LIFE, LEARNING, AND LITERACY ON THE SOCIAL NETWORK: DIGITAL PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses qualitative case studies of seven graduate and undergraduate students in which I examine their situated literacy and identity practices within social network sites. I argue that activity on social network sites is ubiquitous, purposeful, and integral to students’ literate lives.

My research examines identity and literacy practices on social network sites by considering individuals’ site use in context. Chapter One situates my research within past studies of digital literacy practices, self-sponsored writing, and identity, and I consider how individuals’ networked literate practices are embedded in and influenced by social context, institutional and technological structures, and the history of these structures. While much work on social network sites in writing studies focuses on rhetorical analyses of profile pages or a consideration of these sites for use in the writing classroom, my research views activity on these sites within specific writers’ larger online and offline literacy practices. Chapter Two introduces my ethnographic case study methodology that combined methods of data collection from different sources, including face-to-face interviews, online written texts, time use diaries and video screen capture. This project does not draw strict boundaries between online and offline activities or between activity on different social network sites, but instead investigates the relationship between them. Instead of studying online interactions based on their textual record, I include data from other sources to gain a better understanding of this online activity as distributed across sites and integrated within daily literacy practices.

Chapter Three focuses on the ways that my research participants represent themselves for different groups of people and theorizes different ways to view identity on social network sites.
Here my research is grounded in Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner and Carole Cain’s (1998) conceptions of situated and transactional identities and figured worlds. The structure of many social network sites flattens one’s multiple contact groups into one group of “friends” or “followers,” where an individual sends the same update to multiple friend groups. This chapter considers the ways that case study participants conceive of audience on these sites and negotiate between different “figured worlds” in online spaces. One research participant, for example, manages two different Twitter accounts, one as a music reviewer for a popular music blog, another for his academic persona as a graduate student, teacher, and rhetorician. Another undergraduate research participant uses the same Twitter and Facebook accounts to send updates in both English and Korean to the same list of contacts. These participants’ experiences demonstrate the purposeful ways in which writers consider audience and representation on social network sites.

Chapter Four moves from users’ interactions with others on social network sites to interactions with the sites themselves. This chapter considers social network sites themselves as technological actors in these writers’ identity representations, and it illustrates the ways in which individuals work purposefully with and against the structures of these sites to manage their identities and online data. An important component of this negotiation with social network sites is how participants construct boundaries in regard to privacy, and how they negotiate the frequently changing settings and policies of each social network site. One research participant, for example, keeps most personal information off Facebook and monitors her privacy settings closely, another constructs fake profiles and posts false information to make a statement about the veracity of information on the service. Another closed off her Facebook wall during her job search process. Along with managing their identities through privacy settings, many participants
also used social network sites to manage data, archiving songs they have listened to in last.fm, organizing images through Flickr, and building an inventory of yarn owned through a social network site for knitters called Ravelry. The experiences that the participants discussed in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which navigating interfaces, settings, and site structures become important literacy skills in the twenty-first century.

Users of social network sites engage in purposeful and thoughtful interactions in these online spaces, negotiating different friend groups, different site designs, and different layers of settings as they manage professional and social identities across online and offline spaces. My dissertation argues that these practices represent important literate activity in the twenty-first century, as individuals learn to negotiate interfaces, user agreements, and personal data, as well as rhetorical situations, in their online writing. In considering the roles that social network sites play in individuals’ literacy and identity practices, writing researchers and educators can better understand the literacy practices that students engage in outside of the classroom and the experiences they bring to their academic writing. My research also suggests methodologies for observing and studying the distributed literate activity that takes place on social network sites. Examining the social, technological and structural factors that influence digital literacy practices in online environments is crucial in understanding the impact of these sites on writing practices.
To Theo and “the kids,”

with love and devotion.
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2010 was the year of the social network site. Under development through a variety of forms and incarnations throughout the previous decade, the influence of these websites on American society and culture became extraordinarily visible during 2010. The most popular social network site, Facebook, gained 500 million followers in July of 2010. Twitter, a newer social network site especially popular with journalists and celebrities, had an average of 65,000 tweets per week, culminating in record traffic to the site during the 2010 World Cup. Much of the attention paid to social network sites, aside from the focus on Twitter connected to political movements, focused on Facebook. In April, David Kirkpatrick published *The Facebook Effect*, a thorough history of the company. Aaron Sorkin’s film *The Social Network*, also about the founding of Facebook based primarily on Ben Mezrich’s 2009 book, *The Accidental Billionaires*, was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won three for Best Original Screenplay, Best Editing, and Best Original Score. *Time* also named Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg as 2010 Person of the Year, “for connecting more than half a billion people and mapping the social relations among them, for creating a new system of exchanging information and for changing how we live our lives” (Grossman, 2010).

Not all of this attention was positive, however. A backlash to changes in the way privacy settings were configured in December 2009 grew to a breaking point in the spring of 2010. This was caused by Facebook’s announcement of its new Connect feature on April 21, 2010, which drew not only media criticism and public panic, but also separate complaints filed by Senator Charles Schumer and the Electronic Privacy Information Center to the Federal Trade
Commission. In addition, Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman’s documentary *Catfish*, released shortly before Sorkin’s film, also commented on anxiety over the nature of identity representation on Facebook and similar sites. Jaron Lanier also published his book, *You Are Not a Gadget*, in resistance to what he saw as an increased reliance on social network sites for communication.

The ways in which social network sites entered into the public consciousness throughout 2010 demonstrates their importance in the ways individuals communicate in online environments, as individuals collectively grapple with living lives at least partially online. Living a “literate life in the information age” (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004) increasingly means learning to navigate complex issues of privacy and the management of one’s online data. Internet users take advantage of easier ways to share content: engaging in short textual interactions with friends through a social networking site, uploading video to YouTube or images to Flickr, and managing a variety of social events and groups through different kinds of social software. Not only do these literate activities take place on networked computers, but they occur in social media platforms stored on commercial websites; content is syndicated in 100 different places, blurring boundaries between work and leisure, friends and strangers, public and private, and online and offline. The endless parade of popular press stories reporting the latest individual fired for online transgressions and the public service announcements warning teens to think before uploading pictures demonstrate that the new boundaries are not yet settled. Our definitions of authorship, audience, and participation change with these new communication practices, creating new questions for language, literacy, rhetoric, and education.

Writing researchers have noted the prominence of writing in digital environments in the work they do outside of the classroom. Andrea Lunsford (2008) and her colleagues followed
undergraduate students for four years of college through the Stanford Study of Writing. They found that not only are students writing more, but they are also effective in crafting and communicating specific messages to specific audiences. As Lunsford and her colleagues found in their study, 38% of the writing that the student participants completed happened outside of the classroom, and most of this writing happened online. Similarly, a study by Jeff Grabill, Bill Hart-Davidson, and their colleagues in the Writing in Digital Environments research group at Michigan State University found that first year college students engage in digital writing most frequently, primarily on mobile phones, social network sites, and email. This type of writing is ubiquitous, the study found, noting the centrality of digital media in students’ writing outside of the classroom (Grabill et al., 2010).

The changes in the way information is presented and accessed on the Internet in the past several years have altered the nature of writing, participation, and learning in online spaces. A recent study by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project found young adults (ages 18-29) to be the most active in managing their identities and data online; the report claimed that reputation management has “become a defining feature of online life for many internet users, especially the young” (Madden & Smith, 2010). As Johndan Johnson-Eilola notes in his book Datacloud (2005), digital technologies have altered our work and communication practices in important and subtle ways as individuals adjust to living and working in information-rich environments. Johnson-Eilola was writing as social network sites were just beginning to develop, and living and working within a datacloud – the “information-saturated environments” (Johnson-Eilola, 2005, p. 18) in which we make meaning. These have become even more central today for those with access to a networked computer or smart phone, especially with Apple’s Lion operating system that syncs content between multiple devices. For social network site users,
these changes have meant living in a datacloud in one’s personal life as well, as social connections are translated into nodes in a network.

This dissertation examines the intersection between identity and literacy in the information age to consider the ways in which individuals use everyday literacy practices to negotiate identity representations on social networking sites. Influenced by situated studies of literate practice that consider cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), such as the work of Paul Prior (1998), Prior and Jody Shipka (2002), Christine Pearson Casanave (2002), and Kevin Roozen (2009), my dissertation includes the case studies of seven individuals in which I observe their situated literacy and identity practices connected with social network sites. Through this research, I explore how these digital literacy practices are integrated within individuals’ everyday literacy practices, and how they are influenced by the technologies they use to represent their identities online. Social network sites represent an important location where the different influences on writing discussed by literacy scholars become visible, laying bare the influence of social, economic, and structural forces that shape literacy development in the twenty-first century. A close study of the rich literate practices that individuals engage on social network sites allows us to better understand the roles they play in shaping current digital literacy practices.

**Digital Literacies**

The concept of “digital literacies” comes from the tradition of New Literacy Studies (NLS) and their definitions of literacy, such as work by Brian Street (1984, 1995) who viewed literacy through an “ideological model,” James Gee (1992, 1996) and other scholars who understand literacy as a social practice, embedded in specific social contexts and imbued with
cultural meaning. Street (1984) defines literacy as a “shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (p. 1). Literacy can only be viewed as multiple and cannot be separated from the specific ideological, political, and cultural practices through which it is learned and used. From the work of Brian Street and other New Literacy Studies scholars, literacy can be understood as historically situated, local, dynamic, and embedded in the practices of daily life.

Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2003) extend the NLS concept of literacy to digital environments. They argue that while New Literacy Studies has a tradition of studying literacy in context, and also studying self-sponsored or “unofficial” literacies, they contend that most work in New Literacy Studies does not consider “new literacy” practices, particularly digital literacies. They use New Literacy Studies as a starting point for their own work with digital literacies, and Ilana Synder (2002) does the same.

My focus on literacy, then, also builds on important traditions within writing studies and computers and writing to view the composing practices that accompany new media and multimodal texts as literacies,\(^1\) often called “digital literacies.” The concept of digital literacy, or digital literacies, has a complex and fragmented history. Lankshear and Knobel (2008) argue that it is important to separate the various uses of the term into two different categories, one that considers literacy as conceptual, and another that considers skills-based definitions. David Bawden (2008) chronicles the history of the term, attributing the origin of conceptual definitions of digital literacy to Paul Gilster, whose 1997 book was the first to call the ability to understand

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\(^1\) Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola (1999) have criticized the extension of the term literacy to other forms of multimodal texts by those within computers and writing, because of its historical ties to the concept of literacy as a discrete skill. While I am mindful of these critiques, and the complicated histories that a term like literacy invokes including histories of colonization and repression, I believe it is still a productive term within writing studies and more specifically computers and writing, especially when defined similarly to Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola’s definition, “not as a monolithic term but as a cloud of sometimes contradictory nexus points among different positions. Literacy can be seen as not a skill but a process of situating and resituating representations in social spaces” (p. 367).
and use information from digital sources “digital literacy.” Bawden described Gilster’s definition as “about mastering ideas, not keystrokes,” centered in “ideas and mindsets, within which particular skills and competences operate, and about information and information resources, in whatever format” (p. 18). The competencies outlined by Gilster included Internet searching, hypertext navigation, knowledge assembly, and content evaluation. Bawden attributes Gilster’s ideas to both traditions in computer science and information science. While these fields subscribe to the more functional definitions of literacy, Gilster drew general principles for a broader idea of digital literacy not tied to any particular technology or skill from this tradition.

As Bawden notes, confusion around the term “digital literacy” has persisted, with many using it to refer to skills-based definitions, while others have used terms like “e-literacy,” “electronic literacy,” and “information literacy” with meanings quite similar to Gilster’s definition for “digital literacy.” More recent uses of the term by Eshet-Alkalai (2004) and Martin (2006) have relied on Gilster’s definition, viewing digital literacy not as based in any particular skill or competency, but as part of living in the 21st century, connected to competencies learned inside and outside of school. Bawden notes that the use of “digital literacy” as a concept has grown in popularity in recent years, and these definitions are rooted in the same spirit as Gilster’s and contain four basic elements: an underpinning in traditional literacy and computer skills-based literacy, containing elements of information literacy, discussing central competencies for processing and creating information in digital and non-digital contexts, and reflecting a spirit of independent learning grounded in a moral framework.

Lankshear and Knobel (2008) take the idea of digital literacy Bawden describes and integrate it with the work of Brian Street and other New Literacy Studies scholars that view literacy as embedded in specific cultural contexts. “Digital literacy” then becomes “digital
literacies,” acknowledging the multiple nature of literacy in digital contexts. Lankshear and Knobel (2008) define digital literacies as “a shorthand for the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged, etc., via digital codification” (p. 5). I use this definition here as well, as I am concerned with the diverse practices associated with creating and receiving a myriad of digital texts through a variety of modes.

As noted above, the term digital literacies also builds on the tradition in education and in computers and writing specifically to extend the idea of literacy to other modes. From the New London Group’s (1996) discussion of multiliteracies, through Selfe and Hawisher’s (2004) study of the technological literacy histories of Americans, to the extensive work of a wide array of scholars in analyzing and producing multimodal texts, I extend their notions of literacy and digital literate practice to social network sites specifically.

Identity

In studying the literate activity of specific individuals using social network sites specifically, I acknowledge that these literacy practices are also identity practices. As boyd and Ellison (2007) argue, these newer spaces through which to interact online “are primarily organized around people, not interests” (para. 37). Social network sites “are structured as personal (or ‘egocentric’) networks, with the individual at the center of their own community” (boyd and Ellison, 2007, para. 37). As individuals make composing decisions through these sites, they also decide how to represent their identities to a specific online audience. This project aims, therefore, to investigate not only what individuals’ literacy practices look like on social network sites, but also the nature of their identity practices. I consider identity practices on social network
sites to be any of a number of activities through which individuals represent themselves to others, from uploading original media content like photos or video, to changing their likes/dislikes on a profile, to updating a Facebook or Twitter status.

Kevin Robins (2005) describes the concept of identity as being seen as “the imagined sameness of a person or of a social group at all times and in all circumstances. . . . Identity may be regarded as a fiction, intended to put an orderly pattern and narrative on the actual complexity and multitudinous nature of both psychological and social worlds” (p. 172). Manuel Castells (2000) has discussed the fragmentation of identity and its separation from traditional roles, but also argues that identity is the most important source of meaning in the network society. Scholars have struggled to define identity and the balance between individual agency and social influences. Jay Lemke (2008) calls attention to the increased reference to identity in scholarship, noting the “theoretical burden” that the term identity has to carry when used as the primary term to describe notions of selfhood and suggests that we need to understand identity in how it functions as a mediating term between social-structural phenomena and lived, interactional experiences.

Previously considered a stable concept based on an individual’s essential characteristics, many now view identity as continually constructed in particular contexts and in interaction with other individuals. Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner and Carole Cain’s (1998) conception of identity works at that intersection Lemke describes and view identity as “specific to practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed ‘worlds’” (p. 7). While aspects of race, class, ethnicity, and gender, among other social markers, are important in this conception of identity, these categories are in constant
negotiation within specific contexts and situations and in negotiation with other individuals (pp. 7-9).

Holland and her colleagues’ conception of identity is ultimately a practice theory of identity, one that sees an internal, intrinsic identity in interaction with a cultural one. This socially constructed self is based in one’s subject position, the influences of the culture in which one lives, and the powerful discourses an individual encounters (p. 26-27). These individual elements do not in and of themselves make an individual, but they are “living tools of the self” (28). The self is always embedded in social practice, and Holland et al. see “sites of self” as always plural (p. 30). In describing this process, the authors rely on the work of Leontiev, who discusses an individual in an environment in a way that does not see the two as opposing forces, but emphasizes the social interactions between an individual and his or her environment in a way that lessens the borders between them (p. 40). Holland et al. construct a model for their practice theory of identity that focuses on 1) “the genesis of products,” meaning identity performances, or what they call improvisations, and 2) “the appropriation of these products as heuristics for the next moment of activity” (p. 40). Holland and her colleagues see individuals as creating identity products (mannerisms, activities, tastes, modes of dress) and then turning to these practices in specific situations to create an identity (p. 40-41).

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is also central to Holland and her colleagues’ conception of the authorship of the self. In making meaning, individuals pull language from a variety of other sources, in order to “author the world” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 170). Holland and her colleagues argue that Bakhtin sees the construction of identity in much the same way. We see and represent ourselves through the words of others in a continuous social process: “The meaning that we make of ourselves is, in Bakhtin’s terms, ‘authoring the self,’ and the site at
which this authoring occurs is a space defined by the interrelationship of differentiated ‘vocal’ perspectives on the social world” (p. 173). Literacy, then, is important to the creation of identity. We borrow language from different sources in order to understand ourselves and to present our continuously constructed identity to others.

This idea of “authoring the self” is important when considering constructing online identities, which are represented primarily through text and images, sometimes created by oneself, but often taken from other sources. Other scholars have viewed the idea of individual identity as embedded in particular contexts, and have seen identity as based in individual performance within certain social constraints (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990). Early scholars of identity on the Internet have been influenced by these ideas, Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg, and post-human concepts of identity to see the Internet as a place where identity, particularly gender identity, is fluid and disconnected from users’ identities in offline spaces, based instead in performance, primarily through text (Turkle, 1995). Others have critiqued this position as a misrepresentation of Butler’s (1990) work on identity performance and provide critiques of this post-human view of identity (e.g., Nakamura, 2002; Paasonen, 2002; Hayles, 1999). Critiques, such as Nakamura’s, for example, have drawn attention to the ways in which one’s online identity is still embedded in, and influenced by, an offline, embodied, self.

Holland and her colleagues (1998) bridge the lines of thought between individual and group identity, looking at identity from the viewpoint of an individual situated in a larger context, continuously negotiating (and remaking) identity as that context changes. Using Holland's and CHAT's notions of situated identity practices provides me with a way in which to discuss identity as changing and situated in different contexts. Recent scholars have begun to
discuss how online and offline identities are intertwined in a variety of identity practices, particularly centered through social network sites. This project continues this work.

**Identity on Social Network Sites**

In focusing on social network sites, I use danah boyd and Nicole Ellison’s (2007) definition: “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (para. 4). Popular examples of these kinds of services include Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and Twitter, but this definition also includes hundreds of similar sites devoted to a variety of interests and groups, such as sites for sports fans (ColtsDirect), knitters (Ravelry), and music fans (last.fm), among others. Like boyd and Ellison, I also use the term social “network” sites rather than the other popular term, social “networking” sites. Boyd and Ellison argue that these services are primarily used to maintain already established relationships, rather than relationship initiation. Hence, “social network site” seems a more appropriate term than “social networking site.” This is true more of some sites than of others, but I follow boyd and Ellison’s convention nevertheless.

Given the amount of time spent on social network sites, they represent an ideal location to study self-sponsored literacy practices in digital environments. Yet most research that investigates how individuals use these sites is currently being done in other fields, namely communication and psychology. danah boyd’s (2008) dissertation is the most visible of these studies, in which she interviewed teens on their use of MySpace, theorizing the concept of “networked publics” in which these young adults operate. Most other studies in this area focus
on this same age group, teens from 14-17 years of age, and consider identity representation, friending practices, users’ perceptions of privacy, “risk taking” and the strength of friendship ties on specific sites, MySpace and primarily Facebook, such as work by social psychologist Sonia Livingstone (2008), mass-communications scholars Bernhard Debatin and Jennette Lovejoy (2009), and education specialists Christine Greenhow and Beth Robelia (2009). Many studies, such as the work of Sebastian Valenzuela, Namsu Park, and Kerk F. Kee (2009) and Kevin Lewis, Jason Kaufman, and Nicholas Christakis (2008) focus on large-scale surveys of student users rather than the participant case studies to which I have turned my attention.

Other recent studies have focused on questions closer to rhetoric, studying the concept of audience among social network site users. danah boyd and Alice Marwick (2011) have studied teens’ practices regarding privacy on social network sites, as well as the concept of an imagined audience on Twitter. Many studies of social network sites have asked similar questions to earlier studies of online discussion boards and blogs: do these sites create community? Malcolm Parks (2010) used a large-scale study and in-depth case analyses of MySpace to consider the criteria of a virtual community, criteria that ultimately, MySpace did not meet (p. 117). Nicole Ellison, Cliff Lampe, Charles Steinfield, and Jessica Vitak (2010) investigated the concept of social capital on social network sites, finding that found that Facebook use was associated with two different types of social capital, both “bridging” and “bonding” social capital, and that the site assisted individuals in maintaining a larger number of weak social ties by lessening the effort required to maintain them. Facebook also extended proximity-based connections into other contexts, therefore enhancing individuals’ social capital (p. 136-138). Thomas Johnson, Weiwu Zhang, Shannon Richard, and Trent Seltzer (2010) direct these questions to a specific kind of community, asking how social network sites can promote civic engagement. While many of
these studies use quantitative or qualitative data from social network site users, what research outside of writing studies misses is a close attention to literacy practices. This work does not consider the activity that occurs on social network sites with an attention to the literacy practices that make up these activities, and this work does not ask what this activity means for literacy, writing and rhetoric.

Among writing researchers, Bronwyn Williams’ 2009 book, *Shimmering Literacies*, uses research gathered from interviews with 18-19 year-old college students on their use of popular culture material in their online writing activities, including social network sites. William’s text is organized around a series of different practices, including remixes, circulation of pop culture images and content and fan fiction, and demonstrates the complexity of activities individuals engage in within these spaces. Stephanie Vie’s (2008) article in *Computers and Composition*, however, more closely exemplifies the direction of work on these sites within the field, which considers the use of social network sites in the writing classroom. Her dissertation, which this article draws from, surveyed students and instructors on their perceptions of privacy and surveillance on social network sites. Erin Frost (2011) also provides an account of her students’ use of Facebook for a class project, posting questions for a class assignment to the social network site and later using the site to collaborate on a group project analyzing social network sites.

Other work in the field, however, has focused strictly on theorizing these sites, using the design of a particular profile, usually one’s own, to theorize digital literacy and identity construction in these spaces. This kind of work appears in Lankshear and Knobel’s (2008) *Multiliteracies* book, as well as in the most recent special issue of *Computers and Composition*, themed Composition 2.0, and edited by Michael Day, Randall McClure, and Mike Palmquist. In
this issue Kristin Arola uses her own profile effectively to shed light on a move from web design to the templates of Facebook and MySpace, and Gina Maranto and Matt Barton provide a thoughtful reading of MySpace and Facebook to consider the use of these sites within the composition classroom. Many of these studies, such as Maranto and Barton’s article and work in Lankshear and Knobel’s *Multiliteracies* (2008) text, analyze the structure of these sites without examining how individuals outside classroom settings use them. Despite its focus on writing practices, the Composition 2.0 edited collection does not include qualitative data from social network site users.

As Lunsford (2008) and Grabill and Hart-Davidson (2010) note, a great deal of self-sponsored writing occurs in digital spaces, particularly on social network sites, which these studies overlook in their focus on the classroom. Brian McNely (2011) points to the need for situated studies of writing practices that consider the complex ways individuals act with technology and integrate social network sites within their daily lives. A close study of individual social network site users will allow researchers to consider sites’ roles within individuals’ daily literacy practices. This approach requires a focus not so much on people’s perceptions of social network sites or friend ties, but a serious look at the kinds of activities that individuals are engaged in on these sites over a period of time. Facebook administrators, for example, frequently alter the design in ways that changes how individuals interact and gather information on the site. The 2006 introduction of the News Feed and its various configurations is just one example of design modifications that contribute to shaping participation. Another often-neglected element is to look at social network sites not as discrete systems, but to trace literate activity across sites. According to the PEW Internet and American Life Project, the average adult has profiles on more than one social network site, and many users synchronize certain kinds of content across
different sites, from Twitter to Facebook, for example, or they use a site like Tumblr to contain media from a number of the different sites on which they participate (Lenhart et al., 2010). To trace literate activity, then, writing researchers need to follow users across a number of different social network platforms.

The literate activity that individuals engage in on social network sites is, of course, produced under a number of rhetorical, social, and technological constraints. In terms of the available means of persuasion for writers in digital environments, social network sites restrict many of the design elements possible for writers of webtexts who are able to design html pages through the use of cascading style sheets (css), Flash, and other media elements. Content on social network sites is restricted within the parameters of their limited templates, which gives some scholars the sense that rhetorical expression on these sites is restricted to filling out forms. Kristin Arola (2010) discusses the trajectory from the personal homepage to the social network site profile, specifically the Facebook profile, and notes the possibilities for design, and also the design literacies, that these sites limit. Tech industry blogger Rick Schwartz (2010) has called sites like Facebook and Twitter “training wheels for the Internet,” in that these sites make users comfortable going online within certain parameters that apply specific constraints.

There have always been technological, material, social, and rhetorical constraints placed on literacy (Brandt, 2001), and social network sites provide one example through which to consider how writers work within a specific form of constraints to represent themselves in digital spaces and to interact with others. As I discuss in Chapter Four, social network sites encourage certain types of activity and discourage others; writers, however, have ways of using these sites in ways differently from the ways that they were intended and also to subvert the designs of the
sites themselves for their own rhetorical purposes. This dissertation project considers the digital literacy practices of writers working within and against these specific constraints.

**Literacy Practices and Literate Activity**

This dissertation project investigates the digital literacy practices of individuals using social network sites for identity representation. In studying the writing that individuals do in these online environments, I focus on two elements for analysis: literacy practices and literate activity. I direct my attention to the literate activity that individuals engage in across social network sites, using Paul Prior’s (1998) definition as “not located in acts of reading and writing, but as cultural forms of life saturated with textuality, that is strongly motivated and mediated by texts” (p. 51). The actions that individuals take on social network sites represent rich literate activity that is integrated within their daily lives. Through a study of this literate activity, I can consider the literacy practices that writers use in managing their social network site use. Paul Prior and Julie Hengst (2010) note that “practices are marked by repeatability and recognizability,” defined by Bourdieu as “habitus” (p. 11). Brian Street (1994) defines literacy practices as “both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing” (p. 2). Through a study of literate activity, this research project identifies specific literacy practices these writers engage in on social network sites.

**Situated Literacies**

Tracing literate activity also requires researchers to move beyond the computer. As Paul Prior and Jody Shipka (2003) remind us, literate activity is dispersed, occurring in a number of different locations and integrated within daily activity. Prior and Shipka note that this work is
often difficult to trace, occurring on a morning commute, in an office, a home, a private coffee shop – or, with many social network sites, wherever one has cell phone service – all places where researchers cannot easily follow participants. Although social network sites leave a record of that communication behind on the site, this activity is often interactional, and the digital record tells only half the story. A comment to an individual through Facebook, then, is normally one part of a more complex, dispersed interaction through a number of different media. To discuss the rich nature of literate activity, researchers cannot rely simply on the textual record.

Literate activity in social network sites are often multimodal. Users of these sites, such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, combine often short text with images and video to share with others; sometimes these are original compositions, and sometimes these texts are remixed from a variety of sources. Yet as Prior and Hengst (2010) note, most of the theories of multimodal composition popular in writing studies (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001) result from the study of multimodal artifacts, not the writing processes used to create them. This situation is true of both the processes of multimodal composition and the texts’ reception. According to Prior and Hengst: “Attention to multimodal production and reception is limited; analysis of ‘reading’, for example, does not examine the concrete practices of readers but rather infers these processes from the objects” (p. 7). There is a need, then, to study multimodal composition in process as a situated practice rather than relying on artifacts for clues to the text’s creation.

Collin Brooke (2009), in his book Lingua Fracta, argues for a shift in focus from investigating “textual objects” to researching “medial interfaces” (p. 6). Our continued disciplinary emphasis on static text, and our reliance on theories derived from print texts, as Brooke and Prior and Hengst (2010) note, not only puts us out of step with students and the
larger culture (Brooke, 2009, p. 23), but also blinds us to many of the rhetorical affordances of new media. Brooke argues:

A turn toward the interface as our unit of analysis would be an acknowledgment that it is not necessary that these processes culminate in products (which can be decoupled from the contexts of their production) but rather that what we think of as products (books, articles, essays) are but special, stabilized instances of an ongoing process conducted at the level of the interface. (p. 25)

In focusing on medial interfaces, Brooke argues for an emphasis not only on the composing processes that lead to the production of interfaces, but also the activity that follows them as well (p. 38). Brooke argues for an attention to “ecologies of practice” with a focus on “conscious, directed activity” in order to trace the ways that rhetorical work happens across an interface.

It is especially important to view the literate activity surrounding multimodal writing when considering composition processes on the Internet. A common practice in both writing studies and communication research is to study online interactions based on their textual record. There is a body of work in both fields that analyze data from information placed on personal homepages (Hawisher and Sullivan, 1998, 2003) and those that analyze information on real time chat spaces or discussion boards (Campbell, 2006; Chan, 2005; Fung, 2002; Gibb, 2002; Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, Wright, 2004; Jarret, 2004; Knadler, 2001; Nakamura, 2002). And this was an excellent way of studying interactions between those who communicate primarily through that medium, such as special interest groups, like the ethnic groups Chan (2005), Fung (2002) and Gibb (2002) studied. Social network sites, however, present a different situation for Internet research. Users primarily communicate through these platforms with those they already know (boyd & Ellison, 2007) and activity on these sites is becoming even more dispersed and
ubiquitous, as individuals continue their Facebook interactions, for example, on their mobile phones (Lenhart et al., 2010). A comment to an individual through Facebook is normally one part of a more complex, dispersed interaction through a number of different media.

There is a need, then, to see literate activity on social network sites within larger systems of activity, where individuals interact with others across various media platforms and within different communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). To trace literate activity in these spaces, I turned to work in cultural historical activity theory. As Prior and his coauthors (2007) describe it in their *Kairos* article, “Remediating the Canons,” cultural-historical activity theory is a synthesis of “Vygotskyan psychology, Voloshinovian and Bakhtinian semiotics, Latour’s actor-network theory, and situated, phenomenological work in sociology and anthropology” (“What is CHAT,” para. 1). The common thread in this work, as noted by James Gee (2000), is the close study of situated practice. This perspective argues that language and learning processes are enacted locally through interactions with others and mediated through historically situated tools and cultural practices. In Prior and his coauthors’ (2007) description, writing researchers can use CHAT to study rhetorical and literate activity in functional systems that exist in “laminated chronotopes,” using Bakhtin’s term, meaning the layering of multiple embodied activities that are embedded in texts and artifacts (Prior et al. 2007; Prior & Shipka, 2003). The material and embodied elements, such as the location of the author or authors and their other embodied activities, become wrapped into the text itself. That text, or more broadly—literate activity—is also part a number of “functional systems” (Prior et al., 2007, “Core Text,” p. 18), which include individuals, institutions, communities, and workplaces, among them, that place this literate activity within a certain social and cultural situation with a given purpose. This theoretical framework is uniquely suited to capture the literate activity of individuals on social network
sites, where users create text and multimodal representations, share them through the systems of
the sites themselves, which are laminated onto specific times and places. Using this approach, I
analyze the artifacts of literate activity that exist on a profile page of a social network site, for
example, but also see the composition of that page as a situated, embodied activity that is part of
a number of functional systems and influenced by histories of the tools, including the sites
themselves, used to create that multimodal text.

This focus on situated literate activity that combines cultural historical activity theory
with actor network theory extends a recent trend within writing studies for examining writing
practices. Since the “social turn” more than 20 years ago, writing studies has centered theories of
writing within the social, viewing writing as a collaborative process situated within specific
cultural contexts (Bruffee, 1984; Bizzell, 1994). Many in writing studies are currently working to
present views of writing as socially situated, but also to take into account the technological
artifacts and infrastructure in which this writing is situated. As those in computers and writing
(Haas, 1996; Baron, 1999; Selfe, 1999) remind us, the technology used in composition has an
impact on the product. Some use an ecological framework for writing in order to take these
factors into account (Cooper, 1986; Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, Papper, 2008; Brooke,
2009); others rely on interdisciplinary theory from scholars such as Régis Debray (Turnley,
2011). My dissertation takes up this call to view literate activity across interfaces rather than as
separate, discrete texts.

This chapter situated this dissertation within other work on digital literacy and identity
practices, including those on social network sites. The following descriptions provide an
overview of each of the following chapters.

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Chapter Two: “Methodological Frameworks.” Chapter Two introduces my ethnographic case study methodology that combines methods of data collection from different sources, including face-to-face interviews, online written texts, time use diaries and video screen capture. This project does not draw strict boundaries between online and offline activities or between activity on different social network sites, but instead investigates the relationship between them. Instead of studying online interactions based on their textual record, I include data from other sources to gain a better understanding of this online activity as distributed across sites and integrated within daily literacy practices.

Chapter Three: “Negotiating Identity within Figured Worlds.” Chapter Three focuses on the ways that my research participants represent themselves for different audiences and theorizes different ways to view identity on social network sites. Here my research is grounded in Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner and Carole Cain’s (1998) conceptions of situated and transactional identities and figured worlds. The structure of many social network sites flatten one’s multiple contact groups into one group of “friends” or “followers,” where an individual sends the same update to multiple friend groups. This chapter considers the ways that case study participants conceive of audience on these sites and negotiate between different communities, figured worlds (Holland, et al., 1998) in online spaces. One research participant, for example, manages two different Twitter accounts, one as a music reviewer for a popular music blog, another for his academic persona as a graduate student, teacher, and rhetorician. Another undergraduate research participant uses the same Twitter and Facebook accounts to send updates in both English and Korean to the same list of contacts. These participants’ experiences demonstrate the purposeful ways in which writers consider audience and representation on social network sites.
Chapter Four: “Chronotopic Laminations: Places and Interfaces.” Chapter Four moves from users’ interactions with others on social network sites to interactions with the sites themselves. This chapter considers social network sites themselves as technological actors in these writers’ identity representations, and it illustrates the ways in which individuals work purposefully with and against the structures of these sites to manage their identities and online data. An important component of this negotiation with social network sites is how participants construct boundaries in regard to privacy, and how they negotiate the frequently changing settings and policies of each social network site. One research participant, for example, keeps most personal information off Facebook and monitors her privacy settings closely, another constructs fake profiles and posts false information to make a statement about the veracity of information on the service. Along with managing their identities through privacy settings, many participants also used social network sites to manage data, archiving songs they have listened to in last.fm, organizing images through Flickr, and building an inventory of yarn owned through a social network site for knitters called Ravelry. The experiences that the participants discussed in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which navigating interfaces and settings become important literacy skills in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 5: “Writing and Identity in Digital Environments.” This chapter summarizes this case study research and discusses its implications for our understanding of literate activity connected to social network sites and the representation of identity on these sites, as well as pointing to directions for future research in writing studies. In considering the roles that social network sites play in individuals’ literacy and identity practices, writing researchers and educators can better understand the literacy practices that students engage in outside of the classroom and the experiences they bring to their academic writing. My research also suggests
methodologies for observing and studying the distributed literate activity that takes place on social network sites. Examining the social, technological and structural factors that influence digital literacy practices in online environments is crucial in understanding the impact of these sites on writing practices and literate activity.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

As I described in Chapter One, literate activity on social networking sites is varied and distributed, occurring in small moments throughout the writer’s day. For these self-sponsored digital writing activities, writing researchers cannot rely on more traditional research methodologies used in literacy research. This kind of writing activity requires new tools and strategies to gain a sense of digital writing that is embedded in daily activity. Unlike traditional case studies of writers, writing researchers need to utilize new tools in order to gain a sense of how this literate activity is situated within daily literacy practices. And unlike many studies of online interactions, researchers cannot look only at the textual record of those interactions. We need new methodologies for these writing situations and understand them as complex and distributed digital writing activity. This chapter details the writing methodologies I drew on from constructing the methods for this study. I detail CHAT approaches such as mediated discourse analysis and case study methodology before describing the mixed qualitative methods I used to study individuals’ identity representation and literacy practices on social networking sites.

