversation, read it, but decided not to post anything. Meanwhile the text itself began presumably with only the overt purpose of Ernest’s desire to talk about this particular topic with others. Because of this open-ended purpose, there are no defining parameters to know when the text is finished. Should the text continue to be interacted with over time, the purpose of the text may shift from this initial conversation to something completely different. In terms of appeals, it could be sympathetically argued that Ernest’s

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79 While rhetorical analyses often go deeper than identifying these six basic structure (i.e. author/audience/purpose and ethos/pathos/logos), they are still the likely starting point for students studying composition and rhetoric for the first time in an academic setting.
The top post is an appeal to *ethos* as he positions himself alongside the authority of the initial hyperlink. Likewise, the colloquial agreement of “totes” (as in, totally) in the bottom circle could be construed as an appeal to *pathos* for its friendly demeanor and potential attempt at humor. In other words, elements of classic rhetoric are undoubtedly present in an analysis of this piece of text, but such an analysis seems to yield more questions than answers, and fails to identify behaviors that are unique to online spaces that may have no direct bridge to previous, traditional language and analyses.

These types of behaviors are easily identifiable, however. The above three analyses—of definition, argumentation, and persuasion—represent established (traditional) approaches to studying texts in undergraduate writing classrooms. As has been demonstrated, they yield a very rich understanding of texts and the writing processes that go into composing them. However, such analyses are implicitly grounded in previous understandings of print-based documents and rhetorical situations of static entities (e.g. the persisting belief in a lone genius as author.) As a result, their application only gives us a partial story of any given contemporary text. Specifically, such analyses largely overlook the affordances of online media that may affect a user’s writing. Such affordances may not only be components of their writing contexts, they may also be the reason student-users return to the spaces again and again to write and interact in increasing numbers. Figure 9.4, below, highlights some of the affordances, circled in red, of a social online space (in this case *Facebook*) that may alter our views on collaborative composition and online writing.
Among the many factors unique to online writing that were brought up in my study’s interviews and online texts, several are present within Figure 9.4, and they may have a direct effect on how student-users approach online writing and how (or if) we can consider such a text as highly valuable in terms of collaborative potential. In looking at this piece of text through the lens of authorship, the first consideration is represented by the upper-most horizontal red circle, and would not be readily apparent through any other type of analysis: this interaction takes place on Ernest’s Wall. This behavior acts as a subtle form of authority, essentially inviting others into his space to share his conversation. Likewise, the next circle over the upper-left-hand profile photos demonstrates how Ernest may be sharing power by allowing users to take turns in equal time. Though this turn-taking later becomes more irregular, at least here—toward the beginning of the text—it could be seen as an open invitation to interact. The small circles around “it’s” and “u” shows how two of the users pass in and out of using proper contractions and Internet-style abbreviations. While nothing conclusive can be said about these behaviors, an argument could be made that they relate to issues of authority or comfort with other users, which may lead to more collaborative activity. Finally we have E’s inclusion of personal evidence in the third post here that was noted in our earlier
Toulmin argument analysis. By citing evidence to advance a claim, he is advancing the conversation in a way that both invites response and co-construction of knowledge.

The give and take of Ernest and “E” midway down the text can clearly be seen as a form of negotiation between the two users, and so exhibits behaviors related to community. These users are already Facebook friends, and so part of a community sharing a sense of belonging, but they are also sharing competing information that seems to be advancing toward a more nuanced understanding of their given topic. Likewise, as already mentioned, the final use of the word “totes” (not circled here) could be seen as a kind of *pathos*-driven appeal to humor and playfulness. Here, it could likewise indicate a shared discourse between the users that only interview data or further observation could definitively reveal. The circled “Like” at the top of the page indicates an opportunity for the users to show a social presence even if they aren’t contributing more text to the conversation. Simply by “liking” a comment, a user can support a claim and let others know that he is an active member of the community, even if he is not interacting directly.

Finally, in terms of the nature of the text, or textuality, there are several things revealed in these red circles that could not be as readily revealed in other previously established analyses. Ernest’s name is circled to highlight that not only is he using his real name, but that it is also hyperlinked; clicking on it will take you directly to his profile, where a user can learn more about him. Whether he means this or not, such inclusion could be read as a sign of responsibility and attribution within a thread like this. I have also circled the timestamps within this conversation to highlight that not only is the conversation portrayed in chronological order (meaning that the newest texts occur at the bottom so that users must scroll down to get caught up), there is also a favoring of newness. Note here how these selected posts all occur within two hours of each other. Later posts may be seen as old news by the time they are revisited. Finally, the long horizontal circle at the bottom reveals an open-endedness to this conversation that previous analyses could not have foreseen. As long as there is an open textbox at the end of conversations like this, they may be added to and edited in ways that could completely change previous analyses. Because of this, we can really only take snapshots of the nature of texts like these; given another week or two, they may have changed drastically or been deleted altogether.
Taken together, these three analyses (the three categories of the Collaborative Triangle analysis) reveal a nuanced view of online writing and interaction. By analyzing data related to the three categories of the heuristic in a systematic manner, I have attempted to not only identify hitherto overlooked behaviors, but to also expand on their traditional analogs with a consistent vocabulary. Applying the heuristic to a text is not meant to be definitive. For example, whether “Liking” a post is the result of thinking about community or textuality is somewhat beside the point. The goal of using the heuristic is to demonstrate that if a user is looking at her text through the lens of community she will think about how it allows users to interact, whereas if she is looking at it through textuality she will see the nature of online texts that may goad authors on to write and interact more even though they’re not using alphanumeric text. In either case, this student will think more thoroughly about her online writing in ways that may not have been easily captured in previous analyses and approaches. In applying the Collaborative Triangle, we are adding another lens through which to view writing and literacy skills that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. By widening our view, we—as instructors—may be able to see more value in online writing that we can then use to validate student-users’ perceptions of their own writing, as well as use those extracurricular literacy skills to further academic pursuits. In other words, we can help students see what they’re doing when they write online, and how they can transfer those behaviors to other (academic) contexts.

9.2 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The above section foregrounds textual analysis that takes place within primary texts (in the above case, with a Facebook conversation.) However, the ways in which student-users approach their texts (i.e. dispositions) are equally important in discussing and defining what is potentially collaborative in nature and valuable in online writing. In the classroom, such approaches may be interrogated through discussion, reflection, or peer-based revision processes. They could likewise be revealed through think-aloud processes where students walk themselves (or others) through their online activity while providing a meta-narrative of their choices and actions. These processes were not conducted as part of this study (and are not very likely in most undergraduate writing
classrooms) but their basic findings could be revealed through direct questioning, which took the form of interviews in this study. So as to contextualize the above section on textual analysis, I briefly invite readers to consider how some of the 20 expanded behaviors that started this chapter were revealed through discourse analysis of interview data. Like that earlier text analysis, these excerpts are presented in order to give a “macro” view of student dispositions, not to walk readers through word by word analysis.

