CONCEPTUALIZING AUDIENCE IN DIGITAL INVENTION

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by

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CHAPTER 1

Inventing an Audience: Unpacking the Relationships between Invention and Audience

Amanda thinks about her mom as she begins writing.¹ She wonders whether her mother would approve of what she posts. She asks herself whether she is saying too much—her mom has told her for years that it is dangerous to give away details which can help someone find her in the real world.

Joe worries whether what he is writing will be enough to attract the right responses. He tries to make it sound important, but it is hard to convince a potential employer that some aspect of his experience as a tent erector will really translate into successful employment for a sports franchise.

Uncommon has in mind one special someone when he writes. He wonders whether she is online right now and how soon she might happen across his profile and respond. In his past experiences, he has found that women were not as willing to respond to others as men.

¹ All participants provided a name of their own choosing for use in these studies.
Pam thinks about her career. She contemplates the possibility of a co-worker finding her online at this dating site. She feels a little embarrassed about this public display, but then, she figures, everyone else is doing it. And, if a co-worker finds her, that means he or she is on here, too.

Each of these individuals was engaged in the process of profile writing, a particular rhetorical act situated within an online digital environment. Whether writing for a dating site, as Uncommon and Pam were, or for a professional networking site, as were Amanda and Joe, they each faced the challenge of translating various aspects of their identity into a text designed to persuade someone else to contact them. This dissertation investigates how writers composing profiles for these two digital forums make decisions about identity construction based on their understanding of audience.

The two digital environments, an online dating site and a professional networking site, both ask each user to compose a profile about him or herself as a means of participating in the site. These profiles are then viewable by particular audience members, and audience members may provide responses to writers’ profiles. The dating site focuses on the writers’ personal qualities and emphasizes the writers’ identities as potential mates. The professional networking site encourages writers to discuss their professional and educational backgrounds and does not incorporate personal interests and beliefs as much. However, both sites essentially ask each writer to present an online identity by composing a profile, and in both sites, profiles are used to elicit responses from audience members. The decisions the writers face when composing may potentially be influenced
by a variety of factors, including both cognitive and social elements. The choices writers make when constructing online identities also may take into account concerns about impression management.

Impression management, as described by sociologist Erving Goffman (1959), suggests that the choices individuals make about their identity construction consist of goal-directed behaviors occurring at either unconscious or conscious levels. When an individual engages in impression management, whether deliberately or not, that action is an attempt to control or persuade an audience or a fellow interlocutor to adopt a particular interpretation of the person doing the persuading. This construct from sociology seems potentially useful for application within rhetoric and writing studies, in that writers also seem likely to make choices about how to construct their identities in online writing situations. Impression management, then, may provide a means of discussing those choices. Further, writers’ impression management concerns may incorporate both social and cognitive considerations, as explained below.

The cognitive aspects of primary interest are writers’ problem-solving and goal-setting. These two facets correspond to rhetorical invention activities. Within rhetoric and writing studies, the socio-cognitive school typically understands writing as problem-solving. Problem-solving, in this dissertation, involves looking at how writers construct and respond to the rhetorical problem of identity construction as they compose within a particular digital location. Goal-setting is often connected with problem-solving, and again shows correspondence to writers’ invention processes (Flower & Hayes, 1980a).
Flower and Hayes (1981) identified “goal-setting” as part of the writing planning process, and they explained that these goals are “created by the writer” (p. 281). Writers establish goals and then work toward them, while often navigating difficulties and pitfalls—acts of problem-solving. The process these scholars identified includes both “procedural” and “substantive” goals (p. 281), which in turn incorporated both higher- and lower-order goals. Flower and Hayes also observed that goal-setting was ongoing throughout writing (p. 287). This dissertation does not seek to develop a comprehensive cognitive process model of digital composing; however, these two particular aspects—goal-setting and problem-solving—may be useful constructs for investigating how writers make decisions about identity construction in writing within the particular socio-cultural context of digital profiles.

The social becomes intricately intertwined with the cognitive in writing situations: writers’ audiences, even when cognitively constructed in the writer’s head, incorporate socially-based knowledge. Specifically, when a writer considers his or her audience, this consideration takes place within a particular social context, which may be shaped by knowledge of prior audiences, analysis of the current audience, and even speculation about future audiences. For example, Nelson (2008) discussed several potential roles for audience as a construct. He explained that audience “seems to have much heuristic value, because writers can generate material for their texts through anticipating possible responses, and also epistemic value, because writers must learn (if they do not already know) much of what their audience might know” (p. 439). In Nelson’s example, the writer’s generation of material through rhetorical invention constitutes a cognitive
activity. However, this cognitive activity is consistently moderated by analysis of the social situation, in particular the audience, for whom the writer is composing. As such, the significance of both the cognitive and the social comes clearly into view.

The cognitive and the social may be fruitfully connected through the impression management construct. While impression management was originally conceptualized and investigated within face-to-face settings, it may well provide means for better understanding the particular goals writers develop when writing online. This possibility arose from a reconsideration of the goal-setting behavior that Flower and Hayes (1980b; 1981) identified in non-digital writers. Specifically, the goal-setting that those authors observed may well have incorporated, at times, a form of impression management. As Goffman (1959) posited, impression management behavior is intended to control and persuade others to adopt a certain impression of the individual doing the controlling. As such, it seems clearly to be a rhetorical behavior because of the significant role of persuasion within the construct. Goffman argued:

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. (pp. 3-4)
In this statement, impression management takes on a definitional role. As rhetorical scholars have shown, definitional considerations are certainly within the purview of rhetoric (e.g. Nadeau, 1964; Schiappa, 2003). Accordingly, impression management seems potentially relevant to myriad writing situations, both digital and non-digital. However, several distinctions between the digital and non-digital settings are worthy of mention first to delineate the potential restrictions upon impression management behavior as encapsulated within the writer-audience relationship.

Within the particular rhetorical situation of digital profile composition, the possible actions of the audience seem restricted compared to a face-to-face situation. This digital setting allows the audience to choose from the following choices: leave the writer’s profile, save the profile for later reference, or initiate contact with the writer. Moreover, in a face-to-face setting, the interlocutor may directly request more information or clarification and may provide immediate feedback to the rhetor through multiple modalities, such as facial expressions, gestures, and supportive words. While online, the feedback may be near-instantaneous, but the available modalities are perhaps fewer.

In addition, the writer’s rhetorical goals within digital profile composition may differ from a writer composing in a different genre, particularly in one which is non-digital. For instance, Collins and Gentner (1980), in an early attempt at developing a process model, identified four key objectives of writers: gaining a reader’s attention, writing in a comprehensible manner, composing a memorable text, and persuading a
reader (pp. 59-60). While these four objectives remain relevant in digital environments, the added immediacy of audience response possibilities means that writers may also hope to gain immediate feedback. Generally, it seems likely that the digital profile composer may have an additional objective beyond those identified by Collins and Gentner. The digital writer, whether writing a profile for a professional networking site or a dating site, may compose with the intent to attract responses from desirable audience members.

Interactions with that desired audience member may be moderated in advance, in situ, or retroactively, through impression management tactics. Goffman explained that “preventive,” “defensive and protective practices” (pp. 13-14) comprise individuals’ attempts to manage the impressions others receive. He observed these practices within the context of face-to-face engagements, noting that individuals employed prevention to avoid potentially damaging occurrences. Defensive practices referred to incidents when an individual tried to maintain his or her own projected self, according to Goffman. Individuals’ attempts to preserve the face of others were described by Goffman as protective practices. Within the context of digital writing research on profile composition, preventive and defensive tactics are likely the most salient of the three practices. Writers within these environs may invoke practices designed to prevent misunderstandings about who they are—preventive tactics; they may also engage in damage control—defensive tactics, when they perceive that a misunderstanding has occurred.
Acts of impression management within digital sites\(^2\) have been documented in the literature (e.g. Donath & boyd, 2004; Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). These studies examined the messages writers attempted to convey through their impression management processes. The former study identified impression management as a factor in writers’ online friend-selection processes in that “public displays of connection” helped writers establish their digital identities (Donath & boyd, 2004, p. 219). The latter study discussed the challenges online dating site users faced when balancing impression management concerns against the desire to represent themselves honestly within their profiles. For example, dating site users sometimes negotiated tension between impression management and honesty by creating a profile which reflected “an ideal self” (Ellison, et al., 2006). As writing moves increasingly online, it seems worthwhile to deepen our examination of both the cognitive processes and the social practices informing identity construction choices as they occur in written products and during writing processes within these relatively uncharted waters.

When conceptualizing impression management in conjunction with goal-setting and problem-solving processes identified in social-cognitive research, it becomes clear that impression management can be seen as other than a sociological function. Impression management also involves rhetorical action, as its purpose is to persuade an audience of the veracity of the argument. It seems probable, then, that online impression

\(^2\) Impression management practices have also been documented within non-digital writing. Ivanic (1998) discussed impression management in adult students’ academic writing. Arndt and Bigelow (2000) investigated how hospitals used impression management strategies within annual reports to justify changing institutional structures.
management, as part of writers’ invention processes, may incorporate several possible aspects of audience consideration.

For example, audience analysis may play into digital writers’ impression management behaviors as they engage in rhetorical invention activities. As in print texts, writers may find it important to contemplate potential audience members as a means of composing effective appeals—audience addressed (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). Ede and Lunsford distinguished between audience addressed and audience invoked, suggesting that the former represents the real people one composes for, while the latter represents the audience constructed within the writer’s head. If writers do engage in addressing audiences while composing online, it is worth considering whether they do so methodically, haphazardly, or in some combination of the two.

Writers might also engage in active construction of the audience as they compose within digital environments. Active audience construction connects both the cognitive and the social, as it involves invoking an audience (Ede & Lunsford, 1984) – an act of cognitive construction, which is based upon knowledge of prior social interactions and conventions. Accessing this type of data about heuristics writers are already using can aid in the deliberate development of heuristics for digital writers who want further assistance in their digital composing processes. In particular, this may provide a deeper understanding of how writers construct online identities that support the rhetorical goals they bring to digital profile writing.
To more fully develop the rhetorical nature of the writers’ goals, it is important to further clarify the concept of constructing an online identity. For the purposes of this dissertation, identity construction refers to the processes and practices writers use to compose a print-linguistic representation of their discoursal selves (Ivanic, 1994, 1998) within a digital profile. Writers may well have multiple identities that are dependent on (or applied within) the particular setting and aspect of the self under consideration. For example, a person may identify as a heavy metal fan in an online site such as MySpace, but might prefer to identify as a literary critic on Amazon.com. Ivanic usefully directed the focus to writing, however, when she explained that “identities are constructed in one’s writing through what is said and through discourses in which the writer has already participated” (Ball & Ellis, 2008, p. 502). Ivanic (1994) suggested further that writers were “positioned” by their discourse and that the various identities belonging to an individual may shift in prominence depending on the context: sometimes certain aspects of one’s identity may be hidden or may counter other aspects (p. 4). This dissertation accepts Ivanic’s understanding of identity construction in reference to the discoursal self. In these studies, the interest is in how writers apply the concept of audience as an impression management device used for constructing their discoursal identity.

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3 Ivanic (1998) identified four aspects of identity: “autobiographical self,” “discoursal self,” “self as author,” and “possibilities for self-hood” (p. 23). She explained that the discoursal self is what the writer “consciously or unconsciously conveys of themself (sic) in a particular written text” (p. 23).
As audience seems central to understanding digital composing and the potential role of impression management, the primary research questions informing this dissertation are as follows:

- In what ways, if any, do digital writers use and think about the concept of audience during their invention processes when composing profiles?
- And, in what ways, if any, do writers’ conceptualizations of audience contribute to their attempts at impression management as part of their identity construction within digital profiles?

Audience, whether addressed, invoked, or through other yet undetermined means, provides a useful construct for helping identify both practices and processes as it may encompass both social and cognitive aspects. As a result, this study employs a social-cognitive approach to allow access to a rich data set encompassing both facets.

The next two sections introduce the theoretical background informing the study. The first explicates the rise and fall of the cognitive school and situates this dissertation within the social-cognitive approach. The subsequent section briefly delineates several key facets of digital composing. Following these two sections, this chapter reviews the literature on rhetorical invention and audience. The chapter closes by connecting these themes.
Theoretical Background: Social Cognitive Influences

The cognitive approach was of great value in early composition studies as it allowed access to writers’ processes in ways that had never before been documented. Focusing on writers’ processes, this approach examined writers’ mental constructs of their audiences and their plans for composing (Flower & Hayes, 1980b). The budding awareness of the highly iterative nature of writers’ processes (Emig, 1971) contributed to the demise of the linear stage theory of writing. Several cognitive models were advanced—most notably those of Flower and Hayes (1981) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987).

Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed a three-section model of the writing process, consisting of the task environment, writer’s long-term memory, and cognitive writing processes (such as planning, translating, and reviewing text). These authors (1980) also developed a taxonomy describing the ways writers planned their texts. Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987) models focused on the distinction between “knowledge telling” and “knowledge transforming” (p. 5). Knowledge telling, for these scholars, dealt essentially with content-retrieval by writers. On the other hand, they defined knowledge transforming as incorporating greater rhetorical awareness. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia, writers who engaged in knowledge transforming incorporated the skills from the knowledge telling model, but then added a focus on problem-solving in that they evaluated whether the text they were producing was actually accomplishing the particular rhetorical goals. The second approach incorporated movement between “developing
knowledge and continuously developing text” (p. 12). While their models are useful for understanding particular ways of writing, they simultaneously imply a potentially problematic deficit model by situating knowledge telling as less desirable than knowledge transforming.

Despite the useful insights of the cognitive approach, it encountered stern critique as social constructionist methodology came to the fore within rhetoric and composition studies. For instance, Porter (1992) equated the cognitive approach (i.e. Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1983) with George Campbell’s faculty psychology audience analysis methods (see below) in that, he suggested, it relies too heavily on a “managerial” view of communication. In other words, it assumed a one-to-one correspondence between sender and receiver with the aptly named receiver acting as a mere passive receptacle, as opposed to behaving as an active interlocutor.

Research has demonstrated that the managerial view is indeed limited and potentially problematic from a rhetorical perspective. While the audience may not actively participate in a verbal debate, as both audience studies and rhetorical studies show, even the seemingly passive receiver is actually actively constructing meaning (McQuail, 1997; Roth, 1990). That is, audience members are actually better thought of as “buyers and users” or even business entities, instead of simply “receivers” (McQuail, 1997, p. 11). However, this now prominent understanding of the active audience initially developed slowly within the scholarship. Audience studies began from a stimulus-response paradigm which suggested that viewers were provided a stimulus, which had the
possibility for manipulating their responses. Accordingly, they responded to that stimulus. Audiences were viewed as nearly child-like and in need of protection (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003). More recently, the field of audience studies has moved in other directions, such as the uses and gratifications school, which suggests that audience members have access to a variety of possible ways of meaning-making; they are not the puppets previously depicted. Rather, the audience members may “use the same media to meet different needs according to their wants” (p. 6). McQuail observed that contemporary audience studies scholars typically view the audience member as “more or less active, resistant to influence, and guided by his or her own concerns, depending on the particular social and cultural context” (p. 142). The audience is no longer a recipient, but may even take on the role of co-creator of content.

Some rhetorical scholars have also suggested that audiences are indeed active participants within discourse. Roth, writing as a poststructuralist within composition and rhetoric, argued that the linear communication model was an inadequate representation of encoding/decoding. Although the cognitive approach identified the writing process as non-linear, its understanding of the communication model was primarily linear. Roth claimed the linear communication model denied the possibility of both invention and revision as iterative activities, and ignored readers’ “meaning-making” potential (p. 176). Roth traced this affinity for the linear model to an assumption that thought comes before

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4 See Wertham (1954) for an example of an audience-protectionist stance. Wertham based his discussion on immorality within comic books. Adorno (1975/2003) suggested the audience was so far degraded that it could not be protected. More recently, Barker (1997/2003) examined the horror film Child’s Play and identified a moral tale within it. Based on this example, he argued that audiences did not need protection.
language, and he applied Vygotskian theory to deconstruct this notion, arguing that thought is sometimes “contingent upon language” (p. 176). In sum, Roth suggested that words cannot perfectly reflect meaning: the audience “isn’t just a passive recipient” (p. 177) but instead actively contributes to constructing meaning.

Because of the limitations associated with the cognitive approach, Porter (1992) posited several questions encouraging greater audience consideration. Porter asked: “In what forms does the writer receive information about audience? How does the writer construct an image of audience? Assuming that an image can be constructed, how does the writer connect this image to textual strategies?” (p. 49). These questions suggest that in addition to considering cognitive aspects of writing processes, researchers need to ask questions about how the writer conceptualizes the social situation, in particular the audience.

Both Hayes and Flower have separately attempted to respond to these questions and the attacks on the cognitive school. Hayes (1996) continued to revise the original writing process model from his perspective as a psychologist and eventually developed a two-section model which he referred to as an “individual-environmental model” (1996, pp. 4-5). His revision included an expanded understanding of both emotive and social influences. He broadened the task environment to incorporate audience and co-authors, as well as additional elements of the physical setting. These additions were linked into writers’ cognitive processes. Within the individual section, he included four interacting boxes with various sub-processes defined: “motivation/affect,” “working memory,”
“cognitive processes,” and “long-term memory” (p. 4). He acknowledged that he had not developed the social as fully as it likely deserved because of his own intellectual focus (as a psychologist) on the role of the individual (p. 5). However, Hayes stated emphatically:

Indeed, writing depends on an appropriate combination of cognitive, affective, social, and physical conditions if it is to happen at all. Writing is a communicative act that requires a social context and a medium. It is a generative activity requiring motivation, and it is an intellectual activity requiring cognitive processes and memory. No theory can be complete that does not include all of these components. (p. 5)

Hayes’ response seems to answer the concerns that Porter raised, in that he overtly acknowledged the need to account for social context within writing situations, in addition to identifying several other key areas within writing processes.

Flower also answered the critiques. To that end, she moved away from her early psychological modeling of cognitive activity, and instead introduced a social-cognitive approach with a more overtly rhetorical emphasis. First, Flower (1994) suggested that communication is purposeful. Language is more than a system of representation; written language is used for articulating, negotiating, and communicating ideas between interlocutors according to a purpose. This communication path is not the straightforward one articulated in early communication studies. Instead, Flower argued that it involves rhetorical action, which itself leads to multi-dimensional constructions of events. Further,
the purposes of those communications are created within a social context, and as she suggested, the context is rife with constructed “tensions between personal agency, social influence, and received knowledge” (Flower, 1994).

Against this background, the social-cognitive approach applied within this dissertation addresses Porter’s critiques by viewing language as purposeful, rhetorical, and socially situated—and it recognizes the possibility of tensions between the various components of the rhetorical situation. Simultaneously, these studies leave room for helpful elements from the cognitive school, in particular their focus on how writers plan and establish goals.

For these reasons, this research includes a carefully triangulated set of methods designed to elicit data about the influence of audience and invention in regard to both social context and cognitive functions within digital settings. In the following section, the digital setting is further explained by developing a working definition of digital profile composition.

Defining the Digital Terrain

This dissertation is written within the context of a digital Web 2.0 world. Digital text is text which has been stored as binary data which a computer can then reconstruct for projection as an image (G. Bonvallet, personal communication, March 23, 2011). Web 2.0, as O’Reilly (2007) argued, is conceptualized with the network itself as the platform. Technologies within Web 2.0 are platforms and or services that enable and assist in social interaction; in essence, Web 2.0 is service-based, not product-based.
O’Reilly explained further that Web 2.0 platforms are typically built and then turned over to users to create and maintain content, as such the service benefits from the power of the crowd. This version of the web is experienced as “data on an epic scale” (Anderson, 2007, p. 14) which is open to being remixed and even hacked (O’Reilly, 2007, p. 32). Another key feature of Web 2.0 is “media convergence” which signifies, the
flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is a word which manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes, depending on who’s speaking and what they think they are talking about. (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 2-3)

The extant literature encompasses many issues regarding the nature of digital composing, but for the sake of this dissertation, four key points are salient in defining online digital profile composition.

First, interactivity is a fundamental feature of digital composing, as online locations typically offer more immediate connections between author and audience than print environments generally can. Some scholars have suggested that digital texts are inherently more interactive than print texts (Bolton, 1998), although it is highly debatable whether certain qualities are inherent within digital writing technologies (or any writing technologies). McQuail (1997), for instance, argued that technologies themselves are
actually “subordinated to social practices and definitions…that already exist” (p. 126).

Haas (1996) also took on what she referred to as “The Technology Question” and suggested that “cultural tools and cognitive activity constitute one another in a symbiotic relationship, and that symbiotic relationship is based in the embodied actions of human beings” (p. xiii). Haas’s view seems to most fully embrace both the social and the cognitive, while successfully finding a home for technology which does not imbue the technology itself with an inappropriate level of autonomy. While this is not the place to engage with debates about the origins of interaction with technology, it seems clear that digital technology encompasses spaces allowing for and often encouraging human interactivity.

Second, digital composing often involves intertextuality. The New London Group (1996) suggested that intertextuality was a vital feature of digital texts which needed to be accounted for when teaching design. Using intertextuality to aid in invention processes may include, among other things, reading others’ texts, referring to previously developed or evolving genre schemas, and viewing other sources both online and in print. Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola (1999) proffered a definition of intertextuality for the screen, which this study accepts. They wrote:

Where ‘intertextuality’ has long been understood at a conceptual level- text citing text citing text in an unseen network of reference- we now have conditions that allow it the possibility of it being material, visible, and navigable, writable and readable, on our computer screens. (p. 363).
Intertextuality then is a key attribute of many digital texts.

Third, writing online is often performative, and these performances may lead to positive or negative effects on audience perceptions of the performer. Goffman (1959), not yet addressing digital writing, described interactions in terms of performances in that interactions are based on only one part of an individual’s being within a particular time and place. Other elements of that individual’s identity may well be subsumed or concealed for the benefit of the audience, and these may apply to digital writing. Beach and Lundell (1998) suggested that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is about both constructing and maintaining social roles as part of performance (p. 104). Put another way, digital composing encompasses acts of discoursal identity construction which may entail both individual cognitive assessment as well as strategic social positioning. It is worth acknowledging that impression management processes can be used for good or ill online. James (2009) examined youths’ interactions in computer-mediated situations, and she found, “the self-reflection that digital spaces afford can be undermined when presenting to an audience becomes more valued and urgent than turning inward to engage in self-examination” (p. 31). In her assessment, over-indulgence in impression management behaviors sometimes led to diminished attention to other possible gains from participating in digital environs. Nonetheless, impression management can also serve important purposes as a tool for advancing one’s status, particularly within the sites this dissertation examined, and it does act as a key feature of digital composing.
Finally, digital texts often allow great potential for the writer to shape and define his or her audience by choosing whom to include or exclude within his or her network. Digital settings also may offer a potentially larger audience than that available to the average print rhetor. This potential means that the author may have many responses to his or her text, these responses may be immediate, and the author may even respond to her responders, in effect, creating an overtly dialogic text. On account of all these factors, the social seems inescapable within the digital realm. However, we have little to no evidence depicting the cognitive within this location. The dissertation works then to account for both social and cognitive facets by examining how digital writers use composing processes and practices to construct their discoursal identities within profiles.

Below the major terms are clarified and explained through a review of the relevant literature. The focus begins broadly as central issues in rhetorical invention are identified. These issues point to audience as a core concern. Part of the central argument is for audience’s key role in identity construction within digital locations. Accordingly, the literature review then turns to the extant digital research on identity construction to establish the need for further work elucidating the role of audience studies within invention in the digital realm.

*Rhetorical Invention*

As a rich field of inquiry, rhetorical invention includes both theoretical and empirical investigations. Scholars have debated the purpose of invention, asking questions such as if it should be defined as leading to the discovery of ideas or the
creation of ideas. They have also considered the nature of invention, asking whether invention is social or individual. Moreover, scholars have also considered whether invention is teachable. Scholars have also debated when and where invention occurs.

The first two categories of debate in some ways mirror the division between audience addressed and audience invoked, which Ede and Lunsford (1984) worked toward resolving with their model of audience. Essentially, both areas of debate question whether a particular composing activity occurs within the social or the cognitive realms. Ede and Lunsford’s model negotiates this terrain by answering with a qualified “both.”

The discovery versus creation binary has not reached such a ready resolution, although it has progressed due to the contemporary integration of the social constructionist and cognitive schools into socio-cognitive research. Before addressing this integration, however, it is perhaps helpful to delineate the paths already traveled.

Invention has often been situated in the binary of discovery versus creation of knowledge. Those on the discovery side suggest that ideas are out there somewhere, waiting to be uncovered. In the 17th century, Bacon was an early proponent of this approach (Atwill & Lauer, 2002; Liu, 2002). Those in the discovery camp would likely agree with the idea that thought comes before language, in that the thinking involved in the discovery process happens prior to the actual writing. Flower and Hayes’ (1980b; Hayes & Flower, 1983) model of the writing process suggested that writing happens as a result of thinking. Their model, based on think-aloud protocols, separates problem-solving from actual text production. Haas (1989) suggested, “Not only is planning the
hallmark of the expert writer, but planning may be what allows us to learn as we write: the movement between text and plan may be where ‘discovery’ during writing takes place” (p. 181). Other scholars, e.g. Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) and Pike (1964/1994), developed heuristics designed to spark discovery. These heuristics seem to suggest that one needs to contemplate ideas in varied ways to discover writing topics.

On the other side, 18th century poet and author Coleridge is credited as the progenitor of the creation model (Liu, 2002). The work of Coleridge suggested that writing occurs as a spontaneous overflow of emotion and is, therefore, based in the writer’s own self. This tradition has been adopted from literary studies into composition and rhetoric. Emig (1977/1994) proposed that writing is a mode of learning. This claim suggests that an individual can learn during the actual process of putting pen to paper. This stance presupposes a creation model, in that new ideas are created during the physical action of writing. Britton (1980/1994) was more overtly positioned in the creation camp, and he argued, “language and thinking are bound up with one another. Both writing and speaking as well are instances of the pattern-forming propensity in our mental processes… the intention to share inherent in spontaneous utterance creates a demand for further shaping” (p.xxii). His fairly Romantic view of the writing process suggests, similarly to Coleridge, an impulsive outpouring of writing and, thus, writing as creation.

More recent scholarship has rejected the binary that pits discovery against creation. Liu (2002) argued that both views are problematically Modernist in their
assumption that the writer is a kind of tabula rasa (p. 56); he suggested instead a postmodern alternative through the idea of “inventiveness.” Inventiveness, for Liu, meant recognizing both the old and the new—intertwining the present and past in such a way that neither discovery nor creation is privileged. Hawhee (2002) also problematized the discovery/creation binary. She insisted instead that invention occurs in the in-between moment characterized by *kairos*—right time and right measure.

In a digital setting, it remains unclear whether writers’ invention processes differ substantially from the early studies of writers composing with pen and paper, and whether invention for digital sites happens in ways that may be categorized as creation, discovery, or both. However, a fairly substantial body of work (e.g. Bridwell, Sirc, & Brooke, 1987; Case, 1985; Haas, 1989; Lutz, 1987) has suggested that there are differences in writers’ revision processes between on-screen and on paper. Waes and Schellens (2003) specifically noted that, “…computer writers tend to pay more attention to the formal aspects of the text than pen & paper writers” (p. 834). It seems fairly certain that writers compose differently on screen than on paper; most of the research has addressed itself to differences between these two modes of composing. The dissertation research, however, examines how invention and audience act as social-cognitive influences within digital writers’ composing processes.

The second issue associated with invention is its nature. One specific point of contention is whether invention is social or individual. LeFevre’s (1987) work began from the standpoint that thought and language are inextricably connected (p. 118); this
position situates her at least partially within the creation binary, but she expanded beyond this assertion to argue explicitly that invention is social. To that end, she provided a helpful model of invention delineating four prominent divisions in the literature: Platonic, dialogic, collaborative, and socially constructed. The Platonic approach locates invention entirely within the writer’s head. The dialogic approach, following from Vygotsky, situates invention as a process of talking to one’s self. In the collaborative approach, the writer requires external connections between herself and others in that any utterance is designed to produce a response. LeFevre’s evidence for this school of thought came primarily from studies of creativity, such as the work of Silvano Arieti. Arieti (1976) demonstrated a tendency for creative advances to occur within clusters of people working on similar projects, for example, among the Parisian writing community of the early 1900s. Finally, in the socially constructed approach, the entire writing process is viewed in terms of social, as opposed to individual, origins. This question of origins includes even the words themselves. This approach echoes Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogism and also Kristeva’s (1986) notion of intertextuality because it suggests that words are already imbued with certain meanings—when we use them in our writing, we are continuously invoking past interpretations.

A third prominent issue associated with invention is whether or not it is teachable. This concern dates back to antiquity when philosophers, particularly Aristotle and Plato, debated whether rhetoric was a knack or an art. If it was an art, as Aristotle held, then it was perceived as something innate. As a knack, according to Plato, it was something of a skill, but perhaps not really worthy of in-depth commitment because an individual either
could or could not do it (Plato, 2005 trans.). This issue came to the fore again in the late 1970s and early 1980s when invention heuristics were a research hot topic for rhetoric and composition studies. Before the process movement, there seemed to be some doubt whether writers could indeed be taught how to invent. But, the rise of process in some ways de-mystified how writing happens. Subsequently, researchers such as Young, Becker, and Pike (1973); Lauer (1984); and Emig (1977) developed ways of helping writers cope with processing demands through heuristics. The heuristic movement suggested that invention was indeed teachable. This dissertation depicts what writers do and do not know about audience, as well as how they use this knowledge when composing. As a result, my work offers specialized heuristics for composing in digital environments. These types of techniques will have direct applications in our classrooms where students often struggle to figure out what exactly they will write about, regardless of the medium in which they are writing.

