MOTIVATION AND SKILL ACQUISITION IN AN ONLINE AMATEUR MULTIMEDIA COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Both the amount of multimedia content and the venues for sharing such content have been steadily increasing, yet not much is known about what motivated, inspired, and helped the content creators to create their artifacts. Using participant observation, web content analysis, and interviews, this case study focuses on one online amateur multimedia community and the animators therein. In particular, it addresses questions concerning 1) one’s motivation to join and create animations in that community, and 2) how one acquires the skills necessary to create animations and participate in the community. Having a better understanding of motivation and skill acquisition in this informal, online setting can provide insight on ways to improve and support the learning processes and environments in other online communities, more formal arenas like classrooms and workplaces, and in other informal settings such as structured after-school programs.
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Preface

The journey to settling on a dissertation topic and a community on which to focus was a meandering one that was influenced by both my background and other external factors over which I had little to no control. Perhaps the biggest driver, however, was my belief that as technology became increasingly more salient in our everyday lives, it was more important that we all had access to areas and materials with which to learn technical skills. While the elementary school I attended had a “computer lab” where we would do Math, Language Arts, and other similar modules on a computer, when it came to learning actual technical skills, the only offering was a typing class in which I learned how to type and how to use office productivity software such as the Microsoft Office Suite. My church also had a handful of computers on which I can remember learning how to ford rivers, budget to purchase cows and other supplies, and avoid typhoid by playing The Oregon Trail and how to multiply and find prime numbers and factors by playing Number Munchers after service on Sundays. Had I not gone to boarding school for the eleventh and twelfth grades, however, where I took several computer programming classes, I would not have been exposed to such instruction until going to college. My own experiences have helped me to understand that with the increasing presence of computer technologies in our lives, it is even more important to have access to opportunities and materials to learn technical skills such as coding and to understand how algorithms shape our everyday lives from the search results that we see when we use the Internet to the coupons that we are offered at our favorite stores as early as possible.

Thankfully now, there are more options for acquiring technical skills, including opportunities outside of formal classrooms and after-school programs. When looking at these different options, I found it helpful to organize them along two spectrums: structured vs. unstructured and formal vs. informal. Traditional classroom instruction is an example of the type of option in the formal, structured bin; after-school programs and camps are examples in the informal, structured bin; course
material repositories such as MIT OpenCourseWare (n.d.) is an example in the formal, unstructured bin; and finally, interest-driven online communities is an example in the informal, unstructured bin. The informal, unstructured bin was more interesting to me, and I found less prior research on the activities in that bin, which suggested to me that it would be a nice research area in which to make a contribution. It was also my opinion that of the options, informal, unstructured learning opportunities were the most accessible when it comes to flexibility and diversity of selections. So, I developed two overarching drivers for this research:

- To better understand at least one informal learning space (i.e., the types of needs that are met there and cultural norms)
- To identify practices that could be replicated in the development of either a similar, informal community or in a more traditional setting

Deciding on a community to study was the next hurdle (See more on this in the Choosing Cold Hotdog section in Chapter 1). There are multiple interest-driven, online communities that cover just about everything; from writing to knitting to making videos about defecating, there is something for everyone. It was important to me, however, to find a community that did not overlap too much with topics that are covered in traditional K-12 classrooms. So, that removed communities such as deviantART (2012), Ravelry (n.d.), and WritersCafe (n.d.), which focus on skills taught in art, home economics, and writing classes respectively. Of the types of communities that remained, the amateur multimedia communities interested me the most as they required the combination of many different skill sets including things taught in K-12 classrooms (e.g., writing and drawing) and those that were not (e.g., music editing and animating). Newgrounds (n.d.) was one such community, but it was quite large with over a million registered users, and there was already great research being conducted there, e.g., (Luther & Bruckman, 2008) and (Luther, 2012). Animutation Portal (n.d.) was another multimedia community, but again, there was already great
research conducted there, e.g., (Kendall, 2008a) and (Kendall, 2008b), and the community seemed to be experiencing declines in submissions and traffic when I started observing it. I finally settled upon Cold Hotdog (CHD), which was a medium-sized community with active members and a relatively welcoming environment for young content creators. There were several visible demonstrations that I witnessed quite early during my observations in the community where members were trading animating tips, offering help in the form of links and diagrams, and giving advice on submitted content. All of these factors led me to believe that Cold Hotdog would be a great community to study to help me to better understand an informal learning environment.

Finally, after finding a topic and a community to study, I decided upon two overarching research questions to scope the work:

- What motivates an individual to move from watching animations to creating them in Cold Hotdog?
- In what way(s) does one acquire the skills necessary to create animations?

To prepare, I attending design critiques and brainstorming sessions in the University of Illinois’ School of Architecture to better understand what that process might look like in a formal setting so that I could compare it to what I would see in Cold Hotdog; I spoke with professors in several departments including the Education, Art and Design, and Computer Science departments to get their opinions on ways to scope and go about my research; and I tinkered with Flash, the software used by many of the members in CHD, so that I could better empathize with the learning curves and frustrations experienced by those individuals. The results of all of these efforts are in the forthcoming pages. I think it was all time and effort well spent.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1. Screenshots of Koit's *Time and Space* music video. Captured 22 July 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8iAyh6c-wk
I will include panels with chronological screenshots such as this throughout the dissertation to give the reader an idea of the types of videos produced in Cold Hotdog.

Figure 2. Screenshots of Surn’s *Papers* video. Captured 22 July 2015 from http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/590994

In some corners of the Internet, videos such as the ones from which I captured the screenshots above are more ubiquitous than written text. Individuals create videos and respond to videos in kind. It is even becoming more common to see video in spaces previously devoted solely to text or still images such as the incorporation of vines, or short videos of six seconds or less, into Twitter streams, which were initially solely devoted to posts of 140 characters or less (“Milestones | About,” n.d.). With the proliferation of video and other forms of digital media, digital literacy is increasingly important. A reflection of this is the Obama Administration’s initiative to promote digital literacy training and services to aid individuals entering and navigating the job market (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, n.d.) and several research
collectives such as the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub (“DML Hub,” n.d.) and the Games+Learning+Society Center (“Games Learning Society,” 2013) that have emerged with funding from sources such as Microsoft Research, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Gates Foundation. These research collectives examine the use of games, social networking tools, mobile apps, blogs, wikis, photo and video editing software, and physical tools like still and video cameras, phones, televisions, and electronic textiles in classrooms and other physical settings including libraries, community centers, and after-school clubs. These tools and applications are viewed as both learning objects and as devices used to grab the attention of students and to enhance the learning experience. Nevertheless, not everyone has the opportunity to participate in such programs nor do all students have similar access to digital technologies (Purcell, Heaps, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013).

What then is one to do when opportunities to learn technical skills are not available in their schools, libraries, or community centers?

One solution is to use structured online communities, which have been created to help in instances where opportunities to participate in physical settings are not available. One could take Computer Science courses through Khan Academy (2012), Udacity (2012), or Coursera (2012) or learn about writing for the web at P2PU (n.d.), for example. However, if the courses or topics therein are not appealing or learning in a structured manner is not optimal, then these options are not opportune. However, because one sometimes picks up skills while participating in online communities even when that was not the initial intent (Ito, 2010a), one way around this hurdle is to find and participate in an online community centered on one’s interests.

Online multimedia communities are one type of community in which informal, interest-driven learning can take place. These communities provide a platform for users to submit content, get feedback on submitted content, and talk about and debate content with others with similar interests. The communities vary in focus, size, openness, and functionality, however. For example,
Newgrounds is an interest-driven community with ~1.5 million registered users that allows users to upload Flash videos, Flash games, audio files, and images files (Newgrounds, n.d.). Therein, forums and other tools for communication allow members to communicate with one another to trade information about the artifacts in the community, to work together, or to just chit-chat. The deviantART community, another interest-driven community, has around 19 million registered users who focus mostly on the creation, editing, and sharing of still images and tutorials, yet some also contribute video artwork in the form of films and anime (deviantART, 2012). With this difference in size and the types of media that are given precedence, the affordances of these and other interest-driven communities differ. What is similar though is an emphasis on supporting and producing quality work that is appreciated by many, which demands that members continue practicing and improving their craft, whether that be by creating better story lines, improving their audio/visual mixing skills, or choosing the correct paint medium.

So, how do participants acquire the skills necessary to participate in these interest-driven communities and what motivates them to pick up these skills? This case study seeks to understand more about how skill acquisition takes place in one particular online multimedia community as well as the motivations behind acquiring these skills and participating in such a community.

This study is not without precedent. In a similar vein, Jenkins et al. (2006a) studied participatory cultures, their significance, and the skills youth need to participate in them, and Ito et al. (2010a) examined the ways youth participate and engage in online multimedia communities. Others studied open source communities to understand motivation, socialization, and help seeking and giving therein, e.g., (Ducheneaut, 2005; Lakhani & Wolf, 2005; Oreg & Nov, 2008; Singh, Twidale, & Rathi, 2006), and Yang et al. (2015) studied the learning trajectories of young programmers in the Scratch community. In the gaming community, Yee (2006) looked at the motivations for playing massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) while Nardi et
al. (2007) and Steinkuehler (2004) examined the way in which skills are acquired in MMORPGs. Reeves and Gomm (2015) examined the motivators driving students in a digital design and animation course to participate in non-formal learning activities. Finally, Freund (2011) and Ito (2010b) studied similar concerns in amateur video communities.

The communities in those studies differ from the community under consideration here in focus, size, ways to participate and engage, and demographics. However, the great time commitments, the focus on tools that are not necessarily user-friendly, and the need to acquire skills in these communities that one does not typically learn in traditional classroom settings are some of the things that these communities have in common with the community in this case study. While I will draw parallels between these communities and the community under consideration, the focus of this study is to look at how and why animators in a particular online amateur multimedia community, Cold Hotdog\(^1\), come together to form a community to support the acquisition of tech-related skills. The study will address two overarching research questions:

1. What motivates an individual to move from watching animations to creating them in Cold Hotdog?

2. In what way(s) does one acquire the skills necessary to create animations?

Addressing these concerns in a community like Cold Hotdog in which informal, mostly unstructured learning takes place amongst people of varying ages can inform the support and development of similar communities. It is understood that individuals desire and need technical skills that are not always addressed in formal, or more specifically, classroom settings (Ito, 2010a; Jenkins, 2006a) and that initiative, persistence, and engagement differ depending on the context (Boekaerts & Minnaert, 1999). So, looking at individuals who are learning in these informal spaces

\(^1\) This is an alias and not the real name of the community.
and looking at an example of such a community can identify the types of needs that are being met in these communities, areas for improvement, and best practices that should be replicated in the development of another community. In this regard, this study complements other work in nontraditional settings including gaming, e.g., (Gee, 2007); programing, e.g., (S. Yang et al., 2015); and vidding, e.g., (Freund, 2011).

**Description of Cold Hotdog**

Cold Hotdog is an online multimedia community that started in the 1990s. By the mid-2000s, the community’s website had become one of the more popular multimedia sites on the web with tens of thousands of registered members and over a million visits a day. Since then, however, traffic has varied with an overall downward trend. Nevertheless, traffic tends to drastically increase during special events hosted at the site, most notably, the community’s summer Flash tournament.

The part of the community with which most members are probably most familiar is the homepage of the community’s website, which is curated by the site owner and administrator. The homepage consists of multimedia files submitted by community members as well as work from others in the larger video and animation community. These files are usually accompanied by the administrator’s synopses and personal commentary. Clicking on a file showcased on the homepage takes the user to another page where they can view the file content and leave comments. The types of content considered for the site range from Flash videos and Flash games to audio and image files, and their subject matter ranges from educational tutorials on Flash and Photoshop to entertaining rewrites of *The Smurfs* or *Pokémon* episodes to original content focusing on feuding fruit or other inanimate objects.

Part of the site’s appeal is that few submissions are actually chosen to be showcased on the homepage. There are other sites that showcase similar content that have automatic submissions, e.g., Newgrounds (n.d.) and YouTube (n.d.), yet the sheer volume of content submitted and hosted on
those sites makes it difficult for individual works to stand out or to be noticed at all. Accepted submissions to Cold Hotdog, on the other hand, are posted prominently on the homepage sans popups and are categorized into the appropriate section of the website to aid easy retrieval once the content gets older. Current categories include genres (e.g., audio or games), artist names, and series names. If a submission is not accepted for the homepage, it can still be shared in the community’s forums.

As suggested in the last paragraph, in order to facilitate discussion beyond what is possible on the community’s homepage, the site also includes functionality that allows users to comment on individual submitted media, and they can post in the community’s extensive forums, its Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels, and through pages hosted on other social media sites including Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, and Twitter. While the IRC channels see very little traffic at this point in the community’s lifecycle, videos and other content posted on the community’s YouTube page, for example, have thousands of views.

Unlike the community’s IRC channels, at the time of this study, the Cold Hotdog forums are active with several postings and post viewings each day. Currently, the forums contain five subforums – Flash, the summer tournament, general chatter, rehab, and archives – and conversations vary widely. They range from general chitchat, science, and gaming to discussions about computers, coding and scripting, and tips on how to become a better developer. The commentary takes many forms from text, to comic strips, to photographs and illustrations that individuals have augmented to make particular points (see Figure 3 for an example), and the tone varies from warm exchanges to the griefing (intentionally, and usually repeatedly, irritating, angering, and degrading someone’s experience) and trolling (deliberately annoying, and sometimes deceiving, others in an attempt to provoke a response) that has become more visible in many online arenas (Bakioğlu, 2012; Kirman, Lineham, & Lawson, 2012; Shachaf & Hara, 2010).
Changes to Cold Hotdog

CHD and its community are significantly different today than they were when I first started actively participating in the fall of 2009. Site traffic at the main webpage has continued to decline. The number of posts and animations on the main webpage have declined, and more of the conversations are starting to move to other platforms and social networking sites. Some of this has been by design, and others have been due to technological changes and cultural shifts. The first technological change was in November 2009 when the content submission process switched from using the forum as the submission vehicle to having community members submit content directly to Admin via email. I did not participate in the community much prior to this change, but I can imagine that it may have resulted in fewer videos posted in the forums, which would have meant lost engagement with that content by the community members unless the video was chosen by Admin to be featured on the main webpage or a member chose to post it in the forums anyway.

On the other hand, Admin saw declines in the broader animation community as a whole as far back as 2010 when I asked him about declining traffic at CHD:

I think YouTube is the reason for the slight decline in all animation communities. Not because people can post their animations there, but less people are going to take the time and effort to create animation compared to the ease of recording themselves talking on camera. […] There is a huge learning curve in animating and then a larger learning curve in making an animation popular. Now, all someone has to do to achieve online popularity is have their camera out when they [sic] cat or baby does something cute. Interaction with an online community isn't necessary for this.
Then, a server change in 2011 led to a new forum where CHD members had to start new accounts and create new content. According to Tomacco, “only a handful of the members from the original site moved over, and now it’s a lot slower than it used to be.” On top of that, some of the first CHD members to join the new forums were “considered to be trolls by some of the Flash dev people,” which made it a less pleasant place to spend time and further contributed to the dwindling community numbers. Some of the individuals who did make the effort to create new accounts at the new forum were either unable to or chose not to claim the same username that they had previously used. This led to frustration amongst some, which was expected as usernames function as real names for some users (Bruckman, 2002; Bruckman, Luther, & Fiesler, 2015; Frankel & Siang, 1999), and it also led to many exchanges in which a user would have to make reference to their old username so that other community members would know who they were and that they were not in fact a newcomer to the community.

In 2015, The Tourney was moved from the CHD forums to the CHD Facebook page, which changed both the structure, frequency, and the tone of the conversations as fewer of the forum regulars made the move to the new platform and new participants joined. It was also a bit of a challenge to maintain some of the same conversations and relationships as the usernames maintained on the CHD forums were not always the same on Facebook.

Finally, at the time of this writing in 2016, the CHD forums are totally defunct, and most of the community activities seem to focus around the main webpage and the official webpages on other platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

As in the fan communities in the studies recounted by Jenkins (2006b), the type of assistance that takes place in CHD can be more helpful in enabling learners to figure out what they are actually trying to achieve and can promote a wider range of creative expressions than is typically fostered in a traditional classroom setting. As such, I hope that the community can find a way to survive all of
these changes or at the very least, that the members can find another supportive community in which they can socialize, create, and share.

**Choosing Cold Hotdog**

The online amateur creative community is large yet segmented into smaller communities that allow for individuals to find groups and support systems that best fit their needs and desires whether those center on craft or demographics. For example, one could join a medium-sized community like Craftster with approximately 306,000 members to share and find crafts (n.d.), or one could do the same in Etsy, a community of over 1.6 million contributors (n.d.). The communities are not limited to crafting, however. Amongst a myriad of other things, one could also share recipes on BakeSpace (n.d.), improve their writing by joining and contributing to WritersCafe (n.d.), or find musicians with whom one could collaborate through Kompoz (n.d.).

In initially attempting to examine skill acquisition in informal online settings, I thought that a multimedia community would be the best place to start since I assumed that the individuals therein
must possess numerous skills in order to be successful. Some of these skills include storytelling, music composing, sound editing and mixing, drawing, character design, visual design (i.e., the use of imagery, colors, shapes, typography, and form), and animating. What is more, many of these skills are not taught in traditional K-12 settings. Removing communities from consideration that center on skills taught in traditional K-12 settings removed the various fanfiction communities and even communities like Ravelry (n.d.) that focus on skills taught in the ever decreasing number of home economics classes (Graham, 2013) from consideration. Nevertheless, several communities remained including large communities like Newgrounds (n.d.) and smaller communities like YouChew (n.d.) or Anime Music Videos (n.d.).

