COMPOSING DIGITAL COMMUNITY SPACES:
DESIGN AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN/OF THE ARCHIVE

A dissertation presented

by

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of Northeastern University
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a case study of Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive & WBUR Oral History Project by exploring the relationships between the creation of the archive, the use of the archive, and the narratives the archive tells on its surface and in its stories. More specifically, it looks at how Our Marathon adheres to/departs from traditional archives through its state as a digital archive, its attempt to both historicize and memorialize an event, and its focus as a community project. This dissertation takes advantage of offering a real-time examination of the digital archive’s role in capturing the artifacts and reflective practices of people affected by the tragic events of the Boston Marathon bombings through a mixed-methods approach; it draws upon primary research, the archive itself, and the researcher’s own participation in designing and building the space. To add to ongoing conversations on digital archives in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship, because of the complicated nature of the term “community” and because of a gap in understanding how these types of digital community sites function in the world, this dissertation aims to open up a conversation on building spaces for public writing and how the sponsors of these spaces impact participation and representation. Theoretically, this dissertation contends with literacy sponsors, decolonial archives, and discourse communities. Pragmatically, this dissertation offers scholars and other interested parties reflections on building such a space and recommendations for building digital community projects like Our Marathon in the future.
To the city of Boston—those who have felt pride in it, who have been challenged by it, and who have experienced disappointment in it—especially those who have shared their stories and left their marks.

To paraphrase David “Big Papi” Ortiz, “This is our city.”
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I’d also like to recognize Neal Lerner and Paula Mathieu. I was actually first exposed to Neal’s work when I was just an undergrad looking to get a job in a writing center; now I value learning from his insights as a teacher, researcher, administrator, and fellow creative nonfiction
enthusiast. On a similar note, I was inspired by Paula’s *Tactics of Hope* when I first read it some years ago and will undoubtedly be inspired again when I reread it soon; I am so fortunate that we connected through the Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network and that you agreed to be my outside reader. Thank you, both, for your scholarship and presence in my life.

Northeastern has granted me the chance to work with many dedicated colleagues in the Writing Program, English department, and in our surrounding community. A very special thank you to my *Our Marathon* colleagues—especially Ryan Cordell, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Dave DeCamp, Liz Hopwood, Jim McGrath, and Alicia Peaker—for your time on the archive and as my research participants. I also thank Jayne Guberman and Joanna Shea-O’Brien for their guidance in the craft of oral history. There were two people who always made my life just a little bit easier and my days a little brighter whenever I went into the front office or sent a frantic email—Linda Collins and Melissa Daigle—you have been amazing. And I express gratitude to all of the grad students who have offered their kindness and curiosity with a special shout out to Charlie Lesh and Michael Turner—two friends who have inspired as much productivity as unproductivity in the past half decade of our lives.

A very warm thank you to my family—especially my sister, Laurie, whose support has always been a blessing (I probably owe you a new couch from my UMass Boston years of crashing on yours instead of paying rent somewhere); to my bonus dad, Chuck, whose support included asking my favorite questions to answer (like when he came to our office and asked if someone had an animal: he was looking at a crumpled up sleeping bag on the floor that definitely looked like a place a dog would nap—it was our “sleeping nook”); to my dad, Arnold, who paved the path for his daughter by being an academic himself (who could offer advice from his experience writing his dissertation); and to my mother, Lorna, who has continually supported me
in all areas of my life (as well as consistently reminding me that it took my dad a really, really long time to write his dissertation). There are not enough pages in 10 dissertations to express my gratitude.

Along with my family, I want to recognize my great friends from Leicester and UMass and, of course, Strawberry Julie—working on a project that causes you to often reflect on your own well being (and, let’s face it, mortality) is its own challenge; I’m lucky to have surrounded myself with such fun, funny, hardworking people and appreciate you all.

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Chapter 1: Composing Digital Community Spaces

Introduction

On April 15, 2013, I was sitting in my old bedroom at my parents’ house and grading public writing projects from my online course. Along with Blackboard, I had my email tab open, and it wasn’t uncommon to instant message with friends in between commenting on student work. A little after 3pm that day, I received a message: “explosions at the marathon???” It came with a link to WCVB.com where I immediately read a very brief description of an explosion along the Boston Marathon route. I turned on the television and saw the smoke. At the time, I assumed it was an accident. I remember hearing something about a pipe bursting. After trying to make sense of what I saw and heard, I messaged the same link to my friend in California, this time with the eloquent text: “WTF”

It was an attack. On April 15, 2013, two pressure-cooker bombs filled with shrapnel were detonated near the finish line of the world’s oldest annual marathon. The suspects—26-year-old Tamerlan Tsarnaev and 19-year-old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev—had put the homemade bombs into backpacks and placed them amidst the large cheering crowds on Boylston Street where the Boston Marathon culminates for professional and amateur marathoners alike. The blasts killed 3 spectators and injured 260 others. During the manhunt three nights later, one of the suspects would also kill a university police officer.

From my own bed, I was able to watch, listen, and read different threads accounting for the terrifying activity around Boston. My best friend in London instant messaged me a link to a
local police scanner that someone was live streaming from his home. The news on television lagged behind what we were learning from Twitter.

Our Marathon item: “My worst night of sleep”

On April 18, 2013 the suspects carjacked a man at gunpoint a few miles away in Cambridge. The hostage escaped and called the police, which led to a shootout nearby in Watertown. Before the night would end, one police officer would be critically wounded, one suspect would get away, and one suspect would be pronounced dead at the scene following the firefight. On the next day, April 19th, Boston imposed an unprecedented lockdown on the city and its surrounding suburbs. The controversial call for Boston-area residents to “shelter in place” was lifted that evening; not much later, the younger Tsarnaev would be captured from his hiding place under a boat in a Watertown resident’s backyard.

It was a surreal week in Boston’s history, to say the least. Whether mourning the victims, applauding the police and other first responders, or turning grief and anger outwards, various senses of community came about—often finding form through both physical and digital story sharing. Near the marathon’s finish line in Copley Square, a makeshift memorial quickly grew

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1 “I use the Sleep Cycle app to track my sleep quality. Usually I go to bed around 12:30, but on Thursday, April 18, I stayed up past 2:00, watching the news coverage of the hunt for the Tsarnaev brothers. My husband stayed up all night watching the news, and came to wake me up after only a few hours to tell me that the city was shutting down and I wouldn't be going to work that day. That night is still recorded in Sleep Cycle as my shortest night of sleep and my worst night of sleep” (hillarycorbett). See also this “colorful” gif of general sentiments from the week: http://marathon.neu.edu/files/original/d8f287af3806509e3af5117882ac05b6.gif
with shoes, medals, and drawings often accompanied by notes of hope and perseverance; a mile
down the street, during the final spring semester classes at Northeastern University, students
wanted to talk about what had happened, as I am sure was the agenda in classrooms all over the
area. In the online course I had been teaching, my students were set to complete a final blog post
on reflection: they were instructed that they could continue as planned, or they could use this
final post to reflect on what had happened that week. During my “Doing Digital Humanities”
graduate course’s final meeting at our professor’s home—a meeting that had been postponed due
to the lockdown—we shared our own stories and experiences.