The last relevant invention issue is when and where invention occurs. This question has received very different types of responses. Early process work (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Emig, 1971, 1977/1994; Flower & Hayes, 1980b; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1983) demonstrated how invention was embedded throughout the writing process. These scholars showed that writing was not necessarily linear but iterative. Research participants demonstrated how they would vacillate between composing, problem-solving, revising, and brainstorming throughout their writing. More recently, the question of when and where invention occurs has taken several new directions. For example, Quandahl (1986) defined invention according to a hermeneutic
function. She proposed that Aristotle could be read as arguing for invention as argument analysis, instead of text production.

This dissertation examines how invention is operationalized in the context of digital writing processes. Taking a page from Lauer’s (2002) notion of the diaspora of invention, this study offers a new formulation of invention research. Invention in digital locations is at least in part about making decisions about how to represent one’s self, as well as one’s arguments, in virtual locales. In this way, the linkage between audience and invention begins to become more apparent.

**Invention and Audience**

Audience and rhetorical invention have been linked in the literature dating back to Aristotle. The earliest approaches typically conceptualized the audience as real, knowable, and analyzable. As the audience was considered knowable, it was part of the invention process to conduct a mental inventory of audience members’ characteristics to inform one’s rhetorical productions in speeches specifically. In contemporary rhetoric, the audience remains an important part of the invention process; however, the audience is conceived in a broader fashion. Many scholars now believe the audience is a construction which the rhetor uses to inform his or her composing (e.g. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Others have reduced or eliminated the boundaries between the rhetor and his or her audience (e.g. Phelps, 1990). Some have located the audience within a social, textual network (e.g. Porter, 1992) or in textual characteristics (e.g. Iser, 1974). In an
increasingly digitized writing scene, the way we look at the inter-relationship between audience and invention grows increasingly rich and deserving of further inquiry.

For Aristotle (2006), rhetoric is “an ability in each case, to see the available means of persuasion” (1355b1). This definition of rhetoric encompasses both audience and invention, in that it assumes there is someone one is wishing to persuade (an audience) and there are means, able to be produced, to aid in that persuasion. The production process is, of course, invention. Nonetheless, for Aristotle, invention is essentially monologic—the rhetor conveys information to the audience, but not vice versa. Aristotle characterized the audience as knowable and analyzable. This may be due at least in part, to the immediacy of the rhetorical situation. He and his students were making arguments primarily in spoken contexts, where the audience had a clearly defined presence before their eyes.

Aristotle linked invention and audience in that the audience’s characteristics provided the rhetor with fodder to identify agreed upon premises as well as providing cues for how the rhetor should present his or her character, or ethos. In The Rhetoric, Aristotle (trans. 2006) analyzed varied categories of people for whom the rhetor might construct his ethos in particular ways. For instance, he discussed the characteristics of the young and the aged, and delineated the differences between appeals to each of those groups (1389a-1390a). Aristotle concluded his exposition on the character of the young and the old by stating, “since all people receive favorably speeches spoken in their own character and by persons like themselves, it is not unclear how both speakers and
speeches may seem to be of this sort through use of words” (1390a16). In Aristotle’s system, the rhetor must assess the premises the particular real audience is likely to abide by, and then construct his or her argument and ethos based on those premises.

Moving forward, George Campbell’s approach to audience and invention in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (POR) still conceptualized the audience as real. Writing from his 18th century perspective, he enriched the notion of the audience beyond Aristotle’s fairly reductive categories, and he viewed the audience as a more complex, multi-faceted group. In Book I, Chapter 7, Campbell delineated his general approach to appealing to the audience. In this section, he argued that rhetoric is in part about arousing passions in the audience by evoking emotion by expressing ideas, by developing the audience’s sympathies for the rhetor, and by using a vivacious, perspicuous style (Walzer, 2003, p. 81). Campbell stated in the POR, “If the orator would prove successful, it is necessary that he engage in his service all these different powers of the mind, the imagination, the memory, and the passions” (Golden & Corbett, 1990, p. 205). Campbell also encouraged the rhetor to help his audience draw rational connections between the aroused passion and the desired action (p. 210). In the subsequent chapter, he explained that each audience needs to be viewed as a particular one, one which can allow the rhetor to adapt his speech accordingly. However, he quickly concluded that audiences “may be infinitely diversified” and if the rhetor is a “person of discernment” he or she can readily determine how to appropriately address an audience of any particular character (p. 224). While Campbell’s audience analysis builds significantly beyond Aristotle’s, his approach
nonetheless conceptualized the audience as a knowable entity, and situated audience analysis within the invention process.

Aristotle, Campbell (and other contemporaries of Campbell, such as Blair and Whately) essentially viewed rhetoric through a monologic, as opposed to dialogic lens. Monologic communication emphasizes the role of the rhetor as a controller, as opposed to a collaborator. Johannesen (1996), voicing a particularly strong critique, explained that the monologic communicator:

seeks to command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit. Other persons are viewed as ‘things’ to be exploited solely for the communicator's self-serving purpose: they are not taken seriously as persons. Choices are narrowed and consequences are obscured. Focus is on the communicator’s message, not on the audience's real needs. The core values, goals, and policies espoused by the communicator are impervious to influence exerted by receivers. Audience feedback is used only to further the communicator’s purpose. An honest response from a receiver is not wanted or is precluded. Monological communicators persistently strive to impose their truth or program on others; they have the superior attitude that they must coerce people to yield to what they believe others ought to know (Johannesen, 1996, p. 69).

While clearly Johannesen has emphasized an extreme view of monologic communication, it is worth noting that proponents of this approach are less interested in relationship building. They are also perhaps more confrontational—the rhetor is quite
convinced that his or her way is best, and believes that others should agree. On the other hand, a dialogic approach would recognize the multiplicity of voices involved as well as the multiple possible answers, and accordingly, would likely place a greater emphasis on negotiating a middle ground comfortable for all parties involved.\footnote{Rogerian rhetoric has attempted to work toward win-win situations. See Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) and Teich’s (1992) edited volume.}

The idea of the audience as real and analyzable and as part of the invention process held sway until the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century. At that time, the new rhetoricians led by Burke (1969) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) initiated a significant rethinking of the relationship between audience and invention. One significant shift that Burke discussed involves one’s own self as an audience (p. 38). Burke posited that the invention process involves promoting identification between the rhetor and the audience, even when that audience is one’s self. Burke also briefly acknowledged a distinction in audience types beyond that of the ancients, when he explained that rhetoric’s purpose is persuasion, and that rhetoric’s realm encompasses “the function of language as addressed, as direct or roundabout appeal to real or ideal audiences, without or within” (p. 44). His notion of identification entails the rhetor developing a mental construction of an audience within his/her head, which then involved employing “stylistic identifications” (p. 46). Burke explained that identification can occur only when external voices, “can speak in the language of a voice within” (p. 39). The rhetor analyzes how the audience members can be persuaded to see and endorse the rhetor’s perspective by causing the audience to align with the speaker’s particular goals and interests.
Burke also introduced consubstantiation—the idea that individuals develop shared meanings with each other through shared understandings of their individual symbolic systems. He noted, “To identify A with B is to make A ‘consubstantial’ with B…. men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (Burke, 1969, p. 21, italics original). While individuals can remain unique, they can also develop a sense of overlap with another in that they develop an understanding which they hold in common.

From Burke, then, we gain recognition of the self as a possible audience, as well as increased consideration of both the internal and external possibilities of audience analysis through identification and consubstantiation. This shift allowed a role for both discovery and creation in the invention process—the rhetor could look both inward and outward to determine the most effective means of addressing the audience.

Like Burke, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) acknowledged the possibility of arguing with one’s self; however, their treatment of audience went far beyond that recognition. Their treatise re-established the significance of rhetoric in the public space, and consequently both invention and audience. They argued for the return of “reason in directing our own actions and influencing those of others” (p. 3). Their initial task was to counter those who had eliminated the realm of the probable from consideration. This necessarily opened up a significant space for audience considerations, as surely it is much more difficult to convince an audience of the probable than of a traditional logical, self-evident proof. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explained that “all argumentation aims at
gaining the adherence of minds, and, by this very fact, assumes the existence of an intellectual contact” (p. 14). From this very definition of rhetoric, we can see the interlocking of audience and invention. The audience is implied through the “minds” referred to, as well as in the notion of an “intellectual contact.” Invention itself is referenced implicitly in the first phrase—“is aimed at gaining.” This phrase suggests a process of composing in order to produce the alluded to adherence.

Although starting from Aristotle, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) significantly shifted how audience is used in the invention process. They defined the audience as “the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation” (p. 19). These authors did not view the audience as necessarily real and knowable. Instead, the audience is a “systematized construction” (p. 19). To further explain how this differs from the classical understanding of audience, they provided the example of a Parliamentary speaker who may choose to disregard some of those in the immediate physical audience, while simultaneously including some who are not actually physically present for the argumentation (p. 19). Nonetheless, they did note that this construction should be fairly close to the real beings one seeks to influence, otherwise the argument is likely to fail. The rhetor’s job, though, is one of continually adapting, even during his/her speech, to the characteristics of the audience members, whether by analyzing their values, social groups, or beliefs (pp. 22-3).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca envisioned a dynamic array of audience types for the rhetor to draw from in his/her invention processes, such as the universal audience, the
particular audience, the elite audience, the single interlocutor, and one’s self (p. 30, p. 33). Their most famous audience type, the universal audience, is one that the rhetor contemplates when composing an argument based on truths, facts, or propositions. This audience is composed of all whom the rhetor considers to be rational people. Once the rhetor has envisioned this universal audience, he/she can then proceed to develop an argument aimed at persuasion or perhaps conviction with this audience in mind. For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the audience as a mental construct was the central key in the invention process.

Walter Ong (1975) also examined audience. He brought a literary perspective to his analysis and located audience within the text itself. He explained that audiences should not be viewed as real; instead, writers create their audiences by embedding cues in the text. These cues then prompt the audience to take on the prescribed role. To make his case, Ong analyzed textual features within the opening segment of a Hemingway novel, and argued that Hemingway fictionalized his reader by using demonstrative pronouns such as “this” and “that” to point to shared knowledge. Long (1980) observed the implications of Ong’s approach for composition theory:

if audience is a created fiction, then an analysis of its traits becomes possible only as the writer defines his purpose and decides upon desirable reader characteristics. The widespread assumption that audience analysis leads to tactical decisions is reversed; a writer’s choice of alternatives determines his audiences; that is, his decisions create a very specific reader who exists only for the duration of the
reading experience… this literary theory… seems at every point to contradict or reverse the traditional rhetorical assumptions about audience. (p. 225)

While Long saw merit in this reversal as it opened up new pedagogical approaches, it was simultaneously limited by its tendency to ignore the possibility of real audiences (Tomlinson, 1990).

Iser (1974), working as a reader-response critic, also significantly discounted the writer’s role. His work focused most heavily on the interplay of the reader and the text and assumed that the reader’s role was to fill in spaces within the text. He argued, “The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized….as the reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text” (p. 274). Reiff (2004) argued that textual approaches, such as “textual rhetoric” (e.g. Ong, 1975) with its “fictionalized audience” (Reiff, p. 55), structuralism (e.g. Culler, 1975) and phenomenology (e.g. Iser, 1974) were constraining in that they tended to “ignore the social and cultural context that influences the communicative act” (Reiff, p. 72).

Essentially, these text-based approaches are limited because they fail to recognize the dynamic interplay between all the elements of the rhetorical triangle. First, the writer herself often falls below the radar and is subsumed by the text or the fictionalized reader. Second, when there is a real audience, as Barbara Tomlinson (1990) has observed, that audience is not well accounted for by these theories.

With the rise of the cognitive school, with its focus on understanding writers’ cognitive processes during composing, several new understandings of audience came to
the fore. Moffett (1968) proposed an audience continuum based on Piaget’s stages of cognitive development, progressing from sensori-motor to pre-operational, to concrete operational, and finally formal operational (Flavell, 1963). In particular, writers would progress from an immediate, egocentric understanding of audience to the possibility of greater abstraction and less immediacy. Another early study, in which researchers examined 2000 papers by secondary level students, led to the identification of another audience continuum (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975). Britton et al. argued that students progressed from writing for themselves to writing for audiences of greater distance from that self. They suggested the following stages: self, teacher, wider known audience, unknown audience, and additional categories (p. 65-66). They also posited that a greater understanding of audience was correlated to higher levels of maturity as writers. Flower and Hayes (Flower & Hayes, 1980b; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1980/1994), as previously described, investigated the writing process through think-aloud protocols. Their work focused heavily on the writer, and situated the audience within the task environment.

Also drawing from protocol analysis, Berkenkotter (1981) examined writers’ audience awareness. She assessed how writers’ rhetorical considerations corresponded to the evolution of audience-related ambitions. Five of her participants were rhetoricians and the other five were academics from other disciplines; she sought to determine whether those with rhetorical backgrounds more actively conceptualized their audiences than the other group. She concluded that the writers’ disciplinary background did not in itself determine their audience representations, but it did inform their construction of the
problem, which in turn fostered particular audience representations. As a result of her identification of the “internal representation” (p. 396) writers make of their audiences as a key element within composing, she recommended bringing audience-based heuristics into the composition classroom to aid students. In contrast, Roen and Willey (1988) believed that audience considerations during composing could potentially hamper students’ processes due to imposing a heavy cognitive load on the writer. Reiff (2004) explained, the findings of Roen and Willey “suggest that the cognitive process of imagining an audience is distinct from other writing processes, rather than simply one element in the process of defining a purpose or developing a subject” as Berkenkotter had proposed (p. 43).

The cognitive approach has met its share of criticism, such as that of Porter (1992) described above. Reiff (2004) also suggested that cognitive theories still focused on the writer too heavily. She also observed that these theories have supported a problematic “linear construction of the writer/audience relationship” (Reiff, 2004, p. 46). In response, she called for simultaneous recognition of the writer and the actual audience in writing theory.

Other scholars (Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Park, 1982/1994) provided a more focused discussion of the interconnection between invention and audience. These scholars suggested that the rhetor’s conception of the audience actually works on both an invoked and an addressed level, and that both are necessary for most writers during
composition. Park connected audience and invention by situating audience analysis within the larger rhetorical situation. Park stated:

The task of analyzing audience is a matter of identifying the nature of the contexts that are already given by some aspect of the occasion… and of understanding the relationship between those that are given and those that must be more explicitly defined within the discourse itself. (p. 253)

In contrast, Ede and Lunsford’s invoked audience is one that is in the writer’s head. The writer then provides cues for that audience, and the audience willingly takes on the roles provided in the text. Addressed is a more explicit recognition of the actual, or potential, audience during composing. Ede and Lunsford suggested most prior scholarship focused on either one or the other (addressed or invoked) whereas in actuality, both are necessary. Elbow (1987), however, asked us to take a step back from considering audience when composing. He suggested that thinking too heavily about the invoked or addressed audience may actually inhibit invention. Instead, Elbow argued that sometimes there is a place for writer-based (as opposed to reader-based) prose (Flower, 1979) as a useful part of invention, and accordingly, the audience is best saved for consideration during the revision process.

Following Burke, Theresa Enos (1990) proposed a model of a braided interconnection between rhetor and audience. She suggested that the rhetor must construct his or her ethos, which in turn is used to promote identification. Her approach brought a new twist to the inter-relation of audience and invention, in that she suggested
the audience then plays its own inventive role. Successful identification with the audience leads to the audience members’ participation in co-construction of meaning with the rhetor. Enos suggested the writer should leave spaces for the audience to enter. In some sense, Enos posited both a hermeneutic and an inventive role for the audience. The audience’s participation in text construction would probably be categorized as hermeneutic, while the audience’s role when the rhetor is actually composing would be closer to traditional understandings of invention. Working from Bakhtin, Phelps (1990) similarly suggested that the audience and the rhetor are no longer completely separated in the writing process. Instead, they are engaged in a dialogic interaction which leads to the co-construction of meaning within a text.

Porter (1992) provided a social constructionist view of audience with the discourse community at its center. He suggested defining discourse communities rhetorically, not socially, as it is constituted by “argumentative techniques, heuristic strategies, or research methodologies” (p. 87). He argued for forum analysis as a means of understanding and entering into a discourse community. Forum analysis according to Porter consists of studying the community-defining textual network by “reading its discourse, by observing its behavior, determining its classifying principles, rules of formation and (especially important) exclusion” (p. 109). While Porter’s social constructionist discourse community approach is helpful in remedying limitations of some earlier models, some remain. Reiff (2004) argued that Porter’s approach focused too heavily on texts to the exclusion of actual social ties. Further, she found the discourse community model lacking in its conceptualization of the audience as a “fairly
homogenous group‖ (p. 109). While Porter’s take on social constructionism addresses the need for recognizing all parts of the rhetorical triangle, the roles of actual readers and writers need to be accounted for more fully.

Reiff (2004) offered her own take on audience in her “Multiple Audiences” model. This model, stemming from technical communication and workplace writing studies, recognizes the audience as “complex and multi-layered” (p. 122), and allows spaces for “conflict and tension between writers and their readers” (p. 122). Reiff drew from Markel’s (1998) description of audiences as consisting of “experts,” “technicians,” “managers,” and “general readers” (pp. 115-6), as well as the notion of audiences as “primary,” “secondary,” and “immediate” (p. 116) to define her model. Each of these terms describes a type of individual who has a particular knowledge set and who will approach the text with a particular purpose in mind. For example, the expert would approach the text with a thoroughly developed theoretical understanding of the materials and with the desire to understand the implications of the proposal. The second set of terms (primary, secondary, and immediate) describes the routing procedures of the text and the resultant actions—i.e. the primary audience consists of those “directly affected,” whereas the secondary audience is those impacted by “resulting decisions and actions” (p. 116). Finally, the immediate audience consists of those who physically move the text through the organization, such as the “writer’s supervisor or other middle management” (p. 116). To engage with conflict, Reiff, following from Tomlinson (1990), suggested that responses from multiple readers be brought to bear on texts to aid writers in re-evaluating their texts, their ideological stances within text, and their rhetorical decisions.
Reiff’s Multiple Audiences model is convincing. However, her work does not account for digital constructions of audience and the potential differences that the digital environment may bring into audience considerations.

Recently, Lunsford and Ede revisited their seminal 1984 article in “Among the audience: On audience in an age of new literacies” (2009). They noted that the “roles of writers and audiences often conflate, merge, and shift” (p. 48); they began to consider the digital, and in particular, they emphasized the dissolution of stability in writer/audience identities. While they echoed their call from “Audience addressed/Audience invoked” (1984) for “analysis of precise, concrete situations” (p. 68) as means for better understanding the evolving roles of audiences, they also observed limitations to the binary they had originally proposed. They stated, “understanding the complexity of writing processes, audience awareness, and participation calls for a much more specific, grounded, and nuanced analysis than the binary of addressed and invoked audiences can provide” (p. 56). This study works toward answering their call on each front by providing a grounded analysis of several specific rhetorical situations, while allowing for the emergence of audience in ways that extend and perhaps counter the addressed/invoked binary.

Identity Construction as a Form of Impression Management: Moving Toward the Digital

As previously noted, this dissertation research investigates how writers compose print-linguistic self-representations of their discoursal selves (Ivanic, 1994, 1998). A few scholars have begun the work of connecting the act of self-representation as manifested
through identity construction to audience. Early digital research, such as Bolter (1991) and Purves (1998), depicted a collapsing boundary between writer and audience. Although not writing from a digital research perspective, Cherry (1988/1998) argued that “decisions about self-portrayal are not independent, but vary according to the way in which writers characterize their audience and other facets of the rhetorical situation” (p. 387). Cherry further unpacked self-representation by distinguishing between ethos and persona, which he argued are often erroneously conflated terms. The problematic definitional situation Cherry identified may be further clarified by employing the sociological construct of “impression management” (Goffman, 1959) as a rhetorical analytic tool.

Ivanic (1998) utilized Goffman’s idea of impression management to examine identity construction within non-digital academic writing. As a linguist writing from a social constructionist perspective, Ivanic argued “writers construct a ‘discoursal self’ not out of an infinite range of possibilities, but out of the possibilities for self-hood which are supported by the socio-cultural and institutional context in which they are writing” (p. 28). She called for more research making connections between “practices, issues of identity and texts” (p. 335), and she also suggested the importance of looking at how individuals construct their identities in different locales. This dissertation responds accordingly by moving the investigation into digital locations, as identity construction is a highly salient issue within digital domains as well.
Until recently, the digital research on identity construction mostly followed Turkle’s (1995) claim that digital identity representations are fragmented and may lack cohesion with both real-life identity and sometimes also between online locations. For example, Romano (1999) examined transcriptions from a synchronous chat situation within a classroom setting and found that women sometimes selected to identify themselves in highly gendered ways, but on other occasions they stepped into more anonymous roles. However, some recent scholarship, such as Kennedy (2006), has suggested that this is not an ethical representation of the participants because they do not view themselves as identity-fragmented. Kennedy implied this improperly imposes the researcher’s frame on the situation, instead of acknowledging the participants’ own perspectives and voices.

Drawing from the Ede/Lunsford audience model and Burke’s concept of identification, Karper’s (2009) rhetoric research began forging connections between audience and self-presentation in digital settings. She noted, “people shape (or do not shape) their Web-based self-presentations based on their perceptions of audience, and they invite or permit their audience to participate in the construction of their Web-based self presentations” (p. 268). Her findings demonstrated the rhetorical character of interactions between composers and audience members within computer-mediated communication (CMC), in that her participants actively addressed and invoked particular audiences. Of particular note, Karper identified “trust-filtering” as a tool used for audience identification and construction; “trust-filtering” refers to site-provided tools,
such as privacy settings, deployed to restrict some individuals’ access to their materials (p. 273).

Currently, scholars from a variety of fields are drawing in diverse analytic tools to assess how identity construction works online. Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006), working from communication studies and business perspectives, investigated the implementation of Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory (Walther, 1992, 1996; Walther & Tidwell, 1996) in dating site profiles. Writing from a psychological perspective, Walther and Tidwell found that CMC was typified by selective self-presentation, an idealized sense of audience, and self-introspection. Ellison et al. found support for the SIP theory through telephone interviews with dating site users, which suggested the users did typically construct their profiles with an “ideal self” in mind. The users they interviewed conceptualized honesty differently within an online setting, as opposed to a face-to-face setting, when they described the self that they wanted to be. Some users even invoked that idealized self as a motivational self-improvement tool, i.e. they decided to lose weight or exercise more based on what they had written about themselves.

Beginning the Journey

Despite the rapidly growing literature on social network sites and identity construction, the research on digital profile construction is limited and represents a gap in the literature which this dissertation research works toward filling. The digital work reviewed above comes mostly from fields outside of rhetoric. The above review of the rhetorical literature on audience and invention demonstrates the extensive background
rhetoric offers in these areas. Bringing a rhetorical perspective to bear on digital identity construction should provide numerous new insights for digital writing research in areas as potentially diverse as how invention happens in digital locations, how and what types of audience considerations actually contribute to digital composing, and how invention might be taught for digital locations.

This dissertation investigates two distinct digital sites. Within Study One (Chapter 2), dating site users’ impression management strategies are considered through analysis of interviews about their composing experiences. This study led to the identification of audience as a particularly salient concern for digital writers. Chapter 3 addresses methods and methodology for the second study, as well as introducing the core category uncovered within this study. While Study One identified audience as a key construct, Study Two allowed for a deeper investigation into how audience actually contributed to digital writers’ invention processes. Study Two also shifted the context and purpose of the composing. Instead of working from a dating site or a social networking site (SNS), the latter of which has been heavily researched (e.g. boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison, et al., 2006; James, 2009), data was collected from a professional networking site. Writers using this site generate their materials for the purposes of advancing their careers by establishing and enhancing professional connections and searching for jobs.

After the delineation of the core category in Chapter 3, the following chapter presents a series of examples which illuminate the various dimensions within the core category. Chapter Five then provides additional analysis of the data, resulting in multiple
scholarly contributions. Two key contributions are the development of a framework for understanding digital composition of profiles and the provision of a heuristic to aid those composing in digital environments. The dissertation closes with Chapter 6, which offers implications and future directions for research.
CHAPTER 2

The Role of Invention in Digital Dating Site Profile Composition

This chapter opens the investigation into writers’ invention processes and practices within a non-academic digital environment. The data described and analyzed here came from dating site participants who completed surveys about their composing processes and who provided profiles they had previously written for the dating site. In particular, the investigation considers the inventional choices writers made to represent themselves through discourse in this particular environment. Based on the analysis, it becomes clear that the audience’s role within digital composition merits additional investigation.

The first section of this chapter introduces the dating site context and demonstrates the cultural force of dating sites, significant due to their widespread usage, while simultaneously justifying their relevance as a site for writing research. The next section delineates the qualitative methods used for Study One. Qualitative textual analysis focused on surveys, with participants’ profiles used as supplementary materials. Following explication of methods, the findings are presented. The core category identified, Digital Invention Strategies, contains four dimensions which are explained in detail. Finally, implications and future directions are discussed. Accordingly, the dimensions uncovered in Study One, with their emergent emphasis on both audience and process, point to the necessity of Study Two, with its closer look at how digital writers’
considered audience while they actually composed profiles within an online professional networking environment.

*Contextualizing Dating Site Research*

Based on numbers alone, online dating sites clearly represent a significant cultural force. The world’s largest online dating site, Match.com, claimed 1.3 million paid subscribers (IAC/InteractiveCorp, 2010), and about 20 million active users (Match.com, 2008), with about 20,000 new users registering daily (Match.com, 2010b). The second largest site, eHarmony, claimed about 33 million users since its founding in 2000 (Vega, 2010), with 20 million currently registered users (eHarmony.com, 2011), and 10,000-15,000 new users joining daily (eHarmony, 2008). Match.com hired research firm Chadwick Martin Bailey to investigate online dating, and they found that 17% of couples married in the past three years met through online dating sites (Match.com, 2010a). They also found that one in five singles have dated someone met through a dating site (Match.com, 2010a). Numerous other sites also support online dating; the top ten sites cumulatively spent about $356 million on advertising in 2007 (VNU Business Media, 2008).

Other disciplines have begun to mine the wealth of dating site data, and uncovered rich results. For instance, researchers in the fields of computing, business, and communications studies have examined online daters’ attempts at “impression management” (Goffman, 1959) and online self-representations (Clark, 1998; Ellison, et al., 2006; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006; Humphreys, 2006; Lawson & Leck, 2006).
Health studies scholars have also examined the ways that users of online dating sites sift through other users’ profiles and decide who they will contact (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Waskul, 2003). The extant research is discussed below in further detail.

While the current interdisciplinary scholarship on the social processes involved in online dating provides some means of learning about interpersonal relationships, the composing processes and the self-representational practices dating site participants engage in within their discourse offer potential sources of knowledge for writing studies scholars. The sheer quantity of writing occurring on dating sites, coupled with the research from other fields which has only begun to hint at how rhetorical that writing is, suggest the rich potential of these locations for rhetoric and writing studies research.

Writing plays a significant role within these sites, as site users compose profiles designed to represent themselves to others. Accordingly, rhetoric and writing studies, broadly construed, could benefit from examining the rhetorical acts performed within dating site discourse. McKee and Porter (2008) observed:

Digital research, particularly research that involves the Internet and other online spaces, is fundamentally composition research. That is, while psychologists, for example, may be studying the interactions of participants in an online self-help forum, they are also studying writing and writers because almost all communications that occur on the Web occur in writing. (p. 712, emphasis original)
Dating sites provide potentially fruitful sources for inquiry into real-world writing practices possessing a high degree of exigency. As the participants are looking for significant others, they have a high stake in composing profiles which will attract the “right” audience members’ responses. Investigating the writing processes on these sites can enrich our understanding of rhetoric and composition, and may provide opportunities to discover how writing processes change and remain the same in varying mediums.

Online dating sites typically require each user to generate a personal profile for inclusion in the site’s database, which may then be searched by other users. Profiles provide first-impressions, and the quality of one’s profile may impact the responses and interest one can generate on the site. Although each site differs in its approach, on Meet.com—one of the most popular international dating sites, users begin their profile composition process by answering a series of pre-programmed questions related to individual preferences. These include items addressing physical characteristics, alcohol use, geographic location, pet ownership, desire to have children, and more. The user answers these questions with respect to him or herself, and selects the desired characteristics of his or her match.

The user then has the opportunity to compose an open-ended description of him or herself and the desired mate. Although dating sites do continue to update their prompts and length specifications, as of 2011, Match.com asked each profile writer to “Describe yourself and your real match” in at least 200 characters, but not to exceed 4000

\[1\] A pseudonym. Dating site participants will also be identified by self-assigned pseudonyms throughout this study.
characters. The profile writer is also instructed to create a headline to attract attention to his or her materials. The headline specifications, as of this writing, are a two character minimum and 140 characters maximum. Figure 2.1 shows an open-ended response section from Match.com, as well as one from OkCupid, which claims to be the fastest growing dating website (OkCupid, 2010).

The profile writer may use a variety of means to decide what goes into his or her open-ended responses. On some dating sites, there are additional short open-ended questions, such as “The five things I could never live without,” “how I spend my Friday nights,” and “I spend a lot time thinking about,” where users generally provide either a few words or a few short sentences. However, the dating sites often present the open-ended self and mate description on their own screens within the profile composing process, which suggests that the site designers want users to recognize these responses as particularly important. Interestingly, many users generate responses by reading others’ profiles and sometimes adapting or even plagiarizing materials (Saranow, 2008) from other writers. Although Meet.com expressly prohibits posting copyrighted materials taken from others, Saranow observed that profile writers do occasionally lift materials from other people’s postings and other sites.

Users may also upload photographs to the site. Many dating sites strongly encourage the addition of photos. For example, the Match.com (2008) website explained why users should add pictures: “guys are 14 times more likely to look at a profile with a

\[\text{Photos are beyond the scope of this study. See Humphreys (2006) for an analysis of how photos are used on dating sites for self-presentation.}\]
photo. Women are 8.5 times more likely to look at your profile if you have a pic. And members with photos get up to 15 times more attention than those without one.” Many dating sites in fact privilege profiles which have included photos. For instance, on Match.com, the search default shows only profiles with pictures. One must de-select this option to include profiles without pictures.

