RESPONDING (OR NOT) ON FACEBOOK: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF LIKING, COMMENTING, AND OTHER REACTIONS TO POSTS

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ABSTRACT

Although social-networking sites have become increasingly dialogic – with automated response buttons and spaces for comments available under almost every bit of content – the audience patterns and hearership norms that have developed alongside this evolution have not been widely studied. While this investigation provides a linguistic analysis of audience behaviors on Facebook, the findings are of relevance to discourse in the context of many social-networking sites. This is because of the uniformity of basic responsive options across such sites: an automatic "like"-like feature, a space to Comment, or the option to express a reaction outside of the responsive space designated by the platform. I combine ethnographic methods of data collection with the goals and analytical units of interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis to illuminate the influences on members' choices between such options. The three analytical chapters of the current examination focuses on the three basic responsive choices in turn: Like, Comment, and what I term a "non-response" – the practice of reacting to a post outside of the responsive space created beneath it.

All of the chapters involve an interpretation of specific responsive choices in relation to what was notably not chosen. Such an analytical consideration is based on Linde's (2009) concept of "noisy silences" and Trester's (2013) adaptation of the term to encompass other types of silences that she calls "noisy nots." My analyses provide a broad appreciation of the Facebook interactive context and an in-depth understanding of how audience members react to posts through the expression and negotiation of participation frameworks, the use of byplay, and the management of epistemic rights, each of which is partially accomplished by drawing on what is noticeably left unsaid within a Facebook exchange. Crucially, I analyze how the mechanics of conversation function in spite of the complication a networked private (Marwick & boyd 2014) audience context potentially presents to interactive goals, and I demonstrate the innovative discursive practices that have arisen to support social interaction. I detail the many off-screen influences on members' online interactional decisions, such as media ideologies and personal relationships, as well as the platform-specific affordances and challenges that support and problematize Facebook social interaction.

This investigation contributes to computer-mediated communication research and sociolinguistic literature by using established units of discursive analysis such as adjacency pairs (Schegloff & Sacks 1973), intertextual ties (Hamilton 1996), first and second assessment positions (Heritage & Raymond 2005) and constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989) to identify some of the audience norms of Facebook. I hold that Facebook's size and influence make it a particularly important site for sociolinguistic discovery, and that its foundational role in social media allows the insights from this study to be widely-relevant. I share in Tannen and Trester's (2013: ix) conviction that social media "provide a new means of understanding who we are and how we connect through language."
The research and writing of this dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Julia Alexander and Mary Frances West, both of whom passed during the completion of this project. Both women were a constant, loving presence in my life, and even though they never understood the nature of my work, were always very proud of me for doing it.

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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1. The Study .................................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Motivation ...................................................................................................................... 4
  1.3 The Facebook Evolution .............................................................................................. 6
    1.3.1 Membership Changes ............................................................................................... 7
    1.3.2 The Like Button ....................................................................................................... 8
    1.3.3 The Newsfeed ........................................................................................................ 10
    1.3.4 Reported Actions .................................................................................................... 12
  1.4 The Chapters of the Study ............................................................................................ 14
  1.5 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 2. Literature Review: Networked Privacy and Discourse ................................................. 18
  2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 18
  2.2 Computer-mediated Communication Linguistic Research ............................................ 19
    2.2.1 Early CMC and Language-related Topics ................................................................. 19
    2.2.2 SNSs and CMC Research ......................................................................................... 22
    2.2.3 The Gaps in CMC Research ..................................................................................... 26
  2.3 Discourse: The Said and Unsaid .................................................................................... 28
    2.3.1 Connection and Consideration ................................................................................ 29
    2.3.2 The Participation Framework .................................................................................. 31
    2.3.3 Adjacency Pairs and Reach ..................................................................................... 33
  2.4 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 34

Chapter 3. Methodology ........................................................................................................... 36
  3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 36
  3.2 Discourse Analysis ........................................................................................................ 36
    3.2.1 Ethnography of Communication .............................................................................. 37
    3.2.2 Interactional Sociolinguistics .................................................................................. 38
    3.2.3 Conversation Analysis ............................................................................................ 40
  3.3 Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 42
    3.3.1 Facebook Screenshots ............................................................................................. 44
    3.3.2 Fieldnotes ................................................................................................................. 46
    3.3.3 Focus Group Discussions ......................................................................................... 47
    3.3.4 Interviews ............................................................................................................... 49
    3.3.5 Online Practical Metadiscourse .............................................................................. 50
  3.4 Analytical approach ....................................................................................................... 52

Chapter 4. "Click if you Accept Jesus": Like as a Notable not ....................................................... 54
  4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 54
  4.2 Analysis: Like's Functional, Semantic, and Sociolinguistic Aspects ................................ 56
    4.2.1 Liking Versus Non-Liking: Pages and Forced-stancetaking .................................... 56
    4.2.2 Like as Not-silence: Listening Like .......................................................................... 61
    4.2.3 Like as Not-a-Comment: Responsive Like ............................................................ 64
    4.2.4 Supportive Like ...................................................................................................... 67
    4.2.5 Like as Unmarked Response .................................................................................... 68
    4.2.6 Like and Ambiguous Reach ...................................................................................... 71
    4.2.7 Sociolinguistic Influences on Like-use .................................................................... 74
CHAPTER 1. THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The goal of the current study is to examine how social interaction occurs despite, and in some ways because of, two potentially problematic aspects of Facebook – the not-wholly knowable audience and the site's sometimes overbearing infrastructure, which together make up the networked privacy (Marwick & boyd 2014) of the social-networking site. My analyses provide a broad appreciation of the Facebook interactive context and an in-depth understanding of how audience members "do" networked privacy through the expression and negotiation of participation frameworks, the use of byplay, and the management of epistemic rights, each of which is partially accomplished by drawing on what is "saliently unsaid…what could be said but is not" (Linde 2009: 197) in a Facebook interaction. While Facebook interactions may at first glance seem trivial and ordinary, it is precisely "ordinary conversation" that is the "primordial site of human sociality and social life" (Schegloff 1987: 101), and Facebook's prominence among social-networking sites (SNSs) makes it a logical social space to explore. As of early 2015, almost 2.1 billion people have social media accounts (Bullas 2015) and Facebook boasts 1.49 billion active users¹, by far dominating the social media industry. In 2014, even the majority of online adults over 65 years of age had become Facebook members (Duggan et al. 2015).

The present exploration includes three analytical chapters focusing on the three responsive options of the Facebook audience: Likes, Comments, and what I term non-responses on Facebook, meaning reactions to posts that are not expressed in the relevant responsive spaces beneath the posts. Each analytical chapter draws from a database of: screenshots of Facebook interactions, ethnographic fieldnotes, focus group discussions, individual interviews and online metadiscourse, all of which are detailed in chapter 3. The selection of my analytical foci come from my long-term ethnography of the site, which I also discuss in chapter 3. Crucially, this is an investigation of the interactional

¹ Based on those which had logged in to Facebook during the 30 days before the statistics were taken by Statista (www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/).
decisions members make in a networked private. In such a context neither speaker nor hearers know the actual boundaries of overhearers or possible participants, and thus lack important contextual information about the nature of relationships, attitudes and metaknowledge involved. Each member interacts within a context that is: (1) a "collapsed context" (boyd 2008) of their social network (including family, friends and coworkers alike), (2) a layering of who is imagined to be, potentially could be, actually are, and actively identify themselves as hearers, (3) overlapping with other members’ social networks due to high numbers of shared "friends," and (4) influenced by the Facebook newsfeed algorithm. All of these aspects together I refer to using Marwick and boyd's (2014) term "networked privacy." Put another way, the Facebook context involves an understanding that, while one is "among friends," the exact makeup and boundaries of this circle of friends is blurry and constantly in flux. My interest is not in how information is guarded or revealed to a public or private audience – a popular topic of past CMC research – but in how and why members interpret and engage (or not) with certain information in a space that is a complex private.

In each chapter, I focus on a specific responsive option, detailing influential sociolinguistic factors and discursive choices that react to and reshape the networked private context of Facebook. I outline norms and expectations alluded to in the focus group discussions and interviews as well as those highlighted in online metadiscourse about Facebook, using discourse analysis to identify additional insights. Critically, I use established units of analysis from several types of approaches to discourse, drawing upon, among others, the concept of adjacency pairs in chapter 4, intertextual ties and byplay in chapter 5, and constructed dialogue, second stories and first- and second-assessment positions in chapter 6. All of the chapters involve an interpretation of responsive choices in relation to what was notably not chosen. Such an analytical consideration is based on Linde's (2009) concept of "noisy silences" and Trester's (2013) adaptation of the term (2013) as "noisy nots" to encompass other types of silences, such as discursive moves that were not made but could have been. In the current study which often deals with visual data, I will use the term "notable nots" to refer to what a discursive choice notably

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2 Throughout this investigation I refer to "speakers" and "hearers," in keeping with most discourse studies.
does not say or do, such as when a member bypasses the obvious option to simply click a Like button and uses a Comment to express "I like this!" In such an instance, that the Like could have been used but was not is part of what creates the positive social meaning behind the Comment: that a member took the extra time to uniquely express their appreciation of a post (see West and Trester [2013] and chapter 4 of this study).

In contrast to most Facebook research to date, this examination of the site is audience-focused; rather than analyzing Facebook behavior in terms of the content and structure of posts and how members act as posters, I focus on the expressed interpretations and demonstrated reactive behavior of members as audiences on Facebook. I analyze how the mechanics of conversation function in spite of the complication a networked private audience context potentially presents to coherence and epistemic rights, and I demonstrate the innovative discursive practices that have arisen to support social interaction. A networked private, I argue, is largely maintained by an audience that actively highlights and interprets what is unsaid and draws on the notable nots to convey responsive meaning to the poster. Another example using Like: while the button can function as a basic "back channel" (Yngve 1970) cue by expressing "boosterlike encouragements" (Goffman 1981: 12, 28) from the audience, it also boils down the "facial gestures, nonverbal vocalizations…smiles, chuckles, headshakes, and knowing grunts" (Goffman 1981a: 12) that normally make up such cues in face-to-face conversation into a one-size-fits-all gesture, making it an inherently ambiguous responsive device. Much of its meaning comes from what it is not – a Comment or a lack of response, as I demonstrate in chapter 4. The meaning of each individual Like exists unsaid, motivated and interpreted by Liker and poster based on their knowledge of one another and the topic. In chapter 5, I investigate Commenting behaviors which I reveal often center around what is not included in a status update, and in chapter 6, I examine members' moral and epistemic stances toward stories they did not tell on Facebook. I demonstrate that members react to a status update that threatens their epistemic rights by not Commenting on the post and instead creating a new first-assessment position in offline interactions or a new post.

I begin this chapter by outlining my motivation for the study in section 2, explaining the importance of social media research and the special nature of Facebook as
a site of study. I also refer to two personal experiences that influenced my choices of analytical foci. I then discuss the history of Facebook in section 3 and how it has evolved to support social interactions. In section 4, I outline the chapters of the study with particular detail to my analytical chapters and then summarize the overall investigation in section 5.

1.2 Motivation

During my investigation of Facebook discourse, I experienced two major events that were impacted by the site. The first was my uncle becoming terminally ill. During his time in the hospital, my large extended family was kept abreast of the news each day through group text messages. Each of us also shared a bit about the situation with close friends in person or over the phone. A few days into my uncle's hospital stay, a close family friend began posting updates about my uncle on Facebook (which were not always accurate since they were second-hand). This received a very emotional response from my family, and another one of my uncles called the friend and requested that he stop sharing news on the site. Taking offline action to actively manage information illustrates a practice I examine in chapter 6 in which members choose to assert epistemic rights threatened by Facebook through offline interactions.

A short time later, my grandmother passed away. While she was declining in health and family was traveling to be with her, I could not travel to say good-bye as I was 9 months pregnant at the time. As a way to feel connected with her, I changed my profile picture to a picture of the two of us together. A few close friends and family members who knew of the situation Liked and Commented on my picture to express their support, while many friends Liked the picture without the knowledge of what offline events it was connected to; they simply expressed positive sentiment about seeing a picture of me and my grandmother. I later talked to a cousin on the phone who was in town with my grandmother. She said that she had seen my new profile picture and decided to change hers to one of her and my grandmother as well. She told me that as a result of this action, she received several emotional responses from friends and family who were not in town who had assumed that her updated profile picture was prompted by my grandmother's passing (though she had not yet). The norm of changing a profile picture based on whose birthday it is or in remembrance of someone on the anniversary of their death has imbued
the-changing-of-the-profile-picture with meaning-making potential. However, as is the 
case with *Like*, these ambiguous actions that may or may not be reactions to offline 
events are subject to misinterpretation by the Facebook audience with very real offline 
repercussions.

The example of profile picture updates and *Like*-responses fueled my interest in 
the inexplicit meanings of actions on Facebook, the potential to discursively employ 
Facebook-specific features. These examples also highlighted for me the complicated 
nature of Facebook sharing that is influenced by the context of the site (the Newsfeed and 
the collapsed and overlapping audience) and offline relationships. Examining Facebook 
exchanges alone, I realized, would obscure these realities: the motivations for and 
interpretations of site-specific features, the offline negotiations of who tells a story or 
whether a story gets told on Facebook, as well as the evaluation of discourse in the 
newsfeed and the assumptions being drawn.

While Facebook interactions may appear frivolous at first glance, they make up 
part of the everyday ordinary conversations people are having, or as Schegloff (1987: 
102) terms it, "the bedrock of social life" (Schegloff 1987: 102). This critical discourse, 
in fact, is now where much of social interaction is occurring (Nisen 2013). There is, 
however, widely circulated critique of online interaction as less real and less valuable 
than offline interactions and complaints that the popularity of social media robs young 
people of more traditional encounters crucial for building social skills (e.g., Johnson 
2014). However, research has uncovered positive impacts on both linguistic and social 
development. Instead of discouraging socialization, various modes of online 
communication are interwoven with offline life and relationships, especially in the case 
of Facebook (e.g. Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield 2008). Studies suggest that teenagers on 
social-networking sites (SNSs) are using innovative language (e.g., Androutsopoukos 
2007), developing social skills (boyd 2008), and have been "radically changing the face 
of literacy" through participation online (Merchant 2001: 293). Computer-mediated 
communication (CMC) has been found to be not impersonal or socially empty but rather 
"hyperpersonal" (Walther 1996), allowing users more freedom to connect than in face-to-face conversations. Social networking sites in particular have the effect of maintaining 
open lines of communication among people (Varis & Blommaert 2014), with some
research showing a correlation between an increase in face-to-face interaction and SNS use (e.g. Tillema, Dijst & Schwanen 2010).

I believe that Facebook, like any new communicative technology, is not the total salvation or obliteration of society but rather a demonstration of and an influence on how we acknowledge one another (chapter 4), how we build conversations (chapter 5), and how we negotiate epistemic rights in new and layered contexts (chapter 6). In short, this study is about how people adopt and adapt new technologies to serve ancient and persisting social goals, which center around the need for interaction, to create and connect a self with others. I assert that the key to understanding social media is found in the symbiotic link between discursive choices and the networked private context. Crucial to the analyses are the expressed and demonstrated beliefs about what should be communicated to whom on Facebook and relatedly, what discursive moves like automated responses, topic development, and epistemic stance reveal about the networked privacy. I now situate my investigation in terms of the current state of Facebook and highlight the importance of how the site has changed to support interaction.

1.3 The Facebook Evolution

The Internet was not originally designed for social interaction, but rather for information access (Herring 1999); this was also the case of Facebook, which was originally designed as a "a basic directory" (Chan 2009). But the site, like the Internet, is constantly moving and growing, adopting and abandoning changes\(^3\) that allow people to connect with one another. The site has slowly come to be, in many cases, "an integral part of peoples' lives" (Kirkpatrick 2010: 144). Overall, the changes on Facebook can be summarized as a movement away from the original static concept of a database and toward interaction.

Several changes to the Facebook platform have happened over time to create more of a discursive space and encourage social interaction. First, added features such as the Like button and the Comment option have expanded the discursive opportunities

\(^3\) For example, Facebook added the feature Questions in 2010, which was an automated way to poll "friends," but abandoned it in 2012 since members had not adopted it as a way to ask questions in their network (Frankhauser 2013). Instead, members ask their "friends" questions in the Status Update box, as a post.
members have on the site. Also, the shift to a central newsfeed where information is constantly updated has encouraged members to frequently check in and often engage with one another. In addition to a newsfeed that disperses posts to members, it collects information about actions members are taking on the site and reports this to members' "friends." Finally, membership changes have caused "friend" networks to expand to include a wide variety of offline relationships, increasing the range of topic and identity management done on the site.

1.3.1 Membership Changes

The expansion of the Facebook community occurred fairly rapidly during the first few years of the site's existence. Begun in February of 2004, the social networking site was originally set up as an online facebook – a directory that includes photos and basic information about members of a community – specifically for Harvard students ("thefacebook.com"). The site, however, was soon opened to several other Ivy League schools, and in 2005, permission to join was extended to any college and university student with a .edu email address. Facebook's association with college students greatly appealed to high schoolers. High school seniors even began writing the colleges that had accepted them to request their .edu addresses early so they could join the social networking site; Facebook membership had become a coveted "rite of passage" to college life (boyd 2008: 102), until, in 2006, the site became accessible to everyone over the age of 13. Thus, at just two years old, Facebook had changed dramatically as a social space, rapidly growing and diversifying in membership.

Such changes were not always seamless. The phenomenon of parents and grandparents joining Facebook gained momentum in 2008, prompting public outcry and media attention; the "Oh, Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook" blog, which was featured in an online Time Magazine article (Fletcher 2009), was started in January, 2009, and the Facebook group "For the love of god – don't let parents join Facebook" had around 6,000 high school and college-aged members that same month (Davis 2009). Just a few years prior, college-aged members had been bemoaning the fact that high schoolers could join the site. Thus, even when the site was open to other age-categories, there was still an informal regulating of membership rights. In one of the group discussions I recorded for this study, a mother remarked that "you almost have to get your kids' permission" to use
Facebook, suggesting that to many users, the site is still something belonging to the first generation of users or at least to younger users. In another one of the group discussions for this study, one member (30 years old) remarked that whenever he observes “weird” behavior on Facebook, it is either by an “old person” or a particularly young member, concluding that only “people between 25 and 35… use it the way it's supposed to be.” At the time of the focus group discussions and writing for this study (2012-2015), this is the age category representing the first group of Facebook members.

Part of the early criticism of new, older-age members in particular was that they didn't quite "get it" (Westlake 2008) at first, often creating what younger members felt were awkward social interactions on the site. While the original members' (now in their late 20's and early 30's) parents seem to be catching on, the wave of grandparents who joined the site a few years later may be having a harder time adjusting to the new discursive context. Specifically, I have heard numerous, mostly unsolicited, stories during my ethnographic study of the site about grandparents being confused about who is communicating with whom. Users who have been on the site less time also tend to be less aware of how their discursive actions on the site will be interpreted and unfamiliar with Facebook responsive norms. The reasons for this confusion include the high agency of the platform, which both aids in encouraging interaction but also greatly complicates the notion of audience, and discursively-ambiguous features such as the Like button.

1.3.2 The Like Button

In the summer of 2007, a team at Facebook, Inc. began meeting to discuss adding a uniform positive response option allowing users to acknowledge content via a click on a symbol. Before Facebook invented the Like feature, there were "no feedback loops" (boyd 2008: 169) to give members insight into audience reactions to their activity on the site or to even confirm who was in the audience of a given post (See boyd 2008 for a description of online social networking sites before this backchannel cue). The three main contestants for the clickable icon were a star, a plus sign, and a thumbs-up. All of these symbols raised some concern over meaning potential; the star could be read as giving 1 star within a rating system, which is an unfavorable assessment. The plus sign might not make sense as a positive opinion unless a negative sign were also an option, something that Facebook, Inc. did not want to provide. And the thumbs-up symbol posed a potential
problem for internationalization, since this sign is hostile in some cultures. Like the symbol, the actual term was also debated. The team initially decided to name the feature the "awesome button" (Bosworth 2010) 4, which Zuckerberg later rejected in favor of the more moderate, and presumably more widely-applicable, "like button" (Tsotsis 2010). It was not until February 20095 – after five-years of development and expansion of Facebook – that the Like feature was introduced as a clickable thumbs-up icon below content posted to the site; the creators described the feature as communicating a literal, "I like this." (Pearlman 2009). Then, in June 2010, the creators explained that Liking had become so "central to the way people communicate on Facebook"6 that it would be made as a clickable feature below individual Comments as well as posts.

Use of the Like button quickly became "ubiquitous and natural" (Cohen 2011)7 on Facebook, its use more than doubling between 2010 and 2012 (Page, Harper, & Frobenius 2013). In a report released just two years after it was introduced, 26% of Facebook users said they Liked content on an average day – the highest percentage reported for a Facebook activity – with only 15% saying they posted something themselves on an average day (Hampton et al. 2011). The percentage of members who Liked content daily has risen to 44% while only 10% now report posting regularly themselves (Smith 2014). The "rapid public response" feature (Cobb 2013: 202) thus helped Facebook become a quicker, more interactive space. The one-click acknowledgement option has also spread to other platforms and is now integral to social media culture in general. Also integral to all social media and likely the aspect that prompts most social interaction on Facebook is the newsfeed. A technology columnist for The New York Times even claimed that the: “News feed is the basis for Facebook’s popularity, the thing that initially set it apart from every other social network, and the

4 Unfortunately, the only source of information on the decisions of design is a brief post by a Facebook engineer on a discussion board.
5 There is wide debate online about the original idea of the Like button, with many sources claiming that Facebook "borrowed" or "cloned" the idea from the site Friendfeed, which introduced a "like" option in 2007 and had been a source of ideas for Facebook, Inc. for some time (http://mashable.com/2009/08/10/reasons-facebook-friendfeed/).
6 Quote from the Facebook blog/help section: https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/i-like-your-comment/399440987130
reason hundreds of millions of us go back to the site every day" (Manjoo 2013).

1.3.3 The Newsfeed

In its earliest stages, Facebook was a website made up of individual profile pages with listed biographical information. The structure limited activity on the site to browsing other members' profile pages, requiring a user to look up and click on specific profiles to see one another's information. Later, the pages were named "walls" and members could post messages to one another in these personal spaces. However, these messages were not very interactive, as responding to a message on a member's wall required going to the message-poster's wall and leaving a new message. Facebook later compiled the disjointed back-and-forths in a single space accessible by clicking "wall-to-wall," however, this still required seeking out specific information. So even though changes to the "wall" allowed for easier communication, before the newsfeed the site was still a collection of disjointed webpages and members had to take initiative to find and view these pages individually. With the creation of a separate home screen with a feed in 2006 (Sanghvi 2006), members were suddenly greeted with a constant stream of friends' activity in a single space. The newsfeed now displays the actions of a subset of a member's "friends" on their homepage based on what members and activities the site's algorithm determines will be of most interest to the member. Now when members log on to the site, they are immediately tossed into a social space – Facebook changed the point of entry onto the site from a user’s "wall" to the newsfeed homepage. When a user signs on, they are now greeted by an ever-changing landscape of their friends' activities.

This automatic channeling of information has had two major effects on the discursive context of Facebook (1) it drastically increased the potential number of people who see posts or updates about other members' actions on the site, making many practices, such as sharing break-ups, suddenly much more public, often with social consequences (Gershon 2010); on the other hand, (2) the "noisiness" of the constantly refreshed feed grants only brief stage time for individual posts, so visibility on Facebook is generally "constituted as something to aspire to, rather than feel threatened by" (Bucher 2012: 1174). When the newsfeed was first introduced, however, there was international panic among Facebook members who interpreted the stream of information as a massive privacy breach. Facebook Inc. responded to the complaints with the following statement:
A small number of users raised concerns after what they mistakenly believed to be private messages appeared on their Timeline. Our engineers investigated these reports and found that the messages were older wall posts that had always been visible on the users' profile pages. Facebook is satisfied that there has been no breach of user privacy (Facebook statement taken from [Taylor 2012]).

In short, this structural change made what once felt private (and what was probably only actually viewed occasionally by a few friends) immediately available to a wider audience. Since members had not anticipated their posts being funneled to their network in this way when they had originally constructed them as wall posts, this felt like a violation. Now that status updates are blasted to other members via a feed and that membership includes a much larger segment of the general population, the audience more likely contains – mixed in with a user's intended audience – distant acquaintances and even strangers (who see a post in their newsfeed because of a mutual "friend" connection). While a user can know who is a potential receiver of their messages, due to the algorithm of Facebook and the fact that everyone is on the site at different times, the number and identity of those who actually read a post is never consistent nor entirely known to the poster.

Instead, the poster must make assumptions based on their "friend" list and gather insight through responses, which only reveal readers who choose to identify themselves through Likes, Comments, or offline mentions to the poster. Given that content on the current Facebook platform is now situated in a much more public context than before the newsfeed, members must accept that they are part of a networked private context, "among friends," but with an unspecified number of overhearers. Successfully interacting in a newsfeed requires an appreciation of the flexibility of participation frameworks and the ability to interpret and negotiate hearer roles (see chapter 2 for a literature review of participation framework). Shortly after the newsfeed was introduced, the Comment and Share options were made available, marshaling in Facebook's true "interaction period" (Miller 2014), when development of the platform focused on supporting interaction. Instead of just viewing activity in their feed, members were given ways to respond to it. Facebook not only provided these discursive options, but also began reporting on members' uses of these and other actions they take on the site.
1.3.4 Reported Actions

In addition to directing a member's status updates to "friends," the Facebook platform also actively reports about a member. This has the effect of repositioning a member – decontextualizing their action from the discursive context in which they were directly participating. While the first few years of the site's existence centered around user-generated content, Facebook now generates much of the content, often based on the actions of its members. For instance, Example 1 is a screenshot of statements generated about my "friends" in the sidebar of my newsfeed.

**Example 1.** Facebook reports on sidebar of newsfeed.

In Example 1, Facebook has notified me that: "Sue commented on Joanne's photo." I do not know the discursive context, only that Sue responded to information Joanne shared. At the very least, in the above example, Sue has been placed in a different role within the participation framework (Goffman 1981b, Schiffrin 1993) than the one she originally occupied when Commenting – going from an active participant in a conversation to an unaddressed party being spoken about. While the members represented in Example 1 are not necessarily being positioned in a specific way by Facebook, such stories can implicitly place members in an unfavorable light. For example, the data below is taken from the blog *MyParentsJoinedFacebook*. In Example 2, Toni (aka. "mom") has been interacting with content on Facebook, and Facebook notifies "you" of these actions.
Example 2. Facebook "giving off" an impression of Toni.

Example 2 represents a screenshot of what appears when "you" click on the Notifications tab at the top of the newsfeed. Each member is notified by Facebook about activity specifically involving them on the site, such as who has Commented on their post, Tagged them in a photo, or Liked something they posted. It usually consists of a diverse list involving many people from a member's network. However, in Example 2, Toni dominates the list of notifications due to her choice to Like several photos in quick succession. While Toni's communicative act was Liking several photos, Facebook now narrates her actions, the result of which, when read in list form, positions Toni as someone who "spends her Friday nights" browsing Facebook. Of course, this is not the explicit positioning, but is noted in the metadiscursive evaluation added to the bottom of Example 2 in large black print by the blog poster. It is the interpretation "given off" (Goffman 1959) by the list of notifications. The individual Likes Toni communicated may have initially positioned her as a member of a certain group of friends, an interested listener, and/or a proficient Facebook user, since Liking is a common and even expected part of Facebook behavior (see chapter 4). However, by stacking these actions, she arguably now appears as an overeager, disingenuous Facebook user with no offline social
life. The Facebook platform has claimed rights to tell about Toni as an observer of her actions, threatening her discursive power to make her own claims directly.

The Facebook platform's role in distributing member-created discourse as well as discourse about members is of relevance throughout the current study. Highlighting the networked private context as supported and complicated by the Facebook platform, I examine the acts of Liking, Commenting and reacting to status updates, and I reveal sociolinguistic influences on when such acts are and are notably not done. Because of its ubiquity and influence on SNS discourse, I focus my first analytical chapter on Like. I now provide the overall outline of the study and preview the three analytical chapters and their findings.

1.4 The Chapters of the Study

In chapter 2, I present an overview of computer-mediated communication (CMC) research and introduce key figures and findings. I then explain how my own study contributes to CMC literature and how it adds to the growing body of Facebook research. Finally, I introduce readers to relevant linguistic concepts that frame my analyses and describe how my investigation advances these concepts by exploring how they are influenced by the networked private context.

In chapter 3, I review the types of data I have collected and give a detailed account of the collection process. I then provide readers with an understanding of my analytical approach. I believe that efforts to understand the nature of interaction on a specific social-networking site require a range of data. Specifically, I assert that the field notes, focus group discussions, interviews, and online metadiscourse are just as important analytically as the actual Facebook exchanges I also collected. I then argue that the most productive way to consider this data is using a mixed-methods approach focusing on discursive actions. An analytical approach that considers the relationship dynamics between participants, as interactional sociolinguistics proposes, and the line-by-line dissection of the discourse, as Conversation Analysis does, is particularly well-suited for handling the many macro and micro aspects of the data in this study. My understanding of discourse analysis is a broad, cross-disciplinary framework grounded by well-established analytical units, such as adjacency pairs (Schegloff & Sacks 1973), cohesive
ties (Halliday & Hasan 1976), and constructed dialogue (Tannen 2007), which allows for a comprehensive examination of language in use, treating communication contextually.

While many studies have investigated the various ways posters manage multiple audiences on social media, chapter 4 focuses on the function of a particular mechanism of audience feedback on Facebook: the Like button. More specifically, I consider the meaning of Like based on other options – a Comment or complete lack of response – and based on what Like does not do – specify its reach. I demonstrate that what influence the choice to Like – versus Commenting or remaining silent – are invisible forces such as the imagined participation framework and media ideologies as well as what was known and not known by a member prior to reading the post in question. Ultimately I claim that Like is an invaluable responsive device in a networked private, making participation in a discursive feed possible by allowing rapid non-committal involvement through a semantically ambiguous and flexible feature.

In chapter 5, I investigate the act of Commenting on Facebook. I focus my analysis on Comments made on a common mode of status update involving what I term local displaced immediacy, adapted from Chafe's (1994) notions of modes of communication. In this type of status update the poster shares an often minor observation during or immediately after their experience and makes their present context partially accessible in the "local" context of Facebook through language and photographs. I demonstrate how Commenters then establish "topical cohesion" (Erickson 1981) by highlighting the unsaid and fleshing out such minimalist posts. I reveal how social conversation is often accomplished on Facebook by drawing on what is saliently not included in the post. I analyze screenshots of interactions from my own Facebook network to demonstrate how members tie their individual Comment to the post topic, adopting the poster's deictic center to engage with them. In a second part of the analysis, I analyze responses to the unfavorable behavior of "vaguebooking" – when posters take a highly affective stance toward an opaque situation – using online metadiscourse data. I highlight the technique of Commenting on the presences of "noisy silences" (Linde 2009) that are central to vaguebook posts is a common way to build coherence while bypassing the forced position of requesting more context. Overall, I demonstrate that "byplay" – "teasing, heckling, or playfully dealing with a description or story (Goodwin, M. 1990:
156) is a common responsive behavior on Facebook posts overall and allows members, who vary widely in access to information about a poster, to interact with a post in a variety of ways.

Finally, in chapter 6 I investigate what I term "non-responses," which involve members' reactions to posts in other places than beneath the posts themselves. I explore this choice in relation to members' attempts to manage what gets posted on the site and reveal that negotiations around rights to certain information carried out using a variety of discursive acts in other contexts in order reclaim epistemic primacy and manage relationships. Specifically, I demonstrate how a first-assessment position originally lost to a member due to another member's post is reclaimed by: (1) taking an evaluative stance and repositioning the poster in an offline telling about the status update, (2) contacting a poster offline to request upgraded access to a story, (3) establishing offline that a shared experience not be posted about before it occurs. Finally, I reveal a practice for reclaiming epistemic primacy on the site itself: (4) creating a new post in reaction to a Comment rather than responding to the Comment, thus creating a new first-assessment position. All of this negotiation around what should not be told on Facebook by whom is a critical aspect of social interaction on the site. Crucially, much of this negotiation is invisible on Facebook, happening in other contexts while the involved members largely maintain silence in the discursive space of the relevant post.

