FROM WRITERS AND READERS TO PARTICIPANTS:

A RHETORICAL/HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON AUTHORSHIP

IN SOCIAL MEDIA

A Dissertation

by

CANDICE CHOVANEC MELZOW

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	C. Jan Swearingen
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ABSTRACT

From Writers and Readers to Participants: A Rhetorical/Historical Perspective on Authorship in Social Media. (August 2012)

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Despite the recent growth of social media, rhetorical theory which addresses authorship in this realm has been slow to develop. Static terms such as “reader,” “writer,” and “author” are often used to refer to the roles occupied by users in social media, although these terms are insufficient to describe the dynamic rhetorical exchange which occurs there. The goal of this dissertation is to use rhetorical theory to develop an updated terminology to describe the model(s) adopted by creators of social media content. First, past models of authorship are surveyed to locate rhetorical precedents for the model(s) that currently exists in social media. After comparing potential historical precedents to the overall process of content creation in social media, the term “participant” is adopted to describe the roles which users assume when creating digital content. Although “participant” initially appears to be an appropriate term, this notion is complicated when one considers the asymmetrical roles adopted on a smaller scale in genres such as social networking and blogs. To determine if the “participant” model is still applicable in such cases, an examination of authorship as it occurs in the genre of women's personal blogs is conducted. An analysis of the terms that bloggers use to refer to themselves as writers reveals that bloggers situate themselves in roles through which they claim to speak for a group such as storyteller and truth-teller. Subsequent examination of the interactions between bloggers and other participants reveals that bloggers negotiate authority with readers in a variety of ways. By using such strategies, bloggers attempt to situate themselves as community members in a manner which aligns with the "participant" model. The participant role adopted in women's personal blogs helps this previously marginalized group to establish a public presence and may also serve as a precedent for models which could be adopted by learners in the composition classroom as they strive to break free from the author/student writer binary and to establish themselves as socially-engaged participants.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Mark and Lisa Chovanec, and to my husband, Billy

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I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Swearingen, and my committee members, Dr. Aune, Dr. Earhart, and Dr. Killingsworth, for their guidance and support throughout this project. Their generosity of time and their willingness to provide insightful feedback have been instrumental in the completion of this dissertation.

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Finally, thank you to my parents, Mark and Lisa Chovanec, for their encouragement and long-standing commitment to my academic success, and to my partner, Billy, for his unwavering support and patience. None of this would have been possible without you, my love.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Contrary to Barthes' proclamation, the author is not dead. In fact, she is alive and well and probably has a witty blog which inspired the publication of her first bestseller. Blogging is one of many genres of digital, social media to take the world by storm in recent years. "Social media" is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build upon the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (UGC) (Kaplan and Haenlein 60). Examples of social media include social networking (Facebook), social bookmarking (Delicious), blogging (Blogger, WordPress), microblogging (Twitter), social news (Reddit), social media sharing (YouTube, Pinterest), and wikis (Wikipedia). Over the span of a decade, dozens of new forms of social media have developed (fig. 1). Sixty-five percent of all Americans currently use social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn (Madden and Zickuhr), and a growing percentage engage with other forms of social media on a regular basis. A 2011 report by Pew Internet & the American Life Project reports that two-thirds of online adults currently use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (A. Smith, "Why Americans Use Social Media"). Thus, it Should come as no surprise that those with access to social media tend to use the Internet

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This dissertation follows the style of *Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed.).

to engage in behaviors which are quite different from early Internet use. Rather than perusing static web pages, for example, users of social media update their status on social networking profiles, "Tweet" about current events, and make comments on their favorite sites. Users even "share" what they are reading and viewing through applications which link content on news sites to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

1999	**2001**	**2003**	**2006**	**2011**
Pyra Labs goes public with Blogger.	Wikipedia launched.	Delicious launched. MySpace launched.	Twitter launched. Facebook goes public. Bloggers reach 42 million.	Google+ launched. Pinterest launched.

Fig. 1 Timeline: Development of Social Media

These shifts in the ways in which people communicate online have affected classroom practices as well. A survey of current pedagogical techniques reveals increasing use of social media such as Blogger and Twitter. One recent study found that more than 80% of college instructors use some form of social media in the classroom (Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane 12). In other words, technology has been cited as a means of increasing digital literacy, or, rather, of teaching students how to become "multi-literate"[1] citizens of the twenty-first century. However, if part of the new educational agenda is to teach students to become digitally literate citizens, then simply encouraging use of such technologies in themselves is not advantageous. Rather, the interactions which take place in these new media must be examined and theorized to understand how such technologies can be used in the classroom to encourage students to adopt roles as critical producers of digital content. With its emphasis on writing and communication, the rhetoric and composition classroom is an ideal location for teaching digital literacy skills. Despite the fact that successful teaching involves a sound theoretical foundation, there is still no cogent theory upon which to base explanations of how authorship or content production occurs in these new forms of social media. Hence, the purpose of my study is to examine the rhetorical theory behind the practice–how do traditional authorship practices change in social media and how might these changes be theorized to enhance existing rhetorical theory and classroom practice?

The most significant rhetorical shift in social media involves the diminishing distinction between "reader" and "writer" roles online. The terms "writer" and "reader" are used to refer to dimensions of the rhetorical situation and to the roles which are adopted there. In contemporary pedagogy, the rhetorical situation is traditionally represented as a triangle with equal distance between all elements: reader, writer, text. However, with the advent of instant publishing and interconnectivity via social media applications, the conceptual distance between writer and reader has decreased

[1]"Multiliteracies" is a term borrowed from Stuart Selber to refer to the three dimensions of the digital "literacy landscape" that students ought to be able to navigate: functional literacy, critical literacy, and rhetorical literacy (24-25). Of particular importance here is rhetorical literacy which positions students as producers of technology and will be a theoretical underpinning of my current study (25).

significantly and these formerly distinct roles begin to intersect and overlap. This decreasing conceptual distance between reader and writer is illustrative of broader changes which social media have brought to the process of content creation online. Social media make everyone a potential author through various technological tools, the availability of instant publishing, and the presence of a public audience.[2] Hence, this autonomous, Romantic model of authorship does not thrive online since works are now authored more collaboratively and collectively than in the age of print. Overall, the Romantic model of authorship encouraged by print capitalizes upon the conceptual distance between writer and reader through its promulgation of the autonomous genius myth; however, social media exhibit many characteristics which decrease the distance between "writer" and "reader" roles and, by default, deemphasize the Romantic model of authorship which relied upon these distinctions. Hence, there is a need for a new term to describe the dynamic role adopted by users during the process of content creation enabled by social media. The term adopted in this study is "participant."

Although there are rhetorical and literary precursors to the participant role, these precedents need to be revised to address the peculiarities of social media. In general, most previous studies on digital authorship either seek to apply static concepts (reader, writer, author) to digital texts or to abandon such concepts entirely in favor of an "authorless" realm, yet neither approach is altogether correct. While I refrain from completely deconstructing traditional understandings of the rhetorical situation, I

[2] As a disclaimer for parties who might cry "determinism," while technology undoubtedly influences communication, this study also acknowledges that the human capacity for invention influences technology. While this study chooses to focus upon technology as a force which affects the ratios between speaker and hearer or knower and known, it acknowledges that technology is only one of many cultural and social forces which affect these ratios.

establish that this model is best understood as a foundation upon which we can base subsequent theories about digital rhetoric, particularly social media. The goal of this dissertation is to use this theoretical foundation to develop an updated terminology and means of assessing the role(s) adopted by creators of social media content and to apply this model to a specific genre of social media to test its appropriateness. Overall, I propose that "participant" is a more applicable means of describing the dynamic role(s) that users adopt in social media and that "participation" is an appropriate means of describing the process by which such content creation occurs.

However, application of the term "participant" without an investigation into models of authorship will not suffice. While there is some truth to Barthes' assertion that the "author" is dead and one might likewise conclude that "participant" can safely be used in place of the "author," this notion must be complicated to account for the differences among digital genres. When content creation is considered on an Internet-wide scale, the traditionally distinct "writer" and "reader" roles intersect in the form of "digital participant." However, the influence of an autonomous model of authorship is evident in the author-like roles assumed by users in specific genres such as personal blogs. Since there are a large number of social media genres and a variety of sub-roles which the participant might adopt, a specific genre was chosen for this study to provide a narrower lens for examining how the participant role(s) plays out. Due to their emerging position online, women's personal blogs were chosen as a case study. An analysis of the terms that these bloggers use to refer to themselves as writers as well as an examination of the interactions between bloggers and other users reveals that bloggers situate themselves as community members in a manner which aligns with the participant model. Hence, even though the role occupied by bloggers may at first glance appear to be author-like, the blogger is actually a strong representation of the participant role that emerges in social media. Not only is participant an appropriate description of the roles adopted by content creators in social media, but "participation" is also an apt description of how content creation occurs there. As demonstrated in our case study, the participant role also functions as a means by which traditionally marginalized[3] groups are empowered through a collective means of invention.[4]

Blogs as Prototype

The term "weblog"–a combination of the words "web" and "log"–was coined by Jorn Barger, creator of the early blog *Robot Wisdom,* in 1997 to refer to a frequently updated website maintained by an individual (Rettberg 24). "Blog," a shortened version of that term, was first used by Blogger Peter Merholz, in 1999 and came to be the standard that we used today.[5] The definition of "blog" proposed by Jill Walker Rettberg identifies many of the same formal features of blogs as other scholars, including Aimée Morrison and Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd. Based upon a survey of scholarship on blogs, the following are formal features which most blogs exhibit:

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[3]In this study, "marginalized" is used to refer to groups which are excluded from meaningful participation in the discourses of society that are relevant to public life and civic issues. Most marginalized groups also lack representation in the mainstream media. Women as a whole are often considered to be a marginalized group, particularly stay-at-home mothers and single mothers.

[4]In "Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs," Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright argue that as recently as 2005, in the mainstream media blogging was identified primarily with filter blogs and, in effect, was defined "in terms of the behavior of a minority elite (educated, adult males), while overlooking the reality of the majority of blogs, and in the process, marginalizing the contributions of women and young people—and many men—to the weblog phenomenon."

[5]See Merholz's blog post "Play With Your Words."

1. Posts are brief and episodic.
2. Posts are date and time-stamped.
3. Posts appear in reverse chronological order.
4. Posts are regularly updated.
5. Posts are a mixture of links and personal commentary from the editor/author.
6. Posts are sorted into browsable categories based on frequent topics/keywords.
7. Posts enable reader commentary.
8. Blogs feature an "about" page with information about the authoring entity.[6]

With the exception of the last item, these formal features are standard on most blogs. Many of these features are regulated by the blogging technologies themselves–or, rather, by the choices of the programmers and coders responsible for such technologies–since they are now built into blogging templates. For example, Blogger, a free blog-publishing service, automatically date-stamps posts and places them in reverse chronological order; however, the program leaves other features–such as the sorting of posts by keyword–up to the discretion of the bloggers themselves. Overall, identifying these formal features of blogs is important not only to determine what is and what is not a blog for the purposes of this study but also because formal features establish the foundation for derivative features of blogs which will be discussed in Chapter IV.

As an early and long-standing form of social media and one of the few genres of social media which may be classified as literary,[7] blogs are unique because of their

[6]These last two items–reader commentary and an "about" page–are typical features of many blogs but are not necessarily present on all blogs.

[7]Unlike other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook which convey only brief snippets of information (140 characters or less) or are designed primarily to form surface social connections (or to

visibly hybrid position and what this position reveals about other forms of authorship online in an age which is experiencing a profound shift from print to digital, social media. As a remediated genre, blogs retain the influence of print with their emphasis on the individual author through the presence of a distinct authorial voice and blogger biography, yet they also enable a degree of reader interactivity and community that is not typical in the model of authorship promulgated by print.[8] Rettberg speculates that the rapid growth and widespread popularity of blogs and blog-like practices may be at least partially attributed to the flexibility afforded by the alternative authorship and reading practices that blogging enables (55-56). In blogs–as in more recent forms of digital media–almost anyone can publicly present her writing and forego the publisher-intermediary in the writing process. Furthermore, blogs allow the potential for near-synchronous reader feedback and for participation in a community (in this case, that community is known as the "blogosphere").[9] Like other social media, blogs blur the traditional boundaries between writer and reader–but not so much that their relationship to past models of authorship is unrecognizable. In this dissertation, personal blogs were chosen to function as a case study to determine whether "participant" could be applied to a genre where users adopt more traditionally author-like roles. The hypothesis was that if the term "participant" could be successfully applied to the genre where the roles

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acquire "friends"), there is often more substance to blogs. With a typical post length of 100-500 words (Brown), scores of websites devoted to the "craft" of blogging, and an increasing body of scholarship about blogging, blogs are a form of social media which can be classified as literary. Steve Himmer addresses this issue at length in his essay "The Labyrinth Unbound: Weblogs as Literature."

[8]Although interactivity and community were not encouraged by print, they were common features of manuscript and even early print culture. In *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, Margaret Ezell argues that as late as the eighteenth century readers were engaging in social authorship practices through a thriving culture of manuscript circulation (6).

[9]The term "blogosphere," derived from the Greek word *logosphere* or world of words, was coined by Blogger Brad L. Graham on September 10, 1999.

appeared the most asymmetrical and traditional (“blogger,” “reader”), then the term could certainly could be applied to other forms of social media where the participant roles were more symmetrical (wikis, media-sharing sites).

Blogs are also significant due to their popularity and their influence on subsequent forms of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein 63). Over the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of blogs increased exponentially, from the 23 known blogs documented by Jesse James Garrett in 1999 to an estimated 181 million blogs worldwide in 2011 (Nielsen and NM Incite). While blogging was initially relegated to those with technology skills advanced enough to write their own code, in 1999 Pyra Labs released the Blogger platform to the general public, thus widening the base of potential bloggers. Now, over a decade later, millions of blogs on a variety of topics from fly fishing to foreign films, from parenting to painting, all exist online.

Some scholars speculate that blogging has run its course and is being overcome by newer practices such as social networking (Facebook) and microblogging (Twitter). However, a 2010 Pew Research Center study recognizes a decrease in blogging only among young adults and finds that blogging among adults 30 and older increased from 2007 to 2009 (Lenhart et al.).[10] The influence of blogging as a whole cannot be denied. Even when people online are not blogging, they are often engaging in activities which are similar to and derived from blogging: “users are doing blog-like things in other

[10]This same Pew Research Center study found that since 2006 blogging has declined in popularity among teens and young adults due to increased use of other applications such as social networking and microblogging. However, a December 2010 Pew Internet & American Life Project Report claims that “blogging ‘peaks,’ but reports of its death are exaggerated” (Singel). Several of the bloggers in my sample have written on the topic as well. See, for example, Dr. Crazy’s October 13, 2010 post entitled “Why Write? (A Blog, That Is . . .).”

online spaces as they post updates about their lives, musings about the world, jokes, and links on social networking sites and micro-blogging sites such as Twitter" (Singel). Although the popularity of blogs among teens appears to have run its course, increased blogging among particular niches of Internet users such as stay-at-home moms ensures that the practice is still going strong.[11] As a genre which has been around for over a decade and which continues to influence subsequent forms of social media, blogging merits further study.

In my case study, the manner in which the participant role functions in women's personal blogs brings several important points to light. The more "author-like" role which emerges in personal blogs maintained by individuals complicates early monolithic theories which maintain that digital rhetoric exists in an "authorless" or "post-authorial" realm. This begs the question of whether the "participant" role explored in this study is even applicable to such genres. However, an assessment of the discourses and actions on these personal blogs confirms that despite the author-like roles adopted in them, "participant" is an appropriate means of describing the roles configured there. When bloggers describe themselves as storytellers and truth-tellers, they attempt to situate themselves as community members despite the more authoritarian role that they adopt on their individual blogs. By adopting author-like roles through which they claim to speak for a group and by acknowledging readers and negotiating authority with them, bloggers attempt to mitigate their authority and to play into the participant role. Hence,

[11]Mom blogging was recognized as one of the top blogging trends in *Technorati*'s "State of the Blogosphere 2010" report (Sobel).

even though the role occupied by bloggers may at first glance appear to be author-like, it, too, is actually representative of the participant role which emerges in social media.

Theoretical Approach

Digital media are diverse and multi-layered, thus requiring a comprehensive approach which considers not only traditional rhetorical theory but also relatively recent ideas about authorship and new media. Hence, this study relies upon rhetorical theory with an emphasis on authorship (Foucault) and collaborative writing practices (LeFevre; Howard) along with digital literacy studies focused on social media (Rettberg; Rheingold) to establish a foundation for assessing authorship in digital, social media. In particular, I am indebted to Michel Foucault who provides a foundation for deconstructing notions of authorship. In "What Is An Author?," Foucault establishes authorship as a social construct which changes with the times, hence opening up the possibility for my claim that perhaps "author" and "authorship" do not exist at all online, at least according to our traditional understanding of these concepts. In addition to Foucault, I rely upon Karen Burke LeFevre's concept of invention as a social act and Rebecca Moore Howard's discussion of authorship as a social practice. Although the work of these scholars is primarily focused in the medium of print, it nonetheless opens up discussions for speculating about how all rhetorical practices are inherently social, including those which occur online. My study also acknowledges the prominence of neo-Aristotelian rhetoricians such as Wayne Booth and Kenneth Burke and their perspectives on medium and motion as essential components in the rhetorical situation which will be considered in my assessment of social media.

As much as this study relies upon rhetorical theory, it also acknowledges that there is an insufficiency in contemporary theory in its failure to account for the "rhetorical situation" as it occurs online. In my quest to address this gap, I seek to extend neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theories through the integration of new media theory and literacy studies. In particular, the terms "participant" and "participation" are associated with new media studies rather than with rhetorical theory. Jill Walker Rettberg defines "participatory media" as "media that makes publishing available to everyone" (155) and Howard Rheingold identifies "participation literacy" as one of the five "literacies" of twenty-first century media (*Net Smart* 10). In this project, the term "participant" will be used since it is a more neutral and expansive term than "author," "writer," or "reader" and since it addresses the ability of users to adopt multiple roles simultaneously in digital, social media.

More broadly, this study relies upon cultural theory. Since the project seeks to examine the intersection point between "reader" and "writer" as the most likely place where understanding may occur, it also relies upon Mary Louise Pratt who emphasizes "contact zones" as fruitful places for discovery. In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (1). Might the Internet be one of these social spaces where a culture of traditional rhetorical theory clashes with the new ways in which rhetoric is practiced and understood?

Pedagogical Concerns

My study hypothesizes that "participant" is the new "writer" and the new "reader" since these more traditional roles have blurred in social media. Recognizing the participant role moves us toward a better understanding of how we might begin to teach digital rhetoric as a practice that complicates our traditional understanding of the tripartite rhetorical situation. It is important to acknowledge this point for several reasons. First, we cannot continue to teach outmoded models. Teaching students about "authors" and "audiences" does very little to improve their understanding of how content creation and rhetorical interactions actually occur in digital, social media. Rather, we need to think in terms of participants. User participation in the creation of digital content has many benefits–it can instill a sense of community, contribute to the knowledge available online, and even produce a profit for companies and individuals (Rheingold, *Net Smart* 119, 122, 134-35). Thus, it is not only individual users who are eager to participate in content creation; companies are also eager to steer users toward participation because they profit from the free digital labor which users provide through uploading content and curating information (Rheingold, *Net Smart* 135). As potential digital citizens and content creators, students need to be aware of the rhetorical context for and the responsibility associated with participant roles. In other words, they need to possess what Howard Rheingold identifies as "digital participation literacy" (*Net Smart* 114).

Rather than fighting the model of participation and accusing digital writers of producing "unoriginal" work as early theorists might have chosen to do, we can embrace this role and the potential that it opens for students to expand their writing beyond the classroom. If social media such as blogs enable previously marginalized groups such as stay-at-home moms (SAHMs) to establish identities as socially-engaged participants in the broader public sphere rather than as writers cloistered away in the private sphere, then the potential for the participant role adopted in blogs to empower members of other marginalized groups becomes evident. Much like the relegation of "women's writing" to the private sphere, student writing has been confined to the classroom and viewed as separate from "real world" writing. We might consider then that the models of authorship adopted in women's personal blogs act as a precedent for models which could be adopted by learners in the composition classroom as they strive to position themselves as socially-engaged participants rather than as student writers. Learning how to be a "good participant" in this sense involves familiarity with rhetorical strategies such knowing how and when to comment on a post and what kind of comments are appropriate (M. Blankenship 42). Learners who view themselves as socially-engaged participants who know how to participate appropriately are better prepared for the writing that they do outside of class. Hence, an overall better understanding of the rhetorical participant role(s) adopted by users of digital, social media will improve our theory as well as our classroom practice. The future of composition pedagogy can be greatly enhanced when the author-like roles adopted in social media are recognized as empowering and taught as such in the classroom rather than shunned as "unoriginal" or "nontraditional." Furthermore, the teaching of such roles has broad, far-reaching consequences as students learn how to harness their identities as responsible digital participants for decades to come in communication beyond the classroom.

Overall, this study adopts a historical approach to understanding the shift from "writer" and "reader" roles in the traditional rhetorical situation to the "participant" role in social media. A chronological approach permits us to examine rhetorical theory and potential precedents in past models of authorship, to consider our current situation and the emerging role of participant in social media, to proceed with an analysis of blogs as a case study for the participant role, and, ultimately, to consider how the participant model might be applied to rhetoric and composition pedagogy.

"Chapter II: A Rhetorical History of Authorship," establishes that theories of authorship shift in conjunction with new media at specific points and looks to these points as potential precedents for the dynamic role(s) emerging in social media. At each of these points, technology shifts the conceptual distance between reader and writer and shapes perceptions of the inventive process. These dimensions, in turn, help to shape the rhetorical theories of authorship emerging during each period. A survey of these theories leads to two important revelations. First, hybridity is often observed in models which are adopted at specific literacy crisis points where media converge. Second, the conceptual distance between dimensions of the rhetorical situation (reader, writer, topic) gradually increases throughout history, culminating with the theory of Romantic, autonomous authorship during the age of print. With the advent of electronic and early digital media, the rhetorical distance between author and reader decreases significantly and encourages perceptions of the "authorless" message. However, neither "autonomous" nor "authorless" accurately describes the role(s) adopted by "authors" in social media. Hence, my findings in this chapter reveal that no rhetorical precedent which is universally applicable to the roles in social media exists; rather, there is only the potential inherent in theories proposed by rhetoricians such as Wayne Booth and Kenneth Burke whose work might be extended to social media. An amalgamation of these concepts is addressed in Chapter III, "The Participant Role in Social Media," and the manner in which author-like roles play out in a specific genre of social media is addressed in Chapter V, "Case Study: Participant Roles in Women's Personal Blogs."

"Chapter III: The Participant Role in Social Media," establishes "participant" as an appropriate terminology for referring to the hybrid, dynamic practices by which content is generated online. Since traditional models do not provide a vocabulary which accounts for this degree of overlap, the term "participant" is used to describe the role which users adopt in social media. There are different degrees to which participants engage with the creation of digital content, including "implicit participants" who interact with (and occasionally generate) information and "active participants" who contribute to content creation online. Since active participants may contribute content in a variety of ways–blog comments, wiki entries, status updates–the "active participant" role is where writer and reader roles most readily intersect in social media. Hence, there is a shift from the autonomous model of authorship to large-scale participation online.

Despite this shift, claims that digital communication is representative of Foucault's post-author utopia are too monolithic.[12] Hence, the "authorless" conundrum introduced in Chapter II merits reconsideration at this point. With the rise in social media over the last ten years, there is renewed interest in the message source. In particular, there is a preference that a distinct, stable participant is identifiable and associated with each message. Social media have spurred the formation of a participant identity which demonstrates cohesion between offline and online dimensions of identity (through real-name policies) and across many different platforms (through interoperable platforms such as "Facebook Connect"). The preference for a fixed, recognizable authorial identity may be a reaction to the previous flexibility of the "authorless" message since fixity reinforces accountability and authenticity online. However, the concern with message source is associated with specific forms of social media (blogs, social networking) rather than with other web genres (corporate websites, discussion forums), illustrating that the role(s) adopted by participants and the degree of power which they are granted is highly dependent upon genre. This observation forms the basis for my analysis of participant role(s) as they function in specific genres in subsequent chapters.

"Chapter IV: Blogs: Medium and Methodology" explores the methods for my genre-specific rhetorical analysis of women's personal blogs. Blogs are an ideal "testing ground" for determining whether the participant role is universally applicable to social

[12]Although "post author utopia" is not a term that Foucault himself uses, it is the term that Mark Poster uses to describe Foucault's prediction that soon we will write in a world where the most common refrain will be "What does it matter who's speaking?"

media. As an evolving digital writing practice, with immediacy, intertextuality, and conversationality built into its very foundation, blogging confronts the long-standing model of authorship which favors autonomy, originality, proprietorship, and morality (Howard 58). However, blogs as a medium still bear many similarities to print, including the asymmetrical relationship between blogger and readers, thus providing ideal grounds for analysis: if "participant" proves an appropriate label for the role(s) adopted in blogs, then it can be applied to digital media which exhibit less rhetorical distance between user roles. Women's personal blogs, which have been marginalized due to their tendency to address topics not previously discussed in the public sphere, are now on the rise and are an ideal medium for examining how alternative authorship practices flourish online. Susan Herring's model of computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA), a hybrid model influenced by both rhetoric and linguistics, is the methodology used to analyze my sample of ten women's personal blogs.

"Chapter V: Case Study: Participant Roles in Women's Personal Blogs" examines how the participant role functions in women's personal blogs. In these blogs, participants operate on several different levels simultaneously: in particular, at the textual level and at the blogosphere/community level. As members of the blogging community, participants can choose the degree to which they engage with content online. Participants may choose to actively engage with content by adopting the role of blogger, they may choose to engage semi-actively by leaving comments on other blogs, or they may choose to adopt both roles simultaneously. These roles are interdependent and demonstrate the sense of community which is necessary for blogs to thrive as a form of social media.

An examination of communicative exchanges on women's personal blogs reveals that participants who occupy the blogger role situate themselves as community members both by adopting rhetorical roles in which they claim to speak for a group and by acknowledging their readers and negotiating authority with them. In place of a more autonomous model of authorship and the static roles of writer and reader, bloggers adopt roles such as storyteller and truth-teller through which they claim to speak for communities. Bloggers often note that these roles are empowered through the community-oriented aspects of blogging, and their attempts to form a sense of community with readers appear to be a response to this realization. First, individual bloggers are empowered through the community-building function inherent in the networked nature of the blogosphere, and they adopt active roles as participants "talking back" to social institutions which have previously marginalized and/or silenced them. Second, readers are empowered through the redistribution of authorial control in blogs through various means enacted by the blogger. The dynamic participant roles adopted in blogs are formed through a series of community-mediated negotiations which are constantly in flux and vary significantly from the static roles of writer and reader. This finding supports my claim that "participant" is the most appropriate term to describe the rhetorical and authorial roles adopted in blogs as well as in other forms of social media.

"Conclusion: Marginalized Writers and Potential Participants" maintains that the model of community-based participation adopted in women's personal blogs can be applied on a broader scale to empower other marginalized groups. Identifying all users as participants acknowledges the potential of the role to empower traditionally marginalized groups by helping them to gain an audible, public voice online. Much as blogs assist groups such as women writers in making the shift from private to public writing by becoming "participants" in the public sphere, blogs can help learners to develop as participants in digital culture rather than as "student writers" isolated from society. Blogging also encourages students to adopt more expansive notions of authorship which enable them to view themselves as both autonomous writers and as empowered community participants, thus helping them to manage the negotiations between these roles which occur outside of the classroom.

CHAPTER II

A RHETORICAL HISTORY OF AUTHORSHIP

Transformations in how authorship is perceived and practiced frequently occur when emerging literacies intermingle with existing literacies in new media, shaping new models of authorship. In *Implications of Literacy,* Brian Stock recounts one such shift which occurred during the Middle Ages as literacy began to intermingle with orality and heretics formed textual communities to confront the moral authority of the Christian Church (90-92). I argue that a similar shift is occurring today in the digital realm where many groups have seized the power of social media such as blogs and wikis to form their own communities of digital participants. In such communities, ratios between writer and reader are shifting–and, in some cases, these concepts are being redefined altogether–as we embark upon a transformation from print to digital, social media.[13] However, use of the term "transformation" does not indicate a complete abdication of print influence.[14] In fact, Stock warns against establishing absolute categories such as "oral" and "literate" as media shift, and, instead, encourages us to pay attention to the areas of overlap between literacies. Stock's theory is used as a foundation for my review of historical models of authorship ranging from Plato's model of truth-seeking, to the Romantic genius, to Barthes' "dead" author. Overall, this chapter aims to survey past models of authorship in

[13]The expressions of "ratios" shifting is borrowed from C. Jan Swearingen. In *Rhetoric and Irony,* Swearingen states that "The notions of the author and speaking subject . . . went through a multitude of transformations, each one affecting the ratios of speaker and hearer, knower and known" (225).

[14]One need only to look to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* which theorizes that all media are remediated versions of previous media.

hopes of locating precedents for the roles adopted by content creators in digital, social media.

Literature Review

Rhetorical scholarship which emphasizes collaborative writing practices provides a foundation for this chapter's survey of past models of authorship. In particular, Karen Burke LeFevre's *Invention as a Social Act* and Rebecca Moore Howard's *Standing in the Shadow of Giants* have been central to this study. LeFevre's study establishes invention as a social act and examines several alternatives to the Platonic model of invention while Howard's work examines various historical precedents to the notion of the autonomous author and then identifies specific attributes associated with this prevailing model of authorship. Both scholars attempt to offer alternatives to the individual, autonomous model of authorship promoted by Romanticism and practiced in contemporary composition classrooms.

LeFevre, who focuses on rhetorical invention rather than exclusively on authorship, bases her claim that invention is a social act on four principles:

1. Invention is social even at the individual level because the inventing self is a socially-constituted self which is always influenced by others.
2. One invents using language, a socially-constructed and shared symbolic system.
3. One invents through the social process of imagining a dialogue with an other whether this is some version of oneself or an imagined audience.