Pending site approval, these components (responses to the closed-questions, the open-ended responses, and potentially photographs) then become the user’s profile. On Meet.com, according to their FAQ page, Customer Service teams review all entries to ensure that they do not contain material deemed inappropriate by the site, such as attempts to sell services, attempts to spam other customers, links to websites, pornography, or other materials deemed offensive.

After the profile posts to the site, other users set search parameters and evaluate matches to determine whether or not to initiate contact with the profile writer. Depending on the site, initiating contact may require paying a subscription fee. On most dating sites, contact initially occurs via a double-blind email system allowing users to maintain privacy unless they decide to provide additional contact information. However, the profile composition process does not necessarily stop with the posting of the materials: indeed, profile writing is often iterative. Many writers may continue to revise their profiles due to the kinds of responses, or lack thereof, received.

The importance of the profile is reflected in the services that have sprouted up in support of this writing activity. Many dating sites provide articles for different genders
Figure 2.1 Open-ended Profile Sections

Match.com prompts

OK Cupid.com prompts
and sexual orientations delineating features writers should and should not write in their profiles, often including advice on both content and form. Suggestions range from avoiding clichés and negativity, to using spell-check, to advice on how to write to a specific audience. Interestingly, profile writing is also sometimes contracted out to others. For example, E-cyrano.com, provides ghost-writing (Brandt, 2007) services for those needing online dating profiles. For a set fee, they will provide editing services. For an additional fee, they will actually write two documents for the consumer: an open-ended self-description and a desired mate description. According to the E-cyrano website (2010), these documents are composed based on a phone interview with the customer and/or completion of a questionnaire.

Although this study focuses on profiles which members claim to have written for themselves, as opposed to profiles contracted out to others, the evident financial success of this and similar services testifies to dating site users’ belief in the importance of open-ended responses, and to some assumptions about language, self-representation and ethos. Specifically, many dating site users do seem to believe that the written language they use to represent themselves has the potential to contribute to or undermine their desirability, and possibly their credibility (ethos), on the dating site. Dating sites such as Meet.com encourage this belief by reminding users that the profile text is second only to the photo(s) in importance. Another site, OkCupid.com, specifically addresses the credibility issue on their FAQ page. Their fictitious site user asks, “Is there incentive for me to lie?” OkCupid responds:
Definitely not, Creep. You could increase your average Match score by picking answers that you think the average person wants to hear, but your Matches won’t like you as much….Lying doesn’t introduce you to better people; it screws the order up. By answering honestly, you’ll find people who really like you best for who you are. Cheesy, but true. (OkCupid, 2010)

While this statement will not prevent some users from gaming the system, it does overtly establish a high value for honesty on this particular site. Although name-calling is never nice, by addressing the user as a “Creep,” the site emphasizes the stigma of dishonesty, likely as an attempt to shape behaviors accordingly.

This attempt at behavioral shaping is well-placed, in that research demonstrates a significant tension between dating sites users’ attempts at “impression management” (Goffman, 1959) and their digital self-representations. Ellison et al.(2006), in their analysis of dating site participants’ approaches to impression management, identified a conflict between participants’ desires to represent themselves honestly versus concerns about impression management. They explained that some participants dealt with this problem by presenting an “ideal self” in their dating site profiles (p. 415). Gibbs et al.’s (2006) research included an examination of dating site users’ opinions about self-presentation practices. They found that 94% of their participants strongly disagreed that they had intentionally misrepresented themselves in their profile or online communication, and 87% strongly disagreed that misrepresenting certain things in one’s profile or online communication was acceptable. However,
although unlikely to admit they themselves had lied, a high proportion of respondents did feel that certain characteristics were frequently misrepresented online by others. (p. 169)

Honesty appears to be a relative standard for some composing within the digital environment. Participants walk a fine line between making themselves appear desirable through their text and photos as a means of attracting suitors, while dealing with the possible ramifications of dishonesty later on in developing relationships.

It is within the particular socio-cultural context surrounding the online dating profile, that I posit the following research questions:

- What invention activities, if any, do writers employ to help them compose online profiles for a dating website?
- And, what do these invention activities and composing practices add to our existing understandings of invention in various textual mediums?

Investigating these questions may contribute to rhetoric and writing studies in several significant ways. The research problem these questions represent is aimed at investigating how dating site participants recount decision-making factors involved in composing a profile— a particular rhetorical act. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) suggested, “All argumentation is conceived only in terms of the action for which it paves the way or which it actually brings about” (p. 54). If we agree with their assessment of argumentation, or invention, profile writing is an inherently rhetorical act. An online profile certainly presents an argument: the user posits a discourse-based self-
representation intended to convince others of its veracity and its appeal. The process used to compose that profile requires the writer to engage in invention. Furthermore, the argument the writer produces through his or her inventional activities is generally intended to move others to action—in this case, contacting the profile-writer. This study then, seeks to enrich the understanding of invention, especially in light of the activities which may inform it within a digital composition site.

This study offers several key contributions. First, it analyzes a writing context outside of the classroom, where much of the prior invention research has been situated; as such, the results of the study not only address that gap, but also can be useful in educating writers who need to compose for similar high-stakes, self-representational writing contexts. As noted above, not only is the participants’ personal credibility at stake, but these writers are also looking for potential mates, and they have a vested interest in ensuring that they appeal to those matches appropriately. They are not writing for a grade; rather they are writing, ostensibly, to improve their personal lives. As sites such as E-cyrano attest, dating site users recognize the significant role written text plays in identifying and attracting dates or mates.

Second, to avoid the theoretical division of invention between generation and discovery as discussed in Chapter 1, this study explores writers’ self-reports of their inventive acts, which have taken place within a specific culturally situated context. To those ends, the questions posed to participants allowed ample open spaces for discussions of invention activities along a broad-ranging continuum (LeFevre, 1987), including idea
generation, problem-solving, discovery, and more. As such, the broad possibilities provided avoided pushing participants to answer according to a researcher’s pre-conceived notion of how rhetorical invention might work within the digital realm. Following further explanation of the methods, based on the data, I argue that digitized rhetorical invention encompasses aspects of both idea creation and discovery, particularly as manifested through writers’ audience considerations and their descriptions of their writing processes. By further deconstructing the artificial binary, digital invention can be more effectively and usefully interpreted according to a socio-cognitive framework (see Chapter 1) which acknowledges spaces for both social influences and individual subjectivities.

In addition, this study sets up the second dissertation study, in that it provides evidence of the importance of audience as a construct within digital composing sites. The dating site research yields needed data about writers’ processes as retroactively reconstructed. As such, it simultaneously demonstrates the need for the additional research demonstrating digital writers’ *in situ* processes, as provided by the subsequent dissertation study.

**Methods**

This study data came from 13 surveys of current or recent dating site users (See Figure 2.2). Participants no longer using dating sites were required to gain access to their profile texts for purposes of enhancing information recall. Survey participants were recruited by contacting randomly selected dating site users, placing ads on social
## Figure 2.2 Study One Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE-RANGE</th>
<th>SELF-IDENTIFIED GENDER</th>
<th>GENDER OF DESIRED MATCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alissa</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJ Blee</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klee</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchild</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJ</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncommon</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
networking sites, and by an email sent to approximately 40 undergraduate and graduate students at a Midwestern university. The completed interview corpus includes both random participants and “pass-along participants” (Norman & Russell, 2006)—those who heard about the study from other participants, constituting a snowball sample. All participants completed the interview process either via email attachment or on www.surveymonkey.com. Norman and Russell explain, “reaching additional pertinent respondents via the pass-along effect could be especially beneficial in the case of hard-to-reach populations” (Teitler, Reichman, & Sprachman, 2003). In this case, while dating sites are highly trafficked, there seems to be some residual stigma attached to using these sites (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008), which perhaps speaks to the challenges encountered when recruiting subjects.

As this research was exploratory in nature and as all participants did identify as dating site participants who had written a profile, they were therefore considered knowledgeable about the subject, and they constituted an appropriate sample. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge several possible limitations. Self-selection bias may have manifested in that those choosing to participate may have had especially strong feelings about their writing or writing processes, or their experiences on the dating site. Second, as retroactive accounts can be problematic, this weakness was countered by recruiting participants who still had access to their profile texts, which could be used to improve recall. Krueger (1994) explained,

3 The questions were identical with the exception of question 7, “Did you read other profiles?” which was presented on www.surveymonkey.com as a multiple choice question.
There is a tendency for participants to respond to the more immediate interviewing experience—the here and now – unless they are requested to shift themselves to another time frame. This focus on the past increases the reliability of the responses because it asks about specific experiences as opposed to current intentions or future possibilities. (p. 66)

Consequently, probes such as the phrase “thinking back” were incorporated into the question structure, as these tend to encourage more effective recall.

The 10-item survey included questions such as the following: “What did you want to convey when you were writing the profile? What types of factors weighed in to how you actually went about writing the profile?” (See Appendix for complete survey). The researcher collated all responses by question, and then coded the responses several times, using the t-unit as a unit of analysis. Answers to individual questions varied widely in length from one word to 13 sentences, and some individual sentences, containing multiple t-units, received multiple codes.

During the first round of coding, multiple facets of the discourse were inductively coded, using an emergent protocol to generate an overview of the researcher’s observations. For example, in this iteration, references to descriptions of writing processes, style, self-presentation choices, and audience, among other things (at this point there were 61 codes) were noted.  

The approach used is similar to that described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) in that while this research began from an inductive stance, later iterations of coding also
preliminary pass through the data, a code book was generated focused on references to invention processes. A subset of the surveys \((n=5)\) were re-coded using this approach, the developing code-book was fine-tuned according to the categories that became most salient in this sample.\(^5\)

After another round of coding the entire data set, the codes had coalesced and the core category of Digital Invention Strategies was identified. Digital invention strategies were strategies or tactics that writers claimed they used to aid their composing processes. That category, then, had four dimensions within it. The multiple codes were folded into the four dimensions, and each t-unit \((\text{Hunt, 1965})\) was re-coded according to its dimension. T-units were used as the unit of analysis because oftentimes sentences contained more than one code. Viewing the discourse through the slightly more microscopic lens of the t-unit allowed for a particularly fine-grained analysis, which moved into a more deductive approach. As I had read extensively in the invention literature prior to beginning this project, the coding process was certainly influenced by that knowledge.

\(^5\) Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) present a rigorous approach to combining inductive and deductive coding. Their approach proceeds in part, as follows: “The coding process involved recognizing (seeing) an important moment and encoding it (seeing it as something) prior to a process of interpretation \((\text{Boyatzis, 1998})\). A ‘good code’ is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon \((\text{Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1})\). Encoding the information organizes the data to identify and develop themes from them. Boyatzis defined a theme as ‘a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon’ \((\text{p. 161})\). In addition to the inductive approach of Boyatzis \((1998)\), in our analysis of the text in this study, we also used a template approach…This involved a template in the form of codes from a codebook to be applied as a means of organizing text for subsequent interpretation. When using a template, a researcher defines the template (or codebook) before commencing an in-depth analysis of the data. The codebook is sometimes based on a preliminary scanning of the text” \((\text{p. 4})\).
could more adequately describe the sometimes multiple invention strategies occurring within individual sentences. To clarify by way of example, one participant’s statement, “I did it [the profile] in small installments” (Manchild) was initially coded as a reference to the composing process. In the final round of coding, references to temporal aspects of the composing process were located within the dimension, Planning/Composing Text. Another participant commented, “I didn’t want to share too much information or give any info that would be too personal” (Kelly). This statement was originally coded as an example of a text-planning decision related to quantity of exposure. These types of decisions were also located within the Planning/Composing text dimension. As a member-check, an early draft of this study was also shared with two of the research participants.

Findings

Four key dimensions constituted digital dating site invention activities, as described by these 13 participants: Assessing Self, Assessing Task, Planning/Composing Text and Assessing Interaction (Figure 2.3). Participants assessed themselves and their emotions to aid their composing processes. They also evaluated the rhetorical task to help them plan their processes. In addition, the participants described how they planned and composed the actual text. Finally, they appraised the potential interactions within the site. The identified dimensions comprehensively described the range of invention-related
topics appearing within the data set. The participants wrote about both discovery and creation as invention elements, as well as internal and social invention activities. Before turning to an in-depth consideration of each of the four key dimensions, it is helpful to see the inter-relations between dimensions as demonstrated through participants’ references to goal-setting.

One particularly interesting facet of the data is the interactions across the dimensions, especially those concerning goal-setting in relation to the intended audiences. The participants demonstrated a high level of awareness of their choices in the writing process; they made 39 references to goal-setting within the data set. The goals the writers set for themselves or identified in others varied, and were located across the dimensions, depending on the context. For instance, when a writer described the discoursal identity she or he wished to construct, this was an instance of assessing self to establish a goal. However, when a writer described his or her rationale for composing a profile of a certain length, this was a goal based on textual planning, and this was located in the Planning/Composing Text dimension. In both of these cases, the goals were generally described on the basis of appealing to a particular audience consideration.

As this study was conceptualized as exploratory, inter-rater reliability was not established. Some researchers have suggested that reliability is simply norming someone into one’s coding system (Grant-Davie, 1992); as such, it does not demonstrate the validity of the coding system itself. While reliability is not paramount in this study, validity is important. Accordingly, in line with RAD (Replicable, Aggregable, Data-Driven) research design principles (Haswell, 2005), extensive examples are provided to allow readers to assess for themselves the validity of the researcher’s observations. An earlier draft was also shared with two study participants as a member-check.
Figure 2.3 Digital Invention Strategies Used for Composing Dating Site Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>DEFINITIONS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Self</td>
<td>References to desired ethos or a specific discoursal identity, personal emotions associated with writing</td>
<td>“I portrayed myself in a more confident light than I really am”; “One aspect I wanted to convey was independence”; “I wanted to describe my personality truthfully”; “I will probably list some of my flaws and struggles”; “I felt narcissistic”; “I felt I was a little too close to the subject matter at hand—ME!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Task</td>
<td>Process planning, evaluating context-specific rhetorical goals for the writing process, including making analogies to other writing experiences, as well as references to reading/evaluating other writing on the site</td>
<td>“It is kind of like making a sales pitch”; “it reminded me of preparing for a job interview”; “I jotted down what was identical to me”; “When someone’s profile was overkill, I imagined that they were either desperate or full of themselves”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning/Composing Text</td>
<td>Textual planning, references to deliberate decisions made about structure/quantity of text; references to actual composing process, including revising</td>
<td>“had to generalize and dumb down to keep my suitor base as broad as possible”; “not a huge list because a person doesn’t want to wade through a long list”; “just give a small nibble to entice”; “a few qualities you feel are important”; “I wanted to keep it short and to the point”; “My friend actually helped write my profile”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Interaction</td>
<td>Concerns about profile’s social ramifications, contemplation of potential or actual interactions</td>
<td>“I was a little worried that I’d be recognized because of my job”; “I realize that if they are seeing me on the personals, then they are on here too”; “It seems to me that most of the women sit back and let the contacts roll in”; “Oh, and I got the girl!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When writers discussed or evaluated the rhetorical goals they perceived in other writing on the site, these references were located within the Assessing Task dimension.

Goal-setting behavior occurred across several dimensions, and these references show the rhetorical nature of profile writing in that they suggest, at least retrospectively, that the participants had specific purposes for their profiles and the audiences who would view the profiles. For example, Alissa stated, “One aspect I wanted to convey was independence, financial and otherwise, because I had often found that men were put off by it, so why not put that out there immediately?” In this response, she referred to a particular goal while simultaneously assessing the audience’s role. Alissa showed keen rhetorical awareness; she clearly set a goal of shaping her profile for a particular audience—an audience of men who would not feel threatened by her self-described independence. The elite audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) that she envisioned informed her invention process. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explained,

The elite audience is by no means always regarded as similar to the universal audience. Indeed, the elite audience often wishes to remain distinct from the common run of men: if this is so, the elite is characterized by its hierarchic position. But often also the elite audience is regarded as a model to which men should conform in order to be worthy of the name: in other words, the elite sets the norm for everybody…. Its opinion is the only one that matters, for, in final analysis, it is the determining one. (p. 34)
In this study, some of the writers (such as Klee and Alissa) discussed their audience in ways which suggested they had composed with an elite audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) in mind. They noted that they were composing their profiles for an individual and that individual’s opinion was what really mattered. However, a few writers (such as Manchild) depicted a universal audience as the intended recipient. In other words, they sought to appeal to any rational reader. This may speak to participants’ goals for profile writing: some were looking for one particular ‘right’ person, whereas others were simply interested in expanding their pool of dating options. The former was more common in this particular sample. JJBlee also demonstrated a goal-setting response when he wrote, “I was hoping to give an accurate portrayal of myself, my position in life, and an idea of what I am like.” His goal was one that several other participants had as well--a desire to represent himself to his audience honestly and accurately.

The Assessing Interaction dimension exhibited some minimal discussion of goal-setting. For instance, Kelly explained, “I think my goal of finding a really nice guy influenced how I wrote my profile.” More often, goal-setting occurred when participants evaluated the interactive possibilities, and that evaluation then fed back into other elements of the writing process expressed within the other dimensions. For instance, Kelly also commented, “I didn’t mind writing the profile since other people need to read a little bit about you to determine if you’re someone they want to talk to. My thoughts at the time were just that I didn’t want to share too much information.” The first sentence demonstrates Kelly’s consideration of interaction within the site. She explained how others would use her profile to decide whether to initiate contact. This consideration
informed her Planning/Composing Text, in that she decided to limit the quantity of information she would share, based on her assessment of the interactive potential of the site. This examination of goal-setting behaviors delineated several relations between the dimensions. Specifically, many of the goals writers established were in relation to audience-based considerations. The following subsections fully develop each of the key dimensions, beginning with Assessing Self.

Assessing Self

Assessing Self referred to incidents when writers commented that they sought to convey a particular ethos or discoursal identity (Ivanic, 1994); as such, it involved the writer looking inward to contemplate his or her own desired discoursal identity for this rhetorical situation. This dimension also included references to emotions writers felt during or about their composing. Although engaging in introspection, the writers typically did so as a means of determining which aspect(s) of the self were appropriate to convey to the audience. For example, one writer commented, “I portrayed myself in a more confident light than I really am” (Manchild). Manchild’s statement suggests that he assumed the audience would value confidence; accordingly, he emphasized that particular attribute in constructing his discoursal identity.

The ethos which Manchild sought to convey was particularly interesting as his approach differed from the other participants. Manchild explained that he used style to construct an ethos of originality. He commented, “I wrote some for shock value to set me

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7 See Chapter 1 for a discussion of “discoursal identity” vis-à-vis Ivanic.
Manchild:

**About my life and what I’m looking for**

- Instead, independent, and self-aware.
- Am incorrigible.
- Am impetuous.
- Am a caveman.
- Am slightly sophisticated.
- Am manly.
- Am world's strongest man.
- Am part fish.
- Am the exception to the rule.
- Am two steps ahead.
- Will save you for all other men.
- Was raised by sand wolves and ice bears.
- Am punk rock.
- Am a naturalist.
- Am an optimist.
- Love salt water.
- Obsess over music.
- Speakers.
- And gadgetry.
- Enjoy good design and efficiency (yet am encumbered by stuff).
- Love style—clothing, furniture, architecture.
- Am very creative.
- Look for the art in everything, from chaos to sleek parallel lines.
- Have strategically placed tattoos.
- Did most of them myself.
- Work with my hands and tools.
- Know how things tick.
- Can assimilate into most social situations or at least look cool and nod.
- Have more songs on my computer than the law should (does) allow and take audio equipment very seriously.
- Listen to everything, from new pop music to rancid (mostly ind rock though).
- Love exotic food and drink. Few things trigger my gag reflex like "down home cookin".
- Am a foodie.
- Love to cook and discover new foods.
- Have had red meat in 14 years, but can cook a steak.
- Quality knives and pans make me happy.
- Love good salt and all things spicy.

Apart from the herd." Figure 2.4 depicts a 249 word excerpt from his 735 word About Me section. He established an unambiguous goal—being noticed as a notable, striking individual, and suggested this was a means of audience appeal. As previously noted, Manchild seemed to be writing for a universal, as opposed to elite, audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969).

Writers also sometimes discussed emotions that they felt during the dating site composition process, and incidents coded as emotions expressed while writing were grouped within this dimension as examples of inward scrutiny. For instance, one
participant wrote, “I was nervous about signing up for personals” (Pam). This statement shows the writer’s self assessment of the emotional state which informed her profile composition. Klee also discussed the role of emotion in his self-assessment when he stated, “I felt motivated to put my best foot forward.” In this case, Klee wanted to represent his “best” self to the audience. He did not clarify what caused him to respond this way, whether it was a particular aspect of the site, or a particular goal he cherished, or past experience; rather, it was simply stated as something he decided he had to do because of some sort of gut feeling. Although emotional statements were incorporated into Assessing Self, it is important to recognize that these self-assessments are situated within the context of an audience. In other words, the emotions the writers felt often seemed to occur because they were concerned about how others might perceive their discoursal selves.

Most respondents, with the notable exception of Manchild, argued for the importance of honesty as a facet of their discoursal identity construction. In the surveys, participants often suggested that honesty could be used to invoke reciprocity between audience and rhetor. For example, Pam said, “I wanted to present myself as honestly as possible. I did not want to attract the wrong type of person and I did not want my date to be surprised or disappointed.” Despite her acknowledgment that there was some selling involved in profile writing, Nancy noted, “everything has to be positive…no lies.” In this sense, her self assessment is somewhat selective; while she did not intend to lie, she focused solely on the positive attributes to construct her discoursal self. Similarly, Uncommon emphasized the importance of honesty as his most important goal, but he
tempered this by suggesting his approach to impression management. He stated, “I prefer to be positive- so I focus mainly on what I’m looking for and honestly describe myself. Though I know many things I don’t want I choose not to list negatives.” Here, like Nancy, he engaged impression management by selecting which elements of face to present, which in turn formed the particular ethos he invoked within the dating site profile to draw in his audience.

JJBlee placed an especially strong emphasis on Assessing Self, although the data he provided also integrates the other dimensions as well. JJBlee explained, “After reading more profiles I will probably amend my own to make cuts that are obvious and common knowledge about people. I will probably list some more of my flaws and struggles.” This participant suggested that reading others’ work (Assessing Task) leads to renewed self-evaluation (Assessing Self), as well as to decisions about how much or how little to display in his text (Planning/Composing Text). This instance shows an intertwining of invention as discovery and invention as generation, as well as demonstrating the interconnectedness of the four dimensions. In his iterative composition process, JJBlee looked outside his own writing, but then turned the gaze back inward before making a decision about how much to show others. For him, profile writing was a process of learning more about himself as well as contemplating how he represented his self within discourse before others. Ivanic (1998) defined the former as an identity aspect she referred to as “possibilities for self-hood” (p. 23) wherein a writer considers the identities available to him or her within a particular socio-cultural context. The discoursal self (Ivanic, 1998) is the identity impression one conveys, whether intentionally or not,
through a text. JJBlee, then, confronted issues associated with both types of identity as he described his dating site writing process.

The Assessing Self dimension demonstrates some correspondence to facets of Hayes and Nash’s (1996) Process Planning construct. Hayes and Nash (1996) sought to provide a comprehensive system for understanding writers’ planning processes based on reviews of the literature as well as their own think-aloud protocol research. Their research focused on non-digital planning studies, and they provided a taxonomy of planning types (p. 45), set in relation to the extant research on planning. As part of their system, they identified Process Planning as “focused on the writer and how the writer intends to carry out the task” (p. 43). When writers in this dating site study engaged in self-analysis, it was a writer-focused activity which then helped to inform the writer’s decision-making about how to carry out the particular rhetorical task.

In sum, the respondents made 56 identity-related statements. They also referred to their emotions 36 times. This dimension contained 92 instances. All four dimensions are numerically represented at the end of the Findings section in Figure 2.6 to better depict the full picture developed across the data. The following sub-section depicts the role of rhetorical task assessment within the dating site writers’ data.

Assessing Task

The second identified dimension, Assessing Task, encompassed incidents when writers engaged in context-specific evaluation of the rhetorical task of profile writing for a dating site. In particular, this dimension included references to reading or evaluating
others’ writing on the site, as well as times when participants offered analogies to other types of writing. This dimension also has some correspondence to Hayes and Nash’s (1996) Process Planning construct. For example, writers made four analogies to other writing experiences, an element of abstract planning (Hayes & Nash, 1996). One participant commented that profile composing “reminded me of preparing for a job interview” (Pam). This incident, coded as an analogy, was located within the Assessing Task dimension. Another participant compared the writing process to “making a sales pitch” (Nancy). Both women’s responses suggest that they viewed the profile as a site of potential public judgment. The analogies they provided, hiring and selling, both incorporate the possibility of rejection. In either case, the audience may decide to walk away.

Klee, on the other hand, defined the profile as a private site. He noted, “I wrote it like I was writing it for just one person.” He suggested that he re-conceptualized the site’s public audience in a private manner, which allowed him to define the task as writing to an elite audience of one. Although he clearly understood that many more eyes could read the lines of his profile, he suggested that it would really resonate with one particular individual image he had in mind. JJBlee used an analogy when describing his experience of reading others’ profiles. He suggested that many people’s open-ended profile responses lacked innovation: “I see the same profile often, like a template. The similarity of one profile to the next surprised me.” His observations, in turn, likely influenced how he wrote his own profile. He explained elsewhere in his survey that in his own writing he focused on “cutting away the crap to rediscover my core, my witness.”
Participants made 72 references to reading or evaluating other written materials on dating sites. Many of the comments about reading occurred in responses to question 4: What types of factors weighed in to how you actually went about writing the profile? (ex. social factors, reading others’ profiles, etc.). When a participant read another’s profile to aid his or her task assessment, oftentimes, this represented an act of invention as discovery, as the writers learned from others about what to do or not do in their own writing, as opposed to focusing only on their extant individual knowledge.

Throughout their surveys, respondents discussed the impact of reading others’ work. Nancy explained that while reading others’ profiles, “I jotted down what was identical to me,” and Pam commented, “When someone’s profile was overkill, I imagined that they were either desperate or full of themselves.” Both of these incidents involved participants reading other profiles and using that knowledge to inform their own plans for their writing process. In the first case, Nancy used materials from others’ profiles to identify key traits which she shared with others. She did not specify whether she would then mention these traits or avoid them in her actual profile composition, but she did explain that this process helped her assess “the competition.” In the second example, Pam’s evaluation of others’ profiles led her to avoid extremes in her own writing so as not to seem desperate. She explained elsewhere that she had avoided “rambling on” because she had identified brevity as a relevant value for her potential audience members. Pam’s statements demonstrate the interplay between invention as discovery and invention as creation. She took into account what she had learned from
others, discovery, but then created her own response which resisted the negative tendencies she observed.

Klee referred to reading others’ profiles to explain how he defined his audience for this particular writing task. He wrote:

Reading others [sic] profiles I noticed they all sounded the same. ‘I want’, ‘I like’ etc. etc. I noticed nobody described who they were. I also noticed they all wasted the most critical part, the opener. I wrote [sic] my profile to interest her, not tell my likes and dislikes.

Klee’s evaluation led him to deliberately avoid certain things in his own writing. He critically observed others’ writing, which acted as an inventive heuristic for him. In his invention process, Klee reacted against what he had discovered in others’ writing to generate his own take on the profile situation—that it should be written for a particular “her.” Like JJBlee, his profile composing served as an educational experience. However, for Klee, his education in assessing the task was used to aid his decision making about portrayal of his discoursal self. These decisions were made on the basis of impression management concerns, as opposed to the deeper considerations of “possibilities for selfhood” (Ivanic, 1998) with which JJBlee struggled.

Uncommon also discussed reading others’ profiles, and he too noted the similarities between profiles. However, he explained the likenesses differently from JJBlee, and consequently reacted to his observations distinctly: “What I noticed in many that I read is some people are very shy or reserved and often just list the same old same
old. I like dinner and walks on the beach etc.” Uncommon noted elsewhere that he did not have a problem with composing a profile because “I’m not shy,” an instance of Assessing Self. This suggests a connection between how Uncommon read others’ writing and how he wrote for himself— he suggested that fear of self-expression caused some not to differentiate themselves in their profiles. Accordingly, although he evaluated others’ writing as fear of self-expression, he claimed this did not impact his own composition choices.

When asked what he noticed about other people’s writing, Vertical identified a much wider variety of profiles than what JJBlee and Klee noted. Vertical commented, I saw profiles that were everything from impressive and depressing. On the impressive end, I saw profiles that would win creative writing assignments. This meaning profiles that were obviously not accurate (over embellishing, fake pictures, etc.). I saw profiles written as though English was not their first language (poor grammar/spelling and sentences that did not make sense). I also saw profiles where people obviously wrote as they spoke (i.e. you know… um… like, etc.).

Throughout his survey, perhaps in response to these observations, Vertical emphasized his own intention of writing “a profile that was both accurate and attractive to the right kind of woman.”

Chuck also commented on tips he had gleaned from reading others’ profiles. He stated that after reading various profiles on many different social-networking and dating
sites, “Nothing really influenced me in a positive way, but I learned a lot of what to stay away from.” Manchild commented that he found the particular site he composed for “sad, vague, lack-luster;” elsewhere in his survey he noted that in his own writing he worked hard to convey “passion, uniqueness,” which would set up a direct contrast to what he had observed on the site. PJ also wrote about the problems he observed in others’ writing: they “Wrote way too much and made themselves sound very important.” Consequently, he emphasized that he made a deliberate choice to write his profile “To the point.”

Happy, however, took a somewhat different approach to reading. Reading helped her revise her task assessment, and in turn, led to her revision of her own responses—Planning/Composing Text. She stated, “As I read the guy’s [sic] profiles, sometimes that made me want [sic] to go back and change things in mine.” Similarly, Sarah explained that she used reading to help her assess the quantity of information to provide. She explained, “I looked at the things other people had in their profiles because I didn’t want to put too much or too little.” For both of these participants, Assessing Task led directly into Planning/Composing Text.