Just as computers and writing scholars argue that our theories of writing and writing pedagogy cannot simply be translated to a computer, Porter (2007) notes that research on digital writing cannot rely on the same methodologies, simply translated to digital environments (p. xiii). What are needed instead are research methodologies that, as James Porter describes it, “account for the local—‘local’ meaning the technological environments in which writing occurs” (p. xiv). Digital writing research methodologies, Porter argues, “should be viewed . . . as changing the fundamental assumptions about methodology, particularly the humanist assumption
that divides the human from the technological” (p. xv). Heidi McKee and Danielle DeVoss (2007) note that as digital technology has radically changed the nature of writing and writing processes, so too has it changed the methods by which we investigate these processes, in workplaces, classrooms, and other contexts. The word “digital” in digital writing research reflects an emphasis not on instrumentalist tools of writing, but on “technology-as-cultural-space as well as technology-as-production-space, as a virtual environment in which humans live, not just a medium through which they talk” (Porter, 2007, p. xviii). Methodologies that consider these realities of digital writing environments can best respond to and investigate digital writing practices. McKee and DeVoss list a number of these realities:

First a transformed composing environment – writing mediated by software and produced on handheld and desktop digital devices. Second, transformed methods of authorship and ownership that perhaps rely more on pastiche, appropriation, and copying and pasting than ever before. Third, and closely related to the second, transformed notions of collaboration in writing processes and authorship. Fourth, transformed modes of delivery – writing not only composed through but distributed primarily via networks. Fifth, transformed modes of interaction, commentary, and participation, facilitated within and across networks and interfaces. (p. 10)

Responding to these transformed notions of authorship, process, and collaboration to study the kinds of writing practices that occur surrounding social network sites that I outlined in Chapter One requires approaches that understand the situated nature of digital writing that occurs within and across online and offline spaces.

Situated Studies of Literate Activity
The cultural, institutional, and technological changes that McKee and DeVoss describe above greatly influence literate activity. Paul Prior (1998) notes that a great deal of writing research has been focused on discrete texts as artifacts rather than the activity and structures surrounding those artifacts (p. 137). Prior calls for the study of writing that takes into account systems of literate activity, made up of persons, artifacts, practices, institutions, and communities (pp. 30-32). In order to study writing in a way that takes these systems into account, researchers must understand writing as situated, mediated, and dispersed (p. 138). Tracing and studying literate activity can be challenging to writing researchers, as literate activity happens in small moments influenced by other tools and contexts:

Writing happens in moments that are richly equipped with tools (material and semiotic) and populated with others (past, present, future). When seen as situated activity, writing does not stand alone as the discrete act of the writer, but emerges as a confluence of many streams of activity: reading, talking, observing, acting, making, thinking, and feeling as well as transcribing words on paper. (Prior, 1998, p. xi)

Considering writing within social network sites as situated within these systems of literate activity means developing an account of this writing that includes not only the individuals involved and the texts they create, but also the technological interfaces, institutions, and communities of which they are a part. Individuals write differently on different sites, influenced both by discrete audiences and the structure of the sites themselves, which encapsulate their own institutional histories of the corporations and designers that shaped them. As noted in Chapter One, online activity cannot be easily separated from offline activity, and I view the writing that individuals engage in on social network sites as situated within daily activity.
Given this perspective, this research is influenced by other situated studies of literate activity, such as Prior’s (1998) study of graduate students’ academic writing and introduction to disciplinary writing practices, as well as Christine Pearson Casanave’s (2002) study of academic writers’ identities, Prior and Shipka’s (2003) research on the places in and activities through which academic writing happens, Kevin Roozen’s (2009, 2010) work on the self-sponsored writing of undergraduate students, and Kendall Leon and Stacy Pigg’s (2011) research on the writing habits of graduate students.

Prior’s (1998) study of disciplinary literate activity in the academy focused on close studies of individual graduate students and on specific classes across a number of disciplines, studying classroom interactions, drafts, response, and the processes of completing writing tasks. Taken together, these data provide a thick description of the literate activity graduate students participate in in becoming enculturated into their disciplines.

In Prior and Shipka’s (2003) study of the writing habits of academic writers, from undergraduates to professors, a use of both graphic representations of these processes and reflective interviews allowed the authors to focus on the processes of specific individuals in order to explore literate activity that is often overlooked as unofficial and informal. Prior and Shipka focus specifically on “chronotopic laminations,” the “dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action” (p. 2) and the ways in which the environments writers select for working become part of their writing processes. Their data collection processes rooted in reflective interviews allow Prior and Shipka to understand the complex nature of the literate activity in which these specific writers engage.
Casanave’s (2002) research links a series of qualitative case studies on academic literacies, situated within particular contexts and connected to writers’ identities. In focusing her study on in-depth case studies of a few individuals, Casanave is able to focus closely on the contexts in which these literacy practices are developed and “situated in the realities of people’s lives” (p. 14). Using narrative inquiry and grounded theory, Casanave developed “clusterings” of topics that pointed to the trends she derived from her data, creating narratives that “impart an embodied sense of [her participants’] selves in the stories [she] construct[s]” (p. 33). Casanave’s work draws connections between a number of case studies, and she argues that researchers need to link case studies more often to further contextualize them and synthesize their conclusions.

Roozen’s (2009, 2010) work also draws connections between case studies to draw larger conclusions about the connection between academic and “extradisciplinary” writing for a number of undergraduates in order to trace texts through a variety of activities and “trajectories of practice” (p. 321). Roozen argues for “less bounded approaches to writing and literate practice” (p. 321), and situated studies of literacy like his case studies allow for that focus. Combining data collection from a variety of different sources, including journals, formal texts, interviews and drawings, Roozen works to trace individuals’ official and unofficial writing across institutional boundaries to gain a thick description of an individual’s literacy practices. Combined, these case studies trace the movement of literacy practices across contexts and their integration within individuals’ literate lives.

Leon and Pigg (2011) conducted case studies on the writing identities and processes of two graduate students in a rhetoric and composition program. Like Prior and Shipka’s (2003) work of academic writers, the authors investigated both “official” and “unofficial” academic writing, in both official and unofficial spaces. In order to explore multiple types of writing in
multiple settings, Leon and Pigg collected data through diary logs of writing activity, screen
captures of writing sessions, and interviews about these writing sessions. This combination
allowed the researchers to view these academic writing activities from a number of different
perspectives.

Prior’s (2010) more recent work considers the construction of new media texts through
the production of IO, a digital art project created through a collaboration between four different
artists. Through an observation of their meetings and a tracing of their activity through text,
image, conversation, and gesture, Prior considers the work of these writers as semiotic
remediation, tracing the ways these multiple ways of making meaning work together through
chains of literate activity involving a variety of computer programs, texts, and interactions.

My research adds to this work on situated literate activity by focusing on the ways that
literate practice is connected not just to the physical environments in which writers compose, but
the digital environments as well. There is a great history of this work within computers and
writing, particularly for word processing work (e.g., Hawisher, 1987; Haas, 1996). The literate
activity that writers engage in within social network sites is interesting particularly for its
occurrence in unofficial spaces and its perception as often invisible writing that occurs in short
moment’s throughout a writer’s daily activity. Someone writes a comment on a friend’s
Facebook status, for example, then leaves for class, takes a picture of a sign by the side of the
road, and uploads the image to Twitpic, sharing the image with his or her followers. This kind of
literate activity encouraged by social network sites and mobile devices is distributed and situated
literate activity, occurring in small moments throughout one’s daily life. A study of these kinds
of literacy practices can help writing researchers to gain an understanding of the distributed
nature of literate activity and its connection to digital technologies.
Because these studies rely on mixed methods that attempt to capture the situated nature of literate activity, they seem especially appropriate models. Prior and Hengst (2010) note in their edited collection on semiotic remediation that all of the studies in their text use the same “methodological toolkit” that combines ethnographic methods of observation and data collection with interpretive analysis (p. 16). In order to study the situated literate activity individuals engage in on social network sites, I rely on similar mixed methods.

**Case Study Methodology**

As in the studies I discuss above, an examination of writing that takes into account the situated, mediated, and dispersed nature of literate activity (Prior, 1998, 2010) lends itself to a case study approach that allows for a study of the ways in which these various influences work together within the literate lives of individuals. For Anne Haas Dyson and Celia Genishi (2005) it is the “messy complexity of human experience” that leads researchers to case studies, and their strength lies in the “detailing of local specificity and the probing of a more abstract phenomenon” (p. 3). Stephen North (1987) argues that the power of case study research comes not from its ability to produce generalizable results, but instead from their “idiographic” power in creating close descriptions of individual writers (p. 237). What is important about these studies is their close attention to unique writers and situations.

Robert Yin (1989) defines the case study method as empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23).
According to Yin, case studies can be used to explain causal links, to describe real-life contexts of a phenomenon, to illustrate a context in which an “intervention” has occurred or to simply “explore” that context. Interpretation, according to Robert Stake (1995), is key in all research, but particularly in case studies, where the researcher tries to “preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening” (p. 12) in order to reach richer descriptions and to consider multiple interpretations on an issue. Dyson and Genishi (2005) emphasize these frameworks and contexts that individuals bring to experiences as central to analysis and interpretation in case studies.

Case studies are often criticized for their lack of external reliability; they cannot be replicated and also cannot be generalized beyond the individual people or contexts studied. Yin (1989), however, notes the importance of case studies not in creating generalized results, but in contributing to theory surrounding the phenomenon being studied. Case studies can examine established theory on the subject, either verifying that theory or questioning it. Other types of research also explore these theories to verify or challenge them. In this way, case studies add to established work in the field in this area, exploring theories at the level of the individual (p. 44). Exploring literate activity on social network sites through a group of case studies adds to work on situated studies of literacy, exploring how theories of writing play out within these specific digital environments and further developing our theories about the social nature of writing, writing in digital environments, and the nature of literate activity in these contexts.

The individual cases of my research participants represent what Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street, and David Bloome (2000) call “telling cases” that work “not through empirical generalisation, but by revealing the principles that underlie relationships between specific writing practices, the local events of which they are a part, and the institutional contexts in which they
take place” (p. 14). For these researchers, a telling case is more important than a typical case, as it can make theoretical relationships more apparent that were previously obscured and suggest greater connections to theory, as Stake (1995) argues. Mary Sheridan (2008) described telling cases as those “that exceed what generalized theories might expect of them and work against the flattening theoretical appraisals that offer predictable answers” (p. 8). Some of the individuals in this study spend more time on social network sites than others, but their practices and the situations they encounter in representing themselves online make visible the issues that many others confront in their social network site use, usually in more subtle ways, when engaging in common activities such as sharing family and vacation photos or making comments on a political issue or event. Studying students like those represented here, then, calls attention to the stakes for literacy and identity representation within social network sites, most especially rhetorical questions of authorship, audience, and privacy, as individuals share information through structures that flatten multiple groups of contacts into one flattened audience while also collecting data about those interactions.

These participants’ experiences by now also represent historical accounts. Many of the social network sites these individuals used underwent design changes throughout the course of this study, particularly Facebook, and have gone through many more since these data were collected. Other social network sites have developed in the time since this project was completed, including Google+, which have also become part of these participants’ online lives. While this account, then, is specific to those using social network sites in 2010, the literate activity discussed still points to the larger implications discussed in this study.
Ethics and Internet research

Case study-based research projects, like all qualitative research methodologies, involve delicate negotiations between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, in this study, I finalized the specific combination of data collection methods in close consultation with the participants. Some participants allowed me greater access to their social networking profiles than others, with many of my participants “friending” or “following” me online, while others preferred to share texts with me only when we met for face-to-face interviews. Research ethics in Internet research are complicated, especially in studies that cross boundaries between public and private online spaces. In addition, I used both online and offline collection methods as well, collecting data, as described in more detail below, from Twitter feeds and Facebook profiles, and from face-to-face interviews.

For guidance on issues of research ethics, I turned to Heidi McKee and James Porter’s 2009 text, The Ethics of Internet Research. McKee and Porter advocate a rhetorical and caustic approach that treats the relationship between researchers and participants as a constantly negotiated rhetorical situation, and “fundamentally a communication situation” (p. 13). This approach, they argue, leads to a focus on situational context, rhetoric, and causality allows “a practical mechanism for addressing complex issues,” (p. 13). They suggest an approach to ethics in Internet research as developed in part by negotiation and discussion with colleagues, as well as the use of heuristics to determine issues such as whether the research requires informed consent. Advocating for a rhetorical approach, McKee and Porter also note that ethical issues need to be negotiated at the level of the situation: “Taking a rhetorical perspective, as applied to research ethics, means that researchers attend to the complexities and particularities of context, of place, of situation, of persons (and their roles as author, players, residents, etc.), and of methodological
type” (p. 22). These are “messy propositions” (p. 22), as they note, but allow researchers to respond to the unique situation in which they find themselves. McKee and Porter advocate for an approach to participants that is not applied in dogmatic ways or in ways that make decisions about communities and individual members without their participation that treat them as other: “ethical decision-making requires attentiveness to people’s lives – and to the complexities, differences, and nuances of human experience, including the researcher’s own experiences” (p. 27).

In approaching my research participants, I treated each initial conversation about the research as a rhetorical negotiation, but one based in similar beliefs and goals. While some of the information that these individuals shared with me was publically available online, some of it was not. Some material was personally sensitive information, about religion, personal relationships, or beliefs, and some of it was just a reposting of links and images this person liked. Each participant and I worked out a system to share information that this individual was comfortable with. With most research participants, I was given full access to their Twitter and Facebook profiles, allowed to see individual posts, images, and interactions with friends. One participant was happy to talk with me about her social networking site use, but I could only see her profile during interviews, as she wasn’t comfortable friending me on either space. A third participant allowed me to friend her, but I relied a great deal on her to gain access to her materials, much of which was written in Korean. While she translated for me during our interviews, at times she skipped a post or update, noting that it was “personal.”

Negotiating interactions with participants in online spaces was an issue I anticipated. Research on Internet communities has an established tradition of participant observation. McKee and Porter describe a number of different researchers who have studied communities of which
they are a part, who announce their presence as researchers and negotiate their participation with the community. This research project was different in two ways: first, I was interested in the online interactions of several discrete individuals, not the dynamics of a community as a whole. Second, social networking sites represent a different kind of community online. Unlike the tight-knit communities organized by common interest studied by the researchers McKee and Porter discuss, most social networking sites function as many different communities, as users primarily connect with those they are connected to in their offline lives (boyd & Ellison, 2007). There is not one Facebook community for its 845 million users as of February 2012 (Protalinski, 2012), then, but each user has his or her own distinct community. After informed consent was negotiated in person,² then, I observed their interactions online as more of an observer than a participant outside of our interviews.

I left all of my own social media information open to each of my participants, determining that if I asked them to open their digital lives to me, I should do the same for them. For research participants with whom I had relationships outside of the research situation, such as the graduate students in my department, I maintained a typical level of interaction with these participants within social networking sites. For the undergraduate research participants, I did not comment on or reply to their content, but one participant occasionally commented and replied to mine, including retweeting some of my own comments on Twitter. I therefore negotiated an attitude of remaining a background participant online, but an active participant engaged in these individuals’ literacy practices in our interviews.

The line between public and private on the Internet is a slippery one, and researchers cannot treat all publicly available information online as “public,” because participants might not see it with the same level of “publicness” as the researcher does (McKee & Porter, 2009, p. 78).

² The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign IRB-approved consent form can be found in the Appendix.
While writing is publicly accessible online, it may not be as polished as work published in print, and it may not have been written with the same expectations of a large audience. Some young people, for example, may consider their social networking profiles private if their parents do not have access to them (McKee & Porter, 2009). As Amy Bruckman described in McKee and Porter’s (2009) text, “most work on the Internet is semi-published” (p. 81). For many researchers, as McKee and Porter discuss, the question is about treating the work as public and published texts, or semi-private conversations in which a researcher would need informed consent. Malin Sveningson Elm (2009) discusses privacy considerations for qualitative Internet researchers in terms of informed consent and argues that not only is privacy a conception, but it is best for researchers to see privacy as a continuum. Some information can be seen as public online, while other information, though technically public, is intended for a smaller group of recipients. These considerations are best made in conversation with research participants who should “decide for themselves what kind of information to share with the researcher and under what conditions” (p. 70).

Much of the interactions my research participants were involved in were public, occurring in public Twitter accounts and similar forums, yet some of it was also private, or semi-private, hidden behind a Facebook password and available only to friends. Many of these social networking sites allow more private messages as well, such as private emails through Facebook and direct messages in Twitter. As noted above, the study participants and I negotiated my access to their material through the informed consent processes. In our interviews, we discussed private messages broadly and the situations in which they were used, but I did not look at the individual private messages.
While I relied on McKee and Porter’s text to frame many of my decisions regarding research ethics, social network sites – and the resulting contexts for research – change frequently. Facebook and Twitter, for example, are a great deal different from the early social network site research McKee and Porter describe in their text. In the case of Facebook, the site’s audience has expanded, moving from a more close-knit space for friends to the place to connect with everyone from a coworker to a high school classmate to a grandmother. For my research participants, they are now negotiating their identities with a larger number of people. Site privacy policies have changed as well and no longer allow as much information to remain private or restricted. Both Facebook and Twitter, for example, have also become more commercial, with Twitter including sponsored tweets and trending topics, and Facebook expanding the power and reach of commercial product pages and promotions. These changes have meant changes for my participants’ actions and ethical considerations as well, and one I constantly negotiated with each writer as the site designs and their own activities changed.

Another issue regarding public and private information concerns identification. I ultimately kept my participants’ information confidential, referring to each by a pseudonym, and their screen names and website addresses as pseudonyms as well. The reasons for this decision were multiple. I was first concerned that providing these names and screen names would make participants incredibly easy to find, given the nature of digital data and search engines. Not only would their data be easily available, then, but their friends’ data would as well. Many of my participants had public Twitter accounts, for example, where they not only posted but also interacted with friends and also retweeted friends’ content. While this was publicly available information, I only had informed consent from each participant, not from those he or she interacted with. By making social media accounts public, then, I would expose not just the
research participant, but his or her friend group as well, individuals who were most likely unaware of the research project. For these reasons, I kept my participants’ data confidential, not only using pseudonyms, but altering screen shots and other visual data. Textual data is only reproduced here when it was not found through online search engines. Search engines, for example, do not index individual tweets on Twitter. In reproducing data from my participants in this dissertation, I ran the text through the Google search engine to verify that this data would not come up in a search engine and identify my participants.

One challenge in this research project was how to keep this information confidential for individuals who were trying to brand themselves publicly online. Two participants, Jack and Ronnie, did this most explicitly, but Becca, Alexis, and Sandra also represented themselves publicly online and wanted others to see these representations. Sveningson Elm (2009) notes the importance of “social control” (p. 83) for participants when negotiating online information discussed in qualitative research projects online. For my own purposes here, I wanted each of my research participants to remain in control of their representations online. Each one of them could change the representation of their online identities tomorrow, altering their images, information, and even their screen names, yet the information I provided about them in this written text would remain the same. In order for these individuals to maintain that social control over their own data in ways that were important to them, I found it best to remove identifying information as much as possible.

My own social media presence, however, could also allow participants to be identified. Like my research participants, I tweet publicly, and I also connect to colleagues within the field of Computers and Writing on Twitter. I follow my research participants on this Twitter account, and although I follow a significant number of people on Twitter, they would not be impossible to
identify by scouring the list of users I follow. I have weighed the factors involved in removing them from my Twitter follower list, and it’s an issue I am constantly reevaluating. Following a rhetorical and caustic approach as McKee and Porter advocate means frequently reconsidering the research situation, as the complexities of individuals and their situations matter (p. 27-28). In terms of the graduate student participants, these are contacts I had before the research began, and in both cases, I was following each participant on Twitter before the research started. As for the undergraduate student participants, one participant protected her tweets, another declined to have me follow her on Twitter. The other two undergraduates tweet publicly. I have constantly reevaluated my connection with these two students’ Twitter accounts, following McKee and Porter’s heuristics for evaluating the public and sensitive nature of online information (p. 21). Both participants have described the information they post to Twitter as being mundane reflections on daily life, and neither post information they would consider sensitive. If any research participant, however, began using his or her account in a different way and discussed topics of a more sensitive and private nature, I would consequently reexamine my connection to their accounts. As I discuss later in Chapter Five, these kinds of questions and concerns regarding research ethics and participant privacy are questions that will only become more important as writing researchers continue to study the work of writers in online environments, and the negotiations I made with my research participants point to a possible approach in navigating these kinds of questions for researchers.

**Research Design**

The nature of distributed literate activity and the need for case studies to derive their data through different sources (e.g., Yin, 1989; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995) require a
multifaceted approach to research that requires multiple methods collected through different means, both to maintain reliability in the study through triangulation and other methods (Yin, 1989; Stake, 1995), and to gain a greater description of this digital literate activity. In designing this study, I was influenced by other situated studies of literate activity mentioned above. The specific study design is outlined below.

**Research questions.** My research was guided by several descriptive questions, as I was interested in obtaining a greater description of the kinds of literate activity that individuals are engaged in within social network sites, and how that activity works to shape identity representation.

These are the primary questions that guided my research:

- How do individuals integrate social network sites within their everyday literacy practices?
- How do people negotiate their identities with multiple audience groups through the sites themselves?
- What literacy practices are involved in representing one’s identity online?
- How do people negotiate site interfaces to represent their identities and communicate with others?

**Setting.** This research took place on the campus of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and on the social networks used by these participants. The participants, graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Illinois, updated social network sites both on campus and off, in various locations throughout the greater Champaign-Urbana area, a community of 120,000 located in East-Central Illinois. The university wireless network is available throughout the buildings of the campus and was frequently used by all research participants. Cellular phone 3G and 4G service with some providers in the area, however, suffers from weak signal strength,
which affected the means through which these individuals updated information on social network sites. Two research participants, for example, preferred to send Twitter updates through the website rather than through their mobile devices.

In regard to the social network sites themselves, I focused on the sites that my participants used rather than looking for individuals who used specific sites. Of the seven participants, each had a Facebook account, and six of the seven participants used Twitter. Other sites used by some of the participants included last.fm, Ravelry, Cyworld, Academia.edu, and other websites considered niche social network sites. Each participant was engaged in a variety of other interesting online activities. One participant, for example, was an avid blogger; while we discussed this activity, I focused my analysis specifically on the activity on social network sites. In making distinctions between these sites, I used danah boyd and Nicole Ellison’s (2007) definition discussed in Chapter One, that is “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (para. 4).

Participants. As mentioned, participants for the case studies that make up this dissertation were undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The undergraduate students were recruited during the Spring 2010 semester by class visits to INFO 303/WRIT 303: Writing Across Media, an advanced composition course focused on composition through a variety of media, including image, audio, and video. As I was interested in studying writing practices that occurred between a number of different social network sites, I recruited participants from the Writing Across Media course, since they are typically active on many social network sites and interested in discussing and analyzing their
own practices in these composing spaces. This research has implications for writing instruction in new media, and those currently invested in a writing intensive course at any university, particularly a course focused on multimodal composition, are those who can most benefit from the research findings. Criteria for participation in this study included a strong presence on social networking sites, as judged by an up-to-date profile and daily participation on a social networking site and participation in a writing-intensive course. I measured students’ participation levels on social network sites through a preliminary questionnaire distributed to INFO 303 students during my classroom visit, which invited interested students to include an email address if they were interested in talking with me further about their social network site use. Two additional undergraduate research participants were recruited through a recommendation from an INFO 303 instructor who suggested a few former students as possible candidates for the research project. These participants were recruited through email.

The graduate student participants were recruited from among personal contacts of current instructors of writing intensive courses at the University. Two of the graduate student participants were instructors of INFO 303, the third an instructor in the Academic Writing Program, a two-semester course sequence for first-year students. Both graduate and undergraduate students were chosen to participate in this study in order to examine literacy practices among groups of writers with different concerns and experiences. Much of the discussion surrounding identity and privacy and social network sites (central concerns of this study) has focused on underage youth since undergraduate students represent the first users of social network sites (such as Facebook) and still form the core demographic of users for many of these sites. Issues of identity, representation, and audience are no less important for this group of users. I included graduate students as well because as writers with different kinds of experience
and priorities, graduate students have different concerns of professionalization as connected to social network sites as well as different concerns for identity and representation. I was also interested in investigating a population that was older than undergraduate students but still easily accessible to me as a researcher.

The participants in this study had varying levels of activity on social network sites and I therefore treat them with a different kind of emphasis within this study. Participants like Ronnie, Jack, and Alexis were quite active on multiple sites, and our interviews were longer and more frequent as we covered more material. My analysis of the writing activity of these individuals therefore received greater focus within this study as well. Esther, while not as active on some of the more common social network sites like Facebook and Twitter, was quite active on a niche social network site called Ravelry. My discussion of Esther, therefore, focuses on her use of this site primarily. The three remaining participants, Beth, Becca, and Sandra, had accounts on social network sites, but did not use them as frequently as some of my other participants. Their perspectives are still important to investigate, but we had fewer interviews, and I spend less time on their online activity within my analysis for this reason.

**Researcher Position.** As noted by Haas Dyson and Genishi (2005), among others, the position of the researcher in qualitative research is critical to the research conducted and can never be separated from the conclusions drawn. My own position as a researcher, graduate student, and my history as a computer literate, middle-class white woman plays a role in the study: how I interacted with my participants, and how I interpreted my results. Prompted by my own concerns of identity, representation, and privacy online, I asked questions of my participants based in my own concerns as well as a growing body of scholarly research on the topic. Interested in the social nature of writing and its connection to technology, as discussed above,
my interpretations of my participants’ activities and experiences are inevitably filtered through this perspective. I also had previous connections and relationships with a few of the participants in this study, while others I met through the course of participant recruitment. My interpretations and assumptions factor into my data collection and analysis processes, something I hope I have made explicit throughout the descriptions of these case studies and my results.

**Case Study Participants.** What follows are descriptions of each research participant. Analyses of the literate activity of each participant follows in Chapters Three and Four.

*Ronnie.* An undergraduate math and statistics major and informatics minor, Ronnie grew up in Park Ridge, IL, a suburb of Chicago and was 20 and 21 years old at the time of the study. Ronnie played bass in the university orchestra and for local theater productions. Ronnie had active accounts on the following social network sites: Twitter, Facebook, Blogger, MySpace, Tumblr, Flickr, YouTube, Last.fm, Linked In, Academia.edu, PureVolume, Digg, LibraryThing, and Ning. Ronnie first used computers in elementary school (fourth grade), primarily for word processing and email. He describes his father as an early technological literacy sponsor (Hawisher & Selfe, 2004) who helped him run DOS programs on the family computer. Ronnie primarily uses a Dell laptop for his social media use; he also bought an iPhone during the course of the study, through which he also updated social network sites. Experienced with web design, Ronnie had been blogging for six years at the time of the study, having started blogging at the suggestion of a high school English teacher. He began using Facebook in 2006, when the service opened itself up to high school students, primarily to keep in touch with friends who had already graduated. He considered himself an early-adopter of many different social network sites; he joined Twitter in 2008, and he reported that he often joined new sites to “claim real estate,” i.e. reserve his username, on the site in case it became popular later.
Alexis. Alexis was a 22 year-old undergraduate media studies major at the time of the study. Alexis was born in South Korea and lived there until she was eight years old. Her family then moved to Raleigh, NC and stayed there for four years. They returned to Korea five years and returned to the United States, moving to Champaign, in 2004. An undergraduate at the University of Illinois, Alexis continued to live at home throughout the course of the study, and she had accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Cyworld, YouTube, and Wordpress. Alexis first used computers in elementary school and used the family Windows 98 desktop for homework, as well as games like solitaire and educational word games. Alexis noted her father as an early computer literacy sponsor (Brandt, 2001), although she reported that his computer knowledge used to be better than it currently is. She had two computers at the time of the study, a Dell laptop and a Aces netbook. Alexis primarily left the laptop at home and used the netbook for checking email and updating social network sites away from home, as well as for taking class notes. She joined Facebook in 2008, while she did not use her account as actively until 2009. Alexis also joined Twitter in 2010, while she has been sending updates to the Korean social network site Cyworld for much longer.

Beth. Beth, an undergraduate earth systems, environment and society major and an informatics minor, uses social network sites less frequently than many of her peers, for both time and privacy reasons. Beth grew up in Oklahoma and moved to central Illinois in high school. Beth cites her father as an early literacy sponsor, and he programmed an early counting, animal and color matching game she played on the computer. While she used a computer primarily for games at home, by 6th grade Beth was also connecting to the Internet to answer daily science questions for school, while she still preferred print encyclopedias for her work, and she also had experience with web design and basic html coding in middle school. As the editor of her high
school newspaper, Beth spent a lot of time using publishing software for print media design. She attended a different college in Illinois before transferring to the U of I. While Beth wanted a computer as a high school graduation gift, she was given jewelry instead, and she saved her summer income to purchase an HP tablet laptop running Windows 7 that she used for all of her schoolwork. Beth was active on Live Journal in high school and maintained a Facebook profile, which she checks once a week to keep up with friends in other cities and states and a Twitter profile, which she was required to join for a class at the time of the study. While her personal use of social network sites is minimal, Beth maintains the social media accounts for a local food co-op as their outreach coordinator. Beth primarily updates her information from a laptop computer, as her cell phone does not have a data or a texting plan, and she uses social network sites more frequently for her job than for her personal use.

_Sandra_. Sandra, an undergraduate art and design major, is also a fashion blogger, photographer, and enjoys making craft jewelry projects. Sandra grew up in the Chicago suburbs and first used a computer at home for games and in elementary school for games and typing papers. Sandra considers herself self-taught on the computer, and she used computers primarily to discover, share, and edit media from an early age. She was burning CDs of songs she downloaded from Napster by the time she was in 5th grade. Sandra used AOL IM throughout middle school, and primarily used the computer in high school for word processing, music, and editing images taken with her digital camera. Sandra joined MySpace in high school, primarily because musical groups she was interested in were using the service. She joined Facebook in high school as well, as one of the first high school students among her peers to join the site. Along with Facebook, Sandra had accounts on the following sites at the time of this study: Twitter, Google, Linked In, Flickr, YouTube and LookBook. Sandra owns a Mac laptop, from
which she updates most of her information on social network sites, but she also updates Twitter from her iPhone using the app Twitterific. Along with her personal social network site use, Sandra also managed the online presence for an art museum while studying abroad in Norway, working with their communications department to promote and report on special events through their Flickr account.

Jack. Jack, a 33 year-old graduate student in writing studies at the time of the study, grew up in Tucson, Arizona. Along with his work as a graduate student and teaching assistant at the university, Jack is a musician, blogger, and also a father of three. Jack had profiles on the following services during this study: Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Google, Tumblr, Flickr, Picasa, Vimeo, YouTube, lala – a music sharing social networking site, and two blogs on Blogger. He also contributed to another music-themed blog that provides music reviews for regional concerts. Jack began using computers in elementary school on a Macintosh computer, primarily for what he described as “Oregon Trail kinds of computing.” His family did not have a computer in their home until Jack was in high school, and he points to one of his best friends during that time as a technological literacy sponsor. His friend worked for AOL and assisted Jack in getting online by giving him a free screen name. Through this account, Jack participated in chats and posted to message boards. Jack has always used a computer to access music as well, and when he was in high school, he used to download 20 second clips of The Smashing Pumpkins samples of their new album, Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness. At the time of the study, Jack used both a Macbook and an iPod touch to connect online and to send messages through social network sites. He also sent both updates to Twitter and pictures from his cell phone. Along with maintaining a Facebook profile, a neglected music profile on MySpace, a
Tumblr account, and two separate blogs, Jack also maintained three different Twitter accounts throughout the course of this study.

*Esther.* Esther, a graduate student in writing studies and a teaching assistant, was also a blogger and a knitter, sharing projects and participating in events with her fellow knitting friends online. Esther grew up in Philadelphia and shared a computer with her siblings at home as a child; she used the Apple 2C primarily for games like Family Feud and Wheel of Fortune. In middle school, she began to use the computer to write stories, including typing, printing, and making them into homemade books. Esther used both a Macbook and an iMac at the time of this study. She had mostly lapsed profiles on MySpace and Orkut, and she used Facebook, Twitter, and blogged through LiveJournal and Word Press. The social network site she used most frequently, however, was Ravelry, a site specifically for knitters. Esther joined all of these sites in graduate school, prompted by friends (Orkut, Twitter), musicians she enjoyed (MySpace), and even students (Facebook). Esther considered herself an occasional user of Facebook, with Ravelry consuming the majority of her online time and attention.

*Becca.* Becca, a graduate student in writing studies and a teaching assistant at the university, grew up outside of Phoenix, Arizona. Becca first used computers in elementary school for playing educational games on Apple 2e machines, and her family first purchased a computer for their home when she was in 8th grade. Before the computer, Becca typed school projects at home on a typewriter. In 8th grade, Becca also took a technology course, using different programs for music and graphic design, as well as word processing. Becca cited her father as a technology literacy sponsor at home; he worked in tech support for mainframe computers, and often assisted her with computer questions at home. Becca gained access to the Internet at home during high school, and used it to research topics for school, before getting an
email account as a senior in high school. In addition to her roles at the university as a graduate student and a teacher in the Undergraduate Rhetoric Program, Becca also participated in a university belly dancing troupe, placing some of their performances online, as well as maintaining a store on Etsy, where she sold jewelry that she made. During this study, Becca was active on Facebook, Etsy, and Academia.edu during our study. Becca uses a Dell laptop to update her social network sites, primarily from home and from her office.