I conclude with chapter 7 where I briefly review and weave together my analytical findings concerning responsive norms and the influences on Like, Comments and non-responses on Facebook. I explain how these findings contribute to CMC literature in general, Facebook studies in particular and what they reveal about several relevant linguistic aspects outside of Facebook. I also highlight gaps that still exist in linguistic research on CMC and suggest how these might be addressed in future studies.

1.5 Summary

From a sociolinguistic perspective social media, and Facebook in particular given its dominant status, allow users to address their social needs and expand their discursive resources. Social-networking sites are spaces where users are in continuous open talk with their social circles largely as a monolithic audience and an audience that is constantly in flux due to the platform and links between "friend" groups. Such a situation
is what I refer to with the term *networked private*, taken from Marwick and Boyd (2014), and is central to interpreting discourse on a site. Specifically, I assert that considering what is unsaid and untold is critical for participating in and managing hearership in the complicated audience context.

The current examination highlights the complexity of social interaction in general, and lends insight into how an agentive platform like Facebook – that actively reports members' actions to one another and distributes information via a feed – might further complicate interactional moves. My findings offer an understanding of the discursive mechanics of social media interactions – how members engage with content to do relationship and identity work that is shaped by and reshapes the networked private space. I do this by combining ethnographic methods of data collection with the methodological goals and analytical units of analyses of interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis to analyze how participation in Facebook discourse is managed and interpreted. Facebook, like all mediums of communication, has benefits and limitations and, of relevance to this investigation, provides social opportunities and challenges. In the next chapter, I situate Facebook discourse within CMC research and introduce the relevant linguistic literature that drives my analyses.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: NETWORKED PRIVACY AND DISCOURSE

2.1 Introduction

Social-networking sites have evolved rapidly to scaffold social interaction in a number of ways and have increasingly become interwoven with offline life, changing peoples' understanding of privacy and publicity. Specifically, Marwick and boyd (2014: 14) argue that the concept of what is private in social media spaces should be discussed not in terms of the individual but in terms of "networked privacy," recognizing that "information is intrinsically intertwined; photographs contain multiple subjects, messages have senders and recipients, and people share information that implicates others." The current investigation contributes to computer-mediated communication (CMC) research by further illuminating how a networked private context influences discourse. Toward that goal, I offer three analytical chapters focusing on the three responsive options of Facebook members: (1) Likes (chapter 4); (2) Comments (chapter 5); (3) and non-responses – reacting to Facebook information by taking action elsewhere (Chapter 6). My analyses draw on interactional sociolinguistics and Conversation Analysis (CA), an underutilized tool in CMC research which Giles et al. (2015) suggest be applied first to those social media which boast the largest, longest-established memberships such as Facebook and Twitter.

This chapter outlines the relevant CMC literature, highlighting the gaps which the current study seeks to address and details a linguistic framework for understanding discourse. As highlighted by Georgalou (2015) in her recent ethnographic work on identity management on Facebook, the majority of CMC researchers are in fields like media studies, information management, and psychology. I focus my review of the research on studies conducted by linguists during the past thirty years, concentrating on those who have taken a discourse approach to CMC. For a more complete review of CMC and Facebook research, I refer readers to Herring (2010), Thurlow and Mroczek (2011a), Wilson et al. (2012) and Bolander and Locher (2015). Since the literature reveals that CMC data is influenced by each unique context – and is highly sensitive to the social variables and communication goals of the users (Herring 2007; Androustopoulos 2006, 2008) – I finish section 2 by outlining what research has thus far revealed about discursive aspects of Facebook in particular.
2.2 Computer-mediated Communication Linguistic Research

Computer-mediated communication refers to humans interacting through electronic channels. The CMC research that has been done by linguists is alternately referred to as computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA), (Herring 2004), new media sociolinguistics (Thurlow & Mroczek 2011b), and discourse-centered online ethnography (DCOE) (Androutsopoulos 2008). Methods used include Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Thurlow 2006); Discourse Analysis (e.g., Nam Mak 2013); Ethnography (e.g., Georgakopoulou 1997, boyd 2008, West & Trester 2013), and Conversation Analysis (e.g., Marcoccia 2004, Laursen 2005, Berglund 2009, Brandt & Jenks 2012). Early CMC research focused on categorization and description of genres of online communication – often prioritizing the technical affordances of a space [over] the communicative acts and interactive goals demonstrated by actual users (see Mondada and Locher [2014] for a detailed discussion of what linguists have studied in the realm of "new media"). Critically, research has evolved from considering CMC as a "new" (form of) language (Crystal 2001) to understanding CMC data as a multitude of new contexts in which language is operating. In this section, I provide an overview of early studies and key figures of CMC research, noting the interactional evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (Herring 2013). I then mention some of the relevant findings about social networking sites and information and relationship management on Facebook in particular. Finally, I highlight the gaps in CMC research and propose how the current investigation addresses these.

2.2.1 Early CMC and Language-related Topics

Research on CMC in the mid 1980's to early 1990's had as its data "Web 1.0," (Herring 2013), the early form of the internet where users' online social interactions were often anonymous and on topic-focused sites or through private channels like email (Baron 1984, 2000), Internet relayed chat (IRC) (Paolillo 2001), or text messaging (see Thurlow and Poff [2013] for an overview of the literature on linguistic studies of text messaging). Other examples of early interactional spaces online include: Bulletin Board Systems (Simmons 1994) – which evolved to Listserves and Discussion lists (e.g., Hamilton 1998, Waseleski 2006, Herring 2010); newsgroups (Marcoccia 2004, Baym 2006) and Chatrooms (Brandt & Jenks 2012), involving what was "essentially rapid
written conversation" (Merchant 2001: 300). In short, participants in CMC group discussions mostly understood that their audience included strangers and that they were engaging in semi-public discourse around certain topics or issues. People were going online to socially engage with one another in a way that was largely separate from their offline relationships.

Unlike in letters and emails, the written/read word was being used in social interaction in new ways, taking place in a more immediate mode that more closely mimicked offline conversations. Thus, a focus of early CMC research involved locating online typed interactions on the written-spoken spectrum (Baron 1984). This was an especially timely focus since writing was not considered by most linguists before the 1970's as an area of inquiry but merely a means of representing spoken language (Baron 1998: 135). However, in the 1980's, linguists had begun to compare the two modes (e.g., Tannen 1982, 1985, 1986; Chafe 1986; Chafe & Tannen 1987), finding that although writing usually exhibits more formal aspects, qualities of the oral and the literate can be found in both spoken and written modes depending on the genres of "texts" being analyzed (Tannen 1986). This adoption of more traditionally oral features into written communication online caused some concern about the lasting impact on written and spoken language offline. Specifically, popular media posited that the youth growing up with CMC is adopting "Netspeak" (Thurlow 2003, 2006) at the exclusion of other forms of speaking and writing. However, this distrust of the new and impulse to guard an idealized version of a "pure" language is a continuous issue in history, with emerging technologies often accused of having negative impacts on society (perhaps, most famously, the inventions of writing itself and later, the printing press).8

The early worry over the offline impact of electronic communication has lessened as technology has become a part of daily interactions, and linguists have attempted to identify the influence on language without evaluating it. For instance, Baron – arguably the first linguist to approach CMC in 1984 – has contributed to the exploration of the impact of CMC on overall language use, positing, for example that "the notion of reading

8 Socrates bemoaned the future effects of the written word, predicting it would make men's minds dependent and unable to store large amounts of information (Merchant 2001). And later, the introduction of movable type caused a large amount of concern about what would happen to the written word (Baron 2011).
is potentially being redefined from linear activity to a random-access process" (2013: 210). She asserts that CMC is changing the way people approach a text now that many texts are electronic. Readers, she explains, no longer read linearly but rather piece-meal, relating to the text through various technological affordances like the "find" button. This causes a shift in relationships between people and linguistic phenomena. This is particularly relevant to the current examination as participants in a conversation on Facebook also may experience a "random-access process" in terms of the time or place at which they engage with a post or whether or not they choose to read and consider intervening Comments by others in their own response.

While Baron was one of the earliest linguists to consider CMC, the most prolific CMC researcher has undoubtedly been Susan Herring, who has committed her career to developing CMC as a legitimate area of linguistic inquiry. She has contributed two decades-worth of innovative studies on a wide range of linguistic topics on CMC, including: politeness norms (1994), sequencing (1999), floor management (2010), illocutionary force (Dresner & Herring 2010), and relevance (2012), among others. Crucially, early in her research, Herring (1996: 4) recognized that “separating out the contributions of the medium from those of human users is an important prerequisite to further CMC analysis.” Her efforts contributed to a move away from a bilateral categorization of CMC data as written or spoken and a push beyond even detailed genre classifications (e.g., "academic discussion list"). She treated medium factors (technological aspects) and the situation factors (e.g., details about the participants, their relationships, their goals) and their combinatory influences as central to understanding the discourse. In short, she has worked toward "the identification of a more nuanced set of computer-mediated discourse types" (Herring 2007: 3).

Her work has been influential in encouraging a discourse analytic approach to CMC which has revealed that the specific CMC context influences the form and function of discourse in important ways. For example, anonymous environments have been found to, sometimes drastically, alter the patterns of social interaction, with researchers observing, for instance, an increase in face-threatening acts (Simmons 1994, Herring 1994, deOliveira 2003). Also, loosened conventions of many early CMC contexts sparked linguistic innovation and language play among users (Herring 1999, Baym 2006)
that continues to be an important part of on newer nonymous social media platforms like MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms make up part of what Herring (2013: 2) terms "Web 2.0" – sites involving "participatory information sharing; user-generated content; an ethic of collaboration; and use of the web as a social platform." In short, Web 2.0 marked a dramatic expansion of social interaction on the Internet, largely in the form of social-networking sites.

The first social-networking site (SNS) was launched in 1997 ("SixDegrees.com") along with several others over the next five years that came and went as internet access increased and large social networks began to exist online. In 2003, the popularity of SNSs surged (boyd & Ellison 2007), and communication via the Internet quickly became "integrated into social life" (Baym, Zhang & Lin 2004: 299). As online interactions began to center around users' existing social networks, researchers transitioned from asking "is email a variety of speech?" (Baron 1998: 134), for example, to exploring questions like: what is being accomplished through email interactionally? How does it affect the message conveyed through it? and what influences how and when it is used? My own research asks similar questions about Facebook: how are the mechanics of conversation shaped by the Facebook audience and platform and how does this influence the social meanings of responsive decisions on the site? CMC research is no longer about defining online language in terms of mode or genre, or even outlining membership and technological aspects of specific sites. Researchers of social-networking sites in particular must appreciate how these things contribute to a context that is being renegotiated through the discursive acts it influences and how this discourse-context relationship responds to and reshapes offline relationships.

2.2.2 SNSs and CMC Research

Online life is now far less separable from offline experiences now that people communicate with their actual social networks on the Internet. Offline relationships among participants are in fact critical contextual information for how their SNS discourse unfolds. For example, Laursen (2005) found that relationships between texters can affect expectations about the response times of text messages, with closer relationships dictating faster response norms. Exploring the interrelations between offline and online communication has also led researchers to realize the influence of media ideologies on
users' content choices and selection of medium (Gershon 2010, Tannen 2013, West 2013). Now, people frequently engage simultaneously in both online and offline communication. For example, recent studies reveal the popular practice of attending to texts while talking with someone else face-to-face (DiDomenico 2013), the use of mobile applications during face-to-face conversation (Gordon 2013), and the act of gchatting while socializing with other friends offline (Robles 2013). The entanglement of offline-online discourse is reflected in the enmeshing of individuals' private and public discourses on SNSs.

Many early researchers of SNSs focused on the "gates and bullhorns" (Cook & Teasley 2011: 41) of social media sharing: how members guarded or promoted their online information. Studies have found that users often struggle to use privacy settings to funnel information as they desire (Madden 2012, Strater & Lipford 2008, Acquisti & Gross 2006). Boyd, a forerunner in SNS research specifically involving teenagers and Twitter, described social networking sites as contexts where "the lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts" (2008: 34) and distinctions in terms of intimate and public topics. Privacy concerns continue to be a topic of focus for research and popular discussion about social media, however the act of framing information as private or public has been problematized by SNSs.

In fact, research in general has moved beyond a simple dichotomous definition of linguistic data. Jones (2004), for example, addresses the misleading assumptions of thinking in terms of a one-or-the-other distinction, separating the "real" and "virtual" aspects, the "public" from the "private" and the "text" from the "context;" the interactions taking place online do not hinge on whether the language demonstrates more characteristics of written or spoken communication (Georgakopoulou 2006), for example. Indeed, Tannen a long-time researcher of both literate and oral language, abandoned this distinction early on. She describes the evolution of her research as concerned first with oral and literate traditions and features as a dichotomy, then a continuum, then moving to examine discourse in terms of involvement- versus content-focused messages, and finally to the adoption of the "notion of features reflecting relative focus on involvement" (1985: 126).
Similarly, a more productive approach to the issue of privacy seems to be recognizing SNSs as what Marwick and boyd (2014: 2) call "networked privacy," which involves "trying to be in public without always being public." Research has revealed that users are highly capable of adopting and adapting discursive behaviors in SNSs to communicate private and public information simultaneously. For example, McCulloch (2009) found that before Facebook had comprehensive audience settings, status updates were composed to be opaque to "friends" outside the "ingroup" by using references recognizable only to the core friend group, a tradition that continues on present-day Facebook. Another practice for negotiating privacy as observed by Georgalou (2015) is that of explicitly proposing a change of CMC channel within the Facebook interaction when one member deems the topic more appropriate to carry on elsewhere. Facebook members have a range of ways to post in the semi-public space, such as avoiding certain language (Lim et al. 2012), focusing on upbeat topics for a more general audience (Bazarova et al. 2012), and code-switching in smaller group-directed posts (Locher & Bolander 2014). Of course, another option is for a member not to monitor their behavior at all. For example, Lee (2011: 123) reported on a study participant, “Peggy,” who used her Facebook account to give frequent updates from the delivery room about her own labor, which, Lee stated, “blurred the boundary between Peggy’s online and offline lives, and between her public and private personae.” In other words, she seemed unconcerned with information management in the collapsed context of Facebook and instead likely conceptualized her Facebook audience as consisting of her close friends (as it is also likely these friends are the ones responding to her posts that others may view disapprovingly and choose not to acknowledge).

A poster on a given social networking site must imagine some audience while composing their message. Studies that have explored the imagined audience of social media find that audience is envisioned by posters in various ways and groupings: friends and family, professional peers, participants in an event being posted about, communities with shared interests, "the generalized audience of the internet" (Cook & Teasley 2011: 44) and a mixture of these. Other social media users express limited curiosity about their listeners, and some think of their posts as being more self-directed (Brake 2012, Cook & Teasley 2011, Marwick & boyd 2010); still others envision making connections on social
media as "acquiring fans while others imagine a community that is far more intimate" (boyd 2008: 131). Posters on social media may conceptualize their audience as "the ideal reader," whom a poster assumes is interested in what is being shared and similar to the poster themselves (Marwick & boyd 2010: 7). The imagined audience, in summary, varies by platform, social groups and even individuals. Overall, as Brake concludes about posting on social media, "it is unclear what kind of audience the writers of such texts envision as they write" (2012: 1058).

Some research, however, has attempted to better understand the actual audiences of certain sites, focusing largely on Facebook. In 2009 Viswanath et al. researched communicative behaviors between "friends" by joining a regional Facebook group and thus obtaining access to the walls (see chapter 1) of each member of this group. They found that only 30% of user pairs in a Facebook network interacted regularly on the site. Instead, members interacted with a larger circle of their "friends" sporadically, most frequently by wishing them "happy birthday" on the site, and for most friendships on Facebook, interaction between members greatly diminished over time. In general, research on Facebook has suggested that members use the site to consistently engage with a limited number of their offline friends (despite often having several hundred Facebook "friends") (Strater & Lipford 2008), which highlights who is likely part of the conceptualized audience of a poster. Confirming this trend, Turkish-American participants in a 2012 study were found to respond most often with friends from their local faith-based organization, despite having several hundred "friends" each (Akkaya 2012), and Burke, Marlow and Lento (2010: 1) discovered that while they only actively engage with a small number of friends regularly, users continue to passively view many of their "friends" activity via the newsfeed. While these studies are several years old at the time of this writing, my examination of Facebook offers data from instances of online metadiscourse, interviews and focus group discussions that suggest the pattern of consistently engaging with a small percentage of one's "friends" persists. And a more recent study by Marwick and boyd (2014) revealed that even when members do keep in mind the networked nature of the context and consider their wider circle of "friends" when posting, when they respond to other peoples' posts, they sometimes forget to consider potential viewers who might see their Comments, such as the "friends" of the
poster, which can have negative social repercussions. Such studies reveal the complexity and the heightened risk of interacting in a networked private context, which likely explains at least part of the frequency of phatic communication (based on Malinowski’s (1923) term "phatic communion" which has come to denote small talk) on Facebook.

While the most common interactions may involve only a small group of friends, researchers have also found Facebook to be a powerful social tool that allows for an online expansion of important offline life events, such as socializing in the workplace (Nam Mak 2013), engaging in political activism (Bode 2012), and mourning the deceased (Marwick & Ellison 2012), and can also be used for building new relationships after an initial offline introduction (Yang, Brown, & Braun 2013). Any kind of Facebook-related behavior, however, depends on the state of offline relationships among participants. For example, McLaughlin and Vitak (2011) discovered that members will sometimes confront a close friend who offends on Facebook but largely ignore violations by mere acquaintances. Marwick and Ellison (2012) revealed that members of Facebook Memorial Pages judged posts on the Page in the context of posters' relationship with the deceased and the topic. Young people communicating with new romantic partners have been found to prefer using Facebook in the earliest stages of the relationship before moving to instant messaging and finally mobile phones as relational closeness increases (Yang, Brown & Braun 2013). While norms may differ according to social group, relationship status, or even individual beliefs, implicit norms do exist concerning central aspects of the site such as: the amount of information to share, what to share in a post versus a private message, the act of friending (and unfriending), and the act of tagging photos (McLaughlin & Vitak 2011; West & Trester 2013). I argue in the current study that there are also norms related to the use of Like, Commenting, and reacting to Facebook posts in other contexts.

2.2.3 The Gaps in CMC Research

All of the above work is foundational for understanding the interactional context of SNS communication. The challenge for researchers now is how to systematically approach discourse in what has been revealed to be a variable and complicated audience context. While the imagined audience (see Brake 2012, Litt 2012) influences the composition of a post and may be partially accessible by analyzing the structure of the
post and interviewing the poster and the active audience is visible in their responses, the 
actual audience that receives and interprets the post includes invisible hearers. This last 
audience type, discussed in Litt (2012), is impossible for the communicator or researcher 
to ever wholly identify, since there is no means of discovering all of the individuals who 
actually viewed a post but did not respond. It is essential, however, that researchers 
acknowledge that the audience in fact includes such hearers, the "nonparticipants" 
(Goodwin 1981: 3). For example, in chapter 6, I reveal reactions of members who are 
expressly not part of the active audience as identified in focus group discussions and 
interviews. These silent (on Facebook) hearers of a post are an important part of the 
audience that is interpreting the post and thus important to account for in an analysis of 
the discourse. And while the entire audience is not accessible to the researcher, or indeed 
to anyone, it is possible to identify some of the silent hearers as I demonstrate in my 
analyses and how they are reacting to certain posts in different contexts, such as in offline 
tellings and in creating new status updates of their own in response to other posts.

Although social-networking sites have become increasingly dialogic – with 
automated response buttons and spaces for comments available under almost every bit of 
content – the audience patterns and hearership norms that have developed alongside this 
evolution have not been widely studied. Some recent research considers the influence of 
responses but does not make them the focus. All of these studies, however, report that 
audience contribution is an important part of what occurs on social media. For example, 
Thurlow and Jaworski (2011: 221) assert that pictures shared on Flickr are “further 
framed (i.e. explained and justified) by their posters and by commenters” [emphasis my 
own]. Chun and Walters (2011) demonstrate instances of audiences on Youtube 
evaluating, affiliating with, and legitimizing the position of the video. Walton and Jaffe 
(2011: 201) mention that commenting is “the taking of a position” in relation to the site, 
the post, “and the prior readers and their comments that constitute the textual context.” 
And finally, Bolander and Locher (2011) point out that commenters often support the 
identity claims a poster makes on Facebook. In short, commenters are critical to the 
construction of a post's meaning and determine the level of success of a poster's 
interactional goals. Clearly, then the complicated SNS audience is critical to illuminate in
analyses, since the motivations for, decisions about and reactions to communicative acts depend on hearer interpretations.

Perhaps because of the unverifiable nature of these audiences, however, the research concerning the relationship between imagined and actual hearers and the offline relationships they represent is still relatively sparse. Profiles, for instance, and posts have been examined a great deal by social scientists, but active discourse between "friends" – the mechanics of information being received and reacted to – has not featured heavily in SNS research. Similarly, despite its massive success as a social space, the Facebook audience as a context has not been a focus of academic attention. And while detailed descriptions exist of many social-networking sites – their affordances and constraints as well as their usership – few long-term ethnographies form the basis of a close discursive analysis. CMC research's preoccupation with newness and technological affordances has often distracted from the fact that SNS interactions are instances of discourse and thus, as Locher and Bolander (2014: 162) recently assert, "it is legitimate to draw on established linguistic tools derived from research on 'offline settings' in order to grasp interaction online."

I address these gaps by offering a long-term study of Facebook using an ethnographic approach to data collection and an interactional sociolinguistic framework for contextualizing the data and units of analysis from sociolinguistics and conversation analysis to systematically interpret instances of discourse. I collected data over several years and updated my CMC literature sources and metadiscursive data during the final writing of the study in the summer of 2015. My analyses focus on the three basic options available to the Facebook audience, which I analyze using established units of discourse analysis: adjacency pairs (chapter 4), intertextual ties (chapter 5), and constructed dialogue and second stories (chapter 6). In the next section, I give a broad overview of discourse within a sociolinguistic framework, focusing on the influence of audience.

2.3 Discourse: The Said and Unsaid

While I provide a review of relevant literature at the beginning of each analytical chapter, in this section I familiarize readers with the basic social mechanics of discourse of relevance to the study overall. I first discuss the importance of the social considerations that drive and shape conversation, then deconstruct the relationship of
speaker-hearer within the participation framework, and finally I highlight the functioning of sequencing among utterances. Fundamentally, the design and reception of information both reveals and renegotiates relationship statuses and participants' understanding of relevant information. In this section, I highlight that discursive evidence also exists in the "noisy silences"—what is "saliently unsaid, hearably unsaid, what could be said but is not." (Linde 2009: 197)–of an interaction. Silences are important management tools due to the need for balancing conflicting social needs in discourse, such as negotiating interpersonal connection while maintaining distinct identities and personal space.

2.3.1 Connection and Consideration

A discursive approach to interaction to recognizes both the necessity and the dangers inherent in communication and the variety of interactional styles individuals' have that influence the shape and interpretation of discourse. While the current examination will not employ Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson 1978) or systematically reference conversational style (Tannen 2005), I mention them both here as indispensible elements of discourse; while patterns may be observed based on sociolinguistic variables such as age, gender and mode of communication, the combinations of individuals' needs and discursive beliefs cannot be discounted and are visible in the variation and miscommunications that pepper discourse, including in this study. For example, while Like may typically be used in certain ways as I suggest in chapter 4, a member may "over"-employ it in order to regularly express the enthusiasm their high-involvement style (Tannen 2005) encourages. In fact, Tannen (2013: 106) reports many young, mostly female, SNS users employing exclamation points not as markers of enthusiasm but as "expected – unmarked in the linguistic sense," such that their absence can communicate anger or disinterest. Similarly, I demonstrate that to some users, Liking is almost an automatic, obligatory part of being on Facebook and a post that has no Likes is arguably marked (see chapter 4).

Individuals are dependent on one another’s interactional competence and good intentions in interaction, as it is fraught with personal risk–specifically, that our words will be ignored by others or cause them to evaluate us negatively (Goffman 1967 [1955]). Lakoff (1973) offers that the rule of "be polite" is one side of the conversational coin, the other being the “rules of clarity,” the latter of which she bases on Grice’s cooperative
rule\(^9\) (from his 1967 Master’s thesis) which involves: quantity, quality, relevance and manner. Boiled down, a speaker wants to provide only the necessary information, say what they believe to be true, maintain relevance, and avoid ambiguity. The fact that these rules are regularly violated in conversations, Lakoff (1973: 298) explains, is due to politeness – the aspect of pragmatic competence that she claims frequently wins out over the rule of clarity. The rule of politeness she summarizes in three steps: “1. Don’t impose, 2. give options, and 3. Make (addressee) feel good – be friendly,” which are often in competition with one another in conversation.

Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) extend Lakoff’s schema by adding the Chinese concept of face (Hu 1944) and the Goffmanian notion of face-work (1967 [1955]), as well as Goffman’s work on deference and demeanor (1956) to create Politeness Theory. They explain the social balance in conversation as involving the two "faces" of each interactant: positive and negative. Positive face they define as the desire to be acknowledged and approved of by others, much in keeping with Goffman’s original notion of face. Negative face they introduce as the desire to be free from obligations, a concept that highlights the importance of Lakoff’s (1973) first rule of politeness: Don’t impose. Brown and Levinson continue with the Chinese understanding and Goffman’s formulation of face by asserting that interactants have influence over both their own and others’ faces in interaction and are expected to manage these with respect. The complication is that conversation is full of what the authors label as “face-threatening acts” (FTAs). This means that polite interaction demands a continuous amount of facework, or “positive and negative politeness” to navigate these FTAs.

Politeness Theory is one attempt to explain the push-and-pull of conversation; Tannen (2005) also explains the balance in terms of individuals’ conversational style. This approach fills a potential gap in Brown and Levinson’s model which focuses on cultural-specific politeness expectations surrounding social distancing but fails to recognize the intra-social group variation. In actual conversation, what is read as positive or negative politeness may differ from participant to participant (not just between

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\(^9\) See Watts, Ide & Ehlich (2005: 3) who note that Grice's unpublished 1967 manuscript "had been circulating among linguists and philosophers," spurring later work on politeness.
cultures). In Tannen’s style framework, different individuals may value different ends of the spectrum (closeness or distance, solidarity or power) in different contexts and participation formats and may express these values in different ways. Tannen analyzes conversation in terms of high involvement style (where closeness and intimacy is most valued) and high considerateness style (where privacy is most valued). Facebook is made up of speakers and hearers with a wide range of styles on the involvement-considerateness spectrum which influences how much they share and in what ways they participate on the site. In addition to aspects of who the participants are as discursive individuals and general interactional norms, the negotiation of their relationships to one another and their roles within the conversation also influences the shape of the discourse.

2.3.2 The Participation Framework

The relationships of the participants and their expressed relationship to the utterances as well as any institutional roles they may be inhabiting at the time of interaction provide important contextual information and outline the "participation framework" (Goffman 1981, Schiffrin 1988) of an exchange. Discourse requires collaborated participation; speaker and hearer exchange signals constantly during interaction. Thus, as M. Goodwin (1990: 156) explains, the participation framework is "talk-invoked" and "includes the talk in progress, as well as participation in it and alignment to it, of both speaker and hearer." Put another way by C. Goodwin (2007: 62), participation frameworks allow "for the organization of cognition and action that must be actively constructed and sustained through the ongoing work of participants." The structuring of information and relationships illuminates how discursive moves are intended and interpreted by participants and reveals their social goals for a given interaction.

The construction of such frameworks require continuous signaling between participants. Speakers give cues as to how they are relating to the ideas being shared (Schiffrin 1987: 27), which in turn indicates how they intend the hearers to understand them. Hearers then signal whether or not they understand the information (Goffman 1981a) and how they are aligning (or not) to what the speaker conveys. This "hearer participation," Schiffrin (1988: 17) asserts, is key to successful interaction, even when a more monologic action seems to be taking place such as a speaker telling a story. A
narrator needs to know if the audience is following the narrative. And in general, in order for a speaker's utterances to be part of the discourse, it requires acceptance from the other participants, or what Schiffrin (1988: 17) terms "hearer endorsement." I demonstrate in chapter 4 how this is accomplished on Facebook largely through Likes.

As Goffman (1981: 144) points out, there are different roles speakers and hearers occupy which introduce different obligations and constraints in conversation. The role of speaker can be deconstructed into animator, author and principal. At times, a given speaker acts as all three, at other times – for example, when a politician animates a speech authored by a speechwriter – the roles can be distinct. The third role, that of “principal,” is the individual whose position, assertions, and beliefs are being expressed in an utterance. It may be the case, for instance, that a lawyer speaks for (i.e., acts as animator) their client, who is the principal whose wishes are being expressed. The deconstruction of speaker and hearer roles influences the participation format and the goals for and interpretations of the discourse. In terms of hearers, according to Goffman (1981b: 132), anyone within hearing distance of a conversation is part of the participation framework and is either a ratified hearer or a bystander, the former of which might be addressed or unaddressed and the latter of which either "overhears" without intention or "eavesdrops." A respectful bystander should either signal that they are listening, or make efforts to limit their access. Ratified hearers, on the other hand, are expected to confirm they are listening and signal how the information is coming across. Social media clouds some of the distinct speaker/hearer roles. For instance, is a social-networking site the animator? If so, how if at all should researchers account for the site within the participation framework? Also, who counts among the ratified hearers on a social-networking site? Do they include whoever receives the information, since a poster is aware that their message is funneled through a newsfeed?

Regardless of the exact participation framework, speaker and hearer must collaborate to build meaningful discourse. The need of the speaker to know about the reception of their message and the hearer's obligation to relay this information is one of the reasons for the frequent two-part exchange structure of conversation, or "adjacency pairs," and why conversationalists look to a response for an understanding of how it
relates to the preceding utterance. Adjacency pairs, replies and responses are the building blocks of conversation and the analytical focus of the current investigation.

2.3.3 Adjacency Pairs and Reach

In the search for how conversationalists maintain order and make sense of each others' contributions, Conversation Analysis (Sacks 1972, Schegloff & Sacks 1973, Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974) maintains that meaning-making is accomplished locally, the interpretation of one turn dependent on the turn before it. This pragmatic aspect of language is known in sociolinguistics as the "exchange structure," (Schiffrin 1988: 24), which consists of turn units in a dialogue that build on and anticipate one another. Many types of utterances anticipate what comes next, and conversationalists automatically attempt to hear the "conditional relevance" (Schegloff 1968: 1083) of a response – how it relates to the prior utterance.

The concept of "adjacency pairs" was developed to explain how interactants manage certain interactional tasks, such as closing a conversation (Schegloff & Sacks 1973). In order to bring the turn-taking machinery to an eventual halt, Schegloff and Sacks claim, a speaker has to initiate a closing adjacency pair, allowing the other(s) involved to respond in a way that signals they understand the goal to terminate the conversation and are going along with it (or not). In addition to the (A) invitation to end a conversation plus (B) an agreement to do so, these part A-part B pairs are found throughout conversations, (e.g., questions-answers, invitations-RSVPs, etc.) These pairs are useful in analysis to interpret how certain utterances are intended and interpreted – what they are signaling in the interaction. For example, both interactants are expected to take part in the "terminal exchange" (1973: 298) to close a conversation, thus a speaker who closes without creating a slot for the other interlocutor to accept the termination (e.g., saying "good-bye" and hanging up the phone before the other person can also say "good-bye") is interpreted as rude or angry. In other words, there is a "hearable silence" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 295) at the end of the conversation that likely has meaning.