Regardless if subjects saw their online writing as ultimately similar to or different from academic writing, all nine subjects referenced similar components of writing that they saw as setting online writing apart from academic writing. They unanimously noted modes of production related to authorship that related to superficial or surface-level concerns about style and mechanics. These issues included: lack of structure and organization; adherence to grammar, spelling, and style conventions; overall (in)formality, including the use of abbreviations and swear words; use of evidence vis-à-vis opinion to engage others, and; a lack of proofreading, editing, and revising. These components were brought up in eight of the nine interviews, and are demonstrated in the following sampling of interview responses concerning the perceived similarities/differences between online and academic writing as they relate to authorship issues:

Marina: For me [online writing is] similar [to academic writing] because I like to think that I have an interesting writing style where I put all of my personality into it, whether it’s for school or work or just my own writing...I’m one of those people that I always use proper grammar and proper sentence structure, everything, and so even

80 As previously discussed, though interviews preceded the analysis of online texts in my study, I present them second here in order to avoid losing site of their role in identifying expanded behaviors in the classroom. The possible limitations of not having access to interview data is discussed further in the following chapter.

81 James was the only interview subject who did not comment on these authorship issues. However, given that his transcript was cut off at the mid-way point means that he could have mentioned it earlier in the interview and it was merely not captured in the final data collection.
when I'm you know, venting or expressing myself in any way, I still do it in a still very organized, like systematic kind of way.

Octavia: I am actually formal and I watch my mouth when I’m writing in class *(chuckles)*...with regular blogs, every other word is a swear word...and I’m going off on tangents *(chuckles)* and I’m quoting, and I’m finding a way to work a million different quotes in there...[a blog is not “formal” because it lacks] the MLA format[ting] that I was taught.

Catherine: Well a lot of times if I’m in a hurry and I don’t feel like researching something, on a blog I could just, you know, state my opinions and it might not necessarily have to back it up right away. But if I’m like writing and academic paper I have to have that stuff then to back myself up. But if it’s a blog, you know, whatever... I wouldn’t say [online writing is] better or worse, but it’s different. It’s more creative than something I would write for school, where if I would write for school, it’s more of a concrete thing. I, I’d go for something that’s easy to grasp where as if I’m writing on line, I go for an abstract. I go very metaphorical in my responses and just hope the Internet understands what I’m saying. If they don’t, they’re strangers, so it doesn’t matter.

Ronald: I try and, I just try and use proper grammar when I write [online]. And I’ll even, you know, if I do a comment on *Facebook* I mean, I don’t just blurt something out. I mean I’ll edit it. I’ll go, I’ll go back and I’ll think about it for a minute. You know even if it’s only two or three sentences... the writing that I do maybe for a class or something is usually a lot more involved. You’ve got, you know, an actual structure going on with what, you know what you’re trying to convey...so you’ve got this whole like process or flow to a paper or a work and online, it’s not really like that. It’s just more little bits of information that are going in.
In each of these interview responses we can see that the subjects identified superficial, rule-based reasons for reporting whether or not they saw their online writing as similar or not to academic writing. All of these surface-level behaviors could be easily revealed through the traditional analyses sampled earlier this chapter. Interestingly, these behaviors were used to both justify ways online writing was similar to academic writing (e.g. Marina and Ronald) as well as different (e.g. Octavia and Catherine.) These dispositions were later confirmed and enacted in the behaviors of their online writing. Subjects also commented on the literacy skills that they thought they were enacting when writing online. In response to the same question referenced above (How is online writing similar to or different from academic writing?) at least one subject referenced specific skills that he identified as valuable and that appear related to issues I identified within the community category of the Collaborative Triangle:

Ernest: I think that like maybe just the, the logical nature of Internet usage, it’s like sort of giving me a better ability to [prove arguments systematically]. But also, there’s so much information accessibility. Like I could spend like hours and hours and hours in the library and I might learn more in like 20 minutes on the Internet just because I can go from page to page in like pretty fast. So I have a much better ability to reference and cite sources and back up my ideas and opinions than people I know who don’t spend much time on the Internet...it’s improved my ability to debate topics...

In referencing the ability to lay out an argument using researched evidence, and a disposition toward writing passionately, Ernest implicitly argues for the value of his online writing through my category of community. Interestingly, though Ernest mentions that he researches his comments and organizes them as would be asked of him in academic settings, he believes that he has honed this craft online, and that these skills are what set him apart from most other online writers. An argumentative analysis could reveal Ernest’s argumentative behaviors, but his insistence on using personal evidence and shared hyperlinks in most of his posts invites users to write and interact with him in ways that a traditional Toulmin analysis may not reveal. The Collaborative Triangle
allows researchers to view this by focusing on issues related specifically to interaction and affordances of online texts.

These issues, which are specific to online writing, take place in the expanded behaviors presented at the beginning of this chapter. Their existence in an online text (or interview) is indicative not only of how student-users see their writing as potentially collaborative, but also as valuable. The majority of the subjects (six of the nine) saw their online writing as similar to academic writing, mostly because of the superficial components listed above. However, several also mentioned that they saw this similarity because of the interaction with other users that they saw as potentially collaborative in nature, mainly because they believed that it was capable of co-constructing knowledge and larger texts. When pushed to elaborate why, or how, they saw their online activities as co-constructing knowledge, subjects gave answers regarding textuality, or the nature of the texts they were producing and interacting with. Subjects gave similar responses to these:

Frank: I definitely feel like [his online writing is] a collection [of multiple voices] because even when I’m not posting, like I post my own content, and then I re-blog content I find on other Tumblr sites but I will frequently also find content on other sites outside of Tumblr and bring that into my, into my blog…So it’s sort of like just, I guess, an amalgamation of everything that I find interesting and that I find on the Internet…so it’s definitely multiple voices.

Rob: [Asked if he or others are more responsible for his Facebook Wall content] Yeah, it’s more of the other people who have interacted with it…Like I mean I can, I think that I put up a lot of links and status updates, you know every bit as much as, like, other people put comments on it, but really, the comments and Wall posts on mine speak just as much as anything I could ever put up.

Ann: It becomes one thing. [when asked if a news article is separate from the user-generated comments that follow it] It starts out separate but it, it certainly becomes one big interesting ball of awesome at the end because it’s like okay, well here’s, it’s like a
writing prompt. You threw it out there and everyone goes, oh, well
this is what so-and-so thinks and then all that debate is so, it’s, a lot
of times it’s more relevant than the article is because it’s what real
people actually think about something…

These responses, like the other interview responses featured in the preceding
findings chapters, demonstrate changing dispositions to online writing and what is
ultimately considered “text” in digital mediums. In even a cursory analysis of their
content, we can see how student-users value text production and interaction in social
online spaces both because they fit in with traditional views of writing (e.g. using formal
structures to communicate effectively) and expand these views (e.g. the desire to return
again and again to a website in order to interact.) Ann’s view of a “big interesting ball of
awesome” demonstrates a cognizance of these expanded views and the richness of
Internet interaction. She points to student-users’ evolving approaches to writing and
interacting in spaces where previous established views of authoring and creating texts
with overt purposes may no longer tell the complete story. In the following chapter, I
discuss how we—as writing instructors and researchers—can help students tell this story
beyond this initial study.
CHAPTER TEN
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study began as an exploration of how students perceived online writing in relation to academic writing (Lenhart, et al., 2008). In exploring this perception, this study has argued that: (1) Student-users are writing and interacting in ways that reflect prior academic approaches to writing and collaboration, (2) Student-users are writing and interacting in ways that expand prior academic approaches to writing and collaboration, and (3) By systematically defining and discussing these expanded literacy skills with their students, compositionists can bridge perception gaps between extracurricular and academic writing, and discuss certain types of online writing as collaborative in nature and worthy of serious examination in formal, academic contexts. By returning to each of these three threads, I conclude by addressing the stakes in studying online writing’s relationship to writing theory and classroom practice. In doing so, my aim is to discuss the potential impact that a study like this may have on the discipline of composition and rhetoric, as well as on fields as far reaching as education, business, and computer science.