It was at my professor’s house that evening that I first engaged with the idea of archiving
these stories. We had looked at the September 11th Digital Archive in class together, and we had
spent the semester working with different tools and methods that relate to building digital
projects. Not too long after classes had finished, Professors Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Ryan
Cordell sent out an email to graduate students about a summer opportunity to work on a new
digital archive. The application included some information about the vision for this archive and
asked questions about things like applicants’ relevant experience, technical proficiencies, and
why we wanted to work on the project. A few days later, Cordell emailed asking to chat about
the project; about halfway through our “chat” in his office, I realized that I was actually being
interviewed.

The quick nature of this project and the interview process would be the first bonding
experience of the graduate students selected to work on the archive: the “non-interview
interview” that we all fondly remember highlights the rapid journey of designing the archive,
soliciting material, and securing funding all while learning as we went along. When we signed
up to work on this project, we were seeking to create a digital community archive that aimed to
both historicize and memorialize the events of the Boston Marathon bombings and their aftermath, but, as will be shown in this dissertation, the motivations, stakes, and gains from working on such a project varied from person to person. For example, personally, I was interested in the healing of a city and a summer job that would supplement teaching an online course and working at a summer camp; academically, I was interested in community engagement and public writing and how the digital would facilitate and promote a democratic space through storytelling—all topics that I had dabbled with individually during my graduate career as a student and teacher—but it was not until turning a critical eye to this work that I began to recognize this experience as such a culmination. Ultimately this dissertation is about the creation of a digital community archive, which is dependent on those who make and sponsor such spaces; in closely reading this archival space I uncover what is included, what is excluded, and why in order to provide rhetoricians with a look into what we can learn from the archive itself as opposed to just the artifacts the archive houses.

* * *

In today’s world, the speed at which the written word can be exchanged is changing how we view civic engagement and participatory culture. While there are studies that focus on the real-time realities of how social media platforms like Twitter have functioned during politically-charged events, very few have paid attention to the digital archive’s role in capturing the artifacts and reflective practices of people affected by those same events in a more formalized venue. Although crowdsourced digital archives are not currently as prevalent as other spaces that house
digital writing (and other digital artifacts), this dissertation argues that we will see more of these types of formalized spaces meant for civic engagement.

This dissertation starts with two observations: digital archives both create and represent communities through discourse, and we will see more of these crowdsourced, digital spaces meant to historicize and memorialize events in the future. To add to ongoing conversations on digital archives in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship, because of the complicated nature of the term “community” and because of a gap in understanding how these types of digital community sites function in the world, this dissertation aims to open up a conversation on building spaces for public writing and how the sponsors of these spaces impact participation and representation. To do so, this research explores the relationships between the design of the archive, the use of the archive, and the narratives the archive tells on its surface and in its stories through a case study of the archive that I helped to build, populate, and promote: *Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive & WBUR Oral History Project*. More specifically, it looks at how *Our Marathon* adheres to/departs from traditional archives through its state as a digital archive, its attempt to both historicize and memorialize an event, and its focus as a community project. As I am interested in this archive’s role as a site of literacy and public writing, I focus on textual artifacts (e.g. stories) as opposed to other artifacts, such as screenshots and photographs, though I do point to some non-story artifacts along the way in order to represent the multifaceted ways this digital archive functions as a site of digitally-literate actions and representations. In order to contextualize the textual artifacts, I draw upon my first-hand experience and have also

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2 To conceptually contend with the term civic engagement in this project, I am influenced by John M. Ackerman’s discussion of “the rhetorical investments of citizen-scholars in the public life of their cities” (76). Ackerman writes, “Civic engagement taken at its word(s) gestures to the endemic nature of rhetorical practice in the polis because citizens engage each other through words and actions to rewrite the symbolic terrain of public life, recorded in the material artifact of the city” (76).
invited my other archive collaborators and those who contributed their stories to the archive into my research process through surveying and interviewing.

In the introduction to the November 2013 special issue of *College English*, guest editors Jessica Enoch and David Gold speak of a shift in a methodological moment in Rhetoric and Composition: in thinking about the way we interact more with digital artifacts today, they focus on “how digital technologies reshape and invigorate our thinking about literacy, rhetorical practice, and composition writ large” (105). Enoch and Gold turn to the field of Digital Humanities to show how digital formats are changing the way we are able to produce knowledge, reach new audiences, and set different types of research agendas and explain that, in particular, historiographers in our field need to critically “pay attention” to technology, echoing Cynthia Selfe’s call to the field a little more than a decade earlier. As they explain, “New scholarship emerging out of the digital humanities works not only to see technology as a mode of literacy, as those in our field may understand it, but rather to *use* technology to develop digital tools and platforms that position scholars to do more robust as well as new kinds of interpretive and historiographic work” (Enoch and Gold 106). While critically thinking this way about archival research in Rhetoric and Composition is not new (see Kirsch and Rohan; Ramsey et al; Wells), it is this idea of using technology to actually build an archive that resonates most with me, my project, and this “methodological moment”: what can we understand from examining the *creation* of a digital archive that one could not get out of just *accessing* a digital archive?

The case study of this dissertation examines a digital archive built after the Boston Marathon bombings that aimed to collaborate with community members—through crowdsourcing—and attempted to capture as many stories as possible for a historical record that would supplement the dominant historical accounts. With the promotional slogan “no story too
small,” Our Marathon was built in the spirit of a decolonial archive—that is with a theoretical approach that restructures hegemonic narratives—however, we understand that the imperialist roots of archival practices in general do not just disappear, and, despite all best intentions, the key concepts that inform this archive—digital, historical, and community—complicate this space for storytelling and civic engagement (Cushman). When looking at the archive in terms of demographics, despite the decolonial, democratic spirit of the archive, a fairly specific population’s voices were captured; a major failure of this archive is its lack of diverse voices.

In their chapter “In, Through, and About the Archive: What Digitization (Dis)Allows,” Tarez Samra Graban, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne, and Whitney Myers explain, “No matter the motivation, rhetoricians and historians who build archives do more than just proliferate digital information—they participate in a larger dialogue about access, proprietary rights, the boundaries of technology, and the conflicts between personal and communal interest” (235). Because Our Marathon is a relatively new archive (as of summer 2016, the archive is only three years old), and because I was afforded the opportunity to participate in and observe its construction, this case study provides the field with an inside, real-time look into the construction of the complicated interests of both those who construct digital spaces for community participation as well as for those who participate in these spaces. As an archive with specific attention to storytelling as both a form of healing and history, this study of the Our Marathon archive offers insights into seemingly simplistic questions that invite complex answers when anchored to a specific context: How does the digital impact this archive’s creation and participation? What does it mean to simultaneously construct an archive that aims to historicize and memorialize a tragic event? How do we reconcile the term community—a term that is as exclusive as it is inclusive—among the multiple, sometimes competing stakeholders? How do
the realities of this space affect the stories and genres story sharers feel comfortable sharing in? Who benefits—immediately and long term—from the actions of the archive? And who really is the “our” of *Our Marathon*?