4. Invention is heavily influenced by social collectives and institutions such as higher education and capitalism.[15] (2)

LeFevre's principles are associated with basic rhetorical theories. In particular, the presence of an imagined audience closely aligns with the concept of the rhetorical situation and its dimensions of speaker, audience, and text. Much literary and rhetorical theory throughout the ages has conceived of invention as a largely individual endeavor without a large degree of social influence, yet LeFevre demonstrates that the social dimensions of invention remain visible in everyday practice. For example, much of scientific and business writing takes place among groups of individuals as does the majority of informal writing which occurs in the digital realm, and composition and rhetoric pedagogy have slowly shifted to collaborative models as well. Building upon this idea of invention as a social practice, LeFevre draws from a wide variety of disciplines to construct a continuum of perspectives on invention ranging from autonomous to collective: Platonic/Individual (Peter Elbow), Internal Dialogic (Sigmund Freud; Wayne Booth), Collaborative (Kenneth Bruffee; Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford), and Supra-Individual Collective (Émile Durkheim). According to LeFevre, the Platonic model which has persisted for centuries emphasizes the individual's role in discovering the ultimate pre-existing truth rather than in generating new truths.[16] The Platonic/individual perspective on invention largely corresponds with Elbow's expressive model of composition which maintains that the writer find his/her "real self"

[15]Elizabeth Eisenstein explores these influences – as well as the influence of new media and literacy practices–at length in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change.*

[16]LeFevre includes the disclaimer that while this may not be the correct interpretation of Plato (who also favored Socratic dialectic), it is the one which has been emphasized in literary and rhetorical studies over the centuries (12).

and “real voice” (306). The internal dialogic perspective of invention holds that one invents by carrying on an internal conversation with another “self;” much like Freud’s superego, this other self “functions as a bridge to the rest of the social world” (54). Booth’s concept of “other selves” and the rhetorical practice of Rogerian argument are examples which align with the internal dialogic perspective. The third model of invention, collaborative, establishes invention as a process that is “concerned with overt social relationships” (62). Thus, meaning is generated through both the individual’s use of specific “gestures” and through the audience’s response to these gestures (62). Pedagogies founded upon collaborative models include Bruffee’s learning groups and Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s collaborative authorship theory. While immediate relationships are a consideration under the collaborative perspective, the supra-individual collective perspective emphasizes broader associations which influence the inventive process, including society’s expectations and institutional attitudes (78). Under this model individuals interact with social collectives to engage in invention (82). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which views language as a shaper of thoughts is one example of a supra-individual perspective of invention (86). If one were to link these four models of invention with relevant dimensions of sociality, then one might find a correspondence similar to the following: Individual (Platonic); Intrapersonal (Internal Dialogic); Interpersonal (Collaborative); Collective (Supra-Individual). Although it is tempting to view these models of invention as distinct, LeFevre cautions against drawing impermeable boundaries between them, stating, “This is a continuum, not a set of categories” (49). Hence, different models may simultaneously be practiced in the same classroom or even in the same text. Additionally, although these models of invention are not exclusive to one historical period, a particular model may be more culturally visible during specific time periods. LeFevre's theory of invention as a social act forms a foundation for how we might begin to view authorship as it occurs online. In particular, the representation of models existing on a continuum in which there is some degree of overlap is helpful since rhetorical elements in digital media are often intertwined. LeFevre's four models of invention are also central to this project because they inform the models of authorship which Rebecca Moore Howard addresses in her study.

In *Standing in the Shadow of Giants,* Howard adopts a narrower approach by exploring the issue of authorship rather than of invention. While she does not establish a continuum of authorship models, Howard identifies several points throughout history where models of authorship began to shift: Plato, Quintilian, Medieval West, Enlightenment, and Romanticism. She also acknowledges technology as a driving force–but not the *only* force–behind such shifts. In her take on Romanticism, Howard identifies four properties associated with the "true author" model which this movement emphasized: autonomy, proprietorship, originality, and morality (76). Autonomy, or the notion that the author "can apprehend Truth without resource to social discourse" (81), is similar to LeFevre's Platonic model which maintains that invention is an asocial endeavor. Proprietorship, or the idea that an author possesses the rights to his/her work, evolved in tandem with the printing press, Enlightenment individualism, and emerging property rights (Howard 79).[17] Originality describes the perception of unique works being of a higher quality than imitative works and supports the conflation of the role of "author" with the notion of "genius" (82), and morality refers to "the high character demonstrated in one's ability to be original" (Howard 87). Overall, Howard maintains that these four attributes–autonomy, proprietorship, originality, morality–are associated with the model of authorship that has been recently emphasized in literary culture and, therefore, is the model which students are encouraged to adopt in composition classrooms.[18]

LeFevre and Howard's work overlaps at several key points, the most obvious of which is the association between LeFevre's Platonic model and Howard's "true author." Both models associate attributes such as individuality and autonomy with the favored mode of authorship in both composition classrooms and literary studies. While LeFevre does not associate the attributes of proprietorship and morality with the Platonic model, she directly links Platonic invention and its emphasis on the individual writer to the Romantic model of authorship that Howard dissects (17-18). Attributes such as proprietorship and morality were not original to the Platonic model, but, rather, were the products of a much later culture that aimed to assign economic and moral value to an author's work. Hence, the Romantic model of authorship explored by Howard is

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[17]In "On the Author Effect: Recovering Collectivity," Martha Woodmansee points out that the autonomous model of authorship is a relatively recent notion which coincided with Romanticism (16).

[18]Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford support this position in *Singular Texts / Plural Authors* when they address the need for collaborative models of authorship in the composition classroom. Ede and Lunsford expand this position even further in "Collaboration and Concepts in Authorship" when they point out that although many scholarly investigations of authorship have taken place since publication of *Singular Texts / Plural Authors*, very little has changed regarding the models which writers in academe adopt, particularly in the humanities.

Platonic Invention re-configured to account for the elements of a print-based, capitalistic society. Although this Romantic model which LeFevre and Howard identify has been thoroughly deconstructed, it nonetheless still influences our conceptions of authorship and of composition pedagogy. In addition to the noted similarities between the autonomous models of invention which they explore, both LeFevre and Howard view invention as a social practice. If findings of authorship as a social endeavor are consistent among in-depth studies such as the ones undertaken by these scholars, then perhaps it is worth speculating about how today's digital authorships might align with this theory. Although the composition classroom has long acknowledged collaborative pedagogies, very little rhetorical theory exists which addresses the varied collaborative models of authorship in new forms of digital media. This topic bears particular importance in the age of social media where authorship practices in all dimensions–business, entertainment, and education–are shifting rapidly toward more overtly social models. An overview of several historical models of authorship is necessary to ascertain how the framework established by LeFevre and Howard correlates with models of authorship not fully examined in their works and which, in turn, might help to establish a precedent for our subsequent examination of the roles adopted by creators of content in social media.

Orality and Early Writing

"Authorship"–a concept borne of print–is a controversial term when used in reference to cultures which depend upon orality as their primary means of communication. Authors in the sense that we think of today did not exist, yet a survey of oral tradition confirms that even before writing and literacy took root, works were identified with the names of the individuals who created them such as Gorgias' "Encomium of Helen" or Plato's *Phaedrus.* Thus, "authorship" in the sense of attribution did exist in ancient Greece and Rome; however, "authorship" as the extended concept which Howard explores and Foucault deconstructs did not yet exist. Long before there was the author, there was *aoidoi*, the singer-poet, and, later, ῥήτωρ, the *rhetor*, or public speaker, and the scribe. It is with these terms in mind that our exploration of "authorship" in ancient oral cultures begins.

If one wants to assess the origins of ancient works, most scholarship on oral tradition identifies the Homeric culture as a shared oral economy. Homeric poems were "stitched together" from prefabricated parts so that "instead of a creator, you had an assembly-line worker" (Ong 22). Or, if we consider the language of the digital realm rather than of the industrial era, instead of a creator, you had an individual who was able to navigate a "shared network" of oral expressions which function much like hyperlinks today. This network of mnemonic devices functions as a source of invention in oral cultures. Although there have been some objections to the theory that oral poems were "stitched together," scholars are in agreement that oral noetic means of sharing information such as "rhythm, song and narrative formulae" did exist during the period. [19] Much notable scholarship focuses on the communal connections between singer-poet

[19] An oral economy relies "heavily on repetition, emulation, and collaborative, shared thought, language, and knowledge" (Swearingen, *Rhetoric and Irony* 38). Swearingen reminds us that innovative thought (rather than mimesis) existed in several forms in such cultures. For example, "The Preplatonics begin to shape what can be thought of as an alternate noetic economy, one that places a high premium on innovation, interrogation, skepticism, analysis, debate, authority, and proof, and that comes to both rely on and be shaped by new uses of writing" (38).

and audience in the storytelling function. Ong states that "For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known" (45). In other words, the storyteller does not present himself as an individual "author" when telling a story or making a speech but, rather, as voicing communal knowledge of the story. As an ancient practice, storytelling falls somewhere between LeFevre's collaborative and supra-individual models of invention since it is concerned with the speaker's gestures and the audiences responses to these gestures. Furthermore, in oral cultures there was no term for authorship or author since the "inventor" existed only within a community of oral participants and the "text" itself originated in a pre-existing framework of oral expressions. Together, this oral framework and community of participants presented quite a different picture of invention than was fostered in the age of the printing press. This communal model of invention is similar to the model that is used in digital media today since it relies upon storytelling, a shared network of expressions, and (at times) the participation of the audience.

However, in contrast to today's digital world, Ancient Greece was primarily an oral culture where concepts that we take for granted–authenticity, identity, authority, credibility–were understood differently or were absent altogether. While it is difficult to determine precisely what early oral performers thought, it is unlikely that they perceived of themselves as authors since this concept gained momentum only with the advent of writing and took hold most fully with the widespread use of print. Traditionally, the singer-poet identified himself as a conduit, an actor who was "divinely inspired" by his muse. For example, at the beginning of *The Odyssey,* Homer invokes the divine, stating

"Tell of the storm-tossed man, O Muse. . . . Of this, O goddess, daughter of Zeus, speak as thou wilt to us" (Trans. George Herbert Palmer 1). The tale of Odysseus' adventures is then represented as if it is derived from the muse. Similar references are scattered throughout other Greek works and in early Christian works as well. For example, in the *Five Books of Moses* (*Pentateuch*), God dictates the content: "Then the Lord instructed Moses, 'Write this *for a* memorial in a book, and rehearse *it* in the ears of Joshua" (Exod. 17:14) and shortly thereafter Moses acts as a conduit to deliver the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel (Exod. 20). Thus, invention in ancient oral cultures is attributed to divine origins rather than to an autonomous author, although individuals are often named in association with a text or even a specific body of work.[20]

The oral speaker's habit of presenting the divine muse as inspiration for a work has several rhetorical effects which represent negotiations in authority. First, the muse's presence increases the conceptual distance between singer-poet and audience and increases the authority of the message, most notably by acknowledging the divine as originator of the work (much as the Bible is attributed to God in Jewish and Christian cultures). However, this model also closes some of the distance that it initially opens by having the human agent serve as an intermediary between the "divine muse" and the "collective audience." In some ways this intermediary serves as the "human face" of communication in the ancient world. Furthermore, despite the collective means of authoring a text, Greek, Jewish, and Christian traditions all attached names to a text and

[20]Greco-Roman and Christian cultures both have a history of identifying the authors of works by name (Homer, Plato, Moses, Augustine). In *Ascension of Authorship,* Wyrick identifies the practice of authorial naming as a means of legitimizing texts in the Christian tradition and contrasts this practice with the Jewish tendency to attach names to individuals only as a means of establishing them as "copyists" for such works (4).

perceived of the use of such names as means of assessing the value of a given work (Wyrick 9). Thus, the messenger or muse model served a two-fold purpose for ancient speakers–it allowed them to both claim divine origins for their work, thus increasing its authority, while simultaneously maintaining a human presence in the communication process through the intermediary singer-poet who acted as a means of infusing a human presence in the text. Overall, while the model of invention practiced in oral poems was to some extent collaborative/collective, there was a tendency to identify individuals by name; thus, invention as practiced was dispersed, yet the authority of a work still coincided with the individual poet's name.

A model similar to muse-inspired authorship is also represented by Plato when Socrates promotes the discovery of "Truth" and addresses the overlap between orality and writing in *The Phaedrus*, but here we see the shift to individuality taking place. Plato represents discovery as a collaborative endeavor which takes place through a dialogue between Phaedrus and Socrates. Although Socrates offers a thorough critique of writing, Plato chooses to preserve his ideas in this new medium, alluding to the notion that individual discovery rather than Socratic dialogue is the preferred model of invention accepted in his culture (though it is not necessarily the model that he prefers). This point becomes most evident toward the end of the dialogue when Socrates instructs Phaedrus that upon delivering his message to Lysias, Phaedrus must represent their "discovery" as divinely inspired: "Go and tell Lysias that we two went down to the stream and shrine of the Nymphs and there received the following message which we are charged to deliver to Lysias and other speech-writers, to Homer and other poets" (100).[21] Even though Plato depicts Socrates as being aware that discovery may take place through alternative models such as dialogue, he endorses a model of invention that invokes divine inspiration. This mechanism capitalizes upon the values of a system based in orality since a message of divine origins cannot be disputed, thus providing a means of enhanced authority. Overall, Plato's depiction of Socrates advocating individual invention and discovery, collaborative dialogue, and divine inspiration illustrates that multiple models of authorship may exist simultaneously, particularly when new technologies such as writing arise.

The notion that the Platonic model advocates discovery of knowledge, rather than autonomous invention, is supported by scholars.[22] As Swearingen points out, for Plato, "individual ownership of truth was impossible because truth, and, to a certain extent, meaning, existed fully apart from any individual author. According to this view, the seeker after truth *finds* rather than *creates* meaning; the primary task of the writer is to aptly express what has been discovered" ("Originality, Authenticity" 23). Thus, the Platonic model establishes knowledge as pre-existing which, in turn, diminishes the agency of the human author as creator of truth. In other words, the Platonic model

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[21]The message delivered is that "the man whose most precious production is what he has composed or written, and who has devoted his time to twisting words this way and that, pasting them together and pulling them apart, may fairly be called a poet or a speech-writer or a maker of laws" (Plato 102).

[22]Plato's theory maintains that forms exist outside of individual human beings and that these forms are the only elements which provide us with "true knowledge." According to Platonic doctrine, "absolute knowledge, or true science if we so choose to call it, is of the Forms and of the Forms alone, and that applied science or skilled technique depends on copying the Forms in artifacts. The painter and the poet achieve neither" (Havelock 25).

largely "abstracts the writer from society" (LeFevre 25) and, in turn, denies him/her agency in the invention process.

In contrast to Plato's perspective, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the first work which attempts to attribute invention to human agency. By defining rhetoric as *techne*, Aristotle associates it with the act of making or doing, thus distancing his model of invention from the Platonic model which, as traditionally interpreted, advocates discovery of pre-existing knowledge. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter" (70), his focus on the reactions of the audience, and his emphasis of three rhetorical proofs (*ethos, pathos, logos*) establishes rhetoric as a *socially* inventive process.[23] In particular, *ethos*, or the credibility of the speaker, becomes yet another example of how invention is active and social under the Aristotelian model. When explaining *ethos,* Aristotle suggests that the character of the speaker may be as contrived as the actor's role though it should be created as "naturally" as possible, with minimal appearance of artifice (1404). Aristotelian *ethos* is defined by George Kennedy as how the speaker presents himself within the speech–an understanding which does not involve dimensions of the speaker's outside life (82). However, a second interpretation of Aristotle's *ethos* as proposed by S. Michael Halloran is that of "gathering place" (60). Under this model, *ethos* is manifested both by the individual and by her place within the community since "character is formed by habit . . . and those habits come from the community or culture" (Reynolds 329). Thus, "an individual's *ethos* cannot be

[23]In his introduction to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, translator H. C. Lawson-Tancred states that "invention can be said to be the primary subject of the *Rhetoric*. . . . *The Rhetoric* might indeed be called an encyclopaedia of invention" (17-18).

determined outside of the space in which it was created or without a sense of the cultural context" (Reynolds 329).[24] How is credibility established in association with cultural context? As Halloran explains, "To have *ethos* is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks" (60). Thus, the speaker's adherence to specific communal values and behaviors helps to establish his or her credibility. Aristotle's theory was one of the first to locate the dimensions of invention both internally within the speaker and externally within the forces of society at large, thus recognizing that invention was a multi-faceted, complex process.[25] More responsibility is placed upon the speaker in this model than in Plato's which proposes that the human agent discovers knowledge that is pre-existing. Although Plato's use of Socratic dialogue alludes to the possibility of collaborative invention, Aristotle's *ethos* is more overtly social than Plato's model. In contrast, Aristotle recognizes that invention must be defined as a social endeavor in order to coincide with his view of rhetoric as *techne* or an acquired skill.

The models advocated by Plato and Aristotle served the needs of a primarily oral culture. Despite their differences, both of these philosophers acknowledge the social dimensions of invention–Plato through dialogue and Aristotle through *ethos*, and both models are less autonomous than subsequent theories of authorship based in a print economy. With the recent explosion in digital, social media, emphasis is once again

[24]It should be noted that this understanding of *ethos* runs counter to the individualism prevalent in much of American culture and canonical literature. The fact that the "gathering place" understanding of *ethos* is at odds with central values of American culture perhaps explains the general reticence to accept this understanding of *ethos* despite it being the most accurate description of how *ethos* is established in texts.

[25]Aristotle's theory even goes so far as to assert that the sense of "authenticity" which is imparted upon the audience from this persona indicates that a preference for "imitative replications of natural language, " may, in fact, be a style that changes "with the times" (Swearingen 118, 121).

placed on the conversational and social aspects of invention first emphasized by these early rhetoricians since the capacity for exchange is present in the immediacy of the digital medium. These interactive capabilities address one of Socrates' key criticisms of writing (it cannot defend itself) by restoring a conversational element to the communication process. The networked nature of communication online is also relevant to Halloran's interpretation of Aristotelian *ethos* as gathering place. The significance of these theories to the study of digital rhetoric emerges as the distance between reader and writer–a gap which increased steadily since the transition from orality to literacy (Ong, 100-101)–is bridged by interactive capabilities, particularly in social media which are the focus of this study. Furthermore, even in ancient Greece, the medium was as important as the message when constructing authorial identity, and issues such as identity, authority, and credibility which begin to take shape under the Aristotelian model are expanded under Roman rhetoric in a form that is still recognizable today.

In response to Aristotle's model, both Cicero and Quintilian promoted the idea that a speaker's words and actions–both within and outside of the speech–are a testament to good character. In *De Oratore,* Cicero explains his philosophy that the ideal orator is a virtuous man who lives a moral life and instructs others how to do so in his speeches. Overall, Cicero establishes that speech is neither good nor bad–only individuals are, that "only a good man can be a good orator" who possesses the ability "to move" people to action (Kennedy 41). Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* also conveys this notion by establishing *ethos* as *vir bonus,* or the idea of the speaker as "a man of good character and of pleasing manners" whose virtue boosts the value of his arguments (VI.ii.18).[26] Hence, human beings are capable of learning moral behaviors, so an orator will have good character if he receives the appropriate training.[27] In this case, the background of the speaker and his actions matter just as much as how he presents himself in the speech, thus differing from Aristotle's model which establishes *ethos* as a contrivance.

During the Greco-Roman period, conflicting views arise concerning both invention and *ethos.* The association between outside character and *ethos* which Cicero and Quintilian make is a valid one considering that the audience might have some knowledge of the orator's reputation; however, Aristotle's concept of ethics as character as presented in the speech seems even more applicable to future models where print and writing place some rhetorical distance between audience and speaker and where character is conveyed largely through the text. Upon first glance, Aristotle's conception of *ethos* seems more applicable for how we assess character in digital rhetoric because audiences only have the persona formed in the text or website upon which to base their values; however, some issues do complicate this perspective as pseudonymous digital texts shift to cohesive digital identities. These issues will be examined in Chapter II of this project. Overall, these conflicting Greco-Roman perspectives on *ethos* as well as invention are reflective of the cultural hybridity of the time and remind us of the hybridity which we are currently experiencing with digital, social media.

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[26]Howard claims that "the competing values of autonomy and collaboration, originality and mimesis, are evident" in the *Institutes of Oratory* where while cautioning one against direct copying, Quintilian recommends imitation as a means of improving one's writing skills (63).

[27]Quintilian states, "But he who, while he speaks, is thought a bad man, must certainly speak ineffectively, for he will not be thought to speak sincerely; if he did, his *ēthos* or character would appear" (VI.ii.18).

The Revitalization of Literacy

Following the decline of the Roman Empire, literacy rates fell and there was a decrease in the use of writing and interest in rhetoric in Western Europe. This section characterizes the Middle Ages as a transformation point which marks the second emergence of writing as a literacy practice and also marks the emergence of authorship as an institution in Europe. Due to the degree of overlap between literate and oral practices, divergent models of authorship continued to exist during this period as well, so invention was perceived as both an act of discovery and, during the late Middle Ages, as a creative act.

Restricted literacy affected the manner in which authorship was practiced and perceived during this period, emphasizing a return to the idea of divinely-inspired (Augustine) rather than human-generated (Aristotle) truth. The Latin-educated clergy comprised the majority of literate individuals, while the masses communicated via regional dialects. Since the clergy were among an educated elite, literacy was almost exclusively controlled by the Church. According to Howard, “Literacy, produced in and controlled by the Church, has the primary task of furthering God’s purposes. . . . the writer voices God’s truth . . . and participates in the tradition of that truth-telling” (64). Thus, Christianity was the institution that drove norms concerning authorship in the Medieval West and, as such, it would come to dominate the ways in which authorship was perceived and practiced during this period.

Because orality and literacy existed side-by-side during the Middle Ages, the influence of oral culture was evident in the composing process. Writings were painstakingly copied by hand and passed from clergyman to clergyman. Scribal authorship and subtle textual modifications were reflective of a model which was orally-influenced in a manner similar to Homer's mnemonic networks since scribal practices depended upon a community of writers who made adjustments to a text. "When a scribe copied a literary work he subconsciously or deliberately intervened in the text, adding, subtracting, substituting, so that the result is a compromise between what the author wrote and what the scribe felt he ought to have written or what he felt the people he was writing for wanted to read" (Pettit 3). This process of subtle modification continued as the text was passed along. Additionally, since the culture was largely illiterate, "medieval writers across Europe continued the classical practice of writing their literary works to be read aloud" (Ong 154). For example, Eadmer of St. Albans is reported to have said that "when he composed in writing, he felt he was dictating to himself" (Ong 94). This scribal model of authorship which was practiced in the Middle Ages demonstrates overlap between dimensions of orality and literacy and corresponds with LeFevre's internal dialogic and collaborative models of authorship–texts are often written with an imagined audience in mind and they are modified through a collaborative process as various scribes make alterations to the manuscript.

Even though a large portion of the populace was illiterate, they were still affected by the "textual communities" which formed during the Middle Ages as literacy began to intermingle with orality. These groups functioned "in the interstices between the imposition of the written word and the articulation of a certain type of social organization" (Stock, *Listening* 150), much like blogs and other digital communities today. The impetus for membership in such communities was textually based. For example, members might rely upon the rules established by a text and depend upon literate leaders to convey these rules to them. Although many lay members were illiterate, their membership in the group was nonetheless based on literacy, and the "leaders" of textual communities adopted the roles of interpreters rather than of authors. Such groups demonstrate that these shifts do not occur dramatically and absolutely but, rather, occur in an environment in which both forms of expression often intermingle, a concept which resurfaces in our exploration of social media later in this project.

The model of authorship practiced in the Middle Ages was often collaborative or internally dialogic, yet the acquisition of knowledge through reading was perceived as a private act of discovery rather than as a social or creative act. St. Augustine (354-430 AD), the most influential rhetorician of the Middle Ages, was one of many church figures during the period who promoted the idea that knowledge was a gift which was to be freely shared among all (Swearingen, "Originality, Authenticity" 20).[28] Rather than viewing rhetoric as a learned skill, Augustine viewed the communicative experience as innate–a gift of Christian love. Thus, a model of invention which favors discovery rather than creation of knowledge is evident once again, although this time the mode of discovery is a conversation with God and post-reading reflection of scripture rather than consulting with one's muse or oracle.

[28]Natalie Zemon Davis notes that it was "believed in the thirteenth century that 'knowledge is a Gift of God and cannot be sold'." She cites the proverb "*Scientiadonumdeiest, undevendi non potest"* as evidence for this statement (71).

Under Augustine's theory, knowledge was discovered in a manner that was similar to Plato's model, yet Augustine also attempted to integrate and expand upon Aristotelian *ethos.* George Kennedy points out that Augustine's most notable work, *On Christian Doctrine*, "revives *ethos* as a major factor in rhetoric" (179) in a manner that is similar to the Ciceronian idea of *ethos* as moral character: "To Augustine, *ethos* is Christian works, the life of the teacher, and the extent to which it accords with his teaching, as known to the audience. *Ethos* thus becomes moral authority" (179). In other words, the life of the speaker must correspond with his words for a message to be perceived as "authentic" (even if those words originate elsewhere–from other Christian preachers or from God).[29] Augustine expands *ethos* to include the speaker's everyday life much like Ciceronian and Quintilian's adoption of the *vir bonus* or "good man" idea of ethos. Thus, if the speaker says one thing but performs another in his life, then he is not to be trusted.[30] By contrast, under Aristotle's view this is merely one of the risks of adopting a persona and partaking in rhetorical interaction since the craft of the rhetorician is akin to that of the actor. These two perspectives on *ethos*–contrived versus authentic–continue to conflict even in the digital realm.

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[29]In *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine offers instructions to homilists and defends what we might consider to be plagiarism. In Chapter 29, entitled "It is Permissible for a Preacher to Deliver to the People What has been Written by a More Eloquent Man than Himself," he states, "if such men take what has been written with wisdom and eloquence by others, and commit it to memory, and deliver it to the people, they cannot be blamed, supposing them to do it without deception. . . . for all deliver the discourse which one real teacher has composed, and there are no divisions among them. . . . For those who steal take what does not belong to them, but the word of God belongs to all who obey it, and it is the man who speaks well, but lives badly, who really takes the words that belong to another." Augustine's primary contribution to authorship theory then is that not only does truth or authority reside outside of the individual in God (much like Plato's idea), but the text is a distinctly separate entity from the author.

[30]It is interesting to note that the Augustinian perception of *ethos* relates to some aspects of authorial identity which are prevalent in digital culture, particularly an expectation on the part of the reader that the content he/she is reading represents the authentic beliefs of the person who is sharing the information online (blogger, social networker, etc).

During the Middle Ages, the perceived model of invention was largely discovery and *ethos* was viewed as being innate rather than contrived. However, a degree of individual creative autonomy was granted to some authors through the adoption of Aristotle's "efficient cause" doctrine. During the thirteenth century, the "efficient cause" doctrine became an accepted way to examine Biblical texts while also acknowledging a human author in the process of invention. "Efficient cause" concerned "the author, involving questions of authenticity and . . . the 'directions' of the divine *auctor* to the human one" (Reeves 29). This partnership increased the amount of authority given to the human authors of Scripture, and Reeves maintains that the emphasis gradually shifted in medieval Biblical theory "from the divine author to the human" (30). According to Beryl Smalley, the book began to be "seen as the product of a human, although divinely inspired, intelligence instead" (qtd. in Reeves 30). Hence, a model of creative rather than of discovery-based invention became gradually accepted, yet the idea of an individual author rather than authorship as social practice was still promoted. The "authorial role," in particular, was associated with the author's "individual literary activity and his individual moral activity" (Minnis 27). This understanding corresponds with the previously discussed Augustinian view of *ethos* as extending beyond the scope of the text or speech itself. In the late Middle Ages, there is a shift toward models of authorship which recognize creativity rather than discovery as potential sources of invention but which also promote the idea that individuals compose in solitude–or in dialogue with God–rather than in collaboration with others.

While some classical and medieval practices reflected authorship as a social, collaborative endeavor, the influence of Christianity maintained that knowledge was a gift that was preexisting and awaiting discovery. Subsequent adaptation of Aristotle's "efficient cause" acknowledged the hybridity of invention, identifying it as the creative act of an individual author working in conjunction with God. According to LeFevre's continuum, then, authorship during the Middle Ages moved from a Platonic model advocating discovery of pre-existing knowledge toward an internal dialogic model which acknowledged the presence of a human element. On the other hand, perceptions of authorial identity shifted toward a model which valued the authenticity of moral actions (Augustine) rather than the performance of language (Aristotle). In much of the era of early writing, the *ethos* of a message depended upon shared authorship with external forces–a divine muse, outside forms, or God–to explain an "invention" process by which texts were (often) unintentionally and mysteriously authored and altered. In Aristotle and Augustine's competing notions of *ethos,* we see the gradual shift to the association between individual invention practices and authorial identity that is "authentic" rather than "contrived." With a correspondence between words and actions comes correspondence between the speaker's character and name, and name thus becomes a marker of truth and credibility. The practice of naming scientific and religious authors was particularly important during the Middle Ages when the author was considered a marker of the credibility of the text (Foucault 383). The importance of linking names with literary authors begins to emerge as an important criteria during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to the convergence of many different cultural factors, including the invention of the printing press and the professionalization of the author. Overall, models of authorship as practiced and perceived in the ancient world are particularly complex due to various factors, including the overwhelming presence of Christianity as well as the reintroduction of literacy–particularly writing–through religious activities. The rhetorical complexity resulting from diverse literacy practices functions as a prelude to the practices emerging today where multiple media and rhetorical roles intersect, helping us to understand its complex nature as well.

The Rise of Print

Models of authorship influenced by print and the subsequent increases in literacy rates firmly took hold from the fifteenth century onward. However, perceptions of invention did not radically shift with the invention of print, but, rather, began to shift gradually in a manner which demonstrated overlaps in literacy practices. For example, the printing press did not dramatically increase literacy among all populations equally, but first encouraged the spread of literacy among elites (Eisenstein xiii). Other cultural factors came into play before print could affect literacy practices among the general public, namely the availability of paper as an inexpensive commodity, the printing of books in the vernacular, and the distribution of information via the railroad (Eisenstein 62; T. Miller 1-2) which all contributed to increasing literacy rates.

Shifts in models of authorship occurred at several levels during the age of print. The publication process itself altered relationships between writers and readers, and features inherent in the form of print helped to influence literary genres and rhetorical roles. The publication process resulted in some distance between writer and reader as the "reproduction of written materials began to move from the copyist's desk to the printer's workshop" (Eisenstein 3), a much less intimate setting which is associated with the commercial rather than the personal sphere. As authorship moved into the public realm, "the cult of the author" developed when early printers "extended their new promotional techniques to the authors and artists whose work they published, thus contributing to the celebration of lay culture-heroes and their achievement of personal celebrity and eponymous fame" (Eisenstein 59). Authors become public figures who–while placed at some distance from the reader–were celebrated as unique individuals with special talents, a sentiment quite different from the interactive nature of writing that occurs in social media.