Finally, participants occasionally commented on rhetorical goals they identified within the site. Nancy, for example, observed the importance of enticing the reader and using a “good picture.” She emphasized the value of writing “the whole ad in a creative…but meaningful…but also fun and enticing way” (ellipses in original). These types of statements were included in the Assessing Task dimension as they reflected participants’ understanding of the rhetorical task within the site. In total, Assessing Task
contained 72 incidents coded as reading or evaluating, four analogies, and seven other references to context-specific rhetorical goals which participants identified in relation to writing for a dating site.

Planning/Composing Text

The third dimension, Planning/Composing Text, included instances when writers discussed the deliberate decisions they had made about the structure or quantity of their own text. Incidents coded within the writing process, such as references to revising and editing, as well as references to the duration of composition, were also consolidated within this dimension.

The physical process of profile composition frequently arose (48 incidents) as a topic. Many participants explained that they did not write the entire profile in one sitting, and they viewed profile composition as iterative. For example, Alissa said, “I remember re-writing my profile slightly every few days because I found that those responding to my profile had read it carefully and that became a kind of litmus test.” Alissa wrote about both the physical process and the audience’s role. She incorporated invention as discovery by integrating responses from others into her own individually subjective, generative process. Another participant explained “I also didn’t post for a few days… updating daily depending on my mood and attitude” (Chuck). This statement from Chuck described his text composing process and suggested that his process was not a one-shot deal; rather, it occurred over a length of time. Happy referred to her writing process by explaining the location in which she composed, “I wrote my profile while
logged into the live site (I did not do it on pen & pencin \textit{sic} or in a word document and cut & paste)."

References to revising and editing based on style concerns were included in the Planning/Composing Text dimension. While Style is traditionally a separate rhetorical canon, stylistic considerations do inform how one participates in rhetorical invention (Fahnestock, 2005). Deliberation about stylistic choices also informs how the writer wants his or her work to be received by the intended audience. Twenty-two references were made to stylistic and editorial considerations. Chuck combined style with audience in interesting ways in that he looked outside himself to others for validation of his stylistic choices. He explained, “I consulted with friends about how it sounded” and, he also noted, “For my initial writing, I would pull phrases or words I liked [from other profiles], and use them in my own writing.” In both of these responses, Chuck identified collaboration and style as important aspects of his text-composing process.

Other participants also discussed the role of style in their composing processes. PJ explained that it was important to “be upfront and find some humor.” Happy observed that she had some problems during the writing process due to editorial concerns, particularly in “Sticking to the word limit. Not making typos (no spell check).” As Happy discussed the word limit, she suggested that her own stylistic tendencies were somewhat repressed by this particular genre. Because of this repression, she had to demonstrate problem-solving as part of her invention process in that she had to fit her style proclivities to the requirements of the dating site profile genre. Following the standards of
the genre (expressed through word limit) became an important goal, as was acknowledging her concerns about her self-representation through correctness. Her response suggests that she feared a negative self-representation if she failed to adhere to certain standards of correctness by eliminating typos. In turn, the particular goals Happy described suggest that she may have been building a particular ethos (Assessing Self) within her profile. She did not explicitly state the intention behind these particular concerns. However, perhaps she wanted to convey correctness and adherence to expected standards. Or, she could have set these goals with the hope of conveying an ethos of intelligence by representing herself as an educated, literate individual.

Pam’s stylistic choices were influenced by her audience analysis. She explained, “Another factor that influenced how I wrote my ad was keeping in mind who would be reading the ad. Men are more visual and are not going to read an ad that rambles on and on. I know that I don’t.” Pam recounted her assessment of the audience’s role as well as how to appeal to that audience, especially in regard to her own stylistic choices.

Other participants wrote about how they controlled the quantity of their text. Fourteen times participants recorded concerns about the quantity of self-revelation. Females made almost twice as many references to self-revelation concerns as men. Nancy noted, “I put down a few of those qualities…not a huge long list because a person doesn’t want to wade through a long list.” In this statement, the participant described the deliberate decision she made to restrict the quantity of her text. This decision was situated within the context of her audience; she felt that the particular audience she anticipated
would not value a large quantity of text. However, respondents differed on why this issue was important to their invention processes. For several writers, the quantity of self-revelation was an issue of personal safety. Kelly explained, “keeping it more general would be safer.” However, in other situations, it was framed as an issue of leaving something to the imagination—wanting to omit information so that the audience might be tempted to find out more. For example, Nancy’s response demonstrated both considerations about self exposure. Nancy explained that she didn’t want to say “too much…because I am a public school teacher and have to be careful just what I put down on paper for public eyes” but then she continued, stating, “You also don’t want to reveal yourself…just give a small nibble to entice.”

All told, the Planning/Composing Text dimension included 84 incidents. Respondents discussed the physical process of profile writing, and they commented on specific aspects of the writing process. Sometimes the decisions these participants made occurred on the basis of stylistic concerns; at other times, their compositional choices related to concerns about the quantity of self-revelation. In both cases, the audience loomed large as a motivating factor, whether through trepidation about that audience or a desire to impress that audience, or a combination of both. The final sub-section delves further into the writers’ audience considerations by examining how they assessed interactive possibilities.
Assessing Interaction

The final dimension, Assessing Interaction, encompassed incidents when writers considered the profile’s potential social ramifications, as well as when they contemplated interactions with audience members. This dimension contained 77 references. Participants often discussed the potential ramifications of their discoursal identities being linked to their offline identities, particularly in regard to their employment. The respondents also commented on how audience members responded (or failed to respond) to their profiles.

Pam described her initial concerns about potential social ramifications for posting a dating site profile and how that impacted her writing process. She explained, “I still wanted to attract men, but I didn’t want to be embarrassed if a colleague viewed it.” Further, she noted, “I was also a little worried that I would be recognized because of my job. The idea of someone recognizing me seemed embarrassing.” This statement clearly demonstrates Pam’s concern about her audience, including both the intended audience (dateable men), as well as incidental audience members who were not intended, but might happen across her profile. She considered the potential social ramifications of being identified through the profile she posted. The response suggests a need to consider the ramifications of posting information in a public location. The response also speaks to a sort of felt stigma that Pam may have initially had toward this online location.\(^8\) The concern was not enough to keep her from participating in the site, but, at the same time, it

\(^8\) Stigma and privacy issues associated with online dating sites may merit future investigation, but are beyond the scope of the dissertation.
did impact how she decided to write about herself. She explained elsewhere in her survey that her concerns about the potential interaction influenced her writing process, particularly regarding the level of self-revelation she was willing to offer. Pam noted, “I was more conservative with my profile because of my career.” Pam herself did not make the connection between her sense of embarrassment at possible recognition and her writing act explicit in her initial responses. However, in the third response, she recounted how this concern about interaction influenced her composition; she made the choice to express herself more conservatively due to her job, and perhaps due to her fear of embarrassment.

An example from Nancy also helps delineate the range within the Assessing Interaction dimension. Nancy suggested, “you need a line at the end to draw them in and want to communicate with you further.” Nancy first identified a rhetorical goal she found appropriate to the site, which was situated within the Assessing Task dimension. Next, she explained the purpose of this goal—engaging audience contact. For Nancy, the profile represented a starting point for attempting to generate responses from others.

JJBlee also provided some interesting commentary regarding possible interactions. Referring to his preferred discoursal identity, JJBlee noted that he had “some desire to present an appealing package instead of the contents.” While this incident fit within the Assessing Self dimension, the “appealing package” was described on the basis of initiating a desired type of audience response. He struggled to return to his stated goals of presenting himself honestly, despite his assessment of how that may impact his
audience. His considerations turned to Assessing Interaction when he acknowledged, “I am discovering that I do not expect to meet anyone. I want to present myself as I am, and be pleased with it.” The first section explains his understanding of interaction within the site. Within the second sentence, the first t-unit expresses his self-assessment; the second refers to his rhetorical goal. He explained elsewhere in his survey, “I hope to learn something about myself and bring down a few more walls. I paid for a month. I feel that if I leave with a little more renewed confidence in me that the experience of writing about me and seeing what people write about themselves will be well worth it.” JJBlee’s response was anomalous within this data set; all other participants did indeed hope to meet others through their profiles. For JJBlee, the profile composing process, as well as the process of assessing the task by reading the work of others, was an educational process.

Another participant, Uncommon, wrote about the types of interactions he observed on the site, and couched it within his own experiences. He had much to say about his perceptions of difference between the female and male experiences on the dating site he used. He asserted that women were typically less forward, whereas men had to be proactive to get respondents. Uncommon commented,

Many [women] say they are looking for friends as well but they don’t seem actually interested in that. If you arn’t [sic] their ‘potential’ they don’t even respond even if your interests or profession is extremly [sic] similar. Many also
seem shy to simply say thanks but no thanks. Many list all the things they want but really are only responding to looks.

In this response, Uncommon attempted to take on the perspective of the females on the site, which suggests that he had carefully analyzed their behavior. While he did not go on to explain how he dealt with this in his profile composition process, in his actual profile text he strongly encouraged women to contact him, even if they were not interested in him as a potential mate. He explicitly dealt with his concerns about those who were unresponsive by commenting on this in his actual profile text as well. Uncommon’s About My Date section from his profile is represented in Figure 2.5.

Pam also commented on interaction and audience-related issues. She explained that she found herself unable to respond to the amount of male attention that she garnered through her profile. She suggested that although she felt bad about it, it was simply impractical for her to acknowledge all the “winks” and other flirtatious behavior addressed to her. Instead, she seemed to concentrate her responses on those who seemed to offer the most potential for her particular dating ambitions. Pam explained,

Normally I would be nice about it and give some type of responses. However some people did not take rejection well. Moreover, I felt justified in only responding to ads that I was interested in because my ad clearly explained the type of person I was looking for.

That being said, Pam did not elaborate within the survey on what she sought in a mate, other than suggesting that he should match what she suggested she was looking for, and
that he should be, in person, what he claimed to be in his profile. She felt that she had honestly represented herself, and she expected the same in others. Pam explained, “Every person I went out with said I was exactly like my ad presented and all wanted to go out again. I can’t say that I had the same experience.” She expressed disappointment that several men she went out with presented an offline identity which did not correspond to the discoursal identity they had advanced. In this sense, these dates’ impression management had failed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2.5 An About My Date section</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uncommon:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>YOU:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Well I’m easy to please. Be a giver not a taker. Be honest and know how to communicate your thoughts and feelings. Play fair and fight fair. Have an understanding, appreciation and application of the Golden Rule. Be independent and self confident. Be secure with yourself (I shoot models as part of my work and art and you need to not freak out and or be jealous over that - I’m loyal and you won't need to worry). Have a life of your own but have space for someone else in it, and some room to be a part of my life as well. No games no drama. Have a generally positive and optimistic attitude. Know when your feeling moody and simply ask for some space - problem solved - I’ve walked on too many eggshells and through too many minefields. Do you know how to be happy? Do you realize that life is too short? Do you know how to accept and give love? Do you know how to keep a disagreement from turning into an argument? Do you strive for calm and balance or create chaos mislabeled as excitement? I am not asking for anything I am not willing to come to the table with myself, everything I am looking for, I am willing to match and reciprocate. <strong>NOTE:</strong> I appreciate the winks and favorites - but if your going to do that you should be willing to at least communicate a bit as well even if just for a new friend. I try to actually respond to emails or acknowledge a wink - even if we arn't a match. I find simple consideration goes a long way. If your an artist, designer, photographer, model, MUA or other creative and just want to make a friend as well - feel free to say hi :-)</td>
</tr>
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The frequent discussion of audience among these respondents lends further credence to the central role of audience considerations within invention processes. Participants remarked on dating site competition as well as assessing potential responses. The Findings section of the paper closes with a synopsis of the dimensions and their inter-relations.

**Interweaving the Dimensions**

Finally, to close this section, the four dimensions are numerically represented below in Figure 2.6. The codes within each dimension are presented, as well as the number of times each code occurred. In addition, the total number of t-units occurring in each dimension are totaled. Ten anomalous t-units were coded as “Off” and are not represented within the chart.

Figure 2.6 suggests that for this group of writers certain invention strategies took precedence over others. The most numerically prominent dimension was Assessing Self. Within this dimension, identity statements may have been particularly prevalent due to the genre of profile writing, with its high emphasis on self-revelation. As part of Assessing Task, the participants relied heavily on reading and evaluating the writing of others within the site. Many of them were encountering a new genre, and this may have provided one means of familiarizing themselves with the genre. Decisions about the writing process itself were also very important for the participants. They discussed physical act of composing most often, and they sometimes discussed revisions they made as part of that process on the basis of new insights gleaned from others. Accordingly,
they placed a significant emphasis on assessing possible interactions and audience perspectives. These assessments sometimes fed back into their composing processes, and the frequency of their occurrence demonstrates just how important audience is to writers on dating sites. Most of the writers were composing for the purpose of eliciting audience response (with the exception of JJBlee); as such, they spent a substantial amount of time

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<th>DIMENSION</th>
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<td>Reading/evaluating others’ writing</td>
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<td>Assessing Interaction</td>
<td>Assessing potential interactions and audience perspectives</td>
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aTen anomalous t-units were coded as “Off” and are not included in any dimensions.
contemplating that audience as well as what that audience might write or say in response to their profiles.

One final example demonstrates the interweaving of the dimensions. Chuck’s responses cross each of the four dimensions and depict the relationships between them. Chuck demonstrated Assessing Task when he observed, “it’s a fine line between sounding desperate and not.” This statement has two key features. One, it demonstrates that Chuck analyzed his audience and recognized that audience members were less likely to come across someone who appeared “desperate.” Two, the statement implicitly comments on the role of interaction on the site—a profile which is situated in the “desperate” camp will likely fail to garner desired audience responses. He used this observation to inform his own writing process, and this became part of his goal for his own profile: to avoid sounding desperate. Chuck wrote that he wanted to convey “that I am a decent guy who’s not desperate, or just looking to have sex. It’s more difficult than I thought to write about yourself without sounding desperate.” These identity statements show Chuck’s desire to convey through his discourse these particular aspects of himself—a lack of desperation and interest in more than solely physical intimacy. Elsewhere in his survey, Chuck explained that he wanted to ensure that his self-portrayal was “accurate.” His actual composition process (Planning/Composing Text) included presenting his profile to friends to have them assess “how it sounded… if it sounded like a description of me” (ellipses in original). These responses from Chuck further demonstrate the interaction between invention as discovery and invention as generative in that his inventive process incorporated audience analysis, collaboration, and individual
creation of materials. Chuck looked inward to define himself, outward to check on this self-representation within discourse, and to others to determine the desirability of that representation. The dimensions sufficiently encompass these moves that writers made as part of their digital invention processes.

Discussion and Implications

How might these findings add to and complicate our understandings of rhetorical invention, and audience in particular? First, the data described here comes from individuals who likely have a high stake in ‘getting it right’ in their writing. Much of the earlier research on rhetorical invention is classroom based, with some exploration of workplace settings. Extant digital writing scholarship has focused heavily on social networking sites, and minimal work has examined these highly trafficked, writing-rich dating sites. Although the classroom, the workplace, and social networking sites have their own exigencies, writing for a dating site may take on particularly high personal stakes. Several participants noted the pressure they felt to market themselves within this environment. Clearly, the invention processes are taking place within an authentic environment of invested writers and readers, and this research allows us a window into that particular site of digital composition.

Further, as so much writing now takes place in digital environments, it is important that writing studies scholars continue to investigate how writing occurs within these sites. Many digital sites offer some traits peculiar to the online environment—such as micro-length compositions (e.g. Tweets and status updates). These innovative genres
may shift how writers compose; research such as this dating site study allows for deeper understandings of the evolution of writing processes, as well as the impact these new genres have on self-representation through discoursal identity construction.

In turn, we can then offer our students methods of approaching composing within digital environments. While many contemporary students are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001), it remains helpful to demonstrate to them the significance invested into appropriate use of impression management strategies in online locations. For, as scholars have suggested, the internet does not forget (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). Hence, students need to be taught to carefully consider their self-representations in all digital locations. This can be accomplished, in part, by providing them with heuristics which aid in evaluating the particular audience to whom they are writing.

This study adds to our understanding of how writing processes work in a digital environment, based on participants’ self-reports. For instance, the participants repeatedly demonstrated the iterative nature of digital invention. Participants explained that they read, write, and then do it all over again based on the responses they did and did not generate. As Happy stated, “I remember re-writing my profile slightly every few days because I found that those responding to my profile had read it carefully and that became a kind of litmus test.” While the field has long recognized the iterative nature of the writing process, this study provides new information on how invention occurs within digital mediums. For example, the data hints at the relationship between invention and revision, as writers’ revision processes sometimes prompted additional invention work. In
addition, the study suggests that writing in digital mediums sometimes collapses the rhetorical canons: style and arrangement decisions were incorporated into invention processes for participants in this study. Invention within this digital space assumes a fluid form, in that the canons become intertwined, and the writing iterative. While Fahnestock (2005) has made similar observations about the fluidity of the canons, it is significant to actually observe writers’ descriptions of their movements between canons.

In addition, the writers discussed how they learned through this particular composing process. Several participants learned by reading others’ profiles. Others learned more about themselves through the writing process. These educational moments are worth further consideration in future studies. We might investigate whether writers composing for other sites learn how to do so using similar approaches, or if the approaches tend to be site-specific. The study also suggests that there may be interesting differences between writers’ processes based on their gender. While the small sample size prohibits any generalizations, within this group, the participants did vary along gender lines in regard to their choices about self-exposure. This may be worth additional investigation by gender studies scholars.

This study has also provided additional insight into our understandings of audience vis-à-vis Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). Most of the participants, with the notable exception of Manchild, described their audiences in ways which implied that they envisioned an elite audience. As Perelman suggested, the elite audience was the only one that truly mattered, and within the audience hierarchy it was situated above the
universal audience. The universal audience, on the other hand, was a broader construction of all rational beings. However, within the particular rhetorical situation of online dating site profile composition, the elite audience played a key determining role in the writers’ composing. They described their contemplations of the audience and how it in turn influenced the appeals that they designed for inclusion in their profiles. The data they provided allow for a better understanding of how the elite audience can actually influence writers’ composing processes.

By allowing us to look through this window at their self-reported writing processes, participants have enriched our understanding of how invention processes and audience may work together within a digital setting. In particular, participants have opened the door to a better understanding of the ways that impression management concerns, as expressed for an audience, contribute to their writing processes. The representational choices that these writers made may be described as acts of impression management designed to show the character and personality of each writer (the writer’s ethos) in ways which elicit particular kinds of audience responses-- pathos. Writers composing for a dating site worked to develop a particular ethos through their discoursal identity, and this constituted an act of impression management. Several writers deliberately selected a particular ethos to aid in the management of impressions they sought to convey. For instance, Pam sought to convey her discoursal identity by establishing her ethos as an honest individual. This served as a means for managing impressions conveyed to her readership, and also laid the groundwork for managing future face-to-face interactions. Alissa was concerned about grammatical correctness in
her profile, which suggested she wanted to establish her ethos as an intelligent writer who used language well.

Regarding pathos, these moves that the writers made to establish their ethos were intended to spark particular emotive responses (pathos) within audience members. Manchild, for instance, hoped to shock his audience as a means of establishing his ethos as a risk-taker. The process of generating pathetic responses is impression management. From the writers’ emotional standpoint, pathos also played a role in individual processes of both composing and impression management. Writers discussed concerns about embarrassment, and even fear, as part of their composing, which in turn informed their compositional choices. Pam, for instance, noted her concerns about the potential stigma of composing a dating site profile and she acknowledged that she felt somewhat embarrassed about it initially. Nancy also expressed concern about how much information she ought to reveal due to safety considerations, as well as her desire to maintain a certain public image. Like Nancy, Uncommon used impression management through selecting which elements of face to present, which in turn formed the particular ethos he invoked within the dating site profile, toward the end of drawing in his audience. These incidents support the findings of Gibbs et al. (2006) which suggested that dating site users typically valued honesty and described themselves as honest when composing profiles, but were nonetheless selective in their self-revelations. The writers within this study engaged in both self-evaluation and audience analysis, and then, based on those evaluations, they selected which elements of face to present to their audience. In a sense then, while the composing environment is relatively new, the writers used strategies
reminiscent of Aristotelian theory. These writers considered how to build their ethos, while also contemplating the ways which pathos could be used for the elite audience which they envisioned.

In effect then, audience is deeply connected to invention throughout the profile composing process. These writers expressed concerns about ethos, pathos, and the process of impression management during their writing processes, and these concerns are all related to audience in various ways. The writer’s ethos is designed to convince the audience of the credibility and/or character of the writer. Developing pathos in the audience serves as a means to further enhance the writer’s appeal. Impression management is the process of enacting these concerns.

This demonstration of the linkages between audience and invention within writers’ processes also provides important evidence that the dichotomization of invention into discovery versus creation is indeed problematic. These writers invoked audiences (Ede & Lunsford, 1984), which was both a cognitive and a social act, as well as an act which incorporated both discovery and creation. The invocation process involved perusing the website and reading other users’ materials, while simultaneously engaging in creative audience generation as they thought about who they would like to meet. The binary also broke down as participants described how their own writing occurred in response to others’ work, how they created arguments by resisting what they had read, and how they wrote from their own sensibilities as well. Invention in this site is highly socially influenced, but simultaneously individual. Further, invention seems to be
informed by writers’ prior experiences and personal subjectivities, as well as the actual and intended audiences that engage with the writing being produced in this digital medium.

Overall, these findings suggest that invention within this particular digital location occurs along a continuum which encompasses all of the factors described: social and individual attributes, as well as both creation and discovery. All of these aspects help define potential roles for audience within digital invention. These findings support the need for further analysis of writers’ actual processes, as described in the following chapters through think-aloud protocols in conjunction with retrospective interviews. These results also help define potential roles for audience within digital invention, while supporting the need for the second dissertation study’s analysis of writers’ *in situ* practices and processes.
CHAPTER 3

Methods and Methodologies: Unveiling the Core Category

Study One demonstrated the importance of audience as a construct within digital composition and provided insight into the ways digital dating site writers engage in rhetorical invention. Because of the importance of audience to these writers, it became clear that an *in situ* examination of writers’ digital composing processes, focused particularly on the impact of audience on writers’ impression management, was in order. Accordingly, this chapter introduces Study Two, the conceptual heart of the dissertation, which focuses on the analysis of participants’ composing processes and practices as they generated materials for a professional networking site. The chapter opens with an introduction to the methodologies and data collection methods informing the research. Next, an overview of the research site and participants is provided. The discussion then turns to the method of analysis, focusing particularly on grounded theory as a research style. Following this research process explication, the core category is unveiled, which sets up the series of extended examples depicting the category in action within Chapter Four.

The primary questions guiding the Study Two research are:
• In what ways, if any, do digital writers use and think about the concept of audience during their invention processes?

• And, in what ways, if any, do writers’ conceptualizations of audience contribute to their attempts at impression management as part of their identity construction within digital texts?

This research began from a contextualist stance which holds that the questions under investigation should point to the methods appropriate for conducting the inquiry (Johanek, 2000; Johnson, 2009). Both Johanek and Johnson argued for the value of methodological pluralism, and they suggested that methods should be determined based on an analysis of both the research question and the research context. Following this stance, two complementary methods of data collection were used: think-aloud protocols generated concurrently during the activity and retrospective accounts. The first research question asked about writers’ thought processes as they compose. Consequently, this indicated the necessity for collecting data in situ. While varied methods, including ethnography, allow for this type of data collection, think-aloud protocols were most appropriate for accessing writers’ thought processes, as will be explained further below. The second question required access to writers’ rationales for their composing behaviors. Post hoc interview data fulfilled that need. The following texts then formed the basis of dissertation study two: protocol transcripts, transcriptions of retrospective interviews based on the protocols, actual LinkedIn profiles generated during the think aloud session, and Facebook profiles participants provided to the researcher.
The combination of varied texts and multiple methods opened spaces for the emergence of multiple variations of writers’ processes and practices to be investigated. Qualitative research is often somewhat relativistic in that it recognizes the possibility for the validity of multiple views (Barbour, 5 May 2001). Accordingly, this particular combination of texts and methods should be viewed as providing “parallel data sets, each affording only a partial view of the whole picture” (Barbour, p. 1117). As such, the data sets offer complementary puzzle pieces, allowing insight into one particular part of digital composing within a particular context.

The deeper rationale behind this particular combination of methods is as follows. Think-aloud protocols are particularly useful for answering questions about what and how processes are occurring during an activity. Ericsson and Simon (1984/1993) indicated that protocols are more reliable than retrospective accounts, and they stated, “verbal reports, elicited with care and interpreted with full understanding of the circumstances under which they were obtained, are a valuable and thoroughly reliable source of information about cognitive processes” (Ericsson & Simon, 1980, p. 247). Retrospective accounts are highly subject to experimenter effects; participants may state what they think they should have thought during the process, as opposed to what they actually thought (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Nonetheless, protocols also have limitations; for instance, they do not typically allow researchers to answer questions about why a particular process occurred (Greene & Higgins, 1994) for two reasons. First, attempts to elicit this type of response would place too great a cognitive strain on the participants (Ericsson & Simon, 1984/1993; Smagorinsky, 1989); second, participants often are
unable to verbalize why they proceed in particular ways because this is typically tacit knowledge (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983). Retrospective accounts, however, counter these limitations by allowing greater access to writers’ motivations and are thus suitable for answering “why” questions. In these accounts, performed after the task is complete, the cognitive strain is lessened and writers are more readily able to provide information about why they made the writing choices that they did (Greene & Higgins, 1994).

Employing both concurrent and retrospective accounts yielded a multifaceted data set. Leighton (2004) explained that this combination of retrospective and concurrently collected data may allow participants to “elaborate or clarify the content and processes mentioned in the concurrent reports” (p. 12). Leighton argued that the retrospective account allows for verification of materials generated during the concurrent protocol. Further, the retrospective accounts may allow greater access to participants’ metacognitive knowledge, which Leighton explained, is used as an indicator of a student’s appreciation of what successful problem solving entails (Kuhn, 2001; Sternberg, 1985), that is, appreciation of how to implement a particular strategy in order to solve a problem, the conditions under which the strategy is used, and the general beliefs that surround solving problems. (p. 12)

Leighton, as an education researcher, described his research based on a classroom setting. Nonetheless, his discussion seems relevant in non-academic research sites as well. Both
types of data, the protocols and the retrospective accounts, proved complementary and provided a more robust, more verifiable data set for this study than either method used alone.

The Task and the Research Site

Each protocol session began with an introductory task which allowed the participants to become comfortable with speaking aloud into a tape recorder while completing an activity. Each participant was then asked to compose a profile for the professional networking site, LinkedIn. At the time of data collection, LinkedIn claimed over 55 million users (2010). Eight months later the site had over 80 million users, demonstrating the site’s rapid, sustained growth since its founding in 2003 (LinkedIn, 2010). The site differentiates itself from other social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace by focusing on making professional, as opposed to solely social, connections. The site organizers suggested that they allow users to “stay informed about your contacts and industry, find the people & knowledge you need to achieve your goals, control your professional identity online” (LinkedIn, 2010). Sections are provided within the profile template for the following information:

- a general statement about one’s current status
- current employment
- past employment
- educational background
- recommendations from other professionals
- connections with other users
- links to other websites
- link to a Twitter feed
- summary, which provides space for extended prose
- links to other digital applications
- expanded details about experience, education, honors and awards, group memberships, and interests
- personal information
- contact settings

Figure 3.1 shows a profile as viewed within the Edit window. Figure 3.2 depicts a profile in the View window. The Edit window is where site users may make changes to their profiles; the View window shows the profile as others entering the site will see it.

Participants generated protocols while completing all sections of the profile which were professionally relevant to them. Instructions for the protocol asked the participants to think-aloud as they composed and to maintain a steady discussion stream. They were not directed to comment on any particular part of the composing process, but rather on any thoughts occurring to them during the process (Huot, 1993). The think-aloud protocols were tape recorded and transcribed.
Figure 3.1 Edit Profile Window

Summary

Teaching: Experienced teacher, with over ten years in the field. Courses taught include: College Writing I and II, College Writing for Business Majors, Introduction to Technical Writing, and Advanced Business and Professional Writing.

Research: Rhetorician; research focuses primarily on writing and the writing process, especially in digital settings. Strong interest in rhetorical invention, and particularly audience, which involves examining how people make decisions about their writing. Other research interests include methodology, legal literacy, and group work in the classroom setting.

Service: Leader of new graduate teachers’ mentoring groups, helped teachers become reflective classroom practitioners.

Administration: Served as Assistant Writing Program Coordinator. Responsibilities included planning workshops for teachers, leading mentoring groups, updating Program documents, judging writing contest entries.

Specialties

research, teaching, mentoring, writing program administration, writing center work
Following the think aloud session, participants participated in retrospectives interviews about their activities. Some standard questions for this retrospective section were used, such as:

- What kinds of concerns seemed most important to you when you were writing your profile?
- What did you want to convey in your profile?
- Were there any problems that you had to solve when writing the profile?
- What types of people do you think will read your profile?
- Who do you hope will read your profile?
- What types of people did you write your profile for?
- Did you have anyone in mind when you were writing your profile?
- In what ways is this similar to writing a profile for ____ (other site)?
- What differences do you find between writing for this site and for ____?
- How important was your potential audience to your writing for ____? For this site?
- Were there any differences in the type of identity you wanted to convey in this site from in site ___?

Summary

Teaching: Experienced teacher, with over ten years in the field. Courses taught include: College Writing I and II, College Writing I for Business Majors, Introduction to Technical Writing, and Advanced Business and Professional Writing.

Research: Rhetorician; research focuses primarily on writing and the writing process, especially in digital settings. Strong interest in rhetorical invention, and particularly audience, which involves examining how people make decisions about their writing. Other research interests include methodology, legal literacy, and group work in the classroom setting.

Service: Leader of new graduate teachers' mentoring groups, helped teachers become reflective classroom practitioners.