To understand how student-users are writing and interacting in ways that reflect previous approaches to collaborative composition, I have argued that we need to revisit what we have discussed as indicative of collaboration in our scholarship and practice. While student-users seem to be collaborating in social online spaces in how they write and interact with one another in ways that co-construct mutual experiences (or knowledge), previous definitions of collaboration carry many assumptions that may prevent the term from being applied to these contemporary exchanges. Among these assumptions, I have highlighted how, in particular, a finished (i.e. published) final text has been at the heart of many previous discussions and definitions. However, the open-ended nature of online writing inherently means that texts are rarely finalized, and are instead in a perpetual state of writing-in-progress. Because of this, compositionists should increasingly be examining the behaviors that go into this progress, or process, instead of
analyzing only finished texts. As part of these processes, student-users often enact behaviors that are components of collaborative activity (e.g., taking responsibility for a text), but do so in often implicit and nuanced ways in social online spaces that may be overlooked when researchers only focus their analysis on finished products.

Some of these potentially undetected implicit behaviors are articulated in students’ approaches to writing and interacting, or what I’ve referred to as dispositions throughout this study. These ways of thinking about, and approaching, online interaction are often implicitly collaborative in nature (if not in definition) because they are geared toward promoting further interaction and writing from others. In all nine interviews conducted for this study, subjects explained ways in which they encouraged others to write back to them. No one sought fewer comments or fewer friends; instead, they unanimously sought out more interaction and more chances to share experiences. At the heart of these desires is an interest in co-constructing (textual) experiences that mirror the best motivations and outcomes of collaborative work in the classroom. Because of this, even when collaborative behaviors are not visibly present in online texts, compositionists may need to explore how students are approaching their online writing for signs that are more like collaborative writing than they are solitary, individual efforts.

In addition to this, student-users also seemed to expand some of our prior approaches to discussing and defining collaborative composition by introducing new behaviors that are uniquely afforded by social technology. As previously stated, James Porter argues for “an exchange of value that serves as the motivation for the production and circulation of rhetorical objects” (2010, p. 174). Porter’s economic framing of the term “value” mirrors this study’s repeated use of the word “potential” to describe the open-ended and always possibly collaborative nature of writing and interacting on Web 2.0 websites. Student-users are not simply mirroring approaches to writing that we could deem as collaborative, they are also enacting behaviors that invite new forms of writing and interaction that were not addressed in previous scholarly discussions on the subject. These behaviors—such as Ernest’s weekly updating of his profile photo in the hopes that other users will revisit in order to interact with him more—promote and facilitate potentially collaborative activity that by no means guarantees its ultimate existence, but provides fertile land should it begin to blossom. Because of this, being more cognizant of
the ways in which student-users make use of the affordances of websites in order to promote writing and interaction increases compositionists’ ability to perceive bridges between online and academic writing.

The key to understanding these moments of reflection and expansion lies not necessarily in definition, but in systematic application of an approach to studying online writing. I’ve done so by creating and applying the Collaborative Triangle heuristic, which is formed by placing the concepts of authorship, community, and textuality into conversation. While these terms will be discussed in more detail in the theoretical implications section to follow, for now I ask readers to merely consider what effect a systematic approach to something as seemingly chaotic (and pedestrian) as writing and interacting on a site like Facebook may have on our perception of online writing vis-à-vis academic writing. One of the primary counterarguments I’ve received as I’ve discussed this research at conferences and with colleagues is that the content of online writing is often perceived as trivial in nature: users only discuss crude or funny things, tweets convey little information in 140 characters or less, etc. Likewise, students in my courses have seen their writing as distinctly different than the formal claims and evidence that I call for in the classroom.

The problem with all of these scenarios is that until this study I’ve lacked a common language with these audiences to discuss the sophisticated approach that I believe exists beneath the superficial aspects of online writing. However, being able to consistently discuss writing habits imbued with authority (i.e. authorship) and using terms like community instead of “your group of friends,” for example, has allowed me to discuss these online behaviors in more convincing ways. More so, as others in our field take up the same language and approaches, we may be better able to identify nuances of online writing that have escaped our view merely because we couldn’t express what they were until we spoke a common language. In other words, we’ll be able to more easily collaborate. To accomplish that, I’ve argued for a movement from established language (i.e. terms that reflect traditional rhetorical principles) to expanded language (i.e. terms that are more conscious of the affordances of online media.) The result has been a consistent approach in this study that I believe can be replicated in classrooms and scholarship moving forward.
As we do so, we continue to confront the perceived binary of online writing and scholarly writing. However, I realize that doing so may perpetuate the very binary of extracurricular and academic writing I’m working against. In response, this study argues that we need not place these two “types” of writing into competition, but rather into conversation by making sure that they speak a common language. To do so, I have offered up a set of terms that I believe are analogous enough to the past (e.g. close to rhetorical terms used for millennia) to retain the focus on quality academic writing valued in composition, while also acknowledging the as-of-yet unacknowledged dispositions and behaviors that student-users see as valuable to their online experiences. The Collaborative Triangle has been put forth to bridge these sets of opposing sides (extracurricular/academic and online/offline) and explore their similarities more than their differences. While the implications of doing so are outlined in another set of false binaries below (theory and practice), the end result is a bridging conversation where both sides have equal amounts of agency and understanding that they may not have had before this study.

10.1 THEORETICAL DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The theoretical implications of the terms associated with the Collaborative Triangle are actually very practical in nature. Previous definitions of collaborative writing tended to be comprised of no less than three primary categories: details of text production, details of collaborative interaction, and details of a final product. These categories became the three points on the Collaborative Triangle because I could trust that if any text or behavior addressed part, or all, of these categories they could be considered at least potentially collaborative in nature. As a result, in creating and applying this heuristic, I hoped to first uncover ways in which online writing reflects definitions that should already be familiar to compositionists interested in collaboration. The potential problem with merely identifying moments of reflection in such traditional definitions (as exemplified throughout this study by Bosley’s “two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document”) is the presence of assumptions including intentionality (i.e. that the co-authors know they are working together and want...
to work together) and production (i.e. that a document is a *thing*, capable of being signed off on.) In other words, while such definitions are helpful as a starting point, these implicit assumptions may limit what can be seen as collaborative in online texts since many users in this study did not claim to see themselves as collaborating (despite the fact that they were enacting behaviors indicative of it.) To this degree, as I applied the heuristic in interviews and online texts, it became apparent that in order to fully understand the implications of online writing on collaborative composition, I needed to study not only moments of reflection, but also expansion.

In identifying no less than twenty “new” dispositions and behaviors that appeared related to collaborative activity, I was enacting this expansion by building new theory. The obvious concern in undertaking such an endeavor is that doing so may be more speculative than empirical. I can only imagine that future applications of the heuristic will encounter similar challenges, especially as more “new” behaviors are identified and discussed. To address this, researchers should keep two things in mind. The first, as will be discussed in more detail below, is that the Collaborative Triangle is based in classical rhetorical theory and no less than thirty years of scholarship on collaboration composition. It’s based in precedent, and in the prior understandings that reflect previously valued collaborative behaviors. Second is that the behaviors I’ve noted here as “expanded” are ones that were discussed by my subjects as important to their interaction(s) online and/or were quantitatively prevalent in their online texts\(^ {82}\). Though not necessarily based in precedent, these behaviors were based in direct empirical evidence. To this degree, the theoretical implications on future definitions seem to be that we need to expand our understandings as writers expand their practices. Within this study, for example, users seemed to be taking advantage of the affordances of online medias that traditional pen and paper writing could have never predicted. As a result, the only way to account for a changing understanding of collaborative composition will be to take into account ways in which student-users are enacting writing behaviors in service to potentially collaborative activity.