In addition to changes in the publication process, characteristics inherent in print also contributed to the ways in which author and reader roles were shaped during this period. According to Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, print situates words in space (119), encourages a sense of private ownership of words (128), and contributes to a sense of closure or finitude in a text (129). The traditional representation of the rhetorical situation as a triangle, for example, relies heavily upon these aspects of print-based authorship. A triangle is a closed plane figure, and since there is no movement or permeability associated with it one cannot account for the vacillating motion which takes place in communication.[31] The triangle corresponds with the fixity of print and

[31]Although a variation of the rhetorical triangle with distinct components for author/speaker, reader/audience, and text/content is the most common illustration of the rhetorical situation in most composition textbooks, this concept has become inapplicable in an age of digital media. More recent rhetorical models have attempted to account for fluidity through use of arrows to simulate motion. See, for example, Blakesley and Hoogeveen's model of the rhetorical situation in *Writing: A Manual for the Digital Age* (3). In *Grammar of Motives,* Kenneth Burke introduces a five-part dramatist pentad with act,

subsequent Romantic notions of authorship. "Print makes for more tightly closed verbal art forms, especially in narrative," and encourages "romantic notions of 'originality' and 'creativity'" (Ong 130-31). With print and permanence comes the desire for copyright as well: "fixity led to new departures from precedent, marked by more explicit recognition of individual innovation and by the staking of claims to inventions, discoveries, and creations" (Eisenstein 119). Thus, the printing press helped to both professionalize the author and to provide a sense of permanence associated with individual innovations, and cultural factors associated with the rise of print greatly contributed to the autonomous model of authorship which began to flourish with the Enlightenment and was promulgated by Romanticism. Hence, print became affiliated with many of the concepts central to Western understandings of authorship as autonomous invention on through to the twentieth century.

The Impartial Spectator and the Romantic Genius

During the early modern period and the eighteenth century, rhetorical theories were modified in response to a largely print-based culture.[32] The author scribbling away alone by candlelight is a common image which was born during this period. The model of authorship known as the "Romantic genius" or "autonomous author" predominated during the last two centuries, emphasizing properties such as autonomy, originality, proprietorship, and morality (Howard 58). British Romantics such as Wordsworth,

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agent, scene, means/agency, and purpose as carefully considered components of the rhetorical situation (xv); James Arnt Aune proposes the "rhetorical rectangle" which takes into account both medium and cultural context when exploring the rhetorical situation (411); and M. Jimmie Killingsworth, while remaining true to some parts of the traditional triangular model (author, audience), revises others, considering both the "values" to which the author appeals and the "medium" of exchange as essential components of any rhetorical situation (1).

[32]For further discussion on this point, see Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (107-8).

Keats, and Coleridge are recognized for upholding this view through images of the author as a solitary, autonomous genius:[33] Wordsworth speculates alone above Tintern Abbey, Keats contemplates his impending death in the autumn wind, and Coleridge writes masterpieces during opium-induced visions. Under this model the writer became an autonomous, originary author who creates works of genius out of his/her own insightful sense of interiority while readers passively absorb these creations as "True Art" (Howard 80-87). Factors which contribute to the emergence of the "true author" model include the emerging ideology of individualism, the printing press, copyright law/the assertion of text as property, notions of authorial creativity as genius, and expanded readership. Although this autonomous model of authorship has long been recognized as a construct that changes with the times (Woodmansee 16), the "true author" model took hold with a fierceness during the advent of print and has been viewed as a fact rather than as a cultural construct.

The "true author" model took root strongly due to its direct endorsement by educational institutions. Vernacular oral education was one means by which authorship was theorized during this period (T. Miller 161-65). Hugh Blair, a professor at the University of Edinburgh, promoted a well-known Enlightenment model of authorship, the "impartial spectator," as he attempted to indoctrinate provincial students to the style of *belles lettres*[34] so that they could become "refined" readers. In terms of *ethos*, Blair's

[33]For more on Wordsworth and the Romantic model of authorship, see Susan Eilenberg's *Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge, & Literary Possession*. Eilenberg argues "that a complex of ideas about property, propriety, and possession informs the images of literary authority, textual identity, and poetic figuration" that are found in much of Coleridge and Wordsworth's work (ix).

[34]The term"*belles* letters" or "*belletrism*," is used here in the sense that Miller defines them–as being associated with the practice which valued works for their aesthetic and stylistic properties rather

model "dismissed invention as an unteachable matter of natural genius" (T. Miller 235). This model of authorship does not specify a "divine author" behind the creation of an "authentic message;" rather, it establishes invention as a "natural process" which originates outside of rhetoric through the mind and senses, thus divorcing the inventive aspects of authorship from rhetoric. "Common sense realism" and universal truths were the sources of authority in Scottish enlightenment culture. Blair represented himself as an "impartial spectator" who had no political or cultural motivations behind his position.[35] By defining invention as a spontaneous, direct expression of an individual's personal character, Blair established assimilated Scots' position "as disinterested spokesmen for self-improvement and social progress" (174). In this case, "authenticity" and "naturalness of language" were respected but only to the degree that they actually mirrored the values of the chosen culture. Thus, the individual author promoting his own opinions was often hidden under a guise of neutrality in the impartial spectator model of authorship.

Following and expanding upon models of authorship developed during the Scottish Enlightenment, the Romantic movement promoted an autonomous model of authorship as well. During this period the term "genius" came to be associated with the concept of "author," indicating that "a writer can not only compose autonomously, but can also be the source, the origins, of ideas and their expression" (Howard 82). Under such a perspective the divine and human aspects of authorship which were separated in

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than exhibiting a concern for their composition or rhetorical content (9). Essentially, belletrists such as Hugh Blair maintained that works could be arhetorical, a claim with which Thomas Miller finds fault.

[35]In a similar vein, the common sense philosophers claimed that they had access to "truths" upon which the very structure of rhetoric rested (T. Miller 214).

earlier models (Plato, Augustine) begin to fuse or overlap. As Ong states, "For the extreme Romantic, the perfect poet should ideally be like God Himself, creating *ex nihilo*" (22). One example can be found in "The Power of Fancy" (1770) as Philip Freneau attempts to bridge the gap between the human and the divine with the claim that human beings are made in God's image and, as such, possess creative potential (qtd. in Fliegelman 175); imagination is equated with power and authority while humanity's creativity is linked with progress and new thought. In his "Advice to Authors" essay (1786), Freneau plays upon the idea of Romantic inspiration, stating that a real author is no "piddling orator . . . cold and inanimate" but is, rather, a "nervous Demosthenes, who stored with an immensity of ideas, awakened within him he knows not how, has them at command upon every occasion'" (337). As sources for autonomous invention begin to be identified as internal yet inexplicable, the conceptual distance between author and reader has reached its peak; hence, "true authors" are born, not made.

Although this model of authorship undoubtedly exaggerated the level of autonomy granted to authors,[36] it was not a model built entirely upon false premises. "The Romantic genius" did reflect some of the aspects by which authorship was practiced during the eighteenth century. Regardless of how ideas came into being (invention), texts were primarily penned by one individual (authorship), and in print publications of the period there was little evidence of collaboration. Furthermore, the eighteenth-century writer did not have readers to provide immediate responses but did

[36]Even Wordsworth and Coleridge–the quintessential examples of the "Romantic genius" model–did not invent in isolation from others. Wordsworth, for example, was known to borrow details from the diaries of his sister Dorothy, and it was together that Wordsworth and Coleridge published the pivotal work *Lyrical Ballads*.

receive occasional feedback provided by book reviews. However, the reviewer pool was often limited to one's acquaintances or to people of literary interest since writing was not as highly public as it is online today. The eighteenth-century writer also had to contend with intermediaries such as newspaper editors and publishing companies. Thus, the rhetorical distance between writer and reader was, in fact, greater than in the past due to print and the corresponding publication process, and invention transformed into a partially-private act since it was no longer performed in front of an audience. In one sense, even during the Romantic period, the writer was part of his social context and no doubt influenced by it as he wrote, so authorship was not completely autonomous.[37] As social beings we are always influenced by our community, an influence which becomes even more visible in digital rhetoric today where membership in specific communities as well as technologies such as hyperlinks and search engines make social influence much more visible. In contrast to our current visible network of public writing, authorship during the Romantic period was private and heavily guarded since the reader could not directly participate in the writing process (as in orally-influenced models) and the author himself was separated from the text by publication. Furthermore, the sense of permanence and finitude instilled by print media and bound texts also contributed to the idea that a text was "complete" upon publication. Since the acts of authoring and reading a text were much more isolated than in previous models, perceptions of authorship during the period shifted toward celebrating autonomy and originality as central components of the "true author." Overall, medium coupled with broad cultural shifts

[37]LeFevre argues that all authorship is inherently social: "even at the individual level . . . the inventing self is a socially-constituted self which is always influenced by others" (2).

caused changes to the manner in which authorship and readership were perceived during the Romantic period.

To overcome the distance between writer and reader fostered by the invention of print, inexpensive paper, and increasing literacy rates, the practice of "reading for the author" was born, a custom whereby readers equate an author's personal character with the character conveyed in his works (B. Hochman 14).[38] An 1850 review of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* focuses largely on "The Custom-House Introductory," praising Hawthorne's "rare . . . individuality" (137) and noting that "we like the preface better than the tale" (139) (qtd. in B. Hochman 14). The reference to Hawthorne's own "individuality" is representative of how textual devices and authorial identity were often linked in nineteenth-century texts. "This enthusiasm for Hawthorne's preface stems largely from the emerging image of a biographically concrete and humanly palpable Hawthorne" (B. Hochman14). Even though today's readers might theorize that Hawthorne was adopting a persona, nineteenth-century audiences believed that an "authentic" authorial presence emanated from the text.[39] This model is not exclusive to Hawthorne; similar models can be found among later authors such as Mark Twain, Jack

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[38]Barbara Hochman continues, "The habit of reading for the author had little to do with the revelation of biographical details" (13). She states, "Antebellum authors were generally imagined as real people who could be known by their words like one's neighbors or other social acquaintances. Aspects of authorial character were presumed to emerge clearly in the course of the reading experience and were considered central to it" (13).

[39]For example, an 1850 review of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* focuses largely on "The Custom-House Introductory," praising Hawthorne's "rare . . . individuality" (137) and noting that "we like the preface better than the tale" (139) (qtd. in B. Hochman 14). The reference to Hawthorne's own "individuality" is representative of how textual devices and authorial identity were often linked in nineteenth-century texts. "This enthusiasm for Hawthorne's preface," Barbara Hochman notes, "stems largely from the emerging image of a biographically concrete and humanly palpable Hawthorne" (14). Even though contemporary audiences might claim that Hawthorne was adopting a persona, audiences during his day and age believed that an "authentic" authorial presence emanated from the text.

London, and Ernest Hemingway–all writers who felt the need to preserve their authorial personas with the American media.[40] Overall, "reading for the author" functioned primarily as a compensatory device aimed at decreasing the distance between author and reader originally fostered by the shift to print texts and broad, public readerships. The model was likely influenced by the Ciceronian conception of *ethos* which claimed that the actions and life of the speaker/author must correspond with his words. A similar shift is occurring today as digital communication evolves from a nameless, faceless practice to one with which a definite author persona is associated.

The belief that the author's personality was exposed in the text was reinforced by pedagogy since rhetoric was taught in nineteenth-century schools as an extension of the self: Primers emphasized "that rhetorical appeals to an audience's emotion would be effective only if the orator felt the same emotions" (Glazener 125), and, hence, sincerity played a large role in rhetoric pedagogy during the period. This perspective resembles Ciceronian and Augustinian notions of *ethos* with their emphasis that the author must live the life that is represented in his work. However, authenticity in mid-nineteenth-century American oratory and literature was judged by how well the authors' style in the work corresponds to his/her actual feelings and actions whereas under other models (Augustine, Cicero) authenticity was determined based on how well the teacher's life corresponded with certain values. Since individual persona is used as a basis for authorial identity under the Romantic model, there is no one standard (such as Christian values) which articulates an "authentic" or a "sincere" presence; thus, authorship

[40]See Loren Daniel Glass's *Authors Inc: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980*.

becomes more individualized as a concern with how well the speaker's individual actions correspond with his words, and the personas adopted in literary texts are believed to be authentic projections of the author's real life persona. Some versions of this model are reflected later in expressivist composition pedagogies which assume the presence of a "real voice" and advocate writing as a process of discovering that voice (Elbow 306). As we will see later in this study, some new media scholars also subscribe to this theory with their idea that social media function as extensions of the self and as a means of establishing one's identity in an increasingly destabilized world.

In periods during which invention originates within the individual isolated from society, it is more difficult for the audience to judge whether the authorial identity projected in a piece is "authentic." This philosophy, borne of Enlightenment individualism, maintains that authenticity is judged as a correspondence between words and actions rather than as a correspondence between words and specific values (Christianity). With this proliferation of materials celebrating the author as a hero and genius, it is easy to see how the model of autonomous authorship became associated with print culture. Although this Romantic model which celebrated the genius behind the text persisted throughout much of the twentieth century, alternative models also began to emerge and to challenge these notions of authorship.

Authorship Theory in the Twentieth Century

In a quest to demote the "autonomous author" from a position of authority, authorship theory in the twentieth century has run the gamut from New Criticism to reader response theory. New Criticism, the predominant model in literature classrooms prior to the 1960s, distanced the author from the text by establishing the work as an autonomous entity. A common New Critical practice was to provide students with a poem that contained no identifying information–no author, no title, no date–and have them analyze the work. This practice emphasized the stance that meaning did not reside outside of the text in cultural context, historical events, or other realms. Notions such as the "intentional fallacy" and "affective fallacy" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 3, 21) removed all ties between rhetoric and literature, and between author and text, arguing against the notion that authorial intentions, authorial identity, and reader reactions have an effect on the meaning of a text. However, the danger in New Criticism lay in its containment and potential for bias–under this model, for example, one professor's interpretation of a text could be disguised as the "right" reading unencumbered by social forces. Kenneth Burke acknowledges this flaw in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, pointing out that statements regarding a work's "autonomy" often go hand-in-hand with claims of objectivity or "nonpolitical esthetics" (28).[41] Although the New Critical approach was ultimately dismantled by critics such as Wayne Booth and Roland Barthes who voiced concerns similar to Burke's, it nonetheless had a profound influence on pedagogical models throughout much of the twentieth century.

At mid-century, theories began to emerge which attempted to decenter the author by focusing on the reader. Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author" (1968) declares that the author is dead and that the text and author are unrelated–the author does not invent a text, but, rather "the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text" (145) in a

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[41]In this way, New Criticism is similar to Hugh Blair's "impartial spectator" stance and the neutral political beliefs which it claimed to espouse.

performative action. Instead of producing an original work, the scriptor blends together heteroglossic elements of culture in “a tissue of quotations” (146): “A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation” (148). Barthes claims that the reader is the site where “a text’s unity lies” (148), thus, the author must die for the reader to take precedence (148). In terms of invention, Barthes model makes a radical maneuver by declaring the death of the author in an age in which the autonomous model was still very much in vogue. Although Barthes’s move is controversial, it does accomplish one significant task: by declaring “the death of the author” Barthes’ draws attention to the reader in a culture which over-emphasized authorial autonomy. Subsequent reader response criticism by Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish also identifies the reader as the site where the meaning of the text is completed through interpretation. The similarity between such models is the extent to which they shift agency traditionally associated with the author role to other dimensions of the rhetorical situation.

The Postmodern Perspective

In contrast to theories which attempt to focus on dimensions such as reader or text in their quest to decenter the author, Foucault’s landmark essay “What Is an Author?” completely dismantles the concept of authorship altogether by identifying it as a cultural construct. In his famous response to Barthes, Foucault examines “how the author became individualized in a culture like ours, what status he has been given, at what moment studies of authenticity and attribution began” (377). Foucault defines authorship and the idea of the “author” as social constructs that emerge during a specific period in time rather than as ultimate truths about how texts come into being. The "author function," a set of beliefs about "the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within society" (382), plays an important role in the classification of texts and the reader's role in such texts. As Foucault points out, this author function does not "develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual" but is the result of complex operations (384) related to culture, historical period, and discipline.[42] He speculates that in the future another means of assessing the credibility of a text might arise, thus leading to the infamous question "What does it matter who is speaking?" Foucault's deconstruction of authorship is very timely in its application to digital texts since it helps us to negotiate a realm where other means such as site design are often used to assess the credibility of a message. By dismantling a model of authorship which had long been accepted as a natural truth, Foucault opens the door for the extension of such concepts into the digital arena.

Digital Authorship: New Media, New Models

While a historical investigation reveals models which reduce the rhetorical distance between all parties in a manner that is similar to what occurs in social media, there are no precedents which account for rhetorical interactions as they occur precisely in social media. However, from our examination of previous models we can surmise that new technologies such as writing and print–in conjunction with other cultural factors–

[42] According to Foucault, "the modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each" (389), so our conception of the author is a cultural construct. My work will explore, specifically, the aspects which relate to Foucault's third and fourth points (attribution, appropriation). We will examine the "complex operations" which are relevant to authorship in the digital world of Web 2. 0, especially blogs and examine the "position" occupied by these blog authors.

gradually increased the distance between speaker and listener or knower and receiver in a manner which contributed to the proliferation of the "writer as genius" model of authorship. Under the Romantic model, the author was viewed as the originator of the work and the reader as the passive recipient while the publisher served as an intermediary

While the Romantic model capitalizes upon the distance between writer and reader influenced by print through its promulgation of the genius myth, social media currently exhibit many characteristics which emphasize a collapse in distance between static "writer" and "reader" roles and the subsequent need for a new term to describe this model of authorship. As previously noted, Howard identifies several dimensions which shaped the Romantic model of authorship that thrived for the last three centuries: autonomy, originality, proprietorship, and morality (58). In recent years, each of these factors has experienced a profound shift in the digital medium. These attributes are significant because they identify the precise points where the model(s) of authorship adopted in social media diverge from the Romantic model. For example, autonomy, while not entirely absent online, has made room for collective models of authorship such as those which arise in wikis and social media sharing sites; proprietorship of texts has given way to online information sharing which Lawrence Lessig identifies as a Read/Write (RW) economy; originality shifts to highly visible intertextuality through hyperlinking and cross-references; and morality–or the conflation of the "author" with "genius"–is shifting as everyday people adopt roles formerly held by "authors" through the ability to participate in content creation online.[43] Together, these large-scale shifts confirm that the Romantic model is no longer sufficient for describing how authorship occurs in social media.

This assertion might lead one to conclude that models which seek to decenter the author such as reader-response criticism are the most applicable solution for explaining how content creation occurs in social media. However, theorizing authorship in social media is not quite as simple as declaring everyone an “author” and moving on. Since social media exist in networked communities, are often authored collectively, and are dependent upon participatory readership, they represent a complex integration of authorship models as well as an overlap of elements of the rhetorical situation such as writer and reader. Hence, theoretical conundrums emerge when applying theories which focus on the “reader” to social media. Although Barthes and Fish deviate from the author-centric focus, they commit the same fallacy as author-centered models by privileging one aspect of the rhetorical situation (reader) over the others (medium, writer, content/message). Analysis of social media cannot take place by examining specific elements of the rhetorical situation as discrete entities–writer, reader, medium, message. In particular, the overlap between writer and reader emphasizes that an integrated perspective of the rhetorical situation–one which considers the importance of all elements–is essential for assessing these emerging rhetorical roles. Booth’s perspective that all elements of the rhetorical situation (writer, reader, text) are interdependent is a starting point from which we might progress (*Rhetoric of Fiction*

[43]For more information on new media and shifting authorship practices, see Lev Manovich’s *The Language of New Media,* particularly the section on “Principles of New Media” (27-48).

116; “Rhetorical Stance” 141). Building upon this idea of interdependence means acknowledging all elements as equally likely to influence content creation online and examining these elements as part of an integrated system. Hence, a better understanding of how “authorship” is configured in digital, social media might be gained by exploring the ways in which the rhetorical situation is largely dependent upon the overlap between writer and reader roles via the emerging, dynamic role of “participant.”

CHAPTER III

THE PARTICIPANT ROLE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

An historical survey of authorship suggests that the traditional concepts of "writer" and "reader" do not provide an adequate means of accounting for the constantly shifting distance (and, often, the degree of overlap) between these roles in digital, social media. On an Internet-wide basis, the roles of reader and writer are virtually interchangeable; thus, the autonomous model of authorship is too static to account for this dynamic role. Rather, readers have become users–and, increasingly, participants–in the digital realm. The different roles which users adopt are indicative of the different degrees to which they participate in the creation of digital content. For example, implicit participants interact with information while more active participants add to or generate content online. These participant roles represent the overlap between writer and reader online and initially appear to support claims that digital media is the realm of the "authorless" message. However, with the shift to social media over the last ten years, there is renewed interest in the message source. This shift manifests itself not as an interest in the prior reputation of the source (after all, anyone can be a "participant" online) but, rather, as the association of a distinct authorial identity with the message. Social media encourage cohesiveness among the dimensions of one's identity which exist across many different online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This trend toward a fixed, recognizable participant identity may be a reaction to the previous flexibility of the "authorless" message in early digital media which allowed users to assume a multitude of anonymous or pseudonymous identities without consequence. Such fixed online identities reinforce accountability and authenticity, thus illustrating a return to concepts which are associated with the autonomous model and emphasizing the hybrid nature of authorship practices online.

The Roles of the Participant in Social Media

One of the initial advantages of digital media was its ability to enable interactivity not only between users and interfaces but also among users themselves. While users have been able to interact with one another through means such as discussion forums and multi-user domains (MUDs)[44] since the early days of the Internet, there is no doubt that readership online has become more participatory over the last ten years with the shift to Web 2.0 technologies. As of 2009, 51% of Internet users posted content that they created online through social networking, blogs, or other social media (A. Smith, "Online Participation"). If users engage in actively generating online content, they are participating in "authorship" by contributing to the knowledge base that is the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 applications such as Blogger enable users to participate in the writing process–both by offering feedback to other users and by publishing their own online content. These practices differ from autonomous authorship with methods which are more collaborative, interactive, immediate, and intertextual. In *Born Digital*, John Palfrey and Urs Gasser identify this aspect of Web 2.0 as the "feedback loop" through which users "actively engage" with information that they encounter online (243), while

[44]Multi-user domains, originally known as "multi-user dungeons," are role-playing games where users take on personas in the form of avatars who complete specific tasks within a virtual community in real time. Contemporary descendants of MUDs include *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life.*

in *Remix* Lawrence Lessig describes it as a Read/Write (RW) culture which emphasizes the creative contributions of amateurs rather than of professionals.

Intersections in rhetorical roles occur online due to the manner in which content is created and used in RW culture. Lessig identifies three layers which are at work simultaneously and contribute to the RW economy in digital texts: content, content about content, and tools for measuring influence of content (61). Examining the relationship among these layers can also help us to understand what becomes of the relationship between traditional "author" and "reader" roles online. Together, blog posts and reader comments comprise what Lessig identifies as "the first layer of the Net's RW culture for text" (59). "Writer" and "reader" roles intersect even at the first textual layer; while some users (such as bloggers) clearly have more authority over individual texts online (such as their own blogs), many users have roughly the same amount of authority on the Internet overall; in other words, they have the potential to respond by creating a blog post or a site of their own. This equality among participants operates in contrast to rhetorical interactions in traditional media such as print, where an author writes a pamphlet to be distributed to the masses, or a public speech, where a live audience is available for reaction but has very little control over the content of the message. In these traditional forms of one-to-many communication, the audience's ability to participate in the rhetorical interaction is limited by gatekeepers such as publishing firms or media companies. Online there are very few gatekeepers, and most individuals are free to publish what they like, thus demonstrating that the distinction between traditional rhetorical roles of "writer" and "reader" does not exist in the same sense online.

The second layer in social media which illustrates the intersection point between "writer" and "reader" involves content about content. This layer of interaction, which is formed via tags and ranking systems made available through social news sites such as Reddit and Digg, adds meaning to user-generated content by imposing order through structures such as classification and ranking systems. These systems are "created directly by the viewers or consumers of that culture—not by advertisers, or by any other intentional efforts at commercial promotion" (Lessig 60). Most significant for the purposes of my study is that "as the reader 'writes' with tags or votes, the importance of the original writing changes" (Lessig 60), and, in the process, the reader's rhetorical role changes as well. For example, something as simple as customer reviews have the potential to significantly sway opinions about a product. Customer feedback can be used not only to voice an unsatisfactory opinion about the product itself, but it may also be used in a more subversive manner as illustrated in the following example.

Among Amazon's "gourmet grocery" offerings is a merchant supplying "fresh whole rabbit." Both the reviews for the item itself as well as the customer "shared" photographs available on the item's page reveal a refusal to recognize the item for what it claims to be (a grocery item) and, rather, depict it as an act of cruelty. Photographs uploaded by customers feature adorable pet rabbits and are shown alongside the merchant's photograph of the butchered rabbit carcass. In their product reviews, Amazon customers construct voices and personas for people who might order this product: "Like many suburban homeowners, I like to kill and eat the wild animals that populate my backyard" or "How many weekends have I spent, in the loincloth, knife clenched in my teeth, running through the fields trying to find a rabbit?"[45] Although these reviews indicate judgment, they nonetheless manage to convey a humorous tone while producing "content about content" which has the potential to greatly change the meaning of the original message. An advertisement for "fresh whole rabbit" in itself is not particularly interesting, but in the act of protesting the original message, customer reviews add meaning by characterizing the original content as unappealing and socially unacceptable.[46] This example illustrates a point at which reader and writer roles begin to intersect online and at which the role traditionally understood as reader gains a degree of authority in the rhetorical situation. Although reviews in themselves are not novel (book reviews have existed for centuries), the speed at which such reviews take place and the ability for practically anyone to contribute a review are both more recent developments with the advent of digital, social media.

The third layer which illustrates interactive content creation online concerns the creation of information rather than of meaningful content. This layer is comprised of tools which "try to measure the significance of a conversation by counting the links that others make to the conversations" (Lessig 61). For example, the blog search engine *Technorati* indexes over a million blogs and assigns each blog a Technorati Authority rating on a scale of 0-1000. The Technorati Authority rating "measures a site's standing & influence in the blogosphere" and is based upon the site's "linking behavior, categorization and other associated data over a short, finite period of time" ("Technorati

[45]For more examples, see Amazon.com reviews listed under "fresh whole rabbit."

[46]It is interesting to note that despite the ability to censor such content, neither Amazon nor the merchant has stepped in to remove the subversive product reviews.

Authority FAQ”). Technorati Authority ratings are assigned according to the blog’s ranking in a specific topical category (technology, movies, etc). Sites such as *Technorati* rely primarily upon features such as algorithms and involve very little direct user input. Hence, these sites function as an example of “information generation” rather than of conscious content creation on the part of users.

Overall, each of these three layers functions as part of a larger whole, a system which resembles Booth’s integrated conception of the rhetorical situation (“Rhetorical Stance” 141) and Burke’s perspective on rhetorical relationships as unifying through consubstantiality (*Rhetoric of Motives* 21). Writer and reader roles in digital, social media are multilayered and intersect. One may, for example, occupy a superior position on one’s own blog while adopting a less powerful position on the blogs of others. Such roles are often occupied simultaneously and visibly whereas the more traditional autonomous model does not allow the potential for such dynamic, interactive roles to exist. Hence, the integrated nature of information and rhetorical roles in digital, social media is exposed here.

As social media have developed, the role of the “user” has gradually come to replace distinct, static roles such as “writer” and “reader.” The term user insinuates contribution to a text, no matter how unintentional or insignificant, and it is here that we first see the intersection between readers and authors occurring in digital media. However, “user” is a generic term which refers to all participants in digital media without regard for the extent of their participation. Therefore, in this project, the term “participant” will be used since it is more specific than “user” yet remains more neutral than “author,” and unlike “reader,” “participant” addresses the ability of users to adopt both roles in digital, social media. Although rhetorical theory has not yet made extensive use of the term, “participant” is an appropriate description of the role(s) adopted by users of social media, and it is frequently used by new media scholars. As previously mentioned, Rheingold identifies “participation literacy” as an essential skill for twenty-first century citizens and “participatory media” as a growing trend within digital culture (10). Characteristics of participatory media include a many-to-many model of communication where all members of the network are able to broadcast and receive messages; in these media, power and value are derived primarily from the participation of many and their ability to link to one another and from the potential of social networks which “enable broader, faster, and lower cost of coordination of activities” (Rheingold, “Using Participatory Media,” 100). Since participatory media *are* social media, they include the usual forms of social media such as blogs, wikis, and media-sharing sites. In these media, creators do not occupy a position of privilege but, rather, function as participants who are on roughly equal footing with others in the exchange and who communicate directly with each other rather than through an intermediary such as an editor or publisher.

Although the term “participant” is not as renowned as the term “author” or as direct as the term “writer,” it appears to be most fitting for describing the roles adopted by users of social media. With these new media anyone with access can participate, and much of the content that is created is of little significance. Who can argue that the average status update has as much cultural significance as a cleverly-written manifesto?[47] While much of the content generated via social media may be unspectacular, what stands out is "the extent to which this creativity represents an opportunity for learning, personal expression, individual autonomy, and political change" (Palfrey and Gasser 113). As the contemporary re-fashioning of the famous Andy Warhol statement suggests, "On the web, everyone will be famous to fifteen people" (Momus). Social media such as Facebook and Blogger have brought this prediction to fruition through the ability of users to establish their identities as "participants" in digitally-created content.

Users of digital, social media adopt roles relevant to the extent of their involvement with content creation online; such roles include "implicit participants" who interact with (and, often, unknowingly generate) information and "active participants" who add to existing conversations or who generate their own content online. Some of the very first interactions which users have online involve making decisions as they engage with content, considering which search engine to use or which terms to apply to their search. Through these acts, users become "implicit participants" who are involved in the generation of information online. The implicit participant role emerged as user data became perceived as a commodity that could be bought and sold.[48] Data generated by implicit participants "can be mined for information that is more valuable than the individual contributions" (Rettberg 156-57). Although these actions do not directly

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[47]There are many sites devoted to entertaining users by compiling status updates ranging from the mundane to the ridiculous. A recent study on Facebook conducted by Christopher Sibona and Steven Walczak draws a fairly logical conclusion: to keep friends on Facebook, avoid mundane status updates, overly political posts, and religious rants.

[48]Data mining is a questionable practice but nonetheless one which is ubiquitous online. Kantardzic points out that consumers typically are not aware of the extent to which their information online is being tracked and mined until something goes wrong, such as a security leak (377).

involve interacting with people, through their use of interfaces, implicit participants generate information that is stored in databases for later use. When examined as a whole, this information often reveals trends or patterns which can be used to target specific markets or demographics. By these standards, virtually all users could be classified as implicit participants. For example, a user who types in a search term has created a phrase which is now cached in a search engine database. Implicit participation differs from the ways in which an audience traditionally participates. In the former situation, one visits a library and searches for a book using a physical card catalog with pre-existing cards and search terms rather than searching online with user-generated search terms. No content is generated by the reader in the traditional library setting, although it is certainly generated and stored in the digital realm in the second case.[49] At times, the information that these participants generate may even put them at risk. For example, in 2006 America Online (AOL) released records of their search data for over 650,000 users to the public rather than to only a select group of academics conducting research as previously planned (Arrington). Many people viewed this breach as an invasion of privacy since much the information was easily traceable to distinct user identities. Implicit participants in the information age are confronted with a series of decisions, some of which may require the use of critical thinking skills which are not called upon in more traditional searches for information. Despite this more active role, implicit participants essentially generate

[49]Humorous search phrases have been the topic of many recent conversations and have even inspired the publication of several articles and books which seek to synthesize the funniest of “Google Suggests” in one location. For examples, see Emma Barnett’s article “20 Funniest Suggestions from Google Suggest” in *The Telegraph*.

information rather than content and, as such, adopt a more passive role that is not comparable to the role which a writer traditionally occupies.