Schiffrin (1988: 9) explains that these pairs "whose propositional completion depends on contributions from both speaker and hearer" connect the speaker and hearer as co-creators of a single text. She refers to them as "dialogic pairs" rather than "adjacency pairs," and Goffman (1981a: 17) refers to them still more broadly as "ritual
interchanges" to capture the fact that many bounded exchanges have multiple parts and that non-adjacent sequencing is possible. Goffman (1981a: 43) asserts that there is the broader category of responses which are more flexible and can address specific aspects of the prior statement (without forming a "proper" reply to the statement as a whole), such as addressing "the statement's duration, tactfulness, style, origin, accent, vocabulary, and so forth." In short, responses are able to "reach" to earlier and broader or smaller aspects of the conversation rather than just to the semantic content of the adjacent utterance. This "reaching" is done regularly on Facebook, where Comments refer directly back to the posts often remaining silent about intervening Comments. Since Comments tend to vary in what topical thread they draw on, it is likely that Commenters are reading the prior Comments but choosing to act in terms of carrying on a dialogue with the poster by reaching to the original post. In chapter 5 I demonstrate the way this is done and how Commenters can reject the expected response a post projects by Commenting about the wording or structure of the post itself to negotiate a different participation framework (see section 5.2).

The critical point, again, is that conversational partners are indispensable to creating interactional meaning. A Facebook post that has a response – even a single Like – is no longer an isolated utterance; it is a topic that has been "taken up" and made into an "interactional achievement" (Schegloff 1982). Recognizing that the response is what creates conversation, I consider how responsive moves on Facebook reveal and negotiate relationships among post, poster, and responder. I analyze responses to a post in terms of what other response options were not chosen and highlight how Comments can draw on the unsaid in a post to negotiate topic and participant roles.

2.4 Summary

While a large amount of CMC research has examined social media, there remains a scarcity of discursive studies carried out by linguists. In order to take a discourse approach to research on current social networking sites, researchers must recognize that online interactions are often extensions of offline relationships, which are maintained via a variety of modes of communication (Baym, Zhang & Lin 2004). SNSs are semi-public spaces that include a large portion of a member's social network, and researchers have only begun to tackle the complicated audience context in their analyses of CMC data.
Doing so requires recognizing how offline relationships between members influences responsive choices online as well as considering how the said and unsaid in an SNS interaction influences offline relationships. Such aspects may best be accessed through ethnographic methods.

The data from an online ethnography can be approached in many ways, though it is my own belief that a discourse analytic approach is the most productive in terms of revealing practices of information and relationship management on a social networking site. Such an approach, that recognizes the "audience as coauthor" (Duranti 1986) and that context is negotiated during an interaction, interprets discourse in its local, sequential context as well as the social context that influences and is influenced by what is being said (and what is not). Many of the underlying expectations and beliefs about what occurs in a Facebook exchange is not accessible through mere observation on the site. Unsolicited stories from members, online metadiscourse about annoying Facebook behaviors and focused discussions about specific features or practices on the site each contribute to an in-depth understanding of the social mechanics of Facebook interaction in the current study. I detail these data as well as my approach to data collection and analysis in chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The current investigation provides a linguistic analysis of discourse on and about Facebook using data captured online and in face-to-face interactions. Included in the analyses are aspects of communication off-screen – ideologies and relationships – that influence (and indeed make possible) the interpretation of the discursive units examined. I have combined ethnographic methods of data collection with a discourse analytic approach that draws from interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis (CA) to illuminate how participation in Facebook discourse is managed and interpreted. Crucially, in the tradition of an ethnographic approach, I allowed the data to inform me, repeatedly stepping back from my own assumptions and previous taken-for-granted understandings of Facebook as a long-time member. Such an approach prevented me from privileging my own voice or that of any specific member. As an ethnographer and a linguist, I took several years to steep in the data and allow topics to surface as important and then focused my analyses around these. In my review of the CMC literature and my own exploration of Facebook discourse, the audience reaction to posts presented itself as a key element lacking illumination. In this chapter, I describe my approach to understanding the audience and responsive norms on the site. Specifically, I outline how ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics and CA are invaluable to the discourse analyses I carry out in this study and I provide a detailed description of the five specific types of data I analyze.

3.2 Discourse Analysis

To demonstrate the uniqueness of the interactional context of social-networking sites (SNSs) and the discursive innovations of its members, I draw upon three approaches (See Schiffrin's [1994] definition of discourse analysis) to discourse: Ethnography of Communication, Interactional Sociolinguistics, and Conversation Analysis (CA). An ethnographic approach involves long term investigation of these relationships through participant-observation, providing a broad context and in-depth understanding of the communicative norms of a community for analysis. At its most basic, a sociolinguistic approach to discourse examines the joint-construction of meaning in interaction, focusing on "the role of language in constituting and negotiating social relationships" (Tannen
Interactional sociolinguistics critically highlights that while such a context is crucial for interpretation of the data, it is constantly being responded to and reshaped during the discourse, thus the analytical focus is the symbiosis of discourse and social context. Finally, CA provides a technical focus on discursive sequences, allowing for microanalysis of the basic mechanics of conversation and what variations on these general patterns might convey in a given interaction.

3.2.1 Ethnography of Communication

Originally titled *Ethnography of Speaking* based on Dell Hymes’ seminal work in 1962, Ethnography of Communication is based in the anthropological tradition. The approach when applied to discourse focuses on the “cultural competence” of speakers in a community (as opposed to the intrinsic competence that Chomsky referenced, which was said to consist of the *grammatical* competency of native speakers.) Within the ethnographic framework, language is understood as “first and foremost a socially situated cultural form” (Saville-Troike 2003: 3) rather than an abstract system of grammar.

The approach assumes that to be interpreted language has to have context, and its speakers must possess expectations and norms about how to use it in context. Thus, a researcher is required to commit to long hours of fieldwork in the community where language is being collected in order to form a clear understanding of the values and beliefs of the speakers and how context shapes their communicative practices. The methodology involves many months or even years of participation and observation in a community. This fieldwork contributes to (1) the ability to identify which interactions to focus on as data and (2) familiarity with the norms and expectations a community has. This allows for an informed interpretation of the social meanings being created and maintained through the discourse. Hymes (1964: 3) says of the approach: “It must take as a context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code takes its place as but part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw." Thus, discourse is understood as a means of creating and sustaining community-specific meaning and each discursive choice is recognized as only one among a range of possible choices that *could have* occurred.

In his work, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, Hymes (1974: 9) explains that an ethnographic approach to discourse the connections between aspects of an interaction as
the key to accomplishing meaningful communication, stating that "the interrelations [are] always essential, so that one cannot only generalize the particularities, but also particularize the generalities." It is the task of ethnography to embrace the complexity of interaction, all of its interrelations and particularities, rather than to seek to constrain and neatly define it. The approach recognizes that “reality is kaleidoscopic, complex and complicated, often a patchwork of overlapping activities” (Blommaert & Jie 2010: 11) and attempts to build a framework large enough to house all of the intricacies of language. The current investigation also focuses on the interrelations in its analyses: for instance, I do not define what Like means, but rather demonstrate context-specific meanings and the contribution of the other responsive choices to the interpretation of a Like (chapter 4). I show that the key to understanding individual Likes is to examine the relationship between poster and Liker, Liker and topic, and Like and other possible actions. Chapter 4 details how Like is generally employed and then illuminates how particular Likes that seem to be outliers can be understood in the overall responsive framework of Facebook.

Ethnography allows a researcher to identify communicative patterns and deviations from and variations on these patterns and to understand them from the perspective of those using the language (Androutsopoulos 2008). The ethnography of communication "combines ethnography – the description and analysis of culture – with linguistics – the description and analysis of language” (Smart 2012: 151). The strength of the approach is that it provides researchers with insights invaluable for understanding language use in cultural contexts. However, a potential weakness is that the “analysis of language” component is not clearly defined, which is why I argue that it is best used in combination with the analytical units that CA and interactional sociolinguistics provide. 3.2.2 Interactional Sociolinguistics

Context is also central in interactional sociolinguistics but under the assumption that the influence of context and discourse is two-way: language is always interpreted within a context that it simultaneously negotiates. The approach, though not coined as interactional sociolinguistics until later, is rooted in the investigation of language and identity, considering "situated talk" in a manner that “brings together social, sociocognitive and linguistic constructs” (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982: 1). As
Gumperz explains of the approach, it analyzes “communicative goals in real life situations by concentrating on the meaning making processes and the taken-for-granted background assumptions that underlie the negotiation of shared interpretations” (Gumperz 1999: 454). In short, an interactional sociolinguist seeks to understand the cultural and idiosyncratic knowledge speakers and hearers draw upon to make sense of what a conversation is accomplishing socially.

Gregory Bateson, an anthropologist, developed the foundational idea for the approach – that of language operating on two levels, creating linguistic meaning while signaling the social context for that meaning – while observing animals "play fighting" at the zoo. Bateson assumed that there must be a way of communicating that a bite was meant as "play" rather than aggression. Extended to human interaction, Bateson et al. (1963: 155), claim that “there is never ‘a message’ singly, but in actual communication always two or more related messages, of different levels and often conveyed by different channels – voice, tone, movement, context, and so on.” This notion of “different channels” conveying other messages is similar to the central concept of interactional sociolinguistics proposed by its founder, the linguist John Gumperz. Gumperz proposed that hearers use signals from the speaker about how the discourse should be understood. His student, Levinson (2003: 34), described Gumperz’s main contribution – the concept of “contextualization cues” – as follows: “that utterances can carry their contexts with them, that is, the set of assumptions necessary to unpack their interpretation.” Utterances use cues, according to Levinson (2003: 35), to “nudge” hearers a certain direction in the interpretation. Among these cues, Gumperz (1982: 131) lists: lexical and syntactic choices, formulaic expressions, and conversational opening, closing and sequencing moves, as well as nonverbal aspects such as facial expressions and gestures. The unique combination of these provides a local context, within the larger cultural context in which the discourse is occurring, to allow people to (mostly) communicate successfully. Gumperz’s student, Deborah Tannen, furthered his work by applying his notion of contextualization cues to everyday conversation in the family (2007), workplace (1994)

10 While facial expressions and gestures seem irrelevant to Facebook interactions (minus the videochat option which is not addressed in this study), the analytical chapters address how certain actions on the site provide "cues" for discursive interpretation in a similar way to visual offline behaviors.
and between friends (2005). Tannen (2005) also applies Bateson’s (1955: 315) work on “metacommunicative messages” – which he later termed “metamessages” (1972) – to instances of social discourse. For example, an interjection by a hearer of a narrative may communicate one meaning verbally and additional meaning based on aspects like the degree of overlap and volume to convey social intentions such as that the hearer wishes to build rapport with or to take the floor from, and thus challenge, the narrator (the interpretation of what discursive acts like interruption mean depends partially on participants' individual communicative style (Tannen 2005).

While ethnography of communication considers a speech event as its basic unit of analysis, interactional sociolinguistics analyzes units of discourse that are bounded by what the researcher determines to be natural breaks in a stretch of talk, often marked by a breath or pause and how these are joined to make social meaning. The approach is driven by the dichotomy of language: that the shape of communication is partially determined by macro-social factors and that individuals also locally construct their social selves during an interaction (Gumperz 1999). An interactional sociolinguistics framework assumes that language in use does not function according to linguistic theoretical models – which treat language in isolation – but asserts that meaning is “jointly created by speakers and listeners in the act of using language to accomplish interactional goals” (Tannen 2013: 76). Since it is assumed that speakers and hearers must imply and infer meaning that is coded in both the linguistic form and extralinguistic features of utterances, interactional sociolinguists use aspects outside of the transcript to inform their analysis – e.g., the interactants' personal and professional relationships to one another, their reported feelings during an interaction – a method CA has traditionally avoided.

3.2.3 Conversation Analysis

Similarly to the other two approaches, CA views language not just as linguistic forms but as “a vehicle for social action” (Clift, Drew, & Hutchby 2006: 5). Grounded in sociology, CA is a detail-oriented approach to analysis of single episodes of talk, often dissecting the intricacies of seemingly trivial interactions (e.g., social phone calls, checking-out at a store). The sequences of turns at talk, the opening and closing of a conversation, self- and other-speaker corrections, and topic management, all provide evidence of how conversationalists construct social reality. The goal of CA is to
understand the conversational machinery that makes social interaction possible. Unlike the other two approaches, CA traditionally limits itself to the transcribed conversation. Crucially, the "context" in CA is the immediately local turns at talk that precede and follow an utterance.

As stated earlier, conversation analysts largely rely on the text (i.e. the transcript) to understand the mechanics of interaction. Since the early data of CA consisted of phone calls, the approach did not traditionally capture visual forms of communication (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) – aspects that interactional sociolinguists argue are critical for the interpretation of the social meaning of interactions. This has now changed, however, with some CA researchers using video to capture data (see Goodwin 2007) and including the nonverbal elements in the transcript. Evidence shows a correlation of pitch and gaze, among other nonverbal cues, and the management of many conversational elements such as turn-taking (a central mechanism considered by CA). Referencing the content and characteristics of particular turns at talk and their placement in the overall structure of the conversation, CA researchers “put participants’ own displayed understanding in interaction at the center of the analysis” (Clift, Drew, & Hutchby 2006: 40). Among the features examined as cues to how participants are reacting to and managing talk CA considers silences, pauses, overlaps, volume, stress patterns, false starts and repetitions. Of course these aspects of offline talk are not all present on social media. It is not possible on Facebook, for instance, to overlap turns with another member, and false starts do not exist since the message is transmitted upon completion. Instead, conversations have to be managed using other tactics and context is shaped via other means.

Despite the differences between approaches, the concept of context is key to any discursive analysis. Drawing from the three approaches, my methodology of data collection and analysis recognizes context as critical for meaning-making. I have put at the forefront of my research the idea that "participants are situated within multiple contexts which are capable of rapid and dynamic change as the events they are engaged in unfold" (Goodwin & Duranti 1992: 5) The foci of my analytical chapters combine to demonstrate that the context for meaningful discourse on Facebook consists of the more enduring offline situations of relationships, the Facebook platform, and the moment-to-moment negotiation of relevant social aspects through posts and responsive choices.
I took an ethnographic approach to data collection to gain a broad view of the communicative behavior of Facebook users, devoting several years to observing different types of members enacting and discussing Facebook norms. In the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics, I had access to details about the relationships between users in my study, which informed my interpretation of the data, while my findings acknowledged that these relationships are themselves reinterpreted by the discourse. Finally, I used established units of analysis from interactional sociolinguistics and CA to systematically analyze stretches of discourse in order to demonstrate how members manage interactional sequences in the networked-private context of Facebook.

Conversations on social media are an attractive data source for a sociolinguist, with endless "speech" immediately available for observation, however, this very accessible data can be difficult to actually collect both for practical and ethical reasons and is only a small piece of the data needed to fully capture the mechanics of online conversation.

3.3 Data Collection

While Facebook data at first seems an easily-accessible, enormous database for discourse, it is also a complicated research site ripe with ethical quagmires and requiring many exchanges with concerned IRB policymakers. Even researchers at Facebook, Inc. have recently come under fire for the ethical ambiguity of studies carried out for which they have claimed "implied user permission" (Talbot 2014). Ethical considerations come first and foremost, and some boundaries continue to be fuzzy on social-networking sites in terms of what is public versus private, as mentioned in chapter 1. For example, many users' posts can be read by strangers and most users have an understanding that their posts are disseminated to an unknown number of newsfeeds for consumption by "friends" of "friends," colleagues, etc., however the level of awareness of the newsfeed context varies among members. This is apparent both when talking to members about Facebook and in the variability in the "publicness" of the information different members post to the site, highlighting that some users seem to be assuming a more public or private audience than actually exists. Given these considerations, I acquired IRB approval\footnote{IRB#: 2010-077} and obtained permission from all Facebook users whose posts I collected; this was done several times during the long observation period as required by the IRB to keep users aware of my
observation while providing them a chance to "renew" their participation. All screenshots were scrubbed of names and locations and replaced with pseudonyms.

During the early stages of data collection, I discovered that the actual language I saw on Facebook was not sufficient for a full analysis of social meaning. Thus, I chose to diversify my data. In addition to the "naturally-occurring" Facebook discourse I collected, I also collected four other types of data that inform the analyses: fieldnote observations, group discussions, interviews, and online "practical metadiscourse" (Taylor 1992) about Facebook. While all five data types contribute to my overall understanding of the setting and communicative norms of Facebook, different analytical chapters draw on a different combination of the data types for primary analysis.

The data I collected provided both breadth and depth of insight and grounded my analysis of Facebook discourse in the context of an observed evolution of the site and in the reconciliation of (or at times, lack thereof) other members' understanding of what is being communicated. The different types of data offered various angles of analysis. For example, included in my fieldnotes are summarized accounts of Facebook interactions I observed and my immediate reactions to them. This type of data allowed me to stand back, as a researcher, and consider Facebook discourse in chunks for a broader analytical picture of interactive behavior based on what aspects struck me at the time of my observation, and since I wasn't recording the actual discourse, I was able to include people outside my smaller list of participants. The group discussions and interviews allowed me to gather other members' observations and interpretations of Facebook discourse to test against my own, a common practice of interactional sociolinguistics (See Tannen 2005). For instance, I introduced the topic of the Like button in all three group discussions due to my interest in the feature. For many users, Like is a simple feature of Facebook that they don't feel has much nuance until they are directly asked to analyze it. Once questioned about it, however, interview and focus group participants expressed a number of beliefs about Like. Also in the focus groups members often voiced frustrations about specific Facebook encounters, frustrations they did not communicate to the offending party within the Facebook encounter itself. I found that the rare Facebook conflicts that were addressed, were often done so offline – or through more private mediums – indicating that surface evidence in Facebook exchanges may suggest
something different than what the participants are actually experiencing.

The variable types of data also allowed me access to a multitude of informants: my offline social networks (fieldnotes, focus groups and interviews), three distinct age groups (focus groups and interviews), numerous individuals outside my social network (online metadiscourse), and my Facebook network (screenshots). Thus, while a majority of the data came from my own online and offline social network (e.g., peers, colleagues, family, family friends), the focus group discussions and online metadiscourse in particular allow me to suggest that my analyses may identify a broader pattern of communication that extends beyond my own social circle; two of the focus groups and all online metadiscursive data involved individuals I did not know well or did not know at all. Finally, since gender may also influence discourse online (e.g., Herring 1994, De Oliveira 2003), I attempted to collect data from both male and female members. While my social network is more female-heavy, and thus most screenshots captured female posters, the young professionals focus group was evenly balanced (5 male, 6 female). And while the college-age focus group only included one male and the over-50 focus group no males, the individual interviews were conducted with one female and one male of the same age group (+50).

Except for fieldnote observations, I treat all data types as primary data. Thus, I use discourse analysis on instances of Facebook interactions, focus group discussion excerpts and interview excerpts as well as the metadiscourse data I collected online. Doing so allows me to interpret and illustrate how members' position themselves and others on and in references to the site. I now detail each type of data in terms of why and how it was collected, beginning with how I obtained permission from my Facebook "friends" to record their interactions.

3.3.1 Facebook Screenshots

I recruited participants for this part of my data collection from my own social network through both an IRB-approved email and a Facebook Page I created (See Appendices A and B). Both electronic recruitment materials included a description of the project and an explanation of the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation in the study. Consent was then given by each participant electronically by either a response to an email or a "yes" on the Facebook Page. Because ethical considerations always took
priority, I blocked out responses in screenshots that were made by people not participating in the study; this means that many of the exchanges have gaps, though I did target for collection those interactions in which the most study participants were involved. Thus, some screenshots were chosen for practical purposes, while others were chosen because they captured a particular discursive behavior that demonstrated or flouted Facebook norms I had identified.

In some instances, an interaction chosen as an example involves non-participants. In these instances, I have blocked out their exact contribution and summarized their contribution as *(says...)*, as demonstrated in Example 1, in which only Mickey and Louis are consenting study participants.

**EXAMPLE 1. Avoiding "recording" non-study participants**

In this way, I avoided recording and analyzing word-for-word responses of unwitting parties while not denying the possible influence of intervening turns. Collecting data in this way from my own social network can limit ability to make generalizations, however it also gave me more of an opportunity to identify group norms playing out, given that media users tend to develop these "idioms of practice" together with friends, family, coworkers, etc. (Gershon 2010: 6). I spent years observing and participating in this Facebook network in keeping with an ethnographic approach.
3.3.2 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are a staple feature of ethnographic research, where "participant observation" is employed to collect knowledge of a community and – in the case of ethnography of communication – to investigate how a group of people use language to establish, maintain, and interpret relationships and vice-versa. I recorded actual notes from April 2012-February 2014, though I began my participant-observation as a researcher of Facebook in 2010 while writing course-specific research papers about the site. The fieldnotes document my own reactions to Facebook observations as well as aspects of Facebook I have heard discussed offline in casual conversation, providing some insight into the influences of online and offline interactions on one another. Also known as fieldwork, I understand this type of approach to data to be “an intellectual enterprise, a procedure that requires serious reflection” (Blommaert & Jie 2010: 2). Part of my methodology involved continuous reflection on my own participation on Facebook and paying attention to which types of posts prompted what types of responses from my friends.

My notes were also where I reflected on and reacted to the Facebook interactions I did not have permission to capture, summarizing what I observed and my reaction rather than collecting a screenshot of the data, as shown in Example 2.

EXAMPLE 2. Fieldnotes from September 2012.

There are many of these “share if you...” posts; today I saw someone posted "click share if you are proud of your daughter." I recognized the mom who had shared this, and at first thought it was sweet. But it also strikes me as any of those email chains we used to get – manipulative. You aren’t proud of your daughter if you don’t click share? Does this bother people who don’t have daughters or moms? Is it face threatening to moms who have daughters but don’t like to take actions on Facebook or “share” things?

Also included in my fieldnotes are informal conversations I had with people about Facebook and unsolicited stories from friends about their Facebook experiences. I have used these to drive some of my research considerations. For instance, one friend told me that she might not have found out that a certain friend had “defriended”12 her – unlinking her from his network of “friends” on the site – if Facebook hadn’t suggested to her

12 Members seem to have individual preferences for the term "defriend" or "unfriend" to refer to removing someone from their Facebook "friend" network.
recently that she might want to friend this person (something that only occurs when
members are not already friends). This highlights the fact that Facebook can be
implicated in a potential facethreat to both users (see West & Trester 2013), enhancing
the social distance between them by indirectly informing the one of the other’s private
social moves. This story (captured in my fieldnotes) sparked my interest in Facebook’s
communication with its members and how Facebook as a context may challenge identity
claims and influence social relationships, which I consider throughout this study and
focus on in chapter 6. Insights gleaned from fieldwork also informed the loose interview
schedule for the focus groups and interviews I conducted with participants, during which
I sometimes explored whether these types of experiences and interpretations resonated
with other members.

3.3.3 Focus Group Discussions

I conducted and recorded three focus group discussions between September 2012
and March 2013. Androutsopoulos (2008: 8) warns that data collection should involve
"interviewees who exemplify different participation formats, e.g., amateur and
professional ones, as identified by observation." Heeding this advice, I included a wide
age range in my focus group data. I arranged the groups around three different age and
life-situation categories: an undergraduate class of students in their late teens and early
twenties, a group of friends who were young professionals in their late twenties and early
thirties; and a gathering of mothers and grandmothers over the age of fifty. Based on my
fieldwork observations and previous research (West 2010), I believe many norms and
group expectations fall roughly along these lines which I discuss in the current
examination of the site.

In addition to the age differences, each group is different in setting, tone, and
inter-group relationships. The undergraduate discussion group was made up of students in
a summer cross-cultural communication course at Georgetown University taught by Anna
Trester. Seven students were involved in the discussion along with the professor and
myself. Before the discussion, I guest lectured about politeness norms on Facebook. The
24-minute recorded discussion came at the end of the class when the students were
analyzing Facebook interactions I had given them in terms of the concept of "face" (See
section 2.3 for a definition of "face"; and West & Trester 2013 for the concept as applied
to Facebook). The students were in three groups and had different data sets they worked on together before discussing with the larger group during the recording. The discussion was informal though more guided than the other two group discussions since I also had the responsibility of teaching them linguistic analytical concepts. However, due to the small size and the relaxed nature of the summer course, the discussion often resulted in conversational segments where students would give their opinions about Facebook and share their own practices on the site.

The young professionals discussion group included 11 participants, all of whom were friends, including myself, who knew each other well. The discussion lasted 52 minutes and was held in the house of one of the participants located in Washington, DC. The conversation was relaxed and did not require much input from me. I reference this group most often due to the fact that the ages of the participants in this group ranged from 27 to 32 (in 2012) – the generation of the first Facebook users. This age group joined Facebook as college students or soon thereafter, before Facebook was the interactive site it is today and experienced numerous changes to Facebook with their peers over time.

The over-fifty discussion group was made up of 11 women, all mothers and some grandmothers, plus myself as a sort of discussion mediator. All of the women were either from, or had been living in, Texas for many years. The recorded discussion lasted 56 minutes in the house of one of the women in San Antonio, Texas. This group was similar to the young professionals group in its casual setting, however, unlike the group of young professionals, not all participants were familiar with one another. Many of the women had preexisting relationships but a few were new to the larger social circle. Also, unlike the other two groups, this group included several people who had never been, or were no longer, members of Facebook.

The focus groups were invaluable for observing mostly organic discussion about Facebook ideologies – beliefs about the "normal" way to behave in the networked private context – and perceptions about other members based on their discursive actions on the site. Collecting data from informal discussion groups provided insights into aspects of communicative behavior and highlighted potentially divisive topics that might have been lost had I only conducted one-on-one interviews, which are by nature limited by my own biases in the questions I ask. Thus, I refer to the focus group discussions often. I did,
however, conduct two individual interviews after I gathered the focus group data so that I could ask specific questions of participants over fifty that the over-fifty group discussion had raised and to diversify my over-fifty informants.

3.3.4 Interviews

The over-fifty discussion group was the most homogenous of the discussion groups. The members shared many characteristics besides age; the participants were all female, politically conservative, religious homemakers who were mothers and grandmothers. Almost all had lived most or all their life in the same town in Texas. To counteract this homogeneity, I then conducted two one-on-one interviews with individuals in the same age group (+50) but who had very different backgrounds from the participants in the over-fifty discussion group (and who demonstrated different behavior on Facebook than those in the over-fifty discussion group and than each other based on my general observations over the course of this study).

The two interviewees were Madeline and Fred\(^\text{13}\), who are married and both of whom I interviewed at their home in July of 2013. Madeline is a social worker, and Fred is an adjunct professor and musician. Both are politically liberal and originally from the Midwest but currently living in Virginia. Since they are also in my "friend" network on Facebook, I had observed that they both accessed the site frequently and used it differently than one another. Madeline often used Facebook to find and share cooking recipes, play games, and to view her kids' pictures; Fred used it to share trivia, jokes and communicate with the local musician community.

The interviews were much more structured than the group discussions though I attempted to keep the exchange casual and open. The one-on-one format, however, encouraged a more question-answer structure. I found that ideologies surfaced much more easily in group discussions than in a format where I directly questioned someone about them. In the group discussions banter and joking about Facebook practices revealed many underlying assumptions, while the two interview participants had a hard time articulating what it was that they believed about Facebook norms (See Appendix C for interview schedule). My interview with Madeline, however, resulted in several valuable descriptions of online behaviors as well as demonstrations of Madeline's position toward

\(^{13}\) Pseudonyms
the site, particularly when her daughter chimed in during the interview to answer questions alongside her mother.

3.3.5 Online Practical Metadiscourse.

In addition to observations and discussions, I use what Androutsopoulos (2008: 12) terms "lay sociolinguistics." This refers to collecting language about, in this case, Facebook language. This is a method of collecting what Taylor (1992: 11) calls "practical metadiscourse," which refers to "the spontaneous, 'colloquial,' and context-specific ways of talking about talk (and writing)." While the interviews and group discussions also produced metadiscourse about Facebook interactions, the online metadiscourse comes from outside my own social network and is less speculative, motivated by other social goals. Often, bloggers or other posters create this metadiscourse to be humorous, express disapproval, or advise others about Facebook practices. This type of metadiscursive practice, Taylor explains "serves as a way for speakers to enforce regularity and conformity in the communicational activities of their community" to charge other members with "conforming to whatever [they] take to be 'normal' patterns of communicational behavior" (1992: 12) all of which provide insight into members’ interpretations of Facebook discourse. I collected this data from blogs, Facebook Pages, and websites. I examined posts that explain the goal of certain Facebook discursive features – such as the Like button – as well as instances of fake Facebook interactions created to mock Facebook communicative practices.

Like with the other types of data, I take a discourse approach toward these instances, recognizing the value of what Craig (1999: 21) asserts about practical metadiscourse" that it "is always pragmatically entwined with the here and now context of situation in which it is produced and to which it refers." Thus, I consider these instances in the online contexts from where they have been collected and whether their goal is to be instructive, humorous, critical, or speculative. I argue that even fabricated instances of Facebook discourse, such as those collected from sites mocking Facebook communicative behaviors, are useful for highlighting values and identifying common practices on the site (See West & Trester 2013 for an example of this methodology). This is also a method used by Tannen and Lakoff (1994: 139), who examined conversational style in dialogue from a play and claimed that “artificial dialogue may represent an
internalized model or schema for the production of conversation – a competence model that speakers have access to." Collecting this public form of practical metadiscourse and considering such data in my analyses allow me to suggest that my results are more generalizable rather than only descriptive of my own social network. Finally, while the interviews and group discussions were more complicated to organize and required large amounts of time to transcribe, metatalk is easily collected via Google.

I found online metadiscourse via Google in two ways: (1) researching how the site has changed over time and (2) searching for: "what NOT to do on Facebook" and "most annoying things on Facebook." The former brought up discussions of what Like might really mean, or how the Newsfeed affects how members feel about Facebook communication. The second search (See Figure 1) brought forth lists of Facebook behaviors sanctioned by at least the writer of the article, with a large amount of overlap among them.
I paid particular attention to sites that mentioned annoying behaviors that were also mentioned in the group discussions, and/or to posts that had a large response from an online readership (in the form of Like-type tokens, shares, or comments). Including this as data in the study makes it more likely that my findings about norms and expectations are at least recognizable to other Facebook members.

3.4 Analytical Approach

Crucially, readers should be aware that in keeping with an ethnographic approach, I moved "from empirical evidence towards theory, not the other way around." In short, I let the data "suggest particular theoretical issues" (Blommaert & Jie 2010: 12). Investigating Facebook communicative beliefs and patterns through participant-observation, interviews and reading online metatalk led me to my focus on the audience and the theoretical issues surrounding responsive options, such as the semantic and social
ambiguity of *Like* that I investigate in chapter 4. The data also revealed that pictures were frequently providing a communicative context, which was not the case when I began research in 2010. This prompted my analysis in chapter 5 of the practice of contextualizing conversations and how Commenters often draw on the notably absent aspects of the picture or statement to create ties to the post and interact with the poster as the deictic center. Finally, several people in the group discussions mentioned having someone reveal something on Facebook that they wanted to tell themselves or that they did not wish to be shared on Facebook, which inspired my consideration of the management of epistemic rights in chapter 6.

I have collected posts that exemplify communicative behaviors I observed over the years for in-depth analysis within a sociolinguistic framework. Particularly, CA's approach of identifying potential "problems" and outlining the practices and patterns interactants adopt to address these has been the foundation of my analytical approach. After gaining an understanding of the discursive affordances and challenges of the Facebook context, I identified several potentially problematic aspects and asked the following questions: (1) since members seem to differ on their use of and interpretation of *Like*, how does it convey meaning? (chapter 4); (2) since users of Facebook do not occupy the same physical and temporal locations while interacting on the site, how does the audience manage to engage with the poster's (near)immediate experience sharing that is so often the subject of a Facebook post? (chapter 5); and (3) since social circles are largely overlapping on Facebook and the newsfeed makes for wide dispersion of information, how do members negotiate epistemic rights and manage stancetaking? (chapter 6). I begin my analysis with the social and semantic ambiguity inherent in Facebook's automatic and ubiquitous response option: the *Like* button.
CHAPTER 4. "CLICK IF YOU ACCEPT JESUS": LIKE AS A NOTABLE NOT

4.1 Introduction

While many studies have investigated the various ways posters manage multiple audiences on social media (e.g., Strater & Lipford 2008, Lee 2011, Baym & boyd 2012, Vivienne & Burgess 2012), this chapter focuses on the function of a particular mechanism of audience feedback on Facebook: the Like button. More specifically, I consider the meaning of Like based on what it is not – a Comment or complete lack of response – and what it does not do – add to the discourse. It is a choice not to Comment and also not to be silent and critically, I reveal that Like is the main way members avoid "hearable" silences (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 295) in the newsfeed; almost every post receives at least one Like in its responsive space. I demonstrate that a Like is a member's claim to have "heard" a post but does not commit the Liker to the participation framework of any ensuing talk on the topic. I also assert that while it suggests a positive evaluation of a post, it does not communicate anything explicitly, which is important to its discursive utility on Facebook.