**The Research Site**

*Our Marathon* defines itself as a crowdsourced digital archive of pictures, videos, and stories related to the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings and aftermath. Its mission is to serve as “a long-term memorial, preserving these records for students and researchers, providing future historians with invaluable, local windows into an important national event” ("About the Our Marathon Archive"). It was started in May 2013 at Northeastern University by a group of professors and graduate students from the English and History departments who worked to design, build, and promote this digital space to the Boston community and beyond. This project has been praised by academics and community members alike; drawing attention from local news outlets and both national and international conferences, it even won the Digital Humanities Award for “Best DH project for public audiences” in 2013 (“DH Awards 2013 Results”).

*Our Marathon* comes from a line of relatively new “historial archives”—a term I have coined to describe archives that aim to both historicize and memorialize recent traumatic histories, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11th (2001) and the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (2005). The historial, a term that will be more fully unpacked in Chapter 3, accounts for archives that take a philosophic approach to history, valuing narratives rather than historical causation, while simultaneously offering a space to memorialize tragedy through crowdsourcing “everyone’s” story. The historial complicates the very nature of the archive by attempting to appeal to dual-audiences with their own specific needs in terms of rhetoric and
design. These simultaneous actions have been critiqued by some scholars, particularly those who were skeptical of collection policies that allow anyone to contribute to a historical collection such as The September 11th Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (“10 Years After Katrina”). It is important to note that Our Marathon operates on a smaller scale than these two archives but still is open to the same critiques. Besides the magnitude of these different tragedies, there were also overall funding differences for the archives that represent them: The September 11th Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank were both initially funded by large grants from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, a nonprofit organization that funds projects nationally, whereas Our Marathon’s funding came from local sources and had a much more modest budget than its predecessors. These three historical archives are unique from other traditional archives in their scope, rationale, methods of collection, attention to oral history as an integral part of the collection, as well as their overall purpose; while other historical archives may bring together disparate documents into one useable venue, these historical archives aim to collect material in real time and focus on the ephemera of an event rather than on more authoritative, mediated artifacts. This means that anyone with an Internet connection can participate in populating the archive with his or her own artifacts, and the spirit of the archive lies within gathering as many personal artifacts as possible in order to diversify the collection for future researchers.

Our Marathon currently houses almost 10,000 items, but not all artifacts were user submitted; in fact, less than 10% of all of the artifacts collected were publicly submitted through

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3 According to interviews conducted by Courtney Rivard, Sloan gave the 9/11 Digital Archive $750,000 and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank $250,000. For reference in scope and attention, Our Marathon was seeded by $50,000 from Northeastern University’s College of Social Science and Humanities; funding from WBUR to support the WBUR Oral History Project ($25,000) was awarded in November 2013; and funding from Iron Mountain to support digitization of cards and other messages of support collected by Boston City Archives ($50,000) was awarded in April 2014.
the archive’s contribution function: most artifacts were either solicited by the archive’s research assistants or absorbed through partnerships with other area institutions. For example, the archive absorbed a collection of 309 stories via GlobeLab (a digital division of The Boston Globe newspaper) immediately following the bombings. To collect these stories during the week of the marathon bombings, GlobeLab⁴ posted an interactive map on the homepage of Boston.com where users could click on where they were during the bombings and share their stories anonymously according to the following prompt: “Were you there? Share your story. Click your location on the map, and tell us what you witnessed.”⁵ A second major failure of the archive is that it did not garner as much public participation through crowdsourcing as expected.

To reiterate, the slogan for Our Marathon—“no story too small”—represented a key motive for the creators of the archive: this site was meant to be a democratizing space in which anyone could participate and add their stories to the public memory/history of the event; the more voices, the richer and more nuanced that formation of public memory would be. To accomplish this, the intended methods of collection relied on the archive’s digital state: users needed to be able to simply navigate the site in order to share their own documents. In her ethnographic study of The September 11th Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, Courtney Rivard’s chapter “Archiving Disaster and National Identity in the Digital Realm” draws our attention to the power of archives in general and how these digital collection methods “actually turn a number of key tenets in the archival field on their head, including timing, scope, and verifiability” (135). These two pioneering archives shifted the way material has been obtained, curated, and preserved and emphasize fostering “some positive legacies” by

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⁴ Our Marathon partnered with the GlobeLab and included these stories in the archive on June 25, 2013. Although anonymous, these stories were submitted in the week immediately following the bombings and give first-hand accounts of thoughts, feelings, and experiences from the actual day at the marathon course.

⁵ Reader-submitted stories with the map of where the stories took place can be found here: http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts specials/boston_marathon_bombing_stories/
allowing those affected by these events to tell their stories (see both 9/11 and Hurricane archives’ “About” pages). These historial archives act to collect an abundance of artifacts quickly and efficiently.

Although Our Marathon was initiated with an attitude of “if you build it, they will come,” we quickly realized that all of our work around usability and design were in vain if we could not encourage participation. For this reason, there were multiple ways for users to contribute material to the archive. First, as is still the case today, any person with an Internet connection can come to our website and share material via the “Share Your Story” button or webpage. The team took to social media and attending local events to let people know about the archive, and we did receive some media promotion through local news venues. Second, in line with social media promotion, we also worked to directly encourage people to contribute their digital materials to the archive by following certain hashtags on Twitter (e.g. #BostonStrong or #MarathonBombing) and reaching out to potential contributors personally. Third, oral-history interviews\(^6\) were set up by myself and two professional oral historians (not affiliated with Northeastern), which involved its own process of scouting potential narrators, developing an interview protocol, learning how to produce radio-quality audio, and completing the various, often intense, tasks that surround oral-history style interviewing. Fourth, team members held in-person “Share Your Story” events in which laptops were set up, questions could be answered, and community members could share their materials on the spot—many opting to write their stories on the provided laptops (in some instances, contributors also had the option of video or

\(^6\) According to Donald Ritchie in his book Doing Oral History, “Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange…. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization or other form of public presentation…. Oral history does not include random taping, such as President Richard Nixon’s surreptitious recording of his White House conversations, nor does it refer to recorded speeches, wiretapping, personal diaries on tape, or other sound recordings that lack the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (1).
audio recording their stories, but most opted to write). These events were mostly held in local libraries.