Despite the differences in size, the communities that remained had similar structures and affordances when it came to submitting and viewing content, getting feedback on content, and otherwise interacting with other members. What did set the communities apart was two-fold: tone and the expectations of the members. Tone, or the general character or attitude of a community, and member expectations for how one should conduct themselves or what they should expect in a community are not mutually exclusive, but it is hard to determine at times how they affect one another (I will not examine this here). Nevertheless, it became apparent that some communities were hostile to newcomers and were not nice to members who submitted content that others deemed of poor quality. In these communities, newcomers had a hard time getting basic questions answered, and when their questions were answered, the responses tended to be terse. As far as member expectations are concerned, members in some communities operated on a gift economy much like that in the fan community in which individuals are expected to give, receive, and to reciprocate (Hellekson, 2009). In those communities, members were expected to give useful, detailed feedback on submitted content while in others, individuals would submit content simply so that large numbers of people would see it, regardless of the feedback. In communities with the latter
expectations, most of the feedback given would consist of a thumbs-up/thumbs-down rating or something along a five-star rating scale. Yet, based on my interactions with individuals in these communities, the number that mattered most to them was the number of views.

So, taking size, purpose, tone, and member expectations into consideration, I chose Cold Hotdog, which is a once medium-sized, yet now small community that is friendly to newcomers and provides different types of help to its members from advice on art and story direction to simple tips of how to better use Flash or write tighter ActionScript. Its smallish size made it a little easier for me to get acquainted with the community and its members, but more importantly, the openness and willingness of the members to help others made the community a natural place to study motivation and to observe skill acquisition in many different ways.

Adobe Flash

Because many of the Cold Hotdog members use Flash to create videos and games, it is appropriate at this point to explain Flash. Adobe Flash (formerly called Macromedia Flash and Shockwave Flash), or Flash for short, is a software tool that helps produce animations, vector graphics, games, and applications for the desktop, Internet, and mobile platforms. Acquired by Adobe in 2005 from Macromedia (Adobe, n.d.) and recently rebranded as Adobe Animate, content created with Flash reaches over one billion devices worldwide (Lee, 2016). Professional animators and hobbyists alike use Flash because of its ubiquity and for its ability to create polished, complete products.

Nevertheless, Flash has a steep learning curve, especially for creating animations, for the tool is not altogether intuitive or user-friendly. Figure 4 is a screenshot of the Flash workspace. The stage takes up the most space in the workspace, and it is initially, as seen in Figure 4, completely empty. The stage is where all content for the resulting video, application, or graphic is placed.
Figure 4. An annotated screenshot of the Adobe Animate CC workspace.

The menus, toolbox, panel sets, and layers should be recognizable to individuals familiar with tools in the Adobe Creative Suite (e.g., Dreamweaver, Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Flash, and Fireworks). The menus allow for the standard actions in most software tools such as saving, editing, and closing a file. The toolbox includes tools for drawing, writing, erasing, and other common actions, yet the panel sets provide a multitude of groupings of actions including seeing the editing history of the open document and the properties of the content on the stage. Finally, the layers are like stacked transparent sheets of paper. One can create as many layers as desired and can then place content on a layer and move it without disturbing the content on the other layers (unless one creates a group of layers which can then be moved together). Layers do not have to remain transparent, however, as the opacity can be changed to make it possible to see or hide other layers.

The timeline, on the other hand, is one of Flash’s features that is not shared with all of the other Adobe tools. The timeline is where the animator controls the speed at which movements
occur in the animation, when things enter or exit the scene, and the position of elements in relation to other elements in the scene. Speed is measured in frames which are signified by the small, vertical boxes in the timeline, and they can contain multiple layers. The faster an animator wants an animation to occur, the closer he or she will place content changes in the timeline. To create a slower animation, the animator will include more frames in between content changes (or they will slow down the frame rate, which is the number of frames that occur each second).

The last important thing to note about Flash is ActionScript. ActionScript is an object-oriented programming language that developers use to write reusable classes that can be assigned to elements within their Flash projects. ActionScript can be used for any number of reasons within a Flash creation including moving an object, creating a button, or changing the color of elements on the stage. For an example, here is a segment of ActionScript that creates a button:

```java
package {
    import flash.display.Sprite;
    import flash.events.Event;
    import flash.display.Graphics;

    public class Main extends Sprite {
        private var button:Sprite;

        public function Main():void {
            //Create a new instance of a Sprite to act as the button
            button = new Sprite();

            //Set the color of the button to mustard yellow
            button.graphics.beginFill(0xFFCC00);

            //Draw a button and set its X, Y (stage position), Width, and Height
            button.graphics.drawRect(0, 0, 200, 200);

            //Apply the color to the new button
            button.graphics.endFill();

            //Add Button to the stage
            this.addChild(button);
        }
    }
}
```
All of the lines that begin with // denote a comment that helps explain what the subsequent line does in the code. An animator can add ActionScript code such as the one above to any Flash creation in the Action panel, which is one of the many panels that appear in the panel sets portion of the workspace in Figure 4.
Chapter 2: What Do You Mean by ‘Learning’ and ‘Motivation’?

The two overarching research questions for this case study address skill acquisition and motivation. While large bodies of work address both of those areas, the ensuing sections will include the most relevant prior scholarship and the definitions that I have chosen to adopt.

Learning

Up to this point, I have intentionally tried to avoid stating that one of the focuses of this case study is to better understand informal “learning” in the Cold Hotdog community. Instead I have used the phrase “skill acquisition” mostly to avoid the baggage that the word “learning” carries. Every person reading this has learned something. They learned the letters in the modern English alphabet, the words made up of those letters, and the meaning behind those words (or, at the very least, how to look up the meaning of those words). Ask just about any person outside of the field of Education how to define learning, however, and despite their experience with learning, coming up with a definition proves difficult. Learning has been generally described in two ways: as a product and as a process (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Smith, 2003). When thought of as a product, learning describes a change in behavior. On the other hand, when thought of as a process, learning describes the procedure by which behavior changes whether the learning is intentional or not. Here, I will primarily focus on learning or acquiring skills as a process. Below I describe five paradigms or orientations of learning theories that attempt to explain how or why learning has taken place when it is described as a process: behaviorist, humanist, constructivist, cognitivist, and social cognitive (Merriam et al., 2007). In the ensuing sections, I will describe other theories and concepts that lean heavily on these orientations that have greatly informed this case study of Cold Hotdog.
**Five Learning Orientations**

While there is no consensus on how many learning theories there are or how to best group them into categories, here, I focus on five orientations that provide different views on learning and that have gained traction in the learning community: behaviorist, humanist, constructivist, cognitivist, and social cognitive. These orientations are not mutually exclusive as some learning theories and learning models have aspects of one or more of these paradigms. For example, Piaget’s (1952) theory on the cognitive development of children is considered useful by both cognitivists and constructivists.

To begin, behaviorism is an orientation to learning developed in the early twentieth century under which three assumptions are held to be true: learning is manifested by a change in behavior, environment shapes behavior, and the principles of contiguity and reinforcement are central to explaining the learning process (Merriam et al., 2007; Smith, 2003). The teacher’s role in this case is to design and foster an environment that brings forth certain behaviors that can be measured and tracked. As such, this orientation to learning is one that is linked to nationwide testing and assessment initiatives in the United States including No Child Left Behind (US Department of Education, n.d.) and Race to the Top (US Department of Education, 2013).

Humanists, on the other hand, do not believe that behavior can be predetermined by environment or by one’s subconscious (Merriam et al., 2007). Rather humanists believe that learners’ affective and cognitive needs are more important and that learners have the freedom and responsibility to become all that they are capable of becoming. In other words, motivation is intrinsic, and the purpose of learning is to become a self-actualized, autonomous, complete individual (Merriam et al., 2007; Smith, 2003). Much of the research and advice on heutagogy (self-determined learning), andragogy (adult learning), and self-directed learning leans on humanist learning theories (Amstutz, 1999; Blaschke, 2012; Martin, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007).
Like behaviorists, constructivists believe that the environment is important to learning. Constructivists posit that meaning is imposed on the world by learners instead of the other way around and that there are many meanings and perspectives for any given event or concept. In this view, meaning is rooted in and constructed by one’s experiences, and those experiences affect his or her ability to understand and use the information encountered (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Merriam et al., 2007). While the theorists with this orientation agree on these basic assumptions, there is disagreement on how big a role experience plays, what knowledge is of interest, the nature of reality, and whether or not the process of meaning making is an individual or a social process (Merriam et al., 2007). Nevertheless, many theories and models of learning are placed under the constructivist umbrella including social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), situated action (Suchman, 1987), activity theory (B. A. Nardi, 1996), cognitive apprenticeships (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Tilley, 2001), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2006).

Constructionism is also largely associated with constructivism. While constructivists and constructionists both equate learning with building knowledge structures, constructionists believe that this building happens in a context where learners are “consciously engaged in constructing a public entity” (Papert, 1991, p. 1) while constructivists do not believe that constructing a physical entity is necessary for learning to take place.

Unlike behaviorists and constructivists who tend to focus on the environment, cognitivists believe that control over learning lies with the learner’s mental processes as opposed to the environment (Merriam et al., 2007; Smith, 2003). Organizing the information to be learned, the learner’s prior knowledge, and the processes involved in perceiving, comprehending, and storing information are all essential to learning under this paradigm. An educator’s job under this paradigm would be to structure the content of the learning activity to aid the learner as he or she focuses on
increasing the capacity and skills to learn better. Piaget’s (1952) theory on the cognitive development of children is one of the seminal cognitivist theories. His suggestion that children develop a mental image of how something works and then experience whether that image is accurate by testing it against reality is the opposite of some constructivists, Vygotsky (1978) for example, who believe that experience comes *before* the development of a mental image.

Finally, social cognitivism combines aspects of behaviorism and cognitivism and is simply a conjecture that people learn by observing others (Merriam et al., 2007). As such, learning takes place in social situations in which individuals acquire knowledge about a myriad of things including rules concerning appropriate behaviors, attitudes, strategies, beliefs, and languages. Individuals learn by observing, by imitating what they see, or by modeling or visualizing different outcomes and consequences (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Merriam et al., 2007). While behaviorists believe that the environment shapes the learner, social cognitivists subscribe to reciprocal determinism, which as described by Bandura (1977, 1986), is a view that cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors all influence one another. As such, one cannot focus solely on the environment or mental processes. An instructor’s role under this paradigm would be to model and guide new roles and behaviors while encouraging the learners to do the same.

*Situated Learning*

One of the theories that falls under the constructivist orientation described above that deserves further attention is situated learning. Situated learning is a learning theory or model that contends that learning is a social activity rather than a psychological activity. According to this theory, learning is situated in a legitimate activity, context, and culture through a process called legitimate peripheral participation, which concerns the process by which individuals become a part of a community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In short, one gains knowledge by doing as opposed to receiving. Members of the CoP determine whether an activity is “legitimate.” The
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>&quot;Can we work on getting this converter box to work? I'm stuck, and I have to review a show.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for information</td>
<td>&quot;Where can I find a DVR to record my shows?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking experience</td>
<td>&quot;Has anyone dealt with Comcast customer service before in this situation?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reusing assets</td>
<td>&quot;I have a proposal for a new column I wrote last year. I can send it to you and you can easily tweak it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination and synergy</td>
<td>&quot;Can we combine our DVD collections so that we can all watch and analyze the series?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing developments</td>
<td>&quot;What do you think of the new season of Grey’s Anatomy? Do you think the writing this season is as good as in previous seasons?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation projects</td>
<td>&quot;We have faced this problem five times now. Let us write it down once and for all.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits</td>
<td>&quot;Can we come and watch House on your big screen? We need to find a place that has enough room to seat all of us so that we can write a critique together.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps</td>
<td>&quot;Who knows what, and what are we missing? What other groups should we connect with?&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Examples of ways that CoP members can develop their practice. The examples are statements that could be heard in a CoP consisting of television critics.

actions that one undertakes are performed under the purview of others who have varying levels of expertise with the hope that the skills that one acquires move one from the periphery of the CoP towards full participation.

Communities of practice refer to a group “of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, para. 4). They can be any size, membership can change, they can last for varying durations, and the learning does not have to be intentional nor does it have to occur in a formal setting like a school lecture hall or an organizational workshop. CoPs have three components or characteristics that define them: 1) domain – a shared sphere of interest, 2) community – members interacting and engaging in shared activities and discussions, and 3) practice – participating in activities and developing a shared collection of resources (see Table 1 for examples) (Wenger, 2006). Cold Hotdog, the community
under study, has the three components of CoPs. Most of the individuals there are interested in artifacts created with the Flash software; they work together making, sharing, and critiquing community created artifacts; and they share and compile resources to assist in the making of their artifacts.

In addition to involving action, the situated learning process also involves cultivating identity. As one performs tasks of increasing difficulty and increasing responsibility in some cases, the changing knowledge, skill, and discourse that is experienced develops one’s identity into one of a member of a CoP. This idea of membership in a CoP is one source of motivation on the part of the individual as is the growing use value of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This identity cultivation is also evident in Cold Hotdog. As participants increase their level of engagement in the community, they acknowledge those community members who have helped them increase their skills by mentioning their names in forum posts whether that assistance was given actively or through the supplying of tutorials and code snippets. They also demonstrate their increasing skills by assisting others, by talking about the ways in which they are or have acquired their skills, and they begin to separate themselves from newer community members by calling attention to newer community members who fail to adhere to community norms. Neither the application of the concept of a CoP to an online community nor the observing of identity cultivation therein is novel or unique to this case study. Davies (2006), for example, also notes identity formation practices in her examination of teenagers in two online communities that are similar to what I have observed in Cold Hotdog, and Reeves and Gomm (2015) interrogate the use of CoP theory as applied to a community that included design and animation students of West Midlands University.

As noted earlier, situated learning asserts that learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation. An important thing to note about legitimate peripheral participation is that it does not require participants to be collocated in order to learn from one another. They can be, as are all of the
individuals in the examples recounted by Lave and Wenger (1991) (i.e., midwives, tailors, quartermasters, meat cutters, and nondrinking alcoholics), however, none of the facets of the legitimate peripheral participation process or the defining characteristics of CoPs require collocation. What is necessary, however, is communication between members of the CoP.

Members of CoPs must share and engage with one another, and through those interactions, they become more involved in the group and are then able to help and motivate newer members. If collocation is not possible, then the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be utilized to help make these interactions possible. Simply communicating, however, is not sufficient. The ICTs chosen should also have affordances that allow members to share information in various ways (e.g., verbally or in text) and forms (e.g., Word docs or audio/visual files). This is necessary to help members to better share context and to engage in some of the activities mentioned in Table 1 like reusing assets and problem solving. Cold Hotdog members utilize several different tools in order to communicate with one another including email and forum postings.

**Distance Education**

Because I mentioned that collocation is not necessary when participating in a community of practice, perhaps I should quickly address distance education and how it compares to what I observed in Cold Hotdog. While some conflate distance and online education, distance education as a practice has in fact predated the World Wide Web and even computers. Depending on how one defines distance education, one could say that distance education dates back to centuries ago when early explorers delivered information by word of mouth about the places and people they had encountered on their travels, or one could instead date distance education back to the 1800s when correspondence courses first appeared (Brown & Brown, 1994; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2000a). For example, an ad in a Swedish newspaper in 1833 publicized the opportunity to study “Composition through the medium of the Post”, and England’s penny post allowed Isaac
Pitman to offer shorthand instruction via correspondence in 1840 (Simonson et al., 2000a). So, it appears that people have been learning across physical distances for quite some time.

Because distance education has manifested in many different places in different configurations, it is perhaps with little surprise that one finds that distance education also has several definitions or been attributed several different characteristics. One thing that scholars have disagreed on through the years is to what the word “distance” is referring. Is it referring to learning at a different time or at a different place or both? Dan Coldeway came up with a framework that helps frame four ways in which education can be practiced which may help us make more sense of these questions. His framework combined time and place in four ways: same-time, same-place; same-time, different-place; different-time, same-place; and different-time, different-place (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2000b). Traditional education would usually fit in the same-time, same-place quadrant. Now, with the use of technology, different incarnations of distance education can fall into any of the other three quadrants. At least that is what some scholars would say, yet others would say that in order to be considered distance education, it must solely fit into the different-time, different-place quadrant.

Another definition posed by Simonson et al. (2000b) defines distance education as institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated geographically and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors. With this definition, their view of distance education could fit into either the different-time, different-place or the same-time, different-place quadrant as long as the instruction were formal and tied to an institution. Technology also has a strong presence in their definition. This focus on instruction tied to an institution using technology is the view most readily found when surveying current research on distance education.
Regardless of which one of the aforementioned ways one chooses to define distance education, many educational opportunities are now offered via the Web where students have the opportunity to learn either informally or formally through programs offered by universities. The British Open University (founded in 1971), Fern Universität of Germany (founded in 1975), and the University of Twente in the Netherlands are some of the leading providers of online courses in Europe while in the US, the American Open University, Nova Southeastern University, and the University of Phoenix are some of the leaders in providing distance education (Simonson et al., 2000a). There are also traditional, physical schools that offer courses, or even entire degrees, online such as Stanford University’s Lagunita program (“About Stanford Online,” n.d.) and the LEEP Program here at the University of Illinois’ School of Information Sciences.

Not only is distance education employed at the collegiate level, but in the United States there is also a focus on utilizing distance education at primary and secondary schools. Prior to 1987, there were less than ten states engaged in distance education. Today, however, most states have distance education programs at institution, system, and state levels with about 45 states sharing distance education programming across state borders (Brown & Brown, 1994).