**Data collection methods.** As noted above, the investigation of situated literacy practices across online and offline spaces relies on a multifaceted research methods approach. In order to establish what Yin (1989) calls “construct validity” (p. 41), it is important for case studies to include multiple sources of evidence. These criteria is also important for situated studies of literate activity in order to better describe dispersed literacy practices that are difficult to observe and measure.

In conducting these situated case studies, I collected data from four different sources. I followed each research participant for two semesters, Spring 2010 and Fall 2010. One undergraduate research participant joined the study later, during the Fall 2010 semester. I continued collecting data on her social network site activities through the Spring 2011 semester. I also conducted a few follow-up interviews with two participants, Esther and Becca, during the Spring 2011 semester.

1. **Research interviews:** I conducted periodic, open-ended reflective interviews with each case study participant. The interviews began with a semi-structured organization, and the first formal interview for each participant focused on questions about their personal histories with literacy and technology. The second interview for each participant consisted of a profile tour of the social networking sites they belong to. (More on this below.) After these first two interviews, I
conducted periodic, occurring every 2-4 weeks, interviews focusing on recent social networking site activity and other changes to participants’ social networking site use. These interviews lasted from 30-60 minutes, and the topics were dictated by the participants, though I frequently asked questions about specific actions taken on social network sites, focusing on literacy practices and on identity representation. Each interview was video recorded and transcribed for future analysis.

In many of these interviews, each writer and I often referred to material on a laptop logged into one of their social network site accounts and talked from the object when discussing their recent online activity. At times, the laptop computer served as an object that prompted additional discussion about their literate activity on social network sites. The research interviews served two important functions in the study: First, they provided a guide through the textual data I collected on online activity. In each interview, the participant and I discussed specific activity he or she engaged in online since we had last met. These interviews helped me to understand the interactions that each participant deemed important, and this insight guided me through analysis of participants’ online texts. Second, the interviews served an important triangulation function. Through each interview, I was able to verify my own interpretations of participants’ online activity, and participants were able to discuss their motivations and provide their own perspective to the conclusions I was drawing from their work.

2. Online texts: The second primary means of data collection was the collection of texts that participants contributed to social networking sites. Aside from one exception, each research participant allowed me to follow him or her in the social network sites they participate in. For these research participants, I observed their activity online, and I collected the textual record of these interactions. The means by which I collected this data depended on the social networking site and the ways in which the participants used it. Two research participants, for example, were
quite active on Twitter and sent occasional tweets to Facebook, but their activity level on Facebook was lower, and they rarely updated the site independently from Twitter. For these research participants, I collected the tweets they sent in a separate word processing document, but I did not collect the Facebook data unless it was activity we specifically discussed in our interviews. For research participants who did not use Facebook, I kept track of their activity on the site by visiting their profile pages periodically, which contained a record of their status updates, as well as the images, links, and other content they had shared through the site. I kept note of specific activity to discuss in our next interview. For the research participant whom I did not follow online, I used a video screen capture program to record our interviews, and we primarily talked from the computer during our interview sessions, as she gave me background information on some of her recent activity online. Each research participant had accounts on special interest social network sites that were not central to our interview discussions and used occasionally by the participants, such as last.fm and LinkedIn. In these cases, I kept a record of the participants’ pages, but did not actively collect data on interactions on these sites. Such activity was often discussed in our interviews, at which time I referred back to the textual record on the sites.

3. Time-use diaries: The third element of data collection involved time-use diaries, which I adapted from Bill Hart-Davidson’s (2007) own time use diaries, as a means to visualize the different documents that made up a workplace writing project. Hart-Davidson described time-use diaries as a means to study situated writing practices:

   The value most researchers see in diary methods lies in the ability to capture data that is otherwise very difficult to collect owing to the fact that researchers cannot be with a
participant at every moment, in every location where important details of activities such as ‘composing’ may occur (p. 154).

I asked each participant to complete a time-use diary based on Hart-Davidson’s model in order for me to visualize how each person’s social network site use was distributed across his or her daily activities. Completing a diary for the length of the project would be time intensive and produce a large amount of data, and so I requested that participants pick three “average” days through which to record their social network site use, asking them the time of the event, the message and its purpose, and the technology through which the message was sent (mobile phone v. computer, for example). Hart-Davidson (2007) noted that diaries could be a means to facilitate dialog between the participant and researcher, and to add contextual information (p. 163).

Through these time-use diaries, I was able to track literate activity as it was embedded within my participants’ daily use of social network sites. We further discussed these diaries in follow-up interviews. The information I gathered through time-use diaries was primarily used to inform my discussion of laminated chronotopes in Chapter Four and to better understand how individuals’ social network site use fit within larger systems of literate activity.

4. Profile tours: During one of the initial interviews I conducted with each research participant, I asked him or her to take me on a “profile tour” of each individual’s social network sites. This tour was a means through which we could discuss identity representation on each site and would allow the participants to speak from specific elements of their identity representation -- for example, profile pictures or specific written descriptions, but also to gain insights into participants’ attitudes towards privacy settings, friend lists, and other elements of social network sites. These profile tours were recorded using the video screen capture software program called iShowU, developed by shinywhitebox. This program was chosen for its compatibility with Mac
computers, its low cost, and its flexibility in recording video in a number of different formats. Video screen capture programs have become a popular means through which to research digital writing practices. Cheryl Geisler and Shaun Slattery (2007) also discussed studies using video screen capture software to investigate reading and writing in computer-based environments, to study how writers utilize multiple texts during writing tasks, and as a means to give writers a view of their own writing activities (p. 186-187). As we conducted the profile tours relatively early in the data collection process, they greatly assisted in my overall view of how each individual represented themselves online and how each of these different sites worked together as part of each writer’s online life. The information discussed in these profile tours gave me an overall sense of how individuals perceived their own identity representation online, some history behind those representations, and their perspective on what those representations meant for them.

I used a number of similar methods to those used by Leon and Pigg (2011), but each method had a different focus based on the nature of writing on social network sites. Given the nature of short but frequent activity on these sites, recording a sustained writing session with video screen capture was not possible, but more reflective profile tours allowed me to gain access to participants’ concepts of their online identities and reflections of their composing decisions.

Given the distributed nature of literate activity, I cannot pretend that I have captured a “complete” picture of these participants’ literacy experiences on social network sites. Collecting data from these various sources, however, allows me to develop a multi-faceted picture of literate activity in connection with social networking sites. The research interviews, for example, allowed me to gauge my own interpretations on comments participants posted online, as well as to gain background information unavailable in the textual record.
**Data Analysis.** Yin (1989) discusses the processes of data analysis in case study research as pattern matching (p. 35). In qualitative research, scholars use a process of “analytic generalization,” where results are compared to currently established theory on an area in order to support that theory or suggest alternative interpretations (p. 38). Researchers can compare their collected data to established patterns, in order to draw conclusions from the data and to fit these conclusions within already established theories (pp. 110-112). Pattern matching can also work across multiple case studies, determining similarities between cases, and between these cases and established theory (pp. 110-113). As Thomas Newkirk (1992) asserts, much meaning making in case studies occurs through the construction of narratives; similarly, Yin (1989) describes explanation-building, primarily through narrative in developing theories about a phenomenon and to explain the causal links around it. For Haas Dyson and Genishi (2005), data analysis is an inductive process based in the particulars of data collected in the study, but is also reflexive, connected to theoretical frameworks and perspectives held by the researcher (p. 81). Casanave (2002), who conducted multiple case studies as well, analyzed the multiple experiences of her participants through a method of clustering, where common trends and threads came together in similar ways to suggest common conclusions (p. 33). As Haas Dyson and Genishi discuss, research can match patterns and create common clusters through open coding, in order to create categories that are further refined.

Following these general principles, I first transcribed the interview video recordings with my participants and created case histories from these transcripts, summarizing each participant’s experiences and placing these experiences into loose categories. I then compared these case histories, looking for similar patterns and perspectives on each participant’s use of social media.
In presenting this data in Chapters Three and Four that follow, I organized each chapter under two main organizational topics, based on my initial research questions. The first considers how individuals negotiated their identities and activities within different audience groups or communities of practice, and the second analyzes how these individuals used literacy practices to negotiate and navigate the structures of the sites themselves.
“You have one identity. Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity.”

- Mark Zuckerberg (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 199)

This quotation, from David Kirkpatrick’s recent book, *The Facebook Effect*, exemplifies a disconnect between the CEO of the largest social networking site and its users. On a number of occasions, Zuckerberg has expressed his goal to tie one’s online identity to a central location, attached to a legal name (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 200). Zuckerberg pushes users, through the site design and privacy policies and configurations, to represent their “true” identities on Facebook to the world in a way that flattens audience. A user has one identity, and therefore, one group of friends. While Google’s newer social network site Google+ acknowledges more complex identity and audience structures, and Facebook has recently changed its structure to mirror some of these changes, other social network sites do not.

In examining my research participants’ literate activity on social network sites, this chapter considers how these individuals negotiate their identities within different communities of practice online, how, within interfaces that flatten audience structures, these individuals conceive of audience and send out different kinds of information to different groups. This activity requires not only a sophisticated awareness of audience, but also an awareness of site structure and the ability to emphasize different aspects of their identity with different audiences, contrary to Zuckerberg’s philosophy.
Social network sites flatten audience behind what Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) call “context collapse,” where sites collapse different social networks and histories of friends, family, coworkers and acquaintances within the same category of “friend” or “follower.” As the endless parade of popular press stories of individuals fired or reprimanded for displaying information on Facebook and other sites can attest, many social network site users have not yet mastered how to distribute content to so many different audience groups. Some individuals use groups to restrict content to certain people, others self-censor information, and some users place certain kinds of content on certain sites, while reserving other content for other social network sites. This skill is an important one for managing one’s information and presenting a rhetorically savvy identity for the different groups through which one connects in online environments. Representing or cultivating one’s identity through social network sites is an activity that happens through every tweet and every message sent. Marwick and boyd note that one’s personal network of connections collaborates in this identity construction, in interacting with others and responding to the interests of one’s followers as well. As mentioned in Chapter One, I view this process of identity construction through the lens of Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner and Carole Cain’s (1998) cultural historical activity theory-based approach to identity construction, viewed as “specific to practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed ‘worlds’” (p. 7). While aspects of race, class, ethnicity, and gender, among other social markers, are important in this conception of identity, these categories are in constant negotiation within specific contexts and situations and in negotiation with other individuals (pp. 7-9). Holland and her colleagues describe how individuals negotiate their identities within “figured worlds,” similar to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) “communities of practice,” defined as social frames of meaning in which interpretations of human actions are
negotiated. These figured worlds are created in the interactions between an individual and a group of people. Identities are constructed in relation to this figured world, in a dialogic relationship between activities within the group and through the individual’s conception of that group.

These figured worlds are formed through everyday practice and continually redefined; they recast language and activities to have specific meaning for that group, and these groups inform participants’ perspectives. For Holland et al., figured words do not represent the reality of group relations, but instead are abstractions of them. These “figured worlds” are a “social reality” and identities form within them and day-to-day activities are carried on in the name of these identities and figured worlds. Newcomers are introduced into this system, and they adopt these practices in time as well: “figured worlds provide the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted. They also provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self, -- that is, develop identities” (p.60).

A prominent example used by Holland and her colleagues is that of Alcoholics Anonymous. As they are initiated into the group, new members learn to construct their identities as alcoholics and recovering alcoholics. This process works primarily through the construction of narratives. As the authors note, individuals arrive at Alcoholics Anonymous with varied experiences, yet through their membership in the group, they learn to tell the story of their alcoholism as one that fits the group’s narrative of a downward spiral, realization, and slow redemption. Members of the group, then, interact with others in the group and learn the group’s values. They then internalize those group values, and create an identity — through words and activity — that reflects their conception of that group. In creating identities within figured worlds, Holland and her colleagues assert, individuals internalize an idea of that group and then
project an identity back on it. While identity is created through performance and interaction with other group members, individuals also create identities based on their conception of that group.

For social network sites, individuals often communicate with members of organized groups in the Alcoholics Anonymous example, but they also communicate with less organized groups, especially friends from different periods of their lives (childhood, high school, college, etc.) and also with individuals who know them in particular settings (work colleagues, friends from leisure groups, and family members). While these groups are often more nebulous than the formal groups described by Holland et al., this process of representing oneself for a specific group on a social network site follows the same process: the individual, in interaction with members of the group, forms a figured world, and uses specific “identity products” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 40) to represent oneself in specific interactions with members of this group. The challenge for social network site users, as Marwick and boyd (2011) discuss, is context collapse: “the requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, creating tension as diverse groups of people flock to social network sites” (p. 9). On some social network sites, such as Facebook, a user can restrict updates to “friends,” an overarching group containing all connections on the site, usually encompassing hundreds of people. On Twitter, on the other hand, updates are public by default, which means that an individual’s audience on the site includes one’s Twitter “followers,” but also include internet users in general.

While this chapter primarily concerns identity representation, social network site users write their identities in interaction with a figured world, with specific and imagined audiences. In addressing an audience, Walter Ong (1975) emphasizes the writer’s role in imagining that group of people the writer is addressing. As Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede (1984) have argued, there is
an important interplay between identifying a real audience of individuals that a writer is communicating with (audience addressed) and constructing the text in such a way that imagines an ideal audience (audience invoked). Both conceptions of audience must be considered in the larger rhetorical situation a writer is addressing. Marwick and boyd (2011) note the importance of the audience invoked for social network site users:

While Facebook or Twitter users don’t know exactly who comprises their audience addressed, they have a mental picture of who they’re writing or speaking to – the audience invoked. Much like writers, social media participants imagine an audience and tailor their online writing to match. (p. 15)

In her conception of writer identity, Roz Ivanič (1998) identifies four categories of identity that interact: 1) an autobiographical self shaped by prior social and discoursal history; 2) a discoursal self that is conveyed within a particular text; 3) the self as author, which is the self a writer creates through his or her authorial voice; and finally, 4) a subject position, or the possibility for self-hood in socio-cultural contexts (p. 23-27). Ivanič notes that the author’s identity is created by an interaction between the first three categories and the last one, where one’s identity is created through interaction with a larger community in text: “writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood, playing their part in reproduction and challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs, and interests which they embody” (p. 32).

James Porter (1992) also emphasizes the sociocultural aspects of audience in interaction with a writer, emphasizing the ways that this community “writes the writer” through sustained interaction in a “communal” and “participatory” process (p. xii). Ivanič and Porter’s emphasis in interaction in representing an identity and communicating to an audience fits with Holland et
al.’s (1998) conception of a “figured world” for continually constructing one’s identity in interaction within a particular group. This chapter considers online identity representation through this lens.

Reading this rhetorical situation can be particularly difficult in online environments. In many cases, social network site users know the exact people they are reaching through a friend list on Facebook, but even this list is not exact. The number of users that one interacts with on the site is, in most cases, considerably smaller, as some site users update more than others and some rarely participate. For sites like Twitter, an individual has a specific list of followers he or she is reaching through the site, but most Twitter users keep their updates public, which means that anyone visiting their profile pages can see their updates, even internet users who do not have Twitter accounts, and any user can retweet another user’s comments to their own followers. As one of my research participants worries about later in this chapter, it is this practice of copying and circulating that a writer cannot control. While a comment or update may be written, or an image or video shared, in a specific rhetorical situation for a specific group of people, given the ease of circulating information online, that information often does not remain in its original rhetorical context. Negotiating these rhetorical situations to represent oneself, then, is a complex literate activity. This chapter describes the different strategies my research participants used in order to negotiate these complex situations and to represent themselves within different figured worlds.

**Ronnie**

Ronnie, an undergraduate math and statistics major, conceives of a number of different figured worlds in constructing his identity for different audiences. For Ronnie, Twitter
represents a “stream of consciousness”; he updates Twitter several times per day and connects primarily with close friends and roommates through the site. The information he shares on Twitter varies widely, from updates on what he’s listening to, to thoughts and musings on his way to class, images from his daily life, and direct questions to his friends about weekend plans or other topics. Some of these tweets were basic updates on his mood and thoughts on daily activities:


[internet is back after tightening a few connections. if only unclogging the toilet was that easy...] 10:29 PM Oct 26th via web

[internet in the apt is strangely dead. thank goodness for smart phones; i can actually get work done, however slow] 10:22 PM Oct 26th via Twitter for iPhone

[dammit yahoo fantasy hockey, you're really bad at keeping players off the bench when i told you to. i could be up several points right now] 2:09 PM Oct 28th via web

[sleep deprived. thus, acting sporadically. this happens from time to time...] 6:27 PM Oct 14th via web

Other updates were based on his location and interactions with his friends:


[eating with the fam at flattop #yum] Wed Mar 31 17:14:55 2010 via Twitterrific

[watching hockey. i'm a good fan] 11:16 PM Oct 28th via Twitter for iPhone

[at brothers with the gang] 10:03 PM Oct 28th via Twitter for iPhone

[fun #minecraft sesh w/ @sammgh. time for chipotle!] 4:01 PM Oct 14th via web
Ronnie also discussed music quite frequently on Twitter, both in terms of what he was listening to, and reflections on music:

[#nowplaying blink-182 - what's my age again?] Sun Mar 28 00:02:38 2010 via Twittrrific


[the chorus of the swell season's 'when your mind's made up' is the same chord progression as the verses of blink's 'adam's song' #jackpot] Wed Mar 31 21:09:34 2010

[music: keeping me alive since 1998] 5:35 PM Oct 26th via Twitter for iPhone via web from Champaign, IL

Ronnie also often uses Twitter to interact with his friends, and uses frequent @ replies and mentions of his core group of friends who communicate frequently on Twitter. He also occasionally retweets celebrities that he follows and passes along petitions:

I signed @thehpalliance’s petition for Harry Potter chocolate to be Fair Trade @twxcorp #deathlyhallows http://t.co/ItAEUhD 12:59 PM Oct 31st via Tweet Button

RT @taylorswift13 I woke up and realized my album comes out at midnight tonight.

Woah. Just.. Woah. 9:30 AM Oct 24th via Twitter for iPhone

While the content is wide-ranging, Ronnie’s use of Twitter is constant, and he is always connecting to someone through the site.

Ronnie also maintains a few other Twitter accounts that represent more specialized audiences, one connected to a music Tumblr account, and another connected to his blog, which simply links to his recent blog posts. He described the differences in audience this way His primary account is “just my main, my go to. I write my own thoughts on it.” The other accounts “I guess they're through lenses, um, mostly just the music one because I don't use the [blog
Ronnie sees this as something that it makes it easy for his audience to follow just more targeted information: “I guess that's just more for benefit of people who are following me in certain capacities. If they just want, like, music updates, then that's what that twitter's for. Then they don't have to follow my actual twitter and see all the random stuff I talk about.”

Ronnie updates Facebook by sending specific tweets to the site through a service called Selective Tweets, but he restricts the content he sends to Facebook significantly. Ronnie describes the audiences of the two services this way:

I use selective tweets on Facebook, so only particular tweets will make it over, pretty much just ones that I know will get a reaction from people who are never using Twitter, because otherwise it's just kind of like a stream of consciousness. I don't want that to bother people's news feeds. . . . [I update Facebook] primarily through Twitter, and it's not that often. Um, usually, maybe once a week depending on how I feel. I'll only go to Facebook to update really long things, because you know, there's a 140 character limit on Twitter, so if I have to, like if I say I have a concert coming up that I want a lot of people to go to, I'll put that on Facebook and put all the details of it. Um, that's about it. And I'll delete it, I'll clear it as soon as the event is over because I figure it's information people don't want to see.

Ronnie updated Facebook with updates that he felt would be more appropriate for this specific figured world. He would update Facebook with progress on his graduate school applications, for example, like this update from December 6, 2010:
Excited to see if [Ronnie] will get into grad school at UIUC? Dripping with anticipation? Who knows when our brave adventurer will find out! Stay tuned to to see how the story unfolds. If the profile picture gains color, then our hero will have succeeded!

Some of them were a little more inscrutable, like this tweet he also sent to Facebook on October 27, 2010:

[ it’s an end of an era and i’m seeing clearer that nothing will ever be the same ]

Ronnie envisions different figured worlds on both Facebook and Twitter, conceives of audiences with different concerns and interests, and constructs his identity on both sites with these figured worlds in mind. Ronnie had approximately 700 friends on Facebook during this study while sending updates to a list of roughly 200 Twitter followers. The difference in audience size, along with conventions for using Twitter and Facebook – it’s socially acceptable to update Twitter 15 times a day, but only a few on Facebook – contributed to the difference in use as well.

Along with Ronnie’s specific audiences, he also adjusted his use of different social network sites based on what he considered to be the community on that site. During the middle of data collection for this study, Ronnie set up a Flickr Pro account, which allowed him to pay a small amount of money to upload more photos and to organize them in unlimited “sets,” or albums. He transitioned to hosting all of his blog images through Flickr, but said that he also thought carefully about the kinds of images that he was uploading to the Flickr site, because of what he saw to be the site’s ethos:

Before it would just be kind of random images [on my blog] in my case, but I guess now it's more artsy, more Flickr appropriate, so I don't feel as weird polluting Flickr with blog images because I feel that Flickr is a very community based website.
He saw Flickr appropriate photos as being more specific:

They're very selective, they're not just random photos, it's not like people uploading albums to Facebook which is pretty much, whatever's in the camera, it's going on Facebook. But you know I have to have appropriate lighting, subject centered, stuff like that, and then yeah, that they all look good I guess.

When developing his profile on Flickr, then, his previous experience with the site had helped him construct a specific figured world: Flickr was an artsy, photography community, and so the information that he shared on the site through his photos needed to fit within that identity as well.

Ronnie also frequently sets up an account on a social network site when it starts in order to “claim real estate” on the site in case it becomes more popular. Ronnie noted that he started his Twitter account in this way, and he also set up accounts on other social network sites: Academia.edu, Tumblr, Linked In, and others in this same way. This allows Ronnie to claim his screen name across the web and represent a part of what he sees as the part of his identity that stays constant across the different social network sites he belongs to, before developing a more tightly crafted persona specifically directed to that figured world. Ronnie joined Academia.edu, for example, while he was working as a math research assistant during the summer. While he was considering graduate school, he was only beginning to think of a more developed academic identity for himself. Setting up an account on Academia.edu, though the purpose wasn’t to claim a screenname because the account doesn’t work that way, was a way for him to begin to participate in that space in the hopes that something bigger develops.

Along with directing different aspects of his identity to specific social network sites, Ronnie also developed a separate persona with a completely different name entirely. He maintains separate social network profiles for what he calls his “musical alter ego,” and he
maintains a Tumblr blog, a Facebook fan page, a MySpace music page, and a PureVolume account under that name. (See some of the material he placed on his musical Tumblr blog in Figure 1.) He described the reasons for the separation of these sites as being related to audience. Ronnie describes his musical identity this way on his Pure Volume account, which is a site for musical artists to share their work, very similar to the MySpace music pages:

Sure, I certainly enjoy going by my real name every now and then but this is "Creative [Ronnie]." The [Ronnie] that people don't get to see because he never has enough time in the day to write music and usually spends his time just performing it. :)

For people who aren’t his friends but are interested in his music, this strategy enabled him to direct specific content to a specific audience:

And I guess I segment it cause I if I want, if people are going to look at my musical self, they don't, they're probably not interested in seeing my blogging self, or you know the photos I take on Flickr or whatever, so I keep that separate more for them, not so much because I don't want them to see my other self. That's why I think, okay, they're here just to see my music, so that's what I'll just give them.

Through Ronnie’s musical alter ego, he creates another figured world, one populated by musicians and fellow music lovers who are interested in his work as a musician but perhaps less interested in his personal life. While many social network site users maintain profiles for professional identities, Ronnie is unique in that he makes the identity separation more complete. In creating a new name and “alter ego” to this persona, Ronnie constructs an identity that he marks as different from those he presents using his other screen names. Ronnie states that he is not concerned about connecting his music to his other online identities, and he does in fact list his real name on the Facebook page for his alter ego. He does not link to his other social media...
accounts through the music accounts, however, demonstrating that he wants to keep the two separate. A large part of the literate activity that Ronnie engages with on social network sites involves managing content for specific audiences to construct his identity. Ronnie’s use of Facebook and Twitter demonstrates how he negotiates flattened audience structures to share information and represent himself for both groups, providing more and unfiltered information on Twitter, while more strategically updating information on Facebook. Through his musical alter ego, Ronnie conceives of a particular audience and creates a specific persona in response.

**Alexis**

Alexis, an undergraduate media studies major, negotiated a number of different friend groups and identities on the various social network sites she belonged to. These groups represent a number of different figured worlds: friends in Korea, high school friends in the United States, friends from the university, and also contacts from her church youth group. While she used Facebook to connect to individuals in all of these groups, she used other social network sites to connect to smaller and more specific groups of friends.

For Alexis, like the other undergraduate students in this study, her Facebook use is characterized by an amount of self-censorship. Alexis had 248 friends on Facebook, including contacts from different places and groups; she was worried about sending irrelevant information out on Facebook, or about updating her status too frequently. At the beginning of my study, she had recently hidden all of her photos except her profile pictures. The reason for this was based on Alexis’ awareness about the multiple audiences she was reaching on Facebook. She was concerned that a friend might get worried or jealous if he or she saw Alexis in photos hanging
out with other friends. Closing off the photos she had already posted, as well as not posting new photos, was a way to “avoid drama.”

Alexis also had an image to uphold on Facebook; she was a church youth group leader and connected to many different people from her church through her Facebook page. A good part of her identity also involved her representing her commitment to her faith. In her ethnography of Korean-American student communities at the University of Illinois, Nancy Abelmann notes the central role the evangelical church plays in students’ social lives and identities. Alexis’ experience is similar to many of the students Abelmann profiles. She often cites Bible verses in status updates, and she uses the notes section of Facebook to post reflections on her faith. Her identity representation on Facebook was also occasionally policed by other members of her church, as someone suggested that she remove some images of her at a party when she became a youth group leader (Examples of these reflections can be seen in Figures 2 and 3).

After planning a youth group event for her church, Alexis posted a church newsletter reporting on the event on Facebook. With the newsletter, she also posted the following reflection:

I hope this was a day/service pleasing to God, and that it challenged, renewed, and blessed each and everyone of our members of [Church] for I was overjoyed, cried in tears, and was blessed. This is my church, my home, my family God has given to me, because you nor I cannot fight alone. I sincerely thank you: God, my own family, youth group, and my church. One body, One God. Bless you all. Love you all. Jesus loves you.

Alexis represented her faith on her Facebook page, both as a large part of her life and to address the figured world of her church. The newsletter in particular was addressed to this audience, and
through these updates, Alexis both represented herself within this figured world, and created community with others in her church.

While Alexis saw Facebook as an essential part of her online life, she frequently spoke about its negatives: it was something she was addicted to, it took up all of her time, and her multiple audiences on the site sometimes created drama. Her use of Facebook was fraught with these rhetorical complexities.

Alexis used Twitter more freely, partially because writing conventions are different on Twitter and more frequent updates are expected, and her contacts list was smaller on Twitter, consisting of 41 followers, concentrated among a core group of friends. Alexis stated, “I feel like I can blabber about whatever I want on Twitter.” Because Twitter updates are sent to a smaller number of people, Alexis said that she used the site primarily for “venting or whining,” both in order to complain, and to receive encouragement from friends.

Alexis also represented her religious faith on Twitter as well, although it was less explicit from her updates on Facebook. She sent a number of tweets as she was formatting her resume and sending out job applications:

What I can do is prayer. 11 Nov 10 via web

do not be anxious, he said not to worry. 13 Nov 10 via web

writing resume. venting frustration on the web: WHY am I so SLOW?!@$!@%! 13 Nov 10 via web

I prayed so much while writing resumes and doing job search. Oh, Jesus, please be my hand… 13 Nov 10 via web

yay, finally got one done. I think. 14 Nov 10
Through these examples, we can see Alexis constructing a figured world of a small group of close friends who care about her frequent updates, and with whom she can both complain and also reference her faith.

Along with Facebook and Twitter, Alexis also had a profile on the social network site Cyworld, a Korean site started in 2002. Cyworld is organized a bit differently, which influences the content that Alexis uploads to the site. Alexis also had a different audience on Cyworld, but it is not distinguished by language. On all three services, Alexis wrote in Korean and English; while that balance was closer to half and half on Twitter and Facebook, her updates on Cyworld were mostly in Korean, and she connected primarily with friends still living in Korea, along with Korean American friends with transnational connections. (Part of Alexis’ Cyworld profile can be seen in Figure 4).

Alexis saw Cyworld as a place to update her Korean friends about college life in the United States. Through this figured world, Alexis saw herself primarily as an American college student, and she shared photos of her travels and her campus life in a way to represent the American university experience for her Korean friends. Given this smaller audience and this specific figured world, her updates on the site, she said in an interview, are also more personal:

I think the social networking site that I use for Cyworld I think, let's say from Facebook I wouldn't . . . write stuff that's too deep inside of me, or about feelings, or about how I feel and stuff like that. Let's say I wouldn't get too moody on Facebook, let's put it that way, just because it's too exposed, and I don't need 300 more people knowing about how I feel, you know, and what I'm going through. So when I want it to be a little more confidential, I think I put that . . . on Cyworld, because just less friends on Cyworld and it's not like, you don't have a news feed. I think recently they put a newsfeed in there, but you have to
click on like a different tab to look at the news feed and stuff like that. So it's not like Facebook where when you log in you just see the whole thing, of people and what they're doing and stuff. You actually have to go to their site, to like their profile page to see what they wrote or what they uploaded and stuff.

Alexis’ language use is also connected to her identity representations. Many of the friends that Alexis connects to through Facebook and Twitter as well as Cyworld are Korean Americans and international Korean students. As noted earlier, she uses the Korean language frequently on Facebook and Twitter as well as on Cyworld for her updates. Her choice to use Korean rather than English, she states, is based more on an emotional reason than on an audience one:

For some incidents it's just the literacy. It feels better to write it in Korean. And in some contexts it just feels better to write it in English. So I think that's the only difference. And then a lot of the times I would mix uh, mix both, so like, I have this brain of mine [the word] “scattered,” um, I can't really think of a word in Korean that would um, represent that that would equate scattered, so, these times I would write it in English.

The majority of Alexis’ contacts on all the social network sites she belongs to are Korean Americans or Korean international students. She chooses the language she writes in, then, for other reasons. During the study, Alexis also held a leadership position in a student organization that sponsored an Asian Film Festival on campus, which Alexis often promoted on both Facebook and Twitter. All of her personal updates about the event were in English rather than Korean, demonstrating that she did at times choose her language for audience reasons.
Sandra

Another undergraduate student, an Art & Design major, Sandra negotiated a number of different friend groups across social network sites like Alexis, focused especially on Facebook and Twitter. An early adopter of social network sites, Sandra described her initial hesitation to represent herself in online spaces when she joined MySpace:

Kids would keep talking about it and I was like, that's so weird, why would I put like, why would I basically make a profile for myself, when the only people that I'm really friends with are people that I already know and see. It just didn't make sense to have like these two lives, but yeah, that got the best of me. . . I think it was mostly because I was just curious, and then it just, I don't know. I think that once you start to explore it, especially since it was the first thing like that. It was just so strange, because it was like a virtual realm where you were you, but at the same time, like you're not.

Sandra first expressed concern in representing herself online, but as she continued to interact with others on social network sites, she stated that she was directed by her parents’ rules about sharing information in online environments:

I've always been kind of cautious about putting all my feelings and emotions, and personal stuff like on the internet, especially when I was younger, because you know, if it's on the internet, it's free to my parents too, so like, they said that, anything that's on the internet, is fair game, so if you don't want us to know, don't put it on the internet. and that's really easy to live by.

When Facebook began to expand into high schools, Sandra received one of the first select invitations and began using the service then, particularly during her senior year. Sandra has over 600 friends on the social network site, and like other research participants, her figured worlds on
the site range from family members, high school friends, close college friends, acquaintances, a few TAs, and even a former employer and mentor. Communicating with these different audience groups was not something that Sandra found to be a challenge. She stated that for the most part, she saw Facebook as the place to keep up with her acquaintances, because she spent more time connecting to close friends in other settings: these were the people she lived with or called on the phone for frequent chats:

I think the only thing I really use Facebook for is really keeping in touch with acquaintances, because my close friends, I'll just pick up the phone and call, or I live with them, or like I can just, we're close, it's not like with Facebook where it's just so like kind of half, it's like a half communication, sort of.

With this large of a group of people, Sandra finds her primary purpose for using Facebook, besides commenting on friends’ content and occasionally posting her own status updates, is to share photos:

I don't take pictures every weekend when I'm hanging out with my friends but when I was, I studied abroad, and I uploaded an album of photos like once a week, and I loved doing that, and I loved the commentary between people, and how you can comment on the photos, and back and forth.

Sandra uploaded images most frequently when she was studying abroad in Norway for a semester. Not only was she taking photos more often, but she felt they were images that had a broad appeal among the audience groups that she connected to on the social network site, and it was content that would also create interactions and commentary between the different groups that she connected with. After Norway, Sandra’s photo updates of other trips, outings and social events around campus were items that she frequently shared on Facebook. In choosing content to
upload, Sandra was most influenced by what she believed would create interest and response from the audiences she connected with on Facebook. Sandra also kept a Tumblr blog that she occasionally posted content to, primarily links that she liked. She didn’t want to over post to Facebook and share too much content, or content she didn’t think that most of her friends were interested in. Because of the comments that received on her photos, though, Sandra saw Facebook as the best place to share images with many of her different friend groups that were interested in her various social and academic activities.

Sandra does describe herself as “cautious” about the information that she does put on Facebook, however. She self-selects the best photos and often untags herself in pictures that she doesn’t feel presents herself in the best light. She also considers the different audiences she connects with when she posts content, both images and status updates: “I've always been cautious of what's on Facebook. It's never anything I wouldn't want my mother to see, or my employer to see, because I'm friends with both of them.” Sandra does often edit what she puts on Facebook based on feedback as well. If a status update didn’t receive any comments from her contacts, for example, Sandra would delete it. In this way, Sandra was constantly representing herself for her audiences on Facebook and revising her identity based on these interactions with the figured worlds she was a part of. If a message didn’t receive any comments or feedback from friends, she revised her identity by removing it and moving on.