Administration: Served as Assistant Writing Program Coordinator. Responsibilities included planning workshops for teachers, leading mentoring groups, updating Program documents, judging writing contest entries.
The intent of the retrospective interview was to encourage participants to speak about their writing experience in their own words. To accomplish this, participants were asked to provide more details about particular aspects of their profile-writing experience. Participants were encouraged to share their own thoughts on their processes. The retrospective accounts were tape recorded and transcribed.

*The Participants*

Study participants were recruited from first and second year college writing classes at a large public university. The eight participants ranged from freshmen to seniors (Figure 3.3). Prior to selection, they were screened for participation in social networking sites, as it was important to the study to avoid recruiting participants who had actually used LinkedIn or similar professional sites. This was imperative because think-aloud protocols yield the most useful data when the task required of participants is fairly novel and of moderate complexity (Ericsson & Simon, 1984/1993; Leighton, 2004). If the task is not novel enough or is too simple, research has demonstrated that think-aloud protocol participants revert to automatic processing and they tend not to be able to report in detail on what they are thinking (Hayes & Flower, 1983; Leighton, 2004). In cases where the task is too difficult, participants struggle to balance the cognitive load of completing the task and engaging in the protocol, which again may lead to sparse data. LinkedIn, however, met the necessary criteria as it was fairly novel but not an exceptionally difficult site to use. All participants had used other social networking sites, and had some limited knowledge to draw from about SNS. They also all likely
entertained some preconceived notions of the characteristics of a profile. However, this particular site with its professional emphasis required them to draw from a different set of knowledge for completing the profile. Participants were able to complete the résumé-like sections of the profile by recalling their previous work and educational experiences, but the summary and status sections required them to synthesize and write about their professional backgrounds and aspirations in novel ways.

![Table of Participants](image)

**Figure 3.3 Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Undecided, possibly Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Theatre Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Sports Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makynna</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Translation/ Flight Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Justice Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Fashion Design</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analytic Approach and Process**

Following data transcription, an inductive, grounded theory approach to coding was applied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Grounded theory is “not really a specific method or technique. Rather it is a style of doing qualitative analysis” (Strauss, 1987, p. 5) which is applicable to a broad range of data types. Although the seminal texts in grounded theory focused on field-based data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987),
The authors acknowledged that the general research style was applicable to other types of data as well. This technique integrates several specific processes meant to produce analysis which is grounded in the data while simultaneously acknowledging the researcher’s interpretative role. The research style typically results in uncovering a core category or categories to which the other data systematically connects. Grounded theory generally incorporates theoretical sampling, constant comparison on multiple levels (i.e. between codes and categories), and a carefully articulated coding paradigm based directly on the data itself (Strauss, 1987).

The analysis began with open coding, which was designed to produce as many insights as possible by allowing spaces for the analytic breaking apart of materials, as opposed to simply describing data. The open coding phase was focused through the guiding questions upon which the dissertation is based, as well as the four core paradigm components of grounded theory. These four components were “conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and tactics, consequences” (Strauss, 1987, pp. 27-8). The four components provided an initial way into the data. For example, Strauss noted that conditions were often identified by participants’ use of words such as “‘because,’ ‘since,’ ‘as’ or phrases like ‘on account of’” (p. 28). This example from one protocol may help clarify the relationship between the coding paradigm components. Amanda stated,
My field of interest, well, right now I’m not sure what I should put because I have a lot of things that I’m interested in here, but I’m not sure which one is my main interest so I’m gonna probably put hmm, design. (3-5)¹

The statement begins with Amanda’s current condition—confusion about what her main professional interest should be. This evaluation of her condition constitutes an invention strategy: assessing one’s past achievements. This invention strategy then produced a consequence in the form of an action. Because of her broad array of interests, Amanda decided to select and type “design” as her current career focal point.

During open coding, the emergent concepts were simultaneously dimensionalized. Dimensionalizing involved making distinctions between various aspects of a category being uncovered (Strauss, 1987, p. 14). The dimensions are discussed in detail below. These distinctions then led to further questions and tentative hypotheses which were checked during additional sampling and coding (pp. 15-16).

Having multiple data sources available for each participant allowed for appropriate theoretical sampling. Analysis began by examining each individual’s think-aloud protocol, using Strauss’s (1987) microscopic approach, which called for word-by-word and line-by-line analysis. Next, relying on the principle of theoretical sampling, retrospective accounts and the two profiles from each participant were drawn from as additional sources for verifying and enriching the developing theories. As the coding scheme became more refined, the sentence served as the unit of analysis within the think-

¹ When referencing Study Two data, numbers represent transcript line numbers.
aloud protocol transcripts and the profile texts. For the interviews, each conversational turn served as the initial unit of analysis. In later stages of analysis, the data was sliced in different ways, i.e., by looking at all responses to single interview questions in the aggregate. This approach provided fresh perspectives and enhanced the theoretical density of the analysis.

In addition to open coding, axial and selective coding (Strauss, 1987) were applied. Axial coding centers on one category (the axis) at a time and requires intense focus on each of the four coding paradigm components (Strauss, 1987, p. 67). This highly directed approach was useful for increasing theoretical density by extending linkages within categories and between concepts; it proved to be an effective method following the initial open coding sessions. Selective coding was used to strategically and systematically connect second-tier categories and subcategories with the core category or categories. For example, selective coding sometimes involved comparing the results of the responses in one category on the four coding paradigm components to the paradigm responses in another situation. This approach led to analytic clusters that connected to each other and to the core category.

Throughout the coding processes, memos were habitually composed. Theoretical memos (Strauss, 1987) are an indispensable tool used for organizing thoughts throughout research and may be employed to discover ideas, to continue developing those ideas, and to more completely form the emergent theory. These varied coding techniques and extensive memo-writing were used throughout the analytic process.
Rhetorical terminology also found its way into the analysis. Based on Strauss (1987), grounded theory allows spaces for incorporating previous theory and extant research by acknowledging the researcher’s individual subjectivities. Grounded theory also allows places for the researcher’s experiential knowledge, some of which may well come from previous reading and conversations in the discipline. Yet, grounded theory does not locate extant research at the heart of new studies. Those materials must earn inclusion by proving relevant to the particular context under study. While working through the data sets, several rhetorical concepts and terms proved useful for describing what was happening in the participants’ writing and thinking processes. Accordingly, those terms are integrated into several illustrations in Chapter Four as part of the grounded theory. The next section provides criteria for evaluating the development and presentation of a grounded theory.

*Evaluating a Grounded Theory*

As grounded theory represents a distinct research style, it also merits a particular set of assessment criteria. Accordingly, Corbin and Strauss (1990) provided comprehensive guidelines for evaluating the quality of a grounded theory. As such, the processes used in Study Two can be read in relation to the criteria those authors provided. They explained that the data itself needs to be subjected to considerations about its “validity, reliability, and credibility” (p. 16). However, traditional quantitative understandings of reliability are not necessarily appropriate within grounded theory; rather, reliability might be more helpfully defined within a qualitative grounded theory.
study as consistency. Study Two demonstrates consistency through providing an auditable trail, including both data as represented in transcripts and other documents, and the analytic process as represented through memos. Much data has been incorporated into Chapter 4 through provision of an extensive set of illustrations of each dimension.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) also note that readers should render “judgments on both the adequacy of the research process which generated, elaborated, or tested the theory” and on “the empirical grounding of the research findings” (p. 16, italics original). They provided a list of seven criteria which they suggested are generally, though not universally, applicable in grounded theory studies:

Criterion #1: How was the original sample selected? On what grounds (selective sampling)? Criterion #2: What major categories emerged? Criterion #3: What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and so on that indicated some of these major categories? Criterion #4: On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? … Criterion #5: What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to relations among categories? On what grounds were they formulated and tested? Criterion #6: Were there instances when hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually seen? … Criterion #7: How and why was the core category selected? Was the selection sudden or gradual, difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made? (p. 17, italics original)

Accordingly, the research process described in this study is rendered as transparently as possible as a means of fulfilling Corbin and Strauss’s criteria. The sources of each sample
have been specified in this chapter, and the major category is described below. Examples in both Chapters 3 and 4 will also elucidate the key indicators for the core category and its dimensions. In addition, the theoretical sampling process is depicted in Chapter 3.

Corbin and Strauss also noted the significance of discussing negative cases; accordingly, several negative examples in Chapter 4 counterbalance positive examples of the dimensions within the core category. These negative examples further enrich the developing theory and demonstrate its flexibility to accommodate the variability of real life composing situations—marking two other key features for evaluating the quality of a grounded theory: “plausibility and value” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 16). For these authors, those standards correspond to how closely the theory appears to fit reality, as well as the potential significance of the theory for understanding the particular concept being analyzed.

Generalizability also needs to be reinterpreted within the grounded theory framework. Corbin and Strauss argued that a grounded theory will delineate the specific conditions under which the phenomenon has been investigated (p. 15). The generalizability of that phenomena then depends on the range of theoretical sampling the researcher has been able to conduct. Broader sampling leads to greater potential for generalizability. In addition, Corbin and Strauss suggested that higher levels of abstraction within the developed theory lead to greater generalizability (p. 15). Because of the small sample size involved in Study Two, generalizability is rather limited. Nonetheless, the study employed substantial theoretical sampling through assessing the
varied documents provided by participants, which did allow for checking the theory, as well as the potential for more generalizable results.

*Unveiling the Core Category*

On the basis of the analytic approach described above, two categories surfaced initially—Interaction and Digital Invention Strategies. After engaging in Strauss’s (1987) process of integration, it finally became apparent that Interaction was actually a particularly robust dimension of Digital Invention. The Digital Invention Strategies category contains multiple other dimensions as well: Assessing Task, Self-assessment, Professional Goals Planning Text, and Assessing Text. Digital Invention Strategies were defined as strategies or tactics writers used to aid in composing online profiles.

![Figure 3.4 Digital Invention Strategies used for composing profiles](image-url)
The dimensions represented in Figure 3.4 all contain temporal elements, but are not represented in chronological order, and they do not represent a linear process. Rather, the dimensions represent the varied invention strategies that writers invoked at different times during their digital writing processes within this study. In other words, writers’ processes were highly variable and some writers engaged in all of the strategies, while others used only a few. In addition, writers used the strategies in varying sequences. For instance, a writer might begin by assessing the task, which involves looking at the present situation to determine what goals were appropriate to the setting. That writer might then move into self-assessment as a means of investigating which elements of his or her autobiographical identity to represent in the profile. However, the writer could then return to assessing the task to help her decide whether that chosen representation was indeed appropriate to the writing context. Chapter 4’s illustrations, drawn from the data, help depict particular conditions which were involved in the application of each of the dimensions.

The first dimension, Assessing Task, contained several codes. This dimension was relevant whenever a participant either evaluated what the task of profile writing required or evaluated his or her progress on the task. LinkedIn provided a status bar on the profile editing page which gradually progressed as participants moved through the profile writing process. Some participants were quite attentive to the status bar and made deliberate attempts to make it progress by assessing which tasks would yield the most in terms of percentage completed on the bar. Accordingly, the code Percentage was used whenever participants reported checking their progress as a means of task assessment.
Participants also examined the website structure to help them assess their task. Several spent some time trying to access others’ profiles and evaluating the various actions possible within the site. These incidents were coded as Web Site Structure. Randy, for example, noted, “It’s not a very well organized list, the system” (6), as he was trying to find his current school to add to his profile. Participants also compared other websites to LinkedIn, which received the code Other Site. One participant, waiting to receive an email confirmation, discussed how these usually came quickly when he had joined video gaming sites. Another code within this dimension occurred when participants discussed other resources which would be useful to complete their profiles. For instance, a participant reviewed some of her other profiles used on social networking sites to see how she had structured information there. Another participant wished that she had brought along a copy of her employment documents, as she thought they would be useful for this task. Finally, Confusion occurred often as a code in the think-aloud protocols. This code was used whenever a participant stated, “I don’t know what to do.” Typically, this code was then followed by further thinking-through of the task, demonstrating that this phrase was often used as part of an in-process task assessment activity. However, in a few cases, incidents of Confusion led the participant to abandon the particular task and move into a different activity within the profile.

Two rhetorical theories provided useful aids for further understanding of the Assessing Task dimension. Sometimes task assessment corresponded to Aristotelian common topoi or topics. Aristotle (2006) delineated 28 common topics of argument which are applicable across a broad range of subjects and in each of the three types of
rhetoric. While the participants were likely completely unaware of Aristotle as a possible argumentative source, they did at times generate their arguments in ways which seemed similar to the topics he proposed, especially when they engaged in task assessment. Assessing Task seems to correspond most often to Aristotelian topic seven: argument from definition (Aristotle, 2006, 2.1398a.1185-1189). This topic suggests rhetors should evaluate the essence of the entity and then draw conclusions based on that evaluation. Similarly, participants evaluated the task and then developed conclusions about how to write to fulfill that task.

The second rhetorical theory which proved helpful for the Assessing Task dimension was *stasis* theory. *Stasis*, originally conceptualized as a generative, heuristic tool, can also be used as an analytic device that allows a rhetor to retroactively identify the central issue within an argument. The four Hermagorean *stases* are conjecture, definition, quality, and objection (Nadeau, 1964, p. 369). The first three are generally recognized as progressive and hierarchical, but objection may be identified at any time within a case. At the level of conjecture, the dispute focuses on existence by considering whether an act occurred. Nadeau (1964) suggests a series of stock questions appropriate to each level of *stasis*, paraphrased here. The stock question for conjectural *stasis* is: is there an act to consider? If there is no disagreement regarding whether the event occurred, then the deliberations move to the definitional level. The second *stasis*, definition, involves categorization and naming of the act. The stock question for definition is: What is the essence or definition of this act? If again, the definitional issue is settled, deliberation moves to the quality of the act. The *stasis* of quality focuses on
determining the specific qualities or characteristics of the act. The qualitative stock
question may be framed as follows: How serious is the act in regard to its nonessential
attributes or attendant circumstances? (Nadeau) If at any of these three levels the rhetor
disagrees, then that becomes a *stasis* point and consequently, the location for
argumentation. The fourth *stasis*, objection, relates to the first three in that while the
parties or the rhetor may agree that the act occurred, agree on the definition of the act, as
well as the qualities of the act, they may disagree about whether the act is appropriate to
discuss in this particular venue and in this particular manner. Nadeau suggested the stock
question here is simply: Is this act appropriate for discussion at this time/place? This
particular theory, as well as Aristotle’s *topoi*, earned its way into the grounded theory
because it proved helpful for explaining the first dimension, Assessing Task.

The second dimension, Self-assessment, had an especially strong temporal
element. This dimension encompassed two types of moments: ones when participants
looked back over their life experiences and ones where they assessed their current
professional status. For example, one participant stated—“I work well with computers
and technology…I’m just quickly showing her [participant’s mother] how to use it and
she’s always just in shock” (Stephanie, 260, 264-5). They used rewinding as a means of
developing ways to describe themselves and their accomplishments to date. When
engaged in self-assessment, participants regularly implied the presence of additional
audience members to aid their processes. For rhetorically savvy participants, the self-
assessment process was then used to craft materials that either pointed to the identified
strengths or downplayed identified weaknesses, such as lack of experience.
Professional Goals was the third dimension located within the core category, Digital Invention Strategies. Like Self-Assessment, it contained a strong temporal element. This dimension came into use when participants looked toward their future lives and used these forward-glancing moments to frame and direct their composing. Several key phrases often signaled professional goal setting, such as “I want to,” “I hope to,” and “In the future.” This dimension was first identified by its verbal invocation within the protocols, and it was verified again in many of the written profiles generated. Participants often stated what they hoped to accomplish professionally and then recorded those professional aspirations as part of their profile compositions. Some variation did occur between the eloquence and detail the verbal statements provided as compared to the actual written materials generated, which tended to be more succinct.

Another dimension, Planning Text, included instances when writers looked toward the future within their actual texts, as opposed to instances when they discussed their future lives. For instance, Randy stated, “let’s try current position. I’m going to add something” (40). He selected a particular aspect of the profile to complete. Here his plans were inchoate; he knew he wanted to complete this section with “something” but the particulars were not yet specified. In another protocol, Elizabeth stated, “when next I get on, I can probably put that” (70). In this case, she was referring to her résumé. She intended to add those materials to her profile at a later time. Planning Text sometimes involved participants weighing several options before deciding on a route. For instance, one participant engaged in planning when selecting which theatrical productions she would include and which she would exclude from this profile. This dimension was
differentiated from Assessing Task because incidents of Planning involved deliberate comments on what should happen next in the composing process. Task assessment acted most often as a precursor to Planning.

Assessing Text occurred when participants re-read and reconsidered what they had already written. The site had two panes available: Edit Profile and View Profile. Several participants habitually clicked between these two options as a means of viewing their compositions from the audience’s perspective. Stephanie often moved between the screens. She added a feature to her profile, and then contemplated how it might appear, noting, “I wonder if this is gonna be like a list in my profile. I’m gonna view it again and see what it looks like” (179-80). She then commented on how the item appeared and returned to the editing window to continue working. Daniela also used the same function as a means of Assessing Text. She stated, “View my public profile how others see it. Ok. Um. You know what I’m gonna go back to edit profile and I’m gonna change this summary. It sounds like crap” (98-99). This series of statements received several codes for both Assessing Text and Planning Text, as the assessment led into planned revisions.

The final dimension, Assessing Interaction, initially situated as its own category, referred to social choices informing impression management as part of identity construction in this particular site. Identity construction was defined as deliberate attempts to build a particular self-representation through text. The choices were social in that participants were basing their decision-making processes on their assessment of the desirability of connecting with various audience members. These social choices were
described by participants in terms of their impression management strategies.
Specifically, impression management occurred whenever writers engaged in goal-directed behaviors as a means of controlling others’ potential responses to their profiles.

Throughout the think-aloud protocols, participants commented on the varied options available to them in regard to interactions. For example, LinkedIn required users to provide an email account address. The site then pulled email contacts from that account and suggested that users invite these contacts to join their network. Whenever LinkedIn made this suggestion, participants typically vocalized their decision-making process about whether or not to include those individuals in their audience. They based their decisions on a variety of factors, but the central theme among the factors was whether or not the participant wanted to establish contact with this potential audience member.

Assessing Interaction took on a variety of forms further developed in Chapter 4. The varied forms, represented as recurring codes within the data, include Interactions with Contacts, Recommendations, Interactions Planned/Anticipated, and Interactions Avoided (Figure 3.5). Interaction with Contacts was coded whenever a participant commented on the contacts option, as in the scenario presented above. The second code—Recommendations—occurred when participants verbally contemplated that option. LinkedIn allowed and actually encouraged users to solicit recommendations from other site users. These recommendations would then become part of the user’s profile. To participate in the recommendation process, the user had to select one of
his/her jobs or school affiliations through a form on the site. The next step was choosing an individual, referred to as a “connection,” to ask for the recommendation. The site then provided a template email asking the connection to endorse the user’s work. Within the protocol transcriptions, the recommendation code was assigned whenever a participant referenced the process or considered soliciting a recommendation from another user.

The third code, Interactions Planned/Anticipated, came into play when a participant made plans for future interactions. For example, one participant added a particular application to her profile, explaining that it could provide conversational fodder for future interactions. The fourth code within Assessing Interactions was Interactions Avoided. Surprisingly often, participants openly discussed who they did not want to interact with on the site: they were engaging in highly deliberate audience formation. This code was sometimes used in conjunction with the Recommendations or Contacts...
codes when participants explained that they were avoiding certain contacts LinkedIn had suggested. These four codes were all situated within the complex dimension, Assessing Interaction.

In sum, this chapter introduced the research site and participants involved in Study Two and also delineated the research process while explicating the core tenets of grounded theory. The discussion then turned to the core category which was developed on the basis of Study Two’s data. This core category will be examined in much greater detail in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 provides illustrations of each of the dimensions within the core category by looking to specific participants’ experiences. These illustrations amplify the details of the dimensions as a means of showing the data in action. The materials then point toward the grounded theory framework for understanding digital invention processes vis-à-vis audience.
CHAPTER 4

Interaction and Invention: Facets of Digital Identity Construction

In this chapter, a series of illustrations depict the dimensions within the grounded theory developed for this study. These descriptions of data from each dimension bring the research materials to life as each of the actors is introduced and the writers’ invention processes and practices are considered. The first illustration introduces several dimensions as represented within the data, but deals in depth with the Assessing Task dimension. Most participants engaged in some level of task assessment, but Stephanie exhibited a particularly dramatic shift in her understanding, and this participant’s process is the focus of the first extended example.

Following this opening illustration, the chapter moves into the other dimensions. The second and third dimensions contain some overlap in that participants often quickly vacillated between the two during their composing. However, each merits its own illustration as they do contain distinct features, particularly due to their different temporal focuses. The second example demonstrates how participants considered professional goals during their composing processes. The Professional Goals dimension focused on the future as participants considered how they intended to shape their life paths, and how they could represent those ambitions within their profiles. This illustration draws from several participants’ processes to demonstrate how some engaged in deliberate identity shaping for an audience by establishing and evaluating their professional goals. A
negative example further complicates the illustration of this dimension in action, in that one participant shaped her goals with only herself in mind. The third example examines self-assessment as an invention strategy. During Self-assessment, participants contemplated their autobiographical selves to date; these considerations often led to participants’ engagement with the Professional Goals dimension.

The fourth illustration focuses on the Planning Text dimension. While much of the participants’ writing processes could be conceptualized as planning according to the discoveries of Flower and Hayes (1980b; 1981) and Hayes and Flower (1980/1994), in Study Two, this dimension was restricted to incidents when the writers actually anticipated the future within their text. The chapter then turns to an examination of how participants assessed what they had written thus far, which often led into either revising or editing on the spot, or making plans to do so later. Following this illustration, the sixth dimension, Assessing Interaction, comes into consideration. As this dimension was very robust, the illustration moves through the varied codes represented within it to provide examples from participants, as opposed to the other illustrations which are generally organized as moving from participant-to-participant.

Finally, in the last two sections of the chapter, audience is brought to the fore as a recurrent theme which runs through many of the dimensions. In one sense, the final extended illustration echoes the opening which focuses on Stephanie, as the focus turns to the distinctive facets of Amanda’s contemplation of audience. This example depicts the integration of several key issues: audience, privacy and identity construction within a
digital locale. The audience data is also viewed cumulatively as the chapter closes. Taken together, the extended illustrations in this chapter provide the reader with opportunities to immerse him or herself within the data as a means of further understanding how this study’s grounded theory developed. To assist the reader, Figure 4.1 offers a synopsis of Study 2’s key features.

An Evolving Task Assessment

This opening illustration focuses on the composing processes of Stephanie, looking particularly to her use of Task Assessment as an invention strategy, while also touching on several other relevant dimensions. Within her protocol, Stephanie’s task assessment evolved as she moved from considering the site’s social possibilities to constructing the site according to a professional rhetorical purpose. Although task assessment occurred in many participants’ processes, her assessment was particularly interesting as she demonstrated a more dramatic shift in understanding of the rhetorical task than any of the other participants.

Stephanie was a freshman interested in fashion design and photography as possible majors. She entered the protocol session with a particular schema in mind for composing digital profiles; however, she soon found this schema problematic for this particular audience within the professional networking context. Through this emergent understanding, she discussed her understanding of the potential audience and possible interactions in remarkable ways, and she exhibited an unusual attention to planning future interactions as part of her impression management strategies.
Research Questions:

- In what ways, if any, do digital writers use and think about the concept of audience during their invention processes?
- And, in what ways, if any, do writers’ conceptualizations of audience contribute to their attempts at impression management as part of their identity construction within digital texts?

Data: Think-aloud protocols, retrospective interviews, profile texts

Participants: 4 freshmen, 2 sophomores, 1 junior, 1 senior

The Grounded Theory:
Stephanie’s protocol incorporated discussions of her audience nearly from the beginning (line 21). Her attention to possible interactions with her audience members suggests that she envisioned a particular relationship with her audience. Many of the other participants, at least in their protocols, seemed to view their audiences as someone “out there” who may or may not care about what they have written. Stephanie, however, commented that she would, “add my birthday so people can tell me happy birthday because I like that” (21). This statement suggests that she assumed the site had a social function, as opposed to solely professional purposes.

Shortly after the birthday incident, Stephanie planned future interactions while considering privacy issues. She commented, “I’m not gonna put my address and phone number or my IM because I don’t feel like people should be seeing all of those. And if they want, they can ask me themselves” (23-24). This passage shows she had a particular audience in mind, and she could already envision her interactions with that audience. She anticipated this audience requesting information from her. Although other participants exhibited attention to identity construction in that they considered who would have access to that identity, they tended not to overtly comment on plans for interactions in the way Stephanie did. Stephanie’s unique attention to deliberately planning future interactions seemed to correspond with her initial assessment of the site as similar to other social networking sites she had used.

Typical of other participants’ consideration of interactions: “It’s asking me to select people that I know and trust. And I don’t know any so I’ll skip this step” (Joe, 19).
As she continued her protocol, Stephanie engaged in further evaluation of the site and what it offered in terms of interactions. She again discussed privacy when thinking about whether to include a photograph of herself. She noted:

If I had a picture, I wouldn’t mind. I guess right now they can see everything because nothing shows anything that I wouldn’t want to give away. I feel I don’t know if people can like: I don’t get this. I don’t know if it’s like Facebook or not. If they can like add you or like look at everything and determine if they want to talk to you or not. (96-101)

In the first two sentences, she considers whether this part of her identity—the pictorial representation—would be appropriate to display. For her, privacy issues were paramount. Her wording, “I wouldn’t want to give away,” suggests that she thought displaying information about herself was a type of gift or a prize for her audience, and perhaps further, that this gift could not be reclaimed once distributed. The next two sentences show her thinking through her initial evaluation of the site, as she tried to determine whether it was indeed comparable to Facebook. This indicates an evolving thought pattern exemplifying task assessment. Earlier in the profile, in the birthday anecdote above, Stephanie seemed to assume the site had a Facebook-like social role. However, after completing more of the profile, including her education and summary sections, she began to reconsider this notion. She envisioned possible audience activities in the last sentence of this passage when she contemplated her readers making a decision about adding her to their network based on an examination of her profile or select elements of
her profile. She crafted her profile according to this vision of the possible audience; she engaged in impression management as an aspect of her identity construction.

Next, Stephanie decided to request recommendations (106). She reached this decision by assessing what remained of the profile completion task and then determining that soliciting a recommendation would increase her profile completion score by 5%. Consequently, the task assessment served her as an invention strategy. When she spoke about actually requesting recommendations, her actions fell within the Interaction dimension. However, after making the decision to request recommendations, she soon redacted it because she became confused about what the actual recommendation would accomplish. This redaction demonstrates the role of the code Confusion within the Assessing Task dimension. She stated, “I guess endorse me for [school name]. Crap. I’m hitting cancel. I don’t know what that means” (107-8). In this case, the intent to interact shifted to Interaction Avoidance due to Stephanie’s re-evaluation of the task, demonstrating the close linkages between the various dimensions. Stephanie essentially panicked when her task assessment failed, and consequently, she redirected to another more cognitively comfortable section of the profile.

Stephanie frequently paused in her profile composition process and selected “view my profile.” This allowed her to take the audience’s perspective, which typically led into more text production. As such, this move also constituted an invention strategy. When viewing the profile, she commented that she did this to “see what it looks like” (117). This particular comment demonstrates a concern for style; she evaluated the effect
of her profile’s formatting. While viewing the profile, she engaged in planning additional text production. For instance, she commented, “That’s where I would like to talk about myself more” (122). Stephanie then vacillated between planning and assessing previously written text.

At several points in the protocol, Stephanie evaluated the rhetorical purpose of her profile. Her first comment on its purpose was, “I guess this will help me get jobs” (129). This task assessment then prompted additional writing and consideration of how the profile would look and sound to her audience—in this case, herself. She commented, “I’m gonna edit that. I don’t like the way that sounds” (132). She demonstrated that she was still considering how the profile could be used when she remarked, “maybe there will be someone like in the fashion industry if that’s what this is for” (161). At this point, she started to understand the site as a job site, but had not yet fully articulated what that meant for her writing.

This task assessment and nascent understanding of her audience also came into play when Stephanie commented, “now on my Facebook for my job experience it says I’m a professional tanner. But I don’t know if people who are looking for jobs would want to see that on here” (185-6). In this particular statement, Stephanie unknowingly invoked one of Aristotle’s (2006) common *topoi* or topics: argument from definition. Her process of task assessment involved examining the essence of the site, and this examination then led into conclusions about the subject. Specifically, this site did not seem to support the humor that she used in her other profile, and instead she was
beginning to realize the serious intentions informing behavioral norms on LinkedIn. This incident also speaks to Stephanie’s budding recognition that the ethos she portrayed on SNS was not an ethos appropriate to a professional site.

Stephanie later commented on how she had a template of sorts which she used when writing her profiles. She explained that she has sought scholarships through websites, and she would write essentially the same thing each time (271). This served as another instance of two Aristotelian *topoi* in action: time (Aristotle, 2006, 2.23.1379b.179-180) and past precedent (2.23.1398b.194). Aristotle suggested that one might look at what had been previously accomplished, and use that as an argument that the same (or more) could be accomplished in the current situation. Similarly, Stephanie looked at previous judgments she had made as a means for determining the appropriate judgment for the current situation. However, in this incident, she then returned to a lament which had been bothering her throughout her protocol: she expressed concern that she had not been able to make any connections with others through this site. Whenever she returned to this concern, she commented that she could not understand what connections were or how they worked. For her, connections represented a failed task assessment. However, this time, her lament about connections triggered a reassessment of the rhetorical purpose of the site itself. She observed,

Maybe I should change my interests because I’m better at people, better to get a job than just to meet people on here. So this would be like my job base one that would help me. Obviously I would have another one such as Facebook would be
like for my friends. So maybe I shouldn’t do everything that I do on one for the other. (279-283)

This section served as a crystallizing moment for Stephanie. From that point on, although she still occasionally complained about her lack of connections, she also began to actively consider her audience as people who might employ her. For example, she returned to the profile section which allowed writers to add web applications, such as Twitter, and remarked, “I think it’s weird how they have a Twitter on here if this is like for jobs. I don’t know why would a person looking to employ you even care what you’re doing” (308-9). From a rhetorical standpoint, what happened to Stephanie at this point in her protocol was she entered into the stasis of objection and this led to a re-evaluation of the site’s rhetorical purpose.