Because there are several different ways to participate in distance education, the people who do participate are quite varied. Learners include primary, secondary, and collegiate students; at-risk students; and adult learners (Threlkeld & Brzoska, 1994). With these varied audiences, there are of course a variety of reasons to enroll (when it is not compulsory) including convenience and flexibility, lack of instructional alternatives, and the fact that distance education can serve as an educational mainstream alternative (Threlkeld & Brzoska, 1994). In a study noted by Perdue (2003), respiratory therapists provided similar reasons for engaging in Web-based continuing education with their top eight motivators including things like being able to fit courses into their schedule better than regularly scheduled classes, the ability to learn at any hour of the day, eliminating the need for
travel, being able to start a course whenever they found it convenient, being able to learn at a convenient location, saving time, being able to take a course that was not available in their area, and saving money. So, there seem to be quite a few reasons that people find distance education useful. These are similar to some of the motivators expressed by Cold Hotdog participants especially the lack of instructional alternatives and convenience.

Despite all of the positive reasons for utilizing distance education, there are a few things that concern and/or deter potential students from taking part in distance education, especially now that distance education is moving increasingly online (Perdue, 2003; Valentine, 2002): the perception of poor instruction or overall quality; hidden costs; misuse of technology; the possible negative or lackluster attitudes of instructors, students, and administrators; family constraints; lack of benefit or relevance; poor feedback; disengagement; lack of confidence; work constraints; a preference for face-to-face communication; a preference for using printed materials over electronic materials; and lack of adequate communication connectivity. Poor feedback and lack of confidence came up quite a bit in my interviews with Cold Hotdog participants as well. Some of these concerns cannot be fixed or mediated by a distance education provider (e.g., family or work constraints). However, some of the others could be mediated by properly preparing and training instructors to work in an online, or otherwise distant, environment; helping the instructor to understand the needs of the students; understanding the target population so that their needs can be better met; providing access to on-site support for instructors; providing timely feedback to students; and providing access to library materials to students (Threlkeld & Brzoska, 1994; Valentine, 2002). In an environment like Cold Hotdog in which instruction is less formal, community norms could help address some of these issues.

Taking into account all of the motivators and deterrents to distance education, there does seem to be a certain type of student that is likely to be successful when undertaking courses at a
distance (or participating in something less formal like an online community). These students have a tendency to have a tolerance for ambiguity, a need for autonomy, and an ability to be flexible. Students that are likely to have trouble tend to need a good deal of reinforcement, need goals to be defined for them, prefer a great deal of structure, and need opportunities to interact face-to-face with instructors (Threlkeld & Brzoska, 1994). It is important to note, however, that as technology improves, some of these barriers could be lessened (e.g., video chat could be used to aid those who need face-to-face interaction) so that more students with different types of learning styles could be able to more successfully take part in distance education. Some of the Cold Hotdog members with which I spoke mentioned ways that they attempted to get around some of these barriers such as emailing one another and sketching or sending screen captures of things that they wanted to share with others.

**E-learning**

As most of the communication and interactions amongst Cold Hotdog members takes place via some computerized device, it would be appropriate to mention not just learning but e-learning as well. A conflation of the words electronic and learning, the definition of e-learning or online learning has not been readily agreed upon. One popular definition is one put forth by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (2005), which defines e-learning as any learning that uses ICTs which includes flexible learning, distance learning, and the use of an ICT as a communications and delivery tool between individuals and groups to support students and improve the management of learning. Keengwe and Kidd (2010) provide a similar, but perhaps broader, definition that includes the delivery of course content via all electronic media including over the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcasts, audio/video tapes, interactive televisions, and compact discs.

The definition with which I am most comfortable, however, is proposed by Caroline Haythornthwaite who defines e-learning as “the practice of gaining and building knowledge on and
through networked information and communication technologies, maximizing the benefits afforded by contemporary technology to connect with informational and human resources” (2013, p. 57). This does not mean that e-learning is simply technology-enhanced learning, but it should be viewed as an inextricably social process whereby learning and technology have a reciprocally co-evolutionary relationship. This type of learning “occurs when the available resources for learning are transformed by the learner to result in personal, social and/or political change, with the added dimension of peer as well as teacher discussion, asynchronously as well as synchronously” (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011, p. 60). In their view, practices of communication, group behavior, and community emerge at the intersection of social and technical practices. E-learners should also be viewed as individuals at the center of a self-selected and self-directed network of resources and learners, and they should be agile or willing to take on the role of either the learner or teacher (Haythornthwaite, 2013). This model of e-learning, especially since it avoids necessitating the presence of a formal institution, helps frame the learning activities that take place in the Cold Hotdog community. Individuals move between teaching simple Flash skills to taking aesthetic feedback on their own work from others. They pick and choose the types of activities in which they engage and also to whom they listen. They also pick and choose which forms of technology to utilize in order to best accomplish their goals at any given time. When something cannot be easily conducted in the forums, for example, they move to other platforms or mediums such as email or phone.

**Informal Learning**

One draw to learning and interacting in online communities like Cold Hotdog is that learning therein can be less structured and interest-driven. The learning can be informal. Just as there is disagreement concerning the definition of e-learning, there is also disagreement about the definition of informal learning. This concept of informal learning has been discussed in several
different ways, e.g., (Bockaerts & Minnaert, 1999; Drotner, 2008; Livingstone, 2001; Sefton-Green, 2008; Werquin, 2010). Nevertheless, there do seem to be some overlapping concepts.

In a review of literature, Sefton-Green finds four key elements to discussions of informal learning: 1) location (i.e., where the learning takes place), 2) processes (i.e., how the learning is organized, supported, and structured), 3) purposes (i.e., reasons the learning occurs), and 4) content (i.e., the type of material being learned and its usefulness in practice) (2008, p. 243). Werquin (2010) defines three types of learning – formal learning, informal learning, and non-formal learning – distinguished by the learning contexts, learning outcomes, and recognition that learning has taken place. In her examination, however, Drotner (2008) finds only two elements that stand out in discussions of informal learning: the extent to which the learning is structured and/or planned and the extent to which the learner identifies the activities that are taking place as learning activities.

Taking into account how the Sefton-Green (2008), Werquin (2010), and Drotner (2008) categorizations collapse onto one another, I adopt a simple definition of informal learning put forth by Livingstone (2001, p. 4): “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria.” While this definition appears to skirt the issue of location, it does not. Though it does not say that it must occur outside of academic institutions as some definitions do, learning that occurs when there is no “externally imposed curricular criteria” can take place anywhere that meets that sole curricular (or absence of curricular) qualification. The use of the word “curricular” implies a certain type of organization or structure, which is the process element that one would expect. Purpose is also addressed in the definition as is content if one embraces the phrase “any activity.” Thus, it seems that Livingstone’s (2001) definition addresses all of the components in the informal learning debate. The only final qualm may be that this definition is broad enough to include both Werquin’s (2010) non-formal learning and informal learning categories. The biggest differences between non-formal and informal
learning as defined by Werquin (2010) is that non-formal learning is typically intentional and structured (or includes some structured elements) while informal learning is unintentional and unstructured. The definition that I have chosen put forth by Livingstone (2001) appears to split the difference by implying that some aspects of informal learning are intentional while not addressing the issue of structure.

Examining the definition of informal learning makes it clear that informal learning can and does occur in most, if not all, online communities – even communities created by educational institutions. It also does not appear to be at odds with the definition that I accepted in the previous section for e-learning. Nevertheless, when one sees a reference to an online, informal learning community in most studies, the focus is usually on sites such as Whyville (n.d.) or Scratch (S. Yang et al., 2015), sites explicitly created so that people could learn and create things together, as opposed to hobbyist or leisure-oriented sites such as Ravelry (n.d.) where people converse and share information about a common interest. Head et al. (2015) suggest that studies of online informal and non-formal learning are severely outpaced by the number of studies focused on face-to-face instruction. But even when focused on online informal learning, most prior research has looked at online, informal knowledge-based learning communities as opposed to online, informal practice-based learning communities as defined by Riel and Polin (2004). Two exceptions are Ziegler et al.’s (2014) study of an online hiking community and Kuznetsov and Paulos’ (2010) study of Do-It-Yourself communities. This study of Cold Hotdog adds to this small, but growing body of work.

Participation Frameworks

Taking into account all of the previous sections on learning orientations and specific types of learning, understanding or examining learning comes down to exploring what people are doing, what they are saying, and how that may or may not have changed from a previous point in time and/or
space. In short, understanding one’s social and discursive practices is one way to understand learning (Vadeboncoeur, 2006), and one way to do that is by examining the context of the learner.

The conditions under which Cold Hotdog community members are engaging and operating are much different from that in a formal, face-to-face classroom environment. That environment or context is what makes the community unique and attractive to some of its members. Understanding this context – including its members, their relationships, and what they value – is necessary in order to fully understand the actions that are undertaken therein. In understanding the context, it will become apparent how the community members define success and what counts as learning in that space. One way to identify and describe a context for learning is with a participation framework.

Erving Goffman (1981) is one of the first to describe participation frameworks highlighting the significance of different interactional configurations and the different ways that one can participate in such configurations. According to Goffman, “When a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in a perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it” (1981, p. 3). During those events, the positions of all of those present and the expectations for appropriate conduct in those positions are all relevant for analysis. While this description seems to view frameworks as a structure and guide for activity therein, later work views frameworks as activities themselves where conduct changes or responds to what the environment allows (Rae, 2001). In frameworks viewed in this manner, individuals are “actively involved in the process of building context through intricate collaborative articulation of the events they are engaged in” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992, p. 97).

Herein, I utilize the general participation framework as described by Vadeboncoeur (2006) that provides a way to study the ways in which contexts for learning are structured and sustained by learners across space and time. This framework is grounded in sociocultural theory or the theory that learning is realized through participation in everyday social practices (this most directly
correlates with the constructivist orientation discussed earlier) and that human action is socially, culturally, and historically situated (Vásquez, 2006; Wertsch, 1991). Much of the work on learning with ties to the sociocultural approach, including situated learning and communities of practice, builds off of the ideas and research of Vygotsky (1978) and his notion that mental functioning in the individual is derived from social life. As such, understanding the environment of the learner is important, which is another reason I have adopted this framework, for it provides scaffolding for studying the features of a context as well as the relationships between those features. Five features of a context that I will use in the analysis of Cold Hotdog that Vadeboncoeur (2006) identifies include:

- Location: what is the location, and how is it organized? (covered in Chapter 1)
- Relationships: how do the relationships develop, and what roles and responsibilities are obtained? (Chapters 4 and 6)
- Content: what is the content, who has access, and is the content disciplinary? (Chapters 1 and 5)
- Pedagogy: how is the pedagogy organized, and what do teachers and learners do? (Chapter 5)
- Assessment: how is assessment conducted, and what are assessments taken to mean? (Chapters 6 and 7)

While Vadeboncoeur developed her framework with evaluating informal and non-school contexts in mind, the flexibility of its definition makes it applicable to all learning contexts. It also makes it easy to compare the similarities and differences across different contexts for learning. The framework is not without challenges, however. Sefton-Green (2013) puts forth two challenges. First, should one use ideas about learning to describe and analyze what one observes or should one use what he or she observes to describe and analyze ideas about learning? Secondly, how does one characterize intrapersonal and identity-based learning? The first challenge is one that affects a great deal of research on learning. A lot of the nomenclature and understandings drawn from research in
formal, and more specifically traditional school-based, environments are used when exploring not-school environments as well – even when there is not a clear parallel. Doing so brings presuppositions to those non-school environments that may or may not be accurate. I think that it is next to impossible to completely “escape our preconceptions of learning” (Sefton-Green, 2013, p. 34), but one way to address this first challenge is by using the words and practices of the observed learners to speak for themselves. That is what I have tried to do in this study.

The second challenge deals with the inherent difficulty of capturing and describing aspects of identity in the intrapersonal aspects of participation within any context. While that would be important to those who describe learning in cognitivist terms, for example, the sociocultural tenets underpinning the general participation framework as described by Vadeboncoeur (2006) do not place as much emphasis on affect or the inner workings of individuals. The emphasis is more on interpersonal relationships, which are indeed much easier to capture and describe by others. Nevertheless, there are researchers who do focus on both the inter- and intra-personal in this area including Milbrey W. McLaughlin (1999) and Barton Hirsch (2005). I have not attempted to do that here.

Motivation

Psychologists define motivation as purposeful behavior that is ultimately directed toward the fundamental goal of inclusive fitness where inclusive fitness refers to an individual’s reproductive genetic output plus the reproductive output of that individual’s kin (Bernard, Mills, Swenson, & Walsh, 2005). Motivational theory is usually grounded in an understanding of basic human needs including physiological needs (e.g., satisfying hunger and thirst), safety needs, love needs, esteem needs (e.g., having strength, independence, prestige, or recognition), and needs for self-actualization (e.g., doing what one is fit for) (Maslow, 1943). These needs are built upon one another such that one must first satisfy their physiological needs before satisfying their safety needs and so on.
In this case study, I do not attempt to break down motivation into these base needs, rather I focus on motivation in terms of the goals and motivators specifically of participants in online communities including Wikipedia, online gaming, the open source community, and the online vidding.

Wikipedia

Because Wikipedia articles are so ubiquitous as to appear near the top of results returned for many search queries, many do not realize that the community consists of much more than the actual articles and that there is a large, active community of Wikipedia contributors that work to make the encyclopedia the artifact that it is. Wikipedia contributors range in contribution level with some people having made small, grammatical changes to one or two articles to those who have started and/or completely re-written several articles. Users can choose to edit articles without creating an account, or they can make changes after registering. One way that these users communicate with one another within the site is through the use of Talk pages. Each article has a Talk page attached to it where one can see and contribute to the different discussions that have taken place with regards to that article and its content. Simply taking a cursory glance at some of these pages, one can see that some of these discussions can get quite lengthy and involved. Sometimes even edits about quite pleasant topics like chocolate can become contentious (Viégas, Wattenberg, & Dave, 2004)! So, why do people spend time doing this? Why do they take the time to look up information, write it up, and then, sometimes, defend it when it comes under question by others?

Yang and Lai (2010) found that knowledge sharing in the English version of Wikipedia was positively associated with internal self-concept motivation or the force that drives individuals to pursue an activity that meets their inherent standards. When individuals feel as though behaviors meet their internal standards and then receive positive feedback from performing the behavior, they feel confident in their competencies (Bandura, 1986). This suggests that it is important to Wikipedia
contributors to enjoy and have pride in their work and to receive some type of feedback for their work.

In a survey of multiple studies, however, Rafaeli and Ariel (2008) recount multiple additional motivators for Wikipedia contributors: ideology, cognitive motivators (e.g., the opportunity to learn), affective motivators (e.g., pleasure), and integrative motivators (e.g., working with others). However, Rafaeli and Ariel found discrepancies. For example, one study found integrative motivators were strong motivators while another did not. They note that the differences could be due to the large number of Wikipedia contributors and the use of different samples. Nevertheless, all of these motivators, with the exception of ideology, were found in the CHD community.

**Online Gaming**

The online gaming umbrella covers many different communities and games from casual games like *Candy Crush* (2015) to multi-user dungeons (MUDs) to massively multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as *World of Warcraft* (2016). The motivators for participation in MUDs and MMORPGs are most like those of the CHD participants. In one of the earlier studies of MUD users, Bartle (1996) found four motivators for participation: achievement within the game context, exploration of the game, socializing with others, and imposition upon others. While many users were motivated primarily by one of these motivators, there was of course some overlap depending upon the player’s mood or playing style. Achievement, or improving one’s craft, was also a motivator of CHD members, and while socializing in and of itself was not an over-arching motivation, a few of the CHD motivators were dependent on others including encouragement and getting feedback.

In subsequent studies of MMORPG users, however, Yee (2006) uncovered five user motivations: achievement (i.e., desiring to become powerful in the context of the virtual environment through the achievement of goals and accumulation of items that confer power),
relationship (i.e., desiring to interact with others and being willing to form meaningful relationships that are supportive in nature), immersion (i.e., enjoying being in a fantasy world and being “someone else”), escapism (i.e., using the virtual world to temporarily avoid, forget about, and escape from real-life stress and problems), and manipulation (i.e., enjoying deceiving, scamming, taunting, and dominating others). The achievement, relationship, manipulation, and immersion motivators are similar to the motivators found by Bartle (1996). MUDs are considered the textual predecessors of MMORPGs, so this overlap is not surprising. However, the escapism motivator was not shared with the MUD community nor did I find it in the CHD community. Additionally, while I encountered very few females (or users who explicitly presented themselves as such) in the CHD community, Yee (2006) was able to find that males were more likely to be driven by the achievement and manipulation factors while females were more driven by the relationship factor.

**Open Source Communities**

Other research on motivation that applies to this study was conducted in open source communities (Hertel, Niedner, & Herrmann, 2003; Lakhani & Wolf, 2005; Oreg & Nov, 2008). Open source software development in these communities can be thought of as the process of producing software based on unconstrained access for both the developers and users to the resulting source code (Bonaccorsi & Rossi, 2003). Oreg and Nov (2008) administered web-based surveys to members of an open source project and found that the software contributors placed an emphasis on reputation-gaining and self-development motivations while the content contributors placed an emphasis on altruistic motives for their actions. Despite seeing lots of individuals providing help in the CHD forums and talking to a few interviewees about how much they enjoyed giving advice to less experienced animators, none of the motivators that I found in Cold Hotdog were purely altruistic.
In a study of the Linux community, Hertel et al. (2003) found that contributors were motivated by general identification as a Linux user, specific identification as a Linux developer or with a Linux subsystem, pragmatic motives related to the improvement of one’s own software and career advantages, norm-oriented motives related to reactions of relevant others (e.g., family, friends, or colleagues), social and political motives related to supporting independent software and networking with the Linux community, hedonistic motives such as pure enjoyment of programming, and the discounting of motivational obstacles such that they failed to feel that their Linux-related activities were a waste of time. Interestingly, the Linux community shared the networking or socializing motivator with the MMORPG community. It also shared the skill improvement, reactions of others, and enjoyment motivator with the CHD community. The career advantage motivator was also a motivator in CHD for continuing, as opposed to starting, to animate.