Like Alexis, Sandra used Twitter with a smaller group of friends, around a group of 20-30 people that made up her core friend group on the site, although she connected with others as well. Sandra followed 87 Twitter accounts, which were a combination of friends, other personal contacts, companies, and news publications. She also had 86 followers on the site. Sandra’s father, for example, set up a Twitter account to communicate with his employees, but also
followed her and had Sandra’s tweets sent to his phone. Unlike Alexis, Sandra kept her account public, so anyone could visit her Twitter profile and see her updates, even if that person did not have a Twitter account. At the beginning of the study, Sandra had been using Twitter for almost a year and enjoyed following the kinds of conversations she would have with other Twitter users. She updated Twitter more frequently than Facebook, and she also was less reserved about the kinds of things that she would post about:

Sometimes it's way less, and sometimes it's a lot. Like the other day I was at the library. All I was doing was complaining via Twitter. I think of Twitter, there's like a couple things its good for. You can complain so well on it because it's kind of like untargeted, and it's also a place to kind of like record thoughts on the go. The other thing that I think is particularly what I use it for when I follow people is to find new things. A lot of people use it as a connecting, because it's like a conversation, it's a conversation that you let other people into, which I really like. And I try to avoid complaining, but generally when I'm happy, I'm not tweeting. I also just because I'm generally a bad texter. I can't text when I'm out with my friends, or walking or anything that's not sitting in a chair. So they're all very concentrated at certain times of the day, which means class, which is why I use it to complain.

During the first semester of data collection, Sandra was enrolled in Chinese Art, a required course for her Art History major that she disliked, and this course was featured prominently in her tweets:

done with chinese art forever!!! cookie time 10 May 10
3 more pages stand between me and the end of chinese art. why is this so hard? 9 May 10
jewelry studio failure and yet to start studying for chinese art. #totallyscrewed 21 Apr 10
She also used her Twitter account for her Writing Across Media course and would occasionally
tweet updates and questions about her projects to her classmates and her instructor:

this video project is absolutely killing me. #thelibraryisreallyhot #imovieistheworst
#sticktowritingessays 5 Apr 10

Sandra also frequently tweeted when she was studying in the library:

i thought I was distracted at the library, but there's a girl in front of me watching sitcoms.
I highly doubt its a subject of a thesis 12 Dec 10

I understand the library is crowded today. I will share my table with you, but please for
the love of god, stop socializing. #imlookingatyou 12 Dec 10

if you're in college you're too old to wear perfume that smells like cotton candy
#musingsfromalibrary 1:43 PM Oct 3rd via web

While Sandra’s updates on Twitter were primarily sent out to a figured world that included her
closer friends and also classmates, she said that she did occasionally censor the information she
sent out on her account because of the other audience groups she connected to: “I don't like to
swear, I'm not a vulgar person, but sometimes I have to catch myself and I'll be like, oh wait,
your teacher and your dad follow you. Careful what you say.”

Sandra was, however, occasionally surprised by the audiences she reaching on Twitter. In
November, Sandra’s apartment flooded, and she tweeted the following:

Nothing says welcome home like no heat, violin practice, and a water damaged ceiling.
#crackden 28 Nov 10

Oh wait... It's not just the ceiling. My apartment is super flooded. 28 Nov 10

I have 4 buckets catching water and the ceiling tile with my kitchen light just crashed
down and broke into a ton of pieces 29 Nov 10
Sandra noted that a few weeks after the incident, several people asked about her apartment, and mentioned the tweets she sent. She noted, however, that no one had acknowledged the tweets at the time: “My apartment flooded and I was at a party and someone said, I saw your tweets about your apartment. Is it ok? I was like, well, thanks for helping me with the laundry.” While she hadn’t specifically solicited help on Twitter, she did find the response to her tweets in a different context to be surprising.

Sandra used both her Facebook and her Twitter accounts frequently to send updates, and given the smaller and more tightly defined figured world she connected to on Twitter, Sandra was a bit freer in representing herself and sending out updates with her followers on this service. On both accounts, Sandra considered the audiences she was reaching and represented herself accordingly, as a traveler, photographer and college student on Facebook, and as a college student attempting to navigate large creative and critical projects on Twitter.

As she approached graduation, Sandra also began to consider other audiences to represent herself to online. She joined Linked In and began using it to network with professionals in her field as she was job searching. Constructing an identity as a professional in order to secure employment that will lead to a career is something students approaching graduation have always done, but are now doing in online spaces as well. Sandra was uncomfortable with this process of creating an identity for this more professional figured world. She called Linked In “the death of every college student” and expressed her discomfort and unfamiliarity with this particular figured world: “I hate that stupid site because it's so serious. There's no component of fun, at all, and you know that you're not going to stay in college forever when you actually have to update your resume and say actively looking for a job. It's just like terribly depressing.”
Sandra describes the site as a “business portfolio” where she lists key information from her resume and connects to past coworkers and other connections. She keeps her personal contacts on the site to people she knows in real life, but because users’ information is public, she uses the site to network during her job search process. She noted that before she had an interview with a particular company, she looked up those interviewing her on LinkedIn, which helped her present herself, her skills, and her past professional experiences in a particular way. While this was an aspect of identity representation that Sandra was uncomfortable with, using this site specifically for this professional figured world helped her represent herself for this audience and to helped her land a permanent position after graduation.

Beth

College students are often portrayed as savvy users of technology in the popular press, sharing content on social network sites without pause and without concern for their potential consequences. Discussions of always wired, and wireless, “digital natives” circulate in academic circles as well (Prensky, 2001; Jones & Shao, 2011). Not every college student is familiar with these technologies or feels comfortable in online environments like social network sites, however. Beth was skilled in her use of computer technology and described experience with web design, print publishing programs, and a number of other media editing software programs through her Writing Across Media class, including audio, video, and image editing. While Beth had frequently represented herself online through Live Journal before joining Facebook, she was less comfortable about representing herself in online spaces and sharing her information online.

Beth noted that she was first reluctant to join Live Journal, which she was convinced to join in high school by her friends:
I think my one memory is my first entry, because I was really resistant to go in online. I got my first email account because I had to get it for class in middle school, things like that. I got my first gmail because it was for class in high school, and I got [Live Journal] because people were getting on my case, things like that, . . . like ‘why aren't you online? We have to get you a live journal,’ and I was like, it's too challenging, and they were like, no, it's not so I think someone actually set this up for me.

Beth joined Facebook when she graduated from high school, and she described the same reluctance and peer pressure to join that site:

My friends were like, ‘we need to stay in touch,’ and I was like this is actually a good point, because when I've moved, people don't stay in touch. That's why I got on Facebook, and I got in touch with my friends from elementary school.”

Beth had 87 friends on Facebook, and she used it primarily to keep up with her friends from other places: elementary and middle school friends from Oklahoma, high school friends from Illinois, and those from her church youth group. She used Facebook’s groups feature to organize her friends list according to these different figured worlds, but she did not send out different content to each one. Beth described her use of Facebook as minimal; she checked the site once every few weeks, and she updated her status on the site once every few months. She did share photos on Facebook, but often by tagging herself in photos taken by her mother or other friends, so that they would show up on her wall.

Beth’s concerns about her online identity and the information she placed on Facebook will be discussed at more length in the next chapter, but she often described an apprehension about putting personal information online in any context, and a lack of control about where that information would spread:
I just don't want people to be able to find out that much about me, just like online. And I can see in other people, and in myself, the tendency to put way too much information online, so I definitely try to keep that restricted. Even though, like, it's very private. Anyone could just copy and paste off of that and take it somewhere else. So even though I know it's not likely to happen and it's not likely for people I don't intend to see my stuff, I just go into it what the assumption that everything will be seen by people who I don't want it to be. So I don't put anything on there that I'm not comfortable with. But at the same time, I'm not going to just throw it out there. I don't want people to be able to stalk me, so I keep to people I know.

Beth’s concern about sharing her information on Facebook meant that she only connected to individuals she knew, but also that she was cautious about the kinds of information that she shared online. While Beth is conscious of her audience groups on Facebook, she represents herself on the site primarily by not representing herself. She doesn’t interact much with others, and she doesn’t engage with a figured world that she represents herself to, primarily because she doesn’t see her identity representation as staying within that group.

For her Writing Across Media class, Beth was required to set up a Twitter account for her class and to check it for updates. Beth connected with people from her class, along with her mother, a few other friends, and her church youth group leader. She occasionally tweeted from the account, primarily to ask questions and receive updates on class material, and she occasionally received helpful information from these questions, including feedback from her instructor on movie editing software, and an update on the university library’s electronic reserves. While Sandra enjoyed sending out rants and complaining about class via Twitter, Beth did not like this tendency on the service: “I remember there was one time I was complaining
about something, and [her instructor] was like, congratulations you've discovered the primary purpose of Twitter, complaining. And that's why I don't like Twitter.” Besides complaining, Beth didn’t see that it had much of a purpose.

She also did not trust information on the site she saw from other users, especially content shared through shortened links:

People say how easy it is to like put up links and stuff, and you can spread information around really fast, but you have to use tiny urls for that, and a lot of them are really sketchy looking. I'm not going to click that even if it probably does go to the Huffington Post. I mean, I'm not sure where it goes, so. It’s the way I see people use it, it's pretty much just another way to like, it's all about you, and that's not so interesting to me. I don't know. I would just use this to complain, and I don't need to do that.

In her interviews, Beth expressed being uncomfortable in online rhetorical situations, unsure how to connect with others, to share information, and to evaluate the information that others shared with her. She was also ultimately concerned about the control of her own information and how it might spread beyond the situations in which she shared it. She did not interact with other communities much with which to share her identity, and she did not express a desire to do so, primarily because she did not trust the technologies themselves, which I discuss in Chapter Four.

While Beth expressed concerns with sharing her own information on social network sites, she communicated with other audiences on these sites for specific purposes that she found productive. In her job as Outreach Coordinator for a local community food co-operative, Beth often updated the group’s Facebook and Twitter accounts, sending out information on products and events, and soliciting feedback from customers. In her position, Beth had a specific audience
and purpose for communicating with customers and sharing information about the co-op’s services. She stated that she uses Twitter:

not to complain but to promote things, like my classes, or events we have coming up, or initiatives that we're doing, things like that. I get to use Facebook a lot at work to promote different causes that are going on because it's a good way to communicate with our owners so of course I answer people's questions who comment with questions on our posts. That's another part of my job.

Beth noted that she’d become more comfortable using these social network sites for her job, but she still preferred to use them in an organizational context: “I've gotten better at it since I have to do it for work, but I'm still not interested in doing it for myself. It makes sense in a promotion and marketing context, but not for me personally as an individual. I'm not trying to market myself over Twitter.”

Ultimately, Beth preferred not to share much information about herself, particularly online where her concerns about the technology added to her own reluctance to share details of her daily life with others. For Beth, who kept much information private, the amount of information that other social network site users share online was not a level of openness that she was comfortable with, no matter the context.

**Jack**

Graduate students have different sets of concerns when representing themselves online for different figured worlds. They balanced different friend groups with family, like the undergraduate participants in this study did, but they also had to balance a more personal persona with a professional one, as many participants made themselves available to their students on
social network sites. They also negotiated between interests outside of academia with their personas as beginning scholars, as many graduate students also connect to scholars in their field and cultivate public personas online. For graduate students entering the profession, the introduction of social network sites into the list of requirements for professionalization can be daunting as they bring up a number of questions: located between the personal and the professional, how should a graduate student represent oneself on social network sites? With whom should one interact? How does one represent the various parts of a graduate student’s identity online: teacher, student, and young scholar in one’s interactions? Should a graduate student use separate social network accounts for personal and professional information, or is it okay to integrate these topics within a single account? These are issues for which there is no conventional wisdom, and each participant in my study had their own unique ways of negotiating their online identity.

The majority of Jack’s activity on social network sites was concentrated on Facebook and Twitter. Although Ronnie, Alexis, and Sandra used Twitter more frequently among a smaller group of friends, Jack saw his audiences on Facebook and Twitter as quite different; Facebook was for connecting with the various friend groups in his life: “academic friends, hometown friends, and church friends,” as he described them, and others connected to his personal networks, while Twitter was for individuals connected to Jack’s interests: primarily musicians, music bloggers, and academics. Jack knew all of his Facebook contacts personally, where he had only met a small number of his twitter followers.

Jack uses Facebook much less frequently than Twitter, and he considers himself primarily a “lurker” on Facebook: “[I] just kind of like look at how things are going and what things people are saying.” While he uses it less frequently, he also puts the most information on
Facebook, listing his birthday, hometown, relationship, job, favorite types of music (rather than specific bands), and also a list of quotes that cross his interests in both music and rhetoric, featuring quotes from Yates, Bakhtin, Colper, and the band Wilco. Jack does not upload many photos to Facebook besides the occasional picture of his family; one photo discussed in an interview was of a Mario-themed birthday party for one of his children where all of the kids wore thick black mustaches, as well as some Halloween photos.

Jack uses Facebook’s Groups feature to organize his approximately 380 friends, 373 at the beginning of my data collection, into categories like the ones mentioned earlier: friends from Tucson, from graduate school, and other contacts. While he has his friend list organized in this way, Jack does not send out updates only to specific groups or restrict some updates from certain groups:

So there are some people who are very specific about the kinds of things that they [update] about so as to be understood by one of those little groups of people in particular, Tucson friends, for example. And I guess anymore I just avoid those kind of, like if I have to say something I'm more interested in like it being interesting to everybody, instead of just um, the people that might fit inside one of those boxes, and in addition, I don't comment necessarily on things of that nature, on polarized or specific things.

Given the range of friends he connects to on Facebook, Jack prefers to send more general updates that would be of interest to most of his friends on the site, which is perhaps why he sends fewer updates on Facebook.

Even when Jack writes updates that could be directed to a specific group of friends, he sends these updates out to all of his followers. Before a trip home to Tucson, for example, Jack
updated his status to ask about the best place in Tucson to get a Sonoran hotdog. Rather than sending this out to only his Tucson friends, however, he sent it to all of his friend groups.

Jack has also friended a number of professors on Facebook, and he finds these connections complicated in the ways that they blend personal and professional spaces. Connecting to his professors online is something that Jack values; he mentioned a status update he wrote about attending his last graduate class, before beginning to study for his comprehensive exams. Two of his professors “liked” his status update. He said: “It was kind of nice. It was really nice to see that. but that's I think most of the extent of that kind of communication.” He describes his relationships with most of his professors as 99% professional and 1% social. When a professor discusses a personal interest on Facebook, Jack is never sure whether to cross that professional/personal boundary and comment on that interest:

He sings in his church choir, and I think that's kind of cool, and so sometimes he'll talk about it, and I want to comment back and say, dude, that's cool. I think that's really neat that you sing in your church choir, but I don't because who am I? Like he doesn't care, necessarily if I, even if I said, oh I sometimes I sing in my church choir. You know, it's like who cares about that? I just think it's kind of cool, so I don't know about those kinds of things. But so then the question is do I need to know that he sings in his church choir; this is weird. Like I wouldn't know that in nonfacebook land, you know. Like that would not come up in a conversation. Though maybe it gives us something in common next time I see him we'll actually have, dude that's pretty cool.

For Jack, Facebook still replicated the same hierarchies that he encountered in physical spaces, and crossing those boundaries, even in a space like Facebook, is not something Jack felt he could do.
Jack spent most of his time on social network sites communicating through Twitter, where his contacts included those who shared common interests rather than common histories. Perhaps because he was connecting primarily to individuals he had never met, Jack was constantly worried about his identity on Twitter. At various times throughout my data collection period in 2010, Jack maintained three different Twitter accounts: a long-standing personal Twitter account, a more professionally focused Twitter account about academic research interests, and one account for teaching. Jack had identified specific figured worlds and their corresponding audience groups, and he represented his identity in relation to these figured worlds, as a teacher on one account, as an academic on another, and his out of school identity as musician and music critic on what he labeled his primary account.

At the beginning of the study, Jack had recently retired his academic Twitter account. He noted that no one followed the academic account, as he had already made connections with academics through his personal account before starting the second one. He described it primarily as a “container for links,” most of which he also retweeted in his primary twitter account, and stopped using after 4 months, having sent only 25 tweets.

He was using a separate account for his teaching, however, which he had created to communicate with students without “subjecting students to personal tweets.” He required his students to check the class Twitter account frequently, but only about four or five students tweeted actively. While not many of his students tweeted regularly, Jack found tweeting a valuable activity to engage in with his class, which was an advanced composition class focused on multimodal composition:

For the most part I’ve just used the twitter account to kind of interact with those students who use twitter to pass back and forth links to things that I find interesting. And then just
to kind of get to know my students better, I think. It's been kind of fun to watch them, those who are active use it to do what they do. It's fun to see them outside of the context of the classroom.

Keeping the class Twitter posts on a separate account was a way for Jack to manage his different audiences on Twitter. In an interview, he mentioned a tweet he had sent out via the class account the night before: “don't forget to send me your write-ups before the end of the night (12am) Word? Word. 5:24 PM Feb 10th via web” Jack stated that he didn’t want announcements like this tweet going out to all of his other Twitter followers:

So I mean, I could have created like a hash tag or something like that that would have made that specific tweet go to um my students, but still if I sent that through my regular account, everybody that follows me would see it, and like what, what would the point of that be? I don't really know. It's weird, and so I don't know that I would be comfortable sending out that kind of tweet that obviously has an audience that can respond to it and the information there is important, um, but I always feel less comfortable just sending it out to the world.

The reason for this was that he saw the student account tweets as distinct from the rest of his tweeting practices, and therefore, his identity practices:

So there's those things, and there's this question of does this really intersect much with my um, my teaching. And for the most part, I would say not really. Whereas if I created my own account, I could make my tweets much more specific to that class, and at the same time not disrupt or annoy other people who might follow me for those particular reasons with these kind of, you know, very directive tweets.
Jack noted that he often saw other academics tweeting with their students on a regular Twitter account, but didn’t feel comfortable doing the same, even as he worried he wasn’t giving students a good example of how most people use Twitter:

On the other hand, I see people like um, like [name of scholar] who uses Twitter for her teaching as well. I've noticed this semester. I guess it's not like that big of a deal, like I see things come through that's obviously for her students, and I think that's maybe one of the things about Twitter that you have to get used to is that . . . you don't have to read every single post, so as we kind of get more used to the way that we use Twitter, maybe these kinds of more like, pointed messages will . . . feel less strange because they will have a specific audience that they're intended for and can just be ignored by those people that it's not for. For me, it's like, it's so easy to create a second user account, why not do that? On the other hand, it does create a really, like if I'm trying to teach my students what twitter is, this really isn't what it is, all this really is is like kind of an easier version of email, you know?

After about a month, however, Jack noted that he kept missing his students’ messages because he did not log into his class account regularly enough, and he stopped using the account specifically for his students. He was still concerned that he would be subjecting the other people he connects with to class information, but this just seemed easier, and was along the lines of what other Twitter users did. He stated in an interview: “I have no idea. I see people tweeting about stuff that has no bearing on my life, and I guess it just becomes kind of noise. So I guess I’m now noise for some people every once in a while.”

In describing his choice to return to one Twitter account, Jack relied on the activity of other Twitter users, his followers and other academics to justify that what he was doing was a
common practice. He could tweet with a class hashtag from his regular Twitter account, and the rest of his followers would understand and ignore those tweets.

For the majority of my study, Jack used one Twitter account to connect to the various figured worlds that he belonged to: musicians, music bloggers, friends, academics and students. In describing his Twitter account during the profile tour, Jack explained his About Me blurb as being an important part of his identity representation, where he mentions his position as a graduate student, a teacher, a researcher of the “intersections of rhetoric and sound,” and a music writer. He uses other Twitter users’ blurbs to decide whether or not to follow them, and so listing this information here, Jack felt, helped create his own legitimacy. He noted that he felt his identity on Twitter was rather solid:

I think that my identity as far as what I usually Twitter about is fairly stable. It's not super stable but I mean, I usually Twitter about music stuff I'm interested in, the occasional kind of academic problem or idea, or what it's like to be a teacher / researcher, or whatever. So academic interests and there is several other academics who tweet who, we've been able to pass back and forth ideas, so that's fun. And then like day to day things like food, and pictures of food I'm eating and that kind of thing.

Some sample tweets from Jack’s main account reflects these mixed interests. The following tweets share more of his personal reflection on his life as a student:

Still have 8 students' double-papers to grade - Got Willie Nelson promoting his new b'grass album in concert on the dvr. Let's do this. 8:31 PM Feb 27th via TweetDeck
Super busy 10 days ahead. Much writing, coding, reading, +writing to do. Today I'm hoping to ease it by with the Junip and S. Carey records. 12:36 PM Dec 1st, 2010 via TweetDeck
ahhh.. just registered for 8 hours of "thesis research" for next semester. Feels good. (as I'm sure it will until I begin said research) 2:24 PM Nov 18th, 2010 via TweetDeck

After abandoning the class-specific Twitter account, Jack also sent tweets to his students for class announcements, using a class hashtag:

#classhashtag students: All but done w grading your projects. Look for them back tomorrow sometime. Great work overall, guys. I'm super impressed. 12:09am March 1, 2010 via TweetDeck

#classhashtag folks: Love this video a girl made stranded in the Pittsburgh airport. Check out her editing/music choices. http://twurl.nl 8:35 AM Feb 23rd via TweetDeck

#classhashtag students: don't forget I need ur (double)write-ups tonight by midnight (& hey, rest of the world: I teach. I tweet. why not both?) 8:59 PM Feb 19th via TweetDeck

The final tweet here shows Jack acknowledging this awkward flattening of audience that often occurs on Twitter, as well as his self-conscious feeling about that audience. Along with tweets focused on his identity as a teacher and graduate student, Jack’s personal twitter account also included tweets related to his musical interests and his online identity as a music blogger and reviewer:

The three middle songs on the new Band of Horses are turning into my favorite jams of the summer. (Blue Beard, Way Back Home, Infinite Arms) Fri Jul 23 15:49:43 2010 via TweetDeck

Heading to Pitchfork today (or is that p4k?). I have this song in my head (substitute "llama" with "hipster"): http://youtu.be/ Fri Jul 16 09:12:38 2010 via TweetDeck

I'm thinking more about the pumpkins (writing a review tonight on tomorrow's EP release) 11:28 PM Nov 22nd, 2010 via TweetDeck
He also often tweets about his personal life, recounting moments with his children:

At ihop for free pancakes. My daughter just ate one of those butter spheres they put on the top of the short stack. 6:51 AM Feb 23rd via txt

Convinced my boy that Buzz Lightyear's tagline is actually "To infinity... and your mom!" HIS mother will be so pleased. 2:59 PM Nov 24th, 2010 via TweetDeck

Another cute malapropism from my daughter this time. "Hey Daddy, when I put my hand on my chest I can feel my heart beep." Sun Jul 25 14:21:13 2010 via TweetDeck

http://twitpic.com/xxxx- Antacid placement win. (By the jalapenos) 11:12 AM Feb 6th via TwitPic

A combination of reflections on teaching, academics, music and his personal life, the personal tweets listed above are the ones that seem most embedded in his daily life. Jack often tweets both from TweetDeck and from his mobile phone or his ipod touch. While the other tweets place him in front of his computer, the personal tweets demonstrate the ways in which Jack’s material literate life is represented in this digital space, discussed more in Chapter Four.

As Jack began to write more music reviews, connecting to the music community on Twitter became more important, which also gave him new writing opportunities. With his music connections, Jack was able to attend almost 50 concerts for free, he mentioned in an interview, but more important was the networking power of Twitter:

This whole network of maybe these music writers that I've become associated with because of Twitter, like I got this job writing for this blog through Twitter, and I've kind of, I don't necessarily have any kind of notoriety and clout, but every once in a while there's a little bit of like, oh, I wrote this piece for this blog and it gets picked up, you
know, and retweeted, and that's the first time I'm ever had any of that, right. Like most of us don't get our stuff, we don't get our stuff published kind of across the web.

When Jack was required to tweet for a graduate course, he revived the academic twitter account, which he is still using along with his personal account. At times, he tweets material from both accounts simultaneously, but at other times, these two accounts have distinct topics and distinct audiences. Jack described this decision as one he made as his research interests developed; both the academic tweets and the music tweets were becoming more specialized. Given the success he had in networking with musicians and writers through his primary Twitter account, he saw the potential for a Twitter account focused specifically on academic issues to work the same way.

Jack often commented on the culture of academia in this account, as well as his conception of himself as an academic:

Oh, so I guess I sense the power of Twitter in that way, and so I want to represent myself to this other group of people when I'm becoming more comfortable talking about academic things there, and I suppose as I get more and more comfortable in that community, that I'll want to interact with those people more often as I get to know them, and meet them maybe at conferences, or read their work or whatever. I see the twitter network as a way of staying connected and interested and having people know who I am and that kind of thing. All this stuff is kind of important when I get a job.

As these interests developed, he saw the increased tweets about music and musicians as separate from and distracting to a more academic tweeting audience. In an interview, Jack described his continued anxieties about identity representation on Twitter in this way:
It’s kind of like this split identity thing. Like, I, if it was me, and I was like an academic . . . I would be annoyed by my music tweets. because I do it pretty much all day long . . . I guess I’m concerned about self-presentation as an academic, like I want to be considered as a scholar in this community, not as like a music blogger, and so, that twitter account is more about trying to like, have a digital presence, so at least people will know who I am when I go to these conferences.

Jack noted that when he had used an academic Twitter account before, he hadn’t followed anyone on that account, and therefore had difficulty gaining followers. When he restarted this academic Twitter account, Jack unfollowed many of the scholars he had connected with through his primary Twitter account, and followed them on his academic account instead; he ended up following about 100 people. When we discussed this change in an interview shortly after he made the switch, he considered the change as successful, as several scholars he had connected with on his primary Twitter account had already switched to sending links and communicating with him primarily through his academic account. The tweets he sent from this academic account ranged from reflections on academia and academic culture:

Learning how to be a scholar is like seeing a sticker and thinking, "Andre the Giant? I didn’t realize he had a posse!” [link to blog] 1:33 PM Sep 15th, 2010 via TweetDeck

being a successful academic is about learning to celebrate (not envy) your colleagues’ brilliance & w/out spite or fear daring to add to it 5:45 PM Dec 8th, 2010 via TweetDeck

That may be the secret of life, actually. 5:45 PM Dec 8th, 2010 via TweetDeck

Been thinking about the observation of new grad student that everybody talks about how busy they are. Academics have a culture of busyness. 9:07 PM Oct 6th, 2010 via TweetDeck
It's true, but why? Is our projected busyness evidence of our "seriousness" or devotion to our work? Or a trick to guard against more work? 9:18 PM Oct 6th, 2010 via TweetDeck
If you have an answer, I'll have to read it tomorrow. I'm busy grading right now. 9:19 PM Oct 6th, 2010 via TweetDeck
Along with these tweets, Jack also often discussed scholarship through his academic Twitter account, sometimes Tweeting questions for his own research, and sometimes tweeting quotations from his reading:

To what extent is sound textual? For example, can we submit musical discourse to the same kinds of critical analysis we give other text? 1:34 PM Sep 16th, 2010 via TweetDeck

“Composition is not writing anymore; it's composition” K.B. Yancey (qtd. in Halbritter's "Musical Rhetoric in integrated-media composition”) 2:45 PM Nov 11th, 2010 via TweetDeck

Digital scholarship has much to offer the future of aural analysis, but what's the cost to publish copyrighted sound in a digital journal? 12:01 PM Nov 22nd, 2010 via TweetDeck

Jack also often retweeted frequently from his academic account, passing along links he came across or from groups he was affiliated with.

RT @HASTACscholars: the sight of sound, including cool sound maps. written by H-Scholar: http://bit.ly/ 10:31 AM Oct 6th, 2010 via TweetDeck

There is some cool visual rhetoric happening here. RT @nprnews: Abandoned Six Flags New Orleans http://n.pr/cyWyBi via @nprpictureshow 11:59 AM Oct 1st, 2010 via TweetDeck

Jack saw this account as a way to discuss his developing research interests, connecting them to material he found online, and most importantly, connecting with like-minded scholars. Given that he had connected with different academics through his primary account before revitalizing this second account, Jack sometimes had difficulty parsing out what activity should appear on which account, and who he should connect with on each account:

Let’s say I went to a conference and met one of these people that I follow on my [academic] account. And we find, oh yeah, we're actually like, friends, and at that point, when the connection becomes something more than just something that's useful academically or for that kind of networking, then that person might graduate into the other feed, into the other place. Because then I know that if they're following me in that other site then they care about the stuff that I'm listening to, with the stuff with my kids that I might tweet about, and whatever. It's like, it's a more personal space. . . . But maybe it's just a weird, like schizophrenic thing. It's really, as you can tell, I'm really weird. because it feels like, it feels a little crazy, right, to separate yourself in that way. And I'm not somebody who like uses the web to do this kind of identity play like that really.

Parsing out this inevitable overlap was something that Jack constantly struggled with in representing his identity with a number of different figured worlds on Twitter.

A later discussion of Jack’s use of the academic Twitter account was a bit more tempered. He noted that he tweeted from the academic account “every once in a while,” and described the difference in content this way:
I'll do two, like if it's something that is both kind of academic-y, or is related to academic process, or stuff, then, um, that's designated as a tweet out of the other account name. If it's like technical kinds of things, like stuff that people in my quote "real world" wouldn't care to know about then I'll just keep it out. But most of the time if I tweet from that name, I'll do both, like I'll do the same. Like yesterday I was tweeting about something like deep thought I was having about academia, and it like applied across the board so I just did it from both. So I wonder if that's obnoxious for people who follow both of my accounts, for them to show up right next to each other at the same exact time. I don't know.

He had about 70 followers on his academic account, but only connected with or talked to those contacts he had already made on his personal account. Even if he didn’t often talk directly to other academics via this account, he still found the connection valuable, and it was also a networking opportunity he planned to continue:

Anyway. I think that over the next year, as I make an effort to be more active in things like conference communities and I start thinking about publishing I start making connections between the names on my twitter list and stuff that they're writing and that kind of thing, maybe I'll have a better sense and be less paranoid about this kind of thing, and maybe if I have, by the time I have something out maybe, like, I eventually will publish something, then I'll feel more justified in interacting with people. I just kind of feel like the new kid, you know, that's not a very good metaphor. I don't know all the dance moves yet. Nobody is circling around me while I do all kinds of hiphop moves. "Go [Jack], go [Jack]!"
While he was learning how to make these kinds of professional connections, he also understood the limits of these in assisting in his future career. He compared the opportunities he had in networking with musicians and music writers with the limitations of these informal connections in academia:

I've never done that kind of stuff before, you know, and so to me there's like this definite, I don't know if the word is like social capital, but there's this but there's this definite capital there there's a potential for it, to make the right connections, um, and so I wonder if that same kind of thing can happen in the academic community. My guess is that maybe not to the extent that I've had experienced outside of it, mostly because the things that, the discourse that is valued in those communities, in the academic communities hasn't been, it's like I can get on a fairly well-read website or blog and write a post about you know, a review of a show and I mean, that's easy compared to the kind of hoops you have to jump through to get work published in academia which is kind of the same. They kind of have the same kind of cache in different communities. Anyway, still, I still think there's some social capital to be, reaped, harvested, gathered, put together, whatever, by making connections with people digitally. So we'll see.

Jack was, however, very excited to receive a reply from someone he referred to as a star academic and a frequent tweeter:

He replied to me once. And I was kind of like, this guy isn't responding to me, this is crazy. And it was also something really stupid too, like I was joking that my hair was getting long enough that I could comb it and look like Justin Bieber, and he said something, congratulations, or something like that. But it felt cool to be noticed, you know, by this person.
Even though the conversation was about something completely innocuous, Jack was excited that this academic noticed him and commented, as he felt it gave him some sort of notoriety.

Throughout the course of this study, Jack refined and redeveloped his identity on Twitter connected with the different figured worlds he connected to through this social network site. We can see Jack recreating that identity through each interaction and each tweet sent. In considering how he should share information and represent himself on this site, Jack relied on others in each of his figured worlds, musicians and academics, to model his own updates on their identity performances. Jack followed the mentions of one music writer on Tweetdeck, so he would see tweets from anyone who tweeted this person’s name. This was a way for Jack to not only find other musicians to connect with, but to get a sense of how other musicians and music writers interacted together in this space. In our interviews, Jack often brought up other academics and their tweeting practices as examples to consider the ways that these academics represented themselves on Twitter. We can see Jack as representing himself online through Holland et. al’s conception of figured worlds: he considered his identity representation through a specific figured world, adjusted his identity representation according to interactions with others in that figured world, in a way that created a dialogic process. As Jack interacted more with both musicians and academics on Twitter, he refined his identity representations as a result to the point that he found two Twitter accounts to be a better way to represent himself to both of these figured worlds, academics and musicians, with whom he was interested in connecting.

Although Jack participated most extensively on Facebook and Twitter, he also had a number of other accounts on different social network sites that represented different figured worlds. He and his wife maintained another Twitter account where they primarily tweeted photos of their children for their family members. As with his other accounts, Jack described the
purpose of this account for tweeting content that most people in his other figured worlds would not be interested in. Jack also had a Google profile that contained pretty basic information. He also sent photos from his phone to a Flickr account, as well as often sending them from his Twitter account.

Jack also shared his own music on social network sites. He had an old MySpace music profile, but also shared current music performances on a YouTube and Vimeo account. This content was often linked and archived on his personal blog and also a blog he maintained for an old band from high school. He also had a Tumblr blog where he occasionally shared music he was listening to that did not fit within his music blogging. This more specialized content appeared on these other sites, but he did also occasionally share this content via Facebook and Twitter. Jack therefore used a variety of different social network sites to share a variety of content with a number of different figured worlds.

**Esther**

In his use of social media, Jack was able to separate identities and also social network sites among different figured worlds. Esther, another graduate student, however, had more difficulty making these distinctions between audiences and also her identity representations, which influenced her social network site use. An early adopter of earlier social network sites Friendster and Orkut, as well as a frequent blogger, Esther had a good deal of experience representing herself in different online environments, but this wasn’t a skill she felt she had mastered. In her blogging in particular, Esther reported that she found it difficult to separate out personal information that she didn’t want to put online:
The thing I've always had an issue with is like, how much of my personal life do I want to have, but I have this really difficult time separating my personal life from other things I'm doing, right, so if I think I want to have an academic blog, right, and I think I want to blog about things that I'm thinking about, it inevitably goes in a personal direction, and I didn't want to censor myself, so I just thought it was better to not do it at all.