Stephanie had originally considered issues of definition and quality—how she ought to define the task and herself, and what qualities of herself were important to bring to the fore. Stephanie’s definition of the task was called into question and moved into a state of objection. She determined that what she had been trying to accomplish—building a social profile similar to her others—was not an appropriate goal for this location. Once settling this stasis of objection, she moved back into the stasis of definition. She worked to determine how she ought to represent herself according to her newfound understanding of the site, which was to be appropriately distinguished from her previous concept.

Her new understanding of the site’s rhetorical purpose surfaced when she reviewed her current status. While she had previously written a comment about her
upcoming exam in Fabrics, she decided, based on her new understanding, to delete it. She explained this choice: “I feel like if people were to look at it, I don’t want people to know that I don’t like taking Fabrics” (355-6), an important course within her major. This statement exemplifies impression management as Stephanie seemed to have a vision of the particular audience as well as how she wanted them to perceive her. She decided that the impression she wanted to convey should demonstrate a conscientious ethos. She wanted to avoid any negative associations between her as a student and her major, likely because she feared that negativity could make her appear less desirable and less enthusiastic as a new entrant into her field. This incident also speaks to pathos, in that Stephanie appears to have considered what emotions her statement might evoke in her audience. Because she wanted to avoid negative associations, she then chose to reframe the way she was constructing her identity.

In addition, as noted earlier, Stephanie had decided not to include her phone number and some other means of contacting her. At the end of her protocol, she had an expanded idea of what she did not want others to see based on her assessment of the task and the role of interaction within the site. She stated,

I don’t know if you’re like friends with people, but I wouldn’t want people seeing some of my stuff unless I allowed them to, unless I knew who they were, what their reason was for looking at it. If they were just browsing. I don’t really want everyone to know what I’m doing. (359-61)
Although she still exhibited some confusion about the site, she realized that its professional purpose differed from the other sites she used, and she decided there was a need for greater selectivity in the identity she would display here.

Stephanie began her protocol by thinking of the site according to a schema she already knew— the traditional social networking site profile. She explained in her interview:

I feel like because I had filled a lot of these out for like scholarships and different profiles I felt like I was just writing like the same stuff just transferring it from different pages you know. Like I already have most of it in my head for what I write for those types of things. Kind of like putting it all back down again.

(Interview, 36-39)

Through her protocol she showed several salient characteristics of what that schema meant to her: she prioritized the interactive potential of SNS, she identified SNS audiences as friendly and eager to engage, she recognized the need for some privacy considerations within these types of sites, and she cared about the overall appearance of her profile. As she worked through the profile generation process for LinkedIn, several aspects of her SNS schema were upheld, but her understanding of audience shifted. Stephanie actively engaged in learning as she composed. She remained eager to use the site for interactive purposes, and she maintained her concerns about privacy and profile appearance. However, by task assessment, she came to understand the audience as potentially more judgmental, as evidenced through her decision to change the status
statement about the Fabrics class exam. Hence, her new understanding of audience
directed her impression management behavior as she constructed her identity for this site.
She decided to avoid humor (the tanning reference) as well as negativity (disliking
Fabrics) and instead focused her profile on more professional attributes instead. In the
interview, she also commented briefly on her task assessment process when asked who
she hoped would read her profile. She stated, “Job or employers. I just kept browsing
because I didn’t really understand what it was about and I was looking at the
connections” (Interview, 23-24). For Stephanie, Assessing Task was a dynamic activity.
She entered the site and the research session with a certain understanding of SNS, but that
idea changed as she encountered new materials.

This illustration has provided a microscopic examination of one participant’s
process, focused particularly on how she changed in her task assessment. In the next
illustration, the Self-Assessment dimension is explicated through data provided by
several participants.

*Using Self-Assessment as an Invention Device*

Self-Assessment involves incidents when participants evaluated what they had
accomplished to date and used this knowledge as an invention strategy. This second
dimension contains some crossover with professional goals, as participants often
vacillated rather quickly between self-assessing moments when they reviewed their
accomplishments to date and moments of forward glancing toward a hopeful future. This
illustration first looks to several participants to demonstrate the significant role of self-
assessment in composing and the ways that audience did and did not impact those choices. These participants used self-assessment to lead directly into composing. Next, the discussion turns to several participants who provided variations on the assess-and-write paradigm. Both Joe and Randy, for instance, struggled with trying to parlay their self-assessments into the written identities they desired to create. Rachel also provided an interesting case. She engaged in self-assessment but then made deliberate decisions about which elements of that assessment deserved to be included and which should be excluded from the discoursal identity (Ivanic, 1998)\(^2\) she was constructing within this site as part of her impression management processes.

Daniela used self-assessment when evaluating how to represent her theatre experience within the profile. Her self-assessment was based on an internalized understanding of the standards for her field. She commented that it was important in theatre to have non-academic productions, but she had thus far only worked in academic performances. Although she had a significant academic repertoire of multiple productions, she felt that these did not serve as convincing enough material to convey her aptitude. She stated, “positions are all academic so that’s craptacular” (Protocol, 92).

Because of this concern and because of the site format, she chose not to list specific productions in her LinkedIn profile. Regarding the site she remarked,

> It doesn’t seem like it’s going to be able to sell my skills…because most of what I have is academic work in the theatre, so I have this resume… of like…10 or more

\(^2\) See Chapter 1 (p. 15) for a discussion of different types of identities Ivanic (1998) identified.
productions, but…there isn’t really a way to put that into LinkedIn. (Interview, 139-141)

Because of the limitations she observed during both her self-assessment and the task-assessment, Daniela’s profile was sparsely populated with minimal information about her educational experiences. Her self-assessment then led her to focus more heavily on her professional goals as opposed to her past experience. Her summary text was entirely future-centered as she wrote about what she would like to accomplish as a scenic artist in theatre and a drama teacher. In this sense then, Daniela participated in deliberative rhetoric as she self-assessed.

On the other hand, Amanda engaged in self-assessment, much of which she then encoded in writing within the profile. However, she did not appear to relate her self-assessment to an intended audience’s values. At the beginning of her protocol, Amanda stated, “I have a lot of things I’m interested in here, but I’m not sure which one is my main interest” (3-4). She examined those interests, but did not appear to base her decision-making on externally derived standards; her profile was not written with any overt attempt to market herself or her skills. She explained during her interview that she did not anticipate the profile having a particular audience; instead, it was directed to “whoever wants to [read it] I guess” (21). Amanda did not list some of her past jobs on the profile, and she explained in her interview that she selected jobs to list according to how hard she had worked at them and which ones she most enjoyed (8-9); again, this represented criteria stemming from her personal concerns, as opposed to consideration of
an external audience. Amanda’s particular approach may have come from her uncertainty about her career path, and because she lacked a vision of any immediate purpose for the profile.

Joe, however, had a developed sense of his audience. When he composed, he also participated in self-assessment, but he generally disapproved of what he found. Joe initially self-assessed while grappling with the requirement to provide a title for his current job. He strongly desired to convey that his job was important, but he simultaneously recognized that it had little to do with his future employment aspirations. Joe contemplated how to title his job to make it sound important:

   It’s asking me to add my position where I work and I don’t really know what it would be called. It’s a tent place so I think it would be event services. A title for my job. I guess you would call it a Tent Erector. For um event tents. Special event tent. I guess I would be a Tent Erector come to think about it. (Protocol, 41-44)

In this excerpt, Joe engaged in self-assessment and considered style as he tried to find the appropriate word to signify that his job was perhaps more than basic manual labor. His self-assessment led directly into writing. By choosing “Tent Erector” as his job title, he tried to demonstrate a specialized skill. He explained during his interview that he wanted to have specialties to list, as the site had prompted him, but he felt like “I don’t really have anything—sounds kind of sad I guess—that would separate me right now….Maybe hardworking but everyone thinks they’re hardworking for the most part” (21-23). In his actual profile text, he did include “hardworking” under his specialties, despite his
concerns about this not being a distinctive trait. However, Joe did not provide any evidence to support this claim. He merely stated, “I am a hardworking individual that does not like to give up on something that I have already begun” (Profile).

Joe chose to foreground his lack of experience, perhaps in the hope of encountering a sympathetic reader. His summary statement began, “The extent of my professional experience its [sic] limited, but I am looking forward to possibly expanding on my future plans, which include working for a sports franchise [sic] yet to be determined” (Profile). Later in his protocol, Joe contemplated how to fill out the status section of his profile, and again he encountered difficulties with his self-assessment. He commented that he was “not currently working on anything” (93). As he puzzled through what the site wanted, he again used self-assessment to prompt writing when it finally occurred to him that he was indeed working toward his degree in Sports Administration, and he decided to make that part of his status statement.

When looking across the profile text, his interview, and his protocol, it became clear that Joe wanted desperately to convey a stronger, more assured professional identity than what he actually felt belonged to him. He noted wryly:

I don’t have anything that would set me apart I feel like. I feel like that’s a huge deal. And I don’t have a lot of experience. I don’t even have a completed degree yet. So why would someone want to take a chance on someone like me?

(Interview, 53-56)
Joe made several remarks which suggested that although he had hoped that a corporate boss would indeed be his potential reader, in retrospect, he anticipated no “real person” would be interested in his materials.

Randy ran into difficulties as well, although his were of a somewhat different sort than Joe’s. In his protocol, Randy engaged in extensive self-assessment. He provided a lot of details that did not make the cut for inclusion in the actual profile; nonetheless, the self-assessing thought processes he described did inform the brief, actual writing he produced. However, Randy, like several other participants, might have benefitted rhetorically from including more detail within the actual profile.

When he verbally described his previous job as a game advisor working for a prominent video game retailer, he offered an anecdote about how he made change without using the computer.

Although you can just type it into computer it’s faster when people hand you cash, to be able to just think of it yourself real fast and not have to actually use the computer, look at the computer and see how much you owe them. (Protocol, 67-69)

Randy also verbalized his philosophy of customer service when assessing his role with this employer. He explained the importance of being “as helpful as you can” (70) and noted,
you always have some, maybe 1 in 20, a customer they’re having a bad day and they come in and you just have to be able to just let it slide and not get angry with people because customer service being number one in any retail store. (70-73)

These two anecdotes were then written into his profile in highly abbreviated form as he recorded that this position entailed, “Organizational skills, competent [sic] computer skills, basic arithmetic, good people skills” (Profile). The incidents showed Randy thinking through what he learned on the job, and they show that he had clear reasons for recording the particular traits that he chose. However, because he did not translate any of these thoughts into the writing within the actual profile, the profile was relatively bland from a rhetorical standpoint. Rather, this section of his profile was merely a list.

Randy continued to struggle with translating insightful self-assessments into the actual profile. As he prepared to compose his summary statement, Randy exposed two facets of his autobiographical identity while reflecting on this job from his perspectives as both an employee and a customer. He also analyzed how the employer advanced its customer service reputation by hiring only gamers or former gamers for customer service roles. After providing these insights, he then began composing the summary statement. While composing, Randy explained verbally:

the need to be able to work quickly, let’s go with efficiently, but to give you more time for customers and making sure you’re not neglecting customers. But you never want to let the store get behind. If you don’t keep up with your work, you
hurt the store which hurts the company as a whole which comes back around to hurt you as an employee. (118-121)

In this section, he tried to translate what he had learned through his previous employment into greater written detail. He recapitulated and then refined his customer-first attitude and also provided the rationale behind it: it is important to serve customers appropriately as inappropriate service will eventually lead to problems for the employee. However, he struggled with moving from this thought process into actual writing. He ended up writing, “I have worked in customer service and learned the value of customer satisfaction. The need to be able to efficiently [sic] both serves to free time as an employee to better help customers as well as ensuring a smooth operating company” (Randy profile). His writing in this section appeared to be an attempt to smooth out the verbal processes, although the writing remained grammatically problematic and was not subject to revision; essentially, it never progressed beyond “writer-based prose” (Flower, 1979).

Although Joe and Randy each struggled with composing a discoursal identity for an audience based on their self-assessments, Rachel did not struggle as much. Rachel used self-assessment in conjunction with her audience awareness to aid in her composing processes, providing an interesting case in the process of selecting elements of self-assessment for inclusion versus exclusion. She opened her protocol stating, “alright, I am employed and I work for Taco Bell which is not very exciting to put on a résumé but it’s a job and I am a manager, which I guess is a little bit better than just working at Taco
Bell” (1-2). She evaluated her employment status in terms of how others might read her status. This was indicated when she noted that it is “not very exciting” (1). She also referred obliquely to audience when she explained that it is “a little bit better” (1). In this statement she seemed to envision someone reading her materials and making the judgment that it was better that she had experience as a manager rather than only as crew. The metric she used for assessing her accomplishments, similar to Daniela and Joe, came from an external reader. From this point on, her process of self-assessment pointed her toward a particular rhetorical goal of doing “something that will make me stand out” (Protocol, 26). Her decision to make herself stand out corresponded to the Aristotelian common topic of opposites. Rachel decided that blending in was bad, therefore standing out was a good to strive toward. Although Joe also valued being distinctive, Rachel was actually able to actualize it more readily: she decided uniqueness was her best marketing asset, and proceeded accordingly.

When asked what she hoped to convey through her profile, Rachel answered without hesitation, “That everything I’m doing is unique… if you know more people that are studying Russian and Finnish and flight technology, let me know, but I don’t. [laughter] So it’s just—I want to stand out” (18-20). Rachel explained further that she wanted to emphasize that she had lived in another culture and spoken the language, which she felt helped distinguish her as more qualified than others who had only coursework in their target languages. Because of this, more than half of her summary statements within the profile dealt with her experiences abroad. During her interview, Rachel included additional discussion of her experiences abroad which were not used
within the profile. She spoke at length about when she “taught English to a Russian professor” and noted that the professor “significantly improved” due to her interactions with Rachel (69). While she did not include this anecdote in her profile, this may have been self-justification for what she decided to actually write in the profile, or perhaps a rhetorical choice; she may also have thought that this experience did not pertain directly to her current career aspirations.

In sum, this illustration has described how self-assessment can occur as an invention activity by examining accomplishments through either the writer’s own point of view as Amanda did, or through other audience members’ perspectives, as the other participants did. Within these instances, self-assessment prompted writing. The participants selected materials to record based on their self-analysis. The analysis itself occurred in at least two different ways: by evaluating their accomplishments from their own perspectives, or evaluating through the eyes of potential audience members. In either case, the analysis typically led into writing, although several participants (e.g. Rachel, Randy) thought through and talked about much more material than what they actually recorded. The next illustration examines the writers’ use of professional goals as an invention strategy.

Establishing Professional Goals for an Audience

This illustration focuses on the dimension of Professional Goals by looking at participants’ integration of goal-based materials into their profiles. Writers integrated Professional Goals into their profiles as a means of promoting the impressions of
themselves that they wished to convey as part of their identity construction on the site. This dimension often informed participants’ invention processes in this particular site, likely because of the site’s character as a professional networking location and because of the prompts built into the site design. When editing the Summary section of the profiles, the site authors asked participants to discuss their professional experience and goals (Figure 4.1). When users shifted to the profile View window, the reference to professional experience and goals was hidden, and the section they had filled in was titled simply “Summary.” (See Figures 3.1 and 3.2 for additional images of profiles.) During interviews, the participants often discussed these goals when asked what they hoped to convey to their audience through their profiles.

During her protocol, Amanda explained her goals as she typed her summary. She commented, “I am an undecided major but I think I am going into education. I would like to teach public speaking or English to seniors in high school. I plan on graduating…with a masters degree” (42-3). This statement demonstrates Amanda’s identity construction within the site. She established herself as a student who was working toward specific educational and professional goals. As she continued composing her profile, Amanda described herself through her education and work experience. In her interview, Amanda explained that she wanted to focus on “what I was planning on doing with the rest of my life” (9). She commented that it “makes me happy” (9-10) to write about those goals. Interestingly, she did not discuss these ambitions in terms of her future reader at this time. Rather, Amanda’s identity construction process as she described it at this point in
the interview seemed to be designed primarily for her own purposes—it pleased her to think about her future, and she was her own audience for these cogitations.

Other participants were more deliberate in shaping their professional goals and experience for audiences beyond themselves. Rachel directly commented on her readers when composing her status as she contemplated her goals. She said during her protocol, “What I am working on right now is trying to get tuition paid for flight school. But they probably don’t want to know that” (46-7). The “they” referenced in this statement suggests that Rachel had a particular audience in mind while she composed. This statement also demonstrates that Rachel had assessed or was in the process of assessing the values of that audience. Accordingly, she decided that this audience would not value a
relatively mundane financial detail, and that this would not enhance her candidacy for employment. She decided to write instead that she was “working on translation because I am doing that also” (47-8). Rachel was referring to a class assignment which required her to translate a text from one language into another. By choosing this fairly immediate but more professional goal, Rachel was able to direct her readers toward her long-term professional ambition of working as a translator. She also demonstrated efficacy by depicting herself as actively engaged in translation. Although she was still a student, she found a way to leverage her academic responsibilities toward future employment.

Joe found composing a summary of his professional goals very difficult. During his protocol, he contemplated his lack of professional experience, and pondered, “The extent of my professional goals, professional experience. See I wonder why they ask such a question. Experience, it’s limited” (55-56). Like Rachel, Joe referred to the audience—“they”—when contemplating his professional goals. Unlike Rachel, Joe seemed to assume that the site should be more personalized toward a student like himself. He questioned why a networking site would not recognize that a student had limited experience thus far and relatively vague goals. After his initial consternation, Joe began to verbalize his goals: “But I am looking forward to possibly expanding on my future plans which include working for a sports franchise… my ultimate goal would be working for a sports franchise as a uh marketing representative” (Protocol, 57-60). In this statement, Joe initially expressed his goal and then began planning his text. He further narrowed his goal by stating that he would work for the franchise as a “marketing
representative” (60). Joe’s identification of goals led to writing and constituted an invention process for him.

During the retrospective interview, Joe reiterated his concept of an ultimate goal, while also acknowledging his current lack of experience. When asked what he hoped to convey in his profile, Joe stated,

I know that it may not be impressive now but I want to let them know that I do have future plans and goals and that I like hope they can like see that from my profile. Maybe not since I don’t have much on there now. But maybe that they can realize that I’m working toward something and I have an ultimate goal. That’s it.

(Interview, 25-28, emphasis added)

Through this statement, Joe’s audience analysis processes again become apparent. He made three references to the audience. This audience was made up of people who Joe hoped to impress. While composing, he constructed them as understanding readers who would not hold his limited experience against him, but would instead perhaps see a diamond in the rough—someone who did indeed have a future as a potential employee. When asked whether he had envisioned a particular audience member while writing, he replied, “Yeah like a corporate boss. So I tried to sound more professional or give my job titles something that sounds important. But in reality I don’t really know who would read it, so I don’t know why I had someone in mind” (Interview, 58-60). For Joe, being prompted to think about professional goals was a challenging writing task, but it did lead to the invention of materials for his profile.
Randy also provided particularly interesting materials while considering professional goals. He felt the need to counter the impressions his employment history conveyed by expressing his long-range professional goals. He explained that his employment history was situated very much in the “immediate”—“Where can I get paid the best, for the immediate, which really being in college it’s what’s important” (Interview, 20-21). Based on this self-assessment, during the interview, he carefully articulated long-range plans for his career. When asked what he hoped to convey through his profile, he explained that he wanted to show his aspirations toward higher levels than his current employment. He explained,

I really wanted to show that my future goals are higher as far as work, um, instead of like, especially in like experiences and goals. I want-- I have a plan right now to go with federal law enforcement. Do a full career there in 25 years, 30 years and during that time hopefully get a masters and a PhD in law so I can retire to my own private law practice. (13-16)

Essentially, Randy decided the identity he had constructed through listing his work experience did not convey the full impression he wanted. This was only one element of him—his past. He wanted to invoke the future to develop his ethos as a well-rounded, ambitious, and potentially hirable person.

Randy constructed his audience as “anyone who’s in this more general path of the justice system” (Interview, 59-60) because of his professional goal to work in that field.
He deliberately excluded members of private industry from the audience he invoked. He explained,

the only people I wouldn’t expect to be looking at it would be um corporate private corporations and stuff just because that’s not the field I’m looking for and I certainly haven’t conveyed any of that interest. So I would think even if they looked at it they probably wouldn’t contact me from that perspective. (61-64)

He differentiated the audience for this site from SNS by explaining that this audience was mainly interested in abilities and employment experience as opposed to personality. Specifically, he explained these attributes mattered, but “not so necessarily much who you [are], like your personality. Interests, so they’re starting to get into that but for the most part it’s just looking at who you are as an employee, not who you are on a more personal level” (93-95). This statement indicates that Randy separated his professional identity from his personal identity when composing for this site. He determined that the discoursal identity he was composing, particularly in regard to his professional goals, needed to be selective for this audience.

Overall, perhaps due to the prompts provided by the site, the participants in this study turned to setting professional goals as an invention strategy. Early cognitive research identified goal-setting as part of many writers’ processes (Flower & Hayes, 1980b); however, goal-setting in those research contexts generally referred to how the writers set particular goals for their composition. In this study, Professional Goals referenced larger life issues which were then sometimes incorporated into the writers’
profiles. The next illustration provides additional more salient connections to earlier process research by considering writers’ planning.

*Planning Text to Support a Particular Discoursal Identity*

Planning also plays a role within digital composing as well. Earlier work on writers’ cognitive processes heavily emphasized the role of planning on many levels (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1980b; Hayes & Flower, 1980/1994). In this study, planning text was limited as a code to specific incidents when writers anticipated the future within their text. For instance, Amanda commented, “I’m gonna put helping someone’s study” (Protocol, 22) as she was deciding what to record for her status, and this phrase was identified as an instance of planning. In another instance, Elizabeth moved from self-assessment into planning. She spoke about her job as a restaurant hostess, and explained, “what I do is like greet the guests, talk to them, get bread… I’m trying to figure out what I should put about that” (Protocol, 102-104). Overall, likely because of the limited definition of the code, planning text seemed to take a backseat to other aspects of digital composing, at least within this particular site. However, several specific examples of deliberate text planning are worth discussing.

Stephanie, as explained in the earlier illustration, initially relied on her comfort with the genre to develop materials—her plans mainly consisted of transferring materials she had composed elsewhere into her new profile. Despite this initial idea, she engaged in more active planning of text than any other participant. In her protocol, she explained:
I want to talk about how I want to incorporate photo [as an academic pursuit] but I feel like … it’s kind of it’s something I’m going to talk about with my school. But if I’m gonna show that I want my fashion and my photo together I might as well just write about it. (33-36)

In this instance, Stephanie was planning how to include each particular aspect of her academic identity. She noted, “I’m going to move that I’m a good sewer because I’m going to put how I communicate well” (251-2). She also exhibited planning when composing her summary statement. At that point, she set a particular goal to “put something about myself. It says professional experience and goals” (110-111). Stephanie planned text at several other points in her protocol as well.

Rachel also made deliberate plans for her text several times. For example, she explained that she was going to add a summary of herself (Protocol, 21) and then planned what should be included when she stated, “values and ethics, goals and my ambitions” (22). She did not provide details about how this statement was transferred into actual writing, but this phrase seemed to offer rhetorical goals for her summary. This statement also shows that Rachel was making connections between planning and identity construction. The four facets she mentioned all would become components of her digital identity for this particular site. For instance, in the summary she composed, she specifically mentioned a future goal. Similarly, although not labeling them as such, she referenced her values by noting that she had studied “ethics and environmental policy” (Profile) while abroad.
Rachel also demonstrated planning as part of identity construction when she discussed what to add to her profile about her activities and societies. As a member of the International Socialist Organization, she contemplated listing this but then evaluated it in terms of its popularity. Her assessment of the potential audience contributed to her plans in this instance as she observed, “I know that’s not very popular in the United States so I’m not really sure if I should include that or not” (Protocol, 14-15). Rachel here exemplified Aristotle’s argument from definition: she evaluated the essence of the site and the audience and based her conclusions upon that evaluation. Despite her discussion of striving to be “unique” in her self-representation (18), she quickly decided not to include her affiliation. It was surprising just how fast she reached this decision. In lines 14-15 she questioned whether to include it. In the following sentence, she said, “I don’t think I’m going to” (15). Rachel engaged in audience assessment which led her to construct her identity according to what she felt the audience would expect and want. In this case, she anticipated that her audience might be uncomfortable with someone engaged in non-mainstream political action, and determined that this should influence her text production.

The incidents depicted here demonstrate how participants actively planned text for inclusion in their profiles. Planning text was only one component of writers’ invention activities, however. Participants also engaged in task assessment and self-assessment, invention activities which at times demonstrate elements of planning. The next extended example depicts how assessing text acts as an invention strategy for these digital writers.
Assessing Text to Aid in Invention

This illustration describes how several participants assessed text that they had already composed. Several of the writers re-examined what they had drafted and then used that assessment to inform their continued composing. Participants also sometimes assessed their texts and then stated that, based on their assessments, they would return later to revise or edit what they had written. In terms of impression management, text assessment was a matter of re-reading what had been written and asking whether the text represented the discoursal identity that the participant desired to convey to this audience. This assessment typically led into either additions and/or revisions at that time or plans for future revisions and/or additions to the profile. Daniela and Elizabeth were two who remarked several times that they intended to return to their profiles at a later time to conduct more revisions and editing.

Elizabeth expressed grave concern about her spelling and planned to return to the site after the research session to edit and proofread. She commented, “Definitely going to want to get on this and edit my spelling because I am a horrible speller, like really bad” (Protocol, 60-1). She also mentioned in both the protocol and in the interview that she intended to revise by adding her résumé text to the profile at a later time for several reasons. For one, she recognized that adding more materials would help garner additional percentage points toward profile completion. Perhaps more importantly, she viewed adding her résumé as a tool to increase her appeal to the audience. During the interview,
Elizabeth mentioned the importance of having something in the profile to make her stand out. She explained her understanding of the site and the audience, stating,

in a sense you’re kinda trying to sell yourself. You’re trying to like hey look at me I’m someone you want in your business type of thing. So you really gotta think like what they’re looking for, what they want to read, like you really gotta think about your audience when putting your information up like what’s gonna in a sense, like what’s gonna sell you and what’s gonna be like oh look at this, I want to know more about this person versus what someone’s just gonna flip by and be like no, no, almost like an application process. There’s always one little thing you kinda want to put that makes them stop and look. (Interview, 81-87)

When asked what aspect of her profile would make her stand out, she assessed her current text and explained that currently, “nothing really jumps out” (Interview, 89). However, she then noted her intention to add her résumé as she felt that would have potential to be the “one little thing.” She viewed her résumé as a particularly effective piece of evidence to demonstrate her credibility—it was an ethos building tool for her. She explained,

I actually have a résumé at home that we typed out um my senior year and like I’m hoping later on when I put stuff on it, it’s stuff that I can pull out from when I was in the teaching profession and like we pooled together like accounting stuff and figured out stuff like budgets … and when they see that I started doing stuff like that at such like a younger age as compared to people who started like as an
adult. I started at 17 doing it. So they might be like, whoa, she has exp--, she started on early on so maybe that might. (Interview, 89-95)

Although based on her text assessment, Elizabeth was not confident that her current profile would attract the attention of employers; her understanding of both the task and the audience led her to believe she could appeal to the desired audience by making additions and revisions to the text.

Daniela also assessed her text and planned revisions and additions accordingly. In her protocol, she mentioned switching several times between the View and Edit windows on the site. When in the View window, she often decided to make changes to both content and format. Regarding format, she rearranged elements of the text to make the page more aesthetically pleasing. She remarked, “Tab. Tab. Beautiful,” as she adjusted margins (Protocol, 71). She also reconsidered her content. For instance, she decided to revise her summary at one point. Like Elizabeth, Daniela explained that she needed to market herself through the site, but she found it difficult to do so. During the interview, she explained her concerns with her current text and specifically noted what she had hoped to avoid conveying as part of her identity,

I’m not very good at expressing myself. I’m not very good at selling myself. So, like the summary for instance, I’m sitting there going well I know what I want to do but how do I say that it doesn’t sound like an 18 year old applying to Arby’s—‘and I want the weekends off to see movies and I need money’ [laugh].

(Interview, 124-127)
In this statement, Daniela demonstrated how she had assessed her text. She examined the text from the perspective of what her desired audience would and would not want to read. She recognized the importance of coming across as mature and professional. Daniela also demonstrated audience awareness as she revised materials for inclusion in her profile. She had access to her résumé through another site, and she pulled that up while composing her LinkedIn profile. She made several changes to her résumé to tailor it to this site; she elected to remove several theatrical productions that she deemed less relevant. In each of these incidents, Daniela assessed her current text and used that assessment as an invention strategy which pointed her toward both deletions and additions to enhance both the impression she hoped to convey and the credibility of that impression.

The materials from Elizabeth and Daniela demonstrate the iterative nature of writing even within digital environments. Both women examined the text they had written and used that text and plans for revision to aid ongoing invention processes. At least within these incidents, text assessment served a similar purpose to its uses in non-digital writing in that the writers re-read what they wrote and then invented more material based on their current understanding of which aspects of the rhetorical situation needed to be addressed. While in these instances similarities outweighed differences between digital and non-digital composing, the next illustration shows how the potential for interaction contributes to a distinctive composing environment in the digital realm.
Assessing Interaction as a Digital Invention Strategy

Assessing Interaction represents an invention strategy that diverges from invention in most non-digital environments. This dimension consisted of four separate codes: interaction with contacts, recommendations, interactions planned/anticipated, and interactions avoided. Because each of the codes within this dimension merits further explanation, this illustrative section will use those codes as an overarching organizational structure. Examples from specific participants are situated within the discussion of each code.