In addition to the archive itself, the site of research for this dissertation includes access to both the creators and story contributors. In an IRB-approved research protocol (NU-IRB Protocol # 15-04-09), I was able to follow up with the creators of the archive with open-ended, semi-structured interviews that took place at Northeastern University. Due to the archive being constructed at Northeastern, I was able to easily contact the initial team members who worked on the project; due to my involvement with the archive as a team member, there was already a familiarity between researcher and interviewees; and due to a bit of luck, all of the creators were currently at Northeastern or planning a visit to campus during the time of my investigation, which meant that all interviews were conducted in person at the university.

Also as part of the same IRB-approved research protocol, I was able to follow up with a subset of Our Marathon participants: those who shared their written stories. To find their contact information I accessed the archive’s backend and located all publicly submitted items. I limited this search to include “text” only, which is the metadata description for stories. I then collected the email addresses of those who specifically gave permission for researchers to follow up with them about their contributions. All story sharers were sent a digital survey; for those who completed the survey, I also requested follow-up interviews in which survey respondents could leave their email addresses if they would not mind a follow-up interview. These interviews took place by phone. Due to my affiliation with Northeastern University and Our Marathon, I had access to all parties, professional surveying software (Qualtrics), and credibility. Both sets of data sources were generous with their time due to their beliefs and interests in the project overall.

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7 We did also hold a session at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital where many of the injured received treatment and developed relationships with its staff.
as well as through their familiarities with me. In the Methodology section of this chapter, I give more information about the data sources themselves.

One thing that was clear in the creation of *Our Marathon*, which has been supported by my subsequent research, was that the people affected by the events positioned themselves as members of a larger community or, as was often the case, multiple communities: runner, Bostonian, student, Muslim, and so on. These constructions mattered as the trauma of the marathon events led to a psychological sense of unease, which prompted desire for connection and support. Of particular interest to this dissertation, in the wake of the marathon bombings, a digital community came to be: in the Habermasian sense, this digital public—which traded in 18th century discursive spaces like coffee houses for modern discursive spaces like Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, news sites, etc.—was created through discourse on various websites. Whether in support or argument, people connected digitally through commenting features on websites and hashtags on social media. These types of discourse communities prompted the actions of the archive: people all over were sharing their stories, and, in 2013, many were sharing their written thoughts, feelings, and memories through writing on social media platforms. It was the intention of the archive to capture stories from as many discourse communities as possible.

**Theoretical Framework**

In my research, “community” and “audience” were often conflated terms, which caused me to contemplate what a community does that an audience does not: in the ways my research participants use the word, community is suggestive of action—it is not just a passive audience that will engage with *Our Marathon* but people who will participate in the project with agency. The action of participants occurs through discourse, which is important to my discussions of
literacy sponsorship and decoloniality. In order to offer a base definition of community as is most appropriate for my work with Our Marathon, I turn to Archive and Information Studies scholar Eric Ketelaar’s definition:

Collective identity is based on the elective processes of memory, so that a given group recognizes itself through its memory of a common past. A community is a “community of memory.” That common past is not merely genealogical or traditional, something which one can take or leave. It is more: a moral imperative for one’s belonging to a community. The common past, sustained through time into the present, is what gives continuity, cohesion and coherence to a community. To be a community, family, a religious community, a profession involves an embeddedness in its past and, consequently, in the memory texts through which that past is mediated (7).

This definition grounds us in ideas of history, identity, and memory and suggests that individual memory becomes social memory through specific engagement with others. In Our Marathon the sharing of memories is mediated by the archive itself—both in terms of affordances and limitations—but community memory is also mediated through the actions of recontextualizing memories through story. To understand such a space, a theoretical framework that accounts for this mediation and remediation is necessary.

The theoretical framework for this dissertation is mindful of the three main aspects of Our Marathon that are being studied in this dissertation: the digital, the historical and memorial, and community. It is also mindful of the three main sources of data I use under the aforementioned umbrellas: the creators of the archive, the contributors to the archive, and the
archive itself. Although these ideas are separated for focus, each aspect impacts and informs one another as will be shown throughout this project.

Likewise, this theoretical framework is broken down into three areas, and each impacts and informs the other when thinking of the design and literacy practices in/of Our Marathon. First, I draw from Deborah Brandt’s theorization of “literacy sponsors” to understand the hidden political forces within the archive that impact the experience of building and using the archive as well as the stories themselves. Second, I think through Ellen Cushman’s historiographic work with a “decolonized” archive and the concept of archival silences in order to account for the type of archive the creators of Our Marathon intended to design and the actualized archive. Third, I contend with the idea that digital archives both create and represent communities and return to the contested theories of discourse communities as explored by Rhetoric and Composition scholars in the 1980s.

Literacy Sponsors

In Deborah Brandt’s seminal article “Sponsors of Literacy,” she offers a conceptual approach that connects literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development as evidenced through 100 in-depth interviews about lifelong literacy acquisition with persons born between about 1895 and 1985. Brandt is not explicitly concerned with the concept of community—yet it does seem to be an important distinction when she mentions a “university community” or a “coal mining community”—rather, Brandt’s work focuses on the larger social and economic forces and contexts that influence one’s literate life. She writes, “Sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—
and gain advantage by it in some way... Although the interests of the sponsor and the sponsored do not have to converge (and, in fact, may conflict) sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty” (Brandt “Sponsors” 166-167). From her diverse research subjects’ experiences with literacy throughout their lives, Brandt uncovered a common thread of “both explicit and latent” sponsors who greatly influenced both the attitudes and practices towards literacy via their hegemonic relationships (167). In her article she demonstrates how unequal access to the practices of literacy stems from larger social and economic forces, how expectations and demands for literacy has risen as reading and writing further permeate all aspects of life, and how the sponsored may appropriate literacy practices from the contexts and intentions of the sponsors.

Many scholars have picked up on Brandt’s concept, which Brandt herself responded to in her 2015 article “A Commentary on Literacy Narratives as Sponsors of Literacy.” She remarks that she has “often been perplexed by how the sponsors of literacy concept has been taken up in writing studies and education over the years” as it has “turned into a more benign concept” than she had initially imagined it (“Commentary” 330). Brandt clarifies that “sponsors of literacy” is an analytic concept that emerged from line-by-line coding of interviews based on her research participants’ memories of literacy throughout their lifetimes: “In carrying out systematic comparisons and contrasts between people’s memories, I began to be struck by how thickly these recalled scenes of literacy learning were populated by interested others who came and went over the course of a lifetime and whose presence and power varied by socioeconomic, political and generational circumstances” (330). In Rhetoric and Composition scholarship, it is common to see the concept of literacy sponsorship in the classroom or extracurricular activities where students are learning to read and write. Brandt reiterates that the most important aspect of her definition
of literacy sponsors is the fact that *sponsors gain something from the sponsored*, and this is where power and exclusion become most apparent. This does not mean that sponsors are never beneficial for the sponsored—they often are—but sponsors can leave their marks on individuals, groups, communities, and even generations in problematic ways as well. Brandt writes, “Sponsors of literacy incorporate our skills into their projects, and the value and reach of our skills come to depend on the viability and durability of those projects. This dependency is what exposes literacy to so much turbulence, makes it so fragile and contingent, and links it so closely to patterns of economic and political inequality” (331). Because of Brandt’s methodology—that is, 100 in-depth interviews with line-by-line coding—she is able to offer a macro-analysis of her subjects’ literate lives, which are sponsored by large-scale institutions such as schools and churches. This is a useful analytical framework when thinking about sponsorship in linear ways particularly as there is mutual understanding of all acting agents involved: one can “see” the other in terms of having direct interaction with and knowledge of the others’ presence; when thinking of digital community spaces, sponsoring relationships become more ambiguous though no less political. A microanalysis of such a space uncovers a need to further Brandt’s conception through an examination of the multiple, sometimes competing, levels of sponsorship that come to bear on digital projects that invite literate actions, such as digital archives. In essence, this project adds a multilayered view to the sponsoring end of Brandt’s theorization.