Esther’s difficulty in conceiving of a figured world that represented her audience, and her subsequent challenge in presenting an identity that fit with that figured world ultimately led her to stop blogging:

The thing I've always had an issue with is like, how much of my personal life do I want to have, but I have this really difficult time separating my personal life from other things I'm doing, right, so if I think I want to have an academic blog, right, and I think I want to blog about things that I'm thinking about, it inevitably goes in a personal direction, and I didn't want to censor myself, so I just thought it was better to not do it at all.

Esther first presented more of a teacher persona on Facebook when she joined the site in 2005. She described her initial interest in Facebook as based on her students’ activities on the social network site:

They were kind of influencing me to do it. I didn't really have any curiosity about it per se, I think I was more interested in this thing my students were using to do certain kinds of writing. I mean I had already been kind of attuned at that point to talking about students' writing in lots of different settings so I was just kind of interested in seeing this format that they were writing in and what it was like. So my interest in it was more about them than something I thought I would use for myself.
At the time, Facebook membership was restricted to those with a .edu email address, and many of Esther’s friends were no longer in college. She noted that there was resistance among her graduate student friends for other reasons as well:

I even knew there was lots of resistance to it at that point, and this idea of having your personal life in any way displayed in a public forum was really by some people I think frowned upon and supposedly affects your ability to get a job, or you know, you have to represent yourself in certain ways.

Esther first joined Facebook as a teacher, interested in her students’ literate activity on the site and interacting with them about writing in this location. Esther, therefore, has a number of former students who are still her friends on Facebook, and she’s connected with other writing classes through the site, joining a Facebook group formed by her business and technical writing students one semester, for example. Parts of this original Facebook audience can still be found on Esther’s Facebook profile. Her favorite quote listed on her profile is “it’s all about writing.” She listed Harry Potter among her favorite books because she had discussed the series with her first-year students, and many of them had not read it.

Esther’s audience on Facebook grew as the site loosened membership restrictions and it became more popular with her graduate student friends, friends from childhood, high school and university, and finally, among her parents and other relatives. While Esther uses Facebook to connect with all of these audiences, she finds this number of people and the multiple concerns of these audiences paralyzing. Esther’s friends on Facebook increased from 387 to 410 throughout the course of this study, and Esther found it overwhelming to follow updates from that many

\[\text{3 Facebook expanded to allow all users over age 13 in 2006.}\]
people on the site: “I have so many friends, 410, that I cannot keep up with them. I don't know what they're doing in their lives.”

Not only does Esther have difficulty keeping up with that many people through Facebook, she has difficulty conceptualizing her audience and the different groups she reaches through that social network site. Deciding what to say to this large, and for Esther, rather unformed, audience group is daunting and even paralyzing: “I just don't know what to say, like, what to say when I update my status, if I want to update my status, you know, so I just feel like it's better sometimes not to say anything.”

Esther stated that she considered herself more of a “stalker” on Facebook, and would go on the site whenever she received a message or a request from a friend, or when she wanted to know how someone was doing whom she hadn’t spoken to in a while. Especially for some Facebook friends, the advantage to the site is not necessarily communicating with her friends, but just being able to find out what was happening in their lives: “I don't necessarily want to talk about them, but I want to look at the pictures. If it was someone I was close to, maybe I'd want to talk to them, or if I want to see their kids, or who they married. I want to know what they're up to in their lives, do they go to school, do they have a job for their profession or something. “

Esther did, however, enjoy posting photos on Facebook, and she found the site to be the ideal way to share her experiences with these multiple audiences:

I mean, you could share pictures on Flickr, but I don't know. I never could figure it out like I'd have to email everybody I know, that I've posted something. The nice thing about if you put pictures up on your page is that all your friends find out because it just says, or it says you were tagged. I think that's one of the reasons that I don't care about being tagged because I want people to be able to see the pictures.
While Esther was rather liberal about being tagged in photos, not all of her Facebook friends felt the same way, which occasionally caused tension. Esther’s mother, for example, was unhappy about a photo of herself from Esther’s wedding that Esther posted on Facebook:

She wanted to take the picture of her walking me down the aisle down. I was like, she walked me down the aisle, I'm not going to take you down. [She said] Well, I don't like my face in it, and this is a professional forum, well, I have friends that are in professional circles, and I don't want them to see the picture. And I was like, I'll just untag you.

The incident demonstrates the challenges of social network sites like Facebook that involve this kind of context collapse. Esther’s mother was concerned about the ability of people from her professional life to see photos of her from more social settings that she did not represent her in a professional light. Esther’s knowledge of Facebook and its various settings allowed her to reach what she considered to be a suitable compromise. These clashes of audiences and concerns are frequent on these sites, however, and for the most part, Esther’s inability to conceive of different figured worlds on Facebook kept her from updating it more frequently.

Unlike Facebook, Esther had a clearly defined figured world that she communicated with through a different social network site called Ravelry, which is site specifically for knitters and about knitting activities. (Esther’s Ravelry project page can be found in Figure 5).

Launched in 2007 by Casey and Jessica Forbes, Ravelry is a niche social network site that was designed by and caters to a knitting community. Casey Forbes is a web developer solely responsible for designing and maintaining the site, and his wife Jessica Forbes is a knitter and blogger who wanted to create a more centralized database of knitters’ projects. Writing in Slate magazine in 2011, technology journalist Farhad Manjoo called Ravelry “the best social network
you've (probably) never heard of,” because of its focus on a specialized and devoted community as well as its features and structure specifically designed for that community. On February 29, 2012, the 2 millionth member joined the Ravelry community (Ravelry, 2012). The site lets knitters organize their yarn collections, buy and save patterns, represent their finished and in-progress projects, learn new techniques, and most importantly, interact with other knitters by friending other users, joining groups, and participating in forum discussions. The forums represent particularly active parts of the site, as individual Ravelry users design and run contests, swaps, knit alongs, and other activities that encourage individuals to learn new techniques, share resources, and meet other knitters.

Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007) note that social network sites are different from more traditional online communities that organized individuals around common interests. As noted earlier, boyd and Ellison argue that individuals primarily connect with people on social network sites that they know from their personal, offline networks, connecting with family members, friends, classmates, and coworkers. As a social network site, Ravelry is unique in that it asks users to connect with others through common interest rather than shared personal histories, and most individuals who interact on Ravelry are people who have never met before. Ravelry allows users to represent themselves through a screen name of their choosing and a profile picture, and the convention on the site is that individuals do not use their real names. While debates on Ravelry can become heated, the kinds of harsh critiques that usually accompany anonymous comments on an online discussion forum, however, are rare on this site, because all of a user’s activity is connected back to a profile, where users represent part of their identity that can be even more important: “On Ravelry, though, there's a powerful force that keeps people in line—knitting. Because everything you say on the site is associated with your
profile, and because your profile houses everything you've knitted and want to knit (which, for many people, is more personal than a name and email address), members feel they have a strong stake in the site. For that reason, there's a strong incentive not to speak out of turn” (Manjoo, 2011).

For Esther, knitting is an important part of her identity, and Ravelry figures prominently in her daily online activity since she joined the site in 2008. Esther checks the forums that she participates in on Ravelry every day: “Like normal people check their Facebook feeds, I don't know if normal people do that, but people check their Facebook feeds to see updates. I check my forums obsessively. So this is what I read most of the time.”

Ravelry gives Esther a forum to share and connect with others about her hobby, but more importantly, to represent an important aspect of her identity, and allows her to show off her hard work in a forum where it is appreciated:

I want to show them off, and it feels really hard to show your knitting off. Like, I just feel in general, I can even wear something and people don't notice it, or necessarily say anything about it, and socks are especially hard because nobody sees them. They're on your feet, so unless I give them as a gift for somebody, or if I'm knitting in a public place and people are around. Non-knitters don't necessarily ask me questions about my knitting all that often. So I feel like I really want to show it off, you know, I put a lot of effort into it. I want to have pictures of it, and I want to put them up.

Rather than asking individuals to represent themselves through consumer items like their favorite books or movies, Ravelry features users representing themselves through items they create. Esther’s “ravatar,” or profile picture, features either her image showing off a recent finished project, or more frequently, a close up shot of that project, either modeled by her or a
friend, usually socks, which Esther knits most frequently. When Esther begins a new knitting project, called a cast off post, she posts a picture of the yarn she has chosen from her “stash,” what Ravelry calls one’s collection of yarn, and then she posts progress photos as she continues to work on the project, along with an FO (finish-off) post. One of her major projects in 2010 was to knit the chuppah for her wedding, and she joined a group of others doing similar projects. Esther frequently participates in online activities called knit alongs, which take place in specific groups, and ask individuals to post their progress updates on their projects, which fit certain parameters set by the group. Individuals post progress updates along with other members, and the knit along culminates in randomly drawn prizes for members. Esther is active in the Sock Knitters Anonymous forum, for example, and completed a knit along that required completing a project from a specific designer. Esther also often participates in swaps, where members trade handmade items or yarn, and pools, which pair members to characters in a certain reality TV show, such as one Esther participated in tied to Project Runway. Members discussed the program as they posted project updates. Because the character Esther was randomly paired with came in second on the show, Esther received a prize when she finished her item. These activities, while focused on knitting, also encourage site users to discuss personal likes and interests as well as popular culture events. Esther also participates in groups connected to other aspects of her identity, including a chuppah knitters board, an academia group, a feminist knitters group, a group called Jewish Fiberholics, and other similar groups.

Esther also participates in several clubs run by knitting stores and dyers, where she pays a fee per month and receives yarn and other items at discounted prices. The connections that Esther made through clubs also continued offline. Esther participated in a club through a yarn store in St. Louis that also sponsors a retreat each year; for two years in a row, Esther attended
the retreat, met other members of the club in person, and participated in activities and classes while on the weekend trip in St. Louis. She posted pictures and stories both to her blog and to Ravelry after the retreat, and stayed in contact with several of the other knitters afterwards.

Esther’s participation in a variety of different forums and activities on Ravelry allowed her to make connections with other knitters online, and these connections also moved beyond the site to physical meetups as well. As Howard Rheingold (1992) noted in his discussion of online community on the WELL, for the San Francisco members of the group, in person meet ups were also crucial in building community. For Esther, in both her online and offline interactions with Ravelry members, she was able to represent herself for a specific figured world that was connected to a specific aspect of her identity, allowing her to show off her knitting skill and to develop it by connecting to other knitters.

Esther’s knitting hobby also fueled her participation in other social network sites, particularly Twitter. She joined Twitter in 2010 in order to follow independent dyers who colored and sold small quantities of specialized yarns. These dyers would post updates on when that yarn would be for sale and when discounts or specials sales would happen. Following Twitter allowed Esther to stay updated in order to buy new yarn. Esther began to follow other designers who posted their patterns on Ravelry as well. Many of Esther’s tweets focused on conversations about and surrounding Ravelry and her knitting activity:

Talk like a pirate day! If you post something on a ravelry pirated thread, it translates your post into buccaneer speak. Coolest thing ever! 12:32pm, Sep 19, 2010 via Tweetdeck

@ravelry, oh no! bad timing, just trying to claim yarn in a swap : ( 1:24pm, Aug 19, 2010 via Tweetdeck
World wide knit in public day, on a cruise boat! [link to blog] 10:05am, Jul 19, 2010 via Tweetdeck

Just finished knitting the chuppah and the crochet bind off. Just blocking and fringe to go.  
Yay! 12:24am, May 14 via Tweetdeck

Using Tweetdeck, Esther had a saved search of the word “Ravelry” on her computer at all times, and she therefore saw every public tweet that mentioned the word Ravelry. Following conversations about the site has enhanced Esther’s participation on it, as she’s learned about new features and activities from listening in on others’ conversations:

So I have this in my Tweetdeck all the time so when something posts, this little thing comes up. If I see something interesting, I'll click on the little thing or look at it in more detail. And I also learned a lot of stuff about the functionality of Ravelry this way, because somebody would say, oh, I downloaded this from, so basically I learned I could download my stash into an Excel file.

It has also allowed her to follow conversations she wouldn’t have otherwise: “Sometimes there are conversations on Ravelry that are kind of funny or interesting, and people will post about them and put a link, and so then I'll go to the conversation and see that board.”

Like Jack, Esther is attracted to this element of Twitter that allows an individual to observe and then interact in an interesting conversation among members of a particular figured world. While Jack overheard and then participated in conversations among academics, Esther did the same with designers and knitters using Ravelry:

Searching for things like Ravelry and then just seeing all the things people are saying about a topic, even more than looking at a particular hashtag that already exists or something like that, it's kind of like, making a community, or like making an organization
of people who aren't really talking to each other, yourself... It's also like, kind of a way to observe people, from a distance, which you can't do on Facebook. Because on Facebook you have to be friends with them to look at their page, but on this, on Twitter, you can see their tweets, they're not private.

Observing and participating in these conversations allowed Esther to more successfully represent herself in online environments. She was inspired with a new idea for a blog by connecting with a specific knitting designer on Twitter. As Esther explained:

I was on Twitter and got a message from one of the designers I follow on Twitter, a sock designer, and she went to Philadelphia, which is where I'm from. She blogged about her trip to Philly and took pictures holding this sock that she was designing, and she had this post with these different pictures in it. I thought that was cool, and I felt kind of inspired to blog about my life, to kind of think about it through sock knitting rather than, because as I was sharing before, I have a really hard time with blogging because I feel like it's boring. I feel like I sort of separate myself out. I think about like, how am I representing myself in this public space, and so I... feel like if going to put me in a bad light somehow academically, or it's too personal or something like that, I don't want to say it, so then if there's anything I have to say I think it's really boring like I did this, I did that because I feel like maybe, I don't have a job yet, or tenure, I have to censor myself in some way. But I feel like sock knitting ... was a cool way to do it, and I know that I knit socks basically everywhere I go, so I could focus on places I go and knitting socks at the same time.

Esther used this other Ravelry and Twitter user’s blog as a model for her to create a figured world where she could represent herself as both a knitter and a traveler. Esther was able
to overcome her challenge for blog content and to focus her blogging activities on an intersection of her personal life and her hobby. She posted project updates, images, and travel reflections on a new blog, hosted on Wordpress. She linked to each post on both her Twitter account and her Facebook account, and received different kinds of feedback. She linked to her post about the retreat she attended, for example, on Ravelry and received 8 comments on her blog from other members of the retreat. She receives more comments to her posts on Facebook than on the blog itself, however, where both her friends and some members of her husband’s family follow her updates. The responses also vary in terms of content:

That's why I always post my, um, blog posts to Twitter and Facebook, so that anyone who is interested can read. But I get most comments actually from fellow knitters. And I get comments when I post about other things from people that are non-knitters, like when I posted my dissertation, finishing my dissertation, getting a job, I got a lot of posts from other people. When I posted about my cat, [who had recently passed away] I got a lot of posts from other people. So actually I know a lot of people read my blog, but not a lot of them comment on it, only really my knitting friends comment on it.

Esther’s blog, then, operates at the intersections of her knitting and personal identities. Through her connections with a specific figured world on Ravelry, Esther was able to connect to a specific group on that site, and to mix her interests on her personal blog, which is read by members of both groups. Sharing the blog posts on the other social network sites she belongs to: Ravelry, Twitter, and Facebook extends interest in her blog posts and allows her to reach multiple audiences in these spaces.

Esther often came up against the boundaries of her identity within this and other figured worlds. She discussed in an interview that when she completed her dissertation, She wanted to
create a project for it on Ravelry and post pictures of her completed draft. She said that she ultimately decided not to because this might cause confusion on Ravelry, and she couldn’t associate it with a specific pattern. Esther could move from Twitter to Ravelry, her blog, and then back to Twitter, moving between her personal identity and her knitting groups and back, but she wasn’t able to represent other aspects of her identity, such as her identity as a scholar, in these spaces.

As a graduate student, Esther also had questions about her representation in online spaces. While Jack worked to develop a professional identity in interaction with a specific community of scholars on Twitter, Esther did not cultivate a professional identity connected to a professional figured world in the same way. Although Esther cited knitting as her primary influence in joining Twitter, she also saw colleagues, particularly her fellow graduate students, tweeting professionally from conferences. She also attended Computers & Writing and other conferences in the field where live tweeting was a popular activity. She tweeted from her phone at CCCCs, but rather than blog posts, she preferred tweeting live events:

I tweeted a lot during 4Cs, and then I haven't since then. So I would say I'm kind of interested in using it for academic purposes, but I kind of like it for more of the live stuff, like it was really fun at 4Cs. I liked when people were tweeting from presentations I couldn't go to. I liked tweeting from presentations myself. Um, and it was fun, there was like different other kinds of exchanges that happened. Like I tweeted that we were going to have Ethiopian food, and somebody like, .... so somebody did the mention for me, asking what restaurant it was, and then I did that for her telling her where to go. So just like stuff like that. It's kind of cool, it feels very live.
Esther only connected to a few academics on Twitter and saw it primarily as a tool to enhance her conference experience, rather than a place where she could join academic conversations on a regular basis. She expected other academics to see her tweets not because they were her followers on Twitter, but because they were using the common conference hashtag. She did occasionally tweet when she was frustrated about academic topics, however, particularly dissertation writing:

today's agenda: coffee, writing, breakfast, writing, lunch, writing, knitting break, writing, potluck, mexican food, board game, writing. 1:37pm, Sep 18, 2010 via Tweetdeck

How am I supposed to be brilliant if microsoft word won't save? What do mean insufficient memory? Trust me, the diss is not that long yet. 3:19pm, Sep 24, 2010 via Tweetdeck

That came out terribly wrong. Should read: what do you mean there's insufficient memory. In my defense, I only slept 4 hours last nite. 3:20pm, Sep 24, 2010, via Tweetdeck

Like Jack, Esther began tweeting with her students, and used a class hashtag. These tweets were minimal, however, and she only used the class hashtag 8 times herself. As an optional part of the class, her students’ use of twitter was minimal, and she herself stopped using it.

Here are some examples of the class-related tweets sent at the beginning of her class:

RT END OF normal TV? http://nyti.ms/ #classhashtag 4:33pm, Aug 31, 2010 via Tweetdeck

Scott Pilgrim vs the world: Movie remediation of a graphic novel remediation of video games. Awesome. #classhashtag 1:16am, Aug 29, 2010 via Tweetdeck
from B: you might want to check out this book which was released today: [link to Designing Obama] #classhashtag 6:29pm, Sep 2 via TweetDeck

These tweets primarily focused on outside links and connections to class to pass along to her students; Jack often used Twitter in this way as well, but also tweeted class announcements. Esther, on the other hand, did not use Twitter for this purpose. Most of Esther’s tweets were posts announcing updates on her blog:

A short post about Gencon gaming convention, and a new pair of socks [link to blog] 2:59pm, Sep 10, 2010 via Tweetdeck

My honeymoon, the saga continues, this time with a trip to Seward. Dog sleds, yarn stores, and more! [link to blog] 12:22pm, Jul 21, 2010 via Tweetdeck

2nd wedding post is up, check it out! This one features the handknit chuppah [link to blog] 8:23pm, May 29, 2010 via Tweetdeck

New blog post on my trip to St Louis for a knitting retreat. Read all about it here! [link to blog] 1:44pm, Apr 26, 2010 via Tweetdeck

While Esther occasionally live tweeted from professional conferences, her tweets are primarily personal in nature, demonstrating both her reported inability to separate personal and professional updates, and the identity she was successful in representing to the figured world of other knitters. The people she primarily communicated with were more interested in her knitting projects, for example, than her dissertation. While Jack was hyper-sensitive to audience and considered a number of different figured worlds with which he was communicating on Twitter, Esther primarily conceived of her updates as reaching primarily friends, and she represented her academic life through a personal lens. Esther was often reluctant to post anything given her multiple audiences, thinking her updates too boring and not of interest to enough people. This
intersection between knitting and travel, however, was one that Esther found successful, specific enough to focus her updates, and varied enough to appeal to multiple audiences.

**Becca**

Unlike the other two graduate students in the study, Becca used Facebook most frequently, to communicate with friends and to represent different aspects of her identity to different figured worlds. Of Becca’s 259 - 305 friends, she connected with a few family members and friends from high school and college, and primarily with groups of friends at the University of Illinois: graduate student friends, former students, professors, and members of her bellydance troupe. While Becca thought frequently about her identity representation on the site, she valued the connections she made with each figured world, and sought to represent herself in ways that would work these different audience groups. Given that she was connecting to both undergraduate students involved in her bellydance troupe and professional academic colleagues, Becca managed her identity on Facebook in a way that tried to balance these different groups. Becca described one of her profile pictures, one of a closeup of her face while in her bellydance costume and jewelry as a way to negotiate these different audience groups, though she expressed some hesitation:

I came back to this one because I, I kind of, thinking more about what I want to present myself as, you know, it got the bellydance aspect in there without showing off half-naked me. I was thinking mostly of like the scholarly audience, probably, but yeah, just generally, it applies to like more wider stuff too, like how public to make certain aspects of my bellydance stuff but lately I've been very much on the side of make it public, but I don't really know.
Becca connected with a number of former students on Facebook, some of them her own dissertation research participants. She had strict policies for friending current students, on the other hand, stating that she would accept friend requests from current students but not initiate them. She placed these current students in a special group on Facebook, using Facebook groups feature, and restricted content to this group. Becca noted that she used to do the same with her professional contacts, but then allowed her information to be shared more widely with her professional connections (primarily professors and alumni at her own institution, but including a few other scholars as well) as well:

I had a separate group for a little while that I would hide my pictures from and then I was like, [forget] it. It doesn't matter, you know, I don't do anything that horrifying that you know, I have to hide things from people. Especially now that I don't have any current students who are my Facebook friends. I would still stash them in the secret folder, if I had current students who were Facebook friends of mine.

Part of Becca’s approach to social media use where she attempted to blend her personal and professional figured worlds was a result of a larger argument she had about academic culture:

I don't know, this is generally something that bothers me about academia that we're not supposed to be entire people. We're just supposed to be academics and we can't have personal lives, and families, and hobbies, and emotions and all that kind of good stuff like real people might have. I think that's crap, and if anyone were to find me on Facebook who was a potential employer and have some problem with anything I was doing, I get the feeling I wouldn't want to work with them anyway, so it's like, I'm not going to make two separate profiles.
Along with Facebook, Becca did also connect to other, specific figured worlds on social network sites. Becca set up a profile and a store on Etsy, a social network site for sellers of handcrafted items, where she sold her own handcrafted jewelry. Her profile photo and banner prominently feature her own jewelry, which she showcases on the site. While the site is in fact a store, Becca found that in order to develop interest and sales in her shop as well as seeking out advice for photographing jewelry, writing shop policies, and applying for and setting up a business license, Becca relied on information from the site forums, and most importantly, from teams of other Etsy sellers. Developing a profile and cultivating and maintaining connections with other users on the site, then, were frequent activities and ones necessary to enhance Becca’s use of the site and for her shop’s success. (Becca’s store page can be found in Figure 6).

Becca joined several groups specifically for vegan and vegetarian sellers, called teams, who did not use animal products in their craft items. These connections became important as Becca was a featured member on two Etsy team blogs, and she contributed to an e-book of recipes for an animal rights fundraiser. Aside from personal friends, Becca found that the best way to promote her shop and to encourage sales was by connecting with individuals in these Etsy teams. While her own use of the site was enhanced by these connections in helping her develop skills to promote it more effectively, the site also encouraged networking with other Etsy sellers for her own gain.

Like Esther, Becca’s use of this site was enhanced by connecting with its community through other social network sites as well. When Facebook still allowed users to customize information on their profiles through application boxes, Becca used an application to feature items from her Etsy site on Facebook, featuring this part of her identity for the other figured worlds that she connected with on the site. She also friended a number of members of the Etsy
teams she belonged to, in order to build connections with these individuals beyond Etsy as well. Becca became less active on the site as she became busier with her academic work, but maintained ties to this community through her connections on Facebook. Unlike many of the other research participants who would friend only those individuals they knew through as part of their personal networks in their offline lives, Becca would often connect to people on Facebook for networking purposes, and she maintained ties to a number of Etsy sellers as well as local artists in the community that she felt might be advantageous to be connected to.

For her shop on Etsy, Becca learned to frame shots and edit photographs to place her items in the best light through tutorials and forums on the Etsy site. Becca also maintained a YouTube account where she shared personal video of her and her husband’s pets, but more frequently, footage from her bellydance troupe’s performances. As the troupe leader, Becca was responsible for keeping their maintaining the group’s online presence and frequently posted videos of performances and then shared them through Facebook. An important advertisement for the group, Becca also shared the videos with others in the local art community, in order to find more performance opportunities for the group. Through her use of Facebook, Etsy, and YouTube, Becca presented different aspects of her artistic skills for networking purposes as well.

During the second semester of my study, Becca was preparing for the academic job market and was actively searching for and applying for jobs. She joined Academia.edu, a social network site for academics during this time, primarily to enhance her professional online presence and to connect with other scholars doing similar work in her field. While Becca found little interaction happening on that social network site, throughout her time on the job market, she would receive a notification from the site when someone had searched for her name on Google and clicked on her Academia profile. Sandra did not develop a website for her job.
search, as she stated that web authoring was not one of her professional strengths she was 
featuring in her job materials. She did find the site to be an important way for her to direct 
information about herself online to this location.

Becca also restricted access to her Facebook profile during her job search process, noting 
that she tried to influence and direct the first impression search committees might have of her 
when looking for her online:

I did make my Facebook profile unfindable to people weren't friends of friends because I 
didn't want people just randomly looking me up and making judgments about me based 
on the first thing they saw there, when they hadn't even talked to me, because like I said, 
for me it's more of a friend space, so I didn't want people who I didn't know at all but 
were in a space to judge me to be here [on Facebook].

While Becca maintained her philosophy of representing her whole person rather than 
separating her personal and professional identities, she acknowledged that controlling this first 
impression was an important part of her online representation and crucial for representing herself 
as a professional: a teacher, scholar, and writing researcher:

I don't feel like they're separate. I feel like I don't have that strong of a web presence for 
my professional identity yet, and I feel like the presence I have that does in a way blend 
some of those things isn't something that I want to be just open to just anybody who 
stumbles on it, and it really took being on the job market and realizing that people were 
Googling me and stuff that made me be like, you know, I probably don't want just any 
random person to stumble into my profile . . . I don't hide personal stuff from people that 
I actually interact with professionally, but . . . I didn't want someone searching the web 
for me and being their first, their first introduction to me to be a picture of me
bellydancing when they're looking for a writing teacher. You know, it just seems incongruous in ways that are not incongruous to me but maybe to other people, and I'm just kind of being aware of that that you know, to me, all this fits together into one person quite nicely, and if you know me, you know that. But if you don't know me, than you don’t know, so I'm not just going to invite you to make judgments about me just because of your first impressions that you didn't have any reason to have anyway.

Becca used other social network sites to represent certain aspects of her personal and professional identities, but most of her social network activity was concentrated on Facebook. While most of my other participants used this site less frequently, or found ways to separate aspects of their identities for different figured worlds, maintaining a balance between these different audience groups was important to Becca and something she cultivated and maintained throughout my study. As she began to represent herself beyond her local and personal networks to others in her professional community, Becca found it necessary to construct an identity more specifically for this figured world and to promote this identity in online spaces. She remained committed, however, to representing these multiple identities in her personal use of social network sites.

Authoring a self

As the previous examples demonstrate, identity representation occurs through practice, in the ways that these writers conceive of figured world and negotiate their identities accordingly. While most writers represent different aspects of their lives for different audiences, one individual, Ronnie, took this a bit farther. As noted above, Ronnie used a completely different name and different social network accounts to represent his identity as a musician. In another
instance, Ronnie manipulated the conventions of identity representation across social network sites to provoke a specific response from his friends. On April 1, Ronnie changed his Facebook relationship status to “in a relationship” with Alison Moreau. Eleven friends “liked” his status, and four friends commented on it. Over the next several days, Ronnie and Allison exchanged a series of messages on Facebook and Twitter, tapering off around April 8. But Ronnie and his girlfriend didn’t break up; she never existed. She was an April Fool’s Day prank Ronnie concocted:

I decided that day, I was like, I need to prank someone really well, and um, on my news feed a bunch of people had gotten into relationships and people were doing pranks like being engaged, but they weren’t very elaborate, you knew they were fake, and like, I want to really prank someone.

Ronnie described how he created this persona, using an alternate university email address and pictures from the website of College Humor’s Hottest Girl of 2008. He gave her a story, telling friends that they met over spring break. He set the privacy settings on Facebook so that no one could see how many friends she had, but her profile pictures and all her information were visible. He listed her as graduating from a high school not far from his hometown, but not one that any of his friends had attended. Ronnie found a number of pictures of this girl with a camera, so he played up photography as a hobby for his character as well. Ronnie wrote her detailed profile on Facebook by copying sections of favorite movies and music from his female friends’ profiles. He also made sure that her writing style was much different from his own, using some social network site users’ convention of repeating the last letter of words multiple times for emphasis. (Find Alison’s Facebook page in Figure 7).
For example, these are some of the Facebook and Twitter updates Ronnie wrote as Alison:

Register for fall classes tomorrowww… Graduation seems right around the corner. Not sure how I feel about that… :/
Blah, I miss my family alreadyyy…. :( Summer, I’m pining for you!
Just arrived home for the weekend. Looking forward to seeing Amy tomorroww!
It’s so nice out todayyy <3

Along with the repeated letters, Alison also used hearts and exclamation points, stylistic features that did not appear in Ronnie’s own updates. Ronnie also uses an equal sign for his own emoticons online, so he consciously made sure that Alison used colons instead.

Ronnie and Alison had many public conversations on both Facebook and Twitter. Ronnie had his laptop logged into his Twitter account and his iPhone logged into Alison’s Twitter account. Like many Facebook users, they shared links, primarily music videos in their case. (Shown in Figures 8-10).

Ronnie often emphasized Alison’s physical location, either somewhere on campus or at home over Easter weekend. Ronnie’s sister, who was in on the joke, suggested that Alison should be present at their Easter dinner, and so Ronnie posted the following on Twitter: [happy easter! having a lovely meal with @skippy96 and @alison_m]#fb Alison also had a number of conversations with Ronnie’s friends who friended her, both people who were in on the prank and those who weren’t, including discussions about hometowns, majors, and plans for after college.

While Ronnie told a few people about the prank from the start, within a few days most of his friends on Twitter knew it was a prank, and by April 9, Ronnie had changed his relationship status. Several people expressed their concern over the end of Ronnie’s relationship, while others
were angry he had pulled the prank. This situation led to a final tweet from Alison’s account: “Some people just have no sense of humor... :/ So, who's up for some fun and games?” And this tweet from Ronnie’s Twitter account: “[just killed one of my characters, @alison_m. today is a sad day for creativity]”

Ronnie’s creation of Alison is certainly not a new practice online, and this kind of activity, which Sherry Turkle described as identity play, is well-chronicled in her book focusing on Lambda Moo, *Life on the Screen*. I wouldn’t suggest that Ronnie’s creation of this character allowed him to experiment with his identity, as Turkle did in her text, though his reliance on some gender stereotypes to create Alison is reminiscent of what Lisa Nakamura (2002) calls identity tourism. While text-based MUDs and MOOs have faded in popularity, Internet users do create fake profiles all of the time. Friendster, an early social network site, met its downfall by trying to police fake accounts, and fake celebrity accounts are common on Twitter. Yet identity is also created through sustained interaction with individuals across multiple platforms. As filmmakers Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost chronicle in the 2010 film *Catfish*, creating a persona on a social network site involves not just one person, but an entire network of corroborating individuals and activities. Because many of the people individuals connect with through these sites are also those with whom they have connections offline, these interactions frequently traverse online and offline boundaries, such as Ronnie’s interactions with his roommates. Ronnie tried to keep up this aspect of his fake character with the frequent references to location. Part of Ronnie’s inability to keep up the fake profile, then, lies in an inability of this character to participate in all of the forums, online and offline, that she plausibly should have.

In Ronnie’s creation of Alison, he also relied heavily on his understanding of specific genres. By pulling content from friends’ profiles and consciously reproducing certain discourse
conventions, Ronnie created believable Facebook and Twitter profile pages. For the creation of Alison, Ronnie demonstrates how he is able to use his knowledge of social network site structures and settings, genres and discourse conventions, and a sophisticated sense of audience to construct an identity that for a time at least, passes for authentic within these structures.

**Conclusion**

Social network sites present interesting issues for identity representation. Unlike Zuckerberg’s assertion about identity, each individual in this study saw their identity as being presented differently for different groups, conceptualized through different figured worlds. Each writer was thoughtful and reflective in representing their identity for different groups, and they often separated that identity by site. Alexis, for example, presented an identity of American college student to her Korean friends on Cyworld; she saw herself as a church youth group leader on Facebook, and used more of a personal persona for school updates with college friends on Twitter. Sandra sent fewer updates to a large number of people on Facebook while she sent more frequent updates to a small number of people on Twitter. For Jack, Facebook was a site for personal updates for multiple groups of friends, while each Twitter account allowed him to interact with a different figured world: students, musicians and music critics, and students. Esther was reluctant to send updates on Facebook to such a large number of people, but she felt more comfortable connecting to a more focused figured world on Ravelry. Becca carefully represented herself to multiple figured worlds on Facebook, while Sarah was reluctant to do so at all.

Ronnie made the distinctions between identities and figured worlds more obvious. While he also communicated with different groups through Facebook and Twitter, he separated off a specific identity under a different name for music related updates, constructing a figured world
specific to musicians that he saw as distinct from his identity representations in other areas. He also played with this identity representation in creating a distinct persona for his April Fools prank. This representation worked differently in that Ronnie first considered the audience he directed his hoax toward, and then created the appropriate identity artifacts to match the expectations of that audience.

Each writer had a unique way of navigating these sites and figured worlds, and developed identity representations on these different social network sites in order to present themselves effectively to these different groups. These different identity practices represent important literacy practices for the twenty-first century. As the experiences of those research participants connecting with professional communities online can attest, the ways in which individuals represent themselves online have high stakes. Social network site users have to assess their audiences, read rhetorical situations, and represent themselves accordingly in these online environments that often flatten audience. The experiences of these individuals demonstrate the thoughtful, reflective practices in which individuals engage in order to represent themselves and communicate with others effectively on these sites. These examples show identity representation on social network sites to be complex and sophisticated literate activity that requires close study by writing researchers. All of these writers also worked with and against the designs of these sites to create their desired identity representations for the different figured worlds they participated in, whether it was working against a flattening of audience to create nuanced identity performances or using those site structures to create a fictional persona. The ways that my research participants negotiated these sites and integrated them within their daily literate activity is covered in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR:
CHRONOTOPIC LAMINATIONS: PLACES AND INTERFACES

Much popular press concerning social network sites in 2010 involved concerns of privacy and the exposure of one’s information. As described in Chapter Three, managing multiple audience groups on social network sites involves sophisticated literacy practices in reading rhetorical situations and negotiating both specific audiences and work with and against the design of these sites. Managing one’s information, who has access to that information, and how it spreads are activities that social network site users engage in with the policies and structures of the social network sites themselves. When sites change their interfaces, organize information differently, and change privacy setting configurations, writers change their practices as well. As these design changes affect so many individuals, such issues often lead to public concern and even backlash.