Finally, Lakhani and Wolf (2005) found that enjoyment, user need, intellectual stimulation, and improving programming skills were top motivators amongst survey respondents in an open source community. All of these, save for the user need motivator, were also important inspirations in the Cold Hotdog community.

**Online Vidding**

Lastly, the online vidding community is probably the closest of these communities to the animating community in terms of necessary skill and end product. Vidding is a form of filmmaking in which clips from television shows, movies, and other media are cut, re-assembled, and set to music (Coppa, 2008). The vidding community is predominantly female and traces its origin to the *Star Trek* television show where early vidders would make vids by cutting, re-ordering, and adding to film pieces (Coppa, 2008; Freund, 2011). Participating in the community demands technical knowledge concerning how to edit music and video, storytelling skills, and both media and popular
culture familiarity as vids tend to serve as criticisms of representations in media (Coppa, 2008; Turk & Johnson, 2012).

In her study of vidders, Freund (2011) found that vidders were motivated by their passion for the source material and desires to tell their own story (oftentimes to make statements about larger issues regarding women and minorities), to entertain, and to respond to art and culture (usually to “fix” what the creators did incorrectly). The motivation to express oneself was also found in CHD, and while not explicitly expressed, the desire to entertain was also broached when some CHD animators discussed the difficulty of catering to both the audience and the judges during competitions in CHD. At least one of my interviewees consciously chose to make animations that catered more to the audience than to the judging panel.
Chapter 3: Constructing a Case Study of an Online Amateur Multimedia Community

As previously noted, this case study focuses on an online amateur multimedia community, Cold Hotdog, and the individuals therein. Using interviews, participant-observation, and web content analysis, I address questions concerning 1) one’s motivation to join and create animations in such a community, and 2) how one acquires the skills necessary to create animations and participate in the community.

Data Collection and Sampling

To attempt to answer the questions above, I conducted an instrumental case study, or rather a case study in which the case itself is secondary to understanding particular phenomena and the relationships therein, and the focus is more likely to be known in advance and designed around established theory or methods (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995). As case studies allow for the use of multiple sources and techniques for data gathering (Soy, 1997), during this case study, I saved forums posts; interviews with community members conducted by the media; videos, images, and audio files; and comments on said multimedia content. I also conducted interviews and collected the resulting data and transcripts, any photos or screenshots that I was allowed to take during the interviews, and any other forms of communication that I had with community participants.

I began participating in Cold Hotdog for research purposes in the fall of 2009. While I used some of the data collected from the fall of 2009 to the summer of 2012 in my analysis, I collected the bulk of the data for this study from the summer of 2012 through February 2014.

A large focus of my data collection was the 2013 summer bracket-based tournament (The Tourney). The Tourney is a large event for the community during which individuals face off against one another creating short (30-second minimum) animations based on themes chosen by the
organizers (see Figure 5). The emphasis of the competition is on creativity and originality as the timeframes for each round of the tournament are shorter (~3 weeks) than one would most likely take to make an animation under normal circumstances. Winners of each round gain notoriety in the community and earn monetary prizes of varying amounts. The 2013 tournament was a large focus of the data I collected because it fell entirely during my participation in the community, increased the visible participation in the community, and focused the conversation therein more so on tech-related issues and skill-acquisition than during any other similar-sized period. As such, and because the focus of this project is on motivation and skill acquisition, I spent most of my time participating and interacting with community members in the Flash and tournament subforums in the community during The Tourney.

The interviews that I conducted were either semi-structured interviews that ranged from 30 to 80 minutes or email interviews between December 2012 and February 2014. I also included an
interview conducted in January 2013 by a member of the media of one other Cold Hotdog member in my analysis. I initially contacted subjects for interviews via the internal messaging system in the Cold Hotdog community or via their personal email addresses if they posted them in their community profile. I sent interview requests to individuals who were either active in the community forums or who had entered The Tourney, and I conducted interviews until the stories that were relayed to me were no longer unique. Out of the thirty-four interview requests that I sent, I heard responses from and interviewed fifteen individuals. Eight of the interviews were conducted via email while the remaining seven were conducted via Skype. Appendix A contains more information on the interview subjects.

Finally, questions in the interviews were focused on things such as how individuals found out about the community, why they joined, why they started making animations, what physical and/or digital tools they used to help them when they made animations, and how they sought out and/or provided help when it was needed. Because the interviews were semi-structured, however, they sometimes ventured into unexpected territory including cooking microwave pizza. Nevertheless, the questions that I most often tried to address are in Appendix B.

Methods and Analysis

Given the type of data that I collected and the flexibility of case studies to include the use of multiple methods, I considered a myriad of methods including social network analysis, face-to-face and online observations, surveys, interviews, document analysis, and web content analysis. Each of these methods have varying strengths and weaknesses. For example, surveys are best for understanding verifiable facts and events, attitude, behavior, and characteristics of participants (Fowler, Jr., 1995; P. M. Nardi, 2003), yet they are not good for meaning-making. Because I was interested in not only uncovering verifiable facts but also in understanding how the online space was socially constructed and how that affected one’s actions and experiences therein, I chose to use...
interviews, participant-observation, and web content analysis to analyze the data that I collected in Cold Hotdog.

To interpret this data, I used what Stake (1995) refers to as direct interpretation and categorical aggregation. Direct interpretation involves trying to figure out the significance of something by simply “asking ourselves ‘What did that mean?’” while categorical aggregation involves coding data, aggregating frequencies, and looking for patterns (Stake, 1995, p. 78). As this is an instrumental case study in which looking at general patterns and the reappearance of events is most important, I utilized categorical aggregation most often. The following are examples of the lower-level codes that I assigned to statements in my data:

- **Advice giving through example**

  As an example, had we included in the list "The Creation of Adam" from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling (which we didn't!), you might pay homage to it by portraying two of your characters in the pose of God and Adam, to further demonstrate your characters' relationship (one of them might be a famous movie star and the other a hero-worshipping fanboy, for example). But if you merely showed a house's ceiling with that scene painted on it for no justified reason, or if a scene took place in the Sistine Chapel and showed that on the ceiling, you'd be doing it wrong.

- **Advice on best practices**

  Keep it simple. Too many word bubbles or ideas can bog down a strip. If its [sic] possible show instead of telling. You want to figure out what the punchline is and then work backwards from there. there [sic] should be nothing in the strip that doesn't a. build characters b. set up the
punchline. If you can trace anything in your strip that doesn't do any of these things, get rid of it.

- Art advice

Abstract craziness in the background is okay for conveying a drug trip but I think it should have contrasted even more with the "real world" palette because you use such cartoony colours & styles in the rest of animation. So when it snapped from "trip" to "normal" view, I at first thought the background was just an "emotion" effect rather than a "mind-altered" hallucination-y effect.

- Technique

I've only bothered with using a frame with vertical & horizontal centerlines and the corner-to-corner diagonals as symmetry guides.

- Encouragement

Don't worry, you'll figure it out. You've got tons of time since you're done already.

I then rolled up these lower-level codes into higher-order codes such as help via online resources, help from friends or through an apprentice-mentoring relationship, and encouragement from the community. These higher-order codes make up the subsections of the ensuing chapters.

When it came to choosing interview subjects and forum posts to code, I used theoretical sampling whereby data is collected and analyzed cyclically and is controlled by the emerging concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using such a strategy, as I analyzed data, if I found more
questions than answers, data collection continued with an aim towards reaching a point where all concepts were well defined and explained, which should help address fears of selection bias.

As mentioned in the preceding section, I personally conducted a total of 15 interviews with Cold Hotdog members using either email or Skype. Telephone interviews have lower cost than face-to-face interviews and easily allow for the inclusion of widely geographically dispersed participants while face-to-face interviews can be longer and allow for the use of visual aids and better rapport (Czaja & Blair, 2005). By using a technology like Skype that combines the affordances of both the phone and the camera, I was hoping to capitalize on all of these benefits. While I always turned on my camera so that interviewees could see my face during the Skype interviews, four of the interviewees chose to leave their cameras turned off and to only communicate via sound. Nevertheless, using Skype was especially useful as many of my interviewees were in other states and at least one was in another country. The voice over IP technology also helped in that I had the opportunity to talk to some individuals while they were in the space and perhaps even on the machine that they used to create their artifacts. This made it possible to get screenshots of their work environment, which added more insight into their work process and the types of both physical and digital tools that they used during that process. It also made it easy for them to grab links they had bookmarked or other materials that they wanted to share and to show them to me during the course of our conversation. The interviews also allowed me to ask questions about things that were not otherwise apparent from the data collected from the main site or the forums. Because of these and other advantages of video interviews, I conducted email interviews only in instances where scheduling became problematic or if the interview subject felt more comfortable with that option.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also participated in the Cold Hotdog community. There are several different ways to participate. As described earlier, one can submit work to be displayed on the homepage of the site or one can post URL’s to one’s work in the forums, or one
can talk with other community members in both of those venues, through IRC channels, or social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. Even though I monitored the other spaces, most of my active participation was in the forums. Therein, I read posts, conversed with community members, and provided comments on both submitted work and on banal topics covered during the course of normal forum conversations. However, I did not submit work of my own to be judged by the community members, which may be considered a shortcoming of this case study, for I did not get to experience submitting work and getting feedback from the others.

Lastly, while participating in Cold Hotdog, I conducted web content analysis (S. C. Herring, 2010) on older posts in the Cold Hotdog forums. Web content analysis is similar to traditional document analysis, yet it includes not only the examination of the text in a document but also the hyperlinks, images, videos, and other content therein. This analysis added more context to the conversations that I saw brought up in real-time.

**Privacy and Ethical Considerations**

In general, internet qualitative research is not without issue. One has to be careful when defining the boundaries of the project (Hine, 2009), with privacy (Elm, 2009), and with selection and researcher bias. When participating in the community, I was not bound by the site domain of Cold Hotdog or by any other predetermined boundaries. Instead I included any areas that were deemed relevant when engaging in the community and its participants as suggested by Hine (2009). As such, I had to be conscious of the privacy of the observed participants of the community in all arenas. One concern was the age of the participants. As teens are more likely than adults to share content online in the United States (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010) and thirty-nine percent of online teens have admitted to lying about their age in order to gain access to an online service (Madden et al., 2013), it is likely that many of the Cold Hotdog community members are individuals under the age of eighteen though it is not possible to accurately know how many.
Another concern deals with consent. Participants may have seen it as intrusive and bothersome to request consent before all interactions with me (Ess & the Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Committee, 2002), and it was not always possible to do so. To address these concerns, when reporting any findings from observed practices herein, I refrain from using both the real name of the community and the real handles of participants (unless they ask me to use their real handles or names). Instead, I utilize pseudonyms that either I chose or that the interview participant chose when I use any quotes or material from interviews.

In choosing to use pseudonyms for both the community and its members, I used a moderate level of disguise as defined on Bruckman’s (2002) continuum for disguising the group and/or individuals under study. Because I recognize that pseudonyms can and do sometimes function as real names (Bruckman, 2002; Bruckman et al., 2015; Frankel & Siang, 1999), I gave participants the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms for the study or to use their real handles or names. However, allowing them to do so and sometimes using direct quotes from my interactions with them hampers my ability to completely shield the community from those who will choose to uncover them using full-text search engines or even image search engines even if I change or introduce false details as suggested by Bruckman (2002). While Markham (2012) suggests that fabricating interactions or creating composite individuals from actual individuals is another way to combat this problem, I refrained from doing so. Nevertheless, I chose to use a pseudonym for the community name, I use slightly modified titles for forum threads, and I use pseudonyms for users unless I was asked to not do so in an attempt to follow the guidelines of Nissenbaum’s (2004) contextual integrity framework, which calls for one to respect the informational norms of a context – in this case Cold Hotdog – when transmitting information out of that context, while balancing the need to protect the community and acknowledging their right to claim credit for their creative and
intellectual work. I also ask you, the reader, to refrain from conducting searches to attempt to discover the community or the individuals under study herein.

Finally, in addition to using pseudonyms to address issues of privacy and ethics, I also included information in my profile and my forum signature to identify myself as a researcher which included a URL to a webpage (the text is included in Appendix C) with more information about my project. This made members aware of my presence and purpose in the community so that they were able to make an informed decision about whether or not they wanted to communicate with me. This otherwise unencumbered participation helped me interact with community members more frequently than an interview or survey allowed and made it possible for me to better understand the observed events, traditions, and community norms as I experienced them myself (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).
Chapter 4: Why’d You Get Started Animating?

After general small talk about the weather or why I had chosen to interview him or her, the first questions I usually asked an interviewee was how he or she got interested in animation and why he or she started animating. Prior to starting this project, I thought I knew the answer to at least that first question. Cartoons! Video games! Or something else along that vein. Looking at threads in the Cold Hotdog (CHD) forums and talking to members, I found that that was indeed the case for many of them. Just as Freund (2011) found in the vidding community when looking for what initially sparked interest in that art form, several CHD members were initially drawn to animation through cartoons, movies, and video games. However, they also mentioned other things that I had not thought of including: comic books and comic strips, flipbooks, and content shared in Cold Hotdog or similar online communities. CHD member Kouf mentioned in an interview that simply “watching Flash animations on Newgrounds and YouTube made [him] download the trial of Adobe Photoshop CS5 and play around in it.” From there, he went on to use a trial version of Adobe Flash CS5 to make his first animation, which he submitted to The Tourney in 2012.

A good example of how some of these influences appear in animations is Andrew Kepple’s *Spy & Pyro* from which screenshots can be seen in Figure 6. The first frame shows the word “Bonk!” faintly written on the screen after a character is hit reminiscent of the *Batman* television show from the 1960s. The scene and setting also bring to mind the interactions between Wile E.
Coyote and Road Runner in the Warner Bros. produced animated series *Looney Tunes* in which Coyote was routinely injured during his pursuit of Road Runner. The second frame in Figure 6 has a staggered comic book panel layout that will be familiar to comic book readers, and the third frame is an homage to the popular 1985 *Super Mario Bros.* game that will probably be familiar to many video game players of a certain age. While not all animations feature these references, especially not references to so many different types of art forms, this animation makes salient the connection between those art forms and the animations created in CHD.

**From Interest to Production**

Learning about the types of things that spurred interest in animation was one thing, but from there, I wanted to know how that interest turned into actual production. I was especially interested to see if the motivators for animating resembled those from communities that shared some of the same sources of inspiration as CHD such as the vidding, gaming, and computer programming communities. I found that there was indeed significant overlap. For example, when I asked Koit during an interview whether or not he got started for fun, he responded with the following statement:

No, I started actually doing Photoshop work, which is editing photos, obviously, to make it a funny image or whatever, melding an owl with a cat or something like that. I started doing that and then I thought, “Well I’ll take this one stage further,” and I started making web GIFs. So I tried to make them blink and stuff like that and then make funny GIFs out of that. And then people recognized I could do animation based on that. I saw other people doing Flash and I thought I’ll give that a go.
Later, he continued:

Because I like creating. [...] And I like to add to my top catalog of content. [...] And you know, it’s nice to be involved in competitions. I don’t really…I’ve never really done it before the last couple of years. And I thought oh, I’ll give it a go then. Not because I thought I’d win but because I know damn well I’m not going to win. I’m not that good and I’m not interested in being awesome, because I’m not as good as other people. For me, it’s about ideas.

In our conversation, Koit acknowledged many different things as motivators that are analogous to the motivators found in other communities: self-development, skill improvement, intellectual stimulation, and enjoyment. Self-development, which they defined as learning from others in the field, receiving feedback, and enhancing one’s abilities and skills, was noted by Oreg and Nov (2008) in the open source community; similarly, a desire to work on a particular skill, intellectual stimulation, and enjoyment were found to be motivators in the open source community by Lakhani and Wolf (2005).

Another motivator that Koit hints at is the desire for a challenge, to continue to push himself. Other individuals in the community also noted this motivator as many of them attempted their first animation to compete in either a school or online competition or as a voluntary school project. This motivator is most related to the achievement motivator noted by Yee (2006) in the MMORPG community wherein individuals were driven by a desire to continue to improve and best others in a game. There is a slight distinction between the MMORPG motivators and the CHD motivators, however, when it comes to the desire to learn. As noted earlier, a desire to learn or improve upon a skill was a motivator in CHD, the vidding community, and the open source community. Perhaps surprisingly though, this desire to learn was not found to be a motivator in the
MMORPG community that Yee (2006) studied. Instead, he found that learning or the desire to work on a particular skill was not a motivating factor to begin playing but was instead a way that a person behaved in the game once they began playing. I did not see a similar distinction in CHD.

To further demonstrate the CHD motivators we see in Koit’s story, here is another statement from the Cold Hotdog forums by an individual I will refer to as Poster1:

I always loved special effects in movies, especially movies like Star Wars, and also I've always loved video games. One day I decided to see if there were any free [sic] game making programs out there so I googled it and found Game Maker 6. I messed around with it for about 2 years, made several (half completed) games.

And then I tried to make a movie with it. I made something, but I don’t know if anyone can call it a movie, but that gave me a thirst to find something that I could make a real movie with. In my searched [sic] I stumbled upon this program called Flash. [...]

Poster1, like Koit, notes desires for skill improvement, intellectual stimulation, and enjoyment led them to animating. This process of moving from enjoying professional games and movies to creating his or her own games over the course of several years with first a simple tool to a more complex tool like Flash is also similar to the process noted by Ito et al. (2010a). It is a process that benefits greatly from communities of practice such as the community surrounding Cold Hotdog. I will address this notion further in subsequent chapters.