*Decolonized Archives and Archival Silences*

While digital archives alleviate some of the physical factors necessary for access—for example, when it comes to travel and resources—digital archives also exacerbate archivists’ choices in ways in terms of purpose, preservation, and so on (choices that will be paid greater
attention in Chapter 2), and these relations of power demand our attention especially when it comes to the choices regarding what is digitized, who has access to the collections, and, especially, how digitization can reassign the potential meanings of artifacts (see Ramsey “Viewing the Archives”). In line with potentials for misrepresentations in digital spaces, there are also realities of simply not including artifacts that are clear in their representations for the sake of the community the space seeks to represent.

Ellen Cushman’s discussions of decolonial digital archives are particularly apt here. According to Cushman, decolonial archives “operate by relocating meaning in the context of its unfolding that opposes the imperial archive’s penchant for collecting, classifying, and isolating. They operate through the co-construction of knowledge based on interactions between storytellers and listeners that counter the imperial archive’s insistence on expert codification of knowledge. And they operate through linguistic and cultural perseverance rather than the imperialist agenda of preservation of cultural tradition as hermetically sealed, contained, and unchanging” (116-117). Cushman’s work specifically looks to preserve language, knowledge, and culture of the Cherokee Nation, and the hope for the decolonized archive is that the digital can simulate tribal understandings on Cherokee terms. To contend with imperial archives, Cushman argues for the direct participation of the archive’s subjects so that representations of selves and culture are as accurate as possible and stay true to the contexts of the space- and place-based notions of knowledge, history, and memory (see also Biesecker; Cook and Schwartz; Haskins; Powell; Tuhiwai-Smith).

Cushman’s work also draws attention to the importance of storytelling as a social, cultural, and knowledge-making medium. She writes, “Unfortunately, digital stories and archives…cannot escape the thorny questions of what can be mediated, especially digitally
mediated, and by whom. They are limited by the type and scope of content that can be made accessible” (130). In essence, Cushman draws attention to the “silences” associated with building and accessing archives. Scholars from archival studies (see especially Carter; Theimer) and the Digital Humanities (see especially Harris; Koh; Underwood; Whitson) also draw our attention to the concept of archival silences, which are often representative of larger community silences. In his influential book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Haitian historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences” (27). There are four main foci of archival silences as illuminated by Trouillot:

1) Silencing occurs in the making of sources.
2) Silencing occurs in the creation of archives.
3) Narrators themselves necessarily silence much.
4) Not every narrative becomes a part of the standard historical narrative received and accepted by various groups as the past—the “corpus” itself is corrupted from the beginning.

Though scholars in Rhetoric and Composition have explored the theoretical underpinnings of relations of power within archives, this dissertation tracks the development of the archive as it occurs thus disrupting the silences associated with making sources and creating archives. Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch turn our attention to how researchers’ motivations and positions also affect the utilization of an archive. In other words, who we are matters just as much as what we are researching. They cite work done by Jacqueline Jones Royster on literacy and social change among African-American women: Royster calls for scholars to be critically aware of their ideological and political positions as they present and represent people, places, ideas, and objects in scholarship, claiming that we need to “locate ourselves within the text as scholars, and thereby as people who have interpretive power” (Royster 281). To enact these research values, not only does this project point to the colonial/decolonial functions of the archive with particular
attention to the co-construction of knowledge in this digital space, but it also uncovers the sponsors’ positions to the archive that impact participation and representation by inherently appealing to particular populations while holding back from others.

Community in Writing; Community in Archives

In Joseph Harris’s touchstone article “The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing” (published in 1989; republished in his book *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966* in 1996 and 2012), he criticizes romanticized notions of the term “community” with particular attention to discourse communities (Bartholomae; Bizzell; Brodkey; Porter; Swales), interpretive communities (Bizzell; Fish), and writing communities (Bartholomae and Petrosky; Lu). Still apt today, Harris problematizes community in two ways: first, it is easy to reduce the concept to something utopic—a “friendly, fuzzier” version of something like a state or society (Harris 13); second, particularly in critique of Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University,” it is easy to reduce the term to something static—through its rhetorical power, the concept of community can quickly become exclusionary. With its vague and deceptively utopian undertones, Harris argues that “community” is the wrong word to characterize the relationship between members of a university yet we still see widespread engagement with the term in the field today.

In light of the public turn, we have seen much critical work with conceptions of community moving outside of the university through notions of community engagement (see Deans, Roswell, and Wurr) and community literacy, the latter which has even produced a new venue for publication: articles in the *Community Literacy Journal* explore many issues such as family literacies (see Lentes; Hansen; Webb-Sunderhaus; Shanahan), women’s literacy programs (see Bowen et al; Moss), and literacy in marginalized communities (see McCracken;
Adkins; Zwerling). In current Rhetoric and Composition scholarship, there has been a movement outside the classroom and into other spaces of literacy and learning. While community engagement and community literacy are important concepts for Our Marathon as a university-community project with a focus on literate actions of its participants, neither of these areas in the field convincingly account for community as represented in archives. I suggest a resuscitation of discourse communities with particular attention to the idea of memory. To further explain this, I turn to Patricia Bizzell’s definition and draw out a discussion of memory from David Bartholomae and James E. Porter.