\(^{82}\) As previously discussed in the methods and findings chapters, I only highlighted expanded behaviors in this study that occurred in a majority (five or more, of the nine) of subjects’ online texts.
That being said, seeking out moments of where online writing reflects previous scholarship may be the best way to bridge potentially opposing approaches to valuing extracurricular (and online) writing in the classroom. For example, basic rhetorical analyses look for three categories in any situation or text—author, audience, and text—that mirror the three categories of many definitions of collaboration like the one mentioned above. As a result, the Collaborative Triangle heuristic was constructed as a way to bridge previous conversations about rhetoric and collaboration to contemporary ones by acknowledging where behaviors were reflected, but also realizing that previous assumptions would need to be confronted. In applying my heuristic to online writing, presence of any of these antecedent categories did not guarantee (or predict) collaboration. However, their presence did provide a starting point for exploring where potential new, or expanded, dispositions and behaviors may exist that could confront and/or complement our previous discussions and definitions.

These potential dispositions and behaviors were explored by examining the deconstructed components of the Collaborative Triangle for both moments of reflecting and expanding. Putting the three components into a single conversation results in a potential bridge that can connect our previous scholarship with evolving theory. Needless to say, however, the deconstructed components of the Collaborative Triangle are parts of a whole, and any attempt to highlight one overlooks the recursive implications of its effects on another. For example, in acknowledging the term “community’s” inherently problematic range as both describing a tangible thing (e.g. a community of practice) and a feeling (e.g. a sense of community), I’ve sought to explore both the dispositions and behaviors associated with student-users’ interactions with one another in online spaces. Doing so, however, asks the researcher (or practitioner if used in the classroom) to suspend one in favor of another. So, for instance, while an agent may feel a sense of community while involved in a community of practice, studying her behaviors highlights her actions (if even briefly) over her dispositions, or approaches. This highlighting increasingly asks the researcher to focus on one aspect (either the thinking or the doing) of community, while the components of authorship and textuality remain as abstract concepts until interrogated in kind. As each component is focused on, however, the others change accordingly, thus making the focused study necessary for a successful tool all but
impossible to crystallize. Going forward, researchers will need to be aware of such issues, especially as previous definitions inevitably come into conflict with evolving ones.

10.2 PEDAGOGICAL DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study, and the heuristic, on pedagogical conversations will play out on both small and large scales. Though this is not a teaching document, per se, this study has been conducted and presented with an eye toward classroom practice. As such, writing instructors could be considered its primary audience and those whose implications I had most in mind. That being said, I realize the limitations and implications of setting up a potentially problematic dichotomy of extracurricular and academic writing, especially as computers play a larger role in our classrooms and schools. As a result, I return to them here to further the conversation about who historically has had—and who, looking forward, should have—agency in the teaching of writing. In discussing such issues, I invite users to look forward to the future of education, which increasingly both relies on technology in the classroom, and also considers online and hybrid possibilities like the ones explored in the study.

The reason this study so self-consciously relies on approaches to studying online writing that reflect previous ones is that forcing a new conversation without proper contextualization risks not only ignorance, but also alienation. With this latter concern in mind, I have been careful throughout this study to avoid a potential polemic: an indictment against traditional approaches in favor of “new” ones, simply for the sake of staking a claim in uncharted territory. One of the reasons the Collaborative Triangle was founded in classical rhetoric and previous definitions of collaboration, in fact, was to avoid such a polemic and instead offer a linear path from past to present. While I believe I’ve done so, the potential problem of expanding our curricula to embrace (even in part) extracurricular texts and practices is a bit more challenging. There is a risk that in studying extracurricular texts and literacies, our teaching could be seen as falling into this polemic: enacting not only an indictment, but also maintaining an unhealthy dichotomy that years of research have already confronted. Cognizant that extracurricular texts and literacies are already being valued in the classroom, then, this study is offered to instructors as a way not to do something necessarily “new,” but more so to do something
that invites their students to share in what has historically been a top-down discussion.
The bridge I envision between acknowledging previous practices and valuing new ones is
built on a discussion of agency with our students that is more in line with student-
centered pedagogies already widely enacted in many of our classrooms.

As a result, the pedagogical implications of this study are best understood as an explicit approach to the sharing of power and understanding in the classroom. Whereas students may feel a sense of power in their extracurricular activities (perhaps because of a perceived lack of authority in online spaces), they may feel less empowered in our classrooms. There is historical precedent for such an anecdote despite many contemporary examples of student-centered pedagogy present in democratic classrooms or active learning-based curricula. These academic examples of expanding our teaching may be less evident (especially to students) in deciding what texts we discuss as quality writing, and what skills we value in our writing processes. This is important to keep in mind as instructors may currently discuss blogs or games, for example, in their classrooms as a way of valuing their students’ interests and activities. However, such cases may be seen as ways of motivating, or increasing engagement, that do little to change power dynamics in our students’ eyes. While such instructors should in no way be chided for potentially misplaced intentions, we should recognize that such pedagogy remains more traditional than progressive if it ends with the instructor ultimately assessing students’ work in light of higher models of excellence (e.g. the clichéd Shakespearian sonnet vis-à-vis a Tweet.) In such cases, putting prior scholarship side by side with evolving texts is less bridging than it is comparison where the traditionally valued texts may always trump the emerging ones.

To truly bridge such texts and practices, we must consider the role that agency plays in giving students the authority to inform our writing curricula. Application of the Collaborative Triangle attempts to do this not by dumbing curriculum down, or blindly valuing extracurricular interests just because they’re popular with students, but by being open to students taking ownership of their learning by applying their extracurricular (and online) practices to ones that have been valued in academic contexts for decades. Being open, and sharing such agency, may allow students to not only utilize their nascent literacy skills in new contexts, but to also begin seeing more similarities than differences
in their writing lives, and to begin ceasing to discuss their extracurricular (online) writing as an “other.” Agency as a bridge may most effectively address the perception gap that framed this chapter, and this entire study.

Such pedagogical implications are increasingly salient as learning institutions move toward hybrid and online models of instruction. Throughout this study I have tried to be clear that I am not necessarily advocating that courses need to bring technology into the classroom, nor force the use of social technology in service to any part of an academic context. Instead, I have simply called on instructors to be more cognizant of the behaviors related to these actions, and to try to bridge their mostly extracurricular activities with that of our classrooms. However, as schools move their instruction to online spaces that are increasingly social in nature, it behooves us to explore the ongoing implications into how these academic online spaces mimic, mirror, and mistake their utility for the everyday, extracurricular sites studied as part of this dissertation. In addition to murky distribution of agency in these new platforms, factors such as globalization, commercialization, and privacy rights will only grow as these technologies increase in popularity and ubiquity. The anecdotal argument, to date, in favor of such online learning platforms has been one of student access and equity (to say nothing of economics). As these platforms proliferate, however, so too should our exploration of how quality writing instruction can inform technology, even as technology informs our writing.