Another motivator to begin animating amongst Cold Hotdog members was the encouragement of others, especially friends and family, either through direct admonishments or by simply setting good examples:
I guess I wanted to make something to be proud of (I was 9 or 10, kinda [sic] hard to remember motives). My cousin set me up with a camera and taught me how to make stop-motion animation with it. … [She] taught me the concept of showing short clips in rapid succession to simulate music. (Surname)

Seven years ago my father walks into my room and says “You play too many video games. Make your own” as he throws a copy of Flash at me. (Poster2)

I [sic] started a year and a half ago, a friend of mine gave me a pirated copy, and said she was having trouble working with it, and assumed i [sic] would be better at it then she was. (Poster3)

Once when I was over my cousin's house, I was 6 I believe, he was playing around with Flash 4. He let me play around with it, and I had to constantly ask him what button I had to press to make a frame. As far I can remember, my first animation was based on Yatta². (Poster4)

My mom used to do Web Design for a living, she made sites for people and stuff, she had a site that listed popular places for a lot of the states, I think they were mostly called "Aroundwhateverstate.com" […] But she had first given me a side folder that had no links to it on her site for Tucson, and I called it "Poster5web" because, well, it was Poster5’s Website, and I was 7 and a bit too GENIUS. […] She taught [sic] me how to save images on the computer to certain files, and how to make new pages and hyperlinks on my little page. It was really stupid, but

² “Yatta” is a parody song by a fictional Japanese boy band named Green Leaves.
there's nothing really good you could expect from a 7 year old who has only just started animation. (Poster5)

While I did not find other studies that cited encouragement from friends and family as motivators in communities similar to Cold Hotdog, Yee (2006) did find the likelihood of co-usage of MMORPGs with individuals who are emotionally close to the user to be quite high, especially amongst female players. Also, the recognition and reputation-gaining motivators that were noted by Ito (2010b) and Oreg and Nov (2008) in the amateur multimedia community and open source community respectively can be seen to be related to this encouragement motivator. It is not unreasonable to assume that being recognized by one’s friends and family members as someone capable of animating and then demonstrating that ability (and making increasingly better animations at that) are all a part of the overall encouragement motivator that I noted.

Another thing that must be noted when it comes to this encouragement motivator, especially in the case of Surn, Poster4, Poster5, and others who were encouraged by close individuals who also were involved in either animating or a related field, is the importance of seeing someone with whom one can identify that is already performing the skill that one is trying to learn. As noted in the myriad of articles concerning the racial and gender gap in tech, e.g., (Bonetta, 2010; Dimitriadi, 2013; Simard, 2009; Trapp, 2014), seeing and/or knowing someone that either looks like or is otherwise similar to oneself goes a long way to convince someone that they too can acquire the skills to excel in a trade. Even in the presence of all of the other motivators that I have discussed thus far, if one does not believe that they can actually succeed at animating, it is not likely that they would attempt to try to do so. While I have not done any work to determine whether or not the motivators that I have discovered have different weights or affect individuals in different ways, it would be a good follow-on study to see whether or not this encouragement motivator carries more weight than the others.
Finally, finding an outlet or being able to express oneself is also a motivator to begin animating. An example of this can be found in the quote above by Surn from our interview in which he talked about how his cousin helped him to make his first animation, which was his way “to make something to be proud of.” In another interview, Dean Halsey noted how he painstakingly made an animation using PowerPoint at the age of 10! This need to get ideas out of one’s head onto paper (digital or physical) was a repeated story during this study and is similar to the stories that vidders recounted to Freund (2011) during her study. The vidders described music as a big motivator as was the desire to tell a story with that music and other media that they felt was not already being told. Many of the CHD animators, especially the animators who specialized in parodies, echoed those sentiments. For others, like WooleyWorld, it was simple. He just had a “funny idea that [he] wanted to try in animation.”

To recap, Cold Hotdog animators’ initial interest in animation was sparked by both expected and unexpected art forms: cartoons, video games, comic books and comic strips, flipbooks, and animated content found in online multimedia communities including Cold Hotdog itself. Moving from consumer to producer of animated content occurred for a myriad of different reasons including desires for self-development, which includes learning and getting feedback from others; skill improvement; the desire for a challenge; intellectual stimulation; encouragement from others; the need for an outlet to express oneself; and enjoyment. Unsurprisingly, both the sources of initial interest and the subsequent motivators for participation have significant overlap with similar communities including the vidding, gaming, and open source communities despite some of the differences in the domain, skills necessary for participation, and participation demographics in the case of the heavily female vidding community. In the next chapter, I will detail how CHD members picked up the skills to animate once they decided to take that step.
Chapter 5: So, How’d You Figure out How to Create Animations?

Status serves as a big motivator for continued participation in online communities (Ito, 2010b; Oreg & Nov, 2008; Yee, 2006). One way that status is gained and demonstrated in Cold Hotdog is through the ways that one claims to have gained the skills necessary to make animations. This made it easy to either find stories or examples of skill acquisition in the forums or to elicit them in conversation with CHD members who were eager to prove their mastery in this way.

Creating complete animations requires the combination of many different skill sets including storytelling, music editing (and maybe even music creation), drawing, coloring, and putting graphics together in a way that simulates movement. Putting graphics together can be done in a myriad of ways including using cameras, programming, and/or software programs such as Flash, a screenshot of which can be seen above in Figure 7. During my study, CHD members expressed six methods of
acquiring these skills: formal schooling, help from friends or through an apprentice-mentoring relationship, online resources including tutorials and messages boards, books and other offline materials including the in-tool tutorials in the Flash software, reverse engineering Flash videos or learning by example, and trial and error. Most individuals used a combination of these methods, for example, combining help from friends and online resources.

Of course, there were also those who claimed to magically learn how to animate:

I walked from the living room to the kitchen with an unopened copy of Flash on my head. I then knew flash. (Poster6) true story. (Poster7)

I was genetically engineered to make flash, oh the good old test tube days…

(Poster8)

I discounted those stories as pure hubris and humor. However, there were also those who claimed that they were self-taught:

As far as learning [emphasis in original] to animate, I’m self taught [sic] (and not very good yet) (Poster9)

Much as Lange (2014) found in her study of young YouTube video creators, in most cases, upon further questioning, what being “self-taught” usually meant was that an individual learned how to animate outside of a formal classroom environment and without the help of someone face-to-face either by reverse engineering existing animations or with help in the form of tutorials, books, or online forums:

It’s true, you can learn Flash without outside/online help! (Poster10)

I self taught [sic] myself on animation, but I used alot [sic] of the tut.s [sic] on CHD, mostly Poster2’s (Poster11)
Most of my actionscripting knowledge I learned by myself too, but I have read a few things on it. (Poster12)

I learned flash from one of the most unused yet underestimated places ever—The Built-In Tutorials! (insert gasp) (Poster13)

Keeping this in mind, in the following sections, I will go into more detail about how members described acquiring skills in each of the six ways expressed by the Cold Hotdog members.

**Formal Schooling**

As noted earlier, making animations requires a myriad of skill sets, many of which are not a part of the typical American public K-12 school curriculum, such as music editing. As in other online communities including YouTube (Lange, 2014) and in American culture in general (Catano, 1990), the idea of being self-taught or being a self-made man is valued and carries a great deal of esteem amongst CHD members. In fact, some individuals denigrate those who use the assistance of others for help:

I got mine in 4th grade... 8th grade now so... 4 years of animation. I had no help from books, internet or what so ever [sic], and if i [sic] needed help, it would be for the gamings [sic]. I did start out badly, got the mic last year ago, learn to stream a month after that and vola [sic], here i [sic] am, not the greatest but creatainly [sic] not the worst animator here. i [sic] lol to people who took it for class... Psh, teachers tend to make bad animation themselves. 😏 (Poster14)

Because of this, many of the members either deny getting help when acquiring skills or they downplay the help that they received as Poster12 does in the previous section. Nevertheless, in my
discussions with members, I learned that many CHD members had in fact taken part in formal training to acquire useful, animating-related skills.

Unsurprisingly, many individuals recalled taking art classes in at least high school (or the equivalent of high school in their country) with some taking classes as early as elementary school. These art classes usually covered the basics of drawing and painting in different media and introduced them to the use of color. None of the classes at this level included using software for drawing, however, just physical media.

According to Shamus Culhane, the animator who made the dwarfs in Disney’s *Snow White*, good animators should “know a great deal about acting theory and practice” in addition to the ability to make funny drawings and actions (1990, p. 16). I encountered a few individuals in CHD who took and recommended drama or acting classes including two of my interviewees, Novice and Rob, who acknowledged independent acting classes and film classes respectively as something that had impacted their animating work. Additionally, during a discussion about giving characters realistic poses and movements in animations, one animator expressed their opinion about the utility of drama classes:

> If you ever have a chance to take a theater class I highly recommend it, you learn a lot about character and it's a lot of fun too! Heck, it isn't uncommon for an animator doing character animation to first act out the action (many even record it for reference later) to get into the character's head and figure out their timing and poses. (Poster15)

This discussion then proceeded with additional advice that Poster15 gleaned from the course that they had taken, which appeared to be well received. The advice seemed surprising to some of the
CHD members, however, for they had not previously thought about how physical acting could improve their digital creations.

In addition to art and drama classes, some members recalled taking computer programming courses. Rob, one of the animators that I interviewed, made his first animation for a competition at the end of a computer programming and repair course during his junior year of high school. Others, like Koit, took programming courses at the collegiate level. Both the programming skills learned in those courses and the process of learning how to break down larger problems into smaller problems as taught in these courses are all useful when creating animations. In Flash in particular, in lieu of using many images with slight differences in order to simulate movement (for example, see how the deer seems to be running in Figure 8), one can use the object-oriented programming language ActionScript to simulate movement. Using only ActionScript commands, an image can be made to move across the screen or to change in some other way. If one chooses to animate using ActionScript, the utility of a programming class is straightforward.

Lastly, animation courses, both concerning the history of animation and classes that actually teach animation techniques, were useful to the community members who took them. Seven of the
fifteen individuals that I interviewed were either currently enrolled in or had previously taken animation, visual communication, or multimedia classes in college. These classes seemed to vary in focus from the traditional form of animation that “is very much like making a flip book, where you flip the pages and the figures on them seem to move” (Culhane, 1990, p. 11) in which drawings are produced either using physical media like paper or software programs like Flash to 3D animation using tools like Maya or Blender.

Help From Friends or Through Apprentice-Mentoring Relationships

Two of the first threads I happened upon in the Cold Hotdog community were titled “I seek a worthy Flash apprentice., Enquiry within.” and “Flash Apprentice: Here’s Your Chance, FIRST, YOU MUST PASS THE TEST.” In both threads, a more seasoned animator offered to help teach an animator with less experience, but the animators seeking a mentor were asked to demonstrate both that they had some level of experience animating, even if it was very little experience, and to demonstrate that they were willing to put in the work necessary to become better at their craft. Using terms from the community of practice literature, the potential apprentices needed to show that they had participated in some form of “legitimate” activity. These demonstrations tended to be within reason including making a short animation or script based on a topic proposed by the potential mentor or simply expressing to the potential mentor why they wanted the opportunity to be their apprentice. This type of learning arrangement is similar to the arrangements noted by Steinkuehler (2004) and Lindtner et al. (2008) in online gaming communities in which users guided others through the completion of tasks, or in the case of the World of Warcraft players observed by Lindtner et al. (2008), players would intentionally sit next to players who were playing the game so that they could talk to one another and learn from each other’s playing experience. Players would even do this in cases in which they did not know the player that they were observing! In Nardi et al.’s (2007) ethnography of World of Warcraft players, they noticed similar collaborative learning
behavior in world where players would devise strategies and work together to make progress. These behaviors are reminiscent of those prescribed by social cognitivists.

Another example of CHD members offering to help others is in the form of collaboration projects as in the case in which Poster16 responds to another person’s entreaty for help in the forums by saying, “I like to think that I am fairly skilled when it comes to game development. What kind of help do you need? Maybe we can do a collaboration project to help get your feet wet?” More aligned with the constructivist view of learning, these collaborations are a common way for individuals to attempt to both gain more experience in animating and to expand their network despite the fact that many collaboration projects do not lead to a finished animation because of poor communication, poor teamwork, or poorly defined project parameters (Luther & Bruckman, 2008).

Because of how strong the “I learned it by myself” narrative is in the CHD community, I was surprised to see this open embrace of accepting help from others both within the community and out. However, the presence of the threads that I found in which users were both soliciting and responding to mentor-apprentice relationships, the many postings in the forums in which someone stated that they were “[other CHD member’s] newb” or that they “learned animation technique from [one CHD member] and [another CHD member]”, and the responses in my interviews demonstrate that these types of relationships were not necessarily something of which one should be ashamed and were in fact common. Three of the individuals that I interviewed explicitly acknowledged asking friends or colleagues for help while seven of them noted friends or family members who were also in either the art or animation field that they could use as a resource if need be. This type of support was usually in addition to other resources, however, as in this recounting from Jimmysanimation when I asked him how he got started learning Flash:

I just kind of messed around in the program and I worked through it, and I may have asked the guys that turned me on to it for points here and there. But at that
initial stage I just kind of did it, and then moving forward, I wanted to you know create, I wanted to change the canvas size. I didn’t know how to do that so I wanted that wide screen look so moved to that, I had to look up how to do just little things that seem so easy.

This use of multiple types of help when learning how to animate was not unique to Jimmysanimation nor was it unique to those who had learned from others. Another animator, Novice, also recounted to me how he used both a friend and online videos to help him when he was first starting to animate:

Friend taught me the basics, from there I took his advice and experimented with what he taught me and tried to simulate different ways of which I could use my newly taught knowledge. I also watched tutorial videos from renown [sic] professional freelancer animators.

Notice how both Novice and Jimmysanimation both mention that they learned things on their own even in the midst of utilizing help from others and using online resources. This continued multi-source explanation of help was repeated by many during the course of my study. The next section will go into more depth of the use of online resources.

Finally, in addition to talking about how he learned with the help of others, Jimmysanimation also highly recommended that beginners reach out to more seasoned animators for advice and help:

I would target these individuals like an Andrew Kepple or myself or anyone and say send them an email and be like “Hey, how did you do this? How’d you get started? I’d love to whatever.” I mean people, I think people love to be able to help other people if it’s if it’s [sic] initiated by such a fan of your work. … So I
think that nine times out of ten you’d get a positive and a beneficial response and even make possibly a relationship like a mentorship that you could then use throughout your career and kind of bounce ideas off that other person because they would always appreciate you respecting their work and their path.

He had a great experience sending a cold email to an animator employed in the animation field who responded with a multi-page email. He found the experience both really useful and now considers it important to respond in kind to those who reach out to him now that he has gained more experience.

**Online Resources**

Unsurprisingly, online resources were mentioned and used by many of the individuals with whom I spoke. The types of resources varied, however, from web pages returned after doing simple searches using a search engine to structured tutorials to asking questions in web forums, including the CHD community forum. Most community members seemed to use search engines for simple help as in the case of Jimmysanimation’s attempt to figure out how to change the Flash canvas size in the quote in the previous section.

The structured tutorials were sought whenever a person wanted to complete a more complex task such as tweening (an interpolation technique where an animation program generates extra frames between two images to give the illusion of motion), making a preloader (a custom-built indicator that informs the viewer that content is being loaded into a Flash player), or creating a button in Flash. The tutorials to which the members referred were hosted both in the CHD community and on external sites. They were both in video and textual form, though the text-based tutorials usually, if not always, included images to bolster the information. Figure 9 is an example of an image in one of the tutorials that I found in which the tutorial author used the image to point out
Figure 9. A screenshot of a menu in Adobe's Flash tool that I found in an online tutorial.

Figure 10. An example of a red-line diagram on menus and windows in an older version of Adobe’s Flash tool.
where to go in the Flash software to change the properties of a graphic from “single frame” to “loop.” Choosing to use images in this way makes it much easier for the reader to understand what the author is trying to impart and for the author who does not have to try to describe the visual interface using only words.

In addition to using images, tutorial authors would occasionally use annotations on their images. I refer to these images as red-line diagrams. Red-line diagrams, such as the one in Figure 10, specifically call out portions of the image to the reader and they occasionally provide extra instructions for the reader to follow, e.g., “click dis [sic].” The attractiveness of using such a diagram is obvious. Just using Figure 10 as an example, it would be much more onerous to explain using just words which menus to click, which tab to select, and which buttons to click in order to pull up the Sound Settings window in Adobe Flash than it was to just create the image and circle the menus and buttons. This is especially the case when you can use the tool that you are trying to explain in order to create the red-line diagram itself! I was surprised to see many of these screenshots within the forums and on auxiliary sites. While the annotations were not always created with red ink, the function of the annotations seemed to perform the same purpose – to point out features and to add more explanation.

In addition to full tutorials, CHD members would also provide help or advice in more ad hoc ways to questions posed by community members. Sometimes a simple textual answer would suffice. Other times, the question would be answered with a short ActionScript code snippet. Poster17 provided this code snippet in the forums, which can be used during the creation of buttons: on(release) {gotoAndStop(2); }. This line of code describes what happens when one releases the mouse button after clicking on some object. In this specific instance, when one releases the mouse button, the movie will go to the second frame, and the action will stop. What I found interesting about code sharing was how little explanation accompanied the snippets. Usually code
sharing was done after another person posed a question to the community, “How do I create a button using ActionScript?”, for example. So, there was that context. However, usually there was no explanation as to how the code worked, where to put the code in the Flash tool, how to run it, or any other explanation that might help a true novice. It seemed that a base level of competence was expected when community members helped one another with code snippets that was not assumed with some of the other ways that help was given.

Besides code snippets, CHD members would also provide images or screenshots as responses to questions. These images were typically not annotated like red-line diagrams, but they would usually be accompanied be explanatory text. Examples of this are Figure 11 and Figure 12 in which one CHD member shares two pictures of his workspace in response to someone who is thinking about getting a new tablet with which to animate instead of continuing to use a computer and mouse setup. After these images, the animator gave lengthy explanations as to how much the equipment cost and why the equipment was set up the way it was. For example, the “keyboard is to the left, so I can access the Ctrl + Z key, and the mouse to the right if I need quicker functionality and heavier timeline control.” He also provided advice for finding comparable equipment:

Since your [sic] looking to purchase seconds [sic] hand I guess it would be a good idea to see if you can find EX store displays, units with minimal use anyway. …If you can find yourself a Wacom Cintiq 21UX (brand new $2500) or on ebay for about 1500 – atm. I think you’d be quite well off. Although you can try your luck with a cheaper older model like myself =). Its [sic] really well worth the money.