The motivations to study Like are many. First, Like not only identifies part of the audience of a post but influences it by increasing visibility (Page, Harper, & Frobenius 2013): what a user Likes is displayed to their friends in the newsfeed. Thus, as the audience of a post employs Like, their use of the feature changes the future audience of the post. Indeed, the Like button can even increase the number of Comments posts receive because of its distributional effect (Bosworth 2010). Second, there is much debate about what Like really means, and a disconnect between how Facebook, Inc. seeks to define it and how it is employed by users. Finally, and perhaps most compelling of all, is Like's pervasiveness on the site. Liking is the most frequent action taken on the site (Smith 2014). Recognizing members' tendency to Like over Comment on a post, I decided to quantify this responsive preference in my own "friend" network by taking two random samples. I collected responses on all the posts appearing in my newsfeed during a 24-hour period (April 14, 2013) and the responses to my own posts during a two-month period (February-April of 2013). In both samples, Likes were almost five times as frequent as Comments, as demonstrated in Table 1.
Table 1. *Likes* versus *Comments*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My posts in two months (N=14)</th>
<th>Posts in my newsfeed in a day (N=96)</th>
<th>Total (posts=110)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>222 (82.5%)</td>
<td>794 (82.1%)</td>
<td>1016 (82.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>47 (17.5%)</td>
<td>173 (17.9%)</td>
<td>220 (17.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>269 (100%)</td>
<td>967 (100%)</td>
<td>1236 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice in Table 1 *Likes* make up more than 80 percent of the responses posts received, while Comments represent only 17 percent of the sample. This preference for using *Like* over replying with a *Comment* may partly be due to ease of use, but I suggest that employing *Like* may also be prevalent for other reasons and that there are social influences on whether a user chooses to *Like* or *Comment*.

The goal of this chapter is to argue that *Like* is a nuanced discursive device and to demonstrate how it functions as such in the networked private (Marwick & boyd 2014) context specific to Facebook. Using examples from Facebook exchanges, interviews and group discussions, I show how *Like* functions similarly to "ok," capable of conveying attention, acceptance, support, recognition, and appreciation in addition to potentially communicating a default positive response, such as a "yes" to an invitation or that an expected action was taken (e.g., "I clicked and read this" about a hyperlink). Finally, I demonstrate that the decision to use and the subsequent interpretation of a *Like* on a post is influenced by sociolinguistic variables such as participation framework shifts and members' sensitivity to the enthusiasm constraint (Tannen 1979). While it is well established that *Like* is a major part of interaction on social media ¹⁵, why and how it is employed is understudied in the academic literature. In this chapter I address this gap by adopting a discursive perspective to explore how *Like* influences Facebook interactions and what influences its use. I divide my analysis into three parts, contrasting *Like* with no response, with not-*Liking* and with *Commenting*. In the first case and at its most basic,

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¹⁴ These counts were taken in the Spring of 2013 during several months when I was attempting to quantify my newsfeed to better contextualize the interactions I saw there.

¹⁵ The actual Facebook *Like* button is embedded on 7.5 million websites (Taylor 2013), but many more websites have a *Like*-like button: such as Google’s "+", and Twitter’s "favorite."
Like communicates that a post had (a) hearer(s) and avoids an undesirable silence underneath a post. Like may also convey further semantic information depending on the context of the post, but unlike a Comment it inherently does so implicitly. However, commercial uses of Facebook, which often revolve around collecting support in the form of Likes, treat the feature as an on-off switch, explicitly assigning meaning to Like and even to the choice to not-Like. I highlight this problematic manipulation of the responsive option and show that by forcing Likers to take a specific stance around the feature, it robs the feature of its valuable flexibility. In the final section, I examine Like as a choice not to Comment and reveal the social influences on and the interpretations of such choices. Overall, I demonstrate that while Likes seem simple and homogenous, they are, like any discursive element, variably used and interpreted in the context of topic and offline relationships.

4.2 Analysis: Like's Functional, Semantic, and Sociolinguistic Aspects

While Like is frequently used by members in conversation, its elasticity as a communicative device is not commonly acknowledged. In discussion groups and interviews I found that members often differed, sometimes a great deal, in their beliefs about and use of Like and only seemed to appreciate its discursive complexity when asked to explain the feature. In the next section, I demonstrate Like's basic function as a backchannel (Yngve 1970) device and assert that as such, Like has interactional value without clear semantic meaning, what I refer to as "listening Like". I contrast this with Facebook Pages' tendency to force Likers into a specific stance. I reveal that posts by Pages often contrast Liking explicitly with not-Liking, which robs the feature of its discursive flexibility. Finally, I show that responsive Like is most usefully contrasted with Commenting, with the choice between the two determined by aspects of the post-specific participation framework based on offline relationships and topic.

4.2.1 Liking Versus non-Liking: Pages and Forced-stancetaking

Facebook, Inc. intends for Like to form connections between users and preferences. Organizational Pages strive for Likes as lasting endorsements and seek them out. As one participant in the young professionals group discussion said:

How many organizations out there are saying, "We'll give you a free cookie if you Like our Facebook Page?" Well, that's not a genuine Like. That's not me saying, "I
really love Nike," That's me saying, "a Like doesn't cost me anything and I want a free cookie."

While users may have different motivations for unique Likes, Facebook and Pages treat all Likes as the same positive rating, to be accumulated and presented as "# of people who Like this," as in Example 1.

**EXAMPLE 1. Likes and Comments (on a public figure's post)**

Despite the fact that the 10,722 Likers in Example 1 all have unique relationships with the content of the post, the public figure posting the content and levels of background knowledge of the topic, they are collapsed into a group. The site's reporting of Likes also does not acknowledge the more ephemeral nature some members may mean Like to have. For every other action members take on the site, Facebook debriefs friends of the action using the past tense – when their friends have "changed," "shared," "tagged," "uploaded," "commented on," "updated," "rated," "pinned," "added," or "posted" something to Facebook, as in Figure 1. A Like, however, is reported in the present tense.

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16 Notice that the number of Likes in Example 1 is roughly five-times greater than the number of Comments. I am not claiming that this is a formula for Facebook communication in general – the correlation between this example and my random sample is likely coincidence – however, Likes are observably much more frequent than Comments.
This present-tense reporting of a Like, especially when contrasted with the past-tense references to other Facebook actions, situates Like as an ongoing state rather than a discursive action taken at a specific point in time. However, in conversations with members I have noticed that most do not distinguish Liking in this way. Instead, the action is almost always talked about in the past tense, the same as having "commented on" or "shared" something - as a discursive act bounded in the moment of interaction. For instance, one member of the over-fifty discussion group told me: "I've never posted. I've replied to people or Liked or Commented on what they've done, but I've never put anything on."

Like as a discursive act used between "friends" is often not what Facebook or its Pages\textsuperscript{17} portray. Facebook Inc. and Pages frame Like as an ongoing indication of group identity. Many times, posts by Pages even seek to assign Like post-specific meaning. In Example 5, the post is an assertion followed by a yes-no question. Even though Like often implies "yes" to this type of question – as I demonstrate in the final section of my analysis - the poster for the Page in Example 2 chooses to assign Like the meaning "accept!" This robs Like of its valuable ability to not say anything specific. Comments are for taking a definite stance toward a post; Like is for not specifying.

\textsuperscript{17} "Pages" are Facebook profiles managed by businesses, public figures, celebrities, brands and organizations which have the same posting capabilities as an individual with a regular profile.
In Example 2, users are told to use *Like* conditionally: "if you accept" Jesus. In this way, *Like* is locally constrained and even stripped of its simpler interactional meaning. Not only is *Like* assigned a meaning in Example 2, but a non-*Like* – the choice to "keep scrolling" – is given an explicit meaning as well ("I reject Jesus"). This changes *Like* from an optional discursive device to a declaration or renunciation of the Christian faith, forcing *Likers* into explicit stancetaking. Rather than a discursive marker, then, it has been explicitly defined and contrasted with the act of scrolling, further highlighting the "hearable" silence of a non-*Like*. This is similar to what occurs in Example 3.
In Example 3 a Like – referred to as "giving a thumbs up" – is again given a conditional constraint. While a Like on any post can imply recognition of the subject matter, by making this meaning explicit, this post suggests that a reader who does not click Like does not understand or recognize the picture; the post in Example 3 hints at what the post in Example 2 states outright: that scrolling past without Liking has meaning beyond the decision not to acknowledge a post. Examples 2 and 3 create a dichotomy around Like; either a reader is a group affiliate or not.

Facebook's comparison of Likes and Comments to a rating system and the conditions placed on Like-use by Page posts deny Likes their role as the backchanneling building blocks of Facebook discourse and assumes all Likes are equal. Within a networked private context, however, Likes and Comments between "friends" are usually employed with interactive goals, not simply as a reward. While the conglomerate interpretation of Like may be appropriate in the context of Pages, treating Likes on friends' posts this way misses the significance of Like as a discursive choice. In the next section, I demonstrate why this is a misinterpretation of many of the Likes occurring in Facebook interactions. In addition to examining Like in Facebook discourse itself, I continue to offer insight from the interviews and focus group discussions, since so much
of the meaning of *Like* is implicit and two-sided (what the *Liker* intends and what the poster or other readers interpret the *Like* to indicate). Now I present evidence of the discursive value of *Like* as well as examples of how it can imply semantic meanings. In the final section, I highlight the sociolinguistic factors that influence these values, specifically the participation framework set-up by a post and the offline contexts of members.

4.2.2 *Like* as Not-silence: Listening *Like*

While *Like* has been lumped in research with other actions on Facebook, such as posts themselves, Comments or "pokes"\(^{18}\) under general labels like "communicative acts" (Jucker & Durscheid 2012) and "phatic expressions" (Radovanovic & Ragnedda 2012: 10), *Like* is actually a unique piece in the exchange structure in that it is always a response and cannot create a next slot. Thus, it is the absolute lowest on the "scale of uptake expectations" (Jucker & Durscheid 2012: 47) (i.e., You cannot *Like a Like*), as I demonstrate in a sketch of the Facebook discursive structure in Figure 2. In general, a post that is visibly engaged with begins a conversational topic which can be (1) acknowledged with a *Like*, (2) contributed to with a Comment, (3) Shared, starting a new conversational thread on the topic, or (4) a combination of any or all of the three.

**Figure 2.** Tree diagram of the main communicative acts of Facebook

Notice in Figure 2 that while a Comment or Share can advance the topic of a post, the conversational buck stops at *Like*. This aspect is part of what gives *Like* its meaning. Arguably, the *Like* button, native to Facebook, is its most important feature for managing the networked private context where members receive a barrage of updates from their "friends." *Like* allows for quick backchanneling on content in the newsfeed without

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\(^{18}\) As of August 2014, a "poke" is presented as a notification to the user who is "poked" and comes with a clickable option to "poke back."
positioning the *Liker* as an active participant in any further development of a post. As further evidence of this, the Facebook platform automatically notifies a member who has Commented on a post about other Comments that occur in the thread while members who have *Liked* a post receive no such automatic notifications about further actions that occur on the post.¹⁹

A post is the first part in an adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks 1973) that carries a request for acknowledgement by its very nature of existing in a newsfeed and by the implication of having responsive options located beneath it. In discursive terms, Facebook arranges an explicit second-pair slot beneath a post underneath clickable response choices, with *Like* listed first, as shown in Figure 3:

**Figure 3.** The second-pair slot beneath every post

In Figure 3, *Like* is the first of two individual response options.²⁰ No responses on a Facebook post is creates a "hearable" silence (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 295); this is true largely due to the Newsfeed, which funnels posts to "friends." Given this visibility, and the buttons and slot that exist below a post, there is a noted "absence of an item" (Schegloff 1968: 1083) when a post has no *Likes* or Comments following it. Users acknowledge this expectation and recognize the awkwardness of a post with no response. For instance, there is a Facebook Page called "that awkward moment when your status gets no 'likes' ____," and 6,811²¹ users have *Liked* this Page. The understanding that a lack of response is an "uncomfortable silence" is also conveyed in a blog post on the topic of Facebook business Pages:

> You know that silence during a dinner when, suddenly, no one has anything to say? That uncomfortable silence is being recreated on Facebook Pages

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¹⁹ This is true as of August 2015.
²⁰ "Share" is also an option, but is less responsive and more of an act of creating a new first-pair part using another member's post, thus I will not focus on it in this chapter. In support of this decision, I offer Varis & Blommaert (2015: 8) who state that "share" is "reentextualization" in the sense that content is removed from the original context and inserted into a new participation framework.
²¹ This number is as of August 2014.
everywhere. Businesses are asking questions that go unanswered and posting news items and product pictures that tragically go un-liked (Lucey 2012).

I sought evidence for the influence of hearable silences as demonstrated by the response behaviors in my own newsfeed by taking another random sample. The numbers confirm a strong tendency for users to respond to Facebook actions; Table 2 shows that almost every post received at least one Like or Comment, or both. In the left-hand column, I list the type of post, beginning with what I label "status," which refers to the posting of immediately-relevant first-person topics (the types of posts examined in chapter 5), usually about a very recent experience or observation. Notice that in the final row, 93% of posts (350/374) received some sort of response, and nearly one-third (31.6%) of the responded-to posts were responded to only with Like(s) (118/374). I present this as evidence that Like is an easy way to avoid silence and that the impulse to do so is strong.

**Table 2. Newsfeed post and response types (November 1st-7th 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Post</th>
<th>Liked only</th>
<th>Commented on only</th>
<th>Liked &amp; Commented on</th>
<th>Received no response</th>
<th>Total Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links &amp; shares</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., articles)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative post</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile/cover picture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the strong impulse to respond and the tendency to use Like – over 90% (340/374) of posts received at least one Like – 24 posts received no response (6%). This, however, may be due to the less discursive nature of these posts, which were largely links to recipes and articles. Arguably, this may have made a response less "expectable" (Schegloff 1968: 1083) and thus the lack of a second part potentially less offensive. Also important to note in Table 2 is that some of the Likes and Comments in the Liked & Commented-on column were done by the same members, demonstrating a third type of responsive option: to Like and Comment on a post. This third option acts as a two-part

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22 See appendix D for examples of each.
response, similar to the way "okay" before a response can mark the previous statement as "received" and what comes next as in the context of something prior (Beach 1993), again, highlighting its use as a backchannel token.

4.2.3 Like as Not-a-Comment: Responsive Like

Some members, regard Liking and Commenting as either-or options, as demonstrated in the next example where one student, Emma, implies that she uses one or the other in response to a post, not both together, while two other students, Jane and Alicia, claim to sometimes use them in combination. I now analyze Example 4 to demonstrate the nuance of Like and propose that Jane and Alicia's displayed struggle to verbalize the implications of Like and to explain its position in relation to the Comment is evidence of its complexity. The example is from the undergraduate group discussion. I had just finished reading some of the answers from a survey the students filled out before class about how they used Facebook. Specifically, I read the answers three students wrote about what they use Like for and pointed out how drastically the answers differed. A student, Emma, raised her hand and asked a peripherally related question in line 1.

EXAMPLE 4. Discussion of Like + Comment (undergraduate class group)

1  Emma  What would you call it when someone Likes something, and Comments on it?
2             like there's some people who just like-  
3  Jane  There are people who do that a lot.
4  What does- I don't know. What does that mean?  
5  Emma  Maybe it's positive politeness?  
6  Alicia I think you can Like something and you comment on it  
7  Me -Commenting has more personal meaning?  
8  Alicia  and it shows that like a personal attachment to the  
9  thing.  
10  Me  not only do you like that the person posted it, but  
11  Alicia  that...
I guess, more so it's like liking's almost for metacommenting like you like it for you. Like it brings that level to it like just a specific example, like of a friend where a post about a concert coming up and I would like that- that they're going to it, but I'd comment and say, "wait, I'll be in town then too. we should go."

Oh, ok.

The excerpt in Example 4 demonstrates the ambiguous meaning of a Like and the variability in its use even by those in very similar socio-cultural groups (such as the participants in this group who are very similar ages, attend the same school, and are taking the same summer course). To Emma, a Like is a response already and thus no longer relevant if a Comment is used. Two other members of Facebook, however, Jane and Alicia, admit to using the Like-and-Comment option, though they have difficulty answering Emma's questions about what it means.

I now walk through their discussion to reveal the complexity and flexibility of Like as a discursive tool. This complexity is marked by Jane and Alicia's struggle to explain Like, signaled by a number of restarts, pauses and instances of constructed dialogue. Jane first defines Like as an automatic reaction in line 7. She continues with her turn in line 8 by beginning to say what Like is not and then abandons this line of thought. She begins again in line 9, rephrasing her assertive statements with a qualification of her answer (sometimes I feel like it's...). Finally, rather than defining Like with a term or straightforward explanation, she opts to demonstrate it with a type of "constructed dialogue" (Tannen 2007) in line 10, exclaiming Like! in the middle of her statement. The structure of her sentence in lines 9-11 captures the automaticity of Like for her, and serves "to illustrate an utterance type that is represented as occurring repeatedly" (Tannen 2007: 111), as if Like is something that happens to her before she even finishes reading posts. She concludes her attempted explanation of this responsive behavior by using two conjunctive adverbs to link her Commenting action to the fact that Like has occurred in line 11 and now therefore she can Comment. Note that Jane switches from the present perfect tense description of when she Likes before a Comment (before I have even finished) in line 10, to the present tense of constructed dialogue in line 11 – her thoughts at the moment she makes this responsive decision (ok, now therefore I can
respond). Jane's explanation strongly suggests that Like for her is a requirement before further participation, linking what she will say in the Comment with what came prior in the post.

In line 15, Alicia weighs in on what Like-and-Comment means. Like Jane, Alicia struggles to explain the act concisely, having to restart in line 24, scaling back her earlier I think (line 15) and I know (line 18) assertions with I guess. Her overall explanation is disorienting; she suggests that Commenting shows a more personal attachment (line 16) to a post, but then states that Liking is when you like it for you, on a personal level (lines 24-26). In line 27 Alicia, like Jane, abandons her attempt to define Like and instead offers a theoretical example. She describes a situation where a friend posts that they are going to a concert and explains in line 29 that she would use Like to signal that she is glad for them, and then would use a Comment to actually insert herself into the scenario. In line 31 she uses constructed dialogue – also like Jane – in her example as a way to demonstrate what she could not define. Unlike Jane, however, rather than introducing dialogue to voice a Like and an inner thought, she uses it to give a voice to the Comment (wait, I'll be in town then too. We should go). For Alicia, a Like is oriented towards the poster, while a Comment makes the discussion relevant to the Commenter.

That Alicia and Jane both end their explanation with constructed dialogue is worth noting. Defining the act of Liking and how it relates to Commenting is not a straightforward exercise; when speakers attempt to define the discursive feature, they resort to examples and demonstrations instead. Also, even when discursive choices seem similar, members can differ in their understanding of similar communicative acts. For example, even though both Alicia and Jane combine Like with a Comment, Jane describes Like in terms of an automatic acknowledgement made while receiving the information (almost an overlapping interjection), while Alicia explains her Like in the combinatorial move to be based on a literal understanding of the word, expressing that she is glad for her friend. An understanding of Like's discursive properties and members' underlying beliefs about the feature, especially when contrasted with the option to Comment, is important for the interpretation of any additional social meaning a specific Like might carry, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter.
4.2.4 Supportive Like

The default context for interpreting a Like seems to be that one is speaking among supportive friends, which is why the feature can be used on a post relaying bad news with the understanding that it likely positions the Liker as sympathetic rather than enjoying the news. Like's association with the meaning of "to like," however, can make this use of the feature risky. In Example 5 from an interview with 65-year-old user, Madeline, this conflict of meanings emerges when I ask how she uses the Like button and whether she notices when other members Like her posts.

**Example 5.** Like as an awkward response to sad posts (individual interview, Madeline)

1 Madeline You know when [dog] died-
2 Laura -mhm-
3 Madeline you know somebody will Like it.
4 Sometimes I. always wonder when somebody's s- telling you something
5 sad and you Like it it sounds like you're-...
6 like you're happy that they're (hh) sad, you know? (hh)
7 Laura Right.
8 Madeline You know that's just I- some I won't Like it
9 you know for that reason.
10 Laura Will you- will you comment instead?-
11 Madeline -I'll COMment, yeah yeah.

In Example 5, Madeline refers to a recent experience she shared on Facebook about her dog dying, to which some people responded with a Like. Madeline struggles to voice why Like is an awkward choice in this context. She switches from the specific example of her post about the passing of her dog to a more anonymous and general "somebody" and "you" example (lines 4-6), perhaps attempting to get some distance between her and her negative evaluation of this type of Like-use by her "friends." Notice Madeline's general interpretation of Like is linked to the verb – that someone is "happy" about something – so that in the context of somebody sharing sad news a Like "sounds" "like you're happy that they're sad," (line 6). She punctuates her opinion on this type of Like by a couple instances of laughter, a discursive move which can highlight discomfort with a topic (Murata 2008: 294).

This interpretation is encouraged by Facebook, Inc. Because of the possible inappropriateness of Liking negative content, thousands of users have asked Facebook,
Inc. to add a "dislike" button\textsuperscript{23} (Vincent 2014). When responding to whether Facebook, Inc. would ever add this feature, Baldwin (2014), a Facebook product engineer, replied with: "I know there are times when it'd make sense, like when a friend is having a rough day, or got into a car accident like my sister yesterday (she's OK!). For these times, a nice comment from a friend goes a long way." Tension exists, however, around this issue and the way the site is structured, as demonstrated in a study of Facebook Memorial Pages by Marwick & Ellison (2012). In the following example from the study, one member complains about what they felt was a morbid constraint created by Facebook:

**EXAMPLE 6.** "i don't like this!"

1. User: u know i had 2 click like on this page to comment, its sooo sad!
2. i don’t like this and noone eles could either!!"

(from Marwick & Ellison, 2012: 396).

In instances of Facebook Pages, a user has to *like* the Page to become part of the group of users that can interact on the Page. The user in Example 6 uses a Comment to undo the implication of the *Like* action they were forced to take, asserting that Facebook *Like* invariably expresses positive sentiment that they do not feel about the topic. This coercing of members by Pages to *Like* content appeared multiple times in the data, as I detailed in the section above. In conversations between friends, however, *Likes* often carry individual interactional implications depending on offline relationships and media ideologies which I now address.

4.2.5 *Like* as Unmarked Response

Despite its main use as a backchannel device, *Like* can be employed by the *Liker* to imply and the poster to infer further meaning. While the feature maintains a strong link with the literal meaning of the verb, its structural positioning as a response makes it, "sensitive to the contingencies of any given moment of conversational involvement," again correlating with "okay," (Beach 1993: 326). This positive affiliation is why a *Like* can also indicate the acceptance of an invitation or "yes" to a yes-no question when it is the second pair part to such a post. This again correlates with the particle "okay," which Condon (1986: 88) asserts "rarely appears in environments where it could constitute a

\textsuperscript{23} Update: While finishing the final formatting for this chapter in September 2015, Facebook announced it will introduce a "dislike" button. At this point, there has not been a final decision announced as to what this feature will look like or where it will appear in the structure of a post in terms of the order of response options.
response without doing so." I argue that Like can suggest an answer when it follows a yes-no question or invitation post but with some uncertainty as demonstrated by one member's attempt to explain a "yes"-Like in Example 7.

EXAMPLE 7. Like as "yes" (college student focus group)

1  Marcus or um like if somebody- maybe I post a status that's like,
2    "hey, like who wants to
3    go play soccer after- after class or something."
4    and somebody hits Like on it,
5    to me, I would interpret that as,
6    as if I've just said it, and somebody in the room was like, "yeah, ok, sure."
7    but, you know even that,
8    you don't really know if they're coming
9    but they did kind of tell you they were coming?
10   but, not as much.
11   so, sort of, for me, that's how I sort of see it, as like
12   a- a nod, or a "yes," or a "ok"

In Example 7, Marcus describes a hypothetical Facebook interaction in order to explain how Like might serve as an answer to a post that asks a question. Like in earlier examples, he uses constructed dialogue to act out the post and his interpretation of a Like as saying yeah, ok, sure (line 6) to his invitation. In lines 7-10, however, he highlights that a Like is only a possible "yes." He underlines the inconclusiveness by saying that the implicit acceptance means you don't really know if they're coming (line 8) but they did kind of tell you they were coming? (line 9). While he concludes his example in line 10 with but not as much, he ultimately summarizes his interpretation of the hypothetical Like as a casual "yes," in lines 11 and 12 qualified again with sort of, for me, and that's how I sort of see it. The back-and-forth in Marcus' description of a Like on an invitation post reveals the subtlety of such a response. In addition, Marcus' knowledge about the offline context of a member inevitably would influence his interpretation of their Like since someone who Likes his post about playing soccer is likely not communicating they will join him if they live out of town or if they do not ever play the support. In cases such as these, Like would clearly be indicating something else.

Similar to how Like can imply "yes" to an invitation, it can imply that an expected action was taken. For example, when a post containing a link is Liked it suggests the Liker clicked on the link. This has to do with the fact that posting a link anticipates a hearer to respond by clicking on the link (as the unmarked response). In Example 8 from
the undergraduate focus group discussion, Facebook member Alicia, tells a story in answer to Anna's (the professor) question about Like when applied to posts with hyperlinks. Alicia explains that in some cases, she will Like a post because of the subject matter and her relationship with the poster (the post in this instance was veteran-related and she knows the poster because of their mutual link to veteran issues), without reading the link.

**EXAMPLE 8. Liking a link (undergraduate students focus group)**

1. Anna  Does it mean you read it if you "liked" the link?
2. Alicia  There's a beret and he posts articles about like military
3. and because I'm in the student VETS organization,
4. I just Like it because
5. you know, I feel obligated to
6. because we're in the same organization,
7. and then he'll like text me and say,
8. "did you really read the article?"
9. Like, "no."
10. Group  (hiii)

In line 2, Alicia explains that because she's in the same organization as her friend, when he posts something related to the cause of the organization, she will just Like it (line 3) out of obligation (line 5), repeating that this is because they're in the same organization (line 6). Her repetition of the cause-and-affect of the relationship on her use of Like highlights her norm of Liking to show support and affiliation. While Like's unmarked responsive meaning in this context would indicate the Liker read the linked article, Like may have a different kind of unmarked meaning for Alicia. It may be the case that Alicia's regular use of the feature makes not using it feel marked in the context of certain posts. Depending on the conversational style of individuals, giving a Like may be similar to using a lot of backchanneling for high-involvement style speakers (Tannen 2005), its frequent use spurred by a desire to stress connection.

Users are aware that motivations other than genuine appreciation of content may cause the Like to be used, as demonstrated in Example 8 by what Alicia reports that her friend asks her in line 8: whether she really read the article? While this question presupposes that a Like should indicate that the Liker read the article, it also reveals the friend's awareness that Alicia's use of the feature may not have this meaning. Of course, all Likes look the same on the surface (unlike a verbal "okay" which may be said with a
certain intonation, volume, facial expression, etc.), however, *Likes'* underlying semantic meanings are rooted in the motivations of the *Likers* and the poster's awareness (or lack) of these motivations. In the case of Example 8, Alicia's *Like* was not responsive but rather a nod to her relationship with the poster, and the poster was aware of this motivation to some extent as suggested in his constructed dialogue.

4.2.6 *Like* and Ambiguous Reach

Instead of referencing the underlying relationships between poster, Liker and subject matter, a *Like* can also nod to a specific *part of* a post, a responsive aspect of what Goffman (1981a) refers to as "reach." Depending on the complexity and length of a post, there can be a great deal of ambiguity around what aspect of the message *Like* is responding to. This ambiguity in what a *Like* selects has been noted in other research, such as that by Palencia and Lower (2013: 634) on Facebook compliments, in which they offer the following example:

… where people *Like* someone’s engagement photos in a romantic setting, it is not clear whether the approval is for the photographer’s skills, the romantic setting or something else entirely. In other words, there is a certain degree of *opacity* in this kind of compliment.

The meaning of a *Like* will always contain some vagueness for all but the *Liker*; I demonstrate that it is too blunt a responsive tool to make precise selections, unless its meaning is explicitly stated in an accompanying Comment or offline conversation (or in the Post itself like the "*Like if you"*-posts in Examples 2 and 3). Since *Likes* can vary in terms of information selecting and implied meaning, some users choose to explicitly and locally define their *Like* in a Comment. In my fieldnotes (February 2013) I recorded an exchange involving a clarified *Like*: A member posted a link to a dance show coming up and asked who wanted to go. Someone *Liked* the post and then Commented that this was not an indication that he could go, only that he loves the dancers in question. His *Like* reached to the information contained in the link, bypassing the poster's invitation altogether. The fact that the Commenter first explained what he did *not* mean with *Like* – that he will attend the show – highlights the strong link with "yes" that *Like* carries in an invitation context (and suggests that this interpretation might be primary). That such clarifications of *Likes* exist is evidence of *Like's* ambiguous reach.
A member may control the interpretation of their Like on a post by explaining it in a Comment, however, up until a Like is explicitly defined – which is rare – its true meaning exists only in the mind of the Liker and its interpretation is sensitive to their relationship with the poster and the content, as demonstrated in the following example. Example 9 is a humorous instance of fake Facebook interactions created by the site collegehumor.com. It involves a series of fake Facebook birthday posts on a member's Timeline being reacted to by the owner of the Timeline. Each poster has been given a humorous name demonstrating their relationship to the content and the Timeline owner, and each Like has been given a distinct motivation (this existing only in the mind of the Liker/Timeline owner). The same Liker ("You") uses Like on different posts to accomplish various discursive acts such as: avoiding a hearable silence, expressing genuine appreciation or to influence other members who might read a post.
Example 9. *Like* as a social management device (online metadiscourse)

Example 9 is a different context for examining *Like* than the previous Facebook examples of *Likes* by various people on a single status update. Instead, Example 9 is an

instance of a single person Liking various posts to their Timeline. The first Like is meant to mitigate an awkward birthday message from a friend: it is meant as a knowing laugh to mark the message as a joke for others who might see it and otherwise take offense. While the Timeline owner literally likes – enjoys – the birthday message from their Significant Other and Aunt, their Likes on posts by Who The F? and Unique Trailblazer fulfill a social obligation: since the Timeline owner Liked the rest, an absence of Like on a post would be particularly marked. Liking has become an automated response to this series of birthday posts. Finally, notice that the penultimate post receives a Like like all the rest, but the Liker actually feels negatively toward this post, supposedly due to their lack of a real relationship with this person who is suggested to be disingenuous – based on their label as Person With 4940 Friends. This Like in response is also disingenuous.

The instance of the Person With 4940 Friends from Example 9 suggests that there are sociolinguistic constraints on discursive moves depending on the offline relationships between members. In this final section, I explore what these constraints may be and how relationships and information states influence choices surrounding Like. Recognizing that "media ideologies" vary from user to user and even within social groups (Gershon 2010), I complete my analysis by identifying post-specific participation frameworks and how these influence the use of Like.