A backlash to changes in the way Facebook privacy settings were configured in December 2009 grew to a breaking point in the Spring of 2010. This was caused by Facebook’s announcement of its new Connect feature on April 21, 2010, which drew not only media criticism and public panic, but also separate complaints filed by Senator Charles Schumer and the Electronic Privacy Information Center to the Federal Trade Commission.

The public backlash of Spring 2010 is what Alice Marwick would call a “technopanic,” which she defines as a “moral panic as a response to fear of modernity as represented by new technologies.” One of Marwick’s examples of a technopanic is the fear of child predators on MySpace, sustained by media like NBC’s To Catch a Predator. For Marwick, technopanics usually involve an attempt to modify or regulate young people’s behavior or to control their
media products. In this case, while Facebook is still a site primarily populated by young people, it is widely used by other groups as well. The critical mass of 500 million users concerned about the use of their information on the site caused panic and also reflection on the ways social networking sites like Facebook have changed and are changing how people relate to each other and how they share information.

A number of events precipitated this technopanic, beginning with a December 2009 notification users received on the service prompting them to review their privacy settings. While this move seems to have been prompted by complaints that users don’t review or understand their privacy settings, the default option on the site for most information categories switched to “everyone,” prompting those who hadn’t paid attention to the notifications to have their information exposed to anyone on the Internet. In April, Facebook announced the Facebook Connect program, which changed the way information is displayed on users’ profiles, linking them to former Fan, now called “Like” pages, and a larger program called Social Plugins, that allows Facebook “Like” buttons to be placed on outside websites, linking people through their Facebook pages to numerous other places online.

It was unclear how much information Facebook was sharing with other companies through these Social Plugins, and the web, television, and print media exploded with stories attempting to explain the changes and to comment on their larger implications. The media coverage came from those who typically write about Facebook, such as technology sites like Read, Write, Web, Wired, and Slate, but also stories across a range of media outlets, from the Wall Street Journal, to stories on Yahoo’s Finance section with titles like “Seven Things to Stop Doing on Facebook,” a cover story in Time magazine, and a very detailed chart in the New York Times mapping out all 50 of Facebook’s privacy settings and more than 170 options. Facebook
users circulated status updates alerting people to the new changes while schooling them on how to alter these settings. The Electronic Frontier Foundation called for a Bill of Privacy Rights, and critics declared May 31 to be Quit Facebook Day. A group of students in New York announced that they were building Diaspora, a decentralized social network, around this time as well, and immediately raised over $200,000.

After almost a month of defending the site’s changes, including a rather disastrous question and answer forum with Elliot Schrage, Facebook’s Vice President for Public Policy, in the New York Times, Facebook announced that it would be revamping and simplifying its privacy controls on May 26. The panic slowly died down, and coverage of Facebook retreated back to the tech pages. This panic followed by a gradual acceptance of the site’s changes is a cycle that repeats with every change made to the service, from the 2006 introduction of the news feed to every design change the site makes.

This technopanic was essentially a public debate about rhetoric – about authorship, audience, and intellectual property. Who am I writing to? What are the consequences of this writing? And who owns it? While the technopanic of Facebook’s Great Privacy Debate has died down, the issues that created it in the first place have not. Most users did not leave the service and have to find a way to manage their concerns about information sharing with the activities they do on Facebook. As described in Chapter Three, as Zuckerberg pushes users, through the site design and privacy policies and configurations, to represent their “true” identities on Facebook to the world in a way that flattens audience, this technopanic demonstrates the ways in which these users pushed back, questioning Facebook’s policies and insisting on more control over what content individuals share and with whom, demanding the ability to present different information and different aspects of self to different audiences.
What this incident demonstrates is that individuals are concerned about who can see the content they share online, and media outlets have tried to turn themselves into places to educate users about these issues. When an individual signs up for an account on a social network site, this person has to consider not only how to represent one’s identity on the site, but also what the social network site company will do with that information, how to navigate the control of one’s information through the site interface, and how use of the site will become integrated (or not) into one’s writing and communication practices. Beyond the audiences that individuals communicate with on social network sites, their literacy and identity practices are also influenced by the sites themselves, through their design, the companies’ policies and through the ways that individuals integrate use of these sites into their daily practice. This chapter details the ways in which social network site users interact with the social network sites themselves and integrate these sites within their daily literacy practices. These writers, while influenced by the design of these web platforms, have agency in these interactions and each respond to changes in site structure like those detailed above in thoughtful and reflective ways that demonstrate the importance of viewing these concerns as part of individuals’ literacy practices.

**Chronotopic Laminations**

Lisa Nakamura (2002) argued that early discourse surrounding the Internet saw it as a place, an exotic third-world location that reified Western Internet users as tourists in cyberspace (p. 89). Through conceptions like the ones she pointed to, the Internet has typically been seen as a location that a user visits that is separate from one’s embodied, offline life. The MUD users interviewed in Sherry Turkle’s (1995) book, *Life on the Screen*, for example, drew distinctions between the worlds in which they interacted and experimented with identity, and “IRL,” or “in
real life.” Rather than viewing the Internet as a “place,” however, ubiquitous networked computing means that the Internet goes everywhere, accessed through a wireless laptop computer, a handheld tablet, e-reader, or mobile device. Users of social network sites update their status from multiple locations, share content on the go, and have updates sent to their mobile devices. Instead of providing strict boundaries between online and offline selves, users of social network sites instead embed them in their own daily activity.

I approach this activity from the viewpoint of embodied identities that traverse online and offline boundaries, but also through an examination of everyday literacy practices in which instead of spending a long block of time on social network sites each evening, activities on these sites are distributed across the course of one’s day and integrated within one’s daily literacy practices. Individuals’ use of social network sites are part of the distributed chains of literate activity that Paul Prior and Jody Shipka (2003) describe as “chronotopic laminations.” As discussed in Chapter One, Prior and Shipka see literate activity as “ways of being in the world, forms of life,” which comprise histories of activity, representational practices, and “constantly make our worlds—the ways we select from, (re)structure, fiddle with, and transform the material and social worlds we inhabit” (p. 181-182). In the first section of this chapter, I trace the ways in which activity on social network sites is embedded in individuals’ daily literate practice through an examination of the laminated chronotopes through which people engage in literate activity, defined by Prior and Shipka as “the dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action, the ways multiple activity footings are simultaneously held and managed” (p. 181). Writers’ literate activity is dispersed through chains of daily events, and writing happens in moments between domestic activity, as Prior and Shipka discuss, in coffee shops, and on commutes. For literate activity on social
network sites, this activity happens wherever writers have access to a wireless Internet connection or a mobile device with a data plan. Through these individual writers’ interactions on social network sites, we can see these sites as integrated within their daily activities and literacy practices.

**Ronnie: Chronotopic Laminations**

Ronnie’s social media use provides the best example of the ways that many social network site users integrate their social network activity within their daily lives. He had an iPhone that he carried with him everywhere, and he sent updates to Twitter frequently through his phone. He also used it to document his day through images and video, and he sent the images to Twitpic from his phone. Ronnie cited his iPhone as much of the reason that he shared images so frequently and pointed to one example where he saw an image in a bar that reminded him of his friend (seen in Figure 11):

> My friend's in the, he's a railroad engineer, so if any time I want to see a train I kinda tell him about it, so I saw that in the bathroom at Murphy's so I just tweeted him. Just like that.

Ronnie’s social media use was integrated within his daily activity, and he connected to his personal contacts by documenting his lived experience on social network sites. On an unseasonably warm day, Ronnie used an account on 12 seconds to upload a short video from his phone of Ronnie and his friends hanging out on the roof of his apartment building.

It’s not unreasonable to say that Ronnie was engaged in at least one social network site most of the time. He checked Twitter constantly from the website, and saw it as a habit, part of his daily routine, and something he did when he was bored:
I guess I usually check it out of habit just type in the website and go to them and see if anything has changed . . . In a way it's kind of like a nervous habit, when I'm like, trying to do something else. It's like, I don't know what I need to do, I'll just, I need to do something, though, so I'll check Twitter.

He also visited Facebook a few times each day from his laptop computer to keep up with his friends. His roommates were on Twitter as well, and the three of them had conversations in the apartment that took place partially in person and partially on Twitter. He stated in an interview,

It's weird, we'll mention each other and sometimes when we're in the apartment. We'll talk about what's going on on Twitter and say, hey, did you check out this tweet, or did you check out what I wrote on your wall, which kind of feels weird because it kind of defeats the purpose, you know, I could just tell you in person.

Ronnie’s roommates, for example, knew when he is awake in the morning not because he left his bedroom, but because he sent a tweet from his phone or computer. Apartment announcements, for example, were also circulated through the Facebook group rather than through physical notes left in common areas.

When Ronnie studied at the library, he usually listened to music through last.fm, which documented the songs he listened to and shared them with his friends. He often tweeted his last.fm activity as well, sharing the songs he currently listened with his contacts as well:

[#nowplaying tool. specifically, lateralus and 10,000 days. i have some arguments to settle] Sun May 30 13:27:21 2010 via web

[i need to WAKE UP. #nowplaying lady gaga] 10:08 AM Dec 7th, 2010 via web
Ronnie’s digital literacy practices involved chains of activity that included taking a photo with his iPhone on the way to class and uploading it to Twitpic, sending a link to a video or news story to a friend, commenting on a friend’s Facebook status, and sharing a sunny May afternoon by uploading and then tweeting a 12 second video of his friends goofing around on a rooftop patio. We can see each of these individual actions as situated, embodied activities that are part of a number of functional systems and influenced by histories of the tools, including the sites themselves, used to create them. Rather than seeing Ronnie’s activity on social network sites as discrete and isolated actions, we instead should see that work as part of a larger system of literate activity that traverses a number of different interfaces.

Along with moving across different interfaces, Ronnie’s experience also documents the complex ways in which activities on social network sites bridge online and offline spaces. Interactions are often initiated online and end in some kind of offline activity; Ronnie contacted friends through either Facebook or Twitter to plan social events. Ronnie also used Twitter as he would text messaging to plan meet ups with his friends. In one instance, he tweeted his plans to have dinner at a campus restaurant and invited others to meet him there. Sitting at a table in the restaurant, replies on Twitter were sent to his phone, and he used Twitter as he would texting, through which he learned that several of his friends planned to join him. Ronnie’s activity complicates easy boundaries between sites as online and offline activity become fully integrated within his daily life.
Alexis: Chronotopic Laminations

Like Ronnie, Alexis was constantly connected to social network sites, and she most frequently updated Facebook, which she characterized as an “addiction.” She said during an interview that “I've just been going on constantly” because with her web browser, Google Chrome, typing in “f” to the address bar would automatically bring up Facebook’s URL, and all she has to do is hit enter. Her password was saved in her computer, so pressing enter would automatically bring up her friends’ updates with her news feed. She said, “I think I use it more than ten times a day, going in and out.” While she checked Twitter frequently as well, Facebook was a habit, a quick switch to a browser and two key strokes that kept Alexis in constant contact with her friends and their updates online.

Alexis also used Facebook to network with friends and make plans, and also to send updates to her friends and contacts. These connections were especially important for Alexis, as she lived off-campus at home rather than with friends on campus. Alexis updated her Facebook status with her location when she stayed with a friend on campus during finals week. Unlike Ronnie, Alexis shared few photo updates from her phone, though she did occasionally upload photos to Cyworld. While Alexis was traveling, however, she sent updates to Twitter via her cell phone in order to keep her friends updated about her travels:

When I'm traveling and stuff and people aren't physically there with me, for example, I traveled to Michigan by myself and I just loved constantly texting to a twitter, updating my status to other people um, for those people who know I'm gone, but don't know exactly what I'm doing, you know, so my close friends gets updated.

Alexis uses social network sites in her daily literacy practices in order to send frequent updates on her lived experience to her friends and connections.
One of the most important people Alexis connected with was a friend in Korea; she and Alexis shared a group diary on Cyworld and frequently connected on that site. Because their wireless plans didn’t include international rates, she and her friend would send each other “texts” by using the direct message function on Twitter. They had these updates sent to their cell phones, and they were able to stay in frequent contact by using the instant messaging service.

For students with transnational connections like Alexis, this constant contact with her multiple friend groups also represents important relationship maintenance with those far away. As Youngjoo Lee and Alan Hirvela (2010) note in their study of the self-sponsored writing practices of a 1.5 generation Korean American student, participating in these different sites, particularly Cyworld, helped their research participant “establish and maintain her memberships in ‘affinity groups,’ that is, groups of other Korean 1.5 Generation adolescents as well as some of her non-Korean friends.” Wan Shun Eva Lam and Enid Rosario-Ramos (2009) note the importance of online connections, particularly blogs, for immigrant students in the United States to maintain ties with friends and with their home cultures across long distances as well.

Patrick Berry, Gail Hawisher, and Cynthia Selfe (2012) describe the various ways students with transnational experiences use digital networks to communicate across geographically dispersed communities, arguing that their co-researchers “create digital communicative landscapes, connected spaces of globalized human flows that resist a simple mapping onto conventional, physically contiguous geopolitical spaces.” Alexis’ experience with social network sites allowed her to connect to her various friend groups and figured worlds at one time, and the multiple identities and locations that made up her life in digital spaces were integrated within her everyday experience, as she connected to and updated these sites throughout the day through both a computer and mobile devices.
Alexis’ digital literacy practices involved chains of activity that included updating her Facebook status from class with her netbook, sharing photos of a recent trip on Cyworld, and sending updates about her location to Twitter with her cell phone. This dispersed literate activity constantly recreates the identities and maintains the relationships of the different figured worlds she belongs to. For students like Alexis who have transnational experiences, layering identities also means layering languages and places. In her online interactions, Alexis crossed boundaries of language and place quite easily, sending updates in both English and Korean to friends in the United States and in Korea. Social network sites represent important locations where transnational students can connect to friends from home in ways that allows them to keep strong ties to a home identity and culture.

**Jack: Chronotopic Laminations**

Like Ronnie and Alexis, Jack was connected to his contacts via social network sites most of the time. Jack noted that he checks Twitter from his ipod touch, usually before he got out of bed in the morning, and then was connected to Twitter through most of the day, through the Tweetdeck interface on his computer, through his ipod touch, and through his phone. Many of the tweets from his personal account, especially those containing links to images he’s uploaded to Twitpic, were connected to his everyday lived experience. Jack tweeted about conversations with friends and family, social events, and posted pictures of these events on Twitter, such as the jalapeños from the grocery store and occasionally images from good meals, see examples in Figures 12 and 13.

Through use of his mobile devices, Jack frequently updated his daily activities and posting text and images representing these events. He also tweeted notes and images from the
concerts he attended. Overall, Jack was in constant contact with his contacts through these social network sites.

Jack rarely updated Twitter from the website, however. He used an external Twitter client, Tweetdeck, to connect to the social network site, and he kept Tweetdeck up on his computer throughout the day while he was working. Tweetdeck allows the user to connect not only to Twitter, but also to Facebook and other social network sites as well. Jack frequently posted to Tweetdeck to update his own status on Twitter (much less frequently on Facebook), but for most of the day, Jack considered the updates coming through on his Tweetdeck software as ambient communication; they were primarily noise in the background that he occasionally paid attention to, catching the updates that came through when he could. Jack frequently used Twitter to share information about his daily life, and his updates on this site, particularly through this personal account, are laminations of this experience, as he shares information from his daily activities, posts photos of his kids’ activity and also the music events he attends. As Jack shared his updates frequently, others’ updates formed a kind of ambient communication in his daily literate activity, constantly receiving updates and responding to them as he sits in front of a computer.

**Esther: Chronotopic Laminations**

Like Jack, Esther also used Tweetdeck for updates while she was working on the computer. Esther stated that it helped her connect to Ravelry by showing her updates from the Ravelry page and from other Twitter users that mentioned Ravelry. This helped Esther connect to Ravelry through this more ambient communication:
The thing I really like about it is that, the update comes here in the corner, right, so I can look at it, and if I'm not interested in it, I can just look away, but if I am interested in it, then I can click on the link, or I can go back to Tweetdeck. I think it's a quick look where Ravelry gets very consuming for me, like I could sit there and look at it for 45 minutes to catch up with all the things that I want to catch up with, Twitter is quick.

Some of Esther’s first experiences with Twitter were live tweeting from conferences, which she did from her Android phone. She didn’t use her phone much for these events after, however, as she found her phone updates too slow. The majority of Esther’s Twitter updates, as noted in Chapter Three, linked to her blog, where she posted longer reflections of her travel experiences rather than in the moment updates from social network sites. For one major life event, Esther also encouraged the live tweeting of others. As Esther and her husband both used social media, and invited people to tweet during their wedding.

Before the event, Esther posted the following tweets:

We're having a live twitter feed up during the wedding. Even if you can't make it, send us a message. #weddinghashtag 10:24am, May 21, 2010 via Tweetdeck

If you tweet between 3PM to midnight Sat May 22, your tweets will appear on a screen at our wedding #weddinghashtag 10:26am, May 21, 2010 via Tweetdeck

Getting married today! #weddinghashtag 9:22am, May 22, 2010 via Tweetdeck

During the event, wedding guests and other friends tweeted messages to the couple, and Esther then posted the following tweet afterwards:

Thanks all for tweeting my wedding! #weddinghashtag 8:54am, May 23, 2010 via Tweetdeck
Esther and her husband also included social media into their ceremony, as they updated their Facebook relationship statuses during the event. While Esther didn’t often update these more general social networks, she turned to them to mark momentous occasions in her life and to invite others to participate in them as well.\(^4\)

**Sandra: Chronotopic Laminations**

Like Alexis, Sandra used both Facebook and Twitter frequently and also described Facebook as intimately integrated into her daily activity. Like Alexis, she checked Facebook sometimes 10 times a day, and while she didn’t update it as frequently, she often commented on friends’ statuses.

Although Sandra bought a new iPhone during our study, she didn’t use it frequently for social media updates, and most of Sandra’s tweets were sent from her computer while she was at the library:

I thought I would be doing it all the time, but generally I'm on my computer, or like, on one of the computers in the computer lab. For some reason my AT&T network doesn't work on the quad. It's like the only place I'd want remote access. Um, I think I will more over the summer, and like being at home, just because I'm just around computers less, and I'm going on vacation, and I don't want to take my computer with me.

The following tweets demonstrate how Sandra commented on her daily activities, primarily in her hours at the library, but also commenting on her daily activities in other contexts, through social network sites:

Typing on windows computers at the library is proving to be stupidly difficult

\(^4\) Facebook has recently been encouraging this kind of use, as the timeline, which is a revision to the Facebook profile initially introduced in October 2011 and first introduced to Facebook users in January 2012 that allows users to identify “life events” to share with others.
26 Apr 10
On a scale of 1 to 10 of how excited I am to be at a history final review session, im definitely at -3

9 Dec 10
watching a romantic comedy based around ramen. #netflixmondays

2 Aug 10
Sandra used the Twitterific application to check and update Twitter on her iPhone, but the application also made her use of the service difficult. It took the Twitter client too long to load, it was “buggy,” and she stated that she didn’t have the patience for it. Unlike Ronnie, Alexis, and Jack, who enjoyed updating social network sites while they were away traveling, around campus, and conducting other activities, Sandra found that only felt the need to update the service when she was at a computer:

I also think I think more about tweeting when I'm sitting at my computer, you know, I'm generally kind of bored. It's usually probably because I'm studying and doing work. Kind of just doing nothing.

Through the use of mobile devices and social network sites, Ronnie, Jack, and Alexis laminate their daily lives and experiences on their social network updates, representing physical places and activities in online environments. While Sandra spent a great deal of time in the library, she did not feel the need to update her activities outside of this space online. Although Sandra reported that she expected to use her phone more to update social network sites over the summer, she didn’t use them much, and continued her library updating habits during the fall semester as well, as seen in the following tweets sent during one study session:

remember august when everyone in the library was wearing shorts. Makes all the boots and winter coats really sad. #whyisntthiscalifornia

12 Dec 10 i thought I was distracted at
the library, but there's a girl in front of me watching sitcoms. I highly doubt its a subject of a thesis 12 Dec 10

nothing is happening on the internet. how am i supposed to stay distracted from statistics? 12 Dec 10

haven't even started statistics...12 Dec 10

just realized I've been at the library for almost 8 hours. holy shit.12 Dec 10

For Sandra, the rhetorical situations that occasioned an update to her social network sites were specific to these contexts.

For many writers like those described here, social network sites are integrated into their daily literate practices. Individuals use these sites to share quick reactions and reflections to daily events, to represent their experiences through text and images, and to encourage others to interact with them. The images Ronnie and Jack send, Alexis’ travel updates, and Esther’s encouragements to tweet her wedding demonstrate the role social network sites play in individuals’ mundane daily activities and important life events alike.

**Archiving Daily Life**

As well as integrating social network sites within their daily literacy practices, these writers also use them to archive aspects of lives, using these tools in order to represent information for themselves. Ronnie, as a math and statistics major, was interested in quantifying different aspects of his life through the social network sites he used. When he listened to music anywhere: on his ipod, his laptop, or even through his phone in the car, he made sure that the song he listened to was “scrobbled” (i.e., recorded) through last.fm. While Ronnie was interested in sharing the music he was listening to with his friends, as the earlier discussion of his tweets
about the service can attest, Ronnie’s use of the site was mostly for his own use and his own recording purposes. Last.fm tracks his total number of songs played his top artists, and the number of times he listens to each artist. This data is then compared to that of his friends to create the compatibility discussed earlier. As Ronnie discussed, he uses the site “mostly see what I'm listening to because I forget.” The ability to track this information is something he found valuable, and his friends did as well:

Just the other day we were throwing a party and one of my friends was dj-ing but none of the stuff he dj-ed was scrobbled at all. He was really annoyed at that, because there is a lot of music that didn't get counted. It's in a way it's kind of like watching, it's entertaining to see like which artists will go up and down.

This social aspect of sharing music is important to Ronnie, but even more important is the ability to track his daily activity and then to review the trends of that activity.

He also was interested in keeping track of other kinds of numbers on social network sites as well. Ronnie celebrated when he reached his 10,000th tweet, and he was conscious to keep his number of followers higher than the number of people he was following. This number had a significance to Ronnie about his identity as a producer rather than a consumer based on his experience on Twitter:

I try to keep my followers greater than the number of people I'm following because, you know, it's just like my, I guess, weird habit. All the big people who tweet have tend to have more followers than people they're following, so I feel like in a way that I am a publisher and not just someone who's following people.

Esther also used social network sites to keep track of her daily activity, notably to track the yarn she had purchased and knitted. Ravelry has an aspect of the site called the “stash” where
members catalog the different kinds of yarn they have in their collections. Esther uses this feature frequently, and it is the way that she organizes and keeps track of the different kinds of yarn she has. Over the course of the study, Esther’s stash increased from 155 different kinds of yarn to 339, which is a large number of individual kinds of yarn to keep track of, so she uses tools on the site to help her manage this yarn. She can download the information on her stash as an Excel spreadsheet, and the site also calculates how many miles of yarn she has, which was 7.5 at the time of the study. The site also integrates her yarn with the pattern database on the site, so that when Esther searches for a particular pattern, the site integrates information from her stash and recommends certain types of yarn that she currently has for the project. The site also allows Esther to archive all of her knitting projects as well, as discussed in Chapter Three. Esther described the process of updating her projects on Ravelry as a way of showing off her knitting and sharing with others. The sites Esther and Ronnie used are social network sites, and there is therefore a sharing element to these archival practices, but they were primarily using the tools for themselves, in order to collect data and track information.

Social Network Sites as Actors

In order to share updates, social network site users have to interact with site interfaces and designs that are at times convenient, others frustrating, and sometimes disrupt individuals’ use of these sites. Bruno Latour (2005), in his revisions and reflections on actor network theory, advocates for the importance of considering nonhuman actors in human action, nothing that objects as well can “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid” (p. 72) certain actions and behaviors. While objects themselves do not cause
certain results, human action is mediated by these nonhuman actors (p. 75), and their participation in these interactions is important to study.

For the writers I researched, social network sites were often seen as taking actions that were inscrutable, and these individuals often derived meaning from these technologies in ways that the designers would not have intended. Becca, for example, frequently posted about and commented on both the ads she saw on Facebook, and the ways that the site suggested that she “Fan” certain pages. While the suggestions are based on data from other Facebook users, they seem to have a larger meaning. As Becca stated in an interview:

You know what my favorite thing lately has been? How it suggests pages for you based on other things you've liked. . . I've actually been saving a set of them on my computer, screen captures of them. Because it seems to have developed this little inkling of, "you like Barack Obama? That means you like black people!" It suggests all of these black celebrities and then says, "You are a fan of Barack Obama” underneath. And I'm just sitting here, like, this is so problematic. I just like to speculate about what they're basing these on. I mean, I guess statistically, it's like if people like this thing, they also tend to like this thing. . . Occasionally it's stuff that makes sense, like "become a fan of the White House because you're a fan of Barack Obama,” or “become a fan of Michelle Obama, because you're a fan of Barack Obama,” but Will Smith, and Lil Wayne, and Tyler Perry?

While the Facebook recommendations were generated through an algorithm, Becca read them as having cultural meaning. These are common occurrences on Facebook; the site faced controversy when a new feature encouraged Facebook users to connect with those they hadn’t talked to recently, and some of these contacts were Facebook users who had passed away.

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5 Public business, celebrity and organization pages on Facebook were called “fan pages” by the social network site, where a user could click a button to become a “fan” of that business, person or service. Facebook changed this terminology from “fan” to “like” in April 2010.
Ronnie also had similar questions about these technologies. Ronnie and his friends spend a good amount of time on last.fm, a music sharing social network site, considering how their activity on this site affects both their music compatibility with each other and how that activity affects their statistics on the site overall.

Comments like these on Twitter are frequent: “@Matt And this will up our Last.fm compatibility! ^_~” and “[@wanderbass56(Ronnie)'oh god, ke$ha is being scrobbled to my last.fm' @Ryan_B: 'you're going to lose compatibility with everyone you know’].” One evening, Ronnie’s friends competed for highest compatibility with Ronnie on his musical tastes on last.fm. Ronnie started with this tweet, which linked to a screenshot of his friend’s profile on last.fm, which listed their compatibility: “http://twitpic.com/xxxx - [you just can't buy that kind of compatibility. ;P @n3sam and i are clearly meant to be!]” Within 10 minutes, Ronnie’s friends altered their own music choices to be listed as “super” compatible as well:

http://twitpic.com/xxxx - [actually, @jsanto seems to have the upper hand. @n3sam, you guys need to fight for my musical love!]

http://twitpic.com/xxxx - [it appears @Ryan_B wants in too... okay, if one more person grabs 'super' i swear...]

http://twitpic.com/xxxx - [@Matt is now 'super' with me... and i won't ss @reptilesara since she's been for a while. what's going o

http://twitpic.com/xxxx - [add @hijohn to the list... that makes six 'super' friends! tonight is clearly an epic night =) glad you all

Ronnie spends a good deal of time considering the criteria for these preferences and how his own activity might change and shape these preferences. For Ronnie and his friends, changing their
actions in order to change settings on sites like last.fm becomes a kind of game. They interact with each other, but they interact with the software as well.

Ronnie also interacts with technological actors on Twitter. There are a number of Twitter profiles that automatically collect and retweet tweets that mention certain terms. Ronnie and his friend mentioned socialism, and the tweet was suddenly retweeted by a Twitter profile called “RedScareBot,” which uses a picture of Joseph McCarthy as its profile picture and includes the following under the description: “Joseph McCarthy claimed there were large numbers of Communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers inside the United States federal government and elsewhere.” One can interpret this Twitter profile as a joke or as a serious attempt to root out communism. Ronnie describes it this way:

Somehow communism came up and so we were talking about it, or socialism, and um, there’s this tweetbot called the Red Scare which would retweet a link to people’s posts and then say, ‘turn these people in’ or you know, it’s like, watch out for communists or stuff like that. It was just really crazy, and it can be randomly generated, and all this stuff is just them retweeting people who mention socialism in whatever way. Sometimes the context is completely off. Um, another time I mentioned riding a bicycle, and the bicycle feed picked it up and retweeted it. In a way it’s like a badge, it’s like, “hey, some robot is following us. Cool.”

Whether it is the syndication of content between sites, the use of suggestion software on Last.fm, the use of bots on Twitter, or navigating through the architecture of the sites themselves, the activity that users engage in on social network sites always involves nonhuman actors.

The technologies used on these social network sites were designed by programmers and supported by other individuals working for the organizations behind the sites. These sites are
usually “blackboxed” by their users; technologies and the designers behind them work together in seamless interactions. Latour (1999) defines the process of blackboxing as “the process that makes the joint production of actors and artifacts entirely opaque” (p. 183). An individual doesn’t notice the system that produced an overhead projector, in Latour’s example, and the number of individuals needed to support its use until one element of that production fails to work. Similarly, many of my research participants did not consider Facebook’s many employees or the procedures they follow until something went wrong.

In November 2010, Beth tried to log in to her Facebook profile and learned that her account had been suspended. Beth recounted the frustrating process she had navigating Facebook’s organizational structure in order to regain access to her account:

It was just a pain in the butt because of course there aren't any real people at Facebook that I know of, and so I had to go through all of their different systems, and I was like, ok, I want my account back, and I finally got there, and I was typing in stuff and they're like, well your account doesn't exist anymore because it was a fake identity. I'm like, no it wasn't, and I had to go through this whole process . . . I think my account was hijacked, and they gave it back to me with no explanation as to what happened. My account and everything was still fine on there, and I just got so pissed I deactivated it. I was like, I don't want to deal with this crap. This is ridiculous, like I mean, it was just super stressful because no one told me what was happening, and I ended up going through like 40 hoops to get it back, and I wasn't even sure that it still existed. They didn't tell me if it was like, they still had all my information up there and I just couldn't see it or anything, so I was very uncomfortable about the lack of clarity about what was
happening. So it's deactivated. I may reactivate it in the future, but it was just such a hassle. I was like, no, I'm not dealing with this anymore and I deactivated it.

Beth notes anger and confusion over this process and especially Facebook’s silence on a reason for her account deactivation. Beth stated that her mother told her about a story she heard in the news around that time about young women around Beth’s age having their Facebook accounts deactivated because of a bug. Facebook, in fact, confirmed a problem around that time regarding a glitch in the system the company used to verify accounts, which caused a “small number” of female users’ accounts to be deactivated (Melanson, 2010). Beth was never provided this information by Facebook, however. Beth’s largest complaint, as she described in her interview, was the process. She could never discuss the issue with Facebook directly, and as she stated “there aren't any real people at Facebook that I know of.” She also described a frustrating process of being led through Facebook’s flow charts, moving from one screen to the next in the hopes of finding an answer to her problem, which individuals at Facebook took too long to respond to. For Beth, this incident opened up the black box of Facebook’s operations and their ineffectiveness was enough to make her leave the site.

Beth made this decision based on control. This incident made it clear to her that she did not have control of her own information on the site, and this lack of control and transparency about the company’s process caused her to leave the site entirely. According to news reports of other Facebook users’ issues around the same time, this problem was caused by a program that helped Facebook identify fake accounts.6 What is interesting is that while Facebook deactivated the account of a legitimate user representing an “authentic” offline identity, Facebook never identified or suspected the fictional Facebook profile Ronnie created. Facebook is not only a

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6 Facebook has become more vigilant in policing “fake” accounts (Melanson, 2010), reminiscent of but more successful than Friendster’s crusade against “fakesters” that contributed to users leaving the site (boyd, 2006).
website powered by computer code, it is an organization made up of thousands of employees who work together to create the experience that users have with the site. Although in most cases the actions and activities of individuals who work for these social network sites are invisible, incidents like this one break apart these black boxes and cause frustration for users when they cannot contact someone within Facebook’s confusing labyrinth of help menus.

Although individuals interact with and are influenced by nonhuman actors, these technologies do not determine certain outcomes (Latour, 2005, p. 75). In representing themselves on social network sites, the writers in my study interacted with the interfaces of social network sites in ways that both worked with and against the uses intended by the site designers. This happened most frequently on Facebook when the site changed its design and layout. In May of 2010, Facebook turned the information that individuals wrote about themselves under fields like “Activities,” “Interests,” “Favorite Books,” and “Favorite Movies,” and “Favorite Books” into links to community and fan pages. In order to list one’s alma mater or high school, the user had to link to that school and “Like” it on Facebook. Many users did not want these links to appear on their profile pages because they connected them to the Facebook pages for these organizations, where users received updates and connected with others who also liked the page. These changes disrupted the practices of the writers I studied and made them consider the ways the sites were using their information and sharing and displaying that information to others.

Becca stated she ended up deleting most of the information she had written on her profile, to avoid these links:

I ended up unchecking pretty much everything. I let it put a couple of the things in, but otherwise, I was like no, go away. So I have far fewer likes and interests than I used to have, because I didn't want it linking to freaking everything. So that was annoying, and it
just keeps like randomly rearranging things, which drives me nuts. Oh, my high school is
gone, because I told it not to link to that. It's like, I don't want to join a high school
alumni page. I didn't like anyone from high school.

For Becca, Facebook’s design changes were an annoyance, particularly because they put her in
contact with individuals she didn’t want to communicate or be associated with, her high school
classmates. When Facebook made these profile design changes, Becca had to consider again who
she wanted to connect with and in what contexts.

Sandra also declined to link to her high school, but for her, the design changes of the
Facebook profile itself were more of a negative change. Facebook’s new design placed a row of
images she had been tagged in at the top of the page, but also listed a summary of her
information at the top, her school, major, and hometown, along with her current city and her
relationship status. Sandra changed some of this information, but also disliked the way it drew
people’s attention from the writing she had on her profile and the image she had constructed:

I think it's honestly like a design thing with me. The photos is the first big thing, because
that's not what I want Facebook to do, but then the second thing is the design, I just don't
really like it. That's just the way, you know you read through someone's Facebook, like if
all the information is right at the top, why would you read through the rest of it?