In contrast, “Active Participants” are users who consciously engage in the creation of content online in multiple genres. With the advent of social media, the number of active participants has increased dramatically. The Pew Internet and the American Life Project reports that “older adults are growing increasingly comfortable with online content creation” (A. Smith, “Online Participation”). For example, “the percentage of online 30-49 year olds who share their own creations online has nearly doubled from 18% to 34%” since 2007. Users who engage in content creation online consciously often do so selectively. For example, some participants may simply add to an existing conversation, as in the case of blog comments, while other participants may engage in content creation to a larger extent through their own blog posts or wiki entries. When engaging in large-scale content creation such as blog posts, the participant role more closely resembles “author,” a point which will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. When taking part in an existing conversation in social media, participants contribute to meaning making both indirectly and directly: indirectly by establishing a supportive relationship with the primary author(s) of the digital work and directly by adding to their own opinions about the piece or by encouraging changes or revisions through their comments. I identify these practices as resonance and reciprocity, respectively.

Establishing a supportive community is particularly important in digital, social media such as blogs and social networks. Active participants engage in collaboration through "resonance," or a relationship existing between an inventor and a specific, supportive community within their social sphere (Laswell 65). Resonance occurs to varying degrees in situations where "people provide a supportive social and intellectual environment that nurtures thought and enables ideas to be received, thus completing the inventive act" (LeFevre 65). Those who act as resonators "help an inventor to locate himself or herself in a tradition and a community and to live in a way that is conducive to further invention" (LeFevre 65). Based on these criteria, participants on blogs–both bloggers and their readers–could certainly be classified as engaging in a "resonant relationship" where one party inspires the other. The bloggers who are most successful are often those who are fortunate enough to have a resonant relationship with their readers–readers who enable the blogger to identify her position within the blogging community and to continue to write, thus attracting a large following. Resonance is a common means by which active participants influence blogs and resembles earlier collaborative authorship practices such as the textual communities described by Brian Stock.

Textual communities began to form as literacy intermingled with orality during the Middle Ages. These communities formed "somewhere in the interstices between the imposition of the written word and the articulation of a certain type of social organization" (Stock, *Listening* 150). Although many lay members of such communities were illiterate (Stock, *Implications* 236), the impetus for membership in such communities was textually based. Members generally relied upon the rules established by a text and then upon literate leader(s) to convey these rules to them. Due to their inability to engage in literacy directly, participants in textual communities assumed the rhetorical role of "community members" rather than of readers. Such roles illuminate the hybridity inherent in the rhetorical situation during literacy "shifts" and illustrate that such shifts do not occur dramatically and absolutely but, rather, often create an environment in which both forms of expression intermingle. Textual communities are relevant to our study here because membership in many digital communities is also textually based and highly dependent upon the text which is created by a blogger or another party. For example, a particular blog and its subject matter might bring together a specific community of like-minded participants. Furthermore, in Stock's textual communities, "[A] living text succeeds combinations of traditional written and contemporaneous oral ones" (*Listening* 155) and largely functions as an attempt "to locate individual experience within larger schemata" (*Listening* 38). With the idea of a "living text" and individuals struggling to position themselves within a larger world, there is a parallel between textual communities and the resonant relationship which exists between participants in social media.

In contrast to resonance, reciprocity involves a more direct means of influencing digital, social media. In this process, the reader may contribute to or complete the meaning of the text, often through dialogic exchanges. In *Instructing the Ignorant,* Augustine emphasizes reciprocity as a rhetorical practice." As James J. Murphy points out in his interpretation of the text, "each human being is affecting the other during the rhetorical act;" thus, "there is no possible rhetorical technique or skill that can be learned . . . that will equip one human heart to speak to another heart. . . . only Christian love . . .

can supply this interconnection" (291). Augustine's emphasis on reciprocity corresponds with his idea that the truth must be discovered by all parties rather than invented. Contrary to models proposed by Barthes and reader-response theorists, Augustine does not focus on the listener at the expense of the speaker but, rather, reflects the perspective that listeners are equally responsible for the outcome of rhetorical interactions. In print texts, it was difficult to establish this potential for exchange due to the rhetorical distance between reader and writer; however, emphasis on the dialogic nature of invention is once again applicable to the interactions occurring in digital media. For example, a blog post is not necessarily a complete entity in itself but, rather, is part of a larger entity–the blog–which is complemented through the reciprocity that occurs between blogger and readers via comments and other interactions. Blogs and social networking are often celebrated for their conversational nature and interactive capabilities. The potential to locate meaning here is often located in the dialogic exchanges themselves rather than in any one message conveyed by an "author."

Overall, users of digital, social media may participate both as implicit participants and as active participants, even adopting both roles simultaneously. These relationships are founded upon collaborative means of authorship such as resonance and reciprocity. Resonance and reciprocity, like Booth's integrated rhetorical situation, emphasize the interdependence of varying dimensions of the rhetorical situation (author, reader, medium), allowing for acknowledgment of the participant role. Thus, rather than moving us toward an "authorless" realm, the shift to social media and emphasis on rhetorical exchange brings renewed interest in the source of the message.

Participant Identity and Authenticity in Social Media

Despite their use by new media scholars, “post-author” utopia and “authorless” are both inaccurate descriptions of how the message source functions in digital, social media. With the shift to social media, there appears to be renewed interest in the source of the message and movement toward a fixed, recognizable identity for the participant in specific digital genres. In particular, Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and social networking applications have served to further enforce notions of a cohesive participant identity. Social networking sites encourage individuals to form both 1) an online identity which is fused with one’s offline identity into an “authentic” self representation and 2) an online identity which is (often) cohesive across many different platforms. For example, Facebook requires a connection between online and offline facets of one’s identity with “real name” policies. In addition to forming a connection between offline and online dimensions, social networking sites encourage cohesion among different facets of one’s participant identity across many different digital platforms. A Facebook profile acts as a central location for one’s identity since it typically features personal photographs and information. However, such profiles move beyond the locale of the social networking website since they often feature links to blogs, games, universities, employers, and other websites with which the participant is affiliated. This move toward cohesion among dimensions of online identity is evident in the number of websites which currently offer “login with Facebook” as an option. For example, the social photo-sharing site Pinterest offers users three options–login with site-specific information, login with Facebook, or login with Twitter. Many news websites also include the option to “share” an article via Facebook, Google+, or Twitter. The user who logs into Pinterest with her Facebook account or shares a particular news article via Google+ now has a direct link between previously separate dimensions of her online identity. Facebook touts the potential for such cohesion as a potential benefit on its website: “Use your Facebook account to sign into other sites and see what your friends are doing across the web . . . saves time . . . bring your friends with you.” Of course, motivations for encouraging universal sign-ins are largely commercial since the more interoperability which exists, the more potential that Facebook has to harvest data about users. Whether they are readily identified by the user or not, such options move participants toward cohesion among different facets of identity online.[50]

The movement toward a more cohesive identity–both online and offline–relates to authorship through the accountability that it promotes for the messages that one is seeking to deliver. Accountability, or the personal responsibility associated with a message, was previously lacking in early digital media because there was no means of enforcing it. In *Rhetoric Online,* Barbara Warnick expands upon this concept when discussing the rise of the “authorless” message, claiming that the Internet “may not foster writing and production practices that support reliable identification of sources to establish message credibility” (34). With the advent of the “authorless” message, users began to assess credibility based upon criteria other than the message source, including visual cues, information design and structure, information focus, and the scope of the

[50]For more information on the consequences of data mining, see Kantardzic’s *Data Mining: Concepts, Models, Methods, and Algorithms*.

site (Warnick 51). In a study conducted by B.J. Fogg, Cathy Soohoo, and David Danielson which used 2,440 comments to analyze website credibility, “the identity of the site operator” or author was ranked eleventh out of eighteen categories identified for judging website credibility (23).[51] When static websites were the predominant form of online communication, this means of assessing credibility made sense. However, with digital, social media, new means of reinforcing accountability have emerged. Accountability was a problem in early digital media. As Foucault discusses in “What Is An Author?,” authorship serves as a means of linking transgressions with a particular name (382), or, in the case of the Internet, to a specific user identity. In other words, writers may feel less responsible for their actions if no evidence directly links them to the message. For example, users may frequent multiple sites under different pseudonyms and post inflammatory or offensive material, engaging in a behavior known as trolling. In this context, a troll provokes readers with anger through practices such as name-calling rather than with logical arguments, hence disrupting the potential for productive discourse. Trolling is one of many behaviors which may be influenced by the anonymity and social detachment encouraged by electronic communication which allows people “to write things online that they would seldom consider saying face-to-face” (Alonzo and Aiken 1). The tendency for people to “say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn’t ordinarily say and do in the face-to-face world” has been identified as the “online disinhibition effect” (Suler 321). Disinhibition has both positive and negative

[51]Only 8.8% of user comments addressed the identity of the site operator as a factor in assessing the credibility of the site (Fogg, Soohoo, and Danielson 23). Factors such as design look, information design/structure, information focus, company motive, and information usefulness were all ranked far ahead of the site operator in terms of importance.

consequences. For example, "Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. They show unusual acts of kindness and generosity in a practice known as benign disinhibition (Suler 321). However, disinhibition that is negative, known as toxic disinhibition, involves "rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats" (321). Suler identifies "dissociative anonymity" as one of the factors which contributes to online disinhibition. In other words, when people adopt an anonymous web presence, they lose some tact, and the potential for civil dialogue diminishes since these participants are not held personally accountable for such messages.

The general lack of accountability associated with identity online in the Internet's early years often led to downright deception. Turkle describes a situation which occurred when a male psychiatrist posed as a disabled woman in a chat room community. Women in the community came to respect "Joan" and confided intimate details of their lives to her. Some of the women even had online and offline affairs with a male acquaintance (the psychiatrist) to whom "Joan" introduced them. After the ruse was discovered, the women felt violated by the breach of trust in their group (228-29). Although the psychiatrist had clearly engaged in deception, there were no offline repercussions for his behavior. This example is one of many cases of misrepresented identity online which illustrates a problem–flexible identities may lead to less individual accountability for one's actions.[52] With no definite consequences people may engage in deviant behaviors,

[52]It should be noted that there are some digital spaces, including virtual worlds (*Second Life*) and gaming communities (*World of Warcraft*), where users are understood to adopt personas which may not be authentic. However, these spaces are not traditionally considered social media and hence are not within the scope of this study.

and this increases the risk that others will be psychologically–or even physically–harmed in the process.

Recently, there has been a demand to increase accountability through digital genres which are based upon the idea of authentic self-representations. Both personal blogs and social networking profiles are expected to be authentic representations, meaning that they often function as digital extensions of self. The term “prosthesis” is associated with technology when used to refer to an extension of oneself by artificial means, either physical or psychological. An example of a physical prosthesis is a mechanical arm which enables a person working on an assembly line to extend his/her reach, while an example of a psychological prosthesis is the extension of human consciousness into the digital realm through virtual reality. In *Understanding Media,* Marshall McLuhan thoroughly elucidates the concept of prosthesis to support his position that media are an “extension of ourselves” (7). McLuhan identifies the wheel as an extension of the foot, clothing as an extension of the skin, and the printed book as an extension of the visual faculties (119; 170; 179), establishing prosthesis as a teleological process which culminates with the electronic representation of consciousness. In his 1964 text, McLuhan states that we are rapidly approaching “the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society” (3). More than 50 years after McLuhan’s initial publication, simulation of consciousness takes place on a daily basis in the digital realm through technologies which attempt to replicate the faculties of the human mind, including virtual reality and online search engines.

If one accepts McLuhan's premise that various past technologies are extensions of the body, then might one construe digital, social media as psychological extensions of the self?[53] A social networking profile, with its close relationship to offline identity, is easily acknowledged as a digital representation of oneself, but what about blogs? The theory of blogs as extensions of the self is supported by multiple authorities on the medium. Cameron Barrett, founder of *CamWorld,* states that blogs "have a voice. They have a personality. . . . they are an interactive extension of who you are" (30). Joe Clark, a self-identified "Blogging Analyst," takes Barrett's point one step further, claiming that "A blog is a form of exteriorized psychology. It's a part of you, or of your psyche; while a titanium hip joint or a pacemaker might bring technology *inside* the corporeal you, a weblog uses technology to bring the psychological you *outside* of it. Your weblog acts as a new limb, a new mouth, and a new hemisphere of the brain" (68). Clark's passage links blogs–as extensions of self–to McLuhan's idea of prosthesis and emphasizes the positive aspects of this arrangement. In a similar vein, well-known blogging authority danah boyd argues that "the blog is one's digital *face*" while web producer Tom Coates compares the presence of a blog to one's skin: A weblog "creates a fluid and living form of self-representation, like an avatar in cyberspace that we wear like a skin." These comments from bloggers themselves indicate that blogs are viewed as fluid, living

[53]McLuhan's recognition of media as extensions of the body is based upon Freud's view of technology as prosthesis. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud writes, "Motor power places gigantic forces at [man's] disposal, which, like his muscles, he can employ in any direction . . . Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on him and they still give him much trouble at times" (37-39).

representations of the self. As dynamic entities, blogs are closer to extensions of human consciousness than the static technologies of writing and print which, due to their tangibility, are circumscribed by finite boundaries and a sense of permanence. The fluidity of blogs mimics the fluidity of individual human beings with all of their diversity–blogs convey the emotions and events of one's life in a style that is somehow more "authentic" or dynamic than novels and other forms of fiction-based writing. Due to their ability to account for the day-to-day changes in one's life and to convey personalities with depth and immediacy, blogs can be construed as digital extensions of consciousness and, as such, they are expected to be authentic representations of the writer's identity. In response, bloggers apply rhetorical strategies which ensure that their authorial presence online appears to be "authentic" to readers.

In personal blogs and social networking applications, authenticity is often established by providing a connection between offline and online dimensions of identity. Using one's "real name" is a means of establishing authenticity in digital, social media. Facebook's real name policy requires all users to register with their legal name rather than a screen name or a nickname, thus "enforcing" cohesion between offline and online identities and, in effect, establishing a sense of authenticity.[54] If users refuse to comply

[54]Recently, an entire country attempted to enforce a "real-name" policy. In 2007, South Korea implemented an online "real-name system" which mandated that websites with more than 300,000 visitors per day verify an individual's real name and resident registration number before permitting comments on or contributions from that individual. The policy generated much controversy, particularly when Google refused to comply by shutting down functions which enabled comments from South Korean users on YouTube (Kim). In response to the policy, Google also released a statement entitled "Freedom of Expression on the Internet" (Schachinger). South Korea's real-name policy was recently abandoned after an incident in which 35 million registration numbers were stolen from two popular websites. Of particular interest is that Google objected to the enforced use of real names by South Korea, yet the company has recently established a real names policy on its social networking platform, Google+.

with this stipulation, they may find their account purged. Facebook spokesperson Barry Schnitt maintains that Facebook's "real name culture" is one of the site's fundamental principles: It establishes "accountability and, ultimately, creates a safer and more trusted environment for all of our users. . . We require people to be who they are" ("Got an Unusual Name?"). Facebook is not alone in its "real name" requirement. Google+, one of the most recent social networking platforms to emerge, relies on a detailed "common names" policy to keep tabs on the identities of its customers: "if we challenge the name you intend to use, you will be asked to submit proof that this is an established identity with a meaningful following. . . . this name and your profile must represent you, and not an avatar or other secondary online identity." Such policies are enforced not only for the benefit of users who might be deceived but also for marketing purposes. In this case, by ensuring that participants use the same name in multiple places, Google is able to mine information from sites that users visit all over the Internet.

"Real name" policies are often only a part of the package of "identity verification services" which these sites use. For example, Google+ also markets itself as an "Internet identity service" which links a person's online identity to their real life identity. Typically, such services require the individual to use their legal name ("Charles Edward Harris") or a common name for which they can provide documentation ("Chuck Harris"). Online identity services also require the individual to provide personal information which helps to verify their identity. This personal information is then cross-checked with public records and databases to locate information which confirms whether the "identity" that the participant provided matches existing information. While identity verification may be viewed as an encroachment on one's privacy and "real name" policies are critiqued as "an authoritarian assertion of power over vulnerable people" (boyd, "Real Names' Policies"), they are only a few means of establishing an "authentic" identity online.

Much of the linking that occurs between offline and online dimensions of identity to establish authenticity is voluntary. For example, the use of offline names on personal blogs is quite common. Although bloggers may use a pseudonym on their blogs, they often reveal their offline names in a "bio" or "about" section to reinforce their authenticity, particularly if the blog has become quite popular. The name then functions in combination with other elements of the blog as a testament to the authenticity of the blogger/participant persona presented there. Personal blogs often resemble public diaries and include incidents from the participant's offline life as the subject of blog posts; thus, bloggers' online identities are very closely linked to their offline roles. In fact, the different genres of blogs which have sprung up in recent years are often intimately connected to one or more aspects of offline identity. For example, there are "mommy bloggers" who write primarily about parenting, and there are "academic fem bloggers" who write about issues in academe relevant to gender. Many of these bloggers reinforce authenticity through the use of real names and details which ensure that they are, in fact, who they say they are: Alice Bradley of *Finslippy* really is a professional writer and married mother who lives in New York City, and Marilee Lindemann ("Moose") of *Roxie's World* really is a professor, lesbian, and devoted terrier owner who lives on the East Coast. Aside from using their real names, these women merge facets of their online identities quite seamlessly to authenticate their identities. For example, Lindemann reveals that she is an academic and has published several works. One need only conduct a Google search using her name to find a university affiliation as well as other professional information. In a similar vein, Bradley uses the cohesion of online identity to her advantage to generate publicity through her website which functions as a central location for her professional identity. The site includes a link to Bradley's blog *Finslippy* as well as a link to other professional publications, including her most recent humor book, *Let's Panic About Babies*. By providing information on their offline lives that can be confirmed, such as real names and professional associations, Bradley and Lindemann ensure that the average reader can "authenticate" their identities through a simple online search.

In blogs where offline names are not revealed (or are not revealed at initial publication), the bloggers' stories themselves must serve as a means of authenticating their experiences. Whether it is discussing an offline event such as the BlogHer convention[55] or addressing the minutiae of one's everyday life as a college professor, these details serve as a means of authenticating bloggers' stories. Details which establish connections between a blogger's offline and online activities are particularly important for authenticating stories, and real-life places and events may all be addressed. For example, when a giant blizzard nicknamed "Snowmageddon," pummeled the East Coast in February 2010, many bloggers from that area logged on to provide updates about the severity of the storm. Details on bloggers' experiences during the storm not only

[55] *BlogHer* is an Internet community for women founded in 2005 which currently hosts more than 20 million bloggers.

informed readers of the weather conditions but also served as a means of authenticating their "real life" existence in the world. The bloggers were all experiencing this storm together, despite their varying geographic locations and membership in different online communities. In some cases, even the inability to communicate with readers due to lack of electricity authenticated the bloggers' experiences, indicating a type of presence through absence. In *The New Rhetoric,* Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca address the rhetorical implications of "presence," which they argue "acts directly on our sensibility . . . at the level of perception" (116): "One of the preoccupations of a speaker is to make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he considers important to his argument or, by making them more present, to enhance the value of some of the elements of which one has actually been made conscious" (117). Hence, textual details such as those addressing geographic location or physical appearance establish authenticity in social media by generating presence through a sense of physicality that relies upon personal experiences as shared with readers.

Recent research also supports this association between cohesive identity and authenticity by indicating that many individuals using social media do not distinguish between offline and online selves. "Digital Natives" view themselves as having "multiple self representations" which fuse to form "a more or less unitary self construct" (Palfrey and Gasser 22).[56] The idea of the "unitary self" is also confirmed by multiple new media and rhetoric scholars. Bolter and Grusin acknowledge this concept in *Remediation,* stating that online there is "a self akin to William James's 'pure ego' that

[56]In *Born Digital,* Palfrey and Gasser define "Digital Natives" as those born after 1980 who "have access to networked digital technologies" and possess "the skills to use those technologies" (1).

serves as the ‘brand’ or ‘medium’ that marks or holds together the various mediated empirical selves that make up the virtual self” (248). This concept is also linked to John Ramage’s description of the multidimensional identity which consists of three parts: the Given, the Readymade, the Constructed. “The Given” “includes all aspects of our identity that are inherited or acquired willy-nilly rather than by choice and/or by creative act” such as genetic and family structure and our pasts (42). “The Readymade” “includes those identities that we have not ourselves constructed, that have been prefabricated by others and are on offer through the workplace, the marketplace, and the cultural space we occupy” (42); Ramage offers “the Harley Davidson Guy” as an example of a “readymade” dimension of identity. In contrast, “the Constructed” is an identity developed “all on our own out of nothing. We construct ourselves based on available models and within the limits of that which we’ve been given” (42-43). Even in Turkle’s study conducted 15 years ago, many users did not distinguish between offline and online selves (190). The conditions enforced by Web 2.0 applications have made it virtually impossible to separate identity into offline and online components and to distinguish between multiple identities online. Thus, bloggers and other participants often perceive of their online personas as one dimension of more complete identities. Such personas are expected to come across as being linked to larger “authentic” selves and, as such, are intimately connected to one’s offline life which serves as a means of authenticating online participant identity.

The cohesive identity formed through social media is meant to enforce authenticity, yet it is also an example of a persona, or what Aristotle identifies in *The*

Rhetoric as a contrived means of authenticity (1404). In other words, participants often do not fully disclose an "authentic" self (in the existential sense)–if such a self even exists. "Historiann," an academic fem blogger, explains the concept of contrived participant identity quite eloquently:

> we all play with different voices and different persona in our writing, depending on the genre and our goals. I would say that Historiann and Ann Little are about as closely linked as Dr. Crazy and [Your Name Here.] That is to say, they're both personae we inhabit online, who are mostly our *genuine selves* but only *selective parts of our RL identities.* (*Reassigned Time*; emphasis mine)

Historiann identifies her online persona as a filtered version of her "RL" (real-life) persona, but as a persona which is nonetheless linked with larger aspects of her "genuine" self. Catherine Connors of *Her Bad Mother* extends this notion by describing the way in which her blogger identity operates: "she is not Me-In-My-Entirety. She is not even Me-In-My-Maternal-Entirety. She's just one part of that whole. She's the part that I write about. She's my blog muse. She's a character. A true character, but still: a *character*, of a sort. The real, whole me? You don't know her. Not really, not fully." These descriptions indicate that despite how filtered they may be, bloggers' self representations are often attempts at authenticity. The "authentic" personas that bloggers and other participants reveal are actually incomplete rhetorical representations of a more complex self.

If such personas are accepted as filtered versions of one's "real life" identity, then how do they function rhetorically to establish authenticity? On the part of a blogger or social networker the act of filtering is actually a testament to authenticity because it serves as a protection mechanism. Our discussions of blogging as an extension of self reveal that bloggers experience a “corporeal relationship” with their blogs (boyd).[57] This relationship

> deeply affects the way in which people choose to manage their blogs. There is a sense of ownership, a sense that a blogger has the right to control what acts and speech are acceptable . . . . Part of this stems from the sense that whatever others write affects the representation of the blogger. . . . people’s additions are like graffiti on one’s body. As a result, bloggers have varying degrees of openness to how others shape their blogs. (boyd, “Blogger’s Blog”)

In other words, the blogger’s desire to protect herself actually serves as an indicator of the potential authenticity for the blog. After all, one would not strive to protect a persona in which one was not personally invested. From a reader’s perspective, this might initially be perceived as control; from a blogger’s perspective, it makes sense because she is protecting what she perceives to be a semi-authentic representation of herself and every verbal attack is an affront to one’s person.

When dimensions of participant identity are cohesive across many different online platforms and are consistent between online and offline dimensions of identity, then overall authenticity is also established due to readers’ “perceived stability” of the persona. Identity in blogs is defined as “as an ongoing, socially constructed narrative”

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[57]For more on the corporeal aspects of communication, see Donna Haraway on situated embodiment, particularly “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.”

which is based on coherence and requires "a reliably identifiable subject" (Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody 264-65). Thus, the least authentic blogs are those which lack narrative coherence or which feature a persona that appears to be purely performative, while "highly authentic identities are those that are perceived as genuine and reliable, having strong internal consistency" (Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody 265). In other words, consistency or stability of identity in itself may function as a means of authentication in blogs. For example, on *Roxie's World* blogger Marilee Lindemann ("Moose") identifies herself as the Director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies Program at the University of Maryland. Therefore, one expects other information about Lindemann to cohere with this identity and would not expect to find information which contradicted this position.

Despite this desire for cohesion, several examples of "inconsistent identities" have emerged in the blogosphere recently. Last year it was revealed that two sites associated with LGBT issues, *LezGetReal: A Gay Girl's View on the World* and *Gay Girl in Damascus,* were actually run by male bloggers who constructed lesbian personas online.[58] In these cases, when elements of offline and online identity did not cohere, there was a profound backlash; *Gay Girl in Damascus* was proven to be an entirely fictionalized account while *Lez Get Real,* a site devoted to lesbian and gay news, was ultimately overtaken by another party whose identity was confirmed. In an interview, Bill Graber, who served as the editor of *LezGetReal* under the pseudonym "Paula Brooks," states, "I didn't start this [site] with my name because . . . I thought people

[58]For more information on these scandals, see Elizabeth Flock and Melissa Bell's piece in *The Washington Post*.

wouldn't take it seriously, me being a straight man." In other words, Graber claims that he believed his online lesbian persona would establish *ethos* with readers, but when the ruse was discovered, it had quite the opposite effect by undermining authenticity and destroying any credibility that he had established when posing as "Paula Brooks." These misrepresentations and the outrage that ensues illustrate that bloggers and other users of social media are not preoccupied with role playing; rather, they are interested in "locating, or constructing, for themselves and for others, an identity that they can understand as unitary, as real" (Miller and Shepherd). The blog thus becomes a means of establishing authenticity–"a counter-movement to postmodern destabilization" that "functions as a site of relative stability" (Miller and Shepherd). These examples are upsetting primarily because participants do not like to be reminded of the very authorial instability that they are hoping to counter with social media which enable more "authentic" representations. With personal blogs, in particular, this type of revelation is unsettling because the reader is invested in the blogger's online identity as an authentic representation of an offline self and has come to take the truthfulness of such details for granted. This situation generates some interesting questions concerning online identity and whether or not the means of enforcing such authenticity will become stricter in the future. Of course, with stricter measures come limitations on personal freedoms which many will find unsettling as well.

Conclusion

Although there is no absolute assurance that participants are, in fact, who they say they are online, social media has spurred several new trends: real-name policies, identity verification services, and interoperability all encourage cohesion among different facets of online identity. This trend toward a fixed, recognizable participant identity and toward online genres which promote a sense of cohesion by encouraging authenticity and accountability may be a reaction to the flexibility enabled by the "authorless" message in early digital media and the negative consequences of those endeavors. The information addressed in this chapter suggests that mechanisms which are used in social media do enforce accountability through some individual- and community-mediated means. For example, recent sex scandals of prominent political figures have shown that although people still want to believe that there is anonymity–and, therefore, less accountability–on the web, accountability is enforced by a sense of community online. In the case of one recent scandal, although Congressman Anthony Weiner promptly removed "revealing" photographs of himself from his Twitter account, the damage had already been done. A Twitter user captured screen shots of the images and sent them to Andrew Breitbart who published them on *BigJournalism*, a blog-style media aggregation site devoted to upstaging mainstream sources (Gavin). In this case, pre-existing communities within social media acted quickly to expose what they perceived to be a disjunction between an individual's online and offline identity. This case illustrates that the very same social media which may be used to deceive can also be used to expose inauthenticity and to enforce accountability. Hence, a trend toward more authentic rhetorical constructions of self is evident in social media and the desire to reinforce such authenticity is widespread.

The potential for public humiliation as illustrated in the case above also promotes accountability in another way–by encouraging individuals to keep close tabs on their online identities. Individuals often readily “censor” or “filter” the information that they post online and may even conduct online searches in a quest to remove materials which could be considered offensive if, for example, a potential employer searches the web. Companies such as International Reputation Management and Reputation Defender provide “online identity management” or “online image management” (OIM) services. While these companies may not be able to remove negative content about a particular user, they specialize in “impression management,” or the process by which people try to control the impressions that others receive about them by increasing their online reputation through social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogs (Kinzie and Nakashima). Once again, social media are being used to reinforce accountability. In this case, social media are manipulated to diminish aspects of online identity which may be overly negative.

But what are the lasting repercussions of “enforced accountability” in social media? Although time is the best indicator, at this point, one can conclude that we should be concerned with both overlaps among rhetorical roles such as reader and writer and with the challenges posed by different genres when assessing social media. Hybridity is inherent in the participant role in social media. For example, despite the dynamic nature of this role, it is not marked by a complete absence of concepts associated with autonomous authorship. Instead, social media appear to have spurred the formation of an online participant identity which reinforces accountability and authenticity online. This trend toward a fixed, recognizable participant identity may be a reaction to the previous flexibility of the "authorless" message. Hence, the new concern with who is speaking is one instance where a rhetorical concept has been re-appropriated in a new medium. Interest in the author's individual personality is reminiscent of nineteenth-century concerns over the personality of the author as emanated in the text. The practice of "reading for the author" was aimed at decreasing the rhetorical distance between writer and reader prompted by new technologies such as the printing press; in a similar manner, the distance between writers and readers in social media is also diminished by the presence of a cohesive participant identity which reinforces individual accountability and, by that same token, decreases the rhetorical distance between parties in an online exchange. Not only is the distance between writers and readers reduced by these mechanisms online, but the distance between "author persona" and real-life identity is diminished as well. All of these intersections–between "author" and "reader" roles and between offline and online identity–merge to form the role of "participant" in digital media.

However, the concern with who is speaking is limited primarily to social media rather than to other genres such as discussion posts and gaming sites. Warnick points out that the "coproduction process" incorporated on sites such as wikis and discussion forums demands some other criterion for evaluating credibility rather than the *ethos* of the individual contributor (35). Such observations convey that the ratios of speaker/writer and audience/reader vary greatly not only between digital rhetoric and print texts but also between different digital media. Although the "participant" role in general is applicable across all social media, participants in social media adopt different varieties of the participant role depending upon genre. The characteristics which make social media open to new models of authorship and continuous revision also render genres much more unstable and dynamic than in past media where gatekeepers or other regulatory agencies enforced some means of stability. The shaping of active participant role(s) in a specific genre of social media will be addressed in the following chapter, a study of blogs.