4.2.7 Sociolinguistic Influences on Like-use

In the company blog post used to introduce the Like feature, a Facebook, Inc. employee explained the value of Like in terms of practicality:

Recently, I had a friend write a note about running her first marathon and another friend upload pictures of his new baby. In both cases, they ended up with over 30 comments, all saying: "Awesome!" "Congrats!" The aggregation of the sentiment "I like this" makes room in the comments section for longer accolades.

Despite the intention for Like to "aggregate sentiment" and cut down on simple redundant accolades, short and repetitive comments persist, especially in "big news"-type posts, when dozens of similar comments express congratulations. This redundancy in the Comments section of certain posts suggests the choice to Like and/or Comment is more complex than whether a user wants to give a short or long response.

25 https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/i-like-this/53024537130
Many members express strong beliefs about the goal of Facebook posts and the discursive implications of *Like* and the ambiguous boundaries of participation frameworks, often made more important in the context of serious or "big news" topics. The implied participation framework of Facebook can shift with topic, as I will discuss, however, the average status update often assumes an audience of family and close friends, a group with whom a member engages most often on Facebook (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham 2012, Akkaya 2012), and thus whom they likely conceptualize as their audience (Strater & Lipford 2008). Often the decision to *Like* or Comment seems attributable to who belongs in this subset, as demonstrated in Example 10. Jane suggests that the difference between those who *Like* and those who Comment on a post involves the closeness of relationships.

**Example 10.** *Like* constrained based on relationships (undergraduate group discussion)

1. Jane I feel like, if a group of people *Like* something:
2. a photo, or a status, or a post,
3. and then, it will be like a small portion of the people will Comment
4. and it will specifically be like that person's closest friends.
5. *Like* is a more casual way of communicating?

In Example 10, Jane shares her impression of how *Like* is used in the context of relationships. She suggests that *Likers* on a post form a nondescript "group of people" (line 1), but that those who Comment are "specifically…that person's closest friends" (line 4). Since this seems to be the norm – that closer friends are the ones who Comment – Jane concludes that the other response option, *Liking*, is thus "a more casual way of communicating" (line 5), supposedly reserved for more casual friends.

Online metadiscourse about this norm also supports Jane's observation. For example, one blog post entitled *7 ways to spot a chronic Facebook stalker* states that "while your family and close friends may be welcome commenters," Comments by those outside that circle are usually unwelcome (O'Neill 2011). Similarly, Example 11 demonstrates a member's expectation that closeness of relationships should influence actions on Facebook. In their examination of the management of deceased users' Pages, Marwick and Ellison (2012) report several heated debates surrounding the act of *Liking* a Page in memoriam, and they include the following statement from a participant:
EXAMPLE 11. *Like* constrained (from Marwick & Ellison 2012: 388)

1. User: Don’t randomly 'like' this page because you saw it!!!!!
2. ‘like' it if you actually knew the guy ! jeez!!! RIP bro!

*Liking* in Example 11, is declared by one user to be appropriate only by those who "actually knew" the deceased personally. The user complaining about the violation of this norm – people "randomly" 'lik[ing]' this page" (line 1) – demonstrates his legitimate position on the Page by addressing the deceased at the end of his rant, "RIP bro!" (line 2). This direct speech and term of endearment, "bro," suggest a relationship with the deceased and thus a proper foothold in the proposed participation framework. Since a memorial Page is meant for mourning and remembering an individual by those who knew them, the boundaries of ratified hearers are drawn there and may be considered inflexible by some members, even in terms of permission to use the more casual *Like* option.

In an effort to understand the responsive norms of my own network, I again considered a random sample of the responders to my posts, which I represent in Figure 4 (taken during the same time period as the Table 1 counts). Note that only 30% - 128 individuals out of my total "Friends" network of 513 people - actually form the active audience for my posts during this time (i.e., they *Liked* or Commented on a post).
Only a small percentage of my "friends" – 31 out of 513 – used a Comment to engage with my posts during this time (6% of my total "friend" network). In Figure 6 I demonstrate the breakdown of the "unique responders" from Figure 5 according to their responsive actions (whether they used only *Likes*, only Comments, or both).
Notice in Figure 5 that the vast majority of my active audience of 128 "friends" engaged with my posts exclusively through Likes (95/128). The next most common type of responsive action was to both Like and Comment (26/128) – not necessarily on the same post – during the two-month period examined. Finally, there is a small number (7/128) of the active audience who only responded with a Comment during this time. All seven instances were singular occurrences, meaning each of the seven Commenters only Commented once during this time. Given the ubiquity of Like and how rare it is to be part of the active audience without Liking – 95.5% (121/128) of the active audience employed Like at some point (i.e., Liked only or Liked and Commented) – I decided to examine these seven Comments in detail to better understand what might motivate this rarer type of response.

I assumed, based on the norms suggested above, that the seven Commenters would be in my circle of close friends and family. Interestingly, all seven Comment-only responders were more distant acquaintances: three are former colleagues, two are friends-of-friends, one is my aunt-in-law, and one is a childhood friend with whom I am no longer in contact outside of our connection on Facebook. This again suggests that
responsive behavior on Facebook is more complex than immediately assumed. While frequent Commenters may often be those with close personal relationships with the poster, this need not be the case. This is because the participation framework broadens, narrows or even changes dramatically with the topic of a post, thus shifting responsive norms and expectations. I demonstrate this by examining the posts to which the Comment-only members (See Figures 5 and 6) responded. One of the seven Comment-only responses was on a post I made about going to see a play based on my favorite childhood movie, *Newsies*, shown in Example 12.

**Example 12.** A Comment from a childhood friend

![Comment from Laura West](https://example.com/laura-west-comment.jpg)

In Example 12, my childhood friend (with whom I am no longer in touch outside of our Facebook connection) Comments that she always thinks of me when she thinks of *Newsies*. That the content of the post mentioned something from my childhood, opened the participation framework to older friends who recognize the reference. Consequently,

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26 She was not a participant in my study and thus her Comment is not pictured here.
this friend – who otherwise never responds to my posts – felt included enough in the participation framework, based on background knowledge, to respond.

Movies and cultural references can open up the participation framework of a post and spark responses from different members. As evidence of this, three of the Comment-only audience members responded to posts involving popular culture topics. Such posts seem to create a participation framework that includes all "friends" who recognize the familiar references of, in these cases, Jennifer Lawrence, and the popular TV series Downton Abbey.

Two of the seven Comment-only responses were on a post in which I thanked "friends" for their birthday wishes, shown in Example 13.

**Example 13. Happy birthday thank you post**

![Laura West](March 5, 2013 · New York, NY)  
*Thank you, everyone, for making this birthday so special. Turning thirty feels great when you have so many people to celebrate with you!!!*  
Like · Comment · Share

It is common practice on Facebook to use a post to thank "everyone" for the "happy birthday" wishes to avoid having to respond individually to the dozens, even hundreds, of birthday wishes a Facebook member often receives on their birthday (West & Trester 2013). The fact that this was my thirtieth birthday was new information to those who are not close friends and family. Thus, many of the responses to this post were "friends" responding that they didn't realize it was my thirtieth – news that seemed to deserve a special note of recognition; a former colleague and my aunt-in-law (two of the seven Comment-only responders) Commented on me turning 30.

The final post that received one of the responses from a Comment-only audience member was generated by Facebook when I changed my profile picture, shown in Example 14.

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27 There were six other Commenters on this post but they are not the focus of this example since they were active audience members on at least one other post.
EXAMPLE 14. Comment on a profile picture

In the case of Example 14, a former colleague asked where the picture was taken. The old stone wall, red rooftops and mountain range in the background of the photo suggest a special location that was not named in the post. Such an obvious missing piece of information may open the participation framework by prompting a request for more information (see chapter 5 for an analysis of how Commenters draw on what is unsaid in posts).

Comments may also be employed instead of Likes when an overhearer wishes to insert themselves into a more narrowly-defined participation framework, as was the case in an exchange I recorded in my fieldnotes (April 2012):

_A member posted an entertaining video for “stressed out linguists” during finals week. A “friend” responded with a Comment admitting that they were not a stressed out linguist but were taking advantage and watching the video anyway._

While the responder mentioned in the fieldnote exchange chose to Comment, it is worth considering the other response options the member could have taken: (1) to watch the video in secret, never indicating she did so, or (2) to suggest she watched and appreciated the video with a simple _Like_. However, the latter option may have left her vulnerable to disapproval from the poster who would be aware of her non-linguist,
unratified status. Instead, the Commenter chose to identify herself as an overhearer and make an effort to show she understands her outsider position in the participation framework.

As demonstrated above, when certain posts suggest specific subsets of "friends" as the target audience, Like use is influenced. Similarly, when posts reveal particularly "big news" updates, it may also influence expectations about and demonstrated response behaviors. As Goodwin & Goodwin (1987: 11) claim, when a speaker demonstrates affect about a message, it allows the information to be "responded to, and participated in, in a special way," and members of the audience often display a "reciprocal affect" that "matches" that of the assessment contained in a message; this behavior can be observed on Facebook as well (Kramer 2012). When a speaker points out something as being particularly positive or negative, hearers often respond as particularly excited or sympathetic, reacting to rather than simply acknowledging the news through Commenting. The ease and ubiquity of Like may result in a certain interpretation; "it might also carry the metamessage of being a minimal effort response" (West and Trester 2013: 145). Similar to what Tannen (1979: 10) noted about the response "ok" in a study of crosscultural misunderstandings, a Like may be limited by an "enthusiasm constraint" – activated by certain big news posts, such as a pregnancy announcement; for some members Like may lack the necessary enthusiasm expected in response to such news.

In Example 15, a member announces her pregnancy on Facebook. The post receives 98 Likes but also 36 comments of a repetitive, enthusiastic nature. Example 15 is a subset of these.
EXAMPLE 15. When a *Like* may not be enough

In Example 15, there are six Comments in a row that all wish congratulations, a sentiment that could also be conveyed by a literal reading of *Like* ("I am happy about this"). However, with Comments, users can better convey affect (with word choice, punctuation and emoticons). The fourth Commenter, Margaret, for example, uses a Comment to multiply the power of *Like* by *a thousand*. Not only does a Comment require more time and physical effort to type out, making the Commenter seem more invested in what they express, but the fact that each similar Comment is actually distinct in some way makes the Commenter's contribution more "hearable" (as opposed to being part of the collapsed list of *Likers*). Each Comment's uniqueness is a way to further express genuine and individual sentiment and avoid a formulaic response (See West & Trester 2013 for examples of this practice in regards to wishing Happy Birthday on Facebook).

Table 3 reveals that exactly half of the Comments on the post the subset of Comments in Example 15 are from were written by someone who also *Liked* the post.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Comments</th>
<th>Total <em>Likes</em></th>
<th>Comments authored by someone who also <em>Liked</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of the pregnancy announcement post, the widely-chosen act of Commenting *in addition* to *Liking* (18/36) represented in Table 3 may be further indication that, to some users, *Like* alone may not convey enough affect for certain posts.
This use of Like may also be influenced by how little effort it entails; thus, not Liking something may seem almost offensive to some members since it "costs" so little to click the symbol. This is similar to what Tannen (2013: 103) discovered about the norm of answering text messages promptly, an informant explaining that this was the expectation because "it takes so little time." Of course clicking Like takes even less time than composing a text, so the expectation may be even stronger given that it is truly the most minimal response imaginable.

Certain serious topics, however, may actually encourage Like-use depending on what a member believes about the discursive implications of Like. For instance, recall that Like does not create a response slot so that it does not anticipate any further discursive action from a poster. Thus, on a sad news post, Like may – in addition to showing support – provide some discursive distance out of respect for the poster. This was a belief expressed in the undergraduate discussion group when I mentioned a story someone had told me concerning this topic. The story involved a member receiving several Likes on their post about losing their grandmother, which they perceived as strange. A student in the focus group, Jane, responded to this story by explaining that, in addition to expressing support, a Like in this instance can provide the poster with "distance too" because "maybe they don't want to talk about their grandmother who just passed away." This evaluation suggests that, for some users, a Like may be the response they choose to give space to the poster, showing they do not expect any acknowledgement or response back.

Another influential factor on Like-use on affective topics is the norm of that certain personal "big news" is shared with close friends and family in a more personal medium first and that finding out through Facebook later is expected for more distant friends or those less affected by the news (Gershon 2010 and Tannen 2013 report such findings in their work on social media ideologies). Given that "big news" posts are directed to a different Facebook audience than usual (those more distant friends who have not been contacted offline to receive the news, rather than the usual Facebook audience of close friends), responsive expectations shift; now the farther removed people in one's social network are the privileged responders as they are now the addressed recipients.
Exploring how *Like* fits in with this type of expectation, I found a public debate on the topic (on a pregnancy website discussion board). The next example is two comments in a thread about Facebook pregnancy announcements, which sparked a lot of debate. The top text is a comment made by the original poster and the bottom text is one of the responses that received the most positive feedback from others on the site. The two Commenters represent the contention that exists among members with differing views on the value of *Likes*. In Example 16, Jenna responds to a thread she started about announcing pregnancy on Facebook. She describes posting such a meaningful event on Facebook as "lame," at least in part because of the expected response from friends: "having them click a 'like' button!!!"

**EXAMPLE 16. Pregnancy post and *Likes* (online metadiscourse data)**

Example 16 is part of a long thread on this topic, and one of the participants, Lacey, responds by explaining her philosophy on the matter: which is that Facebook is a place to let her larger social circle – those she won't call to tell – know the news, so that they can quickly respond with *Like*. Facebook, according to Lacey, is actually the correct way to announce such things to more distant friends because the context represents the casualness of their relationships and does not require hearers to demonstrate that they "genuinely care." Thus, *Liking* may contribute to some members' belief that Facebook is the preferred medium for communicating certain news to their larger network. One member from the over-50 focus group voiced a similar idea, describing email as communicating "hey, look at this," and Facebook as suggesting, "well, look at it if you
want to." In other words, Facebook is less imposing, likely due to the fact that specific recipients are not usually addressed and thus no one is obligated to respond but also because a Like provides a quick response option without even requiring the hearer to actually take the time to "look at," read, or otherwise engage with the information; they can just acknowledge the post and "go about their day" (last line in Example 16).

I have demonstrated that the use of Like is sensitive to the content of a post, offline relationships between participants, and new media beliefs, proving to be a much more complex discursive act than might be initially assumed. In addition to its foundational backchanneling role in Facebook conversation, I have shown that a Like is able to imply semantic information in the context of specific Facebook posts, for example, implying "yes" to yes-no questions or "I read this," in response to a post containing a hyperlink. Finally, I have demonstrated the complicated sociolinguistic influences on the choice to (or not to) Like depend on implied participation frameworks, topic, and offline relationships, as well as individuals', sometimes conflicting, ideologies about Facebook practices.

4.3 Discussion

That people have incorporated new media in general and the Like feature in particular into their, often, daily social practices merits the attention of social scientists who have largely conducted research around the specifics of face-to-face interaction or the use of social media in regards to posting behaviors. The fact that Facebook conversations are grounded in offline relationships is both the basis of the site's success and one of the factors that imbues even the most simple and seemingly formulaic interactive moves with significance and nuance. While Like seems at first a simple and perhaps frivolous feature, my analysis peels back the many discursive layers at which it operates, proving it to be a complicated responsive device capable of serving as the foundation to much of the interaction that takes place on Facebook.

I employed discourse analysis to draw out implications surrounding Liking from interviews and group discussion excerpts as well as online metadiscourse and Facebook exchanges. I divided my analysis into three sections based on considering the act of Liking an alternative to: not-Liking, not responding, and not Commenting. I showed that Facebook, Inc. often dismisses the discursive potential and variable meanings of Like, by
reporting it in the present tense and contrasting it with the choice of not Liking a post. I demonstrated, however, that Like is used discursively in interactions on the site and proves an effective alternative to silence, allowing members to quickly nod to many of the vast number of evolving conversations in their newsfeeds. Recall that the creation of the newsfeed in 2006 adjusted the setting, so to speak, on the public-private spectrum; this type of networked privacy heightens posters' vulnerability in terms of going unacknowledged. Like avoids the "notable absence" that would otherwise exist beneath a post without Likes or Comments. I offered further evidence of this by demonstrating the high frequency at which posts are responded to and that Likes are much more common that Comments. I demonstrated that this preference for Likes is not only about ease of use by highlighting members' stated and demonstrated sensitivities to post-specific participation frameworks when deciding whether to Like or Comment.

I revealed how Like can be used to express sympathy on a sad post, "yes" to an invitation post, support for a colleague, etc. I have also shown that this versatility leaves Like vulnerable to ambiguity and that interpreters are not always aware of how a specific Like was intended: for example, when a poster finds a Like awkward on their sad-news post or when a poster wonders if a Liker actually read the article to which they posted a link. I revealed that Like is interpreted in many cases as the unmarked response of a post – as indicating "yes" to an invitation or that a Liker did read the link in a post – but I have also shown how ambiguity always exists around such interpretations, which are subject to members' Facebook ideologies and in the context of what and how well members know about one another.

Like's ambiguous nature and now ubiquitous employment on social media, has prompted some people to claim that Like is now "meaningless" (Ray 2011), however, I have presented evidence to the contrary. As Lakoff (1972: 911) states: if there exist truly "meaningless" linguistic features, then "it would be impossible to misuse them," but as she asserts in her work on "exotic" languages in context, different linguistic phenomena carry meaning in different ways. Lakoff's point was that all languages have markers that are not clearly semantic in nature but rather convey some subtlety about how the speaker feels about or is situated in relation to a hearer or information. The use of honorifics, which can be quite complicated in certain languages like Japanese, is an example Lakoff
provides. But while certain words or affixes may not be straightforwardly defined, they do convey information and the conventions surrounding their use are socially meaningful. As Lakoff (1972: 908) highlights is the case with markers such as honorifics, "one language may require that these markers be present, while another may consider them optional, or to be used only in case special classification is desired, or for special stylistic effects." I assert this is similar to the responsive "marker" Like, which some users or groups may feel obligated to click on frequently, while others believe it to be completely optional and still others find it a very meaningful act. Like may be valued or devalued in certain situations by members based on differing beliefs about Like's discursive implications. Specifically, disagreements among members about how Like should be used seems especially emotionally-charged in the context of serious or "big news" topics.

To continue in my investigation of responsive norms on Facebook, in chapter 5 I shift my focus to Commenting practices. I do this by examining Comments on a very frequent type of post – (near)immediate personal experience sharing. I demonstrate how Commenters draw on the extroverted consciousness (Chafe 1994) from which most members post forming intertextual ties (Hamilton 1996) with what is notably unsaid or not shown in a post, managing to develop coherent topics and demonstrate relationships across time and space.
CHAPTER 5. "WHAT'S WRONG?: COMMENTING ON THE NOTABLE NOTS OF POSTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the act of Commenting on Facebook and how members respond to and manage topic building on posts in the networked private context of a newsfeed. Specifically, I demonstrate that Commenters often draw on the notable nots (adapted from Trester 2013) – what is left out of a photograph or noticeably left unsaid in a post. Many of the examples in this chapter reveal that a major resource for building a Facebook exchange from a post involves calling on what is not present in order to engage in what Marjorie Goodwin (1990: 156) terms byplay – playful commentary about talk in progress. I focus my analysis on Comments made on a particular type of status update involving what I term local displaced immediacy, drawing on Chafe's (1994) notions of modes of communication. This type of status update, shown in Example 1, reports on an offline experience that is (near)immediate for the poster but displaced for their Facebook audience.

EXAMPLE 1. Status update in the local displaced immediacy mode

Despite the obvious displaced aspect of Facebook (members are interacting from different physical and often temporal locations), immediacy is a key element of Facebook posting and often, Facebook Commenting. As demonstrated in Example 1, a status update dealing with local displaced immediacy involves a poster sharing an often minor observation during or immediately after their experience and making their present context partially accessible in the "local" context of Facebook through language and many times photographs. This then functions as a shared "present context," with the poster's immediate experience providing the deictic center from in which interaction takes place; Commenters mentally occupy this established time and place to engage with a poster. Again, this is often done by linking what is revealed in the post with established knowledge between the poster and Commenter and what is not explicit in the post.
in Example 1 that there are an unending number of things not included in the post, such as the name of the campus or the type of experiments being referenced. This suggests such things are either unimportant for the point of the post or already familiar subjects to the audience. In a networked private context, of course, the audience is extremely varied in their preexisting knowledge, so some audience members may choose to ask for what has not been mentioned to acquire this missing information, while others might simply support Amber's evaluations. This chapter analyzes how audience members build on minimalist posts like Example 1 by drawing out what is notably absent to demonstrate relationships either by indicating they are aware of the unstated aspects through intertextual ties or by expressing interest in acquiring such knowledge about the poster.

I focus on this type of post because it is a frequent type of Facebook interaction. A study of Facebook by Bolander and Locher (2010: 178) revealed that members, rather than filling in the personality labels Facebook makes available on the user profiles, prefer using more "narrative"-oriented options to do identity work on the site, highlighting aspects of themselves as they are relevant at specific moments in time. In their study, Bolander and Locher found that more than half of the posts they examined (198/350) were about a user's current desire, state of mind, state of body, location, and/or an act in progress, while only 7% (24/350) of posts reflected on past events. Similarly, Page (2010) concluded that Facebook members use the space to share current-state updates – what she termed "Breaking News updates" (see also Page 2013) based on Georgakopoulou's (2007) term – that seem to mostly describe something about the poster's immediate situation. Page (2010: 430) found that instances of immediate sharing made up 63% of the status updates she examined. In addition, even when posts did use the past tense (15%), the verb was often preceded with "just," as in Example 2, suggesting a near-immediate experience, lacking the time lapse that allows for significant retrospection (Chafe's [1994] extroverted consciousness).
Example 2. (taken from Page 2010: 430)  

April 15  
Karen just shut her finger in the car door :(.
7:13pm

Based on this evidence, recency seems to be one of the parameters of tellability on Facebook, with members using posts to "live"-share (near)immediate experiences with their social network. Linde (1993: 22) observes that certain events that are immediately reportable "are not sufficiently significant to tell a close friend six months later."

Similarly, many of the immediate experiences shared on Facebook are fairly menial, depending on their immediacy for value (as in Examples 1 and 2). Frequently, topics are of extraordinarily banal subject matter – such as what the poster is eating or watching on TV – behavior consistent with the established framework of a phatic "continuing state of incipient talk" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 325) on Facebook. This is also consistent with most forms of social communication online; researchers like Page (2013: 36) continue to note a strong "tendency of social-media genres to prioritize recency over retrospection," suggesting that the unmarked deictic center (Fillmore 1971: 67) of utterances on social media is the immediate. This immediacy is critical for "constructing a discourse of a shared present moment" (Page 2010: 432) that makes communicating on Facebook seem like near real-time social interaction.

The data for this chapter come from screenshots of interactions among my Facebook "friends" as several instances of highly affective, opaque status updates – known popularly as "vaguebook posts" – the later of which I collected from online metadiscourse data, though I offer Example 3 as a demonstration of vaguebooking observed in my own network.

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28 Page's data was collected from May –July 2008, shortly after Facebook altered the structure of its status updates in December 2007 by dropping the "is" before a post (i.e. 
"[NAME] is...") Thus, members tended to still speak in the third person singular.
29 Evidence of the present as the unmarked deictic center of social media conversations is also found in communicative behaviors on other platforms, such as on Instagram where users who upload pictures that are not of their immediate context, label the picture as #latergram. A picture of the poster's immediate context, however, would receive no temporal label.
EXAMPLE 3. Vaguebook example

In instances of vaguebook posts like that in Example 3, I analyze the discursive choices of Commenters who are forced to respond without context. In other instances of local displaced immediacy posts, I identify how Commenters form intertextual ties with the "present" context a poster shares by linking it to the notable nots of the post. Overall, this chapter highlights the various resources the variable audience of a networked private context draw on to engage at different depths with a post and a poster. Before beginning my analysis, I review relevant linguistic areas, including discourse topic (Erickson 1981), flow of consciousness (Chafe 1994), and the discursive understanding of intertextuality (Tannen 2007, Hamilton 1996, Trester 2012) in section 2.

5.2 Topic and Intertextuality

Erickson (1981: 44) refers to the topical resources discursive participants draw on as "production resources," which he categorizes as (1) local, (2) local once removed, and (3) nonlocal. Local resources are aspects of the present context that the conversationalists are experiencing together (in this case, what is available on Facebook). Local-once-removed resources are experiences that the participants share from prior interactions they have had with one another, and nonlocal resources consist of commonplace topics and general knowledge. Erickson's (1981) topical local-once-removed resources and nonlocal resources are based on external factors to the present discourse; they are intertextual.

While the concept of intertextuality comes from literary theory, Hamilton (1996: 64) provides a discursive understanding of the framework as the following:

the ways in which speakers/writers use language to establish and maintain ties between the current linguistic interaction (i.e. conversation) and prior ones involving the same participants, as well as the ways in which listeners/readers identify and use these ties to help them (re)construct a speaker/writer's meaning.

Intertextuality, in other words, is at the root of any successful interaction. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 298), who are concerned with intertextual cohesion, briefly refer to intertextuality as "false or unresolved cohesion" – when the presupposition is not
satisfied within a single text; the referring item is supplied but not the item to which it refers. They assert that while this is not cohesively productive in relation to text-building, it creates solidarity by putting the hearer "on the inside, as one who is assumed to have shared a common experience with the speaker or writer." Failing to explicitly supply a hearer with all the necessary information intratextually, Tannen (1985: 131) claims, creates a "feeling of involvement," as it requires the hearer "to do some of the work of sense making." Such an endeavor is productive in relationship building. Trester (2012: 257) illuminates intertextuality as a prolific "interactional practice," whose procedural moves and motivations are unique to each social group and community. As intertextual ties bind texts, Trester asserts, group-specific intertextual processes and awareness of why they are being enacted bind members of a community. While this can be used purposefully and with social rewards, van Dijk (1981: 190) claims that the nature of any discourse topic "allows that much information is not explicitly expressed in the discourse." Part of communicating requires speakers and hearers to make assumptions and to know what are the relevant and mutually-accessible topical resources, most notably, the local environment in which participants find themselves interacting.

Participants in an "open state of talk" (Goffman 1981a: 74) context, such as Facebook, have the right to initiate a topic, but this topic must then be ratified by an audience. Otherwise, "the speaker has nowhere to go with a topic once it has been introduced" (Erickson 1982: 47). Speaker and hearer collaborate "to establish cohesive themes" (Gumperz 1982: 330) among utterances that build a coherent topic. Interactants work together to accomplish what Chafe (1974: 111) claims is the predominant goal of language in general: "to increase the amount of knowledge that is shared by separate minds." For discourse to succeed, Charles Goodwin (1986: 284) asserts, an audience must agree to be an "active co-participant," interpreting utterances and signaling to the speaker their level of "access to the domain of discourse" (i.e., that they are "following" what the speaker is saying). Speakers must in turn actively consider audience members so that the resulting discourse accounts for what information is already in the minds (or not) of co-participants (Chafe 1994).

This mental and verbal exercise is what Clark and Haviland (1974: 104) refer to as the "Given-new Strategy." Speakers attempt to distinguish information that the hearer
is likely to possess – based on the present context, prior discourse, and general knowledge (Keenan & Schieffelin 1976: 338) – from that about which they are likely unaware. Hearers then assume that what is presented as presupposition in an utterance refers to information they already have and that the assertions and implications the speaker is making offer new information to be integrated with the relevant given knowledge (Keenan & Schieffelin 1976). In this way, participants actively concentrate on small amounts of information at a time and then join these to "express larger coherences of information" (Chafe 1994: 29), or discourse topics. This allows each participant's constantly moving consciousness to collaboratively focus and move forward collectively.

According to Chafe, the mind can only have one active focus at a time while related information exists in a semiactive state (e.g., elements in the shared environment, related knowledge based on knowledge schemas) from where next topics can be drawn, creating a topical flow for interactants to follow.

Conversation, according to Chafe (1994: 198-9) often relies on the introverted consciousness, taking place in the displaced mode with speakers recalling events and emotions or imagining future events or the experiences of third parties. This mode involves a speaker making information that was previously inaccessible to all but the speaker – since it existed only in the speaker's mind – available to the hearer. Thus, conversations in the displaced mode are typically more interesting as they draw on a larger database of topics from displaced times and places. Chafe (1994) mentions another mode as well: the immediate mode. When a conversation is in the immediate mode, the speaker draws on the environment – "local resources" – and introduces topics based on what they are perceiving, doing and feeling at the time of the event itself. In short, the immediate mode tends to involve a verbalization of what the speaker is presently experiencing and reacting to, depending largely on sensory evidence and expressing what Chafe (1994: 197) refers to as the "extroverted consciousness." In these scenarios, topics tend to be more limited and mundane (e.g., strangers sitting together on a plane delayed on the runway may discuss how much time has passed, the temperature of the cabin, their assessment of the customer service; i.e., Goffman's "open state of talk"). On Facebook, members often communicate in the immediate mode, basing the deictic center for the
interaction on what is "present" for the poster. In section 3, I investigate how members engage in this type of displaced immediacy.

5.3 Analysis

In this section, I analyze how Commenters develop a discourse topic in dialogue with a poster – usually referring to the original post without acknowledging any intervening Comments – either focusing superficially on the local resources of the post or general knowledge or by creating intertextual ties with previous interactions with the poster. I demonstrate that Commenters often draw specifically on what is unsaid or unshown in posts to develop a poster-oriented topic, many times engaging in the phatic communication of byplay to highlight personal relationships. Also part of my analysis is a consideration of a type of Facebook posting that is negatively evaluated offline and popularly referred to as "vaguebooking." I analyze responses to these types of posts to reveal how Commenters draw expressly on the "noisy silences" (Linde 2009) inherent in vaguebooking. Overall, the analysis affirms that the unsaid and inexplicit is a large part of participating in networked privacy communication.

5.3.1 Commenting on the Unsaid

Despite the obvious displaced nature of communication between Facebook "friends," like in most routine offline face-to-face conversations, Facebook posts are often reactionary to immediate environmental stimuli, mimicking Chafe's (1994: 196) "immediate mode". Unlike Chafe's depiction of the immediate mode, however, the immediate stimuli are only experienced by the speaker, who serves as the deictic center for ensuing interaction, while remaining physically and often temporally displaced to Facebook audience members. Such a mode differs from what Chafe (1994: 227) references with his term displaced immediacy which involves experiences "belonging to the same self at a distal time and place." As a result of this unique context where topics are in the immediate mode for the speaker but displaced for hearers, many posts in the (near)immediate present include a photograph or description of part of the relevant context from which a poster is sharing an experience. The link between the photograph and the language in a post, as well as what is notably missing from either or both is then established by Commenters.
In Example 4, a poster, Olive, focuses on an arguably mundane experience (a coffee purchase) that is framed as occurring immediately after a notably more significant event – lunch with the hiring committee. Olive provides what Chafe (1974: 111) describes as a "narrow spotlight…directed at only a small area of the available scene" from her material world in the form of a photograph on Facebook. The photo she provides is a close-up of the coffee she is drinking, limiting what members can view to what she is signaling is the active focus; notice the only elements in the photo are the coffee, a glass and a blurry background. There is much that is visually and linguistically absent in the post in Example 4.

EXAMPLE 4. A photographed object

While Olive's post does not contain a present-tense verb, it is likely that she posted this while still sitting with her coffee. I assume this based on my long observation of posting norms on the site and because of the banality of the topic which marks it as one that would lose tellability as time passes (Linde 1993). To link the clear subject of
the photograph with her experience, Olive uses the referring item *awesome discovery*.. Critically, she includes an additional clause that temporally locates the discovery as being made while being treated to *post-lunch coffee by the hiring committee*. While the picture and syntactic structure highlight the coffee as the topic, and the hiring committee as a mere contextual aside, the second clause hints at a more important untold event.