The first area of consideration within this dimension is participants’ discussion of contacts. Contacts were individuals within one’s network on the site. Participants often discussed the possibility of interactions with contacts while considering whether to avoid certain interactions. Specifically, participants frequently mentioned that they might interact with a particular contact or group of contacts, and then shortly thereafter made a decision to avoid at least some contacts during the research session. The site allowed contacts to view each other’s profiles, whereas those not included in an individual’s network did not have this privilege. When setting up the profile, the site prompted users almost immediately to add contacts to their network. When this occurred, most participants balked at the contact list provided, based on suggestions pulled from their email contacts. This may have been due to their status as students who primarily used their school email accounts and who were using a computer that did not belong to them. The site was only able to pull contacts from certain other email services such as Gmail,
Yahoo Mail or Outlook. When participants resorted to these other services as part of the registration process, they often struggled with remembering old passwords and old account user names, and several commented that the email address required was not one they commonly used anymore.

Several participants discussed the contact suggestions. Randy, for instance, stated that he intended to begin his profile by building his network. He explained that he was “trying to find someone who is already in LinkedIn who I know. But I don’t have very many contacts through my email, so I don’t think I’ll get too many results” (Protocol 32-34). Situations such as this may have had a negative impact on the contacts option within this group of writers: the participants were often no longer in touch with the contacts suggested, and consequently, they did not feel comfortable sending them LinkedIn invitations.

Daniela also assessed the contact suggestions and said, “I would like to connect to-- not most of these” (Protocol, 8). She did identify four individuals who she did wish to connect with. When Joe encountered the contacts option, he initially checked “Select All.” However, he quickly reconsidered and only invited three friends and a relative out of the suggested list. The site then prompted him to enter email addresses of trusted friends and colleagues, and he responded, “I don’t really know any emails, not really my means of communication… so I’ll press skip this step” (Protocol, 14). Rachel also was nonplussed with the site’s instructions to add contacts and noted, “I think that’s what they want me to do. Ok and to make me add my contacts whether I want to or not” (Protocol,
The participants did not appear to prioritize network building at this time. To follow-up, six months after collecting data, two participants granted me access to their LinkedIn profiles. Neither had added additional contacts beyond those they identified in the initial session. In sum, participants did frequently discuss the possibility of interacting with contacts; however, their follow-through was infrequent.

The possibility of interacting with recommendations also met with some commentary from participants. Recommendations were distinct from contacts in that a recommendation was a note posted by someone from the profile writer’s network offering an assessment of the profile writer’s work. The site allowed users to solicit recommendations. Every participant discussed the option, but none chose to actively pursue soliciting recommendations during the research session. This choice may have occurred because participants did not have well-developed networks yet, so they did not have individuals available for providing recommendations. Daniela, for instance, commented, “I’ll ask for recommendations…she’s on here. Out of my network” (Protocol, 105). Daniela then responded to this finding by sending the other individual an invitation to connect, which would open up the possibility of soliciting a recommendation at a later time. Joe similarly voiced concern about the recommendations option, stating, “I don’t have anyone to get recommended from so um I have to add something else” (Protocol 73-4). In a study of longer duration, it might be worth following participants to see whether they later pursued the recommendation part of the profile. However, in these instances, while participants did discuss the possibility of interacting through recommendations, these discussions tended to lead into interaction avoidance.
Makynna and Amanda both typified interaction avoidance. These participants commented in their interviews on the possibility of “random” people reading their profiles. Early research on social networking assumed that most networks would be created based on unknown people meeting over the web (e.g. Turkle, 1995). However, later scholarship has explained that the contacts and networks most people actually establish are made up of people already known in real life at least to some degree (boyd and Ellison, 2008). As Amanda and Makynna unknowingly hearkened back to an earlier era in their interviews, they expressed some concerns about the possibilities of strangers trolling their profiles. In her think-aloud, Amanda said, “I personally don’t like when people I don’t know look at it” (61). Neither Amanda nor Makynna actually invited anyone to join her network on LinkedIn. They both avoided interactions, although in their interviews, they suggested that they expected others to stumble across their profiles. What they posted on this site was designed to be safe for any unexpected visitor to read, instead of being tailored to a particular audience with the goal of job-seeking.

Makynna did move beyond her initial interview response regarding “random” people to say that her profile might be viewed by potential employers. Unlike Elizabeth and Daniela, she still did not engage the possibility of using the profile to market herself to these employers. Instead, she commented that “potential employers whatever look at your Facebook or other networks you’re on to see exactly what you’re about” (51-2). This suggested that she would simply present herself selectively and minimally, but from a take-it or leave-it perspective, rather than taking full advantage of the rhetorical possibilities of the site. When asked about the identity she presented on Facebook and the
identity she presented on LinkedIn, she explained that they were on “two completely
different levels right now,” and she characterized her profile on Facebook as an example
of her “being myself,” whereas LinkedIn only represented her “professional side” (84-
87).

A specific example may help further clarify the connection between interaction
avoidance, impression management, and identity construction. Amanda noted that she did
not want her profile to be networked to her current boss because she was concerned that
her boss would think she was looking for other work. Amanda explained, “so I’m just
gonna put another of my emails so it doesn’t send it to my manager” (Protocol, 28).
Therefore, this participant made the professional and social choice to avoid interaction
with her boss through this site. This choice ensured that the impression she had built as a
loyal employee would not be tarnished in the real-world environment. Her impression
management decisions informed her identity construction processes on the site as well.
She could proceed to write her profile without worrying about her current boss as a
potential audience member. Overall, Amanda made a choice about how much to reveal
and to whom that information should be revealed. This choice was a form of impression
management because she used these factors as decision criteria for identifying the
audience for her desired discoursal identity. The audience identification process in this
situation was one of exclusion, rather than inclusion.
Participants also avoided interaction due to privacy concerns. They made choices about what information to include on the site based on these considerations. For example, Randy explained that he did not want to include his mailing address, stating,

I don’t feel it’s important to put on my mailing address, simply because if anyone were interested through this website, they would contact me here first. And I can through more private, either through email exchange or call, I can get them that information. (Protocol, 150-2)

In this example, while avoiding interaction due to privacy considerations, Randy also engaged in planning future interactions—the other code located within this dimension. Randy went on to explain that email would be the best way to reach him as he checked it almost daily (156-160). Similarly, Elizabeth decided not to provide her home phone number, although she did provide a mobile number. She explained, “I have my mobile. I don’t think my mom would be happy if people called the home phone” (Protocol, 68-9); she was selective in which types of contact information were appropriate for the site.

The code for planning or anticipating future interactions applied on the rather rare occasions when participants made specific reference to how they might use the site to interact with someone else at a later time. Stephanie’s data, as presented in the first illustration, dealt with this code in some depth. She anticipated readers’ responses to her profile and planned ways to conversationally interact with them, i.e. discussing books they liked. More typical were instances such as those in Randy’s profile where means of contact were discussed, but specific topics for future conversation were not delineated.
Elizabeth, in a similar vein, also supplied her email address “because I’m always on it…and it’s probably the best way because you get a phone call you don’t know. At least I know I would ignore it” (Protocol, 90-1). In this instance, she planned or anticipated future contact, but she also discussed avoiding interaction through one particular medium--telephone.

All told, the Assessing Interaction dimension contained four codes that represented instances when participants contemplated the possibilities for engaging with other site users. These instances then informed their invention processes as participants decided who to include or exclude from their audiences. As the writers were able to select audience members, they were then able to glean additional insight into the impressions that would be most appropriate for the rhetorical environment. In other words, they were able to think about the specific people for whom they might be writing, and then decide what impressions they wanted to convey to those people through the construction of their discoursal identities. The next illustration focuses most on Amanda. Her vision of her mother as her audience during composing is discussed in detail.

Envisioning an Audience

This chapter delineated each of the dimensions by presenting and examining the relevant data. In the last two sections, the data on audience comes into clearer focus. Audience was not represented as its own separate dimension because it served as a recurrent touchstone throughout the dimensions. As such, this last illustration begins with
an in-depth look at one participant’s understanding of audience and the role that understanding played in her writing.

Amanda claimed to enter any digital environment with a ready-made audience that she carried with her. Amanda was a freshman whose major was undecided, although she discussed the possibility of becoming a teacher. Initially, in the interview Amanda had suggested that she was writing about her goals for herself (see above). However, upon further questioning, she proceeded to delineate a different picture of her audience beyond herself. One essential core member of the audience Amanda invoked was her mother. Her mental image of her mother served as a delimiter for materials on several fronts, and Amanda explained in her interview that she envisioned her mom reading anything she wrote online. As a child, Amanda was frequently warned by her mother, an FBI employee, to avoid digitally displaying any information that could allow others to find her location. Amanda explained that her mother told her “bad stories” to convince her of the importance of discretion (34). Amanda also invoked her mother as the standard of reference to determine whether something was offensive. She avoided writing anything that might “disappoint” or anger her mother (Interview, 39).

Interestingly, Amanda seemed to be using her mother-image as a proxy for the elite audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), that is a step removed from Perelman’s universal audience. The elite audience is “endowed with exceptional and infallible means of knowledge” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 33) and is

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3 See Chapter 1 for additional discussion of the work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969).
“characterized by its hierarchic position” above the universal audience; however, “its opinion is the only one that matters, for, in final analysis, it is the determining one” (p. 34). In Amanda’s case, her mother image acted as a gatekeeper—a first layer of audience that would stop all argumentation if not successfully placated.

Once her writing passed this elite barrier, Amanda allowed space for a more traditional, universal audience. Perelman’s universal audience is not a fixed entity, but is a construction of the rhetor that depends upon the aims of the argument and the audience the rhetor wants to address. This audience is considered universal because those who are not part of it do not need to be considered. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggested that envisioning the universal audience helps the rhetor determine what approaches will be most convincing to this broadly conceptualized audience, and this in turn, shapes the argument. Arguments addressed to the universal audience require warrants that are of “compelling character… self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 32).

At this point in the interview, Amanda’s description sounded very much like Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s universal audience. Amanda explained that she would write so that “anybody can read it” including both “adults and the younger kids” (Interview, 25). When asked to speak further about this audience, she explained it included “any random person” (29), and she noted that this person who read her writing was “going to judge me based on what they know” (30). Consequently, Amanda would write only what is “true” and she would not write anything “bad” (31). While her
comments did not rise to the level of “timeless validity,” she did invoke a truth-claim here that suggested her adherence to this particular audience conceptualization.

Another related delimiter for Amanda’s audience came from what she referred to as “the newspaper game” (36), which she traced back to her church pastor. Amanda explained:

Before you do something, do the newspaper game where you like whatever you’re about to do, if it could be on the cover of the next day’s newspaper, like would you be proud of it or not. And like I decided to do everything like that. I’ve always kind of stuck by that. (Interview, 35-38)

Amanda claimed these components, her mom and the newspaper game, shaped how she composed digitally. This audience would seem to limit potentially both the quantity and the typical qualities of Amanda’s writing in digital locales.

Amanda’s LinkedIn materials did support her claims about audience as they were limited in particular ways. For instance, the summary statement Amanda composed explained her past and current work situation as a lifeguard and waitress and her professional goals: “I would like to teach Public speaking or English to seniors in high school” (Profile). Within her summary, she stuck strictly to facts with the exception of the last sentence, where she offered a brief opinion about her work as a waitress, writing, “I love my job there” (Profile). In this profile she carefully limited the information available. Throughout the interview, Amanda also pointed to the importance of privacy,
which was directly tied to the restrictions imposed by her elite audience. On Facebook though, a slightly different story emerged.

When asked about her participation in Facebook, Amanda explained that she did not “write very much on there. I just write on my friends’ walls” (Interview, 61). She also commented that she censored the pictures of her which were posted as well as comments being made on her own wall. While it is true that she actually wrote very little on her Facebook About Me page, her selection of other materials to display spoke more about her personality and interests than she may have realized. For instance, her list of favorite movies showed a strong taste for goofy humor à la Adam Sandler. Her favorite quotations also provided a peek into her values. For that section, she listed, “Muck Fichigan” and “I’m [sic, all] like jesus, except I don’t walk on water, I swim in it—sophie” (FB profile). She had joined 30 groups; 11 of these were related to her University in some way. Most were protesting some aspect of the University culture, i.e. “Daily Wrongs of ___University” and “President ___ didn’t need a raise.” Although she was underage, several groups Amanda “liked” and groups she linked to referred to drinking, such as the “Chatroulette Drinking Game” and “Getting piss drunk on the night of 12/20/2010…just in case.”

As other scholars have noted, bricolage is a crucial element of online composition (Deuze, 2006). Although Amanda did not write much in the traditional sense, she did construct an identity for herself based on the materials she assembled. The identity composed here was a bit more colorful than the one she presented on LinkedIn. While
she did censor materials others left on her wall, she did not seem to be fully aware of the cumulative identity she created through the groups and information about herself she posted and allowed others to add to her pages.

While none of her choices were particularly extreme, she gave up some of the privacy which she claimed was important. This was particularly true in regard to her contact information because, on Facebook, Amanda provided her cell number, instant messaging contact information, and two email addresses. Perhaps most surprisingly, given her concerns about privacy, she had confirmed 750 Facebook friends. Facebook indicates the average user has 130 friends (Facebook Press Room, 2010). This may add evidence to what others have uncovered regarding young users’ perceptions of privacy—many have different standards of privacy which differ significantly from those of older generations (Tapscott, 2009).

When asked to compare the identities she created on Facebook and LinkedIn, Amanda commented that they were “about the same” (Interview, 66), but that Facebook relied more heavily on what other people wrote on her wall. She noted that if LinkedIn provided more spaces for “what other people say” (Interview, 68) there would be differences in the identity conveyed.

On Facebook, Amanda also provided a link to her MySpace page. While Amanda did not provide access to her actual MySpace account, the publicly available section of her profile contradicted her earlier statement about honesty, as she had her location set as Australia. While it is impossible to know her true rationale for this, it may be an
attention-getting ploy to make her profile stand out against other teen girls’ profiles set in the United States.

Amanda also spoke about the privacy settings on LinkedIn. She commented that she probably would use these settings because it might be easy to track her down. In particular, she was concerned because she had included one of her employers who was well-known and easily found within the particular small town where it was located. She explained further that if she decided not to make her LinkedIn profile private, she might provide a more generic identity for the employer. While this would seem problematic in a job search, Amanda did not plan on using the profile created for any professional purposes at that time. She commented that she already had two regular jobs available to her at home, and that if looking for a new one, she would rather do so face-to-face than online (Interview, 85-89).

In sum, Amanda provided an intriguing example of audience construction which she claimed to use across sites when composing digitally. Indeed, the audience she described fit well with the profile she actually generated on LinkedIn. However, her claim that this audience was used across other networking sites seems a little weaker when actually viewing the profiles she constructed for sites such as MySpace and Facebook. Her materials in these locations demonstrated less of a concern about the carefully selected audience, as well as less awareness of her own public exposure than what she had asserted. While in this data set, Amanda did not present any risqué materials, she was perhaps less of a private person than she claimed to be. The distinction
between what a writer such as Amanda claims she is doing as part of her process and what the writer actually does certainly proves interesting to consider and merits further study. The following section presents a cumulative view of the audience data represented within the participant interviews.

**Audience: A Common Thread Throughout the Invention Strategies**

As indicated above, audience was not represented as a distinct dimension because it was incorporated as part of writers’ invention strategies across multiple dimensions. For instance, Joe’s conceptualizations of his audience influenced his professional goal setting process as he contemplated what materials might convince that audience to look at his profile. Rachel considered how best to appeal to the audience she had invented, and for her, this meant displaying characteristics which identified her as unique. In contrast, Amanda’s vision of her audience determined how much material she was willing to display. For her, the audience limited her invention.

Within the interviews, writers responded to several questions about audience conceptualizations. These questions were designed to draw out both the writers’ overt and tacit knowledge of audience. Figure 4.2 summarizes the participants’ conceptualizations of audience as expressed in their interviews. During the interviews, six out of the eight participants commented that they hoped employers would read their profiles. Joe explained that he hoped someone related to his future field would read his profile and want to give him a job. He said:
I guess someone who’s involved in sports… I would just want any job that was interesting and could pay my bills. I mean I would take anything. But specifically something that had to do with a sports franchise or something that had to do with sports so my degree could actually play a role in it I guess. Because I went to school for a reason I guess. (Joe, Interview, 48-51)

Daniela responded to the same question by explaining what she perceived as the purpose of LinkedIn as opposed to that of Facebook. Daniela commented that she hoped employers would read her profile for this site because “if I’m gonna write on people’s walls and look at statuses, that… in terms of networking is more of a personal thing whereas LinkedIn is more of a professional networking… so employers as opposed to my best friends ever” (Interview, 154-6).

The two outliers for this question were Rachel and Amanda. Rachel said she hoped no one would read her profile yet because she was “not really eligible for any kind of job” but she hoped to keep it updated so that eventually it could be used to gain employment (Interview, 22-24). Amanda did not state an intention to hide her profile, but she did not have any hopes of specific individuals reading it. She said, “Whoever wants to I guess. So I mean I don’t personally think I’m going to go tell my friends to read my profile on here because Facebook is where I, so, I guess who wants to read it” (Interview, 21-22).
Figure 4.3 Writers’ Conceptualizations of Audience

Who do you hope will read your profile?¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whomever</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Question was asked of all participants and quantities represent number of participants responding. Responses were counted one per participant.

Who do you think will actually read it?²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random browser</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobody</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² This follow-up question was only asked of 5 participants due to conversational flow. Each possibility listed by a participant was counted once; three participants contributed multiple possibilities.
In response to a follow-up question posed to five participants, several commented on who they thought would actually read their profiles (Figure 4.2). Three times participants responded that they were either unsure or that no one would actually read it. Twice participants identified a family member as a potential reader. One time a participant noted that a random browser might encounter it. Makynna explained, “No idea. I don’t have any connections right now. I don’t know many people that have. I’ve never actually heard of this until today so I don’t really know who gets on it and how it works” (Interview, 40-1). Both Joe and Daniela were not too optimistic about actually having a broad audience, but they had both sent invitations to relatives to connect, so they anticipated those relatives as actual readers. Daniela commented,

I’m not sure. Because in theatre we have another it’s called Art Search…So hopefully employers. I mean I asked my mom to connect because I found her in there so I mean maybe she might. Um I mean if other people who are on there and have me because one of the things they have you do is look at contacts in whatever email you use. Maybe people see that I’m in LinkedIn and contact that way, but honestly I’m not completely sure. (Interview, 158-160)

Daniela’s comment demonstrates how she vacillated between possible audience members. Within this single response she provided four different answers: “I’m not sure,” employers, a family member, and contacts.

Finally, participants were asked to comment on whether they had envisioned someone particular while they were writing. Several participants made multiple
references. Each initial reference was counted. If the same participant mentioned the
same envisioned individual more than once, additional mentions were not counted. Three
references were made to potential bosses or employers. Participants mentioned “anyone”
or a “random” person three times. Participants also suggested “no one” three times.
Finally, family, a newspaper reader, a pastor, and curiosity seekers were all mentioned
one time each by participants. Except for the curiosity seeker, the other one-time-only
references all came from Amanda within her extended account of who she thinks about
while composing online.

The illustrations within Chapter 4 demonstrated that audience was a pervasive
construct throughout the data. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) claimed, “since
argumentation aims at securing the adherence of those to who it is addressed, it is, in its
entirety, relative to the audience being influenced” (p. 19). Perelman and Olbrechts-
Tyteca suggested that the writer’s audience is always constructed by the writer. Further,
they imply that “if all audiences are constructed, then their views of the real and the
preferable, as imagined by the speaker, must form the initial common ground between
speaker and audience” (Gross & Dearin, 2003, p. 33). The charts within this final
segment depict the writers’ understanding of audience, and they show that most of the
writers described themselves as composing for a particular audience. Some of the writers
envisioned an employer while they wrote. Even of those who did not hold such a vision,
most still hoped that an employer would be the eventual reader for the profile. On the
other hand, several writers described themselves as composing for “anyone,” which is
Figure 4.4 People Envisioned while Participants Composed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you envision anyone while you were writing?¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosses/employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Several participants made multiple references. Each new reference was counted, but repetitions of previously mentioned references were not included.

perhaps more reminiscent of Perelman’s notion of the universal audience made up of all rational beings.

Nonetheless, in their actual writing for the site, the writers typically described themselves in light of certain values that they believed the audience could appreciate. Whether the writers described their audiences in ways that suggested the particular or the universal, in either case, the writers’ emphasis was on promoting audience adherence to values, as opposed to facts. This suggests that the writers were indeed writing for a particular audience; however, some had not developed their analysis of this audience as
fully as others. Those who were writing to “anybody” likely had not contemplated as fully what values “anybody” would support. Even when unable to articulate those values, it is clear from their writing that the writers assumed certain impressions were desirable. Rachel, for instance, focused on the value of uniqueness. Joe and Elizabeth both considered ways to set themselves apart from others. In each of these instances, the writers assumed that being distinctive was a value that might be attractive to the particular audience of employers. In sum, the writers in this study generally composed for a particular audience as a means of managing the impressions they were conveying to that audience. Their composing was often designed with the intent to increase those audience members’ adherence to the values demonstrated within the discoursal identity of the writer.

In this section, the audience materials from the interviews were compiled as a means of further demonstrating the significant role of audience in digital composing, as described throughout the materials. Overall, this chapter has provided extensive illustrations from the data to further enhance the credibility of the grounded theory while also demonstrating the varying dimensions which constitute the overarching category of Digital Invention Strategies. Chapter 5 contains additional analysis of the materials. The analysis allows for the presentation of a grounded-theory based framework for understanding audience conceptualizations within digital composing. This framework incorporates findings from both dissertation studies. Based on the framework, heuristics for aiding digital composing processes are provided.
CHAPTER 5

Unpacking Digital Profile Writers’ Invention Strategies

This chapter draws together Studies One and Two to accomplish several rhetorical goals. The chapter opens by analyzing the findings from both studies to deepen the investigation of digital invention processes and practices. The first section identifies four salient connections between the studies, as expressed through writers’ goal-setting, self-assessment, task assessment, and interaction assessment. The fourth connection is particularly interesting as it contains affordances particular to the digital composition environment. From this analysis, the notion of audience constituted is developed.

The four key areas are then drawn together into a framework of digital profile composition. This framework was developed from the grounded theory-based analysis of job site materials in Chapters 3 and 4, coupled with the qualitative analysis of dating site study materials depicted in Chapter 2. These two studies both dealt with profile composition in digital locales. As a result, they served as useful complements to each other in developing the framework: codes and categories which were salient in one were compared to the dimensions realized in the other to determine which elements were of greatest overall importance in these incidents of digital profile-writing. The framework, while not intended to be a comprehensive model of writers’ composing processes,
identifies prime entry points for future investigations into digital writing activities, including both processes and practices.

Following the introduction of the framework, the definition of digital profile composition offered in Chapter 1 is reintroduced for further consideration. The Chapter then closes by introducing a heuristic developed from the concatenation of Studies One and Two. This heuristic is designed to aid digital writers in their composing by encouraging explicit consideration of audience and impression management strategies throughout the writing processes.

Connections Between Studies One and Two

Within this opening section, the findings from the two dissertation studies are considered in relation to each other. Both studies focused on Digital Invention Strategies. Several dimensions identified within Digital Invention Strategies overlap in terms of rhetorical purpose across both studies; this overlap supports the reliability of the findings. The findings also followed Flower and Hayes’s (1980b) observation about non-digital writing that, “whatever writers choose to say must ultimately conform to the structures posed by their purpose in writing, their sense of the audience, and their projected selves or imagined roles” (p. 40). This statement suggests the significance of writers’ understanding of the rhetorical task, as situated within the larger social context. Further, it implies the presence of impression management strategies through its mention of “projected selves.”
In the dating site study, participants frequently engaged in goal-setting, which appeared across several of the dimensions. Participants set goals for their desired discoursal identities, identified goals specific to the task, and set goals in regard to their own textual planning. In Study Two, two dimensions have some correspondence with goal-setting: Professional Goals and Planning Text. Professional Goals described incidents when writers discussed their career ambitions, which were then often translated into text. Planning Text referred to those times when writers looked toward the future within their actual texts, e.g. “I will write about X.” In both studies, establishing goals served as a means of determining what impressions the writer wished to convey about him or herself through written identity construction.

In non-digital genres, Flower (1994) identified purpose statements, which have connections to the goal-setting grouping identified here. Flower uncovered three purpose codes in her data set: key points, rhetorical, and general (pp. 162-4). She found that key points “were often constructed in the process of planning” and they served for non-digital writers as “major claims” the writer hoped to convey (p. 162). Flower labeled rhetorical purpose statements based on “explicit” incidents when the writer hoped to “produce some kind of effect” (p. 163). Finally, she coded general purpose statements as incidents when writers contemplated “general discourse plans used to describe the purpose or direction for the paper” (pp. 163-4). Within these digital studies, the coding coalesced somewhat differently from Flower’s, but the importance of planning by establishing goals remained noteworthy. This shows that this aspect of invention is likely similar for writers authoring both digital and non-digital texts.
The second connection between Studies One and Two occurred within the Assessing Self dimension. In Study One, Assessing Self codes included identity statements, as well as emotions related to writing. Self-assessment likely preceded the deliberate self-representational choices participants described themselves as having made. The identity statements respondents provided offer significant connections to Study Two. In the second study, as the data was collected *in situ*, the process of assessing one’s self was explicitly referenced. These findings suggest that, at least within the profile-writing genre, self-assessment is an important part of these writers’ invention and discoursal identity construction processes.

Based on the writing prompts used in early non-digital process studies, (i.e. Flower and Hayes (1981) had writers composing an article for *Seventeen* magazine), it is difficult to ascertain whether self-assessment would play into most writers’ composing processes across genres, or if this is particular to the digital profile-writing genre, or perhaps related to the demographic characteristics of student participants. Emig (1971) postulated that what she referred to as “reflexive” writing “focuses upon the writer’s thoughts and feelings concerning his [*sic*] experiences” with the self as the primary audience (p. 4). It seems likely that writers responding to non-personal prompts would be less likely to engage in self-assessment as it occurred in these studies. Nonetheless, it is possible that writers composing in other genres may contemplate how they feel about the issue at hand, which might be conceived as a different sort of self-assessment. However, in this digital research, self-assessment was used as an invention device leading to
content generation, and as such, played a primary role in composing for the purposes of identity construction.

Writers used introspection or self-assessment to develop descriptions of their personal attributes and to aid in their attempts to market what they identified as their best qualities to particular online audiences. Essentially, self-assessment led into social practices of impression management as the writers made intentional choices about how much and which types of information to reveal in particular contexts. Scholars in psychology (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther & Tidwell, 1996) have found that online social practices often involve selective self-presentation as well as introspection; the dissertation studies extend the findings of Tidwell and Walther to indicate that these practices often occur as part of composing practices and processes.

Task assessment also factored into both studies in distinct ways. In Study One, task assessment, as it was described retroactively, was often part of incidents coded as “Reading/Evaluating others’ writing,” which was situated within the Assessing Task dimension. In their surveys, participants frequently wrote about their experiences viewing and considering other profiles on the site as part of their composing. They used that knowledge of typical social practices, as constructed in writing on the site, to inform their own writing processes. This dimension has some correspondence to non-digital cognitive and social-cognitive research, which has demonstrated the importance of the task environment to writers’ composing processes (Flower, 1994; Flower & Hayes, 1980b; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Waes & Schellens, 2003). Writers’ task assessment processes
may vary depending on the task environment (Waes & Schellens, 2003), the genre (Emig, 1971), and other factors such as expert versus novice writer status/development (Flower & Hayes, 1980a). Reading and evaluating digital dating sites occurred for several purposes: writers were gleaning tips about what to do and what to avoid, developing an understanding of the genre structure, and sometimes deliberately lifting materials (Saranow, 2008). Digital writers had myriad models composed by others available to them. While some sites discourage intertextual borrowing, the consequences rarely rise to the plagiarism standards enforced in the academy. In more traditional classroom settings, writers are often presented a few models that have been carefully selected by an instructor. While they may develop genre schemas that include typical structures, borrowing ideas or verbiage is generally viewed as plagiarism and may well be subject to a stiff set of penalties.

Within both studies, Self-Assessment took on a more prominent role than deliberate textual planning. In Study Two, Task Assessment was also more prominent than Planning Text. In Study One, Assessing Task (n=83) occurred almost as frequently as Planning/Composing Text (n=84); perhaps due to the broader definition of Planning used in the dating site study. Overall, between the two studies, it seems that writers expended more effort on invention activities such as self-assessment and task assessment, and less often discussed their processes of figuring out what needed to go into the text itself. The particular allocation of planning between text versus task assessment for these participants may stem from several factors. Participants were familiar with the genre of profile writing, but unfamiliar with the site. Perhaps because of the similar-yet-different
feel of the site, which most participants connected with the nature of the professional audience, they found it necessary to devote effort to assessing the particular task. Often, they jumped directly from task assessment into writing. So it seems that task assessment operated as a different type of planning for most participants. This finding supports Hayes and Nash’s (1996) definition of Process Planning, as distinct from textual planning.

Even with the distinctive character of planning observed in these studies, in both digital and non-digital situations, writers are able to draw from past composing experiences to aid their task assessment. Flower and Hayes (1981) described how writers condensed complex rhetorical problems: “writers frequently reduce this large set of constraints to a radically simplified problem, such as ‘write another theme for English class’” (p. 369). Digital writers in this research sometimes simplified the rhetorical problem by connecting it to other writing experiences. For instance, dating site writers occasionally provided analogies to other writing experiences, such as composing job application materials, which involved selling their best qualities. In Study Two, several writers referenced other profiles which they had written for SNS. Even though the rhetorical purpose of profiles on social sites such as Facebook differed from composing for an employment networking site, the writers drew from their genre knowledge to help them determine what constituted an online profile.