CHAPTER IV

BLOGS: MEDIUM AND METHODOLOGY

Although genre has been raised as an issue relevant to participant roles in this study, this association was not always evident, particularly in scholarship on digital communication published prior to the advent of social media. In "What is an Electronic Author?" (1996), Richard Grusin identifies some of the claims made by early digital authorship theorists. Richard Lanham, for example, postulates that "it is hard not to think that, at the end of the day, electronic text will seem the natural fulfillment of much current literary theory, and resolve many of its questions" (130) while George Landow claims that hypertext is "the convergence of poststructuralist conceptions of textuality and electronic embodiments of it" (73). Much of the discussion extends beyond such general comparisons. For example, Landow claims that "Hypertext embodies many of the ideas and attitudes proposed by Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and others" (73), while Mark Poster asserts that the Internet represents the full realization of Foucault's "postauthor utopia."[59] Many of these early theories make monolithic claims about "electronic authorship" rooted in the idea that all Web texts are authorless entities – "unstable, ephemeral, or dematerialized" (Grusin 53); this limited perspective is yet another consequence of a culture that is obsessed with authorship as it developed in the

[59]Grusin takes issue with such perspectives due to their technologically deterministic nature. He maintains that most of these early theories of electronic writing subscribe to a "technological fallacy" by attributing agency to technology rather than to culture in their descriptions of electronic authorship. "This fallacy most often manifests itself in propositional statements that ascribe agency to technology itself, statements in which the technologies of electronic writing are described as actors" (Grusin 40).

age of print (autonomous, original, and proprietary) and which, in turn, seeks to divorce digital authorship entirely from print influence.

However, as previously mentioned, not all digital pieces adopt principles of authorship which are "unstable, ephemeral, or dematerialized." In discussion forums, wikis, blogs, and social networking applications, the relationship between traditional dimensions of the rhetorical situation such as reader and writer are configured differently. Of course, at the Internet-wide level, all users in these genres could be classified as active participants, but the degree of authority among the different roles varies widely. In some cases, such as discussion forums, the real-life dynamics of conversation are simulated and all writers (with the exception of moderators) are on roughly equal footing. However, in wikis a collective entity is understood as authoring the text even though individual editors might be held accountable for content if there is a discrepancy and the edits log is checked. In social networking applications, an individual user has some degree of control her profile content, yet the site itself largely controls the template which requires that information be classified into specific categories (status update, info, photos). Other social media participants may also contribute by posting pictures, making comments, and tagging a user, or "friend," in comments or photographs. In personal blogs, an individual is most often understood as the "author" of the text, but readers may comment and contribute in other ways, thus affecting the outcome of subsequent posts. Once again, it becomes evident how the static model of the rhetorical situation–which employs separate terms to refer to "writer/speaker" and "reader/audience" across all genres and media–does not correspond with the dynamic nature of communication online. Overall, when theories attempt to deconstruct print-based concepts entirely or to rely on a one-size-fits-all approach to digital texts, they neglect to recognize both medium and genre as fundamental forces in shaping digital texts and determining modes of authorship. Hence, this chapter focuses on particular participant roles as they emerge in a specific genre of social media, women's personal blogs.

Blogs provide a model for examining how the participant role(s) adopted in social media may vary based upon medium and genre. As an evolving digital writing practice, personal blogging promotes notions of cohesive identity discussed in the previous chapter yet confronts other dimensions of the autonomous model by encouraging intertexuality rather than originality and conversationality rather than private reading and writing. Personal blogs are an ideal medium for examining how alternative authorship practices have contributed to publicizing previously marginalized voices online. In establishing women's personal blogs as the genre under study, this chapter also explores the methodology for rhetorical analysis which will be employed, Herring's model of computer-mediated discourse analysis. However, before discussing blogs and the methodology used to study them, it is necessary to identify assumptions about genre as well as some basic characteristics of blogs.

A Note on Genre

According to rhetorical theory, genre is the categorization of a type of discourse based upon rhetorical factors such as stylistic criteria. Carolyn Miller encourages us to view genre as social action: "Genre refers to a conventional category of discourse based in large-scale typification of rhetorical action; as action, it acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose" (163).[60] In other words, genres (and sub-genres) are socially constituted, meaning that they rely upon the recurrence of certain communicative practices and conventions as well as upon social consensus for classification. However, a dilemma emerges in digital media regarding whether we ought to classify genres based upon software variations or upon the manner in which these platforms are used.[61] For example, much has been made of the question of whether blogs are a medium or a genre. The consensus among blogging scholars is that genres should be classified based on function, and since blogs have multiple functions, they cannot be classified as a "genre" alone. Rather, blogs might be considered a medium since "a medium is the channel through which people can communicate or extend their expressions to others" (boyd, "Blogger's Blog"). Thus, in a manner similar to paper–which can be used to take notes, make lists, write essay–blogs are a medium, or the means people use to express themselves in the world (boyd). On the other hand, *how* participants use blogs to express themselves is a matter that is purely functional and which contributes to specific genre formations within the medium of blogging.

[60]Carolyn Miller's theory implies that genres must be analyzed from the bottom up by considering the rhetorical situation in which the genre arose. Hence, genres change over time depending upon a variety of factors.

[61]Within each software classification, there may be multiple functional genres which are characterized "by specific communicative purposes and social uses on various levels of specificity" (Lomborg 58).

Blogs: Derivative Features

Chapter I defined blogs as regularly updated websites maintained by individuals or, in some cases, a group of individuals (Rettberg 24). According to scholarship by Rettberg, Morrison, and Miller and Shepherd, blogs feature date and time-stamped posts which are brief and episodic and appear in reverse chronological order. Blog posts often include a mix of links and personal commentary from the blogger. All of these formal features of blogs pave the way for what I deem the "derivative features" of blogs, including the aspects of immediacy, conversationality, intertextuality, and stability which are conveyed on most blogs. These features are deemed "derivative" because they are derived from or result from some combination of the previously discussed formal features. While there is no official study of derivative features, the list is based upon my own observations as well as upon observations made by other blogging scholars.

Due to their emphasis on temporality via date- and time-stamping of episodic posts, blogs espouse a sense of currency or immediacy. Immediacy, which is marked by a concern with the time-oriented features of the information provided, is a remediated attribute of older genres such as newspapers and television as well as journals, diaries, and serialized novels. For example, newspapers are generally read for the timeliness of the information provided within them; while timeliness is not a primary concern in diaries and journals, these genres are still marked by a preoccupation with the date and time of the information included. In contrast, in blogs immediacy occurs at nearly real-time speed with the blogger able to make multiple posts on a daily basis. Since part of the attraction of blogs lies in this immediacy of content, blogs which are not updated regularly are not likely to retain readers. The concern with immediacy in blogs has several rhetorical effects: Information is assumed to be current; information is assumed to be factual;[62] and a focus on chronology provides a sense of continuity.

Blog qualities derived from immediacy are not unlike that which is generated by newspapers and other forms of "mainstream media" which are assumed to be current, factual, and continuous. Features which provide a "sense of immediacy," reinforce the impression that the content is current and true. Lejeune supports this notion in his discussion of diaries, claiming that "the date creates a sincerity effect. It sucks you in" (87). In other words, the emphasis on date lends an air of authenticity to the document. Not only is dated information believed to be true, but since the information presented is perpetually unfinished, it also "hooks" readers into the storyline. Much like serialized novels, blogs convey a sense of continuity, or a desire to see the story continue. Lejeune claims that diaries in their present form (and blogs, it can be assumed) "give life the consistency and continuity it lacks" through "the accumulated series, growing by one unit each day" (195). This emphasis on continuity may also function as an attempt to counteract mortality. As Lejeune asserts, diaries confront transience by playing upon "the horizon of expectation," or "the idea that the diary will continue" since "there is always writing to be done" (189). Thus, the process of keeping a diary or blog is an assurance against immortality, for it is "the idea of what comes next protects us from the idea of the end" (193; 198). Blogs–through their continuous nature–also emphasize the

[62]There is still some dispute over the degree to which information in a blog may be "ethically" fictionalized. However, downright malicious deception appears to be unacceptable in the blogging community. See Adam Geitgey's elaboration on the Kasey Nicole (Swenson) blogging hoax for further elaboration. This 2001 hoax set the precedent for public reactions to subsequent blog hoaxes.

idea of immortality through a digital existence. However, a sense of continuity is emphasized not only by the features of blogs which are associated with immediacy (date- stamping, reverse chronological order) but also, in part, because blogs lack closure.

Blogs lack closure due to their emphasis on conversationality. Brief, episodic posts, rhetorical markers established by the blogger, and a combination of links, blogger commentary, and reader feedback all contribute to the conversational aspects of blogging, an illustration of Burke's idea of the "unending conversation."[63] For example, the blogger often adopts a role as if he/she is speaking directly to readers through various rhetorical markers which create a conversational tone. According to Douglas Biber's *Variation Across Speech and Writing,* there are specific elements in writing which indicate a "conversational" style such as the use of first and second person, contractions, present tense, conversational adverbs, and filler words ("uh," "well"). Personal bloggers use all these markers to develop a conversational tone which establishes a rapport with readers. Use of the second person such as "you" and "your" makes it seem as if the blogger is speaking directly to the reader since these pronouns "indicate a high degree of involvement with that addressee" (Biber 225). Conversational adverbs such as "finally," "ultimately," and "actually" are used as well to reveal stance, qualities and feelings. Finally, "discourse particles" such as "anyway," "like," and "well" (241) are often used in blog posts to create a conversational tone.

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[63]The "unending conversation," which is discussed by Burke in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (110), provides support for his rhetorical theory of dramatism. Dramatism explores "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 43).

In addition to rhetorical markers on the blogger's part, the potential for reader commentary restores some of the features of orality to blogs. Collin Gifford Brooke explains, "those scholars (cf. Ong, Welch) who see in electronic discourse a return to some of the features of orality are not entirely off the mark, for many of these spaces function conversationally" (82). Rettberg takes this one step further by arguing that blogs "are remarkable for combining aspects of both dialogue and dissemination" (36). Dialogue and dissemination are both influenced by the conversationality of blogs–the ability to share ideas intimately in a one-to-one or one-to-many dialogue is enabled through the comment function while the ability to spread ideas as broadly as possible is conveyed through the public nature of blogs in general. The rhetorical effects of blogs' conversationality are many and varied. For example, since readers directly engage in conversations with the blogger, they often feel more actively involved as creators of blog content. Furthermore, due to this conversational nature, bloggers are less likely to be perceived as solitary, autonomous authors devoid of outside influence. Conversationality also emphasizes the dynamic nature of information online. Rather than information presented through a closed, finite medium such as a print, information is presented in an online setting where anyone can become a public author and the content of a message can change rapidly. Overall, the conversational nature of blogs is derived primarily from the ability for readers and writers to interact in this format.

Due to their brief, episodic posts which are a mix of links and personal commentary, blogs do not follow "traditional" structure but, rather, exhibit forms that are fragmented and intertextual. Intertextuality at its broadest level simply refers to one text being “connected in a work to other texts in the social and textual matrix” (Warnick 95). It is important to realize that intertextuality is not exclusive to the Internet nor is it “a new form of expression” (Warnick 92). The term “intertextuality” was coined by Julia Kristeva, but owes its theoretical heritage to Mikhail Bakhtin. Kristeva explains that Bakhtin’s “conception of the ‘literary word’” is that of “an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context” (65). Although various forms of intertextuality such as parody and allusion have been present for centuries, intertextuality has never been more pervasive than it is online.[64] The Internet “represents in itself a very unstructured intertextual environment,” a cacophonous space “where many voices blend and clash” (Warnick 97).[65] In blogs, intertextuality refers to the interconnectedness of blog content with other texts and writers and operates against traditional notions of authorial “originality.” As Melissa Wall explains, “story forms that are fragmented and interdependent with other Web sites” through a mixture of links and blogger commentary are one of the postmodern traits of blogs (154). Intertextuality may be revealed differently depending on the focus of the blog; for example, personal blogs may exhibit brief, episodic narrative structure while political blogs may use “links to build an argument, providing considerable context and original ideas’ (Rettberg 25-26). Reader commentary also contributes to the intertextual nature of blogs in a way which was nearly unknown with print texts and

[64]Many popular commercial television shows rely on this “remix” strategy–filled with puns, parody, and irony. *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, and *Mad TV* are all examples.

[65]In her book *Rhetoric Online,* Warnick identifies several forms of intertextuality which exist online: archetypal allegory, cross-references (to specific films and books), parody, and intertextual satire (99-100).

more static forms of digital media such as web pages. What blogs do more than anything else–with their mixture of links and personal commentary–is make the intertextuality which has always been present much more visible online.

Although personal blogs exist in an ephemeral digital environment, one surprising derivative feature is the sense of stability they espouse due to their focus on an individual and his/her perspectives. Stability–which was briefly discussed in the previous chapter–arises because blogs operate at a semi-permanent location on the Web and are typically written by an individual or a series of individuals who provide details about their personal experiences through regular posts. The "about" section, a nearly-universal feature of blogs, profiles the blogger, often including details about his/her interests as well as an image such as a photograph or an avatar. The "about" section clearly signifies the important role which the individual author plays in blogs and is a further testament to the stability granted to a blog through an individual author's presence. The strong individual presence which is maintained in blogs contributes to their sense of stability by locating the blog and its content within a single voice which is conveyed through the personal commentary in blog posts, the overall tone of the blogger, and the biographical details included on the blog. Miller and Shepherd claim that blogs offer a "perspectival reality, anchored in the personality of the blogger" while Rettberg states that blogs "present an individual's subjective view of–or log of–the Web, their life or a particular topic" (21).[66] Blogs are attempts to establish a stable presence in

[66]However, the blogger's version of reality is highly mediated, relying on what Bolter and Grusin identify as "the logic of transparent immediacy" (21) primarily conveyed through "verbal or textual

an ephemeral, digital world. This emphasis on the individual and authorial stability originates in a culture which has roots in print texts and the autonomous model of authorship represented within them.

Blogs–much like other digital texts–emphasize the hybrid nature of online communication since they reflect dimensions of both print and digital authorship. Features such as intertextuality and conversationality are not entirely absent from print texts, but they are much more visible online via elements such as hyperlinks and screen names. Immediacy, on the other hand, is a relatively recent phenomenon which has arisen with enhanced digital capabilities while authorial stability has its origins in a print culture which valued finitude and permanence. In providing immediate, conversational, intertextual, and stable accounts, bloggers attempt to balance the fragmented nature of working in a digital medium with maneuvers which establish their blog as a consistent presence in the blogosphere.

Blog Genres

Blogs are a form of social media, and there are a variety of different genres of blogs. Scholarly discussion typically identifies two categories of early blogs: filter-style/aggregator blogs and diary/confessional blogs. Professional Blogger Rebecca Blood first identifies these two types of blogs in her own blog, *Rebecca's Pocket*, in 2000, labeling them as "filter" and "free-style" blogs. However, Jill Walker Rettberg's *Blogging*, published in 2008, reflects large-scale shifts in the blogosphere by identifying at least three different types of blogs: filter blogs such as *Kottke.org*, personal blogs such

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strategies that emphasize intimacy and spontaneity" (Miller and Shepherd). Some of these strategies have been discussed previously in this section.

as *Dooce*, and topic-driven blogs such as *Dailykos*. Personal blogs are those which mimic the diary or journal, focusing primarily on the blogger's personal life. Rettberg maintains that the difference between personal blogs and filter blogs is spatial: "unlike diary-style blogs, filter blogs don't log the blogger's offline life but record his or her experiences and finds on the Web" (12). In contrast, topic-driven blogs are limited to a pre-defined topic and "share newly discovered ideas and information with their readers" (15). Since some variations exist in scholarly discussion of blog categories, a series of caveats must be addressed before committing to a specific classification system for this study.

First, it is difficult to classify some blogs because many exist in a hybrid form, so genre categories should be seen as somewhat arbitrary. Nevertheless, these categories may be useful in helping us to understand how authorship functions in certain varieties of blogs, particularly if we imagine these categories existing on a spectrum ranging from filter blogs to personal blogs. For example, a blog which represents itself as the diary of a graduate student falls toward the personal end of the spectrum; however, topic blogs devoted to various hobbies such as knitting and cooking are one of the most common hybrids because they often alternate between filtering information (i.e. providing readers with recommendations for recipes or knitting patterns) and providing commentary on these topics (i.e. one's own experience with a particular recipe or knitting project). These blogs would fall into the middle of such a continuum since they feature both filtered information and personal commentary. Finally, diary-style blogs would fall toward the ooposite end of the spectrum from filter or aggregator-style blogs since they feature a great deal of personal information.

Regardless of their overall end goal, most blogs are filtering information in some way. There are filter-style blogs whose primary purpose is to filter information by providing a series of links on various topics. For example, the popular filter blog *Boing Boing* “provides news on bizarre Web finds” (Rettberg 12). However, there are also topic-driven blogs whose secondary purpose is to filter information. Cooking blogs, for example, are designed to provide information on a specific type of cooking (ex: organic, gluten-free, Indian cuisine). Clearly, the purpose of such topic-driven blogs is also to filter, providing only the best or most relevant information on a particular topic. Confessional, diary-style blogs function in much the same way, “filtering” only the information that the author wants his/her readers to see while omitting other personal information. As Rettberg explains, “Dooce doesn’t blog everything that happens to her–this is not a secret diary but a diary deliberately written to be shared. Posts are written with care and wit” (11). Hence, even personal bloggers filter the information that they present–hoping to convey only the information that readers will find most relevant or interesting. Regardless of whether they function as aggregator, personal, or hobby blogs, most blogs inherently have some type of filter function.

After considering these caveats and the previously published literature on blogging, this study classifies blogs into the following categories:

1. Aggregator (filter-style) blogs
2. Topic-driven blogs

3. Commercial blogs
4. Personal (diary-style) blogs

The goal of aggregator, or filter-style blogs, is exclusively to filter information. Filter-style blogs differ from topic-driven blogs because although they may have a general focus, the focus is not as narrow as blogs devoted to a single hobby as in topic-driven blogs. The goal of topic-driven blogs is often multi-faceted–they serve both to filter information on a particular hobby or interest and to provide commentary on one's own experience with that topic. Many topic-driven blogs become more business-oriented as their readership expands and other publications (book deals, columns) ensue.[67] However, these blogs began with the purpose of exploring a particular hobby or topic. In contrast, commercial blogs are designed to sell a particular product or a brand name; thus, their very origins can be traced to a specific business or organization rather than to an individual or hobby.[68] It is important to distinguish commercial blogs from other types of blogs because, in a sense, they lack the essence of an authentic blog. Commercial blogs are not designed with blogging's original purpose in mind–to share information for

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[67]Among many topic-driven blogs, the popularity of the blog itself often determines whether a blogger will be offered publishing deals on traditional books and whether the blog, in turn, becomes more commercialized. For example, Shauna James Ahern of *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef* has published two cookbooks since she began her blog about gluten-free living and cooking. Her first cookbook was chosen as one of the best cookbooks of 2010 by *The New York Times*. Ree Drummond of *The Pioneer Woman* recently published *The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Recipes from an Accidental Country Girl* (2009) which is available through major retailers such as Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Both blogs have a glossy, commercial feel but still maintain a personal tone in the writing itself.

[68]Businesses have recently adopted blogging as a marketing technique, "a way of improving customer relations and establishing a popular presence on the Web" (Rettberg 127). For example, General Motors offers the *FastLane Blog* to publicize its latest vehicles and upcoming events related to the company. General Motors is not the only company to jump onto the blogging bandwagon–there are thousands of blogs out there for various companies selling everything from chicken to Chevrolets.[68]

the sake of sharing it; rather, they are designed to provide information in hopes of selling a product and increasing the bottom line.[69]

Personal blogs, also known as confessional or diary-style blogs, present the final category and comprise the sample for my case study in the following chapter. Personal blogs typically feature a distinct online persona and the sharing of the story of one's life with a public audience. Since this project examines participant roles in social media, the most author-centered of the blog genres has been selected. Personal blogs are highly original and diary-like and convey the details of an individual's life on a variety of topics. There are many examples of diary-style blogs online, but one of particular note is *MegNut*. According to Meg Hourihan's "About" page, *MegNut* "started in 1999 as an all-purpose blog, its focused [sic] switched entirely to food in May, 2006. In 2008 it returned to being a general blog, mostly about my life in New York raising my two kids, some tech thrown in, and food thoughts for good measure." The variety of topics addressed in *MegNut*–food, technology, kids, home/garden–reveals a focus "on the varying interests of the individual blogger" rather than on one specific interest like topic-driven blogs (Rettberg 15). Overall, personal blogs are distinct from topic-driven blogs since the former focus on the individual and his/her (often varied) interests rather than

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[69]Blogs evolved to share information–whether it is sharing a collection of quirky links or exploring ideas on a particular hobby. Blogs did not originate with the end goal of selling a product, although they have evolved to being used for this purpose. Corporate blogs which try to promote a product seem somewhat anachronistic in the sense that their end goal is selling an actual product, and this goal may be seen as incompatible with the larger goal which blogs evolved to promote–sharing information rather than selling material goods. Thus, corporate blogs may be classified as another form of advertising and will not be further considered for the purposes of this study.

on a specific hobby or interest.[70] As such, personal blogs are likely to be infused with a strong sense of the participant's identity much like precursor genres such as the diary.

Precursor Genre: The Diary

Examining precursor genres is necessary to determine how authorship and participant roles are configured within personal blogs. As Miller and Shepherd note, "genres" are "the intellectual scaffolds on which community-based knowledge is constructed." Ancestors of the blog are identified based partly on obvious rhetorical connections to prior genres and "partly on the connections that bloggers themselves make to prior discourse" (Miller and Shepherd). These connections are considered in combination with Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of "remediation" which claims that all new media are composed of variations of existing media (14). Precursors to the blog are abundant and historically far reaching. Professional Blogger Dan Burstein claims that blog-like phenomena are ubiquitous in our civilization (xiii), offering cave paintings, the Talmud, and commonplace books as examples of past blog-like phenomena. Although there are many precursor genres to the blog, we will consider only one genre which is the most obvious precursor to the personal blog–the diary or journal.[71]

The association between blogs and journals can be attributed to various features which these genres share, including formal features as well as content. Regarding formal features, the emphasis on dates as well as on the use of brief, episodic entries are

[70] It should also be noted that some "hybrid blogs" exist. These blogs began with more general content but now have a specific focus and, in effect, are more topic-oriented blogs.

[71] Though many apply the term "journal" to the externally-focused text and use "diary" to refer to the internally focused text, Mallon finds the terms 'hopelessly muddled' and uses them synonymously (1). These terms will be used interchangeably in this dissertation as well.

characteristic of diaries as well as blogs. Some of the derivative features of blogs are also present in diaries to a lesser degree. For example, while diaries are not marked by the profound sense of immediacy that is available in blogs, they do have a sense of continuity which is influenced by their open-ended structure. Intertextuality and conversationality are much more pronounced in blogs but are not entirely absent from diaries either. Intertextuality is present in diaries in the same elusive form that it is in other print texts–a web of influences on the diarists' life is often woven subtly without mention of direct, formal citations. Conversationality is a different manner. Although diaries are often assumed to be written for a private audience and blogs nearly always have a public audience, many scholars, including Mallon and Barthes, maintain that diaries are a public literary form. Mallon states that "no one ever kept a diary for just himself. . . . an audience will turn up. . . . Someone will be reading and you'll be talking" (xvii). Barthes also supports this concept, arguing that diarists are always writing "with a view to publication" and hence are never entirely "open" about their experiences ("Deliberation" 480). Thus, diaries are also public and conversational, but in a much more subtle manner than blogs which overtly adopt a conversational style and actively seek out an audience.

The personal content of many blogs is also similar to the details that are recorded in diaries and journals. Diaries chronicle the happenings in one's daily life from a first-person perspective, often including a mixture of the mundane and the unique–aspects of ordinary life coupled with a tendency toward introspection and increased self-awareness. According to Lawrence Rosenwald, "We call that form a diary when a writer uses it to fulfill certain functions. We might describe those functions collectively as the discontinuous recording of aspects of the writer's own life" (5). An individual's diary may encompass the day-to-day aspects of life along with erotic trysts (William Byrd), it may recount specific historical events (Anne Frank), or it may be a multi-volume account which encompasses the majority of one's lifespan (Anaïs Nin). Thus, another commonality between diaries and blogs is the strong emphasis on a stable individual presence and the connection between real life identity and author persona which is not unlike the connection between offline and online dimensions of participant identity in social media.

Unfortunately, the similarities between blogs and other personal, introspective genres results in them being labeled as "inferior." This perceived inferiority stems from academic institutions, which have a history of downplaying personal, expressive writing in favor of more scholarly, reason-based discourse. Another cause for the inferiority issue which arises in conjunction with diaries and blogs may be related to gender– popular opinion throughout the centuries has deemed the diary "unwholesome, hypocritical, cowardly, worthless, artificial, sterile, shriveling, *feminine"* (Lejeune 147; emphasis mine). Such adjectives paint the diary in an unflattering light and associate it with the feminine gender through subjugation. "Women have been socialised to see their diary keeping as less important, as belonging only to the private sphere and to the realm of emotion rather than that of the intellect" (Gannett 149). The dismissal of diaries as insignificant has been equated with domineering behaviors such as shaming and silencing, and popular culture often reinforces such maneuvers. One need look no further than dramatic adolescent television shows from the twentieth century. How many girls were humiliated by exposed secrets when someone “stole” their diary? As bell hooks maintains in *Talking Back*, diaries are often a symbol of young girls “holding and hiding speech” (7). Girls are made to feel as if their ideas are nonsense, and they are constantly at risk of being exposed through the violation of someone reading their diary, so they choose to hide their speech away. Such shaming can lead to silencing through destruction. hooks describes how she learned to destroy her own work rather than to risk exposure when no safe place for it could be found (7). Personal blogs, which are the focus of this study, bear many similarities to the diary and journal. Unfortunately, due to their affiliation with these genres, women’s personal blogs are often marginalized, and some sub-genres are disregarded more than others. Overall, the blogs chosen for this study fell into one of two categories–parenting blogs and academic feminist blogs. Rhetorical analysis of these two sub-genres presents the potential for a broader perspective on participant roles than rhetorical analysis of a single sub-genre.

The Marginalization of Women’s Personal Blogs

During its early years, the blogosphere was primarily a masculine domain due to its association with the information technology field where males often outnumbered females. However, as early as 2004, Herring et al. report roughly equal numbers of male (52%) to female (48%) bloggers. Their findings also reveal that adult males were more likely to engage in filter blogging and that discourses about blogs in mainstream media, scholarly communication, and on blogs themselves often privilege filter blogs, thereby implicitly evaluating “the activities of adult males as more interesting, important and/or newsworthy than those of other blog authors." Although it is difficult to obtain current, accurate statistics on bloggers and gender since blogs are constantly in flux, there is no doubt that the visibility of blogs authored by women is increasing.[72] For example, *BlogHer,* an Internet community for women, currently hosts more than 20 million women bloggers, and the blogging research company Technorati even devoted a section of its 2010 "State of the Blogosphere" report to female bloggers (Sobel). The visibility of blogging among women has been so pronounced in recent years that the trend has spurred new terms such as "mommy/mom blogger," which was coined in 2005 to refer to women who focus primarily on family in their blog.[73] Currently, there is great variety among women's personal blogs: there are blogs authored by women who work in academe, who focus on feminist causes, who discuss specific hobbies such as crafting and cooking, and so forth.[74] Despite these increases in variety and in visibility, discourses which position women's blogs as inferior still persist.

Women's personal blogs, particularly those devoted to parenting and homemaking, are often dismissed by the American mass media and ignored in

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[72]*Technorati*'s 2010 "State of the Blogosphere" report notes that while two-thirds of bloggers are still men, blogs written by women are on the rise and currently comprise about one-third of all blogs online (Sobel).

[73]The number of blogs written by dads is also increasing–16 percent of men focused on family updates according to *Technorati*'s 2008 report (White and Winn). Despite this increase, women still represent the vast majority of family bloggers. Thus, addressing "dad blogs" is beyond the scope of this project.

[74]Despite the variety of topics, there is criticism over the demographics represented on the most popular parenting blog sites such as *Babble*. See, for example, Veronica Arreola's "Mommy & Me: Looking for the Missing Voices in the Burgeoning World of Mom Blogs." In this piece, Arreola claims that "the image of the mommy blogger . . . overlooks the legions of mom bloggers who aren't white, heterosexual, married women" (48).

scholarship.[75] An evident mainstream news bias against mothers who blog is revealed in the condescending language used in many news stories. For instance, a March 2010 *New York Times* article entitled, “Honey, Don’t Bother Mommy. I’m Too Busy Building My Brand” describes a “Bloggy Boot Camp” designed for “the minivan crowd” to enhance their marketing potential (Mendelsohn). The article is filled with condescending remarks: “Teaching your baby to read? Please. How to hide vegetables in your children’s food? Oh, that’s so 2008” and moves on to describe “mommy blogs” of the past as “little more than glorified electronic scrapbooks, a place to share the latest pictures of little Aidan and Ava with Great-Aunt Sylvia in Omaha” (Mendelsohn). The use of such trite language and stereotypical examples to represent mothers who blog is, unfortunately, not confined to one article. Even articles representing these bloggers as empowered often fail to convey a non-biased tone. An article by Lisa Belkin about super-blogger Heather Armstrong, founder of *Dooce,* attempts to offer a more balanced perspective, yet condescension is still discernible. The author claims that Armstrong, one of the nation’s top bloggers, has become famous

> By talking about poop and spit up. And stomach viruses and washing-machine repairs. And home design, and high-strung dogs, and reality television, and sewer-line disasters, and chiropractor visits. And countless other banalities of one

[75] In addition to the *New York Times* article discussed here, see “Stop Press: Little Timmy Ate His Lunch” by Lucy Atkins” and “Mommy (and Me)” by David Hochman. For scholarly work on mom blogs, see “The Radical Act of ‘Mommy Blogging’” by Lori Kido Lopez, “Autobiography in Real Time: A Genre Analysis of Personal Mommy Blogging” by Aimée Morrison, and May Friedman and Shana L. Calixte’s *Mothering and Blogging.*

> mother's eclectic life that, for some reason, hundreds of thousands of strangers tune in, regularly, to read. (Belkin)

The use of examples that relate to gross bodily functions ("poop," "spit up," "stomach viruses") is likely to inspire revulsion in some readers and represents mom bloggers in an unfavorable manner. Furthermore, the phrases "countless other banalities" and "for some reason" emphasize the theme of this article–to represent mom blogging as a mundane phenomenon and to convey puzzlement over the fact that anyone would be interested in reading about such topics.