The post in Example 4 contains a salient absence of information about Olive's interview experience. *The hiring committee* is framed as an established referent by the definite article, suggesting that this post is open state talk with friends for whom the hiring committee topic is "already active at this point in the conversation" (Chafe 1994: 72). While this assumption surely does not correlate with all of the actual audience members of the post (indeed I did not know of Olive's interview prior to reading this post in my newsfeed), hearers who lack the suggested background information may still engage with the smaller topic of focus, which I address next. By making the statement in the Newsfeed, however, Olive has now highlighted what may remain an untold job interview story for the majority of audience members. That this bigger event story is mentioned further establishes the banality of the coffee drink discovery, especially in light of what could be a new career for Olive. Regardless, audience members of the post in Example 4 have a myriad options for Commenting. The post receives ten *Likes*, and three unique Comments from friends (plus one response by Olive to a Comment), shown here:

1. Jan   Nice!
2. Ali   asks how "it" went
3. Lana  asks about the coffee
4. Olive It's chilled cold coffee. Apparently bottling it like a 'brew' is the hot new thing.

The first Comment by Jan in line 1 is the affirmation, "nice!" which is similar to *Like*, but demonstrates more involvement by virtue of being a unique exclamation typed-out, i.e. by being recognizably not-a-*Like* (see chapter 4). It also fails to specify its reach – whether Jan recognizes the coffee Olive is referencing or is glad for Olive's supposed job interview or is only mirroring Olive's positive evaluation. The connection between her Comment and the post is inexplicit and is likely interpreted by Olive based on her relationship with Jan both online and offline.
In line 2, Commenter Ali draws on the notable not: the hiring committee topic, asking how "it" went. This topicalizes the untold part of Ali's coffee shop experience. While Ali's use of the referent "it" could suggest preexisting knowledge from prior discourse with Olive, it is also possible that Ali establishes the referent based on a knowledge schema activated by the original post – spending time with a hiring committee implies an interview. Thus, if "the hiring committee" is already an established referent, Ali can call on her knowledge of the interview process to advance this subtopic of job application discourse. Indeed, according to Chafe (2001: 675), movement between subtopics of a topical category is often accomplished using "some familiar pattern that provides a path for a speaker to follow." Again, how much preexisting access Ali has to this information is not made explicit but is likely known to Olive.

Olive, however, continues to be silent on the matter in this exchange, which is especially notable when she responds to the third Comment that asks about the topic of focus established in the post: the coffee. Olive responds to the Comments by Liking each, but only actually replies to the third question, giving a more detailed description of the subject matter – a chilled cold coffee that is bottled like a brew. While both Ali and Lana's Comments seek missing information, Lana limits her question to exploring what Olive has marked as the focus while Ali draws on the notable not of the post: the left-untold interview story. Since Comments on Facebook do not require a response the same way a question in face-to-face interaction necessitates a relevant answer, members can reach to the untold of a post without threatening the poster's privacy in the same way. Olive is able to acknowledge Ali’s Comment with a Like, indicating she has seen it, and still not provide the asked for information within this exchange.

In this way, the participants in Example 4 navigate the networked private context, communicating some information explicitly and some via what is untold. Olive may have been willing to provide a larger audience with the knowledge that she had an interview but been unwilling to discuss the details on Facebook. The post, however, could serve to update her closer friends about the job hunt by letting them know that she had the interview and that it went well enough for her to be in a happy mood (even if the positive state is implied to be a result of the coffee). That the first and third Comments by Jan and Lana do not attempt to draw out the untold story of the interview may be a result of the
Commenters' relationships with Olive and the subject matter; both are Olive's colleagues from graduate school and thus familiar with the academic interviewing context themselves. Perhaps they are hesitant to draw out details about the success (or failure) of such an event in a semi-public place.

While posters can focus the spotlight in a photograph visually – cropping out other elements – they may include more information in the photograph and highlight the topical focus linguistically; in such cases, a Commenter can draw on what else is visible but not discussed in the post. For instance, in Example 5, the photograph includes the entire back view of a car through a windshield, with the surrounding street and houses visible to either side. The poster, Sally, linguistically expresses her evaluation of the person driving in front of [her].

**EXAMPLE 5. Interpreting the "present context"

Sally

I think the person driving in front of me and I may have slightly different priorities in life.

![Sally's post](image)

Mickey

Regarding distracted driving?

18 hours ago · Like

![Mickey's comment](image)

The photograph and Sally's lexical choices point to an unmentioned aspect of the context – that Sally posted this while driving, marked by her use of the present tense (*the person driving in front of me and I have*). A Commenter, Mickey, draws on this fact to engage in "byplay – teasing, heckling, or playfully dealing with a description or story." (M. Goodwin 1990: 156) – with Sally. Mickey mentions the saliently unsafe aspect of Sally's context: that Sally is texting while driving. Mickey's Comment links to what is unsaid about Sally's context and links this back to the priorities reference: "regarding
distracted driving?" which is also an intertextual tie to popular discourse involving the dangers of "distracted driving" – when drivers use their phones while operating a vehicle.

That the license plate is the topical focus has not been made visually or linguistically explicit but instead calls on the audience for interpretation. The photograph is interpreted in the context of the linguistic element of Sally's post, and vice versa – the linguistic element is also interpreted in light of the photograph. The image of the car in Example 5 allows Sally to use a definite article to reference the driver as given information; a car in the middle of the road with its brake lights on implies that there is a driver. Sally shares a current evaluation of the driver indirectly, by contrasting their priorities with her own. However, while she references both of these sets of priorities, she does not provide the referring items linguistically. Instead, hearers must access the priorities of the person driving in front of me based on information from the photograph and use this to identify Sally's contrastive priorities (they may also draw on preexisting knowledge of Sally's priorities from personal knowledge). That the license plate is a vanity plate (i.e., it spells something rather than being a random arrangement of letters and numbers), and that it references something that could be a "priority in life" (it spells a physical fitness term)\(^{30}\) implies that it is Sally's focus of consciousness. The license plate suggests the driver of the car is a fitness enthusiast. The post insinuates that Sally's lack of enthusiasm for fitness is given knowledge; however, hearers could acquire this information as new by identifying the other driver's priorities from the license plate and understanding that Sally's priorities are different.

The two Commenters that follow Mickey mentally inhabit this scene with Sally and make observations of their own, indicating that they recognize Sally's inexplicit meaning. The two Comments are summarized here since they were made by non-participants of my study. Both Comments concentrate on Sally's topic of active focus, each drawing on a different aspect: (1) that the driver of the car photographed seems over enthused about fitness and (2) that this contrasts with Sally's lack of dedication to the same, as shown here:

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\(^{30}\) While the license plate is legible on Facebook, I do not provide it here for privacy reasons.
Kimmy: *Jokes that "that person" should be traveling in a more physically demanding way*

Tracy: *Recalls her days of lazing about with Sally*

The first Comment following Mickey's is an evaluative remark about the other driver, joining Sally in the activity of evaluating this unknown driver based on their license plate and fleshing out the unsaid "priority" of the driver by mentioning physical fitness. This is also a way of *displaying competence* (C. Goodwin 1986: 283) as Sally's friend by demonstrating her recognition of the implied topic. The third Comment is by a friend, Tracy, with a lot of prior experience with Sally from which to draw. She is able to make intertextual ties to past experiences rather than the more general references to popular discourse that Mickey used, or drawing solely on the visual elements like Kimmy has done. Tracy's Comment reminisces about how she and Sally used to begin their mornings by sitting on the couch watching TV. She also links her statement to the original post by drawing on the implied topic of non-physical fitness, which can be understood to have "triggered" (Jefferson 1978: 220) her recalling of related events. Thus, interactants drawing upon the immediately-displaced context dialogue with Sally about her "present" situation and initial observation, engaging with different domains of the discourse, much of which was notably unmentioned by Sally.

In a final example of Comments on a photographed-present post, a poster, Mickey, provides an uninformative visual of his immediate surroundings, which Commenters' draw on for byplay. While specific details captured in some pictures may provide the topical focus of a post like in Examples 4 and 5, in Example 6, the picture is a more general view of a situation: a table full of paperwork from a distance that makes it illegible. It is as if the poster, Mickey, has leaned back to survey his work up to this point, and is capturing it in all its complexity. The photographed paperwork is both illegible in the photograph and likely incomprehensible to most people without an engineering degree, which Mickey has. Given this inaccessibility of details, Mickey is communicating only his present context without including an explicit evaluation. Mickey has offered his present experience up for interpretation and evaluation.
EXAMPLE 6. Imaginary immediacy through byplay

The Comments in Example 6 playfully engage with imaginary details in the photograph and are what Goodwin (1990: 169) would describe as "a selective form of listening which deals with the story in ways other than those which the principal speaker displays she wants the story to be treated." The two Commenters on the post draw on the inaccessibility of the photograph (that details are not shown) by implying that they can see the words or images in the photographed documents. They engage with the post through byplay (M. Goodwin 1990: 158) "playfully embellish[ing] the talk by exploiting possibilities for playful rendering, reframing it while appreciating it." The Commenters reframe the conversation as a (fictitious) situation where they are physically reviewing the final plans with Mickey. Mickey has highlighted the intended topic by stating it linguistically and providing only a general picture from his point of view; thus, implying that the topic is the event of being at this stage, not the details of the final plans themselves. His friends' Comments, however, playfully flout this topical expectation, teasing Mickey by giving unsolicited input about the house, pretending they can see the plans.

The Comments also make intertextual links to the larger narrative of which the Commenters are aware: that Mickey has bought and is renovating a house. Doing so allows them to claim in-group status by implicitly identifying the notable not of the story – what the plans outline. The first friend mentions something about seeing errors in the
plans, imitating Mickey's own vagueness. That this Commenter does not ask about the unspecified item but instead builds on the topic (albeit playfully) implies that he is aware of the subject matter. He does not name the referred to item either but instead advances the topic intertextually, highlighting his relationship with Mickey by his confident engagement with the limited information supplied in the post. The second Commenter engages with the text by referencing part of the subject matter of the plans, "the roof deck." Two important insights I have as part of this social network: (1) Mickey's house plans do actually include a roof deck, and (2) the roof deck is the entirety of the top of the house (thus, cannot be made bigger). That the roof deck is marked as an established referent through use of the definite article is dependent on Louis' relationship with Mickey as part of his offline friend group, members of which are aware of the discussion of this much-anticipated aspect of the house. The roof deck is an established referent within this social group just as "within every social group there are certain referents that are salient for the members of that group" (Chafe 1994: 101). The ability to properly appreciate playful talk about an actual roof deck depends on hearers' access to this in-group knowledge. Otherwise, hearers not a part of this social group could interpret the roof deck to be part of the imaginary frame of this conversation and reminiscent of the first Commenter's reference to errors that do not actually exist. Mickey's post in Example 6 is part of a series of posts he has made over the course of his house remodeling experience (separated by time and unrelated posts), and the Comments on the post intertextually link this post with the ones that came before by signaling recognition of the larger narrative that is not specified in this post (see West 2013 for a linguistic analysis of this series of posts).

Offering just a piece of a narrative is an effective way to allow Commenters to link to the unsaid, such as providing the abstract to a story about a very recent experience, like in the next example. In Example 7, the poster, Lilly, mentions an experience she had "today." Lilly's summary of the event – that she "saved a baby squirrel" – is the abstract (Labov 1972) of a story. It presupposes that a unique story exists around a baby squirrel needing rescuing. By providing just the abstract, Lilly allows the audience to draw on the untold story as a topical resource – as the third Commenter does – which in turn allows for a more organic telling to unfold in conversation.
EXAMPLE 7. An abstract as a notable not

The first two Commenters do not ask Lilly about the squirrel, perhaps already familiar with the story. Regardless of whether they possess more knowledge of the referenced story or not, the summary of the event is enough information to be positively evaluated. This is also similar to what Georgakopoulou (2004: 26) finds of email interactions: that the evaluation of stories is "the most interactionally drafted component," and thus the audience tends to draw on this as a main resource, "invariably elaborating on and contributing to the teller’s evaluative comments."

The third Commenter, Avra, draws upon the notably absent details that the abstract references by requesting it be introduced into the conversation. Lilly responds to Avra's request by launching directly into the story. She begins with "so" as a "turn-transition device" (Schiffrin 1988: 316), prefacing the entire story with this marker to note a return to the point (Schiffrin 1988: 317) of the conversation: that she has a story to tell. By merely referencing a story through an abstract and waiting for a hearer to request the details, Lilly is able to tell a "locally occasioned" (Jefferson 1978) story as part of a larger cohesive conversation on Facebook, much like in face-to-face conversational storytelling.
I have demonstrated that often Facebook posts focus on near-immediate experiences that the variable newsfeed audience can co-evaluate or engage with to different extents depending on their relationship with the poster. A referring item in a post is often either accompanied by the referred to item expressed linguistically or visually or contains references to general knowledge schemas from which most members can draw. I have shown that Commenters can also engage with such posts by fleshing out the implicit or asking about the untold, and that a poster often responds to requests for additional information about the referred to item, as Olive does in Example 4 and Lilly does in Example 7. Some posts, however, contain only an opaque reference to an event or an evaluation of a present context that is obviously inaccessible to displaced hearers. This flouting of the notably unsaid by a poster is popularly labeled as "vaguebooking." I demonstrate in the next section how Commenters might try to engage with vaguebook posts using examples from the metadiscourse data.

5.3.2 Engaging with Vaguebook Posts

Vaguebook posts are explicitly structured around an unspecified event, anticipating questions but refusing answers. In the young professionals focus group discussion, one member, Liz, described "vaguebooking" as simply "emoting." She then gave two examples of posts that would fall in this category: (1) "today is the first day that I don't have to wear waterproof mascara," and (2) "I'm just having a horrible day, that's all I'll say." Liz finished her discussion of this behavior by saying that hearers then usually respond with dozens of Comments asking "what's wrong?" and "what's going on?" Liz's examples demonstrate why such posts are so problematic – they are a poster's reactions to an immediate context to which audience members are refused access. Since the event is framed as emotionally charged, however, other members feel obliged to respond, often by linking in the only way that is left them, by asking for the referent. Unlike other posts where the posters often respond to topically-relevant questions, These "what's wrong?"-type Comments that seem to be invited and anticipated by a vaguebook post, usually go unanswered by the poster.

Vaguebooking is a much-complained about phenomenon in online metadiscourse, with slight variations on the definition of the term. Generally, however, the descriptions
involve a poster "begging for attention," and trying "to elicit a response from friends." It often seems "meant for only a few people," and sometimes it can contain a "passive-aggressive" message clearly meant for someone or group in particular without revealing whom or which one. In short, it does not respect the networked aspect of the networked private context and suggests, instead, an extension of a private conversation. It is mostly in the focus groups and online metadiscourse that attitudes toward this behavior are revealed; all examples in this section of the analysis come from the website vaguebook.org where people compile and mock instances of vaguebooking.

More problematic than the post itself is the poster's refusal to properly respond to the questions the post anticipates. In Example 8, the poster, Susan, posts a sad emoticon as the only content, indicating she feels unhappy. Susan has referenced that something is wrong, but when a friend tries to link to the "what," Susan withholds it.

**Example 8. Request for the context of evaluation**

Unlike in Example 7 where Lilly used emoticons to evaluate a specific event – that she saved a baby squirrel – the vaguebook post in Example 8 is an emoticon without any context. Such a post leaves many responders with only two choices: (1) to express sympathy without knowing the event the sympathy references, or (2) to ask for more information. The Commenter, Beth, in Example 8 chooses the latter but is told that the cause of the poster's expression of sadness is *nothing*. Such an assertion, after clearly posting in reaction to *something*, makes the notably not-mentioned topic of the vaguebook post even more notable.

31 Vaguebook.org
34 [http://www.mommyish.com/2014/04/03/vaguebooking/](http://www.mommyish.com/2014/04/03/vaguebooking/)
Some friends in the audience of a vaguebook post who possess a great deal of contextual information due to a close offline relationship with a poster, may be able to draw on their knowledge to interpret vague references. In these cases, their Comment usually conveys recognition and sympathy while leaving the event inexplicit, thus perpetrating the private nature of the post. Even closer friends, however, may find themselves with too little information to make the correct ties. Refer to Example 9, where a friend who presumes to know what the emotional state references is in fact mistaken.

**EXAMPLE 9.** Misidentification of the unspecified event in a vaguebook post

In Example 9, the Commenter makes an assumption that they know what the poster is mad about, which they do not explicitly identify, maintaining the private status the poster has imposed on the topic. The Commenter hints at the referred to what of the post giving a sort of knowing nudge by bookending the Comment with "lols," perhaps also to distance themselves from the vaguebooking behavior. The poster's response also continues in the vaguebook register, however, further highlighting and reaffirming the inaccessibility of the post. They indicate the incorrectness of the Commenter's assumption by marking the unexpectedness of the proposed referred to item with "oh!" (Schiffrin 1988). They also explicitly remark that the Commenter's assumed "what" is not the cause of today's angry post, but rather than provide the correct referent after this exchange shines light on the vagueness of the post, the poster merely refers back to the
source of their anger as being *something else*. The referred to event remains expressly unstated.

While unresolved texts can create solidarity by calling on hearers to make connections, if most of the audience lacks necessary context to do so, as is the case in vaguebook posts, it serves only to highlight outsider status and parade around a shrouded private topic. Vaguebook posts often refer explicitly to "given" information that is in fact new information for the vast majority of hearers in a networked private context, as in the next example, where the poster uses the term "this" as the topic. Such a move can prompt Commenters to remark on the vague nature of the post rather than accept being positioned as eavesdroppers of a private conversation. Rather than build a topic that is poster-centric, then, such Comments shift the topic to what the Commenter is thinking and feeling.

**Example 10. Byplay on a vaguebook post**

Since a Facebook audience does not inhabit the same present context as the poster, they likely cannot identify the referent of "this," in posts like Example 10, which is a term appropriate for interactants in a shared environment or if the post were to contain a picture of the referent. One option for responding to such blatant ambiguity is to ask about it, like the Commenter does in Example 8. In order to reject being pigeon-holed into this type of response, however, some Commenters use byplay to provide metacommentary on the vagueness of the post, as demonstrated by the Comment in Example 10. As M. Goodwin (1990: 162) explains of this type of response, the effect is that the "recipients' commentary rather than the speaker's story becomes the focus of interaction." In Goffman's (1981a) terms, the Comment "reaches" to respond to the nature
of the post, rather than forming an adjacency pair around the "this" topic that the poster puts forth. The Commenter in Example 10 labels the post as vaguebooking and expresses their own frustration with a lexical representation of an exasperated sound, ahhhhh! This serves to shift the topic from what the poster is experiencing to what the hearer is experiencing.

Similarly to the poster's response to the Comments in Examples 8 and 9, and exemplary of vaguebook posting behavior in general, the poster in Example 10 refuses to provide more information in response to the Comment. Rather than offering access to the referred to item that the hearer cannot identify, the poster defends the nature of their post as being given information to almost everyone. Since the average number of "friends" a member has on Facebook is 338 (Smith 2014), the chance that the majority of their networked audience in fact knows to what the poster in Example 10 is referring is very unlikely. The post fails to provide access for the different levels of hearers by offering any clear references for less familiar "friends" to link to even generally. Clearly, the goal of posts as Examples 8, 9 and 10 is not to offer any new information or collaborate with the audience but to receive a very specific supportive response. But if the topic is too private to actually reveal to a collapsed-context audience, then hearers may deem the call for support in this setting inappropriate. The complete inaccessibility of a post creates a sense of topical intimacy, which Bazarova (2012) found was judged as less appropriate for the newsfeed and better received as a private Facebook message.

While vaguebook posts usually contain a referring item, such as this in Example 10, without providing a linguistic description or visual depiction of the item referred to, some audience members may find ways to engage with the opaque information. In Example 11, a vaguebook poster, Andy, refers to his situation as "many bridges on fire…". While hearers do not know the actual reference the metaphor is about (as indicated by the first Commenter's question mark) two hearers make intertextual ties with the popular "burning bridges" metaphor, building a coherent friendly discourse by sidestepping the vagueness issue.
EXAMPLE 11. Byplay with vague topics

The fact that a question mark is the only element of the first Comment points to the general inaccessibility of the post in Example 11. The second Comment, by Jason, however, is a humorous play on the metaphor from the post. Jason suggests that Andy should have waited to set the bridges on fire. This is an intertextual tie to the popular use of the metaphor as a verbal phrase \textit{burning bridges}, which allows him to assume an agentive role for Andy. While Andy's actual post is grammatically presented as an observation (\textit{many bridges on fire}) most hearers can identify the metaphor and what it generally refers to – cutting off relational ties/professional opportunities. While the details of the ties and/or opportunities lost are not provided in the post, members manage to draw on knowledge of the metaphor to discuss the inaccessible context metaphorically.

Instead of asking about the actual situation hidden behind the metaphor, Jason and Emma limit the topic to the discussion of these "bridges." Jason suggests that Andy could have blamed fireworks for burning the bridges. This intertextual play is a humorous suggestion that the metaphorical bridges are actually on fire. The next Commenter, Emma, makes a similar reference, perhaps encouraged by Jason's Comment. Again, she limits herself to the metaphorical topic, which is what is accessible to hearers, and talks about the mentioned bridges. She acknowledges the information Andy has provided with "ooooo," suggesting intrigue. This may also be a mocking link to the nature of vaguebook posts which dramatically hint at information. The two Comments notably ignore what the poster has left unsaid.
While vaguebook posts involve the conspicuously unsaid, the impulse to engage with friends' on Facebook spurs hearers to Comment using a smaller range of resources: by mirroring the poster's negative evaluation of the unknown referred to item, requesting the referred to item, or using the vague nature of the post itself as a topic to build on through byplay.

5.4 Discussion

In face-to-face interactions, topics often come from shared physical surroundings (Erickson 1981), while Facebook members are often communicating from different physical environments at different times. A poster's (near)immediate experience, however, can be made accessible as a topical resource to a Facebook audience through present-tense evaluations and photographs. Despite the fact that poster and hearer do not physically inhabit the same environment while posting and Commenting, Facebook members draw on the topical resources made "local" (Erickson 1981) in the Facebook post. The audience uses contextual details from the post to adopt the same deictic center as the poster, such as the view from the driver's seat in Example 5. Commenters may engage with a post's topical resources through metaCommentary or byplay, humorously developing the topic in other ways than the poster intended, as in Example 6 when Mickey's friends pretend to be able to see what is illegible in the photograph he provided. I have demonstrated that Commenters specifically draw upon the notable nots in a post's language or photographs to maintain open talk with a poster and demonstrate their relationship with a poster. Byplay in particular is a valuable method for building a coherent exchange around even an inaccessible topic, such as in instances of vaguebook posts.

In the second part of my analysis, I called upon instances of online metadiscourse involving Commenting on "vaguebook" posts, which flout posting norms by refusing to provide a context to an evaluative statement. While such posts highlights what is unsaid as the topic, thus structurally anticipating questions, vaguebook posters do not provide answers to Comments seeking the missing information. Another responsive tactic on vaguebook posts, however, is to reach beyond what is notably absent and engage in byplay. This allows members to build on the vague nature of a post like in Example 10 when a Commenter labels the post as vaguebooking, shifting the topic to the audience's
point of view and in Example 11 when Commenters adopt the same evasive register of the post to playfully build on the burning bridges metaphor rather than attempting to access what it represented.

I have shown some of the ways the Facebook response options – *Liking* and *Commenting* – are used and interpreted by members. The importance is often not the topics of posts or the content of the responses, both of which are often menial, but the act itself of engaging with "friends" in the Newsfeed, highlighting shared knowledge schemas and offline relationships while maintaining a balance between the networked and private nature of newsfeed discourse. While Facebook provides a platform for this type of phatic communication and flexible responsive options, the site is not a context without serious social risks. Such risks can prompt a member not to respond within a Facebook interaction but to react to the post in other settings, such as contacting the poster via another channel, sharing their reaction to a post offline or starting a new post. In the next chapter I investigate responsive actions that are notably not present in most newsfeed exchanges, specifically, affectively negative reactions to posts. I demonstrate that members reserve such reactions, many times involving negotiations around epistemic rights, for other contexts while remaining notably silent in the relevant Facebook interaction itself.
6.1 Introduction

In chapters 4 and 5 I focused on responsive actions taken on Facebook. In this chapter, I investigate the invisible reactions to status updates – those relayed in other contexts rather than underneath the post. Specifically, I analyze how members negotiate epistemic claims in contexts outside a Facebook interaction that potentially threatens their assessment rights. In any discourse, participants frequently assert their rights to assess information and position themselves in relation to information and other members. A hierarchy of information access is negotiated and managed as individuals do crucial relationship work and enact social roles through narrative (Schiffrin 1996, 2002; Hamilton 1998, 2008), topic assessment (Heritage & Raymond 2005) and other discursive courses of action (Raymond & Heritage 2006). On Facebook, however, the networked private context as well as the involvement of the site itself in animating and distributing information about members, creates a space ripe for challenges to the epistemic hierarchy. At times, the site and "friends" may, purposefully or unwittingly, reveal another member's information. According to a PEW survey, 36% of Facebook users complained about other members posting things about them without their permission (Smith 2014). This can deny individuals their privileged rights to take specific affective and evaluative stances in relation to certain information and enact identities. Members of Facebook do, however, have techniques for responding to these losses and reclaiming primary epistemic positions, as I demonstrate in this chapter.

In section 2, I offer an overview of stancetaking and epistemic claims in conversation and how they are interactively negotiated. I begin my analysis in section 3 with a description of how Facebook posters are initially positioned in status updates, namely as occupying first position (Heritage & Raymond 2005) in relation to information. I then discuss how the Facebook platform's generated reports about members' actions on the site can reposition them in terms of participation framework and social identity. I use interview data and an excerpt from a focus group discussion to demonstrate how older-age, newer members in particular find themselves repositioned and/or denied primary rights to a topic. I then explore the responsive acts of members
trying to navigate these challenges, highlighting how some members reclaim epistemic primacy lost on Facebook through the use of constructed dialogue (Tannen 2007) and second stories (Sacks 1992) when discussing their Facebook experiences offline. Using the interviews and group discussions as data, I demonstrate how members reposition posters and take an epistemic and evaluative stance in narratives about posts. Finally, I analyze two related Facebook exchanges to show one way a member may also take action on the site itself; in the final two-part example I reveal how one member chooses to begin a new post in reaction to a Comment in order to regain control of a personal topic. Overall, much of the negotiation of rights is invisible on Facebook, happening in other contexts while the involved members largely maintain silence in the discursive space of the relevant post. Before illuminating the practice of not-responding within a Facebook exchange that challenges epistemic rights, I first explain how epistemic claims and stancetaking function in everyday conversation.

6.2 Stancetaking and Epistemic Claims

In conversation in general, rights to give and receive certain information are ordered (Heritage & Raymond 2005), with speakers and hearers ranked according to their relationship to the information within the specific social context. An important part of identity enactment in conversation involves who has the right to introduce and assess a topic, when and to whom. Topics are assessable by individuals along a hierarchy (Heritage & Raymond 2005), the ranking of which is socially determined (Raymond & Heritage 2006: 684) and influenced by the type of access individuals have to the relevant subject matter (e.g., first-hand, second-hand). As an example of this ranking, if the topic of a conversation were about a specific car accident, the right to assess the event in the conversation would belong first to the person(s) directly involved in the accident and then to those who may have witnessed the event. The hierarchy is related to who is closest to the source of knowledge; in terms of Chafe's (1986: 263) work on evidentiality, those with the most reliable "modes of knowing" (Chafe 1986: 263), such as first-person experience, possess privileged assessment rights related to that information. In the case of the car accident, if neither of the first two claimant types – those who experienced the accident or those who witnessed the event – are present, the right to tell the story passes on to those with second-hand information (perhaps friends who were told the story by
those involved or someone who read about it in the newspaper). Of course, the hierarchy does not dictate who actually introduces or assesses a given topic first but is part of the understanding with which participants approach a conversation.

Conversational rules involve respecting each individual's right to speak first and on their own behalf about personal topics (Pomerantz 1980, Schiffrin 1993, Heritage & Raymond 2005, Raymond & Heritage 2006). As observed by Heritage & Raymond 2005: 16) the initial assessment of a topic is considered a "first position" that "carries an implied claim that the speaker has primary rights to evaluate the matter assessed."

Heritage and Raymond (2005, 2006) demonstrate that when someone with secondary rights occupies this first position by initiating a topic, they will make an effort to "downgrade" their claims in deference to the person with primary rights. In addition, when those with primary rights find themselves faced with a responsive slot – a "second position" – they attempt to "upgrade" their claim, marking it lexically or grammatically as primary. This upgrading, however, is not done when the person with primary rights is in first position because the place of their assessment alone marks their claim as privileged. A similar hierarchy exists in terms of hearer rights and identities; recall from chapter 4 that certain members of a social circle are meant to receive certain topical updates before other members and via more personal channels.

The dance of upgrading and downgrading certain claims in relation to their structural positioning and the speaker and hearer's relative rights to the given topic is how social identities and relationships are "made relevant and consequential in particular episodes of interaction" (Raymond & Heritage 2006: 700). Individuals do not often explicitly state – or even possess – static identities but instead use a range of linguistic tools to mark access to knowledge as meaningful in a specific context (Bucholtz & Hall 2004). Recognizing and respecting individuals' discursive positions in relation to certain topics is how identities are enacted through discourse. In personal narratives, for instance, speakers position themselves as experiencers of the world and through their own and others' "displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 594) manage what Schiffrin (1993) refers to as "identity display," ways of communicating that position a speaker or hearer in certain social roles. One way this is done is through constructed dialogue, which is, as Tannen (2007) highlights, someone
else's quoted speech presented as being reported directly, but is in fact *constructed* by the speaker to serve interactional goals. This discursive identity enactment is termed in linguistics as stancetaking. Dubois' (2007: 163) approach to stance involves the "stance triangle" – a framework that asserts that when taking a stance a person "(1) evaluates an object, (2) positions a subject (usually the self), and (3) aligns with other subjects." In the case of epistemic stancetaking toward other members' status updates on Facebook analyzed in this chapter, I show that members (1) negatively evaluate a post, (2) position the poster as mistaken in their assessment, and (3) contrast their own position with that of the poster to reclaim primary rights. I demonstrate that instances of constructed dialogue are rife in narratives about posts in order to position others and create an opportunity for claiming a first-assessment position.

Even though discursive topics are typically structured in respect to who has "experiential primacy" (Georgakopoulou 2008: 605), discourse is a sometimes unruly endeavor and the epistemic hierarchy is not always respected. For instance, someone who was present to observe an event may choose to tell the story despite their weaker claim to primary position (Moore 2006). Overlaps in tellership rights and instances of "taking the role of the other" (Schiffrin 1993: 257) can either be face-threatening or relationship-affirming depending on the participation framework and the linguistic context of the utterance (Moore 2006, Schiffrin 1993). Regardless of how it happens, the loss of first position in terms of introducing a topic or setting its evaluative framework can affect a speaker's ability to use a personal story as, for example, an "agentive and epistemic display of self" (Schiffrin 1996: 196). A loss of agentive and epistemic discursive choices is a particular risk in multi-party conversations and in certain social settings (Ochs & Capps 2001). Facebook's networked private context and the fact that many "friends" have largely overlapping social networks on the site, creates a situation ripe for the epistemic hierarchy to breakdown.

6.3 Analysis

Consistent with the chapters before it, this chapter illuminates the influences of the networked private context on the discourse and vice versa. I highlight the inherent risks to epistemic primacy such a context presents and show how Facebook often results in information being told or heard in ways that undermine other members' rights to hear
and tell first. I assert that despite the primary rights afforded the poster in a status update, the Facebook platform's own discursive agency can challenge members' rights to take epistemic and affective stances to enact social roles and can position members in ways contrary to how they intended. I then reveal how members with overlapping epistemic claims and overlapping social circles can usurp the position of primary teller and I illustrate the social repercussions of such instances. Drawing on the concept of second stories (Sacks 1992) and oh-prefaced constructed dialogue (Trester 2009) I analyze several narratives from the interview and focus group data to highlight the common occurrence of overlapping claims and how members reposition themselves when discussing the issue of managing epistemic rights. Finally, I demonstrate methods members employ to renegotiate their identity and the boundaries of their "networked private" (Marwick & boyd 2014) context on Facebook, through actions like untagging photographs or beginning new posts on the site, or taking actions offline to manage what is not said on the site and to mitigate possible social consequences. I begin my analysis by considering the structure of a Facebook post in terms of how a "speaker" is positioned on the site.