10.3 LIMITATIONS AND ETHICS

Part of any ongoing conversation is admitting where mistakes have been made, or where limitations have proven to be notable. There were several such notable instances in my study. The first have already been discussed in the preceding implications sections. In seeking to bridge false binaries, I’ve likewise created and reinforced such binaries for illustrative purposes. While I’ve made every attempt to provide caveats, footnotes, and explanations, I realize the potentially confusing (if not hypocritical) nature of arguing against online writing as an “other,” for example, while also seemingly foregrounding and sympathizing with extracurricular writing over academic writing. The same can be said about discussing terms, such as community, that I’ve simultaneously tried to explore
with specificity but keep fluid and open-ended. Perhaps such limitations are inherent in any theoretical work that is eventually enacted, but I highlight them here as a way of acknowledging that while I may have provided more questions than answers, I believe that the outcome of thinking more deeply about these terms is in line with the goals of my heuristic, and the study at large.

Limitations were also present in how I conducted the empirical work of this study. One occurred in the kind of information I asked for, both in the surveys and interviews. Though my data collection yielded the results that I required to answer my research questions, they left out some interesting information that may have complicated my data in richly informative ways. For example, I only asked students in passing where they did the majority of their online writing. Hearing that they wrote most on their cell phones, on household computers, or in campus computer clusters may have begun interesting discussions about space. Likewise, though they informed some preliminary questions, I admit that I could have dug deeper in asking students about their writing backgrounds. Rouge University (RU), for instance, has many classes on electronic writing that could have informed future discussions about contemporary pedagogy. Along these lines, I also did not differentiate to the full extent possible in asking students about their off- and online relationships. Knowing whether or not students were friends with other users in strictly virtual contexts might have nuanced my analysis of how they communicated with others. This kind of information would have given me more data points to consider and provided a more comprehensive view of the nature of online writing. As such, future conversations may consider seeking it.

While not limitations per se, I was also concerned with ethics throughout this study, and reflected on them consistently as I moved from theory to practice during my inquiry. For instance, though I asked students to sign waivers, and repeatedly offered them the chance to leave the study or block access to their online writing once I was done with the observation, I was still cognizant of the perception that some students have that their online lives are somehow private. All of my subjects were volunteers, and not a single one objected to me following their online activity. Still, due to the nature of

83 To date no subjects have defriended me on Facebook nor blocked me from a blog.
online writing, dozens—if not hundreds—of other users and their texts were inadvertently included in this study without their knowledge.

Privacy issues like these remain an ongoing concern for all research in online environments, but is especially salient when considered in light of the role writing plays for our student-users. As an independent researcher, I was able to request access to students’ writing in ways that their instructors may not be able to. However, if enacted in a classroom, this same study would have to be much more cognizant of students’ hesitation and legitimate desire to maintain a separation between their extracurricular and curricular writing lives. At this point, this is an ethical concern that I feel comfortable discussing with students in my courses, but other instructors (and researchers) may have to invent and adhere to guidelines that allow students to maintain their privacy but still be exposed to the approach at the heart of this study. Though I made every attempt to respect subjects’ privacy within this study, and though IRB granted approval of this study by assuring me that all Internet activity can be considered public if it is not protected behind privacy settings, the overlap of users’ private data and the very public nature of classroom instruction (and published research) remains an ethical concern worthy of future consideration.

Additionally, questions about validity often hover over studies such as this one. Specifically, critics could call into question my defining and coding strategies for the dispositions represented on my Collaborative Triangle. Though I matched behaviors with what I deduced were their analogous dispositions, other readers may have applied them differently. However, as previously discussed, I would argue that since the Collaborative Triangle is meant as a heuristic for thinking more deeply about online writing, whether or not a behavior is matched to community or textuality, for instance, is immaterial. As long as the Triangle helps users to analyze their data in more systematic and fruitful ways, such coding decisions are not incredibly detrimental. Ultimately I hope that whether future applications of this study imitate my coding exactly, or perform it in slightly different ways, the results will fulfill questions such as this study asked.

10.4 FUTURE DIRECTIONS
This study has undertaken an approach that is flexible by design, in the same way that the definition(s) of collaboration we use as compositionists is meant to be plastic. As a result, I hope that the Collaborative Triangle, and the collaborative behaviors I have identified here, will remain as a starting point for future research interested in online writing and collaborative activity. However, I also present it here as an open-ended, fluid approach meant to be adapted and co-opted in ways that I cannot foresee at the time of writing this. This is one reason why I have made every attempt to define my terms very carefully, and apply them very consistently, while still also pushing back on setting them down as one specific thing. Used as an approach, I think this study can be immediately valuable in exploring other similar platforms not addressed here: Twitter, for example; learning management software (LMS) like Blackboard; and visual-heavy sites such as the nascent sharing website Pinterest. This study, then, is meant as a vehicle for understanding and for conversation, across platforms and over time.

There are several ways I envision this approach being flexible enough to support and inspire future research. The first is, of course, applying the heuristic in myriad ways. While the three components are necessary in order to reflect how contemporary behaviors are similar to the analogs present in traditional collaborative composition definitions, classical rhetorical, and contemporary writing contexts, the codes (i.e. dispositions and behaviors) presented here are only one interpretation. In some cases we may face the decision of leaving non-functioning codes behind even as we honor their place in previous definitions. For example, while the concept of explicit responsibility over a text was essential to many prior definitions of collaboration, this study has shown how responsibility is increasingly implicit online, as evidenced in viewing a person’s face next to her text as a form of attribution, and by extension, responsibility. Over time, this reflected behavior may be seen increasingly as an expanded one as the by line of previous definitions fades from prominence. Furthermore, future researchers may use the heuristic to discover further expanded dispositions and behaviors that were not predicted or presented here. Such an approach could still use the same systematic approach and common language so as to build off of this study, but it may go off into other directions.

Along these lines, by simply using the terminology contained within this study, we can provide students with a second way to apply this study in flexible ways that
expands our knowledge. Students need not actually analyze their online writing in order to benefit from this study. Instead, mere acknowledgment of their online writing behaviors and interests may be enough to extend this study beyond its initial footprint by furthering the lineage of a rhetorical view of language and a contemporary manipulation of technology. Especially as these moves occur in online spaces that co-exist both in and beyond the classroom, this study can provide a flexible framework for discussing (and tracing back) how contemporary moves are similar to ones ancient writers were making with other types of technology. This form of expansion both honors the antecedent analogs, while also asks students to articulate their online behaviors and motivations in ever increasing sophistication. For example, it was only through this study that a student like Ernest was able to explain why he kept his friend count on Facebook at exactly 500. Though this may not be a collaborative behavior per se, it does force us—and our students—to reconsider what we consider a literacy act both worthy of study in the classroom and in future research.

Part of discussing future directions also involves revisiting decisions I made, and wondering aloud how they could be altered in future application. One such example involves the interviews, which succeeded in collecting data on student-users' dispositions toward online writing. However, had I asked users to bring in a representative text to discuss (and perhaps do a think-aloud with me present) or agree to a follow-up interview once I had collected their online writing, perhaps I would have been able to uncover behaviors and information that I otherwise did not have access to. My concern in doing the above things would be that students would get too specific about a particular piece of writing at the expense of discussing how they generally approach online writing. They may also be embarrassed or mum if I were to bring in samples of their writing that I found interesting. Despite this, it would be interesting to have subjects, in a sense, self-guide the research by asking them to reflect on why they did particular things. Expanding data collection in this way may yield additional information that may further extend our evolving view of online writing and interacting.