Finally, Assessing Interaction occurred in both dissertation studies, although it was conceptualized differently due to the distinct natures of both the sites and the
research methods. In Study One, the respondents emphasized possible social ramifications of posting their profiles. They also contemplated actual or potential interactions. Because of the nature of dating site profiles, they were able to specify what they sought in a mate both within the open-ended sections of the profile, and through the check box sections where they selected the criteria deemed critical. In Study Two, the participants contemplated specific kinds of interactions, such as building their networks and soliciting recommendations. In both studies, participants actively considered how to obtain desired interactions, as well as how to avoid undesirable interactions. While some non-digital texts have contained elements of interaction avoidance, the particular ways in which these digital authors use this construct are peculiar to the digital environment. As such, this dimension has not been represented in the same ways within non-digital social-cognitive writing research.

In early non-digital research, the audience was accounted for as part of the task-environment. And, as explained in Chapter 1, this lack of thorough accounting has met a fair amount of criticism (c.f. Porter, 1992; Reiff, 2004). In these studies, the writers took on a more active role in actually selecting their audiences. Earlier non-digital research has considered how technical writers and business writers analyze audience as part of their non-digital composing processes. Schriver (1997), for instance, identified three methods commonly employed by technical communicators to analyze audience attitudes and needs: analyses based on classifications, the writer’s intuition, and feedback received. Odell and Goswami (1983) studied the memo writing practices of case workers and administrators. They hypothesized that these writers would consider their audiences on
the basis of the status of audience, their relation to audience, characteristics of the audience, and anticipated action by the audience (pp. 208-9). The possibilities these scholars identified do indeed manifest themselves within the dissertation data sets. However, the writers Schriver and Odell and Goswami discussed were composing within genres which did not afford nearly the same levels of interactive potential that Web 2.0 and particularly profile-writing does. These earlier scholars did not observe the writers deliberately excluding members from the readership. They did not observe writers inviting particular viewers. They also did not observe writers soliciting recommendations to enhance their ethos, as the LinkedIn study participants were encouraged by the site to do as part of their representations of their professional discoursal selves.

The job site writers invited individuals to view their profiles, and they made decisions about whom to exclude from their audience vis-à-vis social network. Even users who elected to make their profiles semi-public invoked some site-based limitations on the amount of information revealed to others not in their network. When LinkedIn results come up in a Google search, for instance, the site often provides only basic information about the profile-writer, unless that writer has elected to make the profile entirely public. To access the full profile, the potential audience member needed to actually be networked to the writer. Similarly, on some dating sites, one must be a site member to view the entire profile of another member. In sum, what this data shows is closer to Robert Johnson’s (1997) notion of “audience involved” coupled with Erin Karper’s (2010) concept of “trust-filtering.” Johnson found, “In contrast to the addressed or invoked models of audience, the involved audience is an actual participant in the
writing process who creates knowledge and determines much of the content of the discourse” (p. 363). Karper identified trust-filtering as “an illusion that one can both invoke and address a specific audience that has access to material” (p. 274), in effect creating the audience. In effect, what happened within these data sets was the writers had the possibility of actually configuring their audience by deliberately selecting members as well as deliberately excluding members based on the impression of themselves that they intended to develop through their discourse. The next subsection expands this discussion and highlights the ways that the heightened interactivity possible within these digital composing sites contributed to writers’ audience conceptualizations.

**Audience Constituted**

The decisions participants made about interaction informed their invention processes within this digital location, and this research has provided a window into these writers’ audience considerations. Online audience construction took on a different form from more traditional print locations as these online participants had the power to both select and avoid particular audience members, whereas in print environments, this power is not as readily available to rhetors. Audience selection acted as a tool for impression management because it allowed participants to designate specific attributes of themselves to share with particular individuals. Participants also made determinations about how they would be accessible; for instance, they made decisions about providing phone numbers, email addresses, or mailing addresses. Simultaneously, they considered which
attributes to avoid sharing through both self-assessment, as described above, and interaction avoidance.

The dating site composers also took active roles in constructing and limiting their audiences, but in other ways. They composed their materials and then revised based on responses they received; some also revised when they did not receive the quantities and types of responses they desired. These approaches may be viewed in light of Goffman’s (1959) notion of defensive and preventive impression management practices. Defensive practices are instances when an individual tries to maintain his or her projected self (in Goffman’s case), more specifically, discoursal self in the case of these studies. The dating site users’ descriptions of how they responded to audience feedback suggest that they engaged in defensive measures. If feedback suggested that their discoursal self was being misinterpreted, then they revised accordingly. The dating site users also invoked preventive tactics when they had friends and acquaintances review their profiles prior to exposing the discoursal self-representation to the broader audience available through the site.

In addition to engaging in preventive and defensive impression management, the dating site users actively selected their audiences by completing the checkboxes within the site. For instance, if a writer wanted his/her matches to be non-smokers, s/he selected that box. When potential audience members would search for their matches, the search parameters provided by the site would limit the matches to those who met each user’s specifications. This data suggests, beyond Walther and Tidwell’s (1996) notion of an
idealized audience informing online practices, that audience was actually a much richer construct in writers’ online invention processes. As described in earlier chapters, some participants invoked the universal audience; others invoked an elite audience. Participants also engaged in audience analysis, especially as part of their task assessments. Beyond invoking and analyzing audiences, participants actively constituted their audiences. In the rhetorical situations within each of these studies, the audiences were not just mentally constructed and addressed by the rhetors, but they were actively constituted by the rhetors’ selection processes. Constituting audiences served as a means of controlling the dissemination of impressions that the writers wanted to present.

Overall, the examples provided in Chapter 4 demonstrated how the data led to the identification of each dimension within the grounded theory. However, perhaps more implicitly, audience remains a recurrent theme within the varied dimensions taken as a whole. Audience does indeed influence digital writers’ processes across the dimensions, and this represents a significant contribution. Audience cannot be confined to solely one segment of the composing process, particularly for these digital profile writers. The data shows that the writers evaluated their own accomplishments in light of their intended audiences. The data also demonstrates how the writers embedded moments of audience analysis into their professional goal-setting. In addition, writers sometimes carried goals that they chose not to express in their discoursal identities, and oftentimes this rhetorical choice seemed to stem from their understanding of how an audience member might react to that particular goal. The considerations that these writers made are represented in the following section within a model of digital profile composition.
A Model of Digital Profile Composition

Taken together, the four areas which appeared most important across both studies were the following dimensions: Goal-Setting, Self-assessment, Task Assessment and Interaction Assessment. As noted above, task assessment and goal-setting have often been represented within cognitive models of composing (e.g. Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Flower & Hayes, 1981); however, Self-assessment and Interaction Assessment recognize the manifestation of writers’ social practices during composing, and Interaction Assessment has a special emphasis in digital composing. Accordingly, a model of digital composing is offered (Figure 5.1). This model recognizes the processes and practices which were most distinctive within the data from this digital profile writing research. Dimensions identified in both data sets are set in italics. Due to the small sample sizes used within Studies One and Two, it is of course impossible to claim generalizability. However, these writers have provided access to helpful data describing individuals’ writing processes and practices, which is depicted in aggregate form within the model.

The model’s design recognizes that both processes and practices contribute to writers’ composing within digital domains and that multiple invention strategies may be used at any time within the writing process. Engaging in interaction assessment, by (de)selecting audience members and considering potential future interactions is a social practice with cognitive elements. While it involves contemplating possible social roles

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1 Goal-setting was not labeled as a dimension within Study One, due to its infiltration across several dimensions (as previously described). In Study Two, Goal-Setting occurred as a distinct dimension. Due to its prominence in both studies, I refer to it in this chapter as one of the four key dimensions.
Figure 5.1 Framework of Digital Invention Processes and Practices in Profile Writing

*Italicized components appeared in both data sets.

*Bolded italicized dimensions assumed the greatest prominence across both the data sets.
and potential audience members, it also may include writers thinking about their prior social experiences as manifested within their long-term memory. Self-assessment also contains both social and cognitive elements. It is cognitive in that it involves diving into the writer’s long-term memory to analyze the writer’s traits and experiences. It is social in that these assessments are considered within the milieu of the particular site—the writer focuses his or her self-analysis on the particular social and rhetorical context of the site. The consideration of context forges a connection between the self-assessment and the task assessment activities. Task assessment, while serving a cognitive role, also includes social elements as it often involved reading others’ materials generated for the site. Finally, goal-setting is primarily a cognitive process as the writer’s goals were developed iteratively in conjunction with the ongoing task assessment processes. Nonetheless, these goals were established within the social context of the site as defined through the writers’ task assessment processes. Within the next subsection, the model is considered in light of the definition of digital profile writing given in the first chapter.

*Considering the Characteristics of Digital Profile Writing and Impression Management*

The identified dimensions provide interesting connections to the definition of digital writing proffered in the first chapter. In that chapter, I suggested digital profile writing was often richly intertextual, performative, heavily audience-driven and generally interactive. Intertextuality occurred in Study Two when writers drew from other profiles they had written for SNS, and in both studies when writers consulted the profiles that other site users had generated. The dating site users in particular referred to instances of
borrowing ideas and structures to inform their writing. In addition, writers in both studies referred to previously developed or evolving genre schemas, another instance of intertextuality. The performative character of digital writing also came through in multiple dimensions as writers engaged in impression management tactics designed to convey a certain image to the audience. In this sense then, the writing was also audience-driven as rhetors analyzed, constituted, and invoked their audiences.

The writing was also interactive as writers determined how they would and would not interact with those audience members. It has been fairly well established that digital writing involves a high level of interactivity and greater immediacy in terms of the audience than print texts in the construction of meaning: the author cedes a greater level of control to his or her audience online than in the print world. Bolter (1998) argued, “Hypertext and electronic communication in general tend to erode the authority of the text and its author (Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1992)” (p. 6). However, this dissertation demonstrates that authors may actually have more authority than older studies have assumed within digital settings, as they can, in at least some situations, deliberately assemble their own audiences. This insight adds to our understanding of digital interactivity as well as the role of audiences online.

The dimensions within the data clearly support the definition, and when considered cumulatively, the findings suggest that impression management played a significant role throughout these writers’ online composing processes and practices. Writers self-assessed as a means of determining how they looked to themselves as an
audience. Task assessment—especially as manifested through evaluating others’ writing, when coupled with self-assessment contributed to impression management. Both dimensions often prompted goal-setting as participants determined how to market select elements of that self-analysis to other potential audience members according to the parameters they had identified in their task-assessments. Finally, goal-setting behavior itself served as an impression management tactic, as the writers determined what perceptions they wanted to create through their digital identity constructions. In the following section, I propose a heuristic useful for applying the theoretical contributions of these studies to digital writing situations.

Practical Implications: A Heuristic for Digital Composing

This section considers how these analyses of digital profile writing might be applied to aid other student writers. In Chapter 4, the third illustration depicted several participants’ use of self-assessment during composition. In that section, two student participants (Joe and Randy) in particular struggled with translating their self-assessments into rhetorically effective profiles. Randy, for instance, provided a great deal of verbal detail, but composed a very brief, non-evocative profile that lacked audience appeal. Why didn’t he incorporate more detail into his profile? Perhaps he felt constrained by this genre; he might also have believed that additional details were not appropriate in this particular situation. And, it certainly is true that some types of details are inappropriate within this genre. Randy’s struggles prompt consideration of how to aid writers like him, who clearly have well-developed thinking and relevant evidence, to select and actually
incorporate that material into their profiles to establish stronger cases for themselves. Similarly, Joe also struggled during his self-assessment. Students like Joe make it clear that it is important to provide ways to help them highlight the positive qualities they possess in more rhetorically effective ways. Certainly, this is particularly challenging when confronting a lack of professional experience, but a more complex self-assessment process might yield more materials for these students which could then be used to encourage someone to take that chance in responding to their profiles.

Accordingly, the heuristic presented in Figure 5.2 offers a systematic way of thinking through acts of digital composition. The heuristic is based on the actual processes and practices observed within the data sets and is designed to prompt writers to actively, strategically evaluate their composing across the four key dimensions. The heuristic explicitly connects the salient dimensions to audience and impression management. It may be used to encourage the production of more rhetorically effective discourse through prompting explicit consideration of dimensions already being used by digital writers. The questions included in the outermost boxes were developed through two means: by considering the implications for impression management, and by applying the Hermagorean *stases*, as described in Chapters 3 and 4.

To use the heuristic, writers may start anywhere within any of the four dimensions: assessing task, assessing interaction, assessing self, or goal-setting. The writer can consider the questions within that dimension and then move back through the center spoke—audience, as she/he moves into another dimension. By moving back
Figure 5.2
A Heuristic for Considering Audience and Impression Management during Digital Composing

- What types of audience members are available on or frequent this site?
- What types of interactions are available on this site?
- How can I constitute the audience to support my desired impression?

- What impression(s) do I want to convey?
- What goals are appropriate for this career/life stage?
- How do my values translate into future goals appropriate to the audience?

Audience

- Addressed: who will I be composing to or for?
- Invoked: who should I think about while composing?
- Constituted: who will I include/exclude?

Assessing interaction

Assessing self

- What impressions are available for me to offer?
- What personal qualities do I value?
- What personal qualities can I make a case for based on my history?

Assessing task

- What impressions will the audience expect or want to see based on this task?
- What are the rhetorical expectations for this genre?
- How is this context similar to/different from other writing contexts?

Assessing interaction

Goal setting

1The concepts of audience addressed and audience invoked come from Ede & Lunsford (1984).
through the center each time, the writer will be encouraged to focus his/her work toward an exterior audience in the hopes of producing reader-based prose (Flower, 1979). During the writing process, it may be useful to revisit the questions from the exterior sections at several points to aid in maintaining focus on the established goals as well as allowing the writer opportunities to see how his/her goals are changing during composing. Because the heuristic breaks out the four dimensions, it encourages writers who may normally over-emphasize one facet to consider other facets more fully. For instance, a writer such as Randy who engaged in extensive self-assessment would be pointed toward translating that self-reflection for the audience as he journeys through the center of the circle and visits the other quadrants. Instructors can use these heuristic questions to aid writers’ self-assessments, task assessments, interaction assessment, and goal-setting, all set within an articulated understanding of audience—with particular attention devoted to the understanding of the rhetor’s capacity for constituting his or her own digital audience.

This chapter developed the connections between Studies One and Two and demonstrated the significant impact of four key areas within digital profile composing processes: Goal-setting, Self-assessment, Task Assessment, and Interaction Assessment. The analysis confirmed the important role of audience conceptualizations for digital writers, and also established the role of impression management practices within digital composing. The fit of the definition of digital profile writing was also assessed, and it was determined that profile-writing is indeed often intertextual, performative, heavily audience-driven, and interactive. On the basis of the data and analyses provided in Chapters 2, 4, and 5, a model of digital profile composition processes and practices was
offered, and pedagogical applications were also suggested through the development of a heuristic to assist digital writers’ composing practices and processes.

Chapter 6 recapitulates the key contributions afforded through this dissertation. This chapter also provides additional pedagogical tools, techniques, and considerations for the digital composition classroom. The dissertation closes by proposing several future studies on the basis of the findings from the dating site study and the professional networking site study.
CHAPTER 6

Digitizing Audience: Future Directions

This concluding chapter briefly delineates the central contributions of this dissertation. Following this discussion, the chapter provides additional pedagogical applications. To close, discussion turns to possibilities for extending this research in future studies.

The research described in these studies began with questions about how writing in general, and invention in particular, happens within specific digital contexts. The original questions informing Study One inquired into the invention activities writers used when composing profiles for a digital dating site. That study lent further credence to the breakdown of the invention process as creation-versus-discovery binary; it also found, among other things, that audience considerations informed many digital invention strategies being used by those writers. Accordingly, the findings pointed toward the second dissertation study, which looked deeper into writers’ audience conceptualizations by collecting data in situ through think-aloud protocols as writers composed profiles for a professional networking site. That second study also initiated an investigation into the impact of impression management considerations on digital profile writers.
Taken together, the two studies have contributed several important insights for rhetoric and writing studies. First, little prior research has investigated digital writers’ inventional practices. Thus, this research has provided additional data on how writers actually compose within digital environments. In particular, Study Two yielded access to *in situ* processes and practices, which have received minimal prior scholarly attention within digital realms. The insights afforded through the data have allowed for the development of a model depicting digital profile writing cognitive processes and social practices. The model incorporates writers’ key invention considerations, as demonstrated within both sets of data. Those key areas were self-assessment, interaction assessment, task assessment, and goal-setting. Although the model was not intended to serve as a comprehensive representation of digital writers’ cognitive processing, it does provide a systematic way of thinking about several key inventional activities which the digital writers in these studies used to aid their composing.

Second, the dissertation has provided in-depth depictions of how these digital writers conceptualize their audiences. Specifically, writers within the two studies addressed and invoked (Ede & Lunsford, 1984) audiences, and these audiences varied across the range Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca identified (1969), including the universal, the particular, and the elite. This deepened understanding has resulted in the uncovering of the notion of *audience constituted*. Digital profile writers have the capacity to actively form their audiences by both inviting and excluding others from viewing their work. The recognition of audience constituted provides evidence to counter earlier claims that the power of the writer has been diminished within online environments. While the
online writer can anticipate a higher degree of interactivity and feedback from his or her audience than most print rhetors, the online writer does not necessarily cede as much authority as previously believed (e.g. Bolter, 1991; 1998).

Third, the research has introduced the sociological construct, impression management, into digital writing research. This construct provided useful ways of discussing ethos and audience, as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 4. In part, the dating site study demonstrated that writers’ representational choices were acts of impression management designed to establish writers’ ethos as a means of eliciting particular responses from their audiences. These writers developed their ethos through their discoursal identities. Within the professional networking study, several writers considered the particular ethos that they wanted to represent on the site in comparison to the ethos they had chosen for SNS. In both studies, investigating impression management as a tool for building ethos allowed for the development of a cogent understanding of writers’ processes of discoursal identity (Ivanic, 1998) construction.

This research established what digital profile writers already know about audience, and how they use those audience conceptualizations to both inform their discoursal identity construction and manage the impressions they generate. Unpacking what writers already implicitly know allowed for the development of a heuristic useful for pedagogy. The heuristic offers a systematic approach for thinking through acts of digital composing, and it explicitly delineates the connections between audience and impression management. It may prove useful for digital writers as it prompts recognition
of process dimensions with which they are already familiar, while simultaneously encouraging them to consider other dimensions which may not be as salient for them. Beyond these significant discoveries, developed directly from the data, several other pedagogical considerations are worthy of consideration. The next section depicts these additional pedagogical implications and applications.

Additional Pedagogical Considerations

Classroom writers may benefit from several additional strategies in support of the dimensions identified within the grounded theory and labeled within the heuristic presented in Chapter 5. The process of profile-development was an educational one for the students involved in this study; the students demonstrated a great deal of learning as they discussed their decision-making during the protocols and in the retrospective interviews. It may be beneficial to incorporate profile composing into some classrooms as a tool for helping writers understand their writing processes as well as the decision-making involved in constructing an online discoursal identity. To aid students in developing complex self-assessments, teachers can direct students to already developed tools, such as the Meyers-Briggs or other personality/trait inventories. These types of tools may be useful to dating site users as well, although some sites such as E-harmony.com already have such devices built-in. Development of digital profiles may also be tailored to specific class groups. For instance, if one is instructing future teachers on preparing job application materials, they may be encouraged to develop profiles for a site such as LinkedIn. To further aid their development of the profile, the teachers could be introduced to the online Teaching Perspectives Inventory
<www.teachingperspectives.com>. Inventories such as these may help writers draw together various strands of their identity to determine which may be most relevant to the individual site, as well as their particular composition ambitions.

To aid in goal-setting as well as self-assessment, students can be asked to create a professional timeline which reaches both backward and forward in their professional lives. This may help them see where they have come from developmentally, as well as helping them establish and record ambitions for the future. This may be particularly useful for students such as Amanda who have yet to settle on an academic major.

Regarding task assessment, writers ought also to be advised to take full advantage of the capabilities of the sites for which they are composing. In Study Two, students writing for the LinkedIn study generally avoided requesting recommendations. However, recommendations can serve as a powerful tool to help build ethos, and students should use the available means of persuasion to convince their audiences of the veracity of the identity they are trying to construct. Research participants also struggled with understanding the genre of LinkedIn profile-writing. They actively drew comparisons between this site and other SNS, but they may need more help in distinguishing how the rhetorical purpose of a site translates into the particular expectations for writing on that site. To advance their understanding, they can use Google or search within LinkedIn itself to identify public profiles of individuals in their academic field. Instructors can then guide the students in rhetorical analysis of the samples to determine what makes profiles particularly effective or ineffective within the students’ chosen fields of employment.
Instructors might also ask students to search for other digital pieces of information about
the profile writer. Then, the students may consider the cumulative effect of that
individual’s digital identity as a professional. This activity may provide an important
object lesson for students who do not yet realize the significance of managing their
overall online identity.

Writers, both within and outside academia, ought to proactively engage in
impression management strategies online to both protect and effectively leverage the
identities they construct.¹ Instructors should advise students to check that the identity
portrayed in the profile they compose for a professional site is consistent with the other
online identities they have already formed. An article in the New York Times Magazine
described the quandary of online identity management and the problematic potential of a
multiplicity of self-representations:

But the hope that we could carefully control how others view us in different
contexts has proved to be another myth. As social-networking sites expanded, it
was no longer quite so easy to have segmented identities: now that so many
people use a single platform to post constant status updates and photos about their
private and public activities, the idea of a home self, a work self, a family self and
a high-school-friends self has become increasingly untenable. In fact, the attempt

¹ Impression management need not be deceitful. As Schlenker (1980) indicated, “All
people control, more or less, through habit or conscious design, the ways they appear to
themselves and others…. There is nothing intrinsic to the concept of impression
management that dictates that it must involve dissimulation” (p. 7). Students should be
advised accordingly that deliberate impression management ought to be considered
within appropriate ethical guidelines.
to maintain different selves often arouses suspicion. Moreover, far from giving us a new sense of control over the face we present to the world, the Internet is shackling us to everything that we have ever said, or that anyone has said about us, making the possibility of digital self-reinvention seem like an ideal from a distant era. (Rosen, 2010, p. 2)

The claim Rosen made directly counters early digital research which anticipated identity fragmentation as a social norm online (Turkle, 1995). Now, in addition to the ethical challenges associated with assuming digital users have segmented or fragmented identities (Kennedy, 2006), it is important to suggest to students and professionals that they actively manage the consistency of their identity.

To manage their identities, writers should use search engines such as Google to identify references to themselves, and if these references are unflattering or no longer relevant, they may need to do some identity clean-up work to support their professional ambitions (Broek, 2009). Broek has also suggested that writers also need to keep their identity updated—i.e., if a Google search turns up details from high school, these are not going to help students find their first post-college employer. Broek recommended viewing materials “in context” as

It’s easy to misrepresent yourself through seemingly innocent information if it appears in the wrong place. If you want to build up your career as a beer expert, those Facebook pictures of you double-fisting beers will probably help. But it may not if you’re trying to be a kindergarten teacher. (n.p.)
Students should also be consistently reminded to think before posting to any digital sites, as clean-up methods are certainly not fail-proof as Mayer-Schönberger (2009) has demonstrated. He described how the Web has revolutionized memory; information which users may not even recall searching for or posting online remains available indefinitely through many digital search engines, sometimes to the user’s detriment.

While writers may contact individual sites to ask them to take down or change problematic representations, this may not be enough to get particularly problematic materials removed, as larger sites often use multiple servers which may not all be updated. In addition, web indexing services such as The Wayback Machine <http://www.archive.org/web/web.php> can make it challenging to ensure that old damaging representations are no longer available. Consequently, if the writer’s image is particularly problematic, he or she may need to invest in a digital identity management service, such as Reputation Defender <www.reputationdefender.com> or Reputation Advocate <http://www.reputationadvocate.com/>.

Similarly, it is important to teach writers about the powers they do have available to them to control the dissemination of personal information. They should carefully review privacy policies and options, as well as taking responsibility for audience constitution on sites where that option is available. In particular, writers composing for professional sites should not be afraid to connect with other professionals as a means of network building. However, they should actively seek out, select, and invite those

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2 See Mayer-Schönberger (2009) for discussion of how the internet has changed the process and role of forgetting within our culture.
individuals who they know and trust, as opposed to attempting a frenetic accumulation of friends or connections.

In sum, instructors need to openly address digital identity construction as part of the professionalization processes of their students. They may do so by pointing to the heuristic provided in Chapter 5, which draws out the role of impression management within the four dimensions digital writers are often using to varying degrees as they compose. The final section identifies other needed research projects.

Limitations and Future Directions

This dissertation, as a whole and within both of the studies, suggests the need for several additional research projects. It certainly points to multiple questions deserving future consideration. In part, these future projects are prompted by the limitations within these particular studies. Within any research situation, the ways that questions are structured may well impact the answers that individuals provide. While the questions in these studies were structured to avoid leading participants, it is possible that participants may attempt to uncover the primary research aim and shift their responses as a means of helping the researcher—the demand effect (Weber & Cook, 1972). It is also possible that participants could have reported what they thought they were supposed to think (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), or social desirability bias may have influenced their responses within the interviews. Those possibilities are somewhat mediated by triangulating the interview data with the protocol data and the profile texts participants actually produced. However, think-aloud protocols have also been debated as a research method (c.f. Cooper &

Protocol analysis is above all a fundamentally human methodology, eliciting a sample of the thoughts that go through writers’ minds, through a medium that can affect their behavior and which may be indeterminably complex due to interactions between the writer and researcher; and subjecting the data to the interpretations of people with biases, agendas, assumptions, and weaknesses. (p. 16, italics original)

As such, think-aloud protocols need to be analyzed within a “context to be accorded validity” (p. 16). The context provided within Study Two was the multiple protocols themselves, as well as the retrospective interviews and the profiles. Nevertheless, it remains important to acknowledge the potential limitations of these studies. While the threats cannot be fully eliminated, they were countered as much as possible by combining methods to allow for verification.

In addition, both studies may have been influenced by the participant pools. First, self-selection bias is a possibility in that the participants were not randomly selected. The generalizability of the studies to the broader population is consequently limited. Second, the sample sizes are relatively small, and were not designed to be representative of the broader population. While keeping these limitations in mind, the studies do suggest future research possibilities.
Study One suggested several avenues for future research. First, self-exposure choices varied between male and female participants; several participants discussed their concerns about determining the appropriate quantity of self-revelation within their online profiles. This topic may be worthy of further consideration by gender studies scholars. The impact of other demographic variables, such as age and educational background, on self-exposure choices might also be explored. In addition, it may be worth investigating the role of stigma within online writing situations. Data from some participants suggested that perceived stigma against online dating impacted some of their choices as writers, and this may merit deeper scrutiny. On a related note, while some research has begun looking at privacy concerns within online settings (e.g. James, 2009; Tapscott, 2009), privacy needs additional consideration as a concern impacting writers’ processes.

Study Two investigated writers’ conceptualizations of audience when composing for a professional networking site. Additional work is needed in regard to audience conceptualizations in writing situations conceptualized collaboratively as opposed to individually. Specifically, do writers conceptualize audience differently when composing individually as compared to group composition situations? Which aspects of audience are salient to group members individually and collectively? Do varied gender combinations (single-gender, mixed gender) in groups influence group members’ construction of audience? These questions merit consideration in both classroom and workplace settings.

In the business writing classroom, it may also be helpful to uncover the role of audience profile sheets. These are fairly commonly used in this setting (e.g. Markel,
2010). When student writers are provided with an audience analysis sheet, do they develop different understandings of audience than when they are simply told to consider audience? How can we structure audience sheets to enhance as opposed to inhibit students’ use of audience as a construct?

Digital writing research could also benefit from larger scale versions of Study Two, as well as use of the protocol method with different types of websites and different types of participants. As suggested previously, little digital research has used this method to unearth writers’ processes and practices within this setting. With the relatively small sample sizes used for the dissertation studies, generalization is not a realistic goal. However, it may be possible to reach a more generalizable understanding of writers’ online composing processes and practices through a large-scale replication study. It would also be worthwhile to revisit Study Two by investigating working professionals, as opposed to students, as they composed their profiles.

The two studies considered together also provide several interesting angles for future inquiry. Within digital writing studies, one possible next step would be to engage actual audience members in consideration of the profiles writers produced. Several approaches promise intriguing possibilities. For one, job networking site participants’ profiles could be presented to a headhunter or human resources professional for evaluation to determine what facets of the profiles were most significant to this professional. This feedback could also be shared with the writers and used to more effectively structure pedagogy to aid in student professionalization. Another possibility
would be continuing the dating site research by presenting profiles to potential audience members to determine which aspects of the writing were most important to these readers. Again, responses could be shared with participants. Studying their digital revision practices and processes in response to the received feedback would also be potentially interesting.

In closing, these studies have opened a window into composing practices and processes used for digital profile writing. Individuals writing in these settings discover and create materials for their audiences that are invoked, addressed, and constituted. The writing these rhetors produce is part of their discoursal identity construction, and is used for impression management purposes: writers compose profiles to build, enhance, and maintain their identities as expressed through discourse within digital locales.
APPENDIX

Study One Survey Questions

There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. I am interested in all comments about your writing and reading experiences on the website. Feel free to write as much as you want—the space will expand to accommodate your responses.

1. For what dating site(s) did you write your profile?

2. How did you feel about writing a profile? What thoughts and emotions did you have at the time?

3. What did you want to convey when you were writing the profile?

4. What types of factors weighed in to how you actually went about writing the profile? (ex. Social factors, reading others’ profiles, etc.)

5. I’d like to hear more about the things that affected you while you were writing your profile. What was your writing process like?

6. Were there any problems that you had to solve when writing the profile?

7. Did you read other profiles? If so, was this before, during, or after you wrote your profile?

8. What, if anything, did you think about other people’s writing on this website?

9. Thinking back, did you notice anything about the website community which influenced how you decided to write your own profile?

10. All things considered, what most influenced how you decided to write your own profile?
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