Don’t buy the Wacom Cintiq 12WX though. When hunting around take into consideration firstly [sic] the SIZE and also the resolution and colour depth specs.
Figure 11. A CHD member’s animation workstation setup.

Figure 12. An electronic pen used by a CHD member.
Such an in-depth explanation was welcomed by the community and encouraged others to also chime in with their own suggestions and experiences with comparable equipment. As is common, they both chided and expressed admiration at the original poster for making the animations that he had up to that point with only a mouse.

An important thing to note here is that the amount of experience of the person posing the question in the community and their standing in the community were undoubtedly contributors to the type of response that their query engendered and to the discussion that followed. I saw much more succinct responses to either individuals who were newer to the community or to individuals that asked questions that could be easily answered using simple search engine queries. When possible, individuals are first expected to try to help themselves (Cook, Teasley, & Ackerman, 2009), and if it appeared that they had not done so, responses could be quite curt.

Another way that I saw CHD community members helping one another online was by simple tip sharing. In the course of animating and/or working with others, it was common for someone to learn something new or to figure out how to more efficiently animate whether or not their tool of choice was Flash. In instances like this, as opposed to waiting for someone to pose a
query about a technique or shortcut, CHD members would share this information unsolicited. This would sometimes come in the form of a story, in images, or both. Figure 13, for example, was shared by Poster18 after she worked on a project with a much more experienced animator. She was surprised to see that he was using the Golden Grid or Golden Rectangle to space and move through each of his scenes. She was surprised to learn that “each and EVERY scene before my eyes had at least ONE bit of line, element, image, whatever pass or fall right on one of these lines.” The proportions of the golden grid appear in classical Greek art and architecture, and experiments have shown that the golden grid holds great aesthetic appeal (Bicknell & Hoggatt Jr., 1969; Fechner, 1871). However, this concept or tool, despite its utility, is probably not something that one without formal art or design training would cursorily come across in the course of their informal training. So, Poster18 and others who come across similar information feel compelled to share it with their colleagues. Poster18’s words sum up both her appreciation for and the efficacy of such information much better than I could: “I’ve been using my gut this whole time to figure out if I’ve been doing things right or not. This dude lets MATH do the work! for [sic] him!! Foolproof!”

The final way that I observed CHD members seeking help via online resources was through design critiques in the CHD forums. Design critiques or juries are staples in formal design education. They typically consist of a student presenting their work and receiving feedback from other students, professors, and potentially other design professionals (Anthony, 1991). In a study by Dannels and Martin (2008), design critiques tended to last between two and four hours during which the student’s presentation of work took up approximately 20% of the time with the remaining time devoted to verbal feedback. They found nine different types of feedback in this setting (in order of decreasing frequency): judgment, process oriented, brainstorming, interpretation, direct recommendation, investigation, free association, comparison, and identity invoking. Similar kinds of
feedback were also offered in the CHD forums, especially judgment, process oriented, and direct recommendation.

CHD design critiques were initiated either by an animator seeking advice or by the prompting of a community elder who wanted to help others improve. In the former case, the animator would typically post a short animation or animatic (a short version of a movie typically consisting of successive sections of a storyboard optionally with accompanying music and sound effects) and ask the community members for advice on technical or artistic improvements or simply for their opinions on the work so far. Then, community members would respond, usually in text, but occasionally, they would also provide links to resources that they believed the animator would find useful or they would include snapshots of their own work environment or animations to demonstrate ways that the animator could improve or work more efficiently.

In the latter case in which design critiques occurred, a community elder would typically provide a prompt or two for others such as creating a scene in which a character jumps from one roof to another or to work on squash, stretch, and timing by animating a bouncing ball. As mentioned earlier, the types of feedback garnered by these requests varied as did the tone of the feedback. For example, in response to a ball bouncing exercise, Poster15 responded to another animator in glowing terms:

I laughed, I cried, then I nominated it for the Emmys. It's like I was in the ball's head. I knew what it was thinking, I could feel the desperation of each bounce, pushing onward yet the helpless feeling of being limited by the physical form, so simple, so perfect, yet not enough. The turmoil felt within the ball expressed in the style you choose, unconforming [sic] and chaotic- yet predictable until the sudden abrupt and unpredicted end. I'm kind of disappointed though, this was just suppose [sic] to be a simple throw-away exercise, and here you go getting all
Figure 14. This is an example of a stick figure "looking" as provided by Poster15.

In response to a prompt to a posing exercise, however, Poster15 responded differently. In addition to providing figures, she still gave encouragement, but expressed precisely how the more inexperienced animator could improve:

One of the things that bothered me is how little thinking happened with the character. He did one thing, then the next thing, then the last thing. While technically there was nothing "wrong" with it, it lacked interesting things, like slipping or poses to express what he was thinking. You did give a brief pause at 26 frames in for him to stop and think, and that was good! One of the tricks I learned in the theater is that even though *you* have the script and know exactly what things the character is going to do, or the lines they're going to say, the character is experiencing this all for the first time. They don't know, for example, when they go into their kitchen there's going to be a leak in the ceiling. … In a more relevant example, for the rooftop scenario I might have had him look at the far away building and then at the edge of his building then back at the building, sizing up the gap. You're working with stick figures and have to use full body acting to see where he's "looking".
At this point, she provided Figure 14 to demonstrate what she meant by “full body acting.”

Then, she continued with her instruction:

I like to reverse the 'c' line of action to make the character more dynamic - it's a lot more fun than just standing straight up and moving just their head. Next, once he's decided to do this, I'll have him run, building up speed until a footstep or two before the edge- fully intending until that moment to make the jump over the edge of the roof to the next, posture bent forward / . Then, when he changes his mind his posture changes completely, feet in front \ possibly even trying to back peddle [sic] with his feet while pinwheeling [sic] his arms. Then I'd have him stop.

Finally, she ends by addressing what would happen once the character actually made the leap and how that differed from what the animator had presented in their animation:

Even while jumping through the air your character is in this pose. Now, I'm not the sort who jumps from building to building (or admits to it, lest my super villain identity be discovered) but that doesn't keep me from finding a reference to see how something like this might look. http://youtu.be/pG63ffTmJfo In the video I saw a lot of the same poses come up when he's jumping. First he crouched down (sometimes not that far, if he had the momentum of a run behind it, but just enough) to get enough of a push off with the next pose. The top of his jump he brought his legs up to his body making himself smaller and more aerodynamic. It makes a HUGE difference! As he comes out of the jump he's preparing to land and extends his legs out, which cushions his impact leaving him in a pose similar to the one he started with.
What is fascinating in this critique is the myriad of ways that Poster15 provides advice all while finding ways to work around the limitations of using only the affordances of the web forum. She provides short scenarios to explain her thinking; she uses images to demonstrate some of the techniques she describes; she uses simple keyboard symbols such as the forward and back slash to demonstrate posture; she provides external links to a live action YouTube video of young men doing parkour, and then she shows via an image, how she would convert the things she saw in the live action video into a drawing (see Figure 15). She also introduced new terminology to the young animators such as “line of action,” which helps as the animators seek to become more active in the CHD CoP. Though Anthony (1991) noted that a climate of fear, defensiveness, anxiety, and stress is associated with the feedback given during typical design critiques, perhaps the richness and utility of the feedback incentivize CHD members to willingly participate in these activities. It is also possible that having the critique unfold asynchronously and not in person also helps make these critiques more palatable for members. Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to talk to any of the community members about these hypotheses, but the fact that these critiques continued to take place demonstrated that at least some of the community members found them useful.
Offline Resources

Perhaps it is a bit odd that I have a separate section here for offline resources considering I have already talked about friends that people consult and formal schooling that has advanced the animating experience of CHD members. This section, however, is for the inanimate, offline resources that came up when conversing with CHD members. They rarely mentioned offline resources. Most of the time they only recounted offline resources after I prompted them. The two most often cited offline resources were the tutorials that were built into the Flash software and books written on animating, Flash, and/or ActionScript.

The tutorials that come along with the Flash software are typically a mix of text, videos, and starter files (e.g., images and music clips) that help an animator get started. As Adobe continues to transition more of its tools from the desktop to cloud based services, more of its tutorials are now hosted online in the form of webpages and videos.

When it comes to books, of the nine individuals in my interviews that talked about using books, seven mentioned *The Animator's Survival Kit: A Manual of Methods, Principles and Formulas for Classical, Computer, Games, Stop Motion and Internet Animators* by Richard Williams. While stressing that after he read the book he realized that ActionScript was not for him, one of my interviewees also mentioned using a “Learn ActionScripting in 24 hours” book. He was most likely referring to one of the *Sams Teach Yourself in 24 Hours* books: either *Sams Teach Yourself Flash MX ActionScript in 24 Hours* by Gary Rosenzweig or *Sams Teach Yourself ActionScript 3 in 24 Hours* by Phillip Kerman. The only other book mentioned was for a more recent version of Flash, *How to Cheat in Adobe Flash CS5: The Art of Design and Animation* by Chris Georgenes. The animator did not comment on whether or not he found that particular book to be useful.
Reverse Engineering or Learning by Example

While many of the CHD members that I talked to at some point mentioned that they reverse engineered other people’s animations, most of them did not in fact take existing animations and try to break them down into smaller components in order to better understand them. What they were in fact doing was, in the words of Dean Halsey during our interview, improving by “watching other people's work, deconstructing how and why they did something” and trying to incorporate “their skills into my own work.” Or as Andrew Kepple put it, when he first started out, he “regularly watched Flash animations on various websites to get an idea of what was possible, and what was being made at the time.” In other words, they were attempting to learn by example, a social cognitivist notion. By doing this, they were trying to better understand use of color, use of music and other sound cues, the rules of spacing and pacing, and humor and the types of stories that could be told using the medium. Almost all of the CHD members mentioned someone else's work that they admired, kept up with, or even emulated with their own work, so this attempt to learn by example seemed pervasive and is in fact not uncommon. The use of examples is customary in creative design (S. R. Herring, Chang, Krantzler, & Bailey, 2009) and has been shown to increase both novelty and the number of ideas generated by designers (Siangliulue, Chan, Gajos, & Dow, 2015).

Trial and Error

The final way that animators claimed to pick up their animating skills was by trial and error. Just as Anton (2013) found in informal game design clubs, some individuals in the CHD community simply jumped right into an animating tool and tried to create something. Often the individuals who claimed to be “self-taught” would talk about the virtues of trial and error and how it was possible to pick things up without outside help. In practice, however, individuals would use trial and error in
addition to at least one of the other previously mentioned methods of skill acquisition. For example, even though Santhosh AKA jackbliss spoke about learning using trial and error during our interview, he also asked for help on web forums, used tutorials, and asked friends and family for help and advice. Likewise, Novice used trial and error in addition to tutorials, friends, other Flash videos as examples, and books. So, while trial and error was highly valued and was expected to a certain extent of CHD members, it was rarely, if ever, the sole way they became proficient animators.
Chapter 6: What Makes Cold Hotdog Your Community of Choice?

Figure 16. A selection of avatars used in the Cold Hotdog forums.

As noted in earlier chapters, there are several existing online multimedia communities as well as large multi-purpose sites such as YouTube and Vimeo to which CHD members can contribute. In an examination of some of these amateur media communities Ito (2010b) found a “peer based ecology of review and critique” where specialization and skill is rewarded and people are motivated “almost entirely through the force of systems of recognition and motivation” while in a study covering six do-it-yourself (DIY) communities, Kuznetsov and Paulos (2010) found ten reasons for participating in such a community: get inspiration and new ideas for future projects; learn new concepts; meet people who share similar interests; receive feedback about personal projects; educate others and share information; showcase ideas and skills; document or archive work; give back to the community; improve reputation and/or website traffic; and find employment opportunities. Many of the CHD members with whom I spoke in interviews and in the site forums relayed similar reasons for participating in an online community, especially the goals to learn new concepts and showcase their ideas and skills that I discussed in Chapter 4 and to improve their reputation and/or website traffic. However, those reasons do not completely explain why they participated in CHD in particular.
Online multimedia communities have, among other things, different affordances, audience sizes, layouts, community norms, and expectations when it comes to the type of content that is allowed (e.g., some sites allow mature or explicit content, while others do not). So, why did CHD community members chose CHD to showcase their work? The reasons varied and included the motivations observed by Ito (2010b) and Kuznetsov and Paulos (2010), but they also centered on an inviting and encouraging culture (relative to some of the other communities), quality feedback and professionalism (in the parts of the community devoted to work and not general chit chat), and The Tourney.

**Inviting and Encouraging Culture**

One of the sentiments repeatedly imparted to me by community participants is that CHD is an encouraging community. Sure, there are trolls and people that trash talk or have only negative things to say. In an interview Tomacco even noted that the amount of trolling increased after the site switched servers in 2011 and forced everyone to have to re-register to use the forums. Nevertheless, the overwhelming opinion seemed to be that CHD was more encouraging and inviting than many of the other amateur multimedia communities. This relatively congenial environment was nurtured not only by community members but by administrators as well, for as Surn noted in his interview, he participated in part because of “the positive input I get from the owner of the website which encourages me to remain loyal to CHD.”

This encouragement was most apparent when community members expressed trouble finishing animations whether the reasons were due to other pressures on their time or just feeling inadequate. In those instances, community members would try to push animators to complete their tasks as in this case where Poster19 tries to be supportive of a fellow animator:
i [sic] remember not to [sic] long ago i [sic] was just like you, making crappy (no offense) animations. With your skills, a little devotion into making a plotted maybe 30-60 second animation WITH sound, you could very well get your animation hosted on here, or at least it would get some serious hits on youtube.

Poster19 made the preceding comment after a community member talked about being discouraged by the poor reception of some of their videos. Despite potentially insulting the original animator by insinuating that their creations thus far were “crappy,” Poster19 tried to encourage the animator by saying that they too had started off in the same position, and that because they had pushed through and found success, so could this animator.

In another instance, during The Tourney, Poster18 decided to drop out because she did not have time to finish her submission. This led to several community members attempting to talk her out of it and encouraging her to continue to animate, but a few of them did so in unexpected ways:

Poster18 will probably accomplish a real thing because that girl can do an art i [sic] swear to jesus (Poster20)

Poster18 you were kind of unpleasant but i rly [sic] like your arts [sic] you are v talented plse [sic] get the heck away from this god awful place this is not the place to be if you want any kind of good exposure the tourney is just a way to humor retards that draw the same dumb cartoons (Poster21)

In the first quote, Poster20 tries to simply stroke Poster18’s ego by saying that she’s a good artist and will accomplish good things, but in the second quote Poster21 is being complimentary while trying to tell her to get away from CHD! Every once in a while I would find comments like that in the community, but when I talk to individuals who had received some of these comments, the
comments seemed to have the reverse effect. The response was always that that type of support could not be found elsewhere and was one of the reasons why they chose to be a part of CHD.

To not give the impression that all supportive comments included negative views about CHD or the work of the recipient of the support, here is an example of a positive bit of counseling from Poster22:

[…], please don't drop out. I thoroughly enjoy your animations and part of the fun / challenge of The Tourney is completing your idea in balance with the demands of your life. I burned The Tourney midnight oil in '09 because I had a day job. I'm sure <<name redacted>> did the same thing in '08. It can be done, you have WAY more free time in college than in the real world, so honor your commitment and bring it home.

As in Poster19's comment, Poster22 empathizes with the animator's plight of having a lot of competing demands on his time, but he nevertheless tries to encourage the animator to continue. While entreaties such as this were not always successful, the recipients of these appeals overwhelmingly expressed gratitude for the community's support.

**Quality Feedback and Professionalism**

In addition to the congenial environment in CHD, members also noted the quality of the feedback that they received there. Novice, in response to a question concerning why he participated in CHD, simply replied, “For the will of evolving as an artist and being noticed and able to get a bit more professional feedback than I would in other sites.” Kuznetsov and Paulos (2010) found all three of these intentions in their study of DIY communities, however, this notion of professional and/or quality feedback kept coming up in my conversations with CHD members. This is not to suggest that all of the feedback was good or professional. In fact, Koit remarked that “while some
people might give you good advice, majority of the feedback is wrapped up in slander and filth and God knows what else [...] so I just ignore everyone and I do my own thing.” However, community members seemed to stress that the feedback was good *compared to other sites*. Take this statement from Jimmysanimation, for example, about the feedback in the CHD community:

I think the kind of YouTube style feedback where you’re almost anonymous you’re just like, “I hate this. This is gay!” You know people like that that doesn’t necessarily help because that’s just someone being a hater you know. [...] There’s really no benefit there, but if you get something from someone in a community or a forum that necessarily doesn’t like it, they’re gonna [sic] do it in a way that’s kind of like apparent that says, “Ok I still love you but you’re not, you’re never gonna [sic] be able to dunk unless you really work at it or something.” And so it’s a little bit of a softer, more constructive feedback I would say from a forum or from a community than it would be from just random comments that you get depending on where you post. But at the same time if you get a lot of glowing comments on YouTube or something like that those don’t hurt. Those always help.

While anonymity is not necessarily the source of the hostility on sites such as YouTube (Lange, 2007), this perception that unfamiliarity makes it easier to be antagonistic as opposed to being helpful towards others was common amongst my interviewees. However, in the smaller CHD community, they found that others took time to not only give feedback, but to give useful, constructive feedback.