The term "mommy blogger" itself can also be used in a derogatory manner. Mainstream news articles use the term to deride the practice, and many bloggers have a conflicted relationship with the term since it reflects a double bind. As Catherine Connors of *Her Bad Mother* explains, the label of "mommy blogger" is at once both insulting and empowering. When one hears the term "mommy," negative connotations abound; among them are "infantile," "silly," and "frivolous." After all, what twenty-first century woman uses for self-reference a term of endearment that is normally reserved for use by three-year-olds? Connors acknowledges that the term can be "reductive and misleading," but it is also a source of empowerment for women since these bloggers are the first generation with the ability to discuss women's roles and an uncensored version of motherhood in a public forum.[76]

[76] At the first BlogHer conference in 2005, Alice Bradley of *Finslippy* confronted a band of critics who attempted to dismiss such blogging practices with the rallying cry that "Mommy blogging *is* a radical act!" Since this conference, this attitude has been largely embraced by "mom bloggers" themselves. See, for example, *Finslippy* "Here's Where I Get All Preachy" and *Her Bad Mother* "I Am Mommy Blogger, Hear Me Roar."

While many mothers embrace the term "mommy blogger" as a source of empowerment, there is still the imminent danger of over-generalization. "Mommy blogger" may be used as a generic term to label all women who are both bloggers and mothers–even those who choose not to make parenthood the sole focus of their blogs.[77] As Jennifer Lance from *Eco Child's Play* writes, she was surprised to be automatically classified as a "mommy blogger" by a *New York Post* reporter who was interviewing her for a story since she writes about a variety of topics which are not exclusive to parents.[78] Herein the danger lies. Assigning labels to large groups of people with a diverse body of interests certainly qualifies as stereotyping while unconditionally assigning the specific label of "mommy" without regard for preference denies women agency and an identity outside of motherhood. Such stereotyping and mislabeling contributes to the marginalization of women's personal blogs both outside of and within the blogosphere.

Another variety of women's personal blogs examined in this study–academic feminist blogs–are also marginalized by discourses both outside of and within the blogosphere but in different ways. Academic fem blogs are written by women who work in a scholarly setting and blog about dimensions of their professional and personal lives through a feminist lens. The specific term "academic fem blogger"[79] is not as

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[77] In "Attracting Readers: Sex and Audience in the Blogosphere," Clancy Ratliff reveals that women are often excluded from the political blogosphere on the basis of their blog content which is deemed "personal" and, therefore, non-political, even when it relates to broader social issues such as family leave, daycare, and abortion.

[78] For the full post, see Lance's "I Am Not a Mommy Blogger."

[79] The term "academic fem blogger" was coined by Marilee Lindemann in her article entitled "The Madwoman with a Laptop" which assesses the use of pseudonymity in academic women's blogs. As Lindemann explains, such blogs can be viewed "in relation to feminist strategies of 'talking back,' as . . . bell hooks termed it, to patriarchal authority" (210) and thus serve as sources of empowerment for their users.

controversial as the term “mommy blogger,” yet general discourses in academe often attempt to dismiss personal blogs as an inferior, narcissistic form of writing. As Daniel W. Drezner reports in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Blogs are an outlet for unexpurgated, unreviewed, and occasionally unprofessional musings. . . .Today’s senior faculty members look at blogs the way a previous generation of academics looked at television–as a guilty, tawdry pleasure that should not be talked about in respectable circles” (B7). Drezner’s perspective reflects the general consensus in academe–blogging is a hobby that should not be taken seriously.[80] In academe, personal blogs, in particular are not highly regarded. Such blogs are considered “superficial, quotidian,” “not rigorous enough,” “too completely in the moment,” and tend to “encourage fast writing and thought rather than deep consideration and reflection” (Walker 136). Although blogging has increased in popularity among faculty in recent years, it still remains a largely marginalized practice in academe.

The reasons for negative rhetoric concerning blogs in academe are varied. Foremost among them is that academic work is based upon a hierarchy which includes a network of citations, peer review, and publication. To establish *ethos* in academe, one must adhere to this publication process, and many academics are not comfortable with blogs because they circumvent the process entirely. Clearly, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital” is at work here: “The fact that anyone can easily start a blog makes it suspect from the perspective of the cultural elite” (Halavais 122). Furthermore, the very elements which make blogging valuable–“a networked audience, open

[80]In “Scholarly Blogging,” Alexander Halavais echoes this statement, noting that “popular opinion often sees blogging as faddish and trivial” (122).

conversation, low barriers to entry, and transparency–are also most threatening to established strictures of academic behavior" (Halavais 123).[81] Since blogging has a tendency to disrupt existing hierarchies, it is not looked upon favorably in academe.

A more specific reason why personal blogs, in particular, may be perceived as inferior in academe is their tendency to combine both professional and personal content. On *Roxie's World,* for example, one is just as likely to encounter a post detailing the academic lecture "The Humanities Are Not a Luxury: A Manifesto for the 21st Century" as one is to stumble upon a post about Thanksgiving dinner complete with a family recipe for pecan pie. There is a blurring of the lines between public and private spheres in personal blogs, which many academics find troubling (Halavais 123). Blogs which combine the personal and the professional are often perceived as risky endeavors. Since the blogger's professional role, and perhaps even his/her association with a specific university or department, are evident, including personal content may expose sensitive institutional issues or reveal the blogger's beliefs on controversial topics. A number of professors have been fired or reprimanded due to controversial blog content,[82] and there is no means of measuring the number who may have been denied interviews or positions due to opinions stated on their blogs.[83] Blogging is considered detrimental to a burgeoning academic career since search committees often explore a candidate online

[81]The perceived threat of blogging may be unsubstantiated, however. As Jill Walker points out, blogging in its current form cannot "fully replace traditional publication" (136). Duration and accessibility are two advantages of traditional publication which cannot be found in the blogosphere, a place where it often proves difficult to track down a blog discussion that occurred a year ago (136).

[82]See, for example, "The Lessons of Juan Cole: Can Blogging Derail Your Career?" by Siva Vaidhyanathan. It is suspected that Cole was denied a tenured position at Yale based on his blog content which was, according to *Inside Higher Education,* "largely critical of U.S. foreign policy and of Israel's government."

[83]In response to such concerns, the academic fem bloggers in this study often operate behind a pseudonymous web presence to avoid directly revealing their professional identities.

before considering whether to interview him/her (Withrow). Thus, the academic who maintains a personal blog is still a marginalized figure in the blogosphere and beyond. Academic fem bloggers are at an increased risk for marginalization due to personal attributes (gender) and professional interests (feminism) which may further conflict with the perspective(s) of those in power in academe.

A reflection of blogging's lack of value in academe is evident in the fact that blogging does not (in most institutions) count towards tenure or promotion. In "The Blogosphere as a Carnival of Ideas," Henry Farrell states that "while blogging has real intellectual payoffs, it is not conventional academic writing and shouldn't be an academic's main focus if he or she wants to get tenure." Some scholars are against blogs counting toward tenure in any manner, yet others argue that blogs should count towards tenure–just not to the same degree as scholarly publishing. Blogs have been described as a form of public intellectual engagement, and even Farrell claims that "they might reasonably count it [blogging] toward public-service requirements." Academic Blogger Bill Wolff claims that such blogs should count as public service or as evidence of teaching engagement and reflection. Comments such as these have helped to mitigate overtly negative views of blogs in academe, yet blogging is still classified as a risky endeavor and is often judged as best placed outside of the institutional hierarchy.[84]

[84]Although blogging is still largely viewed as an inferior form of writing in academe, some fields, such as Digital Humanities, have begun to consider blogging more seriously. In a piece from *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* Adeline Koh argues that blogging and other forms of digital scholarship rely upon "post-publication" rather than pre-publication review. In this form of review, "academics disseminate ideas freely on the internet first, then engage with comments as a type of 'peer review' that exists "post-publication." Koh maintains that academics are uncomfortable with such practices because they disrupt "the politics of gatekeeping" in their "demand that review committees learn a new set of skills, language, jargon and criteria for determining what constitutes merit."

From critiques of both mom blogs and academic blogs, it is clear that the blurring of boundaries between public and private information is a source of discomfort for many people. Judgment is directed at the practice of publishing “private” information online. Mom blogs transmit discourses on topics once only discussed among friends and family while academic fem blogs address issues in academe which overlap with one’s personal life. The combination of the professional and personal content is perceived as a violation of both genre norms and social roles which makes some readers uncomfortable. However, there are benefits to be gained from examining such hybrid genres. The potential for public participation can help writers to develop their skills and to become part of tightly woven communities online. Furthermore, the breaking of genre conventions also helps to introduce new voices into the public sphere–voices which might have otherwise been silenced. Overall, as public forms of “private writing,” women’s personal blogs introduce alternative roles for participants that challenge traditional notions of the autonomous author. These blogs provide an excellent case study for establishing how participant roles function in digital, social media since they enable us to observe how these roles play out at both the individual textual level (blog post) and at the community level (blogosphere). The following section will examine the selection process used to obtain a sample of women’s personal blogs for this study and the methodology used to conduct this investigation.

Sample Selection and Methodology

The blogs in this study were classified into one of two categories–parenting blogs or academic fem blogs–based on blog content and points of reference outside of the blogs such as popular blogging websites. Blogs were chosen based on the following criteria: established by bloggers who self-identified as female, currently active/publishing posts (as of 2010), and loosely classified as personal (rather than professional) blogs. Five blogs in each category were then examined closely to discern the ways in which bloggers situate themselves as participants and community members within the blogosphere.

The selection of blogs was based on authoritative blogging venues in each genre. Five parenting blogs–*Amalah, Dooce, Finslippy, Her Bad Mother,* and *Whiskey in My Sippy Cup*–were chosen from *Babble,* an online parenting magazine aimed at educated, urban parents. The five blogs chosen for my sample were among the "Top 50" mom blogs selected by *Babble* in 2010. Due to their less commercially-oriented nature, selection of academic fem blogs required a more complex process. A post on "Academic Blogs" was located on *Crooked Timber,* a widely-read political blog that features over a dozen well-known academics as contributors.[85] Dr. Crazy's current blog, *Reassigned Time 2.0,* was among the blogs identified in this *Crooked Timber* post. *Reassigned Time 2.0* was subsequently used as a means of locating the four other academic fem blogs which ultimately became a part of my sample: *Bardiac, Clio Bluestocking Tales, Historiann,* and *Roxie's World*. Since no specific criteria for defining an "academic fem blog" exist, blogs by female academics were chosen based on their participation within a particular group who defined themselves as blogging through a feminist lens. The ten blogs selected for this study are identified in Table 1.

[85]*Crooked Timber* was identified as one of seven influential academic blogs and identified as "an intellectual global powerhouse" in an article in *The New York Times* in April 2011 (Paul).

Table 1 Women's Personal Blogs Chosen for Study

Blog	Pseudonym and Real Name (if Provided)	Synopsis
Academic Fem Blogs		
Bardiac http://bardiac.blogspot.com/ *Tagline:* Just another academic blogger	"Bardiac" No offline name given	"Feminist, female Shakespearean who also teaches composition regularly, early modern literature, Chaucer on occasion, graduate classes." Includes professional and personal content on blog.
Clio Bluestocking Tales http://cliobluestockingtales.blogspot.com/ *Tagline:* Sounding my barbaric yawp, by which I mean "mostly bitching and moaning," but some history and stuff, too.	"Clio" No offline name given	Academic blogger who is an historian, teacher, and writer at a university on the East coast. Includes professional and personal content on blog.
Historiann http://www.historiann.com/ *Tagline:* History and sexual politics, 1492 to the present	"Historiann" Ann M. Little	Academic blogger who also serves as Associate Professor in the History Department at Colorado State University and is the author of several scholarly works. Includes professional and personal content on blog, yet blog has a more "professional" feel than many others.
Reassigned Time http://reassignedtime.blogspot.com/ *Reassigned Time 2.0* http://reassignedtime.wordpress.com/ *Tagline:* There may be a time and a place for everything. The difficulty is figuring out when and where.	"Dr. Crazy" No offline name given	Long-time academic blogger who is also Associate Professor of English at a regional university in the Midwest. Includes professional and personal information on blog.
Roxie's World http://roxies-world.blogspot.com/ *Tagline:* Politics. Pop Culture. Basketball. Dog Stuff. Queer Stuff. Higher Ed. New Media. Pretty Pictures. Puns. Books. Righteous Anger. Cock-Eyed Optimism. Persistent Irreverence. From a Queer, Feminist, Critter-Affirming Perspective. Why? Because Dog Is Love, and Tenure Means Never Having to Say You're Sorry.	"Roxie Smith Lindemann" Marilee Lindemann	Academic fem blogger who is also Associate Professor of English and Director of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies at the University of Maryland. Writes under the persona of her deceased terrier. Includes professional and personal information on blog.

Table 1 Continued

Blog	Pseudonym and Real Name (if Provided)	Synopsis
Mom Blogs		
Amalah Tagline: [āim'a'lä] http://www.amalah.com/	"Amalah" Amy (Storcher)86	Lives in Washington, DC area with her husband, three young sons, and pets. Began blogging as a SAHM but now engages in various writing endeavors online. Includes primarily personal information on blog.
Dooce http://www.dooce.com/ Tagline: Changes monthly	"Dooce" Heather B. Armstrong	Lives in Salt Lake City with her husband, two daughters, and two dogs. Most famous of the "mommy bloggers." Earns a sizeable income from her blog. Includes primarily personal information on blog.
Finslippy http://www.finslippy.com/ Tagline: The Life and Work of Alice Bradley Wading in the Shallow End Since 2004	"Finslippy" Alice Bradley	Lives in Brooklyn with her husband, son, and pets. Includes primarily personal information on blog. Also publishes nonfiction and fiction in a variety of other venues.
Her Bad Mother http://herbadmother.com/ Tagline: Bad is the New Good	"Her Bad Mother" Catherine (Connors)	Recently moved from Canada to New York with her husband, son, and daughter to become the Director of Community and Social Good at Babble. Began blogging as a SAHM but now engages in various writing endeavors online. Includes primarily personal information on blog.
Whiskey in My Sippy Cup (WIMSC) *http://www.whiskeyinmysippycup.com/* *Tagline: A Mediocre Mom Blog or* *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Mediocrity*	"Mr. Lady" (Shannon)	Lives in Houston with her husband and three school-age children. Began blogging as a SAHM but now engages in other writing endeavors online and also works from home. Includes primarily personal information on blog.

[86]Parenthesis here indicate that while the blogger's full offline name is not given in her "about" section or bio, no effort is made to hide the name and it is visible elsewhere on the blog.

As evident from Table 1, a variety of blogs in each of the two sub-categories were chosen. All bloggers in the “academic fem blogger” category self-identified as female academics, and all bloggers in the “mom blogger” category self-identified as mothers. All academic fem bloggers were employed full-time in academe and used their blogs as a means of addressing both personal and professional issues. All mom bloggers primarily addressed issues pertaining to their families and life at home, although a few did venture into more public territory with discussion of their other writing ventures and outside means of employment.

This dissertation combines a broad, overall rhetorical analysis with a methodology derived from Susan C. Herring’s model of computer mediated discourse analysis (CMDA). Herring’s model of CMDA was chosen for a number of reasons. First, this model can be adapted to a multitude of disciplines, including rhetorical analysis, primarily because “it is not a single method but rather a set of methods from which the researcher selects those best suited to her data and research questions” (6). CMDA is a flexible approach which is applicable to any “analysis of logs of verbal interaction” which appear online (3). However, this approach is grounded in analysis of text and observations of behaviors online rather than only in theory, and thus provides an empirical foundation upon which to base judgments about digital rhetoric (3). Overall, Herring’s model of CMDA identifies four domains of language, ranging from the smallest unit to the largest unit:

1. *Structure:* Includes typography, orthography, word formations, sentence structure

2. *Meaning:* Includes meanings of words and utterances as well as larger functional units
3. *Interaction:* Includes turn-taking, topic development, and negotiating interactive exchanges
4. *Social Behavior:* Includes "linguistic expressions of play, conflict, power, and group membership"

While analysis of all of the criteria within Herring's domains was not possible within my study, CMDA was deemed appropriate for this study due to its emphasis on macro-level issues which are relevant to examining broad institutions such as authorship and participation. Negotiating interactive exchanges and examining linguistic expressions of group members, identity, and power were macro-level areas of concern.[87] Analysis of these macro-level issues falls within the domain of rhetorical analysis rather than linguistic analysis primarily because one analyzes these behaviors not only within their specific online context but also in conjunction with their effects upon the reader, a researcher, or a general audience. Herring's latter two categories, in particular, reflect this emphasis since they consider interactions and social behavior which are an inherent part of rhetorical analysis.

[87]Herring notes that "the potential–and power–of CMDA is that it enables questions of broad social and psychological significance, including notions that would otherwise be intractable to empirical analysis, to be investigated with fine-grained empirical rigor." Furthermore, Herring's original study does not include the expression of identity within her domains; however, a study by Angela Haas extends Herring's original methodology by adding this criterion since, as Haas states, an expression of identity "impacts the perceptions and social behaviors that take place online" (67). It seems fitting to include expressions of identity as part of online rhetorical analysis since identity is a central factor in Burke's conception of rhetoric. In *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke notes that we are constantly using rhetoric to shape and reshape our identities in our quest to identify with and belong to certain social groups (27-28).

Overall, my study falls into the realm of rhetorical analysis because it considers not just the ways in which participants who identify as bloggers express their perspectives of the author-like roles which they adopt but also examines how rhetoric is used to convey these perspectives to the audience. It adopts the integrated Boothian perspective on rhetorical theory, demonstrating how roles traditionally identified as "author" and "reader"– when adopted by participants in social media–are interdependent and indicative of a sense of community which is necessary for personal blogs to thrive as a genre. There are two areas of analysis by which participants who identify as bloggers attempt to situate themselves as community members, via terms of self-reference and via interactions with readers. The methods used for analyzing each area are addressed in the following chapter.

Ethical Considerations

I chose to approach this project as a rhetorical analysis rather than as an ethnographic analysis. Thus, no contact with any of the bloggers was pursued, and permissions to use the blogs in this study were not sought. All blogs in this sample are widely available public documents featured on *Babble, Crooked Timber*, and other authoritative blogging websites, so there is no need for concern over the privacy of individual bloggers. Contact with bloggers was avoided since knowing their blogs were under study might encourage the alteration or removal of some material. To gain the most unbiased sample in the most "natural" online context possible, it was necessary to conduct an anonymous rhetorical analysis.

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY: PARTICIPANT ROLES IN WOMEN'S PERSONAL BLOGS

Since participant role(s) vary depending upon the medium and genre in which they are adopted, this chapter explores how participant role(s) function specifically in the specific genre of women's personal blogs. This genre was chosen because it provides an excellent case study for establishing how participant roles are negotiated in social media. It enables us to observe how such roles play out in a genre where users appear to adopt more author-like roles; in other words, an asymmetry exists between users in personal blogs since the blogger appears to wield a large degree of authority over the text and the interactions which occur there. If the participant role proves applicable to women's personal blogs, then it can be applied more broadly to other forms of social media such as wikis and content-sharing sites where overtly collaborative models of content creation more closely resemble participation. It should be briefly noted that women's personal blogs do not vary substantially from other forms of personal blogs in terms of genre characteristics–most feature a mix of professional and personal content and include brief episodic posts and the comment function. Since my study is concerned with "authorship" as it occurs online, this chapter will focus primarily upon how bloggers situate themselves as community participants through rhetorical strategies such as adopting roles in which they claim to speak for a group and acknowledging their readers and negotiating authority with them.

Blogs as Digital Communities

The very idea of rhetoric operates in conjunction with community since the concept of the "rhetorical situation" presupposes an audience. "A Rhetorical History of Authorship" emphasized that it was only with the proliferation of print that the author became distanced from the rhetorical situation and from the audience–as well as from the community surrounding a text. However, digital, social media, with their interactive capabilities, have once again brought the idea of community to the forefront. Since "community" will be a unifying concept throughout this chapter, it is necessary to arrive at a consensus of what that term means in digital, social media.

Although our understanding of "community" has not evolved quite as radically as that of identity, it has nonetheless changed in recent years. Online communities–formerly known as virtual communities–were first defined by Howard Rheingold in *The Virtual Community* as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (xx). Despite its generality, Rheingold's definition emphasizes that duration and human connection are central components in online communities. With the ubiquity of the Internet, the concept of online communities has become commonplace. Most Americans are likely to belong to at least a few communities online with Facebook and Internet discussion forums being some of the most likely contenders. Rheingold points out that virtual communities are different from physical communities in one important aspect–while traditional communities are based upon characteristics such as the geographic proximity of group members, virtual communities rely almost exclusively on language to maintain cohesion. This reliance upon language provides fertile ground for rhetorical study of such communities.

Websites devoted to a particular ailment would be considered online communities. For example, the *Celiac.com* site features a broad array of different discussion forums relevant to gluten-free living, including topics such as "Related Disorders" and "Gluten-Free Restaurants." In these discussion forums, authorship is fairly dispersed since most members have a similar degree of authority–with the exception of moderators who monitor forums for uncivil discourse and ban participants who refuse to comply with forum policies. A sense of community is fostered not only through the site itself as a central location for individuals with a common interest or ailment but also through the discussions which take place there and help to establish human relationships in an often "faceless" realm.

The sense of community established in blogs is different from that of discussion forums. Online blogging communities are initially dependent upon individual blogger personas and their stories as shaped by language rather than by the content of many different contributors. Personal blogs are not faceless, generic sites like discussion forums but, rather, are kept by individuals and are perceived as "unedited personal voices" (Winer). Thus, individual presence plays a definite role in whether a sense of community is established on a personal blog. Since a blogger's persona and narrative style are the first points of contact, she must have a strong individual participant presence before she begins to attract attention and to establish connections with and amongst readers. A successful blogger is viewed as capable of producing rhetorical action, even to the extent of spurring readers to write response posts on their own blogs. As blogger and readers interact, particularly across multiple blogs, the line between these roles grows increasingly blurry in online blogging communities.

While a “blogger-participant” acts as the “author in residence” by producing content for her blog, “reader-participants” play an important role by providing support for the blog through direct comments and through resonance, as previously discussed. Allowing readers to participate in the construction of meaning on the blog helps to enhance engagement, or the degree of interactions occurring between the blogger and readers and also amongst the readers themselves (Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody). Aspects of blogging which contribute to engagement include the reader comment function and the use of questions at the end of posts to prompt responses. Readers have come to expect the opportunity to participate and are likely to take their readership elsewhere when they are denied this opportunity (Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody 266). Furthermore, since they are the ones invested with sole power to judge whether or not the blog merits readership readers are provided with a type of authority. In particular, bloggers who achieve “celebrity blogger” status such as Dooce are highly dependent upon their followers to support them. After all, if one is a professional blogger whose livelihood depends upon advertising revenue generated by the blog, then one must demonstrate evidence of a considerable following to be paid top dollar for such advertisements.

Participant roles of blogger and reader are interdependent and may be occupied simultaneously by the same individual in the blogosphere. Such interdependence demonstrates the sense of community which is necessary for a blog to thrive on a larger scale. After all, the blogger may not participate in the larger blogging community unless she first builds her own community with readers. In cases where a blogger's reputation extends beyond her own blog, a sense of community is established with other bloggers via mechanisms such as blogrolls, hyperlinks, and in-post references. In these blogging communities, like attracts like, so academic fem bloggers, for example, will link to similar blogs and so forth. For example, Dr. Crazy is revered within a circle of academic fem bloggers while Catherine Connors of *Her Bad Mother* is well-known among specific groups of mom bloggers. The boundaries of such communities are fluid and dynamic, meaning that members may come and go and there really are no clear "rules" for membership other than engaging in civil conversation.

In this multi-layered rhetorical situation, bloggers view themselves as community participants. They are participants within the community of their very own blogs and also in larger communities within the blogosphere (mom blogosphere, academic blogosphere). Often, the success of a blogger in establishing her role as a participant in her own blog-community through the strategies discussed in the following sections is what makes or breaks her presence in larger blogging communities online.

Bloggers' Terms of Self Reference

The first area of analysis in my study is concerned with self-referential descriptions of the participant roles adopted by bloggers in order to determine how bloggers rhetorically situate themselves. In this section, I seek to answer the question "From a blogger's perspective, what participant-like role(s) does she adopt?" In the ten sample blogs, posts from 2010 were searched for commentary on blogging and authorship using the terms “blog,” “post,” “author,” “participant,” writer,” and “writing.”[88] Posts were also manually scanned for discussions relevant to writing, blogging, or authorship. Posts were then read and categorized based on common topoi related to participant roles. Overall, rhetorical analysis of post content was conducted with the following questions in mind using Herring’s model of computer-mediated discourse analysis:

1. How does the blogger perceive of herself as a writer or a participant?
    a. Specifically, what lexical choices are used by the blogger to describe the role(s) that she adopts?
    b. What is the meaning of these lexical choices?
    c. Can these lexical choices be classified into distinct topoi relevant to specific role(s) adopted by the blogger?
2. From an academic researcher’s perspective, how is the blogger situated as a writer or a participant?
    a. Specifically, what lexical choices are used by the blogger to describe the role(s) that she adopts?
    b. What is the meaning of these lexical choices?
    c. Can these lexical choices be classified into distinct topoi relevant to the specific role(s) adopted by the blogger?

[88]Only content from the year 2010 along with general blog features were used for analysis. General blog features include non-post related content such as the blog title, subject line, and “about” section.

d. How does content of the immediate post help to shape the role(s) adopted by the blogger?

The following questions are addressed from conclusions that I drew as an academic researcher rather than from the blogger's perspective:

1. What participant roles do bloggers adopt?
2. What rhetorical appeals or strategies help to shape each of these roles?
3. How do these roles function rhetorically within the context of women's personal blogs and within the larger context of the blogosphere?

Overall, common topoi regarding participant roles were identified, and a rhetorical analysis of these topoi was conducted for all ten blogs. My hypothesis–which was that bloggers would describe roles which situated them as members of a community–was largely correct.

The most common participant roles occurred when bloggers characterized themselves as empowered writers and represented blogging as an empowering act. Within the empowered writers topoi, two distinct roles for community-oriented participants emerge: storytellers and truth-tellers. When adopting the storyteller role, bloggers identify themselves as storytellers and/or discuss their blogs as possessing narrative-like qualities. Some bloggers also identify blogging as the practice of "truth telling" about a variety of issues confronting women, including motherhood, marriage, and life in academe and, as such, adopt a truth-teller role. The final and least common role which was addressed was that of inferior writer. Often, these posts characterize blogging as a non-traditional, inferior form of writing. Bloggers express perceptions about the inferiority of their role as bloggers when compared to writers of more established genres such as books. In particular, the first two participant roles–storyteller and truth-teller–were roles through which bloggers were empowered as community members since they are roles through which bloggers claim to speak for a group.

None of these roles are mutually exclusive. A blogger may adopt multiple roles within the same blog or even within the same post. For example, statements voicing the idea that bloggers are inferior writers are less prevalent than statements addressing other topoi, yet such statements often appear on the same blogs where bloggers adopt more empowering roles. Another caveat is that in posts which featured these topoi, it was rare that the blogger directly self-identified with the roles discussed here (storyteller, truth-teller). In other words, bloggers rarely came right out and said "I am a storyteller." Instead, some bloggers used forms of indirect reference–by calling blogging "storytelling," for example–while the majority of the posts depended upon my inferences to classify them into one of (or, in some cases, a combination of) these roles.

Blogger as Empowered Writer

The majority of discussions identify bloggers as writers who are empowered through community-oriented participant roles. These discussions emerge both among the bloggers themselves and within the scholarly articles written on the topic.[89] In our sample, there are a number of posts which reveal that bloggers view themselves as

[89]Discussions regarding blogging as an empowering act for women rarely take place in mainstream media. For examples of such discussions, see Lindemann's "The Madwoman with a Laptop: Notes Toward a Literary Prehistory of Academic Fem Blogging" and Lopez's "The Radical Act of Mommy Blogging: Redefining Motherhood Through the Blogosphere."

participants who are empowered through the sense of community established on their blogs. The following post on *Her Bad Mother* emphasizes blogging as empowerment:

> I spoke a lot with people last week about the *power* of social media, about how we who use social media are so *empowered* by this medium . . . . This medium is *powerful*. We who are using this medium are *powerful*. But there's more to it than that. It's the medium–and that medium is us, our voices, magnified through the tool that is social media–*and* the message. (emphasis mine)

This post makes a strong association among blogging, community, and empowerment. Her Bad Mother's lexical choices establish that it is not only social media which is empowering but also the users who harness the power of this new medium ("we," "us," "our voices") together. Many subsequent discussions of blogging as empowerment follow this same type of logic by identifying the power of social media to make voices audible and to affect change. While this sample post provides a general discussion of how social media is empowering through the sense of community established there, there are also specific authorial roles which bloggers associate with empowerment. In particular, bloggers identify with participant roles in which they claim to speak for a group, including blogger as storyteller and blogger as truth-teller.

Blogger as Storyteller

In general, storytelling refers to the act of conveying events in narrative form in any medium, including print. Storytelling is by far the most common community-oriented participant role acknowledged by bloggers. One can find countless examples of storytelling at work on any given blog, and multiple rhetorical strategies are used by bloggers in their conversations about storytelling. Strategies include the use of direct lexical references to storytelling and first-person collective pronouns as well as comparisons of blogging to other more well-established genres.

This section will examine some statements which bloggers use to refer to themselves as storytellers and to refer to the practice of blogging as storytelling. First, there are direct references to bloggers as storytellers and to blogging as storytelling. In one post Amy Storcher of *Amalah* discusses the reactions of her husband's coworkers to the revelation that she is a blogger.[90] She counters criticism with her statement, "I try to tell stylized stories with a lot of humor." In a similar post, Catherine Connors of *Her Bad Mother* refers to blogging as "storytelling" in a number of her posts which are similar to the one included above. Both bloggers suggest that storytelling via blogging is an empowering experience and use this participant role to situate themselves as community members who feel that they can speak for a group through such a role.

In addition to direct lexical references to "stories," "storytelling," and "storyteller," there are more subtle cues which ascribe narrative significance to blogging. Several of the bloggers use words and phrases which, when considering the CMDA model category of "meaning," indicate that they view their blogs as narratives through the use of language associated with this genre (i.e. "characters," "plot"). For example, Amalah states, "Let's check in with our principal characters" and then offers a hilarious update on all of the members of her family from her children all the way down to the

[90]In this encounter, the coworkers exude a series of stereotypical responses about blogging, including "Oh, God, BLOGS. Really?," "Aren't blogs kind of stupid?," "Who has time for that? I mean, I guess if you stay home," "I can't imagine putting stuff about our life on the Internet," and "the child molesters. And pedophiles. Aren't you worried about that?"

family pets. Another post–this one by Dr. Crazy–identifies the storytelling that takes place on blogs as an empowering act:

> blogging hasn't stopped being interesting for me. In contrast, Twitter and Facebook have *always* been uninteresting to me, because at the end of the day they are bereft of nuance and they are narratively so constrained as to offer very little in the way of plot or character development.

From Dr. Crazy's statement about the lack of "nuance" in other genres, the reader can infer that part of what makes blogging unique and engaging is its association with narrative and, by relation, the blogger's association with the role of storyteller. Despite the different points of view held by these bloggers, each emphasizes that the ability to take a narrative or character and to expand upon it is a key strength of blogs.