At the time of writing this dissertation, this view seems to increasingly occur on mobile phones. While this study focused largely on writing that students did on a personal computer, even casual observation of crowded streets and school hallways finds
students looking down at the devices in their hands. This may not be just casual observation, though. According to many popular sources, students are increasingly “writing” by texting on their cell phones. According to Onlineeducation.net in 2011, students spent over 181 minutes per day, on average, texting on their phones, while they spent only 101 minutes on Facebook (and about 56 minutes on email.) Likewise, services such as Facebook and Twitter are increasingly seen as cloud-based, meaning users store all of their information on delocalized servers. Though many still debate if cloud-computing is all that different from Web 2.0 computing, the fact remains that if users are storing texts, images, and video in online spaces, the opportunity for those artifacts to be shared and interacted with can only increase. So, too, may the potential to collaborate with them. This is compounded by technology’s increasing use of geographical data to literally map users’ online activity. As users begin to see that other users not only have the same interests, but also are just across the room, their interactions and communication may change in increasingly important ways. All of these changes may ultimately dictate new behaviors that I have not yet addressed here. The approach and terms I have laid down, though, will hopefully endure even as the platforms in which they’re applied evolve.

10.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS: REVISITING THE STAKES

The ultimate goal of this study has been to address a perception discrepancy between online and academic writing by providing a systematic way of understanding and discussing both sides. In analyzing student-users’ writing, it became clear that their behaviors reflected many of the behaviors that we have already discussed in previous scholarship on collaborative composition. In these cases, their extracurricular texts (and behaviors) simply needed to be studied in respectful, and at times sympathetic, ways in order to explore how these students were doing things that we already valued as indicative of quality and collaborative writing. Students reflected previous behaviors such as using their personal experiences as evidence, negotiating with peers to come to consensus, and took responsibility for their creations in ways that appear in nearly every prior definition of collaboration. The problem, of course, is that students didn’t describe their behaviors in these ways (nor did we, as researchers.) Instead, casual observation
would have noted users discussing their weekend activities, agreeing with their friends about shared topics, and deciding whether or not to use an anonymous username on a blog. This study has first been interested in connecting these moments of reflection by providing the latter activities with more respect, and a more useful vocabulary rooted in our disciplinary tradition.

Despite this, student-users surveyed for this study overwhelmingly saw their online writing as somehow different from their academic writing. Without necessarily being able to articulate it, they astutely recognized that they were practicing “new” writing behaviors that we, as their instructors, had not noticed or expressed to them. Truly understanding the ways in which they write and interact required that we expand our understanding of what it means to co-construct knowledge with others in online spaces. In bridging these moments of reflection and expansion, this dissertation has provided a systematic approach to studying online writing by suggesting theoretical, pedagogical, and verbal bridges. These bridges, embodied in this systematic approach, have been offered as a way for instructors and students to not only view online and academic writing side by side on an even playing field, but to also provide a common vocabulary for discussing both. In so doing, it is my hope that students will see how their online writing reflects what we value in the classroom as well as expands what we will come to know as writing in light of coming technological trends. My study reveals that students are open to expanding their views of text, if given the chance. They, too, seem to be operating on the same hypotheses that guided my research: that there are more similarities than differences between extracurricular and academic writing. In other words, they seem to sense the bridges that already exist.

Students expressed this unanimously in responding to the interview question, “Do you consider your online writing to be your own original creation?” Three of the more colorful responses speak for the rest:

Frank: I definitely feel like it’s a collection because even when I’m not posting, like I post my own content, and then I re-blog content I find on other Tumblr sites but I will frequently also find content on other sites outside of Tumblr and bring that into my, into my blog. So it’s sort of like just, I guess, an amalgamation of everything that
I find interesting and that I find on the Internet, so it’s definitely multiple voices.

Rob: Yeah, it’s more of the other people who have interacted with it. Like, I mean I can, I think that I put up a lot of links and status updates, you know every bit as much as like other people put comments on it, but really, the comments and Wall posts on mine speak just as much as anything I could ever put up.

Ann: Because it’s something, it’s new to both of you and you both had an original viewpoint and now you’re coming together towards something, something that is exciting, like a discovery of some new, dinosaur. It’s cool. But it’s like well, I don’t know. I feel, I feel better about it than if I just put something out there on my own. It’s like, it’s like the Internet. It’s a community. It’s like oh, well all together we can reach a conclusion that is the best. All together, we can reach something cool if everyone puts their two cents in then we’ll make something… It becomes one thing. It starts out separate but it, it certainly becomes one big interesting ball of awesome at the end…

In all three, we can see evidence that students see their writing as potentially valuable, if not collaborative, in relation to academic writing instruction. They seem to see bridges even while seeming gaps persist. Frank’s reference to “multiple voices” and Rob’s admission that others “speak just as much as anything” he could write both acknowledge how these students see their voices not only in harmony with others online, but also stronger because of it. They, in part, define themselves and their writing through the interactions they share and cultivate. Likewise, Ann’s description of her online writing as “one big ball of awesome” speaks to not only the interest of the user to interact, but also to the convoluted nature of understanding the finer details of online writing. These three students, like the other six, feel drawn to writing and interacting, but in their own ways lack a common vocabulary to express its relation to what’s asked of them in a writing classroom.
Responses like the ones above should serve as catalysts for why we should continue exploring and analyzing the links between extracurricular and academic (or professional) writing. These students feel that their writing is worthy of study, and that its inherent social nature co-constructs knowledge in seemingly collaborative ways. They value their own writing. However, the current constructs of our writing instruction and what we have heretofore considered “text” in our classrooms and scholarship may prevent us from allowing students like these to honestly engage their online writing, and each other. By being more open to what drives students’ desires and actions outside of formal instruction, we can be more useful in leading the way for studying the future of writing. In being open to valuing what they see as valuable, we open ourselves—and our field—to a rich conversation that can only increase the utility and dynamism of our interests in writing and writers’ lives.

The stakes, by this point, should be clear. While all of us—both instructors and students—spend increasing amounts of time writing and interacting in online contexts, our theoretical and pedagogical assumptions are rooted in historical assumptions. Far from calling for a revolution, this study has highlighted this fact by proposing an approach to bridging these perceived divides by co-constructing a shared vocabulary and understanding. In doing so, it has sought to explore the agency that student-users may experience online and to invite that as a topic worthy of conversation in the classroom. At this point, it’s difficult to believe that anyone would discount the power of social media (either in the context of education or not), but it’s also a reality that we are at a point where we’re discussing centuries-old authors alongside writing technologies that are in their infancy. As these technologies expand and change, I offer this study as a way to guide the conversation about the affordances and limitations of using such technology alongside our traditional approaches. Such a conversation invites us to share our expertise with others; and perhaps more importantly, invites them to share theirs.
APPENDIX ONE

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Welcome to the Survey on Internet Writing

Welcome to the survey, and thank you for your participation.

This survey is part of a University of Michigan research project on student Internet writing. The questions will ask students to identify where they do the majority of their online writing, as well as gauge their attitudes towards writing and interacting with others. The survey contains 20 questions, and should take less than 5 minutes to complete.

In addition to the survey questions, students will be asked if they are willing to take part in follow-up interviews. If so, these participants will receive a $50 gift certificate for their time.

All participants of this survey are eligible to win an iPod Shuffle (retail value $55) in a random drawing to be held no later than October 1, 2010.