Members of the community also sought to provide feedback that would be useful in a professional setting. As discussed in Chapter 5, many of the community members would give
detailed design critiques and introduce formal terms and techniques to others. This was intentional on the part of the members, including the site admin. He too would provide feedback that would harken back to what things are like in the “real world,” especially during The Tourney. He once had to defend not accepting a submission due to the inclusion of music that was used without the permission of the creator:

This also teaches what the real world of animating is like. If there is a copyright issue with a piece of work that isn't cleared before a deadline, it gets scraped completely. (Admin)

As noted by Novice’s quote at the beginning of this section, this kind of professional feedback was one of the reasons why individuals frequented CHD.

**The Tourney**

Finally, a big reason individuals both knew about and participated in CHD was because of The Tourney. Most of the individuals with whom I spoke had either participated in The Tourney or had observed it during one or more of its proceedings. As described earlier, The Tourney is a summer bracket-based tournament in which animators are paired against one another in single elimination rounds until a final winner is crowned. In each round, the animators are expected to create an animation of at least 30 seconds that is based on a theme selected by The Tourney organizers. They each have the same amount of time to work on their animation, which is judged at the end of the round by a panel of judges based on criteria that includes creativity, incorporation of the theme, adherence to the rules (e.g., length of running time), storytelling, and skill.

During my period of observation, The Tourney was the time during which the CHD community experienced the most traffic. Participation in the forums increased, and the number of views on videos seemed to also increase. This tracked with what most of my interviewees noted as
many of them saw The Tourney as a great way to get more exposure, to get new ideas, learn new techniques, and as remarked by Kouf, to “provide me with the time limit I needed to push myself and give me a motive to actually animate something.” Unsurprisingly, these are very similar to some of the motivations for participation noted by Kuznetsov and Paulos (2010) to learn, showcase skill, get new ideas, and increase reputation.

An easy assumption to make would be that placing one’s content on sites that attract continuous levels of high traffic would be one more exposure. However, according to CHD members, the opposite can sometimes be the case. On larger sites such as Newgrounds, because there is so much content, it can be hard to stand out from the crowd (and content rated lowly by the community is entirely deleted from the site). On CHD, while it is a challenge to make it to the front page, it is worth the attempt as only a few, select videos make it there. And during The Tourney, all of the entries are highlighted and made easy to find. So, even if your video is bad – and would probably not have made the front page under other circumstances – one can expect a certain number of viewings and level of exposure during The Tourney.

Another reason to participate in The Tourney is to receive detailed feedback from the judges. During his interview, Jimmysanimation said that one of his primary motivations for participating the first time he was in The Tourney was “just to see what people were saying about […] my submissions cause you know it was a great way to get feedback from a bunch of unbiased […] reviews.” Feedback is typically given in the forums and in comment threads beneath videos published within the community during other times of the year, but feedback during The Tourney is different in that at least some of the feedback is guaranteed to come from animators with experience and at least some clout within CHD and in some cases the animation community at large. The feedback can also be more detailed in that judges have to give justifications for the scores that they
give. For example, Poster23 took off some points from one submission because the facial expressions did not include enough detail:

Started to get a bit preachy, but it ended with a poignant moral, which was great. The characters needed more facial expression, in my opinion. When the animation is that simple, a lot more detail can be added to characters without huge cost in the time it takes to animate them. Don't hold back on the artwork! :)

In another example, Poster23 felt that another entry lacked detail; not only in the facial expressions but in the story-telling as well:

There was too much in this story that was never resolved or explored when needed: The significance of Joseph's sprocket that makes [sic] it so special (over all the other sprockets in the family business) that Joseph would risk his life for it; the bullies who showed up to create a problem and then stopped existing; Joseph is crazy because... the bullies said he was crazy and stupid and other things that bullies say. I didn't buy it. It seemed more like you were showing that the protagonist is not crazy at all, that he's driven by courage or knowledge or perhaps even greed - and that's still a valid use of this theme. But because so little of Joseph as a character was explained/explored, that train of thought [sic] just seemed to go nowhere. I simply had to assume that he was just crazy, which wasn't quite as interesting as a more sympathetic quality like bravery or even cowardice. A few more emotions than just "sad" and "fearful" in Joseph's face would have helped viewers relate to him as the main character. We have to get to know him better, to make the story purposeful and engaging.
While this level of detail in the feedback is one of the reasons why many of my interviewees participated in The Tourney, interestingly, one of the few negative comments that I received about The Tourney concerned feedback from the judges. While the judges’ feedback itself was not viewed negatively, Surn mentioned that it was sometimes hard to balance what the audience liked with what the judges wanted. In the example that he provided me, he chose to create something that the audience liked despite knowing that he would incur low marks from the judges, suggesting that the critiques from the judges were not always the most influential feedback garnered during The Tourney but that the feedback from the community at large mattered as well.

Finally, The Tourney provided a nice, regular opportunity to actually animate something that would be viewed by others and that would stretch one’s creative muscles in unusual ways. The themes were usually unique and the rounds were timed giving participants a concrete start and end time. A few of my interviewees mentioned having problems with time management or finding a sufficient amount of motivation to actually start and complete an animation when it had no explicit audience or purpose beyond just for fun, and The Tourney provided a remedy to both of those problems. The Tourney had explicit start and end dates for both the rounds and the overall tournament (although sometimes rounds would be extended), there was a sizeable audience to view the resulting animation, and one’s reputation and name recognition within the community would increase as a result of participating. For some individuals, those were big motivations for joining The Tourney.

Altogether, CHD members noted very similar motivations for creating animations in the context of an online community as the individuals observed by Ito (2010b) and Kuznetsov and Paulos (2010), yet they chose CHD specifically because of its relatively convivial environment, elevated levels of constructive feedback, and The Tourney. As was probably apparent, these three stimuli are not mutually exclusive. The community climate lends itself to allowing and encouraging
feedback, and participation in The Tourney was spurred for some by the notion that even better feedback would be received. So, in many ways, these causes for CHD participation reinforce one another.
Chapter 7: Why Do You Continue to Make These Animations?

![Figure 17. Screenshots of Jimmysanimation’s the envy of the universe video. Captured 6 December 2015 from http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/558573](image)

After getting interested in animation, attempting to pick up the skills necessary to animate, and choosing to participate in CHD, what pushes animators to continue to animate? An easy answer is simply that it is fun, and as conveyed by Tomacco and Blinch during their interviews, CHD is an enjoyable place to spend time with friends and others with similar interests. Level of interest in a community of practice is a strong motivator for continued participation (Wasko & Faraj, 2000), and the animating CoP centered around CHD is no different. In addition to simple enjoyment and interest, CHD members also credited encouragement from the CHD community, a desire to seek and attain recognition and status, professional duties, and a need for a creative outlet as other reasons for continuing to make animations.

**Encouragement from the Community**

As discussed in Chapter 6, CHD is a relatively encouraging community, and when asked why they made animations, several members expressed how important other CHD community members were in encouraging them to continue to make animations. For example, when Poster24 tried to drop out of The Tourney during the summer of 2013 due to school commitments, Poster22 quickly tried to dissuade him from doing so:
you [sic] are missing the point. the [sic] predicament you are in never goes away (once you are an adult and enter the post-collegiate "real world"). you [sic] will always have more obligations than time for them. this [sic] is a fantastic opportunity to figure out how to prioritize, but more importantly, how to give 100% to the time you DO have.

if [sic] the idea you have takes you 50 hours and you only have 20 hours to work with, think of a new idea that only takes you 20 hours. it's [sic] just that simple. you [sic] have to get creative. you [sic] don't have to sacrifice any school or homework time, but you will have to sacrifice most or all of your free time – video games, social activities, tv [sic] and possibly a little bit of sleep. it [sic] is going to suck for awhile [sic], but you won't be a quitter and you can be proud of your effort, win or lose.

don't [sic] frame this up like college or day-to-day obligations are making you quit. if [sic] you want to finish, you will. and [sic] if you want to quit, you will.

you [sic] can do this.

This type of encouragement from members serves as both a motivator for participating in CHD and a motivator for continuing to animate in general. Encouragement did not always come in the form of a direct entreaty such as the one in Poster22’s quote above, however. Sometimes, the encouragement was simply a comment after a video that stated, “Looking forward to the next one!” That kind of support and the fact that someone had bothered to look at their animation and comment on it leads to the next motivator for continued participation: recognition and status.
Recognition and Status

In general, both the pursuit and attainment of recognition and reputation or status serve as big motivators for continued participation in online communities (Ito, 2010b; Oreg & Nov, 2008; Wasko & Faraj, 2000; Yee, 2006). This is no different in Cold Hotdog. Many of the community members expressed the desire to get more publicity or as Jimmysanimation put it, to get “validation” for their ideas.

There are several ways that status can be gained and demonstrated in Cold Hotdog including knowledge demonstrations, name-dropping other community members (to mark one’s connections and/or familiarity with the community and its participants), participating in the forums, and through the different ways that members claim to have acquired their animating skills. Higher Flash knowledge is associated with higher status in the community. To show their knowledge of Flash and animating, in addition to simply creating and sharing animations, members would also post tutorials, code fragments, or give feedback in the forums in ways quite similar to the reputation-gaining observed by Oreg and Nov (2008). The conferring of status was then given by those who used the materials and advice who would then give credit to the authors of such material:

Actionscript wise [sic] I learned all of I know from Poster25 and Poster10. (Poster9)

As for actionscript, I learned some from Poster10. (Poster11)

I learned animation technique from Poster26 and Poster2. (Poster13)

This act of giving credit to others for helpful materials also served as a way for the individuals using the materials to gain status. By mentioning the names of active community members or authors of materials on the site, they were showing that they too were a part of the
community and that they had some of the skills necessary in order to be considered a contributing community member. This name-dropping performance was not always successful, however. In the following quote, Poster27 unsuccessfully tried to give credit to some of the community members for work that they had contributed that he found useful:

i learnt [sic] it myself [sic] on my own, i [sic] did some tutorials to make webcam funny things, but most of all the people of chd inspired me, Poster2, Poster10, Poster28(cant [sic] remeber [sic] the full name) and Poster29 (again cant [sic] spell).

Structurally, this statement does not look that much different from the statements from Poster9, Poster11, and Poster13 above. Poster27 mentions learning a skill, mentions what materials they used, and then credits the authors of that material. However, this statement was met with a “who are you?” retort in the forums by Poster26, a frequent poster and moderator in the forums. This suggests that just following the template for giving credit is not enough. One had to be at least an intermittent participant in the forums for this method of status attainment to be successful.

Finally, the way in which animating skills are acquired also affects one’s status in the community. As discussing in Chapter 5, there are six ways that members profess to have acquired their animating skills: formal schooling, help from friends or through an apprentice-mentoring relationship, online resources including tutorials and messages boards, books and other offline materials including the in-tool tutorials in the Flash software, reverse engineering Flash videos or learning by example, and trial and error. Those who learned with little help (e.g., by reverse engineering Flash videos or using books or tutorials) were regarded more highly than those who took courses or received help from friends:
art [sic] degrees are bs; anyone with an iota of talent/drive can teach themselves stuff by the info on the internet and get a 'career' going by using this thing called networking + pirating software. (Poster30)

pls [sic] explain to me what you expect to do w/ your 2d animation degree i [sic] am genuinely curious bc [sic] as i [sic] see it you are falling for a scam invented by universities to trick idiots into giving them money (Poster31)

While it was not the case that individuals with formal schooling were completely disregarded as these quotes might suggest, community members who were “self-taught” were praised more for having done so. See Chapter 5 for a more complete discussion on these skill acquisition methods.

Professional Duties and an Outlet for Creative Expression

The final two reasons for continuing to make videos are similar but not quite the same. The first of the two is because animating is a professional duty. I was surprised by how many CHD members that I encountered were working in a creative field either making animations or in a tangentially related field like graphic design, media, or web development. For many of those individuals, animating was not just a hobby but it was also a part of their day-to-day work.

The final reason for continuing to make animations is that it serves as an outlet for one’s creative expression and is a way to improve certain creative skills. For Koit, animating is a way to challenge himself, and when his “head comes up with an idea, […] he wants] to see the idea in fruition. That’s it. It’s ideas.” Similarly, Rob’s animations are usually the result of him having “a brain fart of a funny idea, [laughing] out loud on the train on the way to the city for class, [and] then [writing] it down or just roughing boards out.” For these individuals, animating is simply how their ideas are made concrete, especially when they have active imaginations:
So in my head if you said something to me, now you could pick...I don't know you could say orange or something. In my head, I've got a dancing orange and he's doing stuff. Yep. That's just how my brain works. (Koit)

Animators relayed having to quickly sketch things on paper, write dialog snippets that came to mind while running errands, or in some instances even creating quick storyboards simply in order to get an idea out of their head and to remember it later. In instances where procrastination, technical limitations, or other reason prohibited an animator from completing an animation, the idea would continue to bother them until they could complete the project.

Freund (2011) found similar reasons for continuing to make videos in the vidding community. There, vidders made videos because of their interest in the source material, to express their ideas about new art and culture, desires to tell a story that was not already being told, and to entertain. As with the CHD members, there would almost be a feeling of frustration on the part of the vidder that an idea was not being or had not already been expressed in a satisfactory manner, so the vidder would take it upon themselves to tell the story.

In conclusion, enjoyment, encouragement from the community, recognition and status, professional duties, and the need for a creative outlet all contribute to CHD members’ impetus to continue producing animations. Perhaps it is no surprise that these motivations are very similar to the motivators for beginning to animate discussed in Chapter 4. The only reason for continuing animating that is different from the initial reasons is professional duty. This difference is foreseeable as it is unlikely that one would start animating as a job duty without having any prior experience, yet continuing to animate as a part of one’s job after already having done so is much more likely.

While there is only one new motivator for continuing to animate as compared to beginning to animate, it is worth noting the absence of some of the internal motivators uncovered for beginning to motivate from the list of motivators for continuing to animate. On balance, there
appears to be a heavier emphasis, or at least a greater recognition on the part of the CHD members themselves, on external motivators for continuing to motivate as compared to the internal motivators for beginning to animate (e.g., desire for self-development and skill improvement). I did not address this with the CHD community members that I interviewed, however, based on our conversations and my time in the community, I can offer three possible reasons for this: 1) it is hard to verbalize internal motivations; 2) the internal motivations may have been a part of the external motivations that were expressed; and 3) the sources of external motivations were not present when beginning to animate, so of course they would be mentioned more as a reason to continue as opposed to starting to animate.

I witnessed the first explanation for the motivator disparity – it is hard to verbalize internal motivations – in almost all of my interviews. When I would question the CHD members about why they starting animating and invested so much time animating and subjecting themselves to tough design critiques and competitions, the first response was always something akin to, “I like it!” Only after talking more and approaching the subject in multiple ways would some of the underlying reasons, such as a desire to improve their skills or for intellectual stimulation, come to the surface. Because of this, I relied a lot of the other content that I collected during this study – the forum postings and the videos themselves, for example – to bolster those findings. Unfortunately, there were far fewer discussions in the forums that addressed why someone would continue to animate compared to why they began animating, which resulted in a heavier reliance on my interviews than I would have liked when it comes to addressing the former concern. As such, there is a chance that my interviewing skills may not have allowed me to surface all of the internal motivators for CHD members to continue to animate resulting in this motivator disparity.

Another reason for this disparity could be that the internal motivations are wrapped up in the external motivations that I note. For example, the motivation for recognition and status from
the community could be realized by the successful achievement of lower-level desires such as improving one’s skills or desires for a challenge. One way for a CHD member to know or feel as though they have achieved the lower-level desire for skill development, for example, is if the community acknowledges and celebrates that achievement. So, while they only recall the motivation for recognition and status to me, there may have been more internal motivations present as well.

Finally, the last potential reason for the motivator disparity is simply that there may be fewer external motivators present when someone is beginning to animate compared to when they are contemplating continuing. When they are starting, they do not yet have the CHD community to lean on; they do not have the relationships that they will inevitably develop once they join the community; and they do not have the professional, animation-related responsibilities to fulfill. However, they do have all of those things after they have started to animate within the CHD community. As such, of course those external motivators would have more salience for CHD members at that point of their animating career.
Chapter 8: Lasting Impressions

![Figure 18. A comic strip by Santhosh AKA jackbliss entitled Before and After Marriage. Captured 18 June 2016 from http://jackbliss.deviantart.com/art/Before-and-After-Marriage-388922727](image)

To conclude, Cold Hotdog is an online multimedia community in which animators socialize, acquire skills, and share creative artifacts. The case study herein included participant-observation, web content analysis, and semi-structured interviews to describe CHD using the five features of a context within a general participation framework as defined by Vadeboncoeur (2006) – location, relationships, content, pedagogy, and assessment – and to address two overarching research questions:

1. What motivates an individual to move from watching animations to creating them in Cold Hotdog?
2. In what way(s) does one acquire the skills necessary to create animations?

Initial interest in animation was sparked in CHD members by cartoons, video games, comic books and comic strips, flipbooks, and animated content found in online multimedia communities,
including CHD. Moving from the consumer of these products to a producer, however, was usually spurred by aspirations for self-development, skill improvement, the desire for a challenge, intellectual stimulation, encouragement from others, the need for an outlet to express oneself, and enjoyment.

In order to figure out how to create animations, CHD members took formal courses, received help from friends or through apprentice-mentoring relationships, used online resources including tutorials or message boards, used books and other offline materials as well as the in-tool tutorials in the Flash software, reverse engineered Flash videos or learned by example, or simply used trial and error. While many individuals professed to be “self-taught”, upon further examination, many of them had used one of more of the above ways to pick up animating-related skills, especially the use of online resources and trial and error.

Despite there being several different animating and/or multimedia communities online in which CHD members could have chosen to participate and to contribute content, when asked why they chose CHD, the answers mostly focused around a collegial and encouraging atmosphere, quality feedback and professionalism, and The Tourney, which provided a challenge, an opportunity for pointed feedback, and the necessary time constraints that some individuals desired.