Bizzell defines a discourse community as “a group of people who share certain language-using practices” thus accounting for a sense of inclusivity (222). She draws from the work of applied linguist John Swales, but these two scholars depart when it comes to agency: Swales emphasizes the element of choice in a discourse community; however, Bizzell argues that often members of a discourse community do not have a choice, which is problematic as their worldviews must assimilate to the conventions of the community; furthermore, there can be conflicting relationships amongst discourse communities: “Both within a society and within a person who has multiple discourse community memberships, the resolution of such conflicts requires the exercise of power. The struggle among discourse communities can thus be seen as a political struggle. Socially privileged discourse communities tend to win such battles; but this does not mean that they are absolutely impervious to challenge” (232). The definition of the term community varies for different disciplines; even in the field of Rhetoric and Composition scholars tend to mean something different when writing about a classroom community, a community of writers, community engagement, and so on.
Bartholomae writes, “One can remember a discourse, to be sure…but discourse, in effect, also has a memory of its own, its own rich network of structures and connections beyond the deliberate control of any individual imagination” (69). Similarly, Porter contends that all text is intertextual, meaning that there are “the bits and pieces of Text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourse” (34). In viewing discourse communities as communities of memory, it highlights the systemic values and practices associated within each community: a writer’s discourse is less about the individual and more about the sources and social contexts of the act of writing. Porter argues, “Thus the intertext constrains writing” (35, emphasis in original). One understands that discourse communities are socially stratified and develop their power through exclusion, but they are also inclusive of shared discursive practices. With the intervention of the digital archive into participants’ literate lives, there is a particular discourse community that we see represented through linguistic choices and overall story arcs; as democratizing as the slogan “no story too small” intended to be, when thinking about the digital archive as a discourse community itself, there are systemic issues and structural implications that deny participation for poor and minority populations. As a site that is simultaneously historicizing and memorializing an event, the archive does not capture the communities impacted by the tragedy; rather it captures a particular discourse community that feels authorized to participate.

_Theorizing Discourse Communities in Our Marathon_

While I honor Harris and other scholars’ critiques of the term discourse community as necessarily exclusive when it comes to discussing the university, I am lifting conceptions of the
term from Bizzell, Bartholomae, and Porter—mainly the political issues of memory and intertextuality in discourse communities—and ultimately using the term discourse community on Swales’s terms wherein the agency of the participant becomes the focus. This resuscitation of the term discourse community is focused on community literacy sponsorships and necessarily excludes spaces like the classroom wherein there are clearly visible relations of power and practices in which to assimilate. In looking at digital discourse communities, I emphasize the choices that are made by participants in co-constructing a decolonized site of knowledge; however, despite the exclusion of physical institutional authority, this dissertation examines the sponsoring relationships that impact this illusion of choice in participation. To unpack *Our Marathon* I look at the relationships between the creators of the space and the contributors to the space (e.g. the Sponsors and the Sponsored), I explore how these sponsoring relationships impact participation in the archive despite its decolonial intentions, and I think through how the main functions of the archive—the digital, historical/memorial, and community—impact the shared memory of the texts themselves and the experiences of those who created them.

In this dissertation I think through Brandt in light of discourse communities to show the external forces bearing on the literate practices of story sharers in *Our Marathon* and how this not only influences who participates in this space but also the discourses they use. I attempt to disrupt the silences of *Our Marathon* by turning a critical eye to the construction of the archive through my research methods and analyses, including discussions of who sponsored this community space and what that sponsorship afforded and limited in terms of participation and discourse. In my re-conception, I examine the power relations—both explicit and latent—that come from design choices, promotion, and sponsorship in the community archive.
These types of digital community spaces promote greater democratic discourse, and the decolonized archive, which consists of co-constructed knowledge, aims to capture as much of that discourse as possible. Whereas the archive that is the subject of Cushman’s work has created a space to preserve a community’s language (literal voices as she is working with oral traditions), *Our Marathon* was created in anticipation of voices being lost. Both archives create particular representations of communities, which are necessarily inclusive of any and all members who identify with the subject matter, but the digital space also necessitates agency on the part of community members, and the power dynamics of the archive play a role in who is authorized to speak.

A decolonized space—highlighted by the “our” of *Our Marathon*—denotes an agency and authority on behalf of all participants, but this does not negate the power relations found in discourse communities and archival spaces particularly as these spaces come with their own set of institutional and intertextual memories. In other words, discourse communities rely on certain shared background knowledge and values that come from various places and stakeholders. For example, one of the major goals of *Our Marathon* was to figure out how to archive things like tweets and status updates—newer forms of community discourse—but along with rational-critical debate comes much *irrational* debate. As a digital community project that aimed to both historicize and memorialize a tragedy, despite the slogan “no story too small,” choices were made by the archive’s creators in terms of whether or not to include all stories; harder to track in the scope of this project, but no less pertinent, choices were made by those who decided not to contribute their stories to the archive.

To understand *Our Marathon* as a representation of community, one has to contend with the archival silences in both creating and contributing to this space, which will be unpacked in
this dissertation. Who is “invited” to participate in this community? Who feels the authority to speak in/for a community? Because of its precarious position between university and community and historical and memorial, *Our Marathon* finds itself in the complicated realm of academic repository vs. community project. As much as it is inclusive—“no story too small”—as a community, it is necessarily exclusive; however, because of its position as a representation of community, we recognize that some exclusions were made purposefully while others were made unintentionally. As will be shown in this dissertation, the overall narrative of the archive is heavily skewed towards particular viewpoints from certain racial and socioeconomic class, which is indicative of sponsorship and other cultural factors around the marathon, the bombing, and the archive. In viewing *Our Marathon* in light of community literacy sponsorship, I argue that there is an awareness of others in our discourse—a specific kind of intertextuality that I see influenced by the archive’s digital nature—which influences participation in digital spaces and the memories that are left behind.

**Methodology**

As a site of research, *Our Marathon* is open to various lines of inquiry. Because I wanted to offer a holistic analysis of the archive, I chose a case study methodology wherein the context of the case would be rich and embedded and the knowledge gathered would be socially constructed. I use a mixed-method approach wherein I could conduct both quantitative and qualitative research on the various data sources of the study: the creators of *Our Marathon*, the contributors to the archive, and the archive itself. Equal priority was given to each of the data source phases, and data were integrated during interpretation. Because of my position to the archive, this case study required both a concurrent and sequential mixed-method design:
Because I was a part of the team who created *Our Marathon* and directly solicited material, I cannot separate my positionality to the archive from the findings of this dissertation, which offers ontological and epistemological concerns. Ontologically, I approached this case study with a particular point of view and use this dissertation to lend voices to my data sources by using direct quotations, themes, and various perspectives from the individuals themselves; epistemologically, in traditional approaches to qualitative research, the researcher tries to minimize the distance between researcher and data source: in my case study, I had to be cognizant of establishing distance as appropriate. Rather than trying to hide my axiological bias, I draw attention to it through sharing my own personal stories and experiences.