Should participants have any questions or concerns about this survey and associated research (IRB exempt: HUM00039883), please contact Chris Gerben, the primary investigator, at cgerben@umich.edu.

1. Which of the following schools do you consider your primary institution? (If you attend more than one of these schools, at which one do you take the most classes?)
   University of Michigan - Ann Arbor
   Eastern Michigan University
   Washtenaw Community College
   Other, or I don't attend school

2. Which degree type are you pursuing?
   Undergraduate (e.g. Associate, Bachelor, etc.)
   Graduate (e.g. Master, PhD, etc.)
   Other (please specify)

3. How old are you?
   13-17
   18-20
2. Website Usage

1. Do you consider yourself an active Internet user?
   Yes
   No
   Other (please specify)

2. Which of the following applications/websites do you use on a regular basis (approximately once a day, or more)? [Please select all that apply.]
   - Personal email
   - Work email
   - Personal blog
   - Others' blog(s)
   - Facebook
   - MySpace
   - Twitter
   - YouTube
   - Chat rooms
   - Fan/Hobby sites
   - News sites (e.g. Detroit Free Press, New York Times, Michigan Daily, etc.)
   - Others (please specify)

3. Of the following applications/websites, which do you use most often? [Please select only one.]
   - Personal blog
   - Others' blog(s)
   - Facebook
   - MySpace
   - Twitter
   - YouTube
   - Chat rooms
   - Fan/Hobby sites
   - News sites (e.g. Detroit Free Press, New York Times, Michigan Daily, etc.)
   - Others (please specify)

4. Why do you go to the website identified in Question #3 as often as you do? [Pick top reason.]
   - Communicate with others
   - Work/School reasons
   - Personal expression
   - Meet new people
   - Entertainment
   - Procrastination
   - Access new information
   - Other (please specify)

3. Writing on Social Sites
   For the following questions, the researcher is interested in how much students WRITE on
the websites. Simply reading, linking, or "liking" on these websites is not considered writing here.

1. Do you have a profile and consider yourself an active user on one or more social networks (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, etc.)?  
   Yes  
   No

2. How often do you write (either to others or updating your own profile) on social networks?  
   Multiple times a day  
   Once a day  
   Every few days  
   Once a week  
   Once a month  
   Rarely, or Never

3. Do you write your own blog and/or actively read and comment on others' blogs?  
   Yes  
   No

4. How often do you write or respond on blogs?  
   Multiple times a day  
   Once a day  
   Every few days  
   Once a week  
   Once a month  
   Rarely, or Never

5. Do you actively read and write in the comments sections on news (e.g. New York Times), commercial (e.g. Amazon), or other sites (e.g. ESPN)?  
   Yes  
   No

6. How often do you write and respond in the comments section of websites?  
   Multiple times a day  
   Once a day  
   Every few days  
   Once a week  
   Once a month  
   Rarely, or Never

4. Reasons for Writing  
For the following questions, consider your responses to WRITING on social networks, blogs, and/or comments sections from the previous page.

1. What are your primary purposes for WRITING on social networks,
blogs, or comments sections? [Please click all that apply.]
Personal expression
Stay in touch with family and friends
Meet new people
Access new information
Engage in debate
View others’ opinions
Work/school purposes
Other (please specify)

2. When you post text online, do you use your real photo and name (as opposed to a generic icon and/or anonymous name)?
Yes, always
Yes, mostly
Yes, on certain sites
No

3. How often do your posts result in a sustained exchange (e.g. a Facebook Wall conversation with at least one response from two or more people, a blog/website comment that engages the author and/or other commenters, etc.)?
Nearly always
Very often
Often
From time to time
Never/Almost never

4. How often do you feel that your views or opinions change after posting or receiving feedback from others on your online posts?
Nearly always
Very often
Often
From time to time
Never/Almost never

5. Relation to Academic Writing
This research project is interested in how students’ Internet writing is related (or not) to their academic writing and training. Please answer the following questions about this topic.

1. Please check all the places/sources that you have received formal writing instruction. [Please check all that apply.]
   From a friend or family member
   Personal tutor
   High school English/writing course
   First-year college writing course
   Upper-level college writing course
   Writing center or literacy club (e.g. 826 Michigan)
   Other (please specify)
2. Do you consider the writing you do on social networks, blogs, and/or comments sections to be similar to the writing you do at school or work?
Yes
No
Other (please specify)

3. Has Internet writing ever been studied or assigned in an English/writing course you've taken?
Yes
No
Other (please specify)

6. Call for Interview Participants
The next stage of research is a series of individual interviews, asking respondents to explain their responses here, as well as discuss how their Internet writing relates (or not) to writing they do in school, at work, or at home.

If chosen, participants will be asked to take part in a one-time, short interview (less than an hour) in October or November, and to share some of their public online writing. These participants will receive an additional $50 gift certificate upon completion of the interview.

Marking your interest in the interviews below neither guarantees participation in the interview, nor obligates participants to be interviewed. Participants are free to remove themselves from the study at any point.

1. Would you be interested in participating in a short follow-up interview and receiving a $50 gift card for your participation?
Yes
No

2. If you answered "Yes" to participating in the interviews, please provide your name and contact information below. You will be contacted by the researcher in the coming weeks.
Name
Email Address

7. Thank You!
Thank you for participating in this survey.

If you previously marked that you would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview (and receive $50 for your extended participation), the researcher will contact you in the coming weeks. You are automatically entered for the iPod raffle.

If you are not interested in a follow-up interview (or indicated that you are a graduate student and/or don't attend UM, EMU, or WCC on the welcome page), but would like
to be entered for the iPod raffle, please enter your name and contact information below. This information will only be used for the raffle. You will receive no additional correspondence, and the information will be deleted upon completion of the raffle.

If you are finished with the survey and are not interested in entering the raffle, simply close this window.

Finally, if you have any questions about the survey, interviews, raffle, or research involved in this study, please contact Chris Gerben at cgerben@umich.edu.

1. To be entered into the iPod raffle, please provide your name and email below.
   Name
   Email address
APPENDIX TWO

SURVEY RESULTS

The following pages contain screenshots of results to the survey questions. As mentioned in the body of the dissertation, some questions were initially skipped by respondents, which accounts for the uneven numbers reported throughout the survey results.
# Student Survey of Online Writing and Interaction

## 1. Which of the following schools do you consider your primary institution? (If you attend more than one of these schools, at which one do you take the most classes?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan - Ann Arbor</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Michigan University</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washburn Community College</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, or I don't attend school</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question: 194

skipped question: 0

## 2. Which degree type are you pursuing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Type</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate (e.g. Associate, Bachelor, etc.)</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate (e.g. Master, PhD, etc.)</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question: 199

skipped question: 5
### 3. How old are you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-17</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-29</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 194
skipped question 0

### 4. Do you consider yourself an active Internet user?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify) 0

answered question 176
skipped question 18
5. Which of the following applications/websites do you use on a regular basis (approximately once a day, or more)? [Please select all that apply.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal email</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work email</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal blog</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others' blog(s)</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat rooms</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan/Hobby sites</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News sites (e.g. Detroit Free Press, New York Times, Michigan Daily, etc.)</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question: 176
skipped question: 18
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application/Website</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal blog</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others' blog(s)</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat rooms</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan/Hobby sites</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News sites (e.g. Detroit Free Press, New York Times, Michigan Daily, etc.)</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 176