Finally, perhaps predictably, CHD members chose to continue animating for reasons similar to the reasons why they initially decided to animate: enjoyment, recognition and status, work, and for an outlet for creative expression.

**Cold Hotdog, Situated Learning, and E-learning**

As detailed in the Situated Learning section of Chapter 2, of the learning theories discussed in Chapter 2, situated learning, or the constructivist learning theory that contends that learning is a social activity rather than a psychological activity, is the learning theory that comes the closest to describing what I observed in the Cold Hotdog community. Relatedly, the best description for the
CHD community itself is as a community of practice – a group “of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” – as CHD has the three components of CoPs: 1) a shared sphere of interest (most of the individuals there are interested in artifacts created with the Flash software); 2) community (they work together making, sharing, and critiquing community created artifacts); and 3) practice (they share and compile resources to assist in the making of their artifacts) (Wenger, 2006).

Situated learning alone, however, is not sufficient to explain everything that I observed. The model of e-learning put forth by Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) is also useful and necessary to help describe the interaction between CHD members and technology (both Flash and the online infrastructure facilitating the CHD community itself). In their model, practices of communication, group behavior, and community emerge at the intersection of social and technical practices. This was all observed in a myriad of ways in Cold Hotdog especially as individuals found novel ways to communicate around the rigid structure of the forums that were set up for primarily textual communications, as the community set aside certain parts of the forums in which certain behaviors were expected while others were not tolerated (e.g., non-topical conversations were to held in the “chit-chat” areas only), and as individuals found ways to work around identifying themselves and maintaining their identity as conversations shifted to different platforms or to different forum servers. In each of these instances, both the technology and the individuals mutually shaped the ultimate outcome. Combining the e-learning theory with situated learning helps better explain how individuals participated in legitimate activities (and perhaps why they are doing so in a particular way), how the context and culture of the community is shaped, and how individuals created and cultivated identities within the bounds of a largely online community such as CHD.
Comparing Cold Hotdog to Other Learning Spaces

During this case study, I found the CHD community to be very much like an affinity space as defined by Gee (2005), for it is a space formed around a common interest, where both newcomers and masters share the same space; individual and distributed knowledge is encouraged and nurtured; there are many forms and routes to participation; there are lots of different routes to status; leadership is porous; and leaders are resources. Two of the initial motivations for this work were to better understand at least one informal learning space (i.e., the types of needs that are met there and cultural norms) and to identify practices that could be replicated in the development of either a similar, informal community or in a more traditional setting. However, as noted by Jenkins (2006b), it is difficult to duplicate the success of affinity spaces in the classroom. He specifically provides two reasons for this difficulty: schools have a fixed leadership hierarchy and schools have less flexibility to support learners at different stages of development. I would also add that school curriculums, the format of a typical school day, and other formal requirements make it difficult to teach the same topic in a myriad of ways so that all students have an equal opportunity to learn a topic. Yet the ability to move between learner and teacher and back again; the presence of newcomers, masters, and everyone in between; and the ability to learn in multiple ways, both offline and online, all contribute to the appeal and utility of Cold Hotdog and similar informal learning spaces.

Perhaps the takeaway to these findings is that these informal spaces cannot supplant formal learning spaces nor can we take all of the affordances of these informal spaces and try to replicate them in formal learning spaces. Instead, the spaces are better viewed as complementary. For example, creative writing can be learned both in a traditional English class and in an online fan fiction community, or computer programming can be learned both in a Computer Science class and in the online Scratch community. Nevertheless, some of the characteristics of CHD and other informal
learning spaces can be incorporated in a traditional setting. Making the classroom an encouraging environment where support comes from both instructor and fellow learners, providing opportunities for students to gain recognition amongst peers, incorporating some level of competition, and providing feedback in various ways and with varying levels of transparency are all practices that could be integrated into the somewhat rigid formal learning educational environment.

Many of the characteristics and affordances of the Cold Hotdog community could also be used to either improve existing or to inform the development of new online informal learning spaces. Perhaps the most important feature of CHD was its relatively convivial environment in which members felt safe enough to share their work and to give feedback to others. Without such an environment, a lot of the skill acquisition that involved more personal, rich interactions – especially the design critiques and the apprentice-mentoring relationships – would not have taken place or would not have taken place in such a public manner. Without the friendly environment, members may also not have found it worth participating in such a small community and would have perhaps only participated in larger sites such as Newgrounds or YouTube where they would have been guaranteed at least a larger audience for their work. Maintaining an environment in which griefing and trolling are at a minimum is very difficult, but one of the ways CHD dealt with those individuals was by providing spaces that were designated for “chit-chat” or “fun” conversations and spaces that were designated for animation-related conversations. The norms in these spaces differed, for the spaces for “chit-chat” tended to have more vulgar language, more teasing was allowed, and the conversations wildly varied from politics to body hair. Individuals who were caught harassing community members or violating some of the community norms in any spaces within the site were relegated to an “exile” space in the community until they either performed some task that the members demanded of them (e.g., posting embarrassing pictures of themselves or doing menial tasks for someone) or until some pre-determined time had elapsed. During their “exile,” users could
still comment and share content in the “exile” space, but they could not enter the other portions of
the site.

In a similar vein to encouraging a friendly environment, online informal learning spaces
should also encourage the sharing of detailed feedback, and to support this, they should provide
affordances for sharing and communicating in multiple ways. The space should provide ways for
members to communicate as much as possible using text, images, video, and/or sound. It would
also be useful to provide ways to communicate both synchronously and asynchronously, if possible.
A few of my interviewees commented that one of the things that the CHD forums would have
greatly benefited from is the ability to annotate or to even create images within the site as opposed
to having to use a standalone tool such as Microsoft Paint to make the annotation and then
uploading the resulting image. Relatedly, the space should allow uploaded media, whether sound,
image, or video, to be rendered within the site as opposed to only allowing an external link to said
media. That way both the uploaded object and all of the conversation surrounding the object can be
found in one place.

The two final suggestions for online informal learning spaces is to provide a way to
showcase some of the work in the community and to consider staging events during which
community members are encouraged to improve themselves and potential new community
members are attracted to the site. The first suggestion to highlight some of the work on the site
comes from interviewees and other CHD members’ comments about how nice it was to know that
when their work made it to the CHD homepage, they were guaranteed to get attention, and that
their work would not be drowned out by the site’s contribution volume. It gave those members
something for which to strive.

The second suggestion to sponsor events is due to the success of The Tourney in attracting
new community members and in encouraging existing CHD members to stretch themselves
creatively and critically. Very few CHD members had negative things to say about The Tourney, and the few negative things mentioned were mostly related to their trouble with time-management or with finding ways to please the judges and the audience equally – both things that are good to practice grappling with if one is considering pursuing animating in a more professional capacity. The Tourney was also an opportunity to educate those who did not participate in the competition. All individuals who visited the site to view the tournament submissions were exposed to new ideas and new concepts through both the animations and through the critiques of the judges and CHD community members. So, entering The Tourney was not required to benefit from its proceeding.

**Future Areas of Inquiry**

Though the Cold Hotdog community has changed since I started participating in 2009, there are a few things that I think would be worthwhile to study in the future either in CHD or in a similar online, informal learning community. The first would be to examine how the tone, or the general character or attitude of the community, and members’ expectations for how one should conduct themselves or what they should expect from the community affect one another. Does a hostile community change members’ expectations concerning the amount and type of help and feedback they will receive? If members expect to give and receive feedback from others, does that necessarily always suggest a pleasant environment?

It would also be worth investigating how the motivators for beginning to animate compare and interact with one another. For example, is someone encouraged by friends or family more likely to begin animating compared to someone who just needs a creative outlet? Is the desire for a challenge sufficient to spur one to begin animating or must it be paired with one of the other motivators? The findings of this case study naturally serve as the starting point to address these questions and others.
Lastly, further examining the reasons why individuals chose to willingly and voluntarily participate in public design critiques in the CHD community would add to the existing literature on design critiques. As mentioned in Chapter 5, at least one study noted that in-person design critiques are associated with a climate of fear, defensiveness, anxiety, and stress (Anthony, 1991). So, why would someone freely undergo this process and do so in public? Is it because it is asynchronous? Or perhaps because the critique is not in-person? Answers to these questions and others could be used to improve both the online and the in-person design critique process.

**Suggestions for Animators**

Finally, as I close, at the end of each interview, I asked the interviewee if they had any advice that they would like to give to a new animator. I recount that advice here for the reader:

Make sure you set yourself an animating process or structure. And what I mean by that is animating within layers or something like that. It’s just more of a technical side of it. If you can sort out that, what it means is that you’re always going to be in a sort of templated position. […] I’ve got a template right that I use for every single animation. It’s a basic thing. So here’s my loader. Here’s my intro. Here’s my outro. Here’s my credits. And I use that as the basis for every animation. […] Make sure you create a sort of template, a way of keeping everything structured, so that your next one is based on your last one. […] I learned that the hard way. I did stuff and it was all over the shop in Flash. And if I look at it now, I would struggle to understand what I even did or how I did it. Now looking at my animation that I’m creating today, it’s perfectly logical structure. This goes there. This goes there. Layered. It’s all named. All these bits and bobs, so I can understand what’s going on. And if you knew Flash, you’d
look to that, you’d think oh that’s nice, you know what that is. But if you look at my old stuff you wouldn’t have a clue what’s going on. (Koit)

I’ve heard that [The Animator’s Survival Kit: A Manual of Methods, Principles and Formulas for Classical, Computer, Games, Stop Motion and Internet Animators by Richard Williams] is very helpful. (Kouf)

Once you’ve got the basics down, once you know all the tools, everything, you don’t really need tutorials but you just need to work on yourself, you know? The best way to learn is to make your own movie or something you know? And that’s I think that’s like the best way to learn. Seriously. Like if you keep just doing only what they teach you, you don’t actually grow actually. Best thing is just grasp all the yeah just learn the rules, learn the tools everything and then just start doing your creating your own things and you know you learn on the way. Basically. (Santhosh AKA jackbliss)

If you’re in a 15-year-old-in-my-room-by-myself situation, then yes […] I would acquire Flash. That’s the way. The means is up to you. And then I would join a forum or community, and I would just kind of observe how things work there as far as what you know if the front page is your goal. It’s so cute cause on CHD there’s these kids that produce horrible animations and they’re like “Please front page this! I just want to be on the front page!” and I can understand where they’re coming from because at 22 I felt the same way. I had no skills as far as animation but I just wanted to be on there. Um so you know just see what it takes to get on the front page and set your bars a little higher, and then I mean if this ever got out to anyone I would do, I would target these individuals like an Andrew Kepple
or myself or anyone and say send them an email and be like “Hey, how did you do this? How’d you get started? I’d love to whatever.” I mean people, I think people love to be able to help other people if it’s if it’s [sic] initiated by such a fan of your work. […] It’s not like we’re celebrities where we’re gonna [sic] be like “Oh I’m too busy to talk to this kid” you know? […] It makes me feel good to talk to you about my experiences and it would make me feel good to talk to someone else like a kid that’s interested in doing what I’m doing but hopefully you know do it better to give them kind of my experience and lay of the land and stuff. So I mean that’s what I would say. I think nowadays with Twitter and email and all this crap it’s so easy to get in touch with people directly. […] It’s worth the risk if they’re like “no eff off I’m never going to talk to you again.” I mean you’re never going to meet them! (Jimmysanimation)
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# Appendix A: Cold Hotdog Interview Subjects

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Appendix B: Email Interview with Cold Hotdog (CHD) Members

Please feel free to skip or answer questions with “N/A” if they do not apply to you. Also, feel free to skip or answer questions with “N/A” if you don’t feel comfortable answering them.

Please email your responses to Brittany at bnsmith3@illinois.edu or through the personal messaging system in CHD, and if you have any questions or concerns, please direct them to Brittany at bnsmith3@illinois.edu or through the personal messaging system in CHD.

1. What name should I use to refer to you if I use one or more of your interview responses in an academic publication? It does not have to be a real name nor does it have to be your Cold Hotdog (CHD) username.

2. How did you find out about CHD?

3. How long have you participated in CHD?

4. Why do you participate in CHD? Has that reason changed over time?

5. How have you participated in CHD? Answer yes or no to each below:
   - Have you participated in the forums?
   - Submitted videos to be displayed on the main CHD page?
   - Submitted videos in the forums for feedback?
   - Submitted music to be displayed on the main CHD page?
   - Submitted music in the forums for feedback?
   - Submitted images and/or comics to be displayed on the main CHD page?
   - Submitted images and/or comics in the forums for feedback?
   - Other_________________________

6. If you participate in the forums, what functionality, if any, do you wish were present in the forums that isn’t there (for example, the ability to sketch in the forums)?

7. In what other online communities do you participate?

If you do not currently draw and have never drawn, please skip to question 11. Otherwise, please continue.

8. When and why did you start drawing?

9. What software, if any, do you use to draw?

10. How did you learn how to draw?
If you do not currently make and have never made animations, please skip to question 22. Otherwise, please continue.

11. When and why did you make your first animation?

12. What was your first animation about?

13. What software did you use to make your first animation?

14. How long did it take you to complete your first animation?

15. How did you learn how to animate?

16. Did you use any books or manuals to aid you when you first started animating? If so, which books? Do you use any now?

17. Did you use any online sites, forums, or other online resources to aid you when you first started animating? If so, which ones? Do you use any now?

18. What software do you use to make animations now?

19. How do you come up with ideas for your animations?

20. On average, how long does it take you to make an animation now?

21. Describe a time when you had difficulty completing an animation. What were the problems, and how did you solve them (if you did, in fact, manage to solve them and complete the animation)? If you didn’t solve them, why didn’t you; what were the obstacles?

General questions

22. Have you taken any art, theater, programming, or animating courses or any course that teaches audio/visual skills? If so, which courses and at which grade level?

23. Do you know or have known anyone in real life who draws or makes animations? If so, how do you know them (i.e., are they family, friends, a teacher, met through CHD, etc.)?

24. Have you ever helped any other CHD members with their drawings or animations? If so, what kinds of help did you provide and how?

25. If you have given help to other CHD members concerning their drawings or animations, when providing help, how did you communicate your instructions (e.g., screenshots, code snippets, text, video, etc.) and why did you choose that method of communication?

Demographics questions

26. How old are you?
27. In what country do you reside?

28. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
   - Less than high school
   - High school/GED
   - Some college
   - 2-year college degree
   - 4-year college degree
   - Master's degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Professional degree (e.g., JD or MD)

29. If you are employed, in what kind of industry are you employed?
   - N/A
   - Automobiles
   - Business Services
   - Chemicals
   - Consumer
   - Consumer Finance
   - Health Care and Pharmaceuticals
   - Industrials and Materials
   - Media
   - Metals, Mining, Oil, and Gas
   - Technology
   - Telecommunications
   - Transportation Services
   - Utilities
   - Other _____________________________

30. May I ask any follow-up questions at a later date if I have any?

31. Feel free to include any other information that you desire below including ways to improve these questions!
Appendix C: Webpage Text Describing the Case Study to Cold Hotdog Members

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

My name is Brittany Smith (http://people.lis.illinois.edu/~bnsmith3/; bnsmith3[at]illinois[dot]edu), and I am a Ph.D. student working under the supervision of Dr. Michael Twidale (http://people.lis.illinois.edu/~twidale/; twidale[at]illinois[dot]edu), a professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (http://www.lis.illinois.edu/) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (http://illinois.edu/). If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact either or both of us.

The purpose of this research is to examine the motivations behind participation, skill acquisition, and skill transfer amongst members of an online multimedia community (heretofore referred to as "the community"). This research will include participating in the community, looking at past and present forum posts and content contributed to the community, and interviewing some community members about their experiences as a member of the community. This study, which should take about one year’s time, will contribute to the completion of my doctoral dissertation. As such, the results from this research will be distributed in conference papers, journal articles, a dissertation, and other academic publications deemed appropriate.

Confidentiality

In this study, we will make every effort to not reveal personally identifiable information in publications based on this research. We will not use your username when referring to you in publications. We will instead assign each person with a pseudonym. Your actions or things you say may be presented in publications without specific reference to you, referenced only by the pseudonym we assign to you, or combined anonymously with the actions and words of other participants.
All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researchers.

Risks and Benefits

This project will have no more than minimal risk associated with it. The only risks that you may incur have to deal with privacy and reputation as well as a breach of confidentiality.

Risks to privacy and reputation will be addressed with the use of pseudonyms as noted above so that no observed activities, work, or comments can be attributed to your real-world identity.

To avoid the risks that may occur if you disclose sensitive information and your confidentiality is breached, we are refraining from attaching real names to the pseudonyms that will be used throughout this study.

You will not be paid for your participation in this research project, nor is it expected that your participation will bring you any tangible benefits. However, your work practices may improve after reflecting on your work and experiences after participating. Additionally, if the expected insights about motivation and skill acquisition in an informal setting are uncovered, the benefits could be great when those insights are utilized not only in informal leisure and work settings but also in formal arenas, e.g., classrooms, in which the same skills are typically learned and/or demonstrated.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to engage or communicate with me in the community. You are also free to decline to participate in any interviews that may take place. If you do not want to participate or if you choose to participate and later withdraw (you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind), you can do so by contacting Brittany (bnsmith3 [at] illinois [dot] edu) or Dr. Twidale (twidale [at] illinois [dot] edu).
We will then no longer include any of your comments, actions, or work contributed to the community in our analysis or any publications that result from this study.

**Questions About the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study or after its completion, please contact Brittany Smith (bnsmith3 [at] illinois [dot] edu) or Dr. Twidale (twidale [at] illinois [dot] edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact

University of Illinois Institutional Review Board

Suite 203

528 East Green Street

Champaign, IL 61820

(217) 333-2670

irb [at] illinois [dot] edu

You may contact the IRB office collect at the number above if you identify yourself as a research participant.