6.3.1 Structural Positioning of Status Updates

A member's initial positioning on Facebook is established by the "status update" box. Again, the structural positioning of a statement is related to "the epistemic claims implied by that positioning" (Heritage & Raymond 2005: 34), so the status update prompt – "What's on your mind?" – positions a poster as the authority on the subject of their personal mental focus. While initially a post is a response to this question prompt, technically making it the second part of a question-answer pair type (Schegloff & Sacks 1973), once it is written the first-pair part disappears. Facebook presents the post as a new topic of discourse and a first-pair part with a response slot potentially filled by Likes and/or Comments (see chapters 4 and 5), shown here in Example 1.
EXAMPLE 1. A status update in the newsfeed

As explored in chapter 5, status updates are often immediate observations like that in Example 1 and posters sometimes offer visual access to the physical context from which they are posting in the form of a photograph. The latter act substantiates their first-hand claims and positions others with an opportunity, albeit a more-mediated one, to make visual observations for themselves and perhaps contribute a second assessment in a Comment.

In terms of the structure of the basic Facebook exchange – post followed by Comments – Facebook visually marks a poster as primary over other contributors. Again, as noted by Heritage and Raymond (2005: 23), an individual who introduces an initial observation or evaluation of a topic is often the interactant with "primary epistemic rights" to assess the information. Facebook helps to scaffold this understanding in its visual representation of turns: any responses to a status update are indented and located below the post in a structurally secondary position as shown in Figure 1.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, a Commenter cannot reclaim a structurally primary position, since their assertion will remain indented and visually secondary. Thus, a
member cannot combat a degradation of their claim to a topic by responding to a post with a Comment. I offer evidence of this in the final Example of this chapter, where a member chooses to compose a new post in reaction to a Comment on their original post.

Although posters are given structural primacy in this way, their position is vulnerable to other aspects of the Facebook platform, namely, that it acts as animator and distributor of their posts and actions on the site. While a member may author a post and be the principal "whose position is established by the words that are spoken" (Goffman 1981b: 144), the newsfeed relays that information to an audience based on an algorithm.

In the next set of examples, I demonstrate how this sometimes denies members agency in terms of stancetaking, as they must accept the loss of discursive choices involving how and to whom their words appear. A participant in the young professionals focus group discussion told me that he had only recently begun to realize (after four years of being on Facebook) that he is only considering of a segment of his potential audience when he posts and that a lot of people who view what he posts likely have "no connection" to what he is posting about. This type of audience member is often silent within the Facebook exchange, remaining invisible hearers who are none the less part of the audience who interprets a post.

It is important to consider such audience members in order to account appreciate the particularities and risks of interacting in a networked private context. Recall from chapter 2 that research suggests that those with whom a member interacts most often on an SNS tend to be the people the member assumes is their "primary and often solitary audience" on the site (Strater & Lipford 2008: 115). An intimate social circle is a context that, as Goffman points out (1983: 42), encourages frequent updating: "the 'closer' the relationship, the more quickly the information is to be imparted and the less dramatic this information need be." The newsfeed, however, directs posts to members with varying degrees of closeness to a poster who may lack the contextual knowledge to interpret or appreciate the social meaning of certain information. Like most discursive acts, relationships and the contextual knowledge that accompanies different levels of relationships determine the success in connecting an audience to information. Without the
connection, there are people to whom the update, and the poster's intended stancetaking, mean nothing.\textsuperscript{35}

I found that in general, however, younger members were better able than older aged members on the site to contextualize what they saw in their newsfeed in terms of what was funneled to them based on some unspecified algorithm. Older-aged, newer users seemed more likely to interpret things in their newsfeeds as being told to them directly by a poster. For instance, one of the women in the over-fifty group discussion reported having deactivated her Facebook account due to having "friends" like one of her kids' father-in-law on the site, who is "on there telling us what he's doing every hour on the hour" [emphasis my own]. This resonates with what interviewee Madeline, a 65-year-old mother of three, explained to me about "boring posters." The idea both women expressed is that people are "telling" them mundane personal details that they don't want to know about. However, these posters are not actually "telling them;" the newsfeed is. While the poster authored the words, they do not control the \textit{telling} aspect.\textsuperscript{36} Example 2 is an excerpt from the interview with Madeline, which I analyze in terms of Madeline's stancetaking and positioning of another member based on their status update.

\textbf{Example 2. Boring posters (individual interview data)}

\begin{verbatim}
1 Madeline A couple of friends are boring posters! You know they just um:-
2 They'll put down when they...
3 that they went to Olive Garden
4 And then they you know,
5 "thank you to my daughter for giving me a"
6 you know "25-dollar gift card."
7 If you just want to give that to your daughter, fine,
8 you know- her recognition but
9 I don't care if you went to Olive Garden! (hh)
10 Laura (hhh)
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{35} While this situation seems similar to the act of "vaguebooking" in chapter 5, I suggest that it is a separate phenomenon. Rather than a poster purposefully being covert in crafting their post and any responses to Comments, the posters in this chapter are not necessarily trying to compose "meaningless" posts. Instead, they are positioned as doing so by the Facebook platform which sends posts to members for whom the poster did not compose their message.

\textsuperscript{36} As I mention in chapter 2, I spoke with only one member during my four-year ethnography who took advantage of the audience-specification option on Facebook. All other users in the study spoke in terms of choosing between private messages or the newsfeed-directed updates on Facebook.
Example 2 is a demonstration of how the newsfeed can influence the stance interpretations of posters. In line 1 Madeline complains about *boring posters* and then gives an example of a boring post in line 3 – someone thanking her daughter for a 25-\$dollar gift card\ in a post, enacting her role as mother. Stancetaking, however, may not accomplish intended social goals if the actual audience does not match with the intended audience. In this example, Madeline demonstrates that instead of reading the utterance as reflective of a good mother, an audience member may interpret it as that of a presumptuous and "boring poster." In line 5 Madeline enacts the post, taking an evaluative stance using constructed dialogue. She expresses exasperation with the hypothetical poster in line 9 by telling them, "*I don't care if you went to Olive Garden!*" Of course, this confrontation does not happen as an actual Comment on the post nor in any context with the actual poster; instead, Madeline evaluates the post offline to an unrelated third party (myself).

Indeed, negative evaluations of posts mostly go unexpressed on the site itself. Instead, members tell about their observations and evaluations of unfavorable posts in other contexts (for example, see Jones, Schieffelin, and Smith's [2011] study of gossiping about Facebook posts, or popular comedian, Amy Schumer's, recent sketch about women who get together to critique a mutual friend's Facebook posts\(^\text{37}\)). The subject matter of a member going to a restaurant to which her daughter gave her a gift card is likely meant for a very small audience of family members and close friends, but Madeline's dialogue toward the poster in line 12 – *Why? Why would I want to know that?* – positions the poster as having decided to tell Madeline this information specifically. Such dialogue represents Madeline's assumption that the poster assumes Madeline *wants to know* this information when in fact the poster may not even be aware that Madeline is an audience member of her post.

6.3.2 Reactions to Downgraded Epistemic Rights

Regardless of how they are received, sharing personal stories or family events is integral to claiming social roles. For example, grandparents and parents inhabit their roles

\(^{37}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d4j2kzgr0c
as such through telling stories about their grandchildren and children, to whom they have primary access as topics of information (Raymond & Heritage 2006). They are the next-closest to the source, second only to the kids and grandkids themselves, usually receiving news about or personally observing updates to the kids’ lives before other non-family members. In fact, most of the users over fifty years of age I interviewed largely joined Facebook to follow their kids and grandkids, in other words, to be parents and grandparents on the site.

At the same time that Facebook grants more opportunities to enact a parent identity and offers another level of access to kids and grandkids, the newsfeed can undermine parents' and grandparents' epistemic rights to hear information before non-family members and to be the ones to share news about their family with their social circle. Since many different generations use the site and have mutual "friends," there are times when a grandparent, for instance, learns of something about their grandchild from an acquaintance, who saw it on Facebook first. The repercussions of such occurrences are largely invisible online but are instead processed and evaluated in offline tellings, as in Example 3.

Before analyzing the next example, the necessary background information about the member, Dora, in Example 3 includes the following: (1) she has three children, all of whom are on Facebook and seven grandchildren, (2) she does not visit the site frequently – which is of note given that 64% of users visit the site daily (Smith 2014) and 40% do so numerous times throughout the day (Duggan & Smith 2013) – and finally, (3) she posts very infrequently. Given the frequency with which other users visit and share on the site, and the overlapping social networks (many of Dora's friends are "friends" with Dora's daughters), Dora is very vulnerable to losing opportunities to be the one to tell her friends certain updates about her family. In Example 3, Dora mentions her disappointment when photographs of her grandbaby are shared with her friends through Facebook rather than by her directly.

Example 3. Loss of opportunity to "be grandmother" (over-fifty group discussion).

[Jenny = pseudonym I chose for Dora's daughter]

1 Dora and now what happens is
2 my friends that are on it say,
3 "Oh! I saw [Jenny]'s new baby on Facebook!"
4 and the- there's part of me that goes,
"Well, rats! I wanted to like.. show with my phone.
and share with them.
I didn't want them to just know from...
the cloud or whatever that thing is." (hhh)

Jane -mhm-
Laura (hhhh)
Dora (hh)

So, it's a little bit kinda disappointing to me cuz I'm like,
"Oh! I wanted to share that."
but..
then on the other hand,
I feel like, "oh, I need to go on it and see my-
I've got pictures of my grandkids I haven't seen."

In Example 3 Dora discusses a negative aspect of Facebook: no longer being the first one to share her grandbaby pictures with friends. Her use of the present tense, *Now what happens is* (line 1), implies that this is the new norm; her friends see the pictures that her daughter shares on the site, which denies her the opportunity to "be" the grandmother. The newsfeed can strip stories of their human animators and make the sharing aspect, which was once useful for cementing friendships and bolstering social identities, seem somewhat impersonal and arbitrary. As grandmother to the children in the pictures, it should be Dora's right to relay information on this topic to her friends and in doing so to inhabit the role of grandmother. Instead, Facebook distributes her grandkid stories, cutting out Dora's role as informational middleman between her daughter and her friends. In line 3, Dora uses constructed dialogue, which Tannen (2007: 111) reveals can be used to highlight an event "as occurring repeatedly." She portrays habitual conversations with her friends, who tell her, "Oh! I saw Jenny's new baby on Facebook!" (line 3). Within this story, Dora has been downgraded as a main source of the information, and is now far-removed from it – she hears of the story through a third-party who has heard it through a mediated source.

Being stripped of these primary rights to be the first to know and tell these stories, Dora is left with very little agency. She highlights her relationship to the site in her discursive choice to label the site as *whatever that thing is* (line 9), implying a weak epistemic stance by demonstrating her lack of basic knowledge about Facebook. As someone who is not confident about how the site works, a point she explicitly states at
another point during the focus group discussion, Dora is powerless to control the flow of information, especially since her daughter, who has the first authority to share about the grandbaby, is choosing to do so on the site. This is as much a case of Facebook challenging epistemic rights through the newsfeed as it is of overlapping epistemic claims: the co-presence of two or more participants who can claim privileged positions in relation to a topic. In fact, in this case, Dora's daughter has primary rights, not Dora. This may account for why Dora seems cautious about expressing her frustration and downgrades her disappointment with hedges like a little bit and kinda (line 13), by laughing (lines 9, 12) and by saying there's part of me (line 4) that thinks this way, rather than fully asserting how she feels. This hedging of her affective stance serves to highlight the complexity of Facebook interactional rights. Dora wants to be the one to share the pictures of her grandkids, but notice she takes an affective stance in relation to Facebook, not her daughter, who has primary rights to choose with whom to share the images. Dora expresses her disappointment about the phenomenon that her friends just know (line 8) something she wants to be the one to share.

The three instances of constructed dialogue Dora uses are critical for understanding her interpretation of and stancetaking toward her Facebook experience. In the first instance of constructed dialogue of friends who saw the pictures on Facebook in line 3, the dialogue highlights Dora's missing role in the social dynamic. Since the friends represented in the constructed dialogue are speaking directly to Dora, they could say "your new grandbaby," or "your daughter's new baby," but instead, the pictures are of Jenny's new baby (line 3). This positions Dora as irrelevant to the social context, which in some ways she is, since her friends now have direct access to her daughter and updates about her kids without Dora needing to be involved. Dora then marks her loss of tellership and primary hearer rights using the next two instances of constructed dialogue with "oh! I wanted to share that" in line 14, and "oh!... I've got pictures of my grandkids I haven't seen" in lines 17 and 18. The "oh"s in these utterances display not only Dora's receipt of and reaction to this information in the "story world" (Schiffrin 1996: 170) but also in the context of the focus group telling. As Trester (2009: 159) observes of "oh"-prefaced constructed dialogue in interview data, it can display the importance of the information represented to those of us listening in the focus group. As Trester explains, it
"ensures a shared interpretation of the information communicated in this constructed dialogue," in this case the shift that Facebook caused in some of the social dynamics Dora used to enjoy as a grandmother. The "oh"s mark the two ways in which Dora is denied epistemic rights: not only does she not get to be the one to tell her friends about her grandkids but now they are the ones who might tell her about them!

Dora also, however, uses this telling about her Facebook experience to assert her epistemic rights and insert herself back into the participation framework to claim her role of grandmother. She ends her story in line 16 with a shift in positioning, marked with *then on the other hand.* She begins to claim ownership and agency in lines 17 and 18 with *I need to go on it and see my- and I've got pictures of my grandkids I haven't seen.* She reclaims her rights to her grandkids using first-person possessive language (*I've got pictures and my grandkids*), thus taking an epistemic stance that she was unable to take on the site itself. As Example 3 demonstrates, in addition to the Facebook platform itself challenging members' rights to information, sometimes information is leaked by other members, often as a by-product of them telling their own related experiences. The following section focuses more deeply on the social consequences to relationships when epistemic rights are lost and how members address these challenges.

In Example 3, Dora's daughter had more rights to the grandkids story than Dora did, but in other instances two "friends" may share equal rights to a story and they may differ in their desires for this information to be shared on Facebook. Like Dora's use of an offline telling to take an evaluative stance and reclaim epistemic rights, Patty in Example 4, uses a story about a Facebook post to enact a stance rather than doing so in a Comment. Specifically, Patty complains of a cousin's decision to share a family story on Facebook that she did not want revealed. Despite being "tagged" in the post, and thus clearly placed into the participation framework, Patty does not engage in the interaction. Instead, Patty reacts to this loss of primary ownership by "untagging" from the post and by constructing a story about the post offline toward which she takes a strong evaluative and affective stance as demonstrated in Example 4.

**EXAMPLE 4.** Tagged in an overlapping story (young professionals group discussion)

1   Patty     [?] my cousin-
2                      so like my family's selling our beach cottage and it's really a sad thing.
3                        And...my cousin..
who is a..nit- anyway,
He.. posted on his wall, "Oh, so sad. Selling our beach cottage."
And tagged my sister and I and all these people,
and I was like, "No! I'm eliminating that tag.
Fuck you for spreading our.. shit on the internet!"

Using the telling of the event, Patty establishes a first-assessment position toward
the story that was originally lost to her cousin on Facebook. She begins by reporting a
story about her cousin in line 1 but she repairs her statement by including herself in the
primary assessment position instead, with my family is selling our beach cottage
[emphasis mine] in line 2. Here she also takes an evaluative stance toward the family
selling their beach cottage by stating it's really a sad thing. After reclaiming her
epistemic rights to the story as part of the family and claiming rights to make a first
assessment, Patty returns to topicalize her cousin in line 3. She reports that her cousin
posted on his wall, Oh, so sad. Selling our beach cottage (line 5), however, to Patty, the
choice to share the news on Facebook is contradictory to her cousin's expressed
evaluation of the event. She takes an affective stance at the beginning of her story by
telling the focus group that it's really a sad thing which she juxtaposes with her cousin's
"oh, so sad" Facebook post. This "oh" is particularly important as Trester (2009: 149)
points out that when prefacing constructed dialogue, "oh" can "be used to display and
evaluate voices towards which the speaker adopts a negatively-evaluative stance." By
introducing her cousin's post with constructed dialogue, specifically by using direct
speech prefaced with the oh-discourse marker, Patty creates a voice from which she can
distinguish her own. Patty discursively displays a mismatch in affective stances: she
juxtaposes her own deeply-felt evaluation of the event as a bald assertion – it really is sad
in line 2 – with her cousin's somewhat disingenuous so sad in line 5. While using the
"untag" option did not delete the story from Facebook, it did distance Patty from it,
making it less likely that her unique social network would become aware of the story. As
Patty demonstrates, however, losing ownership of a story can cause emotional reactions.
Like Madeline in Example 2, Patty uses this story to "tell" her cousin what she does not
say on Facebook – that she is angry.

One of what may be the most epistemically complicated aspects of Facebook is
the number of members with overlapping social networks and shared offline experiences.
A particularly salient example of this is in relationship updates on the site. The following paragraph from Gershon's work on media ideologies contains a powerful demonstration of the social repercussions of the loss of epistemic rights in relationships. In Gershon's (2010: 37) example from interview data, Facebook notifies Leslie, along with her social network, that her boyfriend has ended their relationship and is in a new relationship:

Leslie checked her Facebook profile late in the day, and found out that she was suddenly single. In fact, she learned that her boyfriend, now ex-boyfriend, had a new girlfriend through the news feed that flashes on as soon as one logs on. And then she noticed that her profile had changed, that he was no longer listed as the person she was in a relationship with. This was a Facebook breakup that was immediately effective. And she said ruefully that because of the news feed, everyone else knew before she did.

While Leslie should have been the first to receive the news that her boyfriend broke up with her and had a new girlfriend – and should have been told by her ex-boyfriend directly – the story is relayed through Facebook's newsfeed and even reaches "everyone else" before her. Not only does Leslie lose her epistemic rights to know this information first, but she also loses the chance to tell and shape the story of her breakup; her profile was updated as a result of her ex-partner's actions on the site. Unlike when someone chooses to end a relationship with someone offline, when someone chooses to change their relationship status with someone on Facebook, it is possible that overlapping "friends" will also be notified, and in no particular order. Leslie's ex-boyfriend may have meant to generate the story of their breakup through his status-update action, or he may have meant to simply update his profile and didn't think about the details being diffused throughout his (and Leslie's) social network. Regardless, Facebook widely relayed the update, robbing Leslie of the right to learn of her breakup first and directly, as well as her right to determine how and when to relay the information to others.

38 In order for a relationship between two members of Facebook to be listed on their profile, it must be confirmed by both parties. When one party undoes the relationship status on their own profile, the other party's profile also changes to reflect that there is no longer a relationship.
6.3.3 Story Chains Concerning Epistemic Claims

The next two examples which I break into analytical segments are instances of story chains about Facebook posts. In the examples, participants in the group discussions offer "second stories" (Sacks 1992) about hearership rights being challenged on the site, emphasizing their familiarity with such challenges and their shared negative stance toward losing epistemic claims on Facebook. Examining how a next story about similar Facebook experiences is connected to a prior one in Examples 5 and 6, I demonstrate how "second stories" highlight the importance of such phenomena and reveal offline reactions to epistemic threats on Facebook.

Example 5a begins a story-chain concerning downgraded hearer rights related to posts by other members on Facebook. Recall from chapter 4 that Facebook is ranked as a medium choice along a socio-epistemic hierarchy; to simplify: "big news" is typically shared with close friends and family members by phone or email before being posted to Facebook. In Example 5 from the interview data, Lisa and Madeline tell three stories in quick succession involving loss of hearership rights to Facebook, which I will break into three separate analyses. Lisa begins the chain with a story of how her boyfriend, Dan, learned of her family's cat's death via Facebook. This is considered especially unfair since Dan was the one who originally found the cat as a stray outside Lisa's family's house, resulting in it becoming the family pet. This fact is emphasized by Lisa to highlight Dan's privileged position in relation to the cat.

Example 5a. Story-chain about hearer rights (Interview with Madeline, 65-year-old mother at which Lisa, Madeline's 25-year-old daughter, is also present) [Dan is Lisa's boyfriend; Ariel is Madeline's daughter-in-law]

1 Lisa Dan found out that [the cat] died beCAUSE Ariel
2 posted it on Facebook.
3 I..didn't get to tell him before Ariel posted it on Facebook,
4 and I thought that was AWful.
5 Like-
6 Laura Yeah.
7 Lisa It wasn't like uh..
8 you know, HIS main pet or anything, but
9 but it was like
10 you know he was the first one to like FIND [the cat] (hh)
11 Madeline -Yeah, that's true-
12 Lisa and like- and then that's how he found out.
13
Lisa noticeably emphasizes several words that mark her interpretive stance in the story: Dan found out *beCAUSE* (line 1) of Ariel's post, which is *AWful* (line 5), and while it wasn't *HIS* pet (line 9), he was the one to the *FIND* the cat (line 11) in the first place. Lisa takes an explicit evaluative stance in line 5 with her statement *I thought that was awful*. Notice that Lisa positions Dan as privileged in terms of epistemic claims in line 11 on account of his having discovered the cat as a stray. By doing so, she implies Dan had the right to hear about the death before it was posted on Facebook.

Lisa then offers a second story directly on the heals of her first one conjoined with *and* in Example 5b, a tactic Schiffrin (1996: 180) notes serves to further evaluate the first story and "replays the point of [the] earlier story." This time, the story involves a friend who *found out that her GRANDmother died through a Facebook post by her cousin* (line 15). She emphasizes the word *GRANDmother* to highlight that this story ups-the-ante in the stakes of epistemic claims; this is not just about a pet. Her two stories together emphasize the real risk of serious news on Facebook reaching people who should have found out in a more personal way.

**EXAMPLE 5b. Second story**

| 14 | Lisa and I had a friend who |
| 15 | found out that her GRANDmother died through a Facebook post by her cousin. |
| 16 | Madeline -That wouldn't be cool.- |
| 17 | Lisa So like condolences in THAT way .. can backfire. |
| 18 | Madeline Yeah. |
| 19 | Laura Yeah. |
| 20 | Lisa That's such an awful way to find out that news- |

That Lisa immediately presents another story suggests that what perhaps at first seems like a unique occurrence, is in fact a salient phenomenon on the site. As Sacks (1992: 258) notes of recognizable events, not only will individuals have their own personal story about their experience of such events, but "they will often know one that somebody else has come up with." Notice Lisa links the stories with a similar evaluative stance, upgrading her language with the emphatic *such: that's such an awful way to find out that news* (line 21).

Immediately following this story, Madeline offers her own related story. This again highlights the salience of the event of losing hearer rights and also provides Madeline with a chance to demonstrate her own stance in relation to such an event as
well as her attempts to upgrade her downgraded access to information. In Example 5c, which again comes directly after Example 5b, Madeline presents her story on the topic of downgraded access to family news. However, in contrast with Lisa's stories about third parties, Madeline is the protagonist. She begins with the discourse marker "well," noting the mismatch in information structure. Madeline begins by highlighting the point of the story, that she didn't know (line 22) for sure that her daughter-in-law's grandmother died based on her posts. Instead, Madeline is only made aware of the news of a possible death as family members would imply things (line 24) on Facebook. Notice she gives an overall summary of the point of all three stories by taking an evaluative stance toward the topic in lines 41 and 42: that it's sad when people don't get to hear it that should know it first hand.

**EXAMPLE 5c. Stance toward downgraded hearer rights (Madeline interview)**

Fred is Madeline's husband)

22      Madeline      -Well, see I didn't know like
23            Ariel's grandmother died either.
24            until they- cuz they would kind of imply things, "sad day in the
25            [last name] house," or
26            you know at one point I think they were- like I- Ariel
27            was talking about making stuff to take to a family gathering,
28            because they all needed to have their spirits uplifted,
29            but it wasn't- she hadn't died yet.
30            So I was like,
31            who knows (hh) what's going on you know and then finally when
32            Ariel said something
33            then I had-
34            I think Fred was late and I asked him to text her
35            "what's going on?" you know
36      Laura          mhm.
37      Madeline      And so...
38            I think it-
39            it's good and bad.
40            You know I think it's-
41            you know it's sad when people don't get to hear it that should know
42            it first hand.

While in general the protagonists of the stories in this chain about loss of epistemic rights are largely portrayed as passive victims of a Facebook phenomenon, Madeline notes her proactive approach to addressing her downgraded access to information concerning her family-in-law in lines 34 and 35; she has her husband, Fred,
text Ariel to find out what's going on. This could have been asked online in a Comment, but Madeline chooses not to do so, perhaps because it would draw attention to her downgraded position or perhaps because her daughter-in-law's vague posts are notably not openly discussing the details. Audience members on Facebook, then, often choose to react to posts in other spaces when negotiating epistemic rights and seeking out the notably unsaid in relation to serious topics. While this can be done in reaction to posts, members can also make decisions what not to say in advance as a tactic to have epistemic rights respected.

   The next example, 6a-b, highlights the difficulty of managing what is not shared on Facebook. In Example 6a, Patty, Liz and Rose discuss the social repercussions of posting while traveling. Just prior to Example 6a in the young professionals group discussion, Patty has mentioned her practice of not posting travel plans when she knows she won't have time to see her friends that live in the place she is traveling to. As an explanation of why she has adopted such a practice, she gives a specific example of a time when she did post during a trip and a "friend" was offended about not having been told directly as shown in Example 6a.

EXAMPLE 6a. Managing the unsaid (young professionals group discussion).

1 Patty I was- I posted of me in Central Park with a friend
2 and one of my other friends was like,
3 "if you're in New York right now I'm gonna kill you."
4 Liz  -Right-
5 Patty (hhh)
6 Many (hhh)
7 Rose But then your friend posts a photo,
8 and your other friend finds out a few days later
9 and you have the same problem.

In Example 6a, Patty's Facebook post was a photograph of her and a friend in Central Park. Another friend who lives in New York finds out by seeing the post in her newsfeed that Patty is visiting the city where she lives and did not call to tell her. Using constructed dialogue in line 3, Patty positions her friend as taking offense to her downgraded rights to information about Patty's visit. Even though she is now aware that Patty is in New York, the newsfeed has directed this information to her, not Patty; she is an overhearer of a conversation in which she expected to be included. While it is not clear whether she made this comment on Facebook or via another mode of
communication, Patty indicates that her friend took a highly-affective stance toward receiving this information indirectly on Facebook.

Rose follows this story with a hypothetical alternate scenario ending with what she terms as *the same problem* (line 9). Perhaps not able to immediately recall a specific experience of her own, she demonstrates recognition of the phenomenon and is still able to construct one "on the spur of the moment" (Sacks 1992: 266) to extend the problem. Her hypothetical second story implies an alternate beginning where a member chooses not to post the picture, supposedly to avoid a confrontation like the one Patty had with her friend. Rose begins with *but* (line 7) to indicate that while the solution has been suggested to be not to post in such instances, the outcome can be the same due to the decisions of the other person in the photo who is also supposedly on Facebook. The two stories point to the salience of the "problem" of overlapping epistemic claims: even if a member avoids telling a story due to relationship considerations, someone else who was present can post the information to their – often largely overlapping – "friend" network.

Perhaps the only sure way to address the threat of overlapping epistemic claims is to act preemptively, which is effective but not necessarily a common strategy as suggested in the next example. Example 6b comes directly after Example 6a in the transcript and is a story about a member explicitly requesting an event not be shared on Facebook before it actually occurs. Liz offers a "second" story about potentially leaked stories involving her boyfriend, Jake, who requests that she not post anything about the trip they will be taking together so that his family does not find out (since they do not plan on visiting them while they are in the area).

**EXAMPLE 6b. Second story about *not* posting (young professionals group) [Jake is Liz's boyfriend]**

| 10 | Liz | I know! Jake and I went to the city |
| 11 |     | and he's like, "so this is really weird |
| 12 |     | but I'm gonna ask you not to post anything." |
| 13 | Patty | -Yeah- |
| 14 | Liz | you know because he has family on the West Coast |
| 15 |     | but some of their family's on the East Coast |
| 16 |     | you know from divorced parents and he's like, |
| 17 | Patty | -It's too hard.- |
| 18 | Liz | he's like, "I just- I have to like lie about where I am." |
| 19 |     | Not lie, but you feel like you're lying if you're not posting things on |
| 20 |     | Facebook. |
Liz introduces her story in 6b by taking an epistemic stance toward the first two stories with *I know!* in line 1, marking this phenomenon as one with which she is familiar and offering her story as evidence of her own first-hand experience. Liz also uses constructed dialogue to position Jake in an evaluative stance toward his request. Representing Jake as saying *this is really weird* in line 11 positions him as distancing himself from the action by making the agent, *I*, be the one who is *gonna ask* (line 12) Patty not to post anything. By using articles and pronouns to talk *about* the request, he removes himself somewhat from the request morally. Again, constructed dialogue is used by a current speaker to position someone else, and is likely not Jake's verbatim request. It serves to highlight Liz's own stance toward the tactic of asking a fellow traveler not to post on Facebook, which is that it is unexpected and a bit awkward.

Finally, and most striking is Liz's claim a few lines later that *you feel like you're lying if you're not posting things on Facebook*, (line 19) to which Rose and Sally respond with "yes" and "I know!" respectively. Thus, posting current experiences can be such a common practice to make *not*-telling feel like dishonesty. To members like Liz, Rose and Sally, being on Facebook means maintaining open communication while considering the audience context and the influence of shared epistemic claims. Critically, this involves knowing what *not* to say in the open state of talk while also not remaining noticeably silent as a speaker, clearly a complicated balancing act.

6.3.4 Managing Ownership Rights on Facebook

While members may disagree about whether or not to share certain events, others may agree not to reveal certain information on Facebook for a specified time to mitigate social risks, particularly in the case of relationships. This, however, creates another problematic case for epistemic stancetaking due to the newsfeed, as demonstrated in the next example. In Example 7, Martin, also in the young professionals group discussion group is talking about how he and his wife, Edith, did not update their relationship status while they were dating but waited until they were married. This is a tactic some people use to mitigate the risks demonstrated in the earlier example from Gershon when a relationship status might have to be changed later due to a breakup. While this can also
happen in cases of married relationships, some members consider this a more stable and thus less risky bit of information to publicize. This choice, however, results in a strangeness in terms of the order of events as relayed by the newsfeed.

EXAMPLE 7. Not-telling and the newsfeed (young professionals group discussion)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Edith and I were never in a relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>we just all of a sudden were married.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>(hhh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>You got lots of Likes on that status, too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>(hh)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Example 7, Martin's discursive choices frame all the agency as belonging to the Facebook platform by highlighting his relationship as portrayed by Facebook. While Martin and Edith's decision to only update their relationship status once they were married was a purposeful one, the story about their relationship was not an organic one on Facebook. Martin asserts that *Edith and I were never in a relationship* (line 1) in reference to the fact that he and Edith had never changed the status on their profile from "single" to "in a relationship." Martin's choice to assert this emphasizes Facebook's challenging role as animator coupled with the strong expectations of continual sharing on the site.

In a networked private context where friends are in a state of open talk, remaining silent about a significant event communicates that it never happened. Martin's language in Example 7 can be linked to Example 6b and Liz's claim that not-posting feels like withholding information. Liz's situation of being asked not to post about her trip may have felt like hiding something because purposefully not sharing something like travel when she usually shares even mundane aspects of her current experiences suggests she and her boyfriend never went to the city. Similarly, for those who were previously unaware of Martin's relationship status with Edith, when they were told by Facebook that they were married (in a notification about his status update change), it seemed *just all of a sudden* (line 2). According to Facebook's generated post, they both went from single to married in an instant, a portrayal that receives laughs from the group (line 3). The fact that so many stories exist in the interview and group discussion data about epistemic claims being challenged by Facebook is evidence that this is a central issue on the site, and the chaining of stories in particular bolters this claim.
While much of the negotiation of epistemic rights occurs offline, as I have shown, the final example comes from the Facebook interactions data. In Example 8 a poster, Dorothy, demonstrates a tactic for reclaiming epistemic rights on the site itself. The example is actually two separate posts, which I label and analyze as two parts of a single exchange, since they involve a member reasserting her epistemic primacy by creating a new post on a topic – side-stepping a second position, and constructing a new first assessment position from which to assert her primary rights to the topic (Raymond & Heritage 2006: 697).