Like Sandra, Ronnie was worried about how his information was displayed. He stated,

I don't list anything in my music, movies, or books. um, and now it had all these pages
that you know, I liked at one point and I just kind of forgot about, and now they're like
more prominently displayed than I want them to be. So there's that, so I had to go, um,
hide all of that, change my privacy settings, and also change the order in which some of
the sections are listed.
Ronnie had “liked” several movie and band pages on Facebook, but did not want to list them prominently under his Favorite Music section. Connecting to a band’s page is one thing, but listing them among one’s favorite bands suggested a stronger kind of affiliation, which was one Ronnie did not want to make.

These social network site users adjusted their identity representations based on site changes. Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch (2003) note the importance of studying users’ connection to and take up of technologies and to study those technologies within “their context of use” (p. 2). Technologies are accompanied with scripts about their use, which enable and constrain certain actions (Akrich & Latour, 1992). Users can take up these scripts or resist them, adjusting these technologies for their own usage through an “antiprogram,” defined as “the users’ program of action that is in conflict with the designers’ program” (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 261). The writers I studied took up social network sites in their own ways to resist the expectations of the designers and their scripts. Ronnie, for example, created a fictional Facebook profile when Facebook encourages its users to represent “authentic,” and even legal, offline identities. Becca and Sandra resisted Facebook’s encouragement to connect with other users, and Jack did not use the sharing software on his last.fm account.

Ronnie also resisted the scripts of social network sites in smaller ways as well in adjusting them in order to better represent his digital literacy practices online. Some of this resistance is stylistic. When Ronnie posts updates to Twitter, he always encloses his tweets within square brackets. Along with being a matter of style, Ronnie’s brackets at one time served an important signifying purpose. Ronnie usually updates his Facebook status by forwarding

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7 Facebook’s policy for reinstating an account that has been suspended as a fake identity requires a scanned ID card to reinstate the account.
select tweets to Facebook. The difference in the structure of updates within these two spaces, however, sometimes gave the Facebook updates convoluted grammar. As Ronnie explains:

Back when Facebook had, when you update your status to like, “[Ronnie] is. . . ” it had that “is.” I put the brackets there to kind of segment it off. Even when they got rid of it, I say okay, well, my name is just kind of here. I need this to be separate. So that's where that originally came from.

Ronnie originally used the brackets in order to preserve the grammatical structure of his tweets in Facebook. As in this example, all of Ronnie’s tweets appear in this format: “[quick nap before rehearsal. i have a headache from staring at the computer screen too long].” Formerly, Facebook structured status updates with an automatic “Ronnie is” construction, so the update would appear on Facebook as “Ronnie is [quick nap before rehearsal. i have a headache from staring at the computer screen too long],” which allowed him to preserve his sentence structure and the first-person voice that was common of his updates on Twitter. After Facebook changed the format for status updates, first to just the person’s name, and later dropping the name to adopt an open format, Ronnie kept the brackets, which became a signifying feature of his tweets. Ronnie noted, “I guess it’s artsy. It’s like my trademark in a way.” They also signified Ronnie in a particular way to his friends, as he described: “On occasion I'll use my friends' Twitter accounts when they leave their computers unattended, and I’ll put it into brackets so people will actually know it's me, who follow me. They'll know [Ronnie] messed with this person's Twitter account.” A stylistic convention Ronnie adopted as a way to negotiate the limitations of an interface structure on Facebook became an identifying feature of his own writing online, to the point that his friends recognize writing in square brackets as his.
Part of managing one’s online identity on social network sites, I argue, involves small interventions like this, ways for individuals to adapt the interfaces of social network sites to work more effectively for their needs. Johnson-Eilola (2005) uses the term “conceptual objects” to discuss the ways that objects only have meaning within “specific, contingent, dynamic contexts” (p. 26), and these meanings are often not ones considered by the designers of these objects. While social network sites often place a number of restrictions on users’ activities to occur within specific parameters, individual users adapt these guidelines for their own uses and their own meanings. It is interesting to note, for example, that many of the functions commonly used on Twitter, including retweets, were functions developed by users and not the Twitter designers themselves.

The rise in popularity of Facebook has been lamented by many for the subsequent loss of web design knowledge. As discussed in Chapter One, Kristin Arola (2010) has bemoaned the “rise of the template and the fall of design” (p. 4), describing how Web 2.0 applications like social network sites have led to a decline in home page authoring. This loss is important for Arola because users have less control of their own representations of themselves online. She argues that when we are not making choices about design, we think less about the ways that design contributes to our representations (p. 7). Ronnie’s experiences demonstrate how individuals modify these templates for their own use. Ronnie has experience in web design, having created the website for his hometown historical society while still in high school. While Ronnie does not use these skills as frequently now, they still play a role in his social network use. He customized his Blogger site by writing his own code, which allowed him to customize information placement on the blog to focus on the things he found most important. Ronnie holds up the importance of design in his move from Blogger to Word Press, which allowed him even
more freedom in regard to design, building his own template into more of a portfolio style that allowed for links to his curriculum vitae and a resume detailing his performance experience.

Ronnie also adjusts templates on social network sites for his own uses. Facebook used to include certain default fields on one’s profile where individuals define themselves primarily by the consumption of various media, listing favorite music, movies, television shows, favorite quotations, and writing an open description in the About me section. Ronnie declined to fill these sections out, finding these boxes too limiting to explain his musical tastes, for example. His entire Info section contains a long list of quotations. This space is limited by the template, so he used the About Me section to include additional quotations. He also used an app called Extended Info to list his upcoming concerts and performances. Before Facebook moved to a tab format for the application boxes users can add to their profiles, Ronnie was able to move his boxes around and place the Extended Info section underneath his regular profile information. Facebook’s tab design for profile pages gave him less freedom on placement, however, and places the Extended Info to the side of his main profile, in another tab.

When Ronnie switched to the new profile in December 2010, which eliminated the tab design on the top of the page and allowed for even fewer layout options, he manipulated the way the images were displayed to create one continuous image along the side and top of his profile. Templates such as the ones on Facebook do strongly limit users’ choices, and users like Ronnie have more sophisticated web authoring skills that perhaps encourage them to seek out ways to modify the sites. Ronnie’s case points to how users often explore the means available to modify the interfaces they use in order to utilize the means available to represent himself within Facebook’s design.

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8 Ronnie was inspired in this profile alteration by Alexandre Oudin’s profile alteration, (http://www.facebook.com/alexandre.oudin) and described by Mark Millan (2010) on CNN’s website.
Twitter, in contrast to Facebook, allowed users to develop new conventions for communication on the service, such as retweets (repeating and passing along another user’s message, and @ replies (comments directed toward a particular user). Hashtags on the service are used for users to “tag” their conversations with a particular topic or to participate in a certain event. Both Ronnie and Sandra, however, used these hashtags as meta comments on their tweets.

Ronnie describes how he uses hashtags with his friends:

I mean we look at trending topics and how people do actual hash tags but what we like to do is come up with our own hashtags, um, simply, it's kind of a way, it's like the new parentheses in a way to kind of make a comment and an aside really. Cause I you know some of those, one of my friends was tweeting about how she, because she went to Florida over break so she wasn't used to the weather here and she kept on saying I'm not going to wear a coat even if it's chilly. So I made up the hashtag #denialisariverinegypt um, and so sometimes I use a hashtag in a different way, "I sure could use a burger today" #iguessitsoneofthosedays.

Sandra also used hashtags liberally to classify her own tweets, seen in these examples:

very excited for a self proclaimed snow day tomorrow. cookies, cleaning and cuddling on a much needed day off #domestic #collegegrad 20 Dec 10

this video project is absolutely killing me. #thelibraryisreallyhot #imovieistheworst #sticktowritingessays 5 Apr 10

3 bean vegan chili. First homemade soup ever. #fingerscrossed http://yfrog.com/xxxxx18 Nov 10

The design of social network sites encourage certain actions from their users, and these designs change often, causing frequent disruptions in these writers’ literacy practices that require
them to stop and consider what information they are sharing with whom and how to adjust the representation of their identities to these new settings. These design changes, however, do not create or predetermine certain actions, and social network site users have unique ways of working with and against these designs to represent themselves in their own ways.

Privacy and Identity

In an overview of privacy issues on Facebook, David Kirkpatrick (2010) corresponds a concern with privacy settings with age. He states, “The older you are, the more likely you are to find Facebook’s exposure of personal information intrusive and excessive” (p. 202). Unlike popular accounts of young adults’ lack of concern for privacy on social network sites, Kate Raynes-Goldie (2010) and danah boyd and Eszter Hargittai (2010) have found them to not only be concerned with issues of privacy, but to have developed complex practices to manage the amount of information they share with others, including frequently “scrubbing” one’s Facebook wall of comments (Raynes-Goldie, 2010), frequently changing privacy settings (boyd & Hargittai, 2010), and one Facebook user who deactivated her account every time she logged off, therefore hiding her information and her records of her interactions with friends (boyd & Marwick, 2011). According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 18-29 year-olds represent the age group most concerned with online identity management, as 71% of them have changed the privacy settings on the sites they use (Madden & Smith, 2010).

Discussing the introduction of the Facebook news feed, danah boyd (2008) notes that for many programmers and designers, privacy is an on/off switch; information is either public, or it’s not (p. 14). The Facebook news feed feature, which is a listing of all recent activity from one’s friends on the social network site, did not make any information public that was previously
hidden from an individual’s friends on the social network site. For users, however, the issue of privacy is about exposure and control. As boyd (2008) describes, privacy “is about the sense of vulnerability that an individual experiences when negotiating data,” and social network sites “alter the previously understood social norms” (p. 14). By making an individual’s information visible to either many people (friend connections on a site) or everyone (publicly available), social network sites change the social contexts for information sharing and identity representation, as discussed in Chapter Three. As danah boyd (2010) argued, “privacy is not simply about controlling access. It's about understanding a social context, having a sense of how our information is passed around by others, and shared accordingly.” She notes three different elements of privacy: “a sense of control over information, the context where sharing takes place, and the audience who can gain access” (p. 18).

In order to successfully represent an online identity and interact with individuals in different figured worlds, social network site users need a sophisticated understanding of where their information is displayed, who can see that information, and who has control over that information. Managing one’s data and controlling and understanding privacy settings represent important literate activity for users of social network sites. Like the site designs, privacy settings change frequently over time, and my research participants had to constantly reevaluate and renegotiate their perspectives on privacy and how much they were sharing online. The writers I studied applied two different strategies in managing their identities in terms of privacy: 1) self-censoring information they shared on social network sites; 2) frequently reviewing and managing privacy options on these sites.

Beth was the research participant who employs the first strategy most often, and she was nervous about “putting herself out there” online because “it's accessible forever.” Even though
she kept her privacy settings restricted, she felt keeping her information off the Internet entirely was the best policy for her:

I don’t want people to be able to find out that much about me just, like, online. And I can see in other people and in myself the tendency just to put way too much information online, so I definitely try to keep that restricted, even though, like, it’s very private. Anyone could just copy/paste off of that and take it somewhere else. So even though I know that’s not likely to happen . . . I just go into it with an assumption that everything will be seen by someone I don’t want it to be . . . I don’t want people to be able to stalk me, so I keep it to people I know.

Like most of my participants, Beth also had to make decisions about adjusting her profile with friend requests that cut across her typical audience groups. She slightly cleaned or adjusted her profile when her boss friended her, which was her solution instead of customizing her privacy settings:

When my boss did request to become my friend on Facebook, I went through and made sure there was nothing incriminating-looking. I didn’t think there would be, but someone was making jokes about drugs on my wall post, like way back when, and I’m like, ‘yeah, my boss probably doesn’t want to see that.’ And then, . . . I was somewhere where people were playing beer pong, I wasn’t, and so I just untagged myself so it doesn’t show up in my thing anymore. Cause I couldn’t figure out how to change all of the privacy settings so only a specific group would be able to see something. I’m like, this isn’t worth it. I don’t care about this picture so much anyway. Take it off.

Raynes–Goldie (2010) notes that the most common strategy for Facebook users to manage their privacy does not involve adjusting settings at all, but consists of, as Beth just
described, “cleaning” one’s profile selectively to remove offending information. As discussed in Chapter Three, the writers I studied had unique and sophisticated ways of managing their identities within different figured worlds. Facebook allows individuals to organize friends into groups and then restrict content to or from certain groups. While Beth set up these groups, she found changing her settings confusing and never used them. As she notes above, it was easier for her to just remove the image than to restrict access to it. Most of my research participants felt the same way, and only one of them used these groups; while they had the ability to adjust their privacy settings on Facebook to better manage these different audience groups, these writers developed their own rhetorical strategies instead.

Like Beth, Sandra frequently cleaned her profile as well, more in terms of cultivating a particular image of herself than in removing or censoring content. Sandra stated, “I don't like it to look like I've been on Facebook all day, even though I normally have.” For Sandra, interaction with her friends on the social network site is important, and she always deletes her Facebook statuses that do not receive any comments from her friends. If her status update didn’t receive a response “there's not reason for them to like exist on my own wall,” she stated. “Why am I writing to myself? I already know what I'm thinking.” It’s also a way for Sandra to cultivate her profile with only the witty reflections and updates that received responses from her friends.

Sandra describes cultivating her identity on Facebook as a form of “branding,” and she frequently polices and changes information on her profile to cultivate that image:

I do a lot of policing because I kind of like to think of myself online as like a brand. Whatever you put out there is you, and one bad image, picture, text, it can destroy it. I'm really interested in blogging in the future, and I'm in the process of designing a website,
and I think that the Internet can be your business. There's no reason to destroy it. Because everyone has their own embarrassing stuff, but the Internet is solidified and permanent.

Sandra spends a good deal of time on social network sites managing this information; putting up images and updates that cultivate a particular image. This attention, Sandra noted, applied especially to photos:

I'm very conscientious of the photos of me that are online, I guess the whole way that I think of the Internet persona is as a brand, and you know, I don't want, if I don't want people to see them, I wouldn't put them on the Internet in the first place.

Rather than using the groups feature that Facebook provides for managing content with different groups, Sandra instead managed her content through this editing and policing process she describes:

No, I think it's best just to keep it open, that way people don't think they're being, because I think that is weird if you click on your friend's page and then like, oh, you can't see photos because they've restricted you? It's weird. I'd just rather just not have anything up that I wouldn't want my mother to see.

Privacy settings on Facebook, as discussed earlier, changed frequently throughout the course of my study. In early 2010, these privacy settings involved a myriad of different options for sharing different information (status updates, photo albums, applications, and other information), which resulted in the New York Times article mapping these different settings and options. When Facebook implemented the design changes my participants described above, the social network site also switched many of these categories to “Everyone” by default. Through this technopanic described earlier, many of the writers I studied read about these privacy changes from news stories or from information posted by friends, and each of my research participants
changed and updated their settings. Sandra in particular mentioned a news story she read that caused her to change some of these settings:

I remember there being like a huge thing, Facebook is changing its privacy settings. I remember trying to read through it, and not understanding a word of it. I think I saw like a Yahoo, like one of those stupid articles that pops up on your home screen that said like 10 things to never do on your Facebook, and one of those things was like never put your full birth date including the year, so I took off the year, and I did change it so only I could see my photos. I might have changed who can see my profile, like friends of friends or, . . . I went back to just friends. I don't know, I take such care of what's on my Facebook myself that I don't think the privacy settings are that, I mean it's got your email address, but I put my email address on my thing anyway. It's got my name, but other than that, there's not a whole lot of things that I want to keep secret that I don't keep secret.

Sandra points to a popular press story as informing her about the information she placed on her Facebook page, which brought up issues of reputation (through photos) and larger identity theft concerns (through listing a full birth date). Early in the study, Sandra had most of her information open to “friends of friends,” because she stated:

I'm not too concerned about privacy. I keep it friends of friends, because if I were to meet a friend in person, I would probably be pretty open and friendly. I think it's good for networking too, because if you meet someone for the first time and tell them your name . . . if people don't have a picture, or it says nothing about them and it's just a name, there goes any chance of that connection, which is like the whole point.

In discussing the reasons for her privacy settings, Sandra mentioned both her practice of only putting more public information on Facebook, and in her goal of using the site for
networking as well as keeping in touch with current friends. Sandra therefore used the affordances of the technology in order to better facilitate her goal of connecting with new people on Facebook. Later in the study, however, after Sandra read more about Facebook privacy issues in the press and she began her professional job search, Sandra restricted her privacy settings to friends only. She stated:

I had friends of friends, and then I realized how many people that actually is because I mean, people that I was interning with over the summer from Arizona had mutual friends in common. I haven't been to Arizona since I was 7, like I don't know anyone there. So I was just like, that was just too many, too many people. I think I have like 600, not that many, but then you know, I have friends who have like, 3,000 friends. How have you even met all those people?

A Pew Internet report published in February 2012 notes a lack of density in Facebook connections; on average, only 12% of a user’s friends are friends with each other, so one’s updates are not reaching a close-knit community of friends, but rather, a number of unconnected friend groups. “Friends of friends” on Facebook can, in fact, be 100,000 people (Madden, 2012). Sandra’s use of Facebook’s privacy settings evolved as her identity concerns evolved, and in adjusting these settings, she relied on the affordances of the technologies, popular press accounts giving individuals advice about their settings, and interactions with other Facebook users.

Becca was one research participant who took advantage of Facebook’s group feature, but only for her current students. She noted that she had a “secret folder” that she would “stash current students in” that restricted access to her photos and other profile information. For the most part, however, she kept all of her content open to anyone connected as her friend on the
site. She was also kept updated on Facebook’s privacy and policy changes by her friends on the site, who frequently posted on these changes:

People [were] posting, here's how you get rid of this so Facebook doesn't stalk you everywhere you go. Some people kind of overdo that, but some of the alarmist posts that are like, oh no, quick, stop Facebook from seeing anything ever.

For Becca, revising her privacy settings on the site was a process influenced by the design of technologies themselves, as well as communications and interactions with her friends on the site.

Becca, Sandra, and Beth managed privacy on social network sites both with and against the site structures, in deleting and maintaining content as well as receiving information about privacy changes and settings from their friends. Alexis’ concerns about privacy were also influenced by her friends. Alexis was frequently concerned about who could see her information and what effect that would have. Much of this concern was prompted by a friend who worked in media and gave her advice about closing access to her accounts while she was looking for a job.

Alexis always kept her Twitter account private – one had to send her a request to follow her – and always restricted content on Facebook to friends only. Alexis stated, “I value my privacy, like, I don't want people knowing what I'm doing because Facebook and Twitter is just a constant like status update. I don't want a third party, someone that I do not know, to know what I'm doing or where I am constantly.” She wanted to share this information with her friends, but she didn’t want individuals outside this group, however, to have access to this information.

During her job search, however, Alexis used her Facebook settings to restrict access even further, closing off her pictures, closing her Facebook wall to friends’ posts, and finally, hiding her wall altogether. Much of this was about control; she could not control what her friends were posting on her wall, and therefore sought to minimize any potential problems that could come
about. By closing her wall entirely, which hid all of her own updates as well, Alexis took it a step further and ensured that even her own language couldn’t be misinterpreted. The reason for Alexis’ Facebook clamp down was, in fact, unnecessary. Given her privacy settings, no potential employer would be able to see more than her profile picture unless she approved a friend request. Alexis’ management of her privacy settings gave her peace of mind and control about her information, although it had no effect on potential employers’ ability to see her content, and did shut her off to her friends. She used the tools available on Facebook to manage her privacy, but she used them without a complete understanding about who could see what content.

As danah boyd (2010) argues, managing privacy is about reading context and social situations. While Alexis strictly controlled information available on Facebook, for example, most of the information she placed on Cyworld was completely public. She attributed that difference to the site design itself. Users’ information on Cyworld is organized differently from Facebook and has nothing like a news feed. A user has to click on each individual’s profile in order to see all of one’s updates, which changes the kind of information she places on the site:

I use for Cyworld I think, let's say from Facebook I wouldn't write stuff that's too deep inside of me, or about feelings, or about how I feel and stuff like that. Let's say I wouldn't get too moody on Facebook, let's put it that way, just because it's too exposed, and I don't need 300 more people knowing about how I feel, you know, and what I'm going through, so when I want it to be a little more confidential, I think I put that up . . . on Cyworld, and it's not like, you don't have a news feed. I think recently they put a newsfeed in there, but you have to click on like a different tab to look at the news feed and stuff like that. So it's not like Facebook where you know, when you log in you just see the whole thing, of
people and what they're doing and stuff. You actually have to go to their site, to like their profile page to see what they wrote or what they uploaded.

As Alexis described, she’s not immediately confronted with a list of updates when she visits the site, but instead has to go in search of what each person wrote. Alexis’ comments here demonstrates how her identity representation was influenced not only by the different audience groups she connected with, but also influenced by the design of the sites themselves. Alexis attributes the amount and type of information she puts on the website to the site interface; this demonstrates the ways that her use of the site is influenced not just by the different figured worlds she was communicating with, but the ways in which the sites themselves used and displayed her information. On Cyworld, she felt that she could be more personal because her updates, while public, weren’t broadcast to all of her contacts on the site. Patricia Lange discusses the ways that a group of adolescent YouTube users kept their videos “publicly private,” publicly viewable on the site, but tagged with unique keywords that kept their videos hidden from everyone except for their close friends. Most of Alexis’ information was publicly available on the site, but the lack of a new feed-like feature made her feel that she could update her information more freely when it wasn’t being broadcast so widely.

Beth reported that she often kept information off of Facebook because she didn’t want the company to own her data. That was Ronnie’s primary concern in using social network sites; he was comfortable about his data being public, but he wanted to own that information and remain in control of its circulation. Over the course of the study, Ronnie began to have serious concerns about privacy and ownership of his information on Facebook. Ronnie came back to this fake profile of Alison shortly after Facebook changed its privacy setting configurations in April 2010, which created somewhat of a firestorm in the media. Ronnie grew concerned about the amount
of personal information he was placing on Facebook and also critical of the ways many of his peers took information on Facebook unquestioningly as the truth. He went back to listing Alison as his girlfriend and also listed fake siblings. He removed his high school to list Hogwarts’ School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in its place, and he changed his current employer to the Ministry of Magic. He described this decision in this way: “I guess it’s some sort of a statement. So many people just kind of go with what’s on Facebook and trust it. There’s really no basis other than assuming people are honest.”

Ronnie described himself as sympathetic to Diaspora’s cause, and that in the six months after the Facebook privacy settings change, he migrated most of his information off of the site. He now uses his blog, hosted on his own domain, to hold most of his information, including his CV. All of his profiles on social network sites link back to this blog. He uses this organization for two reasons: he has to update information in just one place, and he leaves as little information with Facebook as possible:

I don’t mind the information being out there. I guess having it in Facebook’s hands kinda bugs me. . . . I’ve seen Facebook as less of a location where I operate out of and more of just a satellite social network, so I’m just taking everything I can and just moving it out and making it as minimal as possible. That’s also why I don’t fill out any information on any of my other social networks like Digg or Flickr. I don’t fill out anything but a little blurb that says where I am and then the link that goes straight to my website. Because I don’t want to maintain all of that . . . Any information I put on there is not really telling a full picture, so I’ll send people to my blog, which says things much more accurately.

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9 Diaspora is a decentralized social network site started by two New York University students in 2010, which was still in testing at the time.
Even if it’s just my interests and my favorite movies and stuff like that. You know, just kind of seeing how information represents me, and I guess my take on it.

Like Sandra, Ronnie also managed his identity on social network sites through the “wall cleaning” Raynes-Goldie (2010) discusses. A more recent design change on Facebook is to list a record of the activity that users participate in on the site (commenting on friends’ walls, liking pages and groups, and posting content) on that individual’s profile page. Ronnie found this record too detailed and preferred not to keep this information visible, which meant that he had to delete these posts manually. As he described, “because of the way Facebook works now, it will say when you wrote on someone's wall and stuff. I delete all of that because I don't want people to knowing when, or where I wrote stuff, or when I wrote it.”

As a frequent user of many different social network sites, what is most interesting about Ronnie’s case is that he has no concerns about his information being online and publicly visible. His blog, for example, contains a good deal of information about his everyday reflections as well as a detailed curriculum vitae of both his academic and musical pursuits. What Ronnie is concerned about, however, is who owns his information and what they can do with it. By putting primarily false information on Facebook, Ronnie prevents Facebook from profiting from that information, while also sending his peers a message about their own use of information on the site. Ronnie’s anxiety over ownership of his information and his continual attempts to control its presentation demonstrate the constant work individuals like Ronnie engage in managing one’s life and identity through social network sites. Frequent technology changes means that these practices can be both time consuming and never ending.

Other social network site users were not as concerned about these issues as Ronnie. Jack, for example, discussed this ownership of data at length and his ambivalence about Facebook and
other social network sites collecting his data. On the one hand, Jack stated, there are advantages to this information sharing:

I guess one of the nice things about the Internet is that it is that it does allow us to do this kind of this very thing that Facebook is like capitalizing on and making a lot of money on, obviously, and some stuff but this model they’ve created, really just uses the Internet in the ways that the Internet can be used, um, so is that bad?

Later in the interview, however, Jack compares Facebook to the large agribusinesses that own seed patents he had recently seen profiled on the film *Food, Inc*:

And so in that sense, there’s this weirdness about how this company owns my information. And that seems kind of wrong that they can make money by, you know, selling advertisers my name as a potential person that might benefit from their advertising or whatever. So that’s funky, that they own me in that way, that they’re capitalizing on information that I’m giving them about myself, and in that way they kind of seem to have, they’re like that one gigantic soybean company. But that’s not necessarily true, because that doesn’t mean that I can’t share my information in other places, and other places can’t use it in similar ways and be really good at it, so I don’t know. As long as like my family and finances aren’t in danger, I’m not super sure how I feel about it.

Jack has vague concerns about Facebook and the way the company might use his information, but as a whole, these concerns are far from his daily lived experience. He stated in a later interview, “I don’t really care if Facebook knows what kind of music I listen to.” While other participants, like Ronnie, Sanda, and Becca, were concerned about what message the music they listed on Facebook said about their identities as music fans, Jack was both unconcerned about this and about what Facebook might do with that information. Rather than defining privacy
through the concerns he addressed above, Jack takes a pragmatic approach that has more to do with rhetorical concerns. Rather than being concerned about the ownership of his data, Jack sees privacy in keeping some kinds of personal information off of social network sites:

I don't know, so I don't want to say that I'm totally an open book, but I just I don't think about it that much. There are certain personal things about me that I kind of don't broadcast like some people might. . . If we're talking about privacy in that way, not so much as like privacy as in information, so like letting the public know that I'm male, and heterosexual or whatever, that's like a whole other issue. I'm just talking about personal life kinds of things. I'm much more guarded, like I don't talk about that stuff. If I have a fight with my wife, I'm not going to [put it on Facebook], I'd never do that.

For Jack, other topics that are off-limits involve politics. He described a friend who often posts political information that always causes heated debates on Facebook:

I have a problem with that. I think it's such a silly thing to do . . . I don't want to be involved in that, right? So there's that kind of privacy stuff. That seems more prescient to me than like coasting whether or not, like getting Facebook access to the knowledge of who I like to listen to.

While Jack thought about the technological structures and settings on Facebook that influenced the ways he shared information with others and with the social network sites themselves, Jack ultimately defined privacy in another way: avoiding contentious subjects on the social network sites was more of a priority than managing his privacy settings through the tools provided by the social network site.
Esther expressed a similar perspective in considering recent social network site changes. She stated that she listed some information about activities and favorite books and movies under the Info section on Facebook, but that wasn’t anything she thought much about:

What does it say about me? No, I don't mind. I like board games, and knitting. Okay, so it's going to give me something on the side bar about those things. That's completely, I don't know. People get annoyed with that? Really? I mean, gmail is no different. I ignore this [the ads]. This to me is easy to ignore.

Like my other research participants, Esther kept her information restricted to only friends, but given her limited use of Facebook, didn’t feel the need to restrict access further. During Esther’s job search, however, she did police some family comments on her Facebook wall, including a post from an aunt about visiting when she was in the area for a campus visit. Esther responded by removing the post and contacting the family member privately instead:

I private messaged her, or whatever it's called on Facebook, and just said, the trip was great. I'm not posting anything public about my travels on Facebook, so if you have any questions, just feel free to personal message me.

Like Jack, Esther was less concerned about the surveillance, tracking, and commercial data issues of using social network sites. While she “cleaned” her profile of content involving the job market, Esther put a minimal enough amount of information on social network sites that the information she did list was content she was comfortable sharing rather widely.

For these writers, participating in social network sites involved not only interacting with different audience groups, but also interacting with different technologies. Many of the design changes made by social network sites, Facebook in particular, disrupted users’ literate activity on these sites and often caused them to rethink the information they were sharing and with whom.
The technologies themselves, while actors in these writers’ identity representations, interacted with these individuals rather than controlled their use of these sites. A close study of these writers’ practices show them to be sophisticated and unique; each writer had different ways of working with and against the design of these sites: from listing limited information and rearranging a profile as much as possible to presenting fake information or closing one’s Facebook wall. In managing this information, these writers employed sophisticated knowledge about the technologies, social network site policies, and how to represent themselves within these technological constraints. Many of these individuals did feel some anxiety and apprehension about these technologies and their identity representations, and did feel that they were at times making up their approaches as they went along. These issues of identity representation within these unique digital environments have implications for the ways we understand digital literacies and how writing researchers and teachers conceive of these sites in our work, which are questions I address in the next chapter.
In her recent book, *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle (2011) expresses concern about the futures of individuals whose relationships are mediated through technologies such as social network sites: “We recreate ourselves as online personae and give ourselves new bodies, homes, jobs, and romances. Yet, suddenly, in the half-light of virtual community, we may feel utterly alone. As we distribute ourselves, we may abandon ourselves” (p. 12). For Turkle, the identities that individuals create online are inauthentic and separate from their offline identities. Similarly, Jaron Lanier (2010) bemoans the difficulty of fitting identities and friendships into the boxes available in a Facebook profile. Representing oneself by filling out boxes on a profile is reductive, and “that reduction of life” is broadcast to friends and eventually becomes the truth (p. 80). Representing an identity online is reducing that identity.

It is certainly important to pay attention to new communication technologies, analyze them critically, and consider their roles in the writing lives of individuals. What Turkle, Lanier and other critics of these sites often overlook is the role of the user of these social network sites and his or her agency in using them. Social network sites do encourage certain behaviors, prescribe certain conceptions of identity through the fields available on profile pages, and also reduce a myriad of human connections and relationships under the common word of “friend.” The writing individuals engage in on these sites is also limited to the means of expression available on the site, as discussed in Chapter One; these sites restrict html design options allowed on web pages, for example. In studying users of social network sites, the actual digital literacy practices they engage in, and the ways that individuals creatively work within these constraints
to produce sophisticated rhetorical responses to others, we can better understand the role that these sites play in individuals’ lives.

This dissertation examined the identity practices of individuals on social network sites in order to view these practices as literate activity. A close study of the interactions of individuals on social network sites can help us to better understand the important meaning making activities that take place on social network sites and how individuals navigate the multiple social and technological influences on their writing practices in online environments. This research project, which examined these issues for seven undergraduate and graduate student writers, points to some observations on the use of social network sites to represent one’s identity for different audiences that have important implications for the study of writing in digital environments and for the teaching of writing. This chapter summarizes this case study research and discusses its implications for our understanding of literate activity connected to social network sites and the representation of identity on these sites, as well as pointing to directions for future research in writing studies.

**Digital Literacies**

My findings from these ethnographic case studies detailed in Chapters Three and Four demonstrate how social network sites represent sites of important literate practice in the early twenty-first century. These sites make visible the various influences on literacy in digital environments, including social and cultural influences on literate practice through interactions with various communities and their discourse conventions on social network sites. They also include technological influences on literacy through writers’ interactions with the social network sites themselves, negotiating site interfaces, data management through different privacy settings,
and technological infrastructure in navigating various computer software and hardware in connecting to social network sites, from laptops, smart phones, and other mobile devices. Studying writing in the twenty-first century requires a focus on the ways in which social influences on literacy work with technology to shape writers’ experiences.

This research project detailed the varied and extensive writing practices of these writers in digital environments. Not only did these writers construct identities by building profiles on a multitude of different social network sites, from popular sites like Facebook and Twitter to Cyworld, Last.fm, Ravelry, and Linked In, they also engaged in a variety of complex literate activities. Alexis, for example, posted poetry and reflections on her faith to the Notes section of Facebook and longer updates on her life as an American college student on Cyworld. Ronnie shared a near constant stream of his thoughts to his contacts on Twitter, uploading video and audio of musical compositions to Tumblr and Facebook, and navigating a number of different technologies and audience groups in creating profiles for and interacting with others as the character he created, Alison. Jack cultivated connections with multiple audience groups through different Twitter accounts, and Esther showed off her knitting as well as her writing skills in showcasing projects on Ravelry and in using social network sites to share posts from her blog about these projects.

These acts that individuals engage on social network sites represent important literate activity, and the writers I studied integrate their use of these sites within their daily lives. As noted in Chapter One, this generation of students writes more than ever, and most of this writing happens in digital environments like social network sites (Lunsford, et al., 2008; Grabill et al., 2010; Blum, 2009). While writers create distinct texts in these environments, the writing work they do is best seen through the study of digital writing that Collin Brooke (2009) advocates,
focusing not on discrete texts but on “medial interfaces,” the ways in which writers constantly interact in digital environments to create texts that “are but special, stabilized instances of an ongoing process conducted at the level of the interface” (p. 25). Through a focus on these digital literacy practices, we can see the complex ways the writers I studied navigated these influences to represent themselves on social network sites.

This work also suggests that these individuals cultivated sophisticated digital literacy practices in order to participate in these online environments. As discussed in Chapter One, Lankshear and Knobel (2008) use the term “digital literacies” to represent “the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged, etc., via digital codification” (p. 5). My research suggests two overarching categories of these digital literacies: 1) How individuals interacted with different figured worlds; 2) How these writers negotiated the interfaces of these sites in doing so. Using social network sites effectively requires sophisticated literacy practices in both of these areas.