The following chart offers a quick look at the what and why of my choices of methods for gathering primary data (see Appendix for survey and interview questions):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>What I did…</th>
<th>Why I did this…</th>
<th>Overall Questions/Data Gathered…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator Interviews</td>
<td>I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with the primary creators of <em>Our Marathon</em>.</td>
<td>I did this to understand the goals and motivations behind this archive and to triangulate the theory, design, and practice of building these types of spaces in an effort to theorize why this work matters and how positionality affects outcomes.</td>
<td>Who are the creators of <em>Our Marathon</em>? What motivated them to build such an archive, and what was their experience in doing so? What are their thoughts on the digital design, the dual-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey (n=60)</td>
<td>I surveyed contributors to <em>Our Marathon</em> through a digital questionnaire with some open-ended, some multiple-choice, and some fill-in-the-blank questions.</td>
<td>I did this to gain a better understanding of the goals, motivations, and experiences of writers who contributed to the archive, as well as attempt to understand the identities of the same population, in order to shape an understanding of the archive itself. How do the contributors to <em>Our Marathon</em> identify themselves? What motivated them to share a written story with the archive? What were their experiences like in contributing to a public, digital community space?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Interviews (n=14)</td>
<td>I administered follow-up, semi-structured interviews to a subset of self-selected survey participants.</td>
<td>I did this to understand the compositional practices and specific experiences that motivated participants to write in this digital community space. Why did participants share their written stories? How did the design of the archive influence their participation? How do participants account for the digital, historical and/or memorial, and sense of community when accessing <em>Our Marathon</em>?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Mining (n=589)</td>
<td>I distantly read of all stories submitted to the archive and engaged in data mining.</td>
<td>I text mined the corpus in order to generate lines of inquiry for close reading for content analysis (of the stories themselves and/or for potential follow-up interview questions). What are common themes of the textual artifacts? What questions does this raise for the digital, historical and/or memorial, and community?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection (my own)</td>
<td>Rather than attempting to distance my experience with the archive from my experience in this research project, I reflect on my own experiences and let the data guide me through new lines of inquiry.</td>
<td>As my own positionality mattered in this work, I wanted to offer my readers a look into my own goals, motivations, and “stories”; furthermore, engaging in a case study of a site in which you are extremely familiar offers particular challenges and opportunities the deserve attention. How was I impacted by the work of the archive in terms of my common research avenues? What have I learned from studying this space that I did not fully think through when helping to build it?</td>
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**Sources of Data and Discussion of Methods**

To offer a holistic view in this case study, I look to the three main subjects that are informing the driving questions of this dissertation: the creators of *Our Marathon*, the contributors to *Our Marathon*, and the stories of the archive. An important element of this dissertation is my research questions changed as I worked on this project: my initial questions...
sought to understand who participated in this space, how the design of the archive impacted their participation, and the motivations and experiences of those creating the archive:

1) How do the contributors to *Our Marathon* identify themselves? What motivated them to share a written story with the archive? What were their experiences like in contributing to a public, digital community space?

2) How do contributors to *Our Marathon* describe their writing processes? Are these in line with how we talk about public and/or digital writing in Rhetoric and Composition? Why did participants share their written stories? How did the design of the archive influence their participation?

3) Who are the creators of *Our Marathon*? What motivated them to build such an archive, and what was their experience in doing so? What did the creators imagine their audience would need to facilitate this space, and how did this impact decisions regarding design?

As will be explored more fully in the following sections, the questions explored in this dissertation emerged from the data itself; whereas I started with the questions above, and created my survey and interview questionnaires accordingly (see Appendix), the answers to these questions morphed into ideas and concerns I had not anticipated. This being said, the sources of data I used remained the same for purposes of this project although I could imagine the addition of more interviews, particularly when it comes to the sponsors who did not directly design and build the archive.

*The Creators*

At the time, the main creators of *Our Marathon* were all employed by Northeastern University either as tenured/tenure-track professors or as graduate students. While the list of students and community members who worked on various aspects of *Our Marathon* is rather large, this dissertation focuses on the seven main creators of the archive and explores their positions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Role</th>
<th>Description from <em>Our Marathon’s</em> “About” Page</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Maddock Dillon;</td>
<td>Professor of English at Northeastern University, she holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley. Her fields include Early American literature, Atlantic colonialism, the early novel, feminist theory, political theory, aesthetics, transatlantic print culture, Caribbean literature, and early American drama. Recent publications include New World Drama: Theatre of the Atlantic, 1660-1850, forthcoming from Duke University Press. She is currently studying print and performance in the 18th-century Atlantic World and is interested in thinking about the theatre as a cultural commons. She also works on a project about geography, sex, race, and reproduction, especially in the early Caribbean.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Investigator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryan Cordell; Primary</td>
<td>Assistant Professor at Northeastern University, he holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. His fields include nineteenth-century American literature, American religious history, religion and literature, apocalypticism, periodical culture, and Digital Humanities. Professor Cordell’s work focuses on intersections between religion and fiction in nineteenth-century American mass media. He also collaborates with NULab faculty David Smith and Elizabeth Dillon on Uncovering Reprinting Networks in Nineteenth-Century American Periodicals, which seeks to develop theoretical models describing what qualities, both textual and thematic, helped news stories, fiction, and poetry “go viral” in nineteenth-century America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia Peaker; Project Co-</td>
<td>She is a Ph.D. candidate in the English department at Northeastern University. Her dissertation explores the crucial contributions several women made to early-twentieth century discussions about “nature” and the environment. In addition to her work on the Our Marathon project, she is the Project Manager for the Women Writers Project and the Development Editor at GradHacker. She has also organized or co-organized six graduate conferences and a number of writing groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim McGrath; Project Co-</td>
<td>He is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Northeastern University. His dissertation (in progress) explores intersections between contemporary American poetry and new media. His research interests include digital archives, aesthetic theory, new media studies, cultural materialism, and contemporary American poetry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David DeCamp; Technical</td>
<td>He is a Ph.D. student in World History at Northeastern University. He is interested in urbanization, transportation, and the digital humanities and his research focuses primarily on perceptions and portrayals of the London Underground from around 1850 through World War II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Hopwood; Archive</td>
<td>She is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Northeastern University. Her current research examines foodways and eating in nineteenth century U.S. and Caribbean novels and slave narratives. Most recently she has worked as a Research Fellow in NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networking, developing a digital archive of early Caribbean texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristi Girdharry; Oral History</td>
<td>She is a Ph.D. student in English Rhetoric and Composition at Northeastern University. Her research interests include multimodal texts, multilingual writers, and language politics. She's also interested in university-community partnerships and public writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The creation of *Our Marathon* was not a “professional” effort in terms of expertise in web development. Each professor and graduate student had other foci and different motivations for participating in this project; furthermore, because of our varied roles in the project, our stakes and takeaways varied as well. As will be illuminated in this dissertation, these motivations, stakes, and takeaways greatly matter in the construction of such a space—whether working on
this project simply for income or looking for extracurricular opportunities to engage with the tools, methods, and communities of the Our Marathon project, participation in this project was not neutral, and individual positions to the archive do matter in the functions of the site.

I conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with the creators of the archive. To ease into the interview, I asked the creators of the archive questions about their personal and academic background; I then transitioned to their experiences with the Boston Marathon in general before asking about their experiences of the bombing. From here, I walked each interviewee through their thought processes in starting/applying to work on this project and then asked design, innovation, and purpose of Our Marathon. Before having interviewees reflect on their academic and professional lives since working on the project, I paused to have each interviewee offer their viewpoints on one of the major tropes of the archive: Boston Strong.