**Example 8a. First assessment Comments**

The post in Example 8a contains an implication that Dorothy is moving, however, the first Comment – my own – reveals more information than Dorothy had intended to reveal on Facebook at the time, as demonstrated by her next post shown in Example 8b. While my Comment is meant to be responsive to Dorothy's news and thus a second-position assessment (Heritage & Raymond 2005), I overstep by introducing additional information that belongs to Dorothy. As first to introduce and assess her heretofore unmentioned homeownership, I have placed myself in first position. Now Dorothy has the problem of having lost what Ochs & Capps (2001: 125) refer to as "launch control:" I have decided when Dorothy's story gets told and have even set up an evaluative framework for the narrative. Because of the newsfeed's distribution of discourse,
individuals who Dorothy may not even know might access this before those she may be close to who may expect to hear such news first. Dorothy responds to this loss of control the same day on Facebook by officially launching the previously untold story in a new post shown in Example 8b. While this is a responsive act to my Comment, by creating a new post, Dorothy now reclaims a first-assessment position.

**EXAMPLE 8b. Reclaiming first position and launch control**

In addition to using a post to reclaim first position, Dorothy upgrades her claim (Heritage & Raymond 2005) further by using four additional discursive moves. First, while Dorothy admits to there being something stated prior on the subject, she blames the occurrence without acknowledging an agent. The phrase, *since the beans are partially spilled*, in Example 8b denies a first position speaker, which would normally be a complicating factor for a second position speaker who has to manage their statements "in relation to the claims embodied in first position assessments" and even "to the specific practices deployed by first speakers" (Heritage & Raymond 2005: 22). However, by not acknowledging a first speaker or the assessment itself, Dorothy does not have to account for this. Second, Dorothy positions herself explicitly as the one to *announce* that she will be a homeowner. Third, she provides specification about where and when she will be owning a home. Finally, she "adjusts" the declarative of my Comment that she will be living in her own home with the conditional *barring any 11th hour disasters* (a concern she later told me was why she had kept the story secret from her wider social circle, to ensure the deal went through before she made the announcement). In this way, she addresses the momentary loss of epistemic rights and takes back ownership.

This final example demonstrates the option to address loss of primary rights to a topic by beginning a new post to reclaim first position, and it highlights that even
members without overlapping claims to an experience can "spill the beans" to overlapping networks about what was meant to be left untold on Facebook. Overall, my analysis suggests that epistemic rights are particularly challenging to manage in Facebook discourse, as demonstrated by the numerous mentions of loss of teller and hearer rights in the group discussions and interview data as well as the epistemic and affective stances these members display in an effort to reclaim primary positions. As in chapters 4 and 5, what is unsaid and not addressed in a Facebook exchange is of central importance to interpreting the larger social meanings of the discourse.

6.4 Discussion

_Liking_ and Commenting are only the visible reactions of audience members. In a networked private context, there are also the responses to posts that occur in other spaces. More specifically, the networked private context of Facebook, while generally a friendly and phatic space, is full of risks to members' epistemic claims. Largely, negotiating epistemic claims and reclaiming a primary position in relation to a topic is accomplished outside of the related Facebook exchange: face-to-face, offline telling, text message, new post, etc. This is of note because these are major hidden players and motivations influencing the surface of a Facebook interaction. In fact, if most of the affective reactions to posts are occurring in other places, then most Facebook exchanges are often only representing the least affected parties. For instance, while Dora, the grandmother in the chapter 6 example, was not visible in relevant Facebook exchanges about her grandkids, she was in fact largely affected by it and demonstrated this in her offline reactions.

Being spoken for (Schiffrin 1993) and interactively repositioned (Davies & Harré 1999) is a potential occurrence of any multiparty conversation, however, on Facebook the newsfeed and the large overlap of experiences and "friends" results in members frequently losing epistemic primacy. Some epistemic rights are integral to a member's social identity, such as that of grandparent as evidenced by Dora's narrative in Example 3. Some epistemic rights about personal information are important to assert in order to manage relationships, as is the case in Example 6b when Liz's boyfriend requests she not post about their upcoming trip. Given the identity and relationship work that depends on the control of information there may be emotional reactions to degraded access to
information or loss of first position or launch control, like the anger Patty demonstrates toward her cousin in Example 4. However, as demonstrated by Patty in the same example, there are options for responding to such losses, such as when Patty untags herself from the post and taking a stance toward the topic in an offline telling. While such reactions and renegotiations of primacy are often done in narratives about posts told to third parties, Facebook members also have techniques for responding to the poster, like Madeline in Example 5c who contacts her daughter-in-law via text message to address the fact that her relationship merited privileged access to family information rather than merely finding out through Facebook.

The situation of "friends" with overlapping epistemic rights and overlapping social circles is particularly problematic for controlling hearership, as evidenced by the chain of stories in Examples 5 and 6. Hearers who should be primary in relationship with certain information find themselves lower down the hierarchy, hearing a story second-hand that they would usually be first-in-line to hear. This can result in relationships being negatively affected, as was the case in Example 6a, when Patty's friend is angry about finding out about her New York trip through Facebook. One option for avoiding hurt relationships is to choose not to reveal certain information, however, even when a member makes such decisions in consideration of social risks, the information may still get "leaked" by others, like Dorothy's homebuying story in Example 8.

Despite these challenges, the examples in this chapter demonstrate that it is possible to renegotiate epistemic rights and that doing so in relation to information on Facebook is usually carried out in an alternative context. For example, a member may create a new post to reclaim first position as Dorothy does in Example 8b, or a member may request offline that others not post about a shared experience on Facebook, like Liz's boyfriend in Example 6b, or a member may use an offline telling about loss of primacy on the site as a way to take an epistemic and evaluative stance toward the topic overall, like Madeline in Example 4c. While I have demonstrated discursive techniques members use to respond to epistemic challenges, they must also, at times, accept a certain amount of loss of ownership of their stories to other members who have overlapping stories and to the Facebook platform itself. As suggested in the chapters focusing on responsive
behaviors on Facebook, the site's platform both affords opportunities for and challenges to information and relationship management.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) have become critical spaces for researchers to investigate how individuals manage interaction with and respond as a networked private audience. Boyd has revealed that especially for the young generations of the modern world the use of social media is now almost essential and members are creatively navigating interaction in the new audience context. Facebook in particular is now an integral part of much of modern life, expanding the distribution of election and ad campaigns, furthering social movements, supporting police searches for criminal and missing persons, and even allowing individuals to track down their own or locate the owners of treasured family mementos lost during natural disasters. The site is also an extension and expansion of, as well as a complicating aspect for, social interactions, changing the face of phatic and even romantically-oriented communication. Brandes and Levin (2013: 175), for example, found that the site affords "liability-free and a-synchronic manners of flirtation" among teenagers, one of these being through choices surrounding the Like button. Given the size of its membership and its expansive social uses, Facebook is an important place to explore questions of online interaction and Marwick and boyd's (2014) concept of networked privacy. I argue that a critical and under researched aspect of this is the responsive decisions of audience members on the site. I have further proposed that such decisions involve the reactions that are invisible on Facebook, since focusing on Likes and Comments neglects most of the negative interpretations of audience members. Important discursive work such as negotiating epistemic rights threatened by the Facebook platform takes place in contexts other than Facebook and is the stuff of social substance that researchers would be remiss to ignore.

7.2 Contribution to CMC Research

Each analytical chapter of this study contributes to an understanding of Facebook communication in this moment-in-time, documenting its current features and how these affect the discourse, providing future studies with a benchmark for comparison. The Facebook of today is practically unrecognizable from its earlier prototype, as discussed in chapter 1. Rather than its original layout as a static collection of pages, it is now centered around a constantly updating newsfeed packed with various ways of addressing hearers,
responding, linking, etc. And the growth in usership (again, see chapter 1) has exploded. The two factors together create a very different structural and social context for interaction on the site than existed previously. Studies such as this one keep the research current and allow an academic understanding of Facebook to evolve with the medium. As Tannen and Trester (2013: ix) recently highlighted, social-networking sites "provide a new means of understanding who we are and how we connect through language." Nearly three decades earlier, Baron (1984: 136) claimed that computer-mediated communication (CMC) was “ill-suited for such ‘social’ uses of language,” and yet given the wide use of social media, it is precisely these uses toward which CMC is being employed today. Online groups and social scientists alike are only now beginning to understand the norms and expectations that have developed in these places and the opportunities and challenges CMC introduces into a social network. A sensible space to focus on as CMC researchers is the SNS with the most longevity and largest membership to date, Facebook.

The current investigation also contributes to CMC research methodologically, specifically by revealing the range of sources required to fully capture the social meanings created in a Facebook exchange, both those intended by the speaker and those interpreted by hearers. Taking an ethnographic approach to data collection involved a large time investment in participant-observation on the site as well as self reflection and reflection with others about Facebook ideologies. Such an approach allowed me to identify "the interrelations" (Hymes 1974: 9) between discursive aspects and the online and offline contexts as well as to make informed decisions about which data to use in my analyses. My approach also drew on interactional sociolinguistics, resulting in a focus on communicative goals and meaning-making processes (Gumperz 1999). This guided my analyses from the broad picture I gained during data collection to a more narrowed appreciation of the specific cultural and idiosyncratic knowledge being represented in the interactions and gave me a framework for structuring evidence of how such knowledge was being employed by members. I also relied heavily on conversation analysis (CA) to interpret instances of discourse, asking what the potential "problems" are that Facebook members must manage in conversation. The CA framework led me to wonder how members identify what a Like indicates in the response slot and how they build conversational coherence across time and space between a single post and various hearer
types. My analyses have demonstrated the optimal nature of a mixed-methods approach to Facebook, recognizing a wide range of contextual factors and the benefit of employing well-established linguistic units of analysis to situate Facebook interaction firmly within a linguistics frame of reference.

In addition to my methodological contribution, the current study offers several valuable findings about specific Facebook features and identifies norms and expectations central to social interaction on the site: crucially, the mechanics of Likes, Comments, and indirect responses, all of which depend on what is saliently not said or done on the site. In section 3 I review the gaps in the research about Facebook interactions and highlight how my study has addressed some of these areas. Then, in section 4 I summarize the analyses and specific findings of my three analytical chapters.

7.3 Contribution to the Discursive Understanding of Facebook

My examination of Facebook provides an ethnographic documentation of the site as well as insights about its understudied audience within a linguistic framework. As mentioned in chapter 2, many early CMC studies used data that were collected piecemeal and fully extracted from the social context they were originally a part of (Androutsopoulos 2008). Early CMC genres also involved a very different context; usually chatrooms and discussion boards revealed the flouting of offline conversational norms due to anonymity, however, the creation and evolution of social-networking sites has shifted online interaction to that largely involving nonymous discourse with a preexisting offline social network. Rather than online conversations involving relative strangers and revolving around general topics or certain shared interests, SNS interactions now center around individual personal topics and are inseparable from the existing offline relationships between the same participants.

Discourse analysis of Facebook interactions is notably missing from the CMC literature. When language has been analyzed, it is largely in non-linguistic terms that is content-focused (see for example Bazarova 2012). As a linguist, of course, I focus on language use, and what its lexicogrammatical and sequential aspects reveal about the social context. Such a focus requires the consideration of language in context, which is best accomplished with an ethnographic approach to data collection. Despite how time-consuming ethnography is, focused, long-term examinations of specific online contexts
are necessary, employing “various frames of analysis, attention to history, and the local contexts and lived experiences of digital media” (Coleman 2010: 489). Knowing the participants in my study and collecting discourse about Facebook allowed me to access offline reactions to posts and factors like media ideologies (Gershon 2010, Tannen 2013) that influence members' interpretations of discourse on the site. To my knowledge, this type of long-term, contextualized analysis focusing on audience does not yet exist for Facebook.

In terms of audience, researchers like boyd, Baym and Marwick have pioneered work on the critical influence of the "invisible audiences" and "collapsed contexts" (boyd 2008) of social media in general. Building on their work, I have considered two additional aspects of the Facebook audience: its layeredness (in terms of its imagined, potential, actual and active segments) and its overlap (most Facebook "friends" have largely-overlapping audiences of "Friends"). These aspects of audience are often not directly treated in the literature, as most studies on related topics like privacy and self presentation on the site focus exclusively on the posters' beliefs and goals (e.g., Acquisti & Gross 2006, Debatin et al. 2009, Barash et al. 2010, Bazarova 2012). Actual Facebook poster-audience exchanges are only rarely examined in systematic detail (for exceptions see West & Trester 2013, Nam Mak 2013, and Locher & Bolander 2014). The current study addresses the underrepresentation of studies of responses on Facebook and the lack of attention to audience by analyzing actual Facebook interactions alongside discourse about Facebook interactions to illuminate how members manage discourse with and as members of the networked private audience.

My study also extends research about how members innovatively communicate using Facebook-specific affordances. Krämer and Haferkamp (2011) and Bolander and Locher (2010) report instances of members conveying identity information indirectly and implicitly using Group memberships and status updates respectively. I have demonstrated that even features as seemingly simple as the Like button, are widely influenced by the audience context, varying in meaning and acceptability based on complex ideologies about participation framework, affective topics, and the underlying meaning of a Like. Like is the most frequent response employed on the site and is relevant throughout much of social media culture, and thus a critical aspect of SNS interaction. In my analyses, I
have also considered members' uses of the photo upload feature and the (un)tagging option to shape social context and epistemic claims. Finally, while studies like Bazarova et al. (2012) focus on content analysis that isolates status updates and posts from the surrounding Facebook elements, removing any language not created by the poster and using text analysis software (LIWC\textsuperscript{39}), the current examination is a detailed qualitative analysis that recognizes the inseparability of posts and the "semiotic landscape" (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010) of the site. Thus, for example, my analysis in chapter 6 highlights how posters are positioned by Facebook and considers how this impacts their stancetaking related to topics on the site.

7.4 Summary of Findings

While the chapters are separable into distinct analyses, they also each contribute to the greater goal of the study: illuminating the Facebook audience and the various influences on responsive behaviors. Specifically, I have revealed various ways that the Facebook audience and the site's platform affect the form and function of feedback, the content of Comments, and the non-response reactions to loss of epistemic rights on the site. In this section, I summarize the main findings and significance of each chapter as well as link the chapter findings together to form a unified linguistic description of the networked-private audience and its centrality to approaching Facebook discourse both as a participant and a researcher.

7.4.1 LIKE

In chapter 4, I investigated influences on members' choices surrounding Like. The analysis unveiled which members of a collapsed-context audience might choose to respond, or not, using the automated device and why. I highlighted the Like button's success as a feature in terms of its frequency of use on the site as well as its proliferation in internet culture. I have asserted that its basic function in conversation is as a quick and inexplicit backchanneling device that fills the second pair slot that a post creates, avoiding the hearable silence that otherwise exists when a post receives no response from the newsfeed audience. I suggested that this is why it is so widely employed in an

\textsuperscript{39} The Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software "calculates the degree to which people use different categories of words across a wide array of texts, including emails, speeches, poems, or transcribed daily speech" http://www.liwc.net/
environment where users are fed numerous utterances a minute that encourage some kind of response and that a *Like* serves as a response without claiming an active role in the participation framework.

Despite its ability to avoid a hearable silence in the response slot of a post, *Like* itself carries what I have referred to as a *notable not* – it is notably not a Comment. I also demonstrated that *Like* can convey semantic meaning and that this is often interpreted in juxtaposition with the option to Comment; for instance, a *Like* might carry less enthusiasm since a responder could have taken the time to construct a Comment (West & Trester 2013) in order to express a more specific and personal evaluation. Even though *Like* and Comment have obvious differences in terms of what they can accomplish discursively (*a Like* can merely imply semantic meaning while a Comment can express concrete sentiments and move a conversation forward), I revealed that there are also social norms and expectations that influence the choice to use one or the other (or both).

Referencing the focus group discussions, I identified idiosyncratic definitions of *Like* and how it is employed. For instance, while some users believe *Like* to be inextricably tied to the meaning of the verb "to like," others view it as a more flexible show of support. I then demonstrated how these different understandings are then reflected in *Like*'s employment and interpretations. For example, for members who view *Like* in terms of the verb, the feature is not appropriate on posts of a sad or negative nature, while for others it is a suitable way to indicate sympathy and may even communicate an appropriate amount of distance by not encouraging the poster to respond further.

I also provided evidence that the participation framework of a post influences decisions and interpretations about *Like*. I showed that while *Like* is often used by more casual acquaintances while Comments are made by closer friends, when a post references a topic that is "big news," the implied participation framework shifts to center around more casual friends who are not yet aware of the news. In these instances, more casual friends may Comment, and a member who *Likes* the post may also choose to express congratulations in a Comment to avoid the "casual" undertones of the device. In short, chapter 4 exposed the complicated nature of even the most widely used discursive device on Facebook – the *Like* button – whose use and interpretation depend on aspects of the site's platform (e.g., what other response options are available, how *Likes* are reported).
the content of a post, and the participation framework. That these aspects complicate
discursive acts on the site was also a central concept for the analyses in chapters 5 and 6
as well.

7.4.2 Comments

In chapter 5, I demonstrated how active audience members Comment on a post,
drawing on the present context aspects that the poster has made available in their post
linguistically and photographically. I revealed that the variable members of the Facebook
audience draws on the individual knowledge they possess about the poster to link to the
poster's present and co-evaluate or request additional information. These intertextual ties
"friends" make to the post serve to create coherent instances of dialogue between the
Commenter and the poster as well as creating a social media-specific conversational
coherence: each Comment typically links back to the original speaker's utterance rather
than forming an obvious string of topical progress with the statement immediately before
it. I assert, however, that many Commenters are reading the intervening responses as
evidenced by the lack of repetition in the Comments section. Due to the networked
private context, however, each Commenter links back to the post to highlight their own
relationship with the poster, who remains the subject of the exchange, and who provides
the deictic center from which the conversational present is drawn.

One resource many Commenters draw on, as I outlined in the examples, is what is
notably not included in the post, such as what is not captured in the frame of a photo or a
detail that is clearly missing from the poster's observation or evaluation of their context.
Specifically, I showed how members used the notable nots to engage in "byplay" (M.
Goodwin 1990) with the poster. This discursive act allows members to playfully engage
with a poster by reaching (Goffman 1981a) beyond the topic of the post to the nature of
the post itself. This was also a popular tactic used by Commenters on "vaguebook" posts,
which were the subject of the second part of my analysis. The term refers to the widely-
recognized and largely condemned practice of posting emotional reactions to vague
events. I demonstrated that members often use the vaguebook aspect itself to draw on,
bypassing the noticeably absent topic with byplay. Other than this playful response, I
highlighted the restricted nature of vaguebook Comments, since audience members have
not been given a present context from which to collaboratively draw with the poster. I
showed that while a vaguebook post emphasizes what is notably not mentioned, vaguebook posters also refuse to cooperate with audience members who try to access the absent information. Overall, in chapter 5 I revealed some of the ways in which the active audience engages with a post and highlighted the importance of the context a post provides, without which the open state of talk is stilted as Commenters cannot inhabit a shared present focus.

7.4.3 Non-responses

While chapters 4 and 5 focused on visible responses to Facebook posts, in chapter 6 I analyzed non-responses – reactions to Facebook discourse that occur in other contexts. Specifically, I examined how members managed epistemic claims that had been threatened by Facebook, either through how information was dispersed by the platform and/or what "friends" with shared experiences chose to share on the site. I analyzed discourse from the focus group and interview discussions to reveal how members address epistemic threats through offline and online communicative acts. Offline, I revealed that members employ storytelling about their experiences and interpretations of epistemic claims on Facebook to renegotiate a primary stance. I analyzed members' stancetaking in these stories to show how they asserted a primary position by addressing the topic in a new context, negatively evaluating the related post and contrasting their position with that the poster took toward the topic. I also showed that members can use preemptive conversations to try and prevent friends with overlapping claims to information from sharing it on Facebook. The latter technique, as I highlighted, is a rare occurrence, however, and most members address a loss of rights after it has happened on the site.

As part of my analysis, I highlighted the social concerns associated with such threats, especially in terms of the complicated and collapsed context of hearers. Just as speakers have hierarchically ordered rights to telling information, hearers have certain privileged claims to receiving information and respecting these claims is how relationships are negotiated and maintained. In a networked private context, however, hearers are collapsed. I demonstrated reactions to loss of hearer rights and how some members may attempt to mitigate threats to their privileged access by contacting the poster directly to reestablish primacy in terms of hearer rights to a topic. That the Facebook platform does not distinguish hearers based on their rights to information or
preexisting knowledge of a poster complicates a poster's right to convey information, as I demonstrated with regards to updating relationship statuses. When a member updates their "current relationship status" on their profile, Facebook tells the audience without providing any missing context. Thus, someone who has waited until marriage to update their status may seem to have gone from single to married overnight to some "friends" who were not in close enough contact with the poster to know they were dating someone. Also, updating a relationship status may generate a newsfeed update that alerts the other person in the relationship of a breakup at the same time or even after third parties! While most reactions and responsive acts to a Facebook newsfeed message involving loss of epistemic claims occur offline, I showed that online options also exist. Specifically, I revealed that members may address loss of epistemic primacy on Facebook by untagging themselves from a epistemically-threatening post or by beginning new posts to reclaim first position in relation to a topic.

Overall, chapter 6 emphasized the importance of interpretations of and responses to posts that are notably not carried out in the relevant discursive space of a post or newsfeed update. Members react to loss of epistemic rights instead using a variety of acts in other discursive contexts to reclaim epistemic primacy by creating a new first-assessment position. In summary, members manage threats to epistemic rights by: (1) reclaiming epistemic primacy through a first-assessment position created in an offline telling about a status update, (2) contacting a poster offline to ask for upgraded access to a story (3) establishing that a shared experience not be posted about before it occurs or (4) creating a new post in reaction to a Comment rather than responding to the Comment, thus creating a new first-assessment position. All of this negotiation around what is purposefully and notably not said or done on the site is central aspect to managing Facebook discourse.

7.5 Future Directions

The distinction between mediated versus unmediated language is no longer believed to be a meaningful dichotomy, as research reveals that "both are equally situated and context-dependent" (Thurlow 2006: 668). While CMC data can often be easily decontextualized and analyzed in neat textual units (e.g., Facebook's boxes containing a post plus Comments), there is an influence of the material world on what happens
between screens, making this a critical aspect of the context for CMC discourse; if participants are drawing on offline situations to interpret the communicative acts of their "friends" on Facebook then researchers would be remiss not to consider such offline aspects.

Given that feedback and responsive options have been added relatively recently to Facebook and that they have expanded over time, studies focused on how users adopt and adapt these are in their infancy. These analytical chapters reveal how some features specific to Facebook are being employed discursively and how the interpretation of their employment requires a consideration of how and when they are not employed and by whom. Future research could consider site-specific features of other popular networking sites or other Facebook features, like the Share feature, and explore how these are used foster social interaction. While I did not examine the Share feature as responsive, it is clearly a discursive and intertextually-rich device that merits the attention of social sciences in terms of the effects on traditional conversational structures and how such a device links multiple interactive spaces by tracing the discursive origin of a topic.

Also in its infancy, is an academic appreciation of the interpretations, motivations and reactions of the social media audience to posts and an understanding of its role as co-author (Duranti 1986) of internet content. An in-depth exploration of who makes up potential audiences and who within these decides to engage with content and why is critical to discourse analysis in networked private spaces, which researchers now know is inseparable from offline relationships. How online and offline relationships and interactions are interwoven with online discursive moves and how these are interpreted and renegotiated offline is a vast area of research in need of structured academic approaches. The networked private context involves the newsfeed, which serves as the hub of most social networking sites. I have demonstrated a number of ways the Facebook newsfeed influences the discourse, but researchers have only begun to approach newsfeeds as discursive contexts in any systematic way, especially within a linguistic framework.

Similarly, how the platform's affordances to and restrictions on sociolinguistic acts as well as how it positions members in updates is a highly influential factor in discursive interpretations, especially when members are not clear on which choices
belong to the platform versus the poster. I have mentioned some of the ways members' (lack of) understanding about the platform effects their response to the discourse, but large-scale survey studies could be particularly useful for accessing members' awareness of what they view in their newsfeeds. I have referenced differing levels of awareness falling along generational lines, but various sociolinguistic factors likely exist that influence such awareness and even shared levels of understanding of a platform do not necessarily result in a shared interpretation of the discourse. How the two factors relate could illuminate much of the hidden influences on social media behaviors, as could uncovering some of the actual non-response moves users make on Facebook when they react to a post in a context other than the relevant responsive space. The current study revealed that much of what goes into the creation and interpretations of a Facebook interaction takes place in other contexts; the Post + Likes and Comments are only the surface representation of a vast underlying interaction. Research of Facebook discourse could greatly benefit from data that included some of this hidden discourse, such as the text messages, emails, or phone calls between the participants sparked by a post or Comment.

In addition to contributing to the field of linguistics in general and the area of computer-mediated communication research in particular, findings like those in this investigation may be enlightening for members of specific social-networking sites. By highlighting sociolinguistic factors that contribute to the more salient complaints some users have about certain behaviors on sites like Facebook, users could understand why their communication in these contexts at times gets misinterpreted. It may even alert members to potential negative reactions some of their posts may be generating in other contexts of which they are unaware. Such insights could also aid social media engineers design interactive spaces that better address users' discursive needs and that better support users' innovations for accomplishing social goals in this complex context. For instance, the Like button, in contexts of non-commercial use, might better serve members if its discursive uses were acknowledged and differentiated. One possibility is to replace the one-size-fits-all Like button with a variety of clickable features. Of course, as chapter 4 shows, there are a number of ways an automatic response can be ambiguous, and providing more of them would not change that fact. Perhaps developers could simply
appreciate that *Like* is being used discursively, note the ways in which its discursive use seems particularly problematic, and add options for cutting down on specific instances of ambiguity. For example, Facebook might allow posters to add Yes and No buttons to a post that asks a question or invites other members to meet up, avoiding confusion around whether a poster who clicks *Like* means the acceptance of an invitation.

Again, the current study is most importantly an analysis of a moment-in-time of Facebook. The site is constantly changing as is its use by members. Facebook is a firmly established time-filler (Mander 2015) in modern culture, but how is this use of the site influencing social relationships? Is there more interaction than would otherwise exist between some friends? Clearly this must be so, but social scientists have not investigated what kinds of interactions these are, whether they alter or just maintain certain types of relationships, for instance. Future research should consider members' accounts of if/how their relationships with some "friends" have been affected and try to more clearly link types of offline relationships with types and quantity of interactions on the site to understand the implications of Facebook discourse.

Finally, Facebook is a site of great import to CMC researchers due to its longevity and continued prominence among SNSs. I have offered an examination of a less-studied piece of the site: audience participation. My analytical chapters have uncovered many influences on members' responsive decisions as well as the myriad factors that effect the interpretations of these choices. I have outlined audience norms on the site concerning the negotiation of rights to engage with and shape information within a networked-private context. Specifically, I situated the responsive options of Facebook within a linguistic framework, interpreting data using established discursive units and constructs such as constructed dialogue, narrative, and epistemic stance. My analyses detailed the factors influencing *Liking*, Commenting, and non-response reactions and how users choose among and interpret these related to specific posts. I have shown the inseparability of Facebook discourse and offline relationships and experiences and have outlined one approach for the data collection and analysis of interactions on the site. Understanding discursive decisions and social expectations in new interactive spaces and highlighting the symbiotic relationship of discourse and context is the job of sociolinguists, and Facebook is a critical site for sociolinguists to both apply and test their current
approaches to discourse, employing established methods of analysis while also adapting them.
APPENDIX A: OFFICIAL CONSENT FORM EMAIL
“Facework on Facebook”

Dear Friends and Family,

I am collecting data for sociolinguistic research I am conducting as a Ph.D. student in linguistics at Georgetown University. The investigation focuses on Facebook social and discursive practices between family members and friends. My goal is to obtain permission from as many as sixty Facebook users. The project’s objective is to look at an environment where people “talk” through written words via technology, a subject that is, understandably, rapidly becoming a popular topic.

If you agree to take part in this study, I will collect instances of conversation from your Wall and those you post via wall-to-wall with friends and family. No personal or identifying information about you or any participant (except sex and age group) will be used or recorded, and all names and places from messages I use will be replaced with a space (i.e. _______). The data is meant to examine language variation and general trends in Facebook social practices.

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. By volunteering to participate, you allow me to look at instances of conversation that you post on your own or others’ walls. There are no risks involved from participation in this study, and no benefits from participating either. You are free to opt out at any time by contacting me by email requesting I remove your data from the study.

Feel free to email me if you have questions or want more details about the project, and if not, please email a simple “yes” or “no” regarding your permission. By responding “yes,” you are allowing me to collect any posting you author on your own wall or someone else’s.

Thank you so much for considering,

Laura West
Student, Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics
Georgetown
Dear Friends and Family,

Thank you for considering, and perhaps agreeing in the past, to participate in earlier studies I have conducted on Facebook. I am now in the dissertation phase of my degree in sociolinguistics at Georgetown University. In order to keep my research as current as possible, I need to continue collecting data while writing my dissertation (given the frequent changes the Facebook space undergoes).

If you agree to take part in this study, you give me permission to record your posts and comments on Facebook. No personal or identifying information about you or any participant (except sex and age group) will be used or recorded, and all names and places from messages I use will be replaced with a space (i.e. ________). The data is meant to examine language variation and general trends in Facebook social practices.

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and volunteering to participate means that you allow me to capture instances of conversation that you post on your own or others’ walls.

There are no risks involved from participation in this study, and no benefits from participating either. You are free to opt out at any time by contacting me by email requesting I remove your data from the study.

Feel free to email me if you have questions or want more details about the project, and if not, please email a simple “yes” or “no” regarding your permission. Again, by responding “yes,” you are allowing me to collect any posting you author on your own wall or someone else’s (at which point, all personal identifying information will be removed).

Thank you so much for considering participating and for supporting my research over the years. Obviously, the research is not possible otherwise. I am happy to share past publications and the final product with whomever is interested.

Racing towards the finish line!!!

Laura (lew34@georgetown.edu)
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE  
(roughly followed)

1. When did you join Facebook? And why did you join originally?

2. What do you currently use Facebook for?

3. Do you think different types of people use it differently?  
   • Age-specific?

4. Who are your "friends"?  
   • Your kids?  
   • People of your same age group?

5. What is your favorite and least favorite thing about Facebook?

6. Do you Like posts?

7. Do you Comment on posts?  
   • When?  
   • Does it depend on subject matter or poster? Both?  
   • Do you ever feel obligated to respond to posts?

12. Have there been any changes to Facebook since you joined that you liked/didn’t like?

13. What would you change about Facebook?
APPENDIX D: POST TYPES FROM CHAPTER 4/ TABLE 2

[Examples based on actual posts or taken from public Pages for demonstration of types]

1. Status

Jane Smith
I’m at work and just received a surprise flower delivery. I love my family!

2. Links & shares

Jezebel
We had to wait until November to get the year’s best Halloween costume (it was worth it) http://jezebel.com/we-had-to-wait-until-november-to-get-the-years-best-ha-1459174615

3. Negative Post

John Smith
I feel so ill. I really haven’t been this sick in my whole life.
4. Quotation

Maggie shared Lessons Learned In Life's photo.

WHEN I LOOK BACK ON MY LIFE, I SEE PAIN, MISTAKES AND HEARTACHE. WHEN I LOOK IN THE MIRROR, I SEE STRENGTH, LEARNED LESSONS, AND PRIDE IN MYSELF.

Lessons Learned In Life
Like · Comment · 3 hours ago via mobile

5. Change of profile pic

Louis changed her profile picture. — with

157


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164


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