While direct and subtle references to storytelling are quite common, statements which compare blogging to other well-established narrative genres are a more subtle means of characterizing blogging as storytelling. For example, in a post about the power of social media, Her Bad Mother states,

> We are only as powerful as the *stories* we tell, and our *stories* are only as powerful as the heart and soul that drives them, ... we connect with other hearts and voices and inspire them to join us in our *story*, our song, our prayer. . . . we are the *storytellers*, we are the voices raised in a kind of narrative prayer, we are the medium, and the message, and we can change the world."[91] (emphasis mine)

[91]For the full post, see *Her Bad Mother*'s "We Are the World."

This post features multiple references to “stories” and “storytelling” and includes the first-person plural pronoun “we” which emphasizes the communal nature of the stories being told on women’s personal blogs. Of particular significance is that Her Bad Mother evokes other well-known genres that are also expressive forms of writing (“song,” “narrative,” “prayer”). “Narrative”–a term associated with storytelling–is combined with another more well-established genre (“prayer”) in an attempt to characterize storytelling as a communal act which is ritualized through blogging. Most significant, however, is that Her Bad Mother is not the only blogger who uses such comparisons in her discussions about blogging and storytelling. On *Whiskey in My Sippy Cup*, Mr. Lady also identifies her blog with a well-established genre when she states that the blog is a “song” for herself and her daughter. Such references are indicative of the personal, expressive nature of the stories shared through blogs, yet they also compare blogging with other well-established, socially-accepted expressive genres, thus serving as attempts to legitimize the blog as a genre and, by association, to legitimize the blogger as a writer.

From the content of these posts, it is evident that bloggers claim to adopt the role of storyteller, but from a reader’s perspective, is this an accurate assessment of what actually takes place in many personal blogs? The short answer is “yes.” The blogger establishes herself as protagonist in many of these stories through the use of first-person pronouns while the narrative structure of many posts provides readers with a beginning, middle, and end. As Bryan Alexander points out in *The New Digital Storytelling*, “the personal sense associated with diaries also enabled ‘blogger’ to emerge as a category . . . letting us think of blogs as character vehicles. This, too, situates blogs well for story thinking" (48). Overall, these tried-and-true narrative techniques ensure that bloggers generate reader interest.

The narrative structure of blog posts is evidence of the storyteller role that bloggers play and of how this model fits in with categories such as interaction (or, more specifically, topic development) in Herring's CMDA. Bloggers are aware of these narrative conventions, including the need for a clear beginning, middle, and end. As Clio points out in a post critiquing blogging prompts, "How do you write that complicated story–or, rather, end it? The ending is so crucial." Indeed, the end of many blog posts either serves as a "wrap up" of sorts ("the moral of the story is . . .") or as an opportunity to engage readers through the use of questions. Bloggers even point out when they are disrupting these conventions. For example, at the end of a post about grossly underestimating the amount of time it would take to arrive at a wedding, Amalah states, "And everybody learned something very important about maps, but nothing about finishing up stories with any sort of actual point." This self-deprecating statement adds a dose of humor in hopes that readers will forgive Amalah for her less-than-stellar conclusion, thus showing that she is aware of the storytelling component inherent in blogging.

As a rhetorical strategy, storytelling is quite successful when the narratives addressed are relatable to large numbers of people. In personal blogs, the adoption of the storyteller role situates the blogger as a community member both by engaging the reader and by legitimizing the existence of personal blogs as a genre. Use of the narrative form and the storyteller role serve as attempts to gain authority, or under Herring's model, as linguistic expressions of power, since bloggers are co-opting a genre popularized by well-established forms of media (oral storytelling; printed books) and attempting to use it in a new medium. Hence, the storyteller role enables the writer to retain some authority while reinforcing her presence in a community, and, as such, is a marker of the bloggers' adoption of the overall participant role as well.

Blogger as Truth-Teller

Although storyteller is the role most frequently identified by bloggers, it is not the only authorial role which bloggers address In several of the posts analyzed in this study, bloggers shape a participant role which relies upon truth telling. Truth-tellers often claim to speak for a group in order to expose injustices by confronting a particular perspective on an entity or a social institution. Bloggers adopting the truth-telling role rarely self-identify as truth-tellers, yet overt rhetorical cues from their posts reveal their perspective. Common rhetorical strategies used by bloggers who adopt the truth-teller role include direct lexical references to telling the “truth” and more complex maneuvers identified with social behavior such as identifying a target issue, positioning oneself as possessing “insider knowledge” on the target issue, and adopting metaphors which convey themes of concealment and revelation.

As community participants, bloggers identify part of their role to tell the truth to readers about institutions and social conventions about which they feel they have been silenced. Thus, personal bloggers often position themselves as individuals who possess “insider knowledge” about an issue and who are confronting a lasting silence concerning certain topics such as motherhood and life for women in academe. Such a maneuver readily positions the blogger as a participant who can speak for a group. The following post by Dr. Crazy addresses the issues that arise when truth-tellers attempt to confront a silence:

> I began in my first space [first blog] thinking that I had things I needed to say that I wasn't allowed to say in my daily life, but I wonder whether I felt that because it was true or because the model of the day for blogging in 2004 was a model of "telling it like it is"–whether we're talking about Invisible Adjunct or Dooce or whatever. I think I got over thinking I really was revealing some Important Truth about anything by the time I moved into my second space. . . . And I think I can say honestly that I don't blog because I think I have something Significant to say, but rather because the thing that I find most interesting right now is the way that blogging has the power to capture individual perspectives and to start substantial conversations. I don't want to be some sort of authority in my blogging life, and I'm not interested in being some poster girl for academic blogging, although I know I am in some ways, in spite of myself.

Dr. Crazy is reluctant to classify herself as a "truth-teller," yet the discussion in her post helps to legitimate the existence of this role. The idea of confronting a silence about a target issue is confirmed through Dr. Crazy's opening statement about her initial reasons for blogging: "I had things I needed to say that I wasn't allowed to say in my daily life." This phrase conveys that bloggers perceive of the truth-teller role as an opportunity to react against a social institution by which they feel silenced. In this case, that institution is higher education, particularly from perspectives which are often marginalized in academe such as graduate students or non-tenured faculty members. Furthermore, Dr. Crazy's statement about "Telling It Like It Is" is important since it closely coincides with the role of "truth-teller" and mentions confessional-style blogs, one of which is part of our sample (*Dooce*). Although Dr. Crazy identifies the truth-telling model as the trend in 2004, I would argue that it still exists today in certain types of blogs as we have seen in previous examples, particularly in personal blogs.

When acting as truth-teller, a blogger often adopts the position of an insider providing information for those on the outside–and on behalf of those who may be too afraid to speak. Although Dr. Crazy does not self identify as a "truth-teller," reader responses to her blog support the idea that she possesses "insider knowledge" on certain topics. A comment from a reader who identifies himself as "Brandon Paul Weaver" confirms this point:

> I am a 22 year old senior in college and planning for graduate school . . . . I have not found a better place than this to get an education in terms of what to expect. . . . I have always found you honest and thoughtful and value every word. Reading this blog has been enlightening as often as it has been inspiring.

"Brandon's" statement indicates that he looks to Dr. Crazy's blog as an "honest" and "enlightening" source for "education" on academe and affirms that this blogger is engaging in truth telling for at least some of her readers, even if she does not self identify with that particular role. By providing insight to those outside of the tenure track on what it is like on the inside, Dr. Crazy is "bearing witness" to events that may be unfamiliar to the reader. Bearing witness is associated with truth telling because, as

Thomas Weitin points out, “anyone who witnesses anything and testifies to it (thereby fulfilling the function of witness) also takes on the obligation to tell the truth” (525). Even though she might not self-identify as a truth-teller, Dr. Crazy writes about the complexities of academic life, particularly within the humanities, and still functions as a source of insider knowledge for those who read her blog. This example illustrates how audience perceptions contribute to bloggers’ authorial roles and also alludes to the amount of accountability placed on the blogger in this situation.

In posts which characterize the blogger as truth-teller, metaphors of concealment abound. One such example is demonstrated in Dr. Crazy’s post above where the notion of “revealing some Important Truth” is mentioned. Another extended example of these metaphors occurs in Connors’ “Bad Mother Manifesto” where she claims that what she does as a blogger is an act of revelation: “I document all of these things and lay them bare for the world to see.” As Her Bad Mother states,

> Good Mothers are private, are modest, are *pudicae*, because Good Mothers tell no tales. . . . They do not share their failures. They do not share their struggles. . . .They do not tell stories about the dark and the difficulty and the anxiety and the impossibility of keeping one’s cool in the dead of night when the baby is shrieking and the toddler is crying and one hasn’t slept in weeks. They do not talk about shutting the door and ignoring the cries. They do not talk about intrusive thoughts. They do not talk about repeating the words *fuck I hate this fuck I hate this* like so many Hail Marys, like a meditation upon frustration, like a mantra of failure. They do not talk about these things, out loud.

This post is a powerful example of metaphors of concealment/revelation and insider knowledge. Verbs such as "tell" and "share" and examples which some readers might find shocking ("shutting the door and ignoring the cries," "intrusive thoughts") emphasize this post as an act of revelation. Mentioning genres such as "mantra," "meditation," and "prayer" aligns the frustrated mother's voice with those of sacred texts, ascribing it a value which it has not previously been granted. Metaphors which present themes of concealment are present in nouns ("veil," "walls") as well as adjectives ("hidden," "secret," "quiet," "private") which indicate obstruction. The idea of "the veil" is particularly significant because it is one of the central metaphors that Viviane Serfaty uses for the personal blog in her work *The Mirror and the Veil*. She argues that personal blogs function as both a mirror (to more clearly see oneself) and as a veil (to obstruct certain aspects of oneself). In online diaries, the veil is that technological barrier which allows users to obscure certain parts of themselves while emphasizing other parts (13). However, personal blogs such as *Her Bad Mother* operate as if they are lifting a veil, thus emphasizing the bloggers' roles as truth-tellers who possess "insider knowledge" on a particular phenomenon and can speak for a particular group regarding that phenomenon. In this case, the revelation concerns Her Bad Mother's "insider knowledge" on the reality of motherhood vs. the image of "the Good Mother." Through transparency Her Bad Mother creates a more realistic image of motherhood for her readers, which operates in opposition to the dominant discourse on the "Good Mother" and functions as an "expression of power" under Herring's model. The "truth" exposed on this blog is that the "Good Mother" is an ideal which no parent can live up to, and this passage emphasizes truth telling through blogging as an alternative to perpetuating this illusion. Through a variety of rhetorical strategies as well as through the publication of this "manifesto," Her Bad Mother positions herself as an insider proclaiming the truth about unjust social expectations. Overall, truth telling is another means by which the blogger establishes herself as a member of a group; in the case of mom blogs, the participant as truth-teller is one who speaks for a group that has been marginalized.

Storytelling and Truth Telling as Rhetorical Strategies

Although storyteller and truth-teller have been identified as participant roles, much discussion remains about how these roles might be used by bloggers to establish themselves as empowered community participants. Insight into the rhetoric of narrative as well as truth telling provides a deeper understanding of how these roles contribute to the "participant" role in personal blogs.

Storytelling involves the recounting of events by a narrator for a variety of rhetorical purposes. In *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric*, M. Jimmie Killingsworth identifies three rhetorical functions of storytelling: building community, reinforcing values, and performing a training function (138). Storytelling on blogs primarily functions in the first manner–building community (although it *may* fulfill either of the two functions to a lesser extent). Storytelling builds community in a variety of ways but, namely, by involving readers "to join in the event vicariously and thus feel included" (138). One means by which the reader feels included and emotionally engaged is by identifying with the storyteller or with a principle character in the story. Since all of the blogs examined in this study are personal blogs told from a first-person perspective, the person with whom the reader most often identifies is the blogger or, rather, her online persona. In this case, the act of community building takes place through positions such as bearing witness by association.

Through "bearing witness," the author has a direct association with the actions that he/she is narrating and involves the reader vicariously in these events (Killingsworth 140). In most personal blogs, the blogger acts as a storyteller who is recounting the events of her daily life, thus providing a direct association between author and content. But why do accounts of the mundane details of one's life draw such large followings of readers? (*Dooce* alone may have as many as 100,000 visitors per day.[92]) The answer lies in the likelihood that the event a blogger recounts is an experience with which the reader can identify. In *Rhetoric of Motives,* Kenneth Burke recognizes identification as one of the primary purposes of rhetoric since for persuasion to occur one party must identify with the other party (19-20). Rhetorical action is thus based upon a series of identifications. The principle of identification in blogs is the same one which makes reality television such a popular form of entertainment–the ability of the viewer to participate in the experience and to find "self-relevant goals and tasks" in a show. In this case, "attraction depends on authentic self-relevant situations" (Rose and Wood 290).

In women's personal blogs, narrative is a strong means of community building because an audience can identify with someone whose lifestyle is similar to theirs (or with someone whose lifestyle *appears to be* similar to theirs) more than they can with

[92]See Belkin's "Queen of the Mommy Bloggers."

someone whose lifestyle is significantly different (Killingsworth 20). Since personal blogs address life within a particular vocation (stay-at-home parenting, academe) they often recount events which are at least marginally familiar to readers, so readers have a personal, vested interest in the stories that are told. Readers might, for example, gain insight on how to handle an unruly child or how to write a statement of teaching philosophy. When readers identify in this manner, they are able to occupy a dual role in the blogger's life, to function both as spectators and as participants. This dual "identification" is confirmed by perusing the "reader comments" on any given blog. These comments are likely to reveal readers sharing similar experiences of their own and, perhaps, even offering support to the blogger or to other members of the blogging community.

When readers hear stories that they find familiar, they are able to relate to them and feel included in the act of storytelling. The following statement from *Dooce* provides an example of identification:

> I've said before that the story of most babies is pretty much just like the story of all the other babies who have ever lived in the world: pooping, crying, screaming, sleeping (and a lot of not sleeping), and then more pooping. I really feel like the Internet has given us back the village we lost so that in those early days we can help each other through the madness of it. That's why I feel like it's okay to write so much about Marlo, because it's the same story of a million other babies hopefully told in a way that we can all laugh about it enough to want to wake up tomorrow morning.

This post establishes that common experience is partially what makes such stories attractive to readers. As parents, many of *Dooce*'s readers can personally identify with the stories that she tells and thus feel less alone. Readers are often interested because the blogger is "bearing witness" by authenticating the reader's own experiences since she can identify with those being recounted on the blog.[93] If someone else is having these same experience–and, better yet, publishing them online to throngs of readers–then these experiences must be of some value. However, personal blogs do not always emphasize everyday experiences. A blogger may "bear witness" to an event that is unfamiliar to her readers. For example, Her Bad Mother discusses her trip to Africa for *Born HIV Free,*[94] and *Roxie's World* shares Moose and Goose's travels to Europe. Such instances allow readers to vicariously experience the events narrated by the bloggers through the stories that they tell.

Due to the identification between blogger and reader which occurs through the storytelling function, this role enables bloggers to abdicate some of the asymmetry and to claim status as participants speaking for a community. In storytelling, there is very little rhetorical distance between parties in the exchange. The blogger typically allows for reader comments on stories and even seeks specific feedback at times by using rhetorical maneuvers such as asking questions. Readers are free to chime in and offer

[93]Since such stories correspond with one's "real" life, they do not provide the "escapist" release that literature often provides. Killingsworth identifies this escapist function of fiction as "making mythic connections" and discusses it at length in *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric* (141).

[94]The *Born HIV Free* campaign was launched by the Global Project to provide education and medical care to HIV-positive mothers in hopes of preventing transmission to their children during pregnancy and delivery. In these posts, Her Bad Mother's role as storyteller often overlaps with her role as activist.

their own opinions or to convey their own experiences, and they often do through mechanisms such as reader comments.

Overall, storytelling is an example of Burke's theory of consubstantiality in action. By telling a story, each woman becomes part of the larger community yet also retains her own autonomous identity as a blogger within that community. Readers, too, may become a part of this community when they share their stories through comments. The blogger as storyteller is at once a part of and separate from the community of bloggers in which she participates. While each story is told by an individual woman, the stories belong to the community since they all share a common concern or vocation (academic work; parenting). A previously-mentioned post on *Her Bad Mother* echoes this point: "We are only as powerful as the *stories* we tell . . . . we connect with other hearts and voices and inspire them to join us in our *story* . . . we are the *storytellers*, . . . and we can change the world" (emphasis mine). With its use of first-person plural pronouns and verbs emphasizing a shared experience ("connect," "join"), this statement emphasizes the collective nature of women's personal blogs. It is representative of LeFevre's collective model of invention (82) and Virginia Woolf's discussion of collectivity among women writers: "Masterpieces are not single and solitary births. They are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (65). She states, "I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals'" (113). In other words, although an individual story may not amount to much on its own, when combined with the stories of many other women, meaning is made and a collective, audible voice is established.

Storytelling is not the only purpose of blogging, but it is the role which is most frequently discussed among and used by personal bloggers, and not without good cause. Even if stories fail in their purpose to teach a lesson, they will at least "build a communal relationship with the audience that may establish a foundation for further communication" (Killingsworth 144). Thus, storytelling in personal blogs typically serves as a foundation for posts in which bloggers adopt other roles. Storytelling deeply involves the reader in the narrative and often helps the reader to identify with the blogger as protagonist. In order for the blogger to successfully occupy other roles such as truth-teller, the reader must be personally invested, and storytelling provides the foundation for generating this personal investment. If the reader is not personally invested, then the rhetorical distance between blogger and reader that exists in the truth-telling role will most likely be too much for the reader to overcome and (s)he will lose interest in the blog. Thus, in order for readers to take the blogger's truth telling into consideration, a storytelling foundation must first be established.

Adopting the role of truth-teller in blogs builds community, reinforces values, and performs a training function just like storytelling, yet truth telling may result in a greater disjunction in authority between blogger and readers. Through the use of the term "truth" one is automatically granted rhetorical authority which, in turn, translates to a power differential when bloggers claim that they possess insider knowledge and can speak for a group. Although the blogger may pose as an authority who speaks for a community, rhetorically the blogger is never truly an authority on any topic since, as Killingsworth points out, modern rhetoric attacks the idea of absolute authority altogether: “outside of the given community, the agreed-upon authority must compete with other authorities” (12-13). The key phrase here is “community,” for within a specific community the blogger may be able to position herself as a truth-teller, but more commonly, she must harness the power of the blogging community in her truth-telling endeavor by granting readers some authority as well–otherwise her message will not be heard outside a specific niche within the blogosphere.

In the sample blogs, there are visible attempts to harness the power of community by mitigating the blogger’s authority. Most of these attempts involve the reader to some degree in the truth-telling endeavor. The following post from *Her Bad Mother* is one such example:

> We need to insist that our presence in the public sphere is good–is necessary–regardless of how we act, regardless of whether we, as women (not just as moms, because we are not only moms, we are not even *primarily* moms), comport ourselves in ways that are serious or silly or sexy or salty or in any manner subversive of what the public . . . expects of us. We need to insist that, to proclaim that, and to demand that that *truth* be accepted by–embraced by–the public, by all our publics, by everyone, by *us*. And we need to start by not denying any part of who we collectively are, not only as moms, but as women . . . and by demanding that all these parts of who we collectively are be taken seriously” (emphasis mine)

This post directly references the term "truth" to reveal Her Bad Mother's positioning of herself as a truth-teller. However, to rescind the role of absolute authority and to position herself on more equal ground with readers, Her Bad Mother represents herself as a truth-teller *within a community of truth-tellers*. Her use of anaphora, a common rhetorical device in preaching and politics, evokes speeches by motivational leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. which typically function as a "call to action" for a group that has faced oppression or marginalization and thus serves to unify rather than to position the speaker as an absolute authority. In this case, Her Bad Mother is reacting to an unflattering article about "mommy bloggers" in the *New York Times* by calling all women, particularly mothers, to demand that they "be taken seriously." To emphasize that collective action must take place, parallelism is coupled with strong verbs ("to insist," "to proclaim," "to demand") and collective first-person pronouns ("us," "we"). This passage exemplifies how the level of authority traditionally assigned to one assuming the role of truth-teller can be distributed throughout the community by shaping truth-telling as a social action.

The participant roles of storyteller and truth-teller both focus on "telling" which is indicative of action and empowerment. As Herring points out, "language is doing, in the truest performative sense on the Internet, where physical bodies (and their actions) are technically lacking" (2). As a form of language, telling is action online, and action is equated with accountability; in other words, bloggers are not perceived as disembodied voices; rather, they are real people, identifiable individuals who are held morally accountable for their words. Thus, while not held to the Romantic standard of producing works of genius, users of social media are expected to communicate responsibly. In *Talking Back,* bell hooks reveals how telling is a sign of empowerment since those who feel empowered do not fear retribution: African Americans frequently choose silence over punishment while "'got everything' white people . . . just tell all their business, just put their stuff right out there" (2). In hooks' perspective, individuals who tell are already empowered to some extent. Through telling-oriented roles, female bloggers indicate that they do not fear the repercussions for the messages that they seek to deliver. Their lack of fear is based upon the power of community harnessed through blogging. In this case, telling has a snowball effect–the more time that one invests in blogging, the more likely one is to attract a following and to be empowered through the community itself. One blogger standing alone to deliver a message would be intimidating, yet a blogger speaking with a community of supporters behind her has little to fear. Despite the empowerment granted by blogging and the roles which enable bloggers to position themselves as community members, new collective forms of "authoring" also breed new fears concerning accountability. Such fears are revealed in the final participant role which bloggers adopt–inferior writer.

Blogger as Inferior Writer

Although it was the exception rather than the rule, several posts in this sample represent bloggers as inferior writers and/or characterize blogging as an inferior writing practice. Of the ten bloggers in our study, four (*Amalah, Clio, Dooce, Finslippy*) identify with this role to some extent while two others (*Reassigned Time 2.0, Roxie's World*) characterize blogging as a distraction from "real work." It should be noted that there was no significant difference in the distribution of such content among parenting blogs and academic fem blogs. Posts which define the practice of blogging as inferior to other forms of writing rely primarily upon two rhetorical strategies–they compare blogging to "book writing" or they locate blogging near the bottom of a "genre hierarchy" and place book or research writing at the top. One example of the comparison strategy occurs on *Amalah:*

> I'm sitting here with hours of uninterrupted work time stretched out in front of me and absolutely no idea what to do first. . . . Finally get around to writing something besides hurried stream-of-consciousness drivel over here? Book proposal? Book outline? A hearty laugh because I don't even have an IDEA for a book, much less the attention span to write one . . .

In this post, Amalah associates blogging with "stream-of-consciousness drivel" which she contrasts with other forms of more important writing such as "book proposal" and "book outline." While the example from *Amalah* makes a comparison, the academic blog *Clio Bluestocking Tales* positions blogging within a genre hierarchy:

> there is a difference between journal writing and blog writing and research writing. The journal is simply stream of consciousness. The blog is pretty much the same but with more structure and an awareness of the audience. The research writing requires focus and concentration, two things that disappear as the semester progresses.

Clio's post creates a hierarchy, positioning journals at the bottom, blogs in the middle, and research writing at the top. Blogging is once again subordinated to other forms of writing. While they might seem unusual, these examples are only two among several which identify blogging as inferior.

Another point of similarity is that both Amalah and Clio use the phrase "stream of consciousness" to describe blogging. Amalah's choice of the phrase "hurried stream-of-consciousness drivel" associates blogging with negative–even, perhaps, senseless, communication acts–such as babble. Although Clio does not characterize blogging as harshly, she still uses the term "stream of consciousness" to position blogging as form of writing which requires little forethought. Traditionally, "stream of consciousness" is a narrative mode of writing associated with following a writer's chain of thought rather than with focusing on linearity, thus conveying the writer's thought process may operate at the expense of granting readers full comprehension of a text. Stream of consciousness is traditionally associated with more private forms of writing such as diaries and journals, and, as evident from years of exclusion of women's writing from the canon, private is often equated with inferior. Thus, it may be inferred that when bloggers use the phrase "stream of consciousness" they are referring to a style of writing which is perceived as being less formal than books. In contrast to the informality and inferiority of stream of consciousness writing, "book" writing is characterized as requiring a good deal of "focus and concentration" or "an attention span" as well as an "IDEA" (in all caps, for emphasis). The notion that the author of a formal text first needs to develop an original or insightful "IDEA" coincides with Howard's identification of originality as one of the properties of the autonomous model of authorship. Such statements are based upon the assumption that writing can only possess value if it requires focus and concentration and implies that valuable writing is composed by an autonomous writer cloistered away from society.

Although references to the "traditional model" of autonomous authorship are absent from most blog posts, the model lives on through the practice of categorizing hobby-oriented genres as inferior. The idea that blogging requires less concentration and occupies a lower position on the genre hierarchy is consistent with models of authorship which value originality or creative "genius" and autonomy rather than collectivity. In the digital era, we might imagine the participant frantically typing by the glow of her computer screen rather than scribbling away by candlelight, yet stereotypes abound. In posts such as these, "serious" writing is still perceived as an autonomous, original act even if the technologies used to compose there are different. Hence, "inferior writer" is the one role which demonstrates the effects when a blogger is rhetorically severed from the source of her empowerment (the community).

The characterization of blogging as inferior at least partly stems from the dissolution of traditional hierarchies. As Palfrey and Gasser point out, "The traditional hierarchies of control of news and information are crumbling, with new dynamics replacing the old" (256). As a genre of digital, social media, personal blogs contribute to the destruction of these hierarchies by inspiring communication and activism at the grassroots level. Through blogging and other forms of social media, new hierarchies are being formed, and accountability is altered since intermediaries such as publishing companies are no longer present in the rhetorical exchange. The dissolution of hierarchy is an issue which authorities and gatekeepers may find threatening and, hence, which accounts for the characterization of blogging as inferior.

Evidence for the tensions created by the hybrid rhetorical roles adopted in social media emerge through the inferior writers versus empowered writers dichotomy. The tendency to compare blogging to “book writing” or to locate blogging near the bottom of a “genre hierarchy” has its roots in print culture and the autonomous model of authorship practiced there. When blogging is viewed as another form of writing which exists alongside these print genres and is judged based on print criteria, it often does not fare well, even in bloggers’ own self descriptions. However, bloggers are empowered as community participants by adopting roles in which they claim to speak for a group. The participant model which one chooses to adopt on one’s own personal blog is often highly individualized and relevant to the blogger’s refusal to separate offline and online dimensions of her identity. Despite the blogger’s ability to publicly discuss participant roles on their own blogs, mainstream media have been slow to address the empowering potential of these specific blog genres and often still use the lens of print to compare blogging to other well established forms of writing such as books and academic publications. Bloggers are fighting a battle on their blogs, but by making their voices heard via the power of community harnessed through blogs perhaps they can confront these disempowering forces. Overall, the truth-teller and storyteller roles adopted by bloggers reflect the complexities of a genre which emphasizes the importance of both communities and of the individuals within these communities. These roles are indicative of the blended nature of digital participation. Blogging has, as Dr. Crazy points out, “the power to capture individual perspectives and to start substantial conversations." Thus, blogging is both individual and communal in nature, and the complexities of this aspect of blogging are exposed in the diverse participant roles adopted by bloggers.

Blogger-Reader Interactions

Participants who identify as bloggers often situate themselves as community members through the roles of storyteller and truth-teller. However, they also foster community building by acknowledging and negotiating authority with their readers through rhetorical strategies such as referring directly to the blog as a community, addressing readers as members of a community, offering statements of appreciation (both individual and collective) to readers, creating online spaces for members of the community, and organizing offline events associated with the blog community.

One of the most obvious means of establishing a sense of community on blogs is through direct references to blogs as "communities." Several of the bloggers in our study make references to the communities which exist on their blogs. For example, Dr. Crazy states,

> These changes have made this *community* look a whole lot more homogeneous, but I'm not sure that's because it is, or because anybody - whether me or my readers - intends to silence anybody else. I think it's just in a lot of ways the nature of how these *communities* develop. (*Reassigned Time;* emphasis mine)

In this post, Dr. Crazy addresses the shifting dynamics of community on this particular academic fem blog while Her Bad Mother, in the following post, refers to bloggers in general:

> I spoke a lot with people last week about the power of social media, about how we who use social media are so empowered by this medium, and about whether this changes everything, whether this–the power of a *community* on the Internet–changes the world. (*Her Bad Mother*; emphasis mine)

Both bloggers use "direct references" to signify their role as community participants. Dr. Crazy's use of the term "community" is casual–almost as if she has not given it a second thought–while Her Bad Mother's use of the term is more intentional. In particular, Dr. Crazy's statement, "it's just in a lot of ways the nature of how these communities develop," conveys the idea that a blogging "community" is something which unfolds or develops organically rather than something which is highly structured. This post establishes Dr. Crazy as a member of the blogging community but not necessarily as an authority within it. Her Bad Mother's post also uses direct reference to convey the potential for social media to bring people together as a community which, in turn, empowers them, and she places herself directly within that community through the use of phrases which use first-person pronouns ("we"). Overall, direct references to community found in these posts are exemplary of references found in other sample posts in that they emphasize the bloggers' role of community participant–not necessarily of community leader–and underscore the undeniably social nature of writing online which, in turn, challenges the Romantic model of autonomous authorship.

Some of the commentary which characterizes bloggers as community participants is less direct and relies on the bloggers' comments and actions which acknowledge others as a part of the writing process. For example, some bloggers offer blanket statements of appreciation to their readers while others mention specific bloggers by name in their posts. The post below from *Dooce* is an example of a blanket statement which graciously acknowledges the presence of community:

> we know we couldn't do it without my fantastic audience, a diverse group of people so generous that I credit them with saving my life during my postpartum depression. Here in this tiny space on the web is an example of just how awesome and life-altering the Internet can be.

Heather describes the experiences with her audience using flattering terms to appeal to readers' sense of *pathos*. The fact that she credits her readers with saving her life further strengthens the passage's *pathos*, and her description of the blog as "a tiny space" connotes a sense of closeness or community that is present on the site. All of these rhetorical maneuvers enhance the sense of community generated in the passage and position Heather strategically as a participant within her community of readers. Even though the level of authority granted to blogger and reader is not equally balanced in this case, it is designed to help readers feel as if they have a palpable effect on the blog itself which, in turn, helps them to feel valued as community members.

Rather than acknowledging a group of readers, some means of community building acknowledge a specific member within the blogging community. For example, instead of making a blanket statement, Clio thanks a specific blogger in her post:

> I want to move an exchange from the comments of my post on Writing Oddities because I want to thank Historiann especially for giving me a brainstorm. . . . Thank you so very much Historiann, for inspiring this passage!

Clio's statement of appreciation toward Historiann indicates a sense of familiarity between these bloggers. This passage directly mentions Historiann as the "inspiration" for a subsequent post, thus appealing to a sense of community among participants in this particular realm of the blogosphere. While posts such as this do not mention the blogger's role as "community participant," they certainly imply that a community surrounding this blog exists, and they also elevate the reader to a position which holds some degree of power within that community.