**Interacting with figured worlds.** As social network sites flatten audience groups into a single category of friends or followers, social network site users develop sophisticated strategies in order to identify these different audience groups and to respond accordingly. We can best understand how writers construct their identities on social network sites through Holland, et al.’s (1998) conception of “figured worlds,” where individuals conceive of a community they are joining and continually construct their identity in connection with this audience. Jack’s use of Twitter best illustrates this concept in the ways that he continually revised his identities on that site in interaction with multiple audience groups. Jack first moved back to one Twitter account based on his observations of how other scholars and writing teachers were using the site; because it was easier to tag his class-related tweets with a specific hashtag, Jack felt no reason to have a
separate account that represented more of a teaching persona for his students. Throughout the course of this study, however, Jack observed conversations within two distinct communities: music bloggers and reviewers and academics in rhetoric and composition. As Jack began to represent himself in ways that more clearly fit within these distinct communities, he created two accounts again in order to more clearly represent himself both as a music critic and as a young scholar refining his research for his dissertation. Participating effectively in both communities involved sending updates of interest to each group and interacting with other group members. In order to participate, Jack needed to successfully conceive of a specific audience on this social network site and to know how to best use the means at his disposal (an image, quick bio, and the ability to send text, links and other content) in order to represent himself as a member of that community.

While Jack created two different accounts on the same social network site, other participants used different sites to conceive of and interact with distinct figured worlds. Alexis, for example, saw Facebook as the place through which she communicated with her church youth group members and therefore represented her identity as a youth group leader on that site. She used different elements of Facebook, including updating her status, posting images, and posting longer reflections in the notes section in order to represent herself as a reflective Christian and to encourage others she connected with to do the same. On Twitter, however, her purpose was quite different and involved communicating more intimately with a smaller group of friends, posting complaints and travel updates to those interested in her daily activities. Like Jack and the other participants in this project, Alexis was able to analyze the online rhetorical situations in which she participated and to use the affordances of those sites (uploading images and text, using the
Notes section of Facebook and the ability to text on the road to Twitter) in order to represent herself effectively for each audience.

**Navigating site interfaces.** Along with effectively analyzing and constructing audiences in online environments and interacting appropriately, social network sites require users to have a sophisticated understanding of the site structures themselves, how to manage their privacy settings and how to customize the programs for their own needs. Each participant had unique ways of integrating the use of these sites within their daily activity, and most writers customized that experience. Jack and Becca frequently hid individuals from their Facebook news feeds from whom they no longer wanted to see updates, in order to streamline the information they received. Alexis used her knowledge about the visibility of her information to manage her site use. She placed fewer updates on Facebook because that information was broadcast prominently to all 248 of her Facebook friends, while she wrote longer and more personal reflections on Cyworld, which were less prominently displayed to her contacts. Esther and Ronnie both used social network sites to collect and manage data about their daily activities as well, from listening to music on last.fm to archiving yarn on Ravelry.

Each participant also customized his or her privacy settings in order to better manage others’ access to information. While Sandra was originally comfortable sharing all of her information with “friends of friends” (an option for one’s privacy settings on Facebook), she changed these settings as she learned how many people she might be reaching in that way. Beth kept her privacy settings as closed as possible and even disengaged from Facebook altogether over control of her information. Sandra, Becca, and Alexis revised their privacy settings when they were on the job market. (I’ll return to this topic later in this chapter). Although each writer I studied had a good deal of knowledge about the way privacy settings were configured on each
site, many of them expressed difficulty in keeping up with the frequent changes to these settings, particularly on Facebook. Rather than spending time pouring over their different options on the site and checking them frequently, the participants in my study developed other strategies for managing their information, primarily involving self-censoring information and keeping certain topics off the site. Important digital literacy practices on social network sites, then, also involve navigating and customizing site interfaces and managing privacy settings.

Ronnie’s creation of the online persona of Alison represents an ideal case through which to understand how these two categories of digital literacy practices work together. In order to create a Facebook and Twitter account for this persona, Ronnie had to draw on his knowledge of the affordances for communication on both social network sites as well as the conventions of communication on these sites with the different communities he planned for Alison to reach. Ronnie created both a Facebook account and a Twitter profile for Alison, and he relied on his female friends as examples for these profiles, going so far as to copy and paste text from the information sections of several of their profiles. Ronnie knew that other social network site users would be interested in learning her background information, and he listed her high school, her major, and her current part-time job. He also chose photos he thought were similar in composition to those of his friends on both Facebook and Twitter. As identity is also created on social network sites through interaction, Ronnie posted as Alison on both Facebook and Twitter, both updates sent to all her contacts and interactions with Ronnie, in order to successfully fool people that she was his girlfriend.

Ronnie also relied on his knowledge of the structure of each site in order for Alison to pass as his girlfriend. Ronnie used his knowledge of privacy settings on Facebook to keep information categories that would raise suspicion private. He knew how to hide a friend list on
Facebook, so friends wouldn’t be suspicious of a Facebook user with only a few friends. He also made use of Twitter’s option to add a location to his updates. With his computer logged into his account and his iPhone logged into Alison’s, Ronnie was able to send updates to Twitter as himself listed as posted from Champaign, where Alison’s location was in Urbana. In creating this account, Ronnie relied on the digital literacy practices he developed through his own use of social network sites: how to represent an identity within a specific figured world, how to use text and images according conventions of that community, how to navigate the interfaces of these different sites, and how to adjust the privacy settings. The fact that Alison’s account existed as long as it did speaks to the ways that Ronnie utilized his knowledge of communication and representation on social network sites in order to create this fiction that passed for a real account for a week.

**Identity**

The digital literacy practices the individuals were engaged in were also identity practices. There were two main facets to identity representation on social network sites: 1) representation of self through the construction of profile pages; and 2) frequent interactions with others in one’s personal network.

The individuals in this dissertation project put a significant amount of thought into their social network site profiles, using their digital literacy skills to carefully select photos, list favorite books and movies, and represent themselves as students, academics, music lovers, and craft artists. The social network site profile, as Kristen Arola (2010) notes, harkens back to the genre of the personal webpage, but dictates available fields for information and levels of customization. While some individuals were able to customize their profiles to fit their needs,
like Ronnie, the ability to customize and design these profiles was limited and contracted over the course of this study, particularly on Facebook. The profile information each writer contributed to his or her page was only stabilized for a short time, and each of my research participants had to constantly adjust to changes in design and to reevaluate one’s information on each profile. Some participants changed their profile pictures frequently and many, especially Esther, Beth, and Jack paid little attention to the text they had written on their profile page when they joined the social network site, finding it not as important for their own identity representation.

The decreased ability to customize a profile combined with the introduction of “news feed” features that compile users’ information make interactions with others in one’s network the primary means for identity representation on social network sites. The identities that the writers I studied enacted in these cases are best seen through Holland et al.’s (1998) practice theory of identity, where individuals constantly remake their identities in interaction with these other individuals in their network. That identity is created through every update posted and every tweet sent. Jack reinforces his identity with both music bloggers and academics through each message he posts to Twitter, and Alexis does the same when she posts a Bible verse or reflection for her youth group contacts to Facebook. For most of these individuals, their profile pages remain rather static and are rarely viewed by others; the Facebook news feed and the Twitter feed are locations where this identity work happens. Writers represent themselves through their status updates and comments on others’ messages. Rather than representing one identity, as Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg argues for, these writers instead enact different aspects of their identities with these different figured worlds.
The identities individuals construct and enact on social network sites, however, are connected to aspects of their offline identities. While Sherry Turkle’s (1995) research on identity construction on MUDs described ways that these Internet users constructed selves of entirely different genders and personalities in order to experiment with identity, writers constructing identities on social network sites primarily connect with individuals from their offline networks. Samuel Gosling and his colleagues (2011) compared five self-assessed personality traits with individuals’ activity on Facebook and found that “users appear to extend their offline personalities into the domains of [Online Social Networking Sites] OSNs.” As the experiences of my research participants suggest, individuals do not create strong boundaries between online and offline interactions and identities. Social network sites are embedded within individuals’ daily lived experience, and interactions that begin on Facebook or Twitter often result in specific actions in the offline world. Alexis and Ronnie both plan social gatherings on Facebook and Twitter, and each research participant also connects to offline contexts in social network spaces. Although Jack has not yet met many of the academics he follows on Twitter, he connects with them primarily so that he can meet them at conferences later. Similarly, Esther connects to other knitters on Ravelry who are not part of her offline networks; through swaps and retreats, however, these connections travel with her into interactions in physical spaces. The writers I studied represented various aspects of their identities with different groups through their digital literacy practices on social network sites in ways that were embedded within the communities they belong to, both on and offline.
Case Study Methodology, Constraints, and Findings

Case study methodology was ideal for me to study the situated literacy practices and identity representations of a small number of people in detail, which allowed me to focus on the ways they integrated social network sites into their daily literacy practices and how that use changed over time as the sites themselves changed. The individuals I studied were a self-selected group of social network site users willing to talk with me at length about their activities on social network sites; they all had accounts on multiple sites and thought deeply about their online practices on these sites before participating in this project. These represent what Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street, and David Bloome (2000) call “telling cases” that point to the larger issues and theories at stake in identity representation on social network sites. While the experiences of these individuals do not speak to those of every social network site user, the close study of the ways in which these writers navigate audience groups and site interfaces and integrate their activity on social network sites within their daily literacy practices speaks to the experiences of many other social network site users. I suggest that negotiating identity representations within flattened audience groups and navigating site interfaces are activities required of every social network site user; successfully negotiating these rhetorical situations and constraints represent important digital literacy skills for those writing in online environments. These descriptions also suggest implications for theories of writing in digital spaces as well as considerations for future writing research connected to social network sites, as detailed below.

This research project is, by now, a historical account of social network site use during a particular time. As social network sites change frequently, the sites my participants used in 2010 are not the same sites social network sites users communicate with today. This research project, then, is a record of what use of these sites was like during the study. Many of the social network
sites my participants used underwent design changes throughout the course of this study, particularly Facebook, and have gone through many more since these data were collected. While this account is specific to someone using social network sites in 2010, the fundamental activities that these writers engaged in and the rhetorical considerations they made on social network sites remains the same, and the literate activity discussed still points to the larger implications discussed here.

This study was limited in terms of demographics. I selected my participants from among the graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Illinois. These individuals had or were working towards a four-year undergraduate degree, and they all had access to high speed Internet through the university. They ranged in age from 20-33, and although my participants did not include anyone older, this was the age demographic that most frequently used social network sites, according to a Pew report (Smith, 2010). My participants were also somewhat limited in terms of racial and ethnic demographics, representing what were majority populations at the university: Caucasian and Asian ethnic backgrounds and a range of religious backgrounds encompassing Jewish and evangelical Christian traditions. The activities my participants engage in on social network sites can be seen as primarily privileged, middle class pursuits, yet these groups are not the only ones using social network sites frequently. A recent Pew study points to the internet connectivity of minority youth, who most frequently use cell phones with data plans to connect to others online (Smith, 2011) and certain social network sites are particularly popular with these groups; Twitter, for example, is particularly popular among African American youth (Smith, 2010). The largest growing demographic on Facebook currently is the over 50 group (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011) as well. This work points to opportunities to study the social network
site use of these different populations, particularly those of older adults and younger users without broadband Internet access.

This project was also limited by the types of data collected for analysis. As discussed in Chapter Two, literate activity on social network sites is difficult to trace as it occurs in small moments distributed throughout one’s daily activity. Through the data I collected, I was able to gain information on some of these moments, from discussing with participants where they tend to update social network sites, to following their updates online, to collecting records of their activity through time-use diaries. Much of this data was self-reported, and although I compared the record of their site use through the Twitter and Facebook updates each participant left as a record on the site with the information gathered through interview conversations and the time use diaries, I did rely on my participants’ accounts for a fair amount of my data collection. From descriptions I received from my participants, social network site use is also often collaborative, where two or more individuals will compose a post or a response together that will be sent from one individual’s account. As Ronnie and his roommates passed links around on Twitter as they all sat around the apartment, for example, from Ronnie’s description, they also engaged in these kinds of collaborative writing activities. I was unable to be present in these collaborative writing activities, however, and relied on accounts of them from my research participants. I also restricted my data collection to communication these individuals kept open to all of their followers on social network sites. Facebook, Twitter and other sites allow users to also send private messages to each other. While my research participants frequently used these features, these were not conversations I had access to, although we discussed their use in general in our interviews.
Lastly, my analysis was also shaped by the scope of this research project. By collecting data over a period of ten months, I was able to study these writers’ use of social network sites over a longer period of time, studying their reactions to site design changes in order to see how their site use changed over time as their identity representations changed and they refined their use of the sites they used accordingly. The research questions I asked about the integration of social network sites into individuals’ daily lives and daily literacy practices pointed to this wider focus that followed participants over time. Because of this focus, I was less interested in individual moments of composing, and I did not ask individuals to allow me to observe them during an individual composing session on a particular social network site, for example. My focus on the experiences of my research participants point to the important digital literacy practices social network site users engage in representing themselves online and negotiating social network site interfaces.

**Implications**

My research points to several important implications for the use of social network sites and for the study of writing in digital environments.

"Everyday” literacy practices and the teaching of writing. Youngjoo Lee and Alan Hirvela (2010) discussed the “everyday literacy” practices of one social network site user to consider the ways that her writing on these sites related to her academic writing, and found that she had a deep interest in both public writing and a “strong sense of audience” (p. 104) through this writing. In considering the roles that social network sites play in individuals’ literacy and identity practices, writing researchers and educators can better understand the literacy practices that students engage in outside of the classroom and the experiences they bring to their academic
writing. The experiences of my research participants demonstrate the complex digital literacy practices they develop in order to represent themselves on social network sites and to successfully utilize and navigate the site interfaces. As noted above, these literacy practices are complex and give writers a sense of reading audiences and responding accordingly as well as using technologies effectively in these communications. Given the ubiquity of social network sites especially among undergraduate students, those entering university writing courses have a good deal of experience analyzing online audiences and responding accordingly. In discussing the online rhetorical situations these writers commonly respond to, writing teachers can compare these rhetorical situations to those students encounter in academic contexts. An awareness of the experiences on social network sites that students bring with them into the writing classroom can help writing teachers address the needs of their students for more academic writing.

As discussed above, successfully communicating on social network sites involves not only reading rhetorical situations, but also navigating the technologies and interfaces. In representing themselves effectively online, social network site users have to know who can see their information, how that information might spread, and how to adjust those settings. The undergraduate participants in my study were all enrolled in the Writing Across Media course at the University of Illinois, which asks students to compose through a variety of different media environments. Learning the affordances of each medium and how best to communicate through the technologies supporting that medium is crucial for each student in that course. This research suggests that these skills are important for all writers. As students are required to communicate more frequently in online environments, whether it is through social network sites, blogs, professional web pages, and other sites, it is crucial for students to learn how to navigate these technologies and use them effectively. Writing classes, then, must focus on these dual elements
of literacy influences – the social and the technological – in order to prepare students for the environments in which they will be writing.

**Professional digital identities.** During the data collection for this research, several of the individuals I worked with were searching for full time jobs. Both Becca and Esther were participating in the academic job market for tenure track positions, and Alexis and Sandra were both looking for entry level positions in their fields: media and fashion retail, respectively. Concerns of online identity representation took on a greater sense of importance during this process, and each individual changed her privacy settings in order to better control how her information spread online and how much prospective employers could learn about her through an initial Google search. While Becca was initially unconcerned about blending personal and professional identities on Facebook, during her job search process she determined that she did not want her belly dancing pictures to be the first material a potential employer saw about her in an online search. She then tightened her privacy settings and revised some of the information on her Facebook page, in order to better control her online persona. Sandra also revised her privacy settings on Facebook during her job search, when she realized just how many people she shared with under her previous “friends of friends” privacy setting.

Becca and Sandra also joined other social network sites in order to represent professional personas online. Becca created a profile on Academia.edu; while she constructed the profile first just to “give somebody something gratifying if they Googled” her, Becca found the account to be helpful when the head of a search committee for a position she had applied for began following her on the site. Linked In was helpful for Sandra not only because she could easily create a professional presence and network with others, but she could also look up information about the individuals at a specific company who were interviewing her. Neither of these women spent
much time on these sites, but they both found the ability to create a basic profile that could serve as a professional online presence for prospective employers who were searching for them online.

Esther and Alexis approached their online presence during the job search differently, without building much of an online professional identity. Alexis relied on the advice from others in her social network on how she was displaying her information to others. But most of the advice Alexis received was negative: *Don’t show your photos; don’t let people write on your wall.* Alexis managed her online identity during her job search primarily by shutting it down. Esther said that she kept meaning to create a website for her teaching portfolio and other materials, but she never found time. While Esther used social network sites less frequently during her job search because of time constraints, she did not change much else about her digital persona except for removing her family member’s post about her travel for campus visits. Sandra and Becca’s experiences suggest that cultivating a digital professional persona through the use of a professional social network or through a personal website would have served them both well.

While in many cases my research participants are skilled at reading rhetorical situations online and responding accordingly, they also have a good deal of fear and anxiety about those representations, particularly when it comes to a professional identity. Alexis, for example, removed information about herself, but she did not create a profile that may have helped her create more of a digital professional presence. Her experience suggests a place for educators to encourage students to consider a digital, professional persona: an online portfolio that could highlight a student’s best work at the university and help them to construct an identity as a professional, or a profile on a social network site that would help a particular student join a professional community. This emphasis is not only in terms of the goal of securing employment,
but also to encourage students to be public writers and intellectuals, able to use their rhetorical skills in digital environments to highlight their best professional talents.

In encouraging students to cultivate a digital professional persona, writing teachers should also be reflective and conscientious about the writing in digital environments they require from students. Alexis noted that when she conducted an online search of her name, the public blog she kept for her Writing Across Media class would come up. While Alexis was concerned about being represented by her class work and the many reading responses she wrote that semester, she also didn’t want to completely hide the blog or delete it. Similarly, Beth joined Twitter as a requirement for her Writing Across Media class. While she kept her tweets protected, she was resistant to using the service and never sent more than a handful of tweets.

When writing teachers ask students to post information for class online, we should discuss this work and its online presence within students’ broader digital identities. Allowing students to keep their information under a pseudonym or a password-protected account will allow students to retain control over their information. Class conversations about how students can turn a class blog into a portfolio after the class by highlighting only one’s best work could assist students in building this professional online identity as well.

The experiences of the graduate students in this study also suggest implications about their professional digital identities. Each of the graduate students had questions about how best to represent themselves as developing scholars and how to connect with professional communities and with individual scholars through social network sites. Jack, Esther, and Becca each raised questions about what kinds of information would be advantageous to share and what kinds of activity had the potential to backfire or reflect on them poorly. Jack kept adjusting his Twitter accounts out of uncertainty about how to represent himself for the different communities
in which he participated on the social network site. Becca created a profile on Academia.edu and “followed” other scholars on the site, yet did not post much information about herself. Esther blended her personal and professional identities through her blog, but she did not develop a strictly professional online persona. Given the relative novelty of using social network sites for networking and professional development, many graduate students are unsure how to represent themselves in online environments. In a discussion about networking with other academics on Twitter, Jack reported that he had received conflicting advice about how much to share online as a graduate student. Given his success in connecting to other scholars as he developed his research interests, Jack’s experience points to the need for additional research on graduate students’ digital professional identities, how they are representing themselves in digital environments, and what kind of training or advice they receive about developing this online identity. Similarly, the experiences of all three of the graduate students suggest the need for further conversations, within the field and between graduate students and their advisors, about their digital professional identities as they refine their research interests and focus on their own professional development.

**Methods for studying writing in digital environments.** As discussed in Chapter Two, situated literate activity on social network sites is difficult to trace, occurring in quick moments integrated within a writer’s daily experience. Viewing and analyzing the textual record of that activity on the social network site provides only a partial picture, as the texts individuals share are part of larger chains of literate activity. In this project, I integrated that study of the digital texts written by each research participant with frequent interviews, time-use diaries, and digital profile tours recorded with video screen capture software, as detailed in Chapter Two. This combination of methods allowed me to consider individuals’ literacy practices on social network
sites from multiple perspectives and as integrated with each participant’s other online and offline activities.

This combination of methods, I suggest, point to approaches that can be productive for other writing researchers studying writing in digital environments. The screen capture software in particular could be used not only for the profile tours I conducted, but also for capturing an individual writer’s daily use of social network sites. In order to study how an individual reads updates on Facebook, for example, a researcher could record a writer reading through his or her news feed and commenting on friends’ updates. Time use diaries could also be used in combination with these methods to trace how often and for what reasons a writer interacts with others on social network sites.

In order to examine how individuals write in digital environments, this specific combination of methods I used in these qualitative case studies can be productive in researching writing practices that are otherwise difficult to trace. The data I gathered through this research project presented a richer picture of these writers’ social network site use than I would have seen through a study of only the online texts and images these writers used to represent themselves, or through only one in-depth interview about their social network site activity. Given the ways that activity on social network sites traverses online/offline boundaries as well as boundaries between sites, understanding the ways that individuals’ literate activity is distributed between different sites and integrated within their daily literacy practices requires these kinds of combinations of multiple methods.

The ethical issues I considered in designing my study methodology and the negotiations I engaged in with my research participants, as detailed in Chapter Two, point to important issues for researchers investigating writing in digital environments. This project suggests that
researchers should carefully consider how research participants are represented in qualitative studies of online activity, how participants might be identified, and what kind of access the researcher should have to each writer’s online information. These considerations should not only be part of a dialogue between researchers and the writers involved, but should also be continually reevaluated, as the online environments individuals engage in change frequently, and individuals’ writing practices and identity representations also often change over time. While some online activity can be considered public and might not require informed consent from writers in order to study that writing, I argue that many kinds of online writing are not considered as public by their writers as a simple on/off privacy switch. As this study suggests, writers take a great deal of interest in and have a great deal of concern about their online identities, and I argue that writing researchers should do their best to ensure writers have control over their information and representations. Researchers should also be aware of the “long tail” of identification and consider how many other individuals in a research participant’s network could be identified as well. These questions regarding online information, research ethics, informed consent and participant representation will only become more important for writing researchers and are ones we should continue to consider as a field.

**Future Research Directions**

These research findings also suggest specific directions for future research in examining social network sites, identity practices, and writers’ literate activity in digital environments.

**Social network sites as literacy sponsors.** As Deborah Brandt (2001) argues, literacy has always been a “resource” that individuals seek to attain for particular ends. Literacy sponsors, whether school, state, economic, church, military, or family-based, have assisted individuals to achieve these literacies, shaped them, and even withheld them, and also “gain
advantage by it in some way” (p. 19). Corporate sponsors of literacy have always existed, in sponsoring writing contests, manufacturing writing tools, and supporting employees in attaining certain kinds of literacy skills. Viewing social network sites as corporate literacy sponsors extends this idea, but social network sites as literacy sponsors also have different implications for writers and their work. Social network site users keep the sites going not through their monetary subscriptions to these services, but through their data, which these sites then monetize and sell to advertisers. Writers on social network sites, and their data, are the products that social network sites sell.

In a recent issue of *Computers and Composition* suggesting future trends for the teaching of composition, Heidi McKee (2011) points to important policy issues that will influence the future of writing and the teaching of writing. Among these is the issue of corporate data mining; described by Google as “interest-based ads” and by Facebook as “instant personalization,” these companies collect information from their users, sell that information to advertisers, and then provide targeted ads for users on these sites (McKee, 2011, p. 280). In Chapter Four, I described the ways in which the individuals I studied were concerned about Facebook’s use of their information. Ronnie and Beth in particular took action on their concerns, with Ronnie adding fake information to Facebook and Beth deactivate her account entirely. Although I describe the ways in which many of the individuals I studied subverted the design of the social network sites they were using for their own purposes, these practices do not interrupt Facebook’s business model, and using social network sites like Facebook means that one pays for the service with one’s personal data.

Much of this work is hidden from the daily activity individuals engage in on social network sites, and this corporate sponsorship and its implications are not always clear. With the
recent change in Google’s privacy policies, for example, users’ Internet search activity through Google becomes integrated with Google’s other services: their social network site Google+, Gmail, Google Docs, YouTube, Blogger, among other Google services. A user’s online search activity, previously separate from other online services, has now become social. While Google sent emails, created ads and videos, and finally used pop-up notifications to inform users about these policy changes, the only way to opt-out was to deactivate one’s Google account. Beyond this brief period when Google sought to inform users, however, this information is difficult to find, and it is easy for social network site users to be unaware of the ways that their information is used. Facebook, for example, has a public comment period when they change the site’s privacy policies, publishing the text of the policy on their website beforehand and allowing users to comment on these policies. It is unclear, however, how much users read these policies, understand their consequences, participate in the public comment process, and how Facebook takes up (or does not take up) the public comments in their finalized policies. Exploring the literacy practices surrounding the various aspects of these policies is important work for writing researchers as well.

While some of my research participants did not care if Facebook had information about their favorite musical artists and movies, others did. Given the varied literate activity that individuals engage in on social network sites, there is a need to consider the implications of these sites as corporate literacy sponsors. What are the consequences for writing in these kinds of online environments? While this research project considered how individuals work with and against Facebook’s design for their own purposes, how does Facebook and other social network sites encourage certain behaviors from users on its site and discourage others? How do these

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10 Google’s privacy policy can be found at http://www.google.com/policies/privacy/
sites consider public comments to its site policy changes? As more companies maintain social network site accounts and run contests and promotions through them, how do they encourage interactions with these companies on social network sites? My future work with social network sites will take a step back from individuals’ literacy practices on these sites and will consider the implications of individuals sharing information and interacting on commercial social network sites.

**Literacy practices in crafting communities.** Esther’s experiences on the social network site Ravelry point to the interesting literacy and identity practices that users engage in on this niche social network site. Designed specifically for members of this interest group, Ravelry provides a unique contrast to the model of popular social network sites like Facebook. Through this social network site, users interact with each other in interesting ways, sharing projects, patterns, ideas, and even swapping knitting items through the mail. Ravelry users represent their identities not through the consumption of consumer items like favorite books and movies, but instead through craft items they create. As discussed earlier, activity on social network sites often crosses online/offline boundaries, and this activity is especially interesting on Ravelry, where individuals send items to strangers they have met on the site. I also plan to investigate the representation of traditional crafting practices in online communities like this one, focusing on the digital literacy practices individuals engage in to share knowledge and resources, and the ways these practices cross online and offline boundaries.

**Place, literacy, and the digital.** As discussed in Chapter Four, the writers I studied integrated social network sites in their daily lives, representing lived experience through posts of text, images, and video to share with others. These individuals were aided in these updates by mobile phones and other devices that allowed them to take and send images easily, as well as
update their status and location on the road. I’m also interested in further exploring place as connected to literacy practices through the study of these kinds of literacy practices in particular. Mobile devices allow writers to take their online connections with them wherever they go, and I am interested in the ways they represent their physical locations in their online activity. These literacy practices may also involve social network sites based on location, such as Foursquare, and the use of information on their mobile devices in order to navigate physical spaces. Overall, I am interested in studying this interaction between online and offline spaces in individuals’ literacy practices.

**Conclusion**

The identity practices that individuals engage on social network sites represent important literate activity in the twenty-first century. The writers I studied responded to complex rhetorical situations in order to represent themselves for the different figured worlds to which they belonged. These individuals also navigated site designs and interfaces in order to represent themselves, continually reflecting on their identity representations, how much information they were sharing with others, and how best to display that information. Social network sites lay bare the dual influences of the social and the technological on literacy practices, particularly in digital environments. As writers continue to live lives at least partially online, the representation of self in digital environments, the negotiation of identity with multiple online audiences, and the knowledge of site interfaces and privacy policies will continue to be important issues for writers. This research suggests a number of implications for writing researchers: a continued study of the self-sponsored literacy practices in which individuals engage online environments, the ways the structure of social network sites interact with users’ activities, and a consideration of the role of
social network site companies in individuals’ literacy practices in online environments. For
writing teachers, an attention to the technological as well as the social influences on writing as
well as an emphasis on constructing a professional digital presence will help prepare students for
the environments in which they will write. The complex literacy and identity practices in which
writers engage in on social network sites demonstrates the need for writing studies as a field to
give more attention to these sites, in the ways individual writers use them and in the ways
activity on these sites intersects with concerns of writing classrooms.


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FIGURES

Figure 1: Material Ronnie places on his music Tumblr account
"A world without suffering appears more like hell than heaven."
If everything was perfect, a world in which there is no sin, pain, tears, and suffering, and if we were granted everything we wished, becoming spoiled brats, always in a happy state, we are more like toys with no free will. Because "if everything was perfect then love, the highest good, cannot have been experieined. Real love – our love of God and our love of each other – must involve a choice. But with the granting of that choice comes the possiblity that people would choose instead to hate." God allowed the possibility for sin, but the potentiality of sin is actualized not by God; but by people.

"Saint Teresa said, 'In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures on earth, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.'"

"The apostle Paul uses another outrageous word in a similar context when he's comparing earthly pleasures with the pleasure of knowing Christ. He said the priveleges of Roman citizenship, of being a Pharisee of the Pharisees, of being highly educated, as to the law blameless – all of this, as compared to knowing Christ, is 'dung' (Phil 3:8)"

God knew "Jesus was more than an explanation." "He's what we really need." The answer to suffering is not an answer but The Answerer, Jesus himself, the presence of God. This is what we need. "God is infinite joy. And insofar as we can participate in his presence, we too have infinite joy."

- Currently reading – Some notes from The Case for Faith: "Objection #1: Since Evil and Suffering Exist, a Loving God Cannot" direct quotes from the words of Kreeft, book by Lee Strobel.

Figure 2: Alexis’ reflection and reading notes on her faith posted on Facebook
There will be oppositions.
Things will happen that seem to suffocate you.
In the process there will be many emotional ups and downs.
Yet, in the end, only the Lord’s victory and His will prevail.
So, even though we may not know how and what to pray about or to proceed in our many obstacles, it’s okay.
Because we know at the end, only the great triumph of the Lord will shine.
And whoever follows in his path will triumph, not lose.
So by faith alone, we persevere in this process and despite many oppositions because perseverance develops our character and in turn gives us hope (Romans 3:3–5).
Like the Alpha and Omega, endurance makes us become more like Christ, which shall be the follower’s joy.
We persevere because we know in the end, to those who follow Christ, God gives victory.
And it must be your joy to become more like Him, and let us tell you, there is abundant joy in following Him.

Figure 3: Alexis’ reflection on her faith posted on Facebook
Figure 4: A photo on Alexis’ Cyworld profile page
Figure 5: Esther’s project page on Ravelry
Figure 6: Items from Becca’s Etsy store
Figure 7: Alison’s Facebook profile page
Figure 8: Ronnie commenting on Alison’s video post on his wall
Figure 9: Alison’s post on Ronnie’s wall
Figure 10: Alison’s comment on Ronnie’s Facebook status update
Figure 11 – An image Ronnie took with his phone and tweeted to his friend from Twitpic.
pasta with scallops, basil, and garlic

Figure 12 – Jack’s picture of his dinner, posted to Twitpic and shared with his friends
Figure 13 – Jack’s image taken at the grocery store, accompanied by the following tweet: “Antacid placement win. (By the jalapenos)”
APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Department of English

200 English Building
608 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801
217-244-5511
e-mail: abuck2@illinois.edu

Informed Consent for

Digital literacies, identity and participatory culture: Writing the new media

Purpose of the study

You are invited to participate in a study I (Amber M. Buck, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of English) am conducting. This research is part of my dissertation project, directed by Gail Hawisher, the Responsible Project Investigator for this study. I would like to develop case histories of individuals’ writing practices on social network sites. I am particularly interested in observing your writing in social networking sites, and your reflections on that writing in the context of self-representation. I hope that this research will provide valuable information on the ways individuals use social networking sites, and how that use influences individuals’ writing practices and identity representation.

What the study involves

I will ask you to consider four kinds of participation; all four kinds of participation are required for participation in the study. First, I will ask you to share texts of your online activity on social networking sites. Second, I will ask you to complete a one-week time-use diary of your online activity. This task should take 20 min. a day for one week, 2.5 hours total. Third, I will ask you to take me on a “tour” of your online life, where you show and explain different aspects of your online profiles with me; this will take about an hour. Finally, I will ask you to participate in audio- and video-taped interviews about, your activity on social networking sites. These interviews will take place for an hour once every two weeks for the duration of the study, which will continue for two semesters. If you agree to participate, we will negotiate the specific texts and contexts to study. Total participation in this study will take 18 hours over the course of two semesters (about 9 hours per semester). I hope that you will participate in the project after the interviews have been completed by giving me feedback on my analysis of the interview data. (Of course, as is stated below, you have the right to discontinue your participation at any time.)

Publication and Identifiability

The results of this research may be published in journal articles, electronic publications, or books and may be presented in professional conferences or lectures. I may quote from or describe recorded activities or interactions, any texts you have written that you have made available for the research, and any interview comments you have made. I may also use still images from still and video screen captures of your online profiles on social networking sites. I will edit these images to remove all identifiable information (including images of yourself) before publication. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in accounts of this research.
To safeguard your privacy, I will keep any identifying data (audio- and video-tapes, copies of your writing, interview transcripts) in a private office where others will not have access to them, and I will not release such raw data to anyone else.

Your Rights, Benefits, and Concerns
You may benefit from the opportunities this research offers to reflect on your writing on social networking sites, the ways you represent yourself on these sites, and your online activity in general. The primary benefit of this research is to increase our basic understanding of the ways that users of social networking sites represent themselves through their literacy practices. Such understanding may eventually improve ways of teaching and using new media in educational settings. The most likely risk of participating in this research would come from loss of privacy and potential to be identifiable to others in research reports. However, the safeguards described above in the section, “Publication and Identifiability” minimize these risks.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not has no bearing on your access to or use of any services that I or others might offer in any context. You may withdraw at any time after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this research. The decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your grades at, status at, or future relations with the University of Illinois.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Amber M. Buck (217-244-5511; abuck2@illinois.edu) or Gail Hawisher (217-333-3251; hawisher@illinois.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you can contact the UIUC Institutional Review Board (528 E. Green Street, suite 203, 217-333-2670; irb@illinois.edu). If you are out of town and identify yourself as a research participant, you may call collect.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

With this form, I give permission to Amber M. Buck (abuck2@illinois.edu) to use my interview responses, written texts, and online profile information in her academic studies, presentations, or publications about technological literacy. I agree to be audio/video taped during my interviews, understanding that my interview comments might be quoted or paraphrased in reports of this research. I agree to the collection of still and video screen captures of my profiles and activity on the social networking sites on which I participate, understanding that edited versions of these captures (removing identifying information including images) may be quoted or reproduced in reports of this research. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that images, videotape, and written transcripts will not be given over to, nor used by, persons other than the named researcher and persons directly involved in this research project without my permission. I also certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty of any kind and that I will be given a copy of the consent form.

______________________________________
(signature)

______________________________________
(date)