Skipped question: 18
7. Why do you go to the website identified in Question #3 as often as you do? [Pick top reason.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with others</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/School reasons</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal expression</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procrastination</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access new information</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 176
skipped question 18

8. Do you have a profile and consider yourself an active user on one or more social networks (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, etc.)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 175
skipped question 19
9. How often do you write (either to others or updating your own profile) on social networks?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely, or Never</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question: 175  
skipped question: 19

10. Do you write your own blog and/or actively read and comment on others' blogs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question: 175  
skipped question: 19
### 11. How often do write or respond on blogs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely, or Never</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 175
Skipped question: 19

### 12. Do you actively read and write in the comments sections on news (e.g. New York Times), commercial (e.g. Amazon), or other sites (e.g. ESPN)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 175
Skipped question: 19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. How often do you write and respond in the comments section of websites?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely, or Never</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 175
Skipped question: 19
14. What are your primary purposes for writing on social networks, blogs, or comments sections? [Please click all that apply.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal expression</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in touch with family and friends</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access new information</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in debate</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View others’ opinions</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/school purposes</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 169

skipped question 25

15. When you post text online, do you use your real photo and name (as opposed to a generic icon and/or anonymous name)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, always</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, mostly</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, on certain sites</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 168

skipped question 26
16. How often do your posts result in a sustained exchange (e.g. a Facebook Wall conversation with at least one response from two or more people, a blog/website comment that engages the author and/or other commenters, etc.)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly always</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time to time</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never/Almost never</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 répondent question 169
 skipped question 25

17. How often do you feel that your views or opinions change after posting or receiving feedback from others on your online posts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly always</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time to time</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never/Almost never</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 répondent question 169
 skipped question 25
### 18. Please check all the places/sources that you have received formal writing instruction. [Please check all that apply.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From a friend or family member</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal tutor</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school English/writing course</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-year college writing course</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-level college writing course</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing center or literacy club (e.g., 826 Michigan)</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 168
Skipped question: 26

### 19. Do you consider the writing you do on social networks, blogs, and/or comments sections to be similar to the writing you do at school or work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify): 6

Answered question: 164
Skipped question: 30
### 20. Has Internet writing ever been studied or assigned in an English/writing course you've taken?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- answered question: 166
- skipped question: 28

### 21. Would you be interested in participating in a short follow-up interview and receiving a $50 gift card for your participation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- answered question: 160
- skipped question: 34
22. If you answered "Yes" to participating in the interviews, please provide your name and contact information below. You will be contacted by the researcher in the coming weeks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question | 122  
skipped question | 72

23. To be entered into the iPod raffle, please provide your name and email below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email address</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question | 133  
skipped question | 61
Appendix Three

Interview Consent Form

Interview and Text Collection Consent

Study Overview
This proposed study aims to explore how student-users’ attitudes towards, and practices of, writing in social online spaces reflect and expand notions of traditional composition, and how this understanding can inform composition pedagogy and (re)define what is considered writing in an era of nearly ubiquitous technology-supported textual interaction. The study is made up of original empirical research composed of surveys, interviews, and discourse analysis of student-users’ online texts in order to explore student-users’ attitudes towards and practices of writing in social online spaces. By comparing notions of traditional composition with student-user writing in social online spaces, this study aims to give a more nuanced understanding of contemporary writing since the rise of the personal computer, and into the future, as student-users continue to write and interact with one another online both in and beyond the classroom.

Subject Benefits and Harms
This study was deemed IRB-exempt (HUM00039883) by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board. IRB-exempt status designates studies that pose no significant harm or impact on the subjects, and/or take place within the public realm. For this study, review of online text technically takes place in public spaces on the Internet. Likewise, all personal information (including screennames, profile photos, and personal identifying information) will be deleted, and pseudonyms will be replaced in any following publication. Subjects may gain greater knowledge and appreciation of their own online writing. While there is no imminent chance of harm, should subjects become uncomfortable or desire to leave the study, they may do so at any time.

The Study
Selected subjects who have taken an online survey on online writing and interaction will be asked to take part in an in-person interview that will take approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed. The audio will only be used for transcription purposes. Any published record of the transcription will utilize pseudonyms. Subjects will also be asked to identify sites where they perform their online writing. The primary investigator (Chris Gerben) will collect this writing over a pre-determined two-week period and later analyze it. Upon completion of the research, subjects may ask for copies of the interview transcription and collected online text.

Consent
By signing below, the primary investigator affirms that the preceding information is correct, and should it change, he will notify the undersigned subject. The subject, by signing below, affirms that he/she has read the preceding information and is willingly taking part in the interview, will allow recording and transcription of the interview, and will allow the primary investigator to collect and analyze the subject’s online text within a future two-week period. The subject also confirms that he/she has received a one-time $50 payment for his/her participation.

____________________________________
Primary Investigator signature and date

____________________________________
Research subject signature and date
APPENDIX FOUR
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions
(Protocol used for blog users)

Overall Writing
- Can you describe the formal writing instruction you received in school or on the job?
- How has writing instruction at <your school> prepared you, or not, for your blog or everyday writing?
- Do you make a distinction between writing you do online and writing you do in “real life”? If so, what are the factors that separate them?
- What makes your blog writing different from academic or everyday writing?
- How do you see others (friends, others with blogs, anonymous people, etc.) as affecting your online writing?

About Blogs
- What made you decide to write a blog?
- Why do you keep going back to the blog?
- How often do you check your own blog?
- How often do you update/edit your own blog?
- How often do you write on others’ blogs?
- When you’re online (specifically when referencing blogs) do you make a distinction between being an author, editor, or consumer?

Production
- [functional collaboration, authority, co-authorship, conflict, invention, and knowledge production]
- Who is your primary audience for your blog? Do you have regular readers/commenters?
- Do you write your blog more for yourself or for others? Why?
- Can you describe one instance where you wrote on your blog specifically to solicit feedback?
- Can you describe one instance where you encountered a sustained exchange via comments on your blog?
• Can you describe one instance where you changed your perspective because of comments left on your (or another’s) blog?
• Do you view your blog as a public or private space?
• Have you ever felt the need to delete someone’s comment from your blog? Can you describe your thought process?
• Do you feel that the blog is “your” space? In other words, do you feel a sense of ownership of your blog?
• Do you believe that once people post on your blog, you then own their comment in some way, or do they retain rights over it?

Interaction
• [proximity, classroom practices, types of communities (including discourse communities, communities of practice, and affinity groups, etc.), and affect or a sense of togetherness]
• What kinds of people read and comment on your blog?
• Are you conscious of trying to get new readers/commenters, or are you happy to keep your current readership?
• When people leave comments on your blog, how do you decide whether or not to respond?
• Do you have a community of bloggers? When someone comments on your blog, do you feel more inclined to write on theirs?
• How does it make you feel when people comment on your blog?

Nature of texts
• [place and space, materiality, visual design, identity, and temporality]
• How do you know when a conversation is over on a blog?
• When is it too late to return to a conversation from a previous blog?
• How much did you consider visual design of your blog? How often do you change its appearance or functionality?
• Do you feel that the blog accurately depicts you as a person?

Misc.
• What have you learned about writing from consistently writing a blog?
• If you were to teach a class about writing a blog, what kinds of things would you include?
• How long will you keep the blog? When will you know it’s time to stop writing it?
• Do you see your blog as your own, original creation, or do you feel that your readers and commenters have shaped it in some significant way(s)?
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