Another rhetorical maneuver which bloggers adopt that fosters community is using collective nicknames or terms of endearment to refer to their audience. For example, "Roxie" often refers to her readers as "kids," "darlings," "beloveds," and "my pretties"–all terms of endearment of a slightly condescending nature, which Lindemann readily points out in her article "The Madwoman with a Laptop."[95] Such methods of audience address connote affection while simultaneously creating a power differential between bloggers and readers: the party doing the naming is placed in a position of authority while the entity being named is positioned as subject (Nuessel 3). Evidence for this conclusion is also present in rhetorical theory. For example, in *Permanence and Change* Kenneth Burke indicates that our orientation toward an object is, at least in part, characterized by the name that we bestow upon it (7). Unfortunately, the naming object is often perceived as superior to the named subject, particularly when terms of address such as the ones noted above are involved. If such nicknames do not position blogger

[95]Roxie uses such terms not as a stand-alone device but, rather, as a means of ordering her readers around the Internet: "Push that button," she'll say. "Click on that link." "Sit down, kids. We need to talk" (Lindemann 216).

and readers on equal rhetorical ground, then what is their purpose? An interpretation offered by David Gilmore claims that nicknames function as a form of community naming and as “a verbal representation of a collective identity” (697). Thus, rather than fostering a sense of community among blogger and readers, nicknames may contribute to a sense of community among readers who are united through a common means of address.

Bloggers also establish a sense of community on their blogs by establishing virtual spaces for readers. Although not all of the bloggers in this study engaged in this technique, enough of them (three out of ten) engaged to make the practice noteworthy. The most well-known example of an online space for readers is the *Dooce Community* which can be accessed through Dooce’s blog. The welcome box on the site states, “We built this space for you to interact with other dooce readers, to ask questions and gather information from each other on topics that range from babies, to depression, to hair care, cameras and pets. Thanks for stopping by, now let's go have some fun!” The *Dooce Comunity* functions primarily as a gathering place where readers can post questions about topics of interest and other readers can respond to them. The community features a large number of discussion questions and forums that are sorted by category (Arts & Entertainment, Business & Finance, Consumer Electronics, Family & Relationships, etc). Dooce herself has very little textual presence in the community*;* however, the presence of the first-person pronoun (“we”) in the welcome statement complements her role as a participant. Overall, the *Dooce Community* functions as a self-governing entity to a large extent since readers moderate groups and forums and are encouraged to report uncivil behavior. It should be noted that the presence of ads is evident, so the site also functions as a source of revenue for Dooce. However, regardless of potential revenue, the *Dooce Community* is an online space where readers are united through the act of community building.

Other bloggers have also created online spaces for their readers to intensify the sense of community associated with their blogs. *Her Bad Mother's Basement,* another such site, is linked to the blog. The purpose of the *Basement* is reflected in the connotations of the term "basement" along with the *Basement'*s tagline "It's like a beanbag chair for your soul." The "basement" is an online space aimed at readers who feel the need to anonymously confess to feelings and/or misdeeds. When introducing the *Basement,* Her Bad Mother states:

> I wanted other people to know about it, and to want to hang out there. My secret clubhouse! For sharing secrets! Come on in! Which defeated my own original purposes, but still. . . . My own secret-sharing is not so secret here. But *your* secret-sharing *can* be. You can share whatever stories/confessions/appeals for support that you like, and you can do so totally anonymously. Your secrets will be safe with me. Promise.

The tone in this post is friendly and conversational, yet the lexical choices indicate that Her Bad Mother retains some degree of authority over the *Basement* since she retains a degree of figurative ownership over the secrets bestowed there.

Despite the fact that the *Basement* grants a space for readers to share their stories, Her Bad Mother establishes herself as the central authority figure on the site. For example, readers must email their stories to the blogger before they are posted, so she definitely has control over what is posted there She also has a set of "Secret Basement Guidelines":

> Norms of blog civility apply in spades here: be nice, be respectful, be a good friend. Be honest and open with your advice, if it's asked for - it's one of the best things about this space - but give that advice as you would give advice to a dear friend. Sensitively, with a hug. Blogtardage - heckling, calling names, being hurtful - will be deleted immediately, and offenders will be blocked from commenting.

The fact that Her Bad Mother has set up such guidelines connotes a sense of authority, and some of her word choices within the guidelines take on an imperative tone. Although the inclusion of such guidelines may disrupt the balance, leaving Her Bad Mother with more authority than her readers, the guidelines also help to maintain a sense of community among readers on the site by encouraging civil discourse. Furthermore, some of the subsequent language used in these guidelines is less than authoritative and seeks to position Her Bad Mother as a participant within the community of readers.

> There has been much story-telling and advice-seeking and support-giving and hug-dispensing, and the guests who have been sharing their stories have really felt the love. You all are wonderful friends, the kind of friends that one knows she can turn to when things are dark or rough or confusing or embarassing or all of the above.

Through this language Her Bad Mother is attempting to mitigate her position of authority by placing herself among–rather than above–her readers. The use of expressions associated with communal support and positive feelings ("story-telling," "advice-seeking," "support-giving," "hug-dispensing") arouse *pathos* in readers, thus perpetuating a sense of community. Her Bad Mother attempts to place herself on equal rhetorical ground with these readers by using the second person (*"You* are all wonderful friends") and by offering insight into specific feelings ("confusing or embarrassing"). Overall, *The Basement* is a pendulum of back-and-forth statements, so it is never entirely clear where Her Bad Mother stands. What is evident, however, is that this blogger both places herself among her readers and sanctions acts of confession, thus encouraging more readers to share and to perpetuate the sense of community there.

Virtual spaces for readers are not limited to mom blogs. Dr. Crazy at *Reassigned Time/Reassigned Time 2.0* has a virtual space constructed within her blog entitled "Higher Education: A Conversation." This space is not so much a separate locale (like the *Dooce Community* or *Her Bad Mother's Basement*) but, rather, a space within Dr. Crazy's blog which addresses a seven-part series of weekly posts on the state of higher education in the U.S. As Dr. Crazy explains,

> The idea behind this series is that there is value in creating a space within which to have a deep conversation about the present and potential future of higher education in the United States. This conversation should encourage contributions from individuals from both outside and inside academia, who espouse a variety

> of disciplinary, political, and theoretical perspectives, and who inhabit a range of locations within academic hierarchies

Dr. Crazy's use of phrases such as "creating a space" and "encourage contributions" indicates that she views the democratic exchanges which take place in this space as an essential part of fostering community on her blog. She invites readers to participate in the conversation and provides a clear set of guidelines to justify why she might impose her blogger authority on this space, for example, by deleting offensive comments. Dr. Crazy attempts to provide her readers with a space of their own, even if it functions in a somewhat limited manner within the confines of her blog. She also uses maneuvers which attempt to work beyond the confines of the blog interface by extending its capabilities and/or using it in non-traditional ways. For example, she uses the comment function in this initial post on "Higher Education: A Conversation" to link to each of her six subsequent posts on the topic. She also invites readers to extend the conversation by writing their own blog posts on the topic to which she will link. Inviting readers to make their own posts is a maneuver by which the blogger relinquishes authority and positions herself as a community participant since Dr. Crazy has no control over what another blogger might decide to publish on his or her own blog. Through these maneuvers, Dr. Crazy establishes a sense of dialectic that is reminiscent of LeFevre's model of collaborative invention where meaning is generated through both the individual's use of specific "gestures" and through the audience's response to such gestures (62). In this manner, readers function as a part of the invention process which becomes a dialogic exchange, yet the blogger remains the entity with whom authority rests–unless, of course, the conversation extends beyond the blog in a cross-blog conversation that more closely resembles LeFevre's collective model of authorship.

Since personal blogs afford more power to bloggers than to readers, the presence of these reader-oriented virtual spaces is particularly important. These examples illustrate that when blogs are designed as an interconnected series of sites (blogs, reader sites, etc) which, together, comprise an entire community associated with a blog, they are able to grant more power to readers than when blogs function as stand-alone entities. These comprehensive online communities are closer to the democratic model inherent in the monolithic perspectives on digital authorship proposed by Landow, Lanham, and Poster, a model where both readers and bloggers are empowered as participants. Bloggers retain control over these communities, but by providing spaces for readers to interact they attempt to mitigate some of their own authority. The success of this attempt largely depends upon the level of presence which the blogger has in the reader community as well as upon the tone which she adopts. Those with a less visible presence may succeed more in establishing a reader-friendly environment.

The sense of community that emerges among bloggers extends into their offline lives as well. Several bloggers in this study acknowledge or even initiate offline meetings among members of their community. For example, mom blogging is so popular that a number of conferences catering to this demographic have arisen in recent years. *BlogHer*, which currently hosts more than 20 million blogs by women, holds an annual conference to engage in topics related to women and social media. This conference has proven to be immensely popular year after year, attracting scores of quality speakers and thousands of attendees. Discussions about the 2010 conference take place on three of the blogs in our sample, including the following statement from Mr. Lady of *Whiskey in My Sippy Cup*:

> Since I can't go to the conference, but I still want to take awkward self-portraits with my partners adentro crimen, I'm having a little get-together on Saturday night for anyone and anyone who wants to come. It's officially the Houston Pre-BlogHer meetup, . . . Everyone is welcome to attend, and no, you don't have to dress like it's prom.

This post represents Mr. Lady's attempt to foster community even when she is unable to attend the primary offline event associated with her blogging community, the BlogHer Conference. Dr. Crazy also attempts to initiate offline meetings among her blogging community in the form of a very informal meet-and-greet at the Modern Language Association's (MLA) annual conference, an event which many of the academic bloggers in her community will be attending. These bloggers create opportunities–both offline and online–to bring a sense of community to their blogs.

Overall, bloggers recognize that due to the nature of the medium and the one-to-many ratio, a power differential exists between themselves and their readers, yet they wish to continue to situate themselves as community members. The performance of community in blogs frequently reflects the tension inherent in this relationship. Many of the maneuvers to establish community attempt to mitigate imbalance by affording readers a degree of power in communicative interactions. For example, bloggers may refer directly to the blog as a community, offer expressions of appreciation to readers, and/or create online spaces where readers can engage. All of these attempts place the blogger on more level rhetorical ground with the reader.

While most of the strategies examined here appear to be attempts to mitigate authorial control, bloggers do occasionally engage in strategies which–whether consciously or unconsciously–serve to emphasize their role as authorities. Perhaps these strategies are remnants of a more autonomous and authoritative model of authorship, or perhaps they are designed to establish a sense of community among readers which will, in turn, enhance the blog's reputation and growth? For example, although collective terms of endearment such as "my pretties" may reinforce the blogger's authority, they also form a connection among readers and establish a powerful community behind the blogger. Thus, in an ironic spin, by making statements which appear to initially subjugate readers, the blogger is, in fact, encouraging a sense of community on her blog and ensuring that she continues to receive support from the community.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a redefinition of authorship and a redistribution of power which can be attributed to the presence of community in women's personal blogs which confirms that participant is a highly applicable term for the rhetorical roles adopted there. First, individual bloggers are empowered through the community-building function inherent in blogs as they adopt participant roles such as storyteller and truth-teller which establish them as writers "talking back" to social institutions. Second, blog readers are also empowered by the ability to participate through various means granted by the blogger. Thus, authorial power in blogs is a series of negotiations between blogger and reader which are constantly in flux, varying significantly from the traditional model of autonomous authorship and its static and author and reader roles as well as from Foucalt's authorless message. These negotiations are visible primarily through the ways in which the participants who identify as bloggers situate themselves as community members.

Bloggers continuously attempt to situate themselves as community members in a manner which aligns with the "participant" model. Although they possess more authority than readers in the immediate context of the blog, bloggers adopt roles such as storyteller and truth-teller through which they claim to speak for a group. Both mom bloggers and academic fem bloggers represent themselves as community-oriented storytellers and truth-tellers whose previously silenced voices are amplified through the public medium of blogging. In this sense, the blogger as participant engages in a collective model of authorship which is empowered by the presence of the community behind that role. This model is reminiscent of LeFevre's collective model of invention (82) and Virginia Woolf's collective of women writers (91) where it is only through a combination of individual stories that an audible communal voice is established. This finding is significant because it recognizes the potential inherent in various forms of social media– the alternative role of "participant" enables previously marginalized groups to harness the power of community in social media and to bring forth ideas in the public sphere.

Women's personal blogs not only grant authorial power to groups which previously lacked a public voice, but they also redistribute power to readers. Whereas traditional print media are often dependent upon a power differential between readers and the autonomous author, blogs thrive at the point at which these roles overlap. Maneuvers which involve readers as participants in blogs include enabling reader comments, referring to readers as a community, and constructing virtual spaces for readers. These maneuvers grant readers some control over blog content. Readers who feel connected as a community are likely to continue reading a blog and supporting the blogger, and they are also likely to continue participating in the process of indirectly influencing blog content through mechanisms such as comments and emails. These readers may even link to the blog through posts they write on their own personal blogs. By granting authority to readers, women's personal blogs are perpetuating a cycle of empowerment which harnesses the potential of community inherent in the participant role.

Overall, the participant role in blogs is dynamic, consisting of a series of negotiations between blogger and reader which are constantly in flux. The roles participants adopt in blogging grant more power to readers than most print-influenced forms of authorship yet also harness the potential of community in a manner that is similar to LeFevre's supra-individual collective model of invention. Under this model, individuals interact with social collectives to engage in the creation of content (LeFevre 82). While there is a single individual who maintains overall control of blog content, in a truly dynamic blog–one that successfully attracts readers–individual bloggers interact with other participants to engage in a creative process, to form a community, and to speak against and about social institutions which, in turn, ensures that their voices are heard. Although the mainstream media continues to try to demean women's personal blogs, these bloggers are gaining ground by adopting participant roles based on the power of a collective model of authorship as hundreds–or even millions–of individual stories unite to form a common voice.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

MARGINALIZED WRITERS AND POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Overall, this study has proposed that a revised rhetorical theory is needed for addressing the role(s) adopted by users of social media. The terms "writer" and "reader" are not sufficient for exploring the types of interactions which occur in social media. By their very nature, these terms are indicative of the roles occupied in a static authorial situation rather than of those adopted in the dynamic exchanges which occur in a realm where interactivity and user-generated content prevail and where everyone is on potentially equal rhetorical ground. Instead of looking for "authors" in social media we should examine multidimensional persons who identify "writer" or "blogger" as one dimension which operates in conjunction with other dimensions of identity ("mother," "academic," "teacher") both online and offline. Hence, my study establishes that the term "participant" is a more appropriate description of the role(s) adopted by users of social media.

Although "participant" is an acceptable model for users of social media online, there is a disjunction in the ways in which content creation is described overall and how it is actually performed on a smaller scale. Contrary to Barthes' prediction, the distinction between author and reader is not entirely obsolete, and Foucault's post-author utopia has not exactly reached fruition. Although users are on roughly equal footing on the large scale in social media and "participant" appears to be an appropriate label, this term is called into question by the asymmetrical exchanges which occur when author-like roles are adopted in genres such as social networking and personal blogs. Despite the power differential in these participant roles, my case study of women's personal blogs reveals that even when users of social media adopt more author-like role(s), they continue to situate themselves as community participants through a variety of rhetorical maneuvers. Personal bloggers identify themselves through roles by which they claim to speak for a group (storyteller, truth-teller) and acknowledge and negotiate authority with readers constantly through these roles, thus proving that participant accurately describes the roles adopted even in forms of digital media which initially appear to employ more traditional models of authorship. Hence, one of my primary findings is that despite the appearance of author-like roles in specific social media, participant is still an accurate means of describing the rhetorical roles which are occupied there. In communities such as the blogosphere, theories which operate on the level of the individual text or autonomous author are not applicable since these forms of social media thrive upon the concept of networks or systems.

Overall, my findings indicate that "participant" is a useful term which accurately describes the complex intersection between "writer" and "reader" roles in social media. This term appears to be broadly applicable across various forms of social media, particularly when we consider interactions as they occur on the large scale in social networks and blogging communities. However, the rhetorical triangle is not completely superseded. When forms of social media are examined on a genre-specific basis as separate entities (a particular blog, for example), traditional notions of "writer" and "reader" may be useful as a starting point for understanding that there are different types of participants for whom a power differential may exist. Despite the similarity to more traditional roles such as "writer" and "reader" on the individual textual level in blogs, when considered as a whole, the roles adopted in these social media more closely resemble a model of "participation" rather of "authorship."

Pedagogical Implications

By exploring how traditionally marginalized groups use social media to redefine the conventions of authorship online and to establish public voices, I have come to understand that student writing has been marginalized as well. Much like the relegation of "women's writing" to the private sphere, student writing has been confined to the classroom and viewed as separate from "real world" writing. As Bruce Horner points out, an Author/student writer binary continues to persist which dismisses student writing as non-social and, in effect, insignificant (505). This binary persists not because pedagogies which recognize alternative models of authorship have been left unexamined and unpracticed but, rather, because pedagogies which attempt to problematize this binary often operate under the very premises of the system which they are seeking to condemn–they label students' experiences as "social writing" yet limit this writing to the classroom rather than situating it within a broader social context (Horner 505). As evident in this study, blogs help marginalized groups make the shift from private to public writing, so it follows that social media may also help students to find their public writing voices and to develop identities as socially-engaged participants.

Findings about how the participant role functions in women's personal blogs might be transferred to the pedagogical uses of blogs as well. Specifically, as public writing spaces, blogs enable participants to enjoy the benefits of shared writing–decentering authority, interacting in a real-world context, and engaging in social action–more easily than other genres such as journals and in-class presentations. Kenneth Bruffee identifies the decentering of authority as one of the primary benefits of public writing (653). As a public, digital practice, blogs deviate from the classroom hierarchy through their networked nature. In the blogosphere, the instructor is no longer the central point of authority, and students form their own communities, viewing themselves as participants who are both autonomous writers and part of a larger entity. As Fernheimer and Nelson point out, "One of the most distinctive features of the blog landscape–its simultaneous invocation of public expression and private thoughts–enables both expressivist and post-process goals for writing to be met" (par. 5). In other words, through the decentering of authority blogs enable individuals to more freely focus on their own personal writing goals while simultaneously evoking the networked nature of the blogosphere.

Blogging takes place in a real-world context, so the potential for a broader audience is infinite. Since the audience is not limited to a classroom full of one's peers, "blogging provides a way for students to understand multiple audiences and perspectives and to develop revision strategies based on feedback from multiple sources" (L. Blankenship v). The presence of such audiences via blogging also means that students may "take real-world writing more seriously" since "it might actually be seen and used"

(C. Smith 241). Indeed, at a conference that I recently attended several participants shared uses of blogging in their classrooms and maintained that students continued to pursue these projects beyond the semester since they were personally invested in them. Blogs encourage students to engage in real thinking about real audiences and issues rather than to rely upon textbook theories or speculative assignment prompts.

Blogging also encourages students to develop identities as socially-engaged writers by emphasizing writing's role as social action. Blogging is correlated with a cycle of action whereby many bloggers use their writing to plan actions and then, after completing those actions, blog about them. Through blogs, students can see that writers do things and have the potential to affect real change in the world. For example, "Social Good Day," a campaign launched by the Internet-based companies Mashable and (Red), makes an appeal to bloggers "in hopes of inspiring good things in the world through social media" (Lavrusik). In this case, bloggers are prompted "to attend or organize a meet-up in your community to celebrate, share, educate and engage in a discussion on how social media can be used to tackle some of the world's social challenges and issues," in particular how it can be used to help fight AIDS in Africa. Catherine Connors of *Her Bad Mother* is among the bloggers who chose to engage in this initiative; as part of the campaign, she blogs about her experiences in Losotho with *Born HIV Free*, a program designed to provide education and medical care to HIV-positive mothers to prevent transmission to their children during pregnancy and delivery. "Social Media for Social Good Day" is just one example of the connection between blogging and activism. Due to its potential to inspire social action, blogging might be successfully integrated with other forms of public writing such as service learning projects so that its maximum pedagogical potential can be realized, and students can better situate themselves as socially-engaged writers who are personally invested in the messages that they seek to deliver.

Digital writing, in general, and blogging, in particular, emphasize a model which exceeds traditional understandings of authorship and shifts the roles of “reader” and “writer” to the role of “participants” in social media. Thus, blogs enable students to adopt the broadest role offered in online authorship–to embrace the dynamism of “participant” by functioning both as individual agents and as social actors. When students adopt an entirely individually-focused model of authorship they either write for an overly narrow and artificial audience (the instructor) or potentially disregard audience altogether in favor of pure expressivism (self-focused writing); however, when students write exclusively as members of a community, they may find themselves adopting the role of “social puppet” and writing in way that is designed primarily to please readers rather than to express their own opinions. Blogging, on the other hand, allows student writers to adopt the role of community participants–to at once embrace their roles as individuals and as community members–in an interactive, online setting. In blogs, writing is practiced as a life skill similar to the conversational aspects of communication that students are likely to encounter in real life. Thus, blogging may serve as a “writing gateway” by which students begin to view themselves (and to be viewed) as writers not only within the confines of the classroom but also as authors with voices and identities which are a part of the broader social world.

A direct benefit of this study of “participant” roles comes into play in our quest to teach students how to become responsible digital participants. We must emphasize that due to the public nature of social media, every rhetorical action is ripe with potential for peace or for peril. Encouraging learners to view themselves as socially-engaged participants rather than as student writers opens the potential for enhanced communication, for the greatest transformation takes place when self-perception is altered–when one begins to view writing not only as having public consequence but also begins to view writers as “active participants” in such communication it opens the door for a paradigm shift in pedagogy.

Potential Participants

Despite the potential for empowerment, there are limitations to participation in social media which merit further study. One concern which has emerged in this study involves the suppression of non-mainstream representations of bloggers and the discourses they share. Blogging has been criticized as a middle-class white phenomenon. Indeed, one may notice the absence of certain demographics in my study–the majority of bloggers profiled here are white, middle-class, middle-aged women with a college education.[96] The lack of diversity within this study is reflective of the overall lack of diversity in mainstream outlets designed to promote these blogs. In “Mommy & Me: Looking for the Missing Voices in the Burgeoning World of Mom Blogs,” Veronica Arreola argues that “the image of the mommy blogger . . . overlooks the legions of mom

[96]All five mom bloggers identify as white and heterosexual, and Mr. Lady is the only one who does not claim to be college educated. The academic fem blogosphere remains more diverse than the mom blogosphere, particularly in regard to sexual orientation, as reflected in our sample. Two of the five academic bloggers profiled here, “Moose” and “Bardiac,” identify as lesbians.

bloggers who aren't white, heterosexual, married women" (48). It is not that blogging voices outside of the mainstream do not exist. It is just that users are less likely to hear about these blogs in mainstream media or to see them promoted on popular blogging communities for women such as *Babble, CafeMom, and Yahoo! Shine.* Blogger Deesha Philyaw of *Mamalicious!* states, "the mom blogosphere is segregated. Rarely, if ever, do I see collaborations across racial lines. And when I do, it's the same 'big name' mom-of-color bloggers involved" ("Mothers of Intention" 43). Blogging communities devoted to women of color such as *Mocha Moms* and *Kimchi Mamas* have sprung up in recent years, yet mass media and mainstream blogging communities' representations of the blogosphere remains largely homogenous.[97] A lack of representation is apparent, and speculation about its causes reveals some ugly truths about online social dynamics and the degree to which "participants" are represented online.

First, one caveat: The "digital divide," or the idea that minority groups are less likely to have access to technology due to socioeconomic inequality, has been diminishing in recent years, yet it may still be at least partly responsible for the lack of representation in blogging communities. Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of Internet users who are black or Latino nearly doubled, and the overall population of Internet users has come to much more closely "resemble the racial composition of the population as a whole" (A. Smith, "Technology Trends"). Despite increasing rates of Internet usage among minority groups, this Pew Internet study also reveals that there are some differences in the manner in which the Internet is accessed by whites versus people

[97] *Forbes.com* features several such offenders in its list of "Top 100 Websites for Women" (Casserly and Goudreau) and *Babble*'s "Top 50 Mom Blogs, 2010" includes very few women of color.

of color. As of 2010, only 51% of black adults own a desktop computer as compared to 65% of white adults (A. Smith, “Technology Trends”). Furthermore, minority groups are more likely than whites to use mobile technologies such as cell phones to access the Internet. Forty-six percent of black cell phone owners and 51% of Hispanic cell phone owners user mobile technologies to access the Internet versus 33% of white cell phone owners. This same survey shows that people of color are more likely to engage in a wider array of mobile application activities than white users, including video recording, instant messaging, and social networking (A. Smith, “Mobile Access”). The “digital divide” which occurs here is much more subtle and results from using mobile technologies as one’s primary means of access. For example, it is often problematic to use a cell phone to fill out forms or to create written content. Extensive content production–such as typing an entire blog post–would prove difficult to engage in on mobile devices. Hence, much of mobile technology use involves consumption of content (playing music, watching videos) and content production associated with social networking (posting photos online, updating status). Such trends may be at least partly responsible for the lack of representation of bloggers of color online.

The absence of specific groups in the blogosphere may also result from the like-attracts-like mentality of online communities and the tendency to censor voices which diverge from mainstream ideals. Shay Stewart-Bouley of *BlackGirlInMaine* discusses an incident she recently witnessed on Twitter where a black mother who, while not a spanker herself, was “taken to task for suggesting that spanking is cultural” (“Mothers of Intention” 43). In the discussion, “many white mom bloggers/Twitter folks” just opted to "gang-pile" rather than to consider the variety of factors which could potentially lead to the preference for spanking in other cultural communities ("Mothers of Intention" 43).[98] This case is illustrative of several incidents which I witnessed on the blogs in this study where readers commented in a hostile or offensive manner and bloggers also complained about receiving "hate mail"[99] featuring personal attacks on topics such as parenting style and breastfeeding. Such cases are indicative of how disagreements in social media can quickly evolve into volatile and non-productive name-calling sessions. Interestingly enough, it appears that non-traditional voices are often censored out of "mainstream" outlets (*Babble, BlogHer*) by the very "democratic" participation which is often cited as a benefit of social media. Since "democracy" by its very nature favors the majority, one is likely to witness homogeny on commercial blogging sites which pander to the masses, meaning that as bigger players such as advertisers step in, they seek to censor opinions which do not cohere with their agenda.

Commercial influence has only very recently become a topic of concern in the blogosphere. In fact, it was not until 2009 that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) made revisions to its terms for endorsements and testimonials to account for blogging. In particular, these measures are designed to protect consumers by requiring bloggers and other "word-of-mouth" advertisers to disclose "material connections" such as payments

[98]Stewart-Bouley continues, "I still feel like motherhood, despite the increase in brown and black mom bloggers, is still viewed through a white lens. I feel the only time white moms are willing to listen to our narratives is when [they are] whitewashed and therefore made acceptable. Too many time in blogs and especially on places like Twitter, white moms will say they are allies, they want to hear our stories. Yet when we (okay, me) share, it is never looked at from my cultural perspective. Too many black and brown bloggers leave the blogging world because our stories are not heard" ("Mothers of Intention" 43).

[99]Catherine of *Her Bad Mother* shares a host of hateful comments on a recent news story for which she was interviewed about parenting blogs: "Isn't this just another form of pimping?" and "If this is the way this woman views her child, I hope she saves up whatever money she's earning from her pathetic blog to pay for her kid's therapy later in life."

or free products. In other words, bloggers must now inform readers when they are writing sponsored posts.[100] Despite the protections inherent in this act, there is still potential for commercial influence to affect the content that one publishes and, perhaps, even the way(s) in which one represents or reacts to non-mainstream discourses. Refraining from advertising altogether might not be a realistic option for all bloggers, some of whom depend upon the medium for their livelihood (*Dooce* alone grosses $30,000 to $50,000 per month).[101] However, commercial interests and mainstream blogging communities are not likely to disappear any time soon. Hence, in future scholarship, it would be beneficial to examine how non-mainstream discourses are handled by participants in social media, particularly in regard to commercial interests and to consider the various rhetorical strategies used to silence or to disempower minority voices on particular blogging sites.

When considering the increasing commercialization of the blogosphere and other social media, it makes sense to address pedagogy. As part of our approach to multiliteracies, we should be teaching students to be critical consumers of social media by questioning whether a blog incorporates advertisements or sponsored posts and, if so, how these commercial interests might affect content. If being a "good participant" means knowing when and how to comment appropriately and how to assess the influences behind social media content, then future studies such as those suggested here have the potential to generate valuable information. There is a definite need to push back against

[100]Sponsored posts are posts for which the blogger has been compensated in some way whether it is through income or through free products from the merchant.

[101]See Belkin's "Queen of the Mommy Bloggers."

mainstream narratives, to bring issues such as race to the forefront, and to diversify popular social media outlets. Part of the push for more diverse voices might come from confronting the commercialization of social media by extending our classroom discussions of digital literacy skills to the very media which often claim to be representative of the values of a democracy.

Conclusions

Embarking upon this study, I hoped to bridge a theoretical gap in rhetorical studies–to define the role(s) adopted by users so that we might have a better means of discussing the rhetorical interactions and models of authorship which occur in social media. While I refrain from completely deconstructing our understanding of the traditional rhetorical situation, I do establish that this model is best explained as a foundation upon which we can base subsequent theories about digital rhetoric, particularly social media. The traditional tripartite conception of the rhetorical situation itself (writer, reader, message) is not impractical, but we must be sure to indicate that substantial movement exists within it which enables the participant role to exist. As Colin Gifford Brooke notes, digital technologies often exceed the notion of authorship as experienced in the print context (80), and this is precisely what the model adopted by participants in social media does–exceeds via overlap. The roles which participants adopt on blogs contribute to a situation that is not unlike Burke's "unending conversation" or McLuhan's "global village." Bloggers are able to exceed certain aspects of print texts, operate on a networked level, and constitute writing as a social act which establishes one's presence in a community. This is a hybrid, remediated form of “authorship” at its most visible. Women’s personal blogs, in particular, exemplify the alternative models of authorship emerging in social media which complicate early theories of digital rhetoric that position digital works as “post-authorial” or “authorless.” When this participant role which focuses on interactivity and community building is coupled with the empowering nature of authorial stability as granted in personal blogs, marginalized groups are able to develop a public voice online. As a digital genre which harnesses the potential of the participant model offered online to empower traditionally marginalized groups, blogs support the case for why both genre and medium should be carefully considered when making observations about the consequences of shifting notions of authorship. Furthermore, as extensions of the self, social media change not only our rhetorical positions but also our self-perceptions, ranging from individual writers to socially-engaged participants who function as members of a digital community.

Digital writing, in general, and blogging, in particular, emphasize an alternative model of authorship–that of a participant who is both reader and writer in digital culture and who simultaneously functions as both individual agent and as social actor. By breaking free from the previously-established author and reader roles, individuals also break free from a certain constricted vision of themselves as writers. The participant role is at once a source of liberation and rife with potential challenges.

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