These interviews were recorded at Northeastern University at the convenience of each creator during the end of summer/beginning of fall 2015. These interviews were transcribed in January 2016, and I coded them based on topics related to the digital, historical/memorial, and community, which were topics that emerged out of the data I gathered from the contributors.

The Contributors

As previously mentioned, Our Marathon hosts artifacts other than stories that do make an appearance in my analysis, but for this project I am particularly interested in the textual artifacts composed for the archive, and so when I speak about “the contributors” to this space I am really looking at a subset of contributors. In all, 280 people contributed stories publicly to Our Marathon through the website’s “Share” function. Of these 280, 240 were willing to be contacted by researchers for follow up, according to the privacy policy established by the
archive. Anyone with access to the archive could contribute an artifact as long as they were 13 years of age or older.

All 240 contributors were sent a link to the survey during the spring of 2015, two years after the events. There was a 25% response rate (n=60) with a 20% completion rate (n=46). At the end of the survey, participants could optionally leave their email addresses to indicate interest in participating in a follow-up interview: 57% (n=26) of survey participants were willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Of this group, during the summer of 2015, I was able to interview 14 contributors of various ages, locations, and backgrounds. This group is representative of the statistics I share in the following paragraph with two exceptions: the majority were not from the Boston area (they were just in town for the marathon), and they were all female.

Findings from survey results, which were limited to participants 18 years of age and older, show that most of those who contributed their stories publicly to Our Marathon were from the Boston area, physically present at the Boston Marathon in 2013 (either as a runner or spectator), and racially identified as White. Many were also highly educated (66% had a Bachelor’s degree; 30% had a Master’s degree or higher) and female (72%). The majority of the respondents were over the age of 35 (65%). Respondents also reported mostly having livable wages (with 30% reporting an average annual household income of over $150,000). Lastly, about half of the contributors submitted their stories from a public library event, and about half contributed from their place of residence.

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8 Before finalizing one’s submission, contributors needed to check a box that indicated agreement with the archive’s Terms and Conditions; furthermore, in addition to the option of one’s artifact being published publically or privately, there was this option to check: “It is ok to contact me for further information.”

9 Many social media sites—including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and Tumblr—have an age requirement of 13.
The purpose of collecting this quantitative demographic information was to give a general sense of who participated in this space when it came to writing stories; upon realization that the data was quite homogenous, this data prompted a major overall question of the archive: who is the “our” of Our Marathon, and how can we create spaces for more diverse participation in the future? The survey also collected information on the following three qualitative questions, which derived from the initial research questions stated at the beginning of this section: Why did you choose to share your story with Our Marathon? What was your experience like in contributing to Our Marathon? Did the archive capture your expectations after submitting? This data was coded by themes, and from these themes emerged the finding of community.

To contextualize the demographic data, I also conducted follow-up interviews by phone. In these interviews, I began by asking more about the background of each participant—where they grew up, what they do for work—and then I spent time talking to them about their writing process. Because I was unsure of what analyses I was going to ultimately offer of the archive’s stories—I was planning on triangulating the survey data and follow-up interview data with themes from text mining—I did collect some data that is not of use to this project (e.g. participants’ writing processes), but I believe that querying about writing processes in general and specifically to writing a story for Our Marathon aided in walking each participant back to their mindset when submitting to the archive. Lastly, I asked participants about their stories in particular, the common trope of Boston Strong, and what the act of submitting their stories meant for them personally. This data was coded by question/topic, and, once again, invocations of the concept of community came into focus thus further prompting me to investigate this aspect of the project.
For my colleagues on the project, there was a mutual understanding of my position to *Our Marathon* and a familiarity that came through in their answers; however, with those who contributed their stories, there was a different sense of my position but still a curiosity of my work and often times a desire to want to talk about the tragic events that had occurred two years earlier. As Robert S. Weiss writes in his introduction to *Learning from Strangers*, “Interviewing rescues events that would otherwise be lost. The celebrations and sorrows of people not in the news, their triumphs and failures, ordinarily leave no record except in their memories. And there are, of course, no observers of the internal events of thought and feeling except in those to whom they occur. Most the significant events of people’s lives can become known to others only through interview” (2). Listening is obviously an important part of the interview process—especially in terms of listening for what Weiss refers to as “markers” for follow-up questions in semi-structured interviews. My position as a former representative of *Our Marathon* and Northeastern University graduate student allowed me access to my research populations, and I acknowledge that this acquaintance may influence this study, so I try to let my research participants speak for themselves whenever possible to allow readers to also listen rhetorically (Ratcliffe).

*The Stories*

As will be shown in this dissertation, when soliciting stories from the public, many individuals simply did not believe that their stories mattered because they were not physically impacted by the marathon events. With the Boston Marathon Bombings, the dominant public narrative that surrounded the events had to mostly do with injury, heroism, and terrorism; these are the accounts one will associate with authoritative sources such as encyclopedic entries and
other historical texts. *Our Marathon* aimed to capture the stories of the event in a way that is fundamentally different than the straightforward, dominant account: rather than negotiated accounts and fact-checked media coverage, pathos-driven stories are welcomed and personal-experience bias is revered. As mentioned above, there were 280 stories publicly submitted to *Our Marathon* through the “Share” function on the website; additionally, there were 309 other public stories that people on the marathon route the day of the bombing submitted to *The Boston Globe*’s website that same week. *Our Marathon* absorbed this collection from *The Boston Globe* soon after the archive was created. The Globe Stories do not contain any metadata, but they do account for immediate reactions to the bombings. Almost all of the stories were written in English though not all of the stories are from the United States.

As Michel de Certeau asserts, people use stories to mentally organize and understand spaces; his usage of the term story implies a narrative that is both personal and culturally based: when one enters a space, the space conjures certain thoughts that immediately become connected to other thoughts; this is how we form and mix memory to portray our stories. De Certeau suggests that stories are “spatial trajectories” that “serve as a means of transportation” for thought processes (115); in this way, the archive can serve as a sort of map for public thought at the time of the stories’ collections, and this dissertation can examine how the digital, historical, and community aspects of the project impact those stories. We understand stories as cultural, social, and historical vessels for communication. In the digital age, particularly when thinking of large community projects, it is the idea of story *sharing* that beckons my attention. To “tell” a story indicates an act of intimacy in which participants are aware of the certain power dynamics in which they move about—bedtime stories, wedding planning with your best friend, and history lectures all include (and preclude) certain understandings—whereas to “share” a story with an
unspecified audience engages intimacy in a different way: it is more of an act of sharing one’s self in an ephemeral way but for posterity.

Again, while the archive houses different types of media—photos, videos, audio-recorded oral histories—this dissertation focuses on the stories contributors shared as a pragmatic decision, as the mediums of stories matter, but also because the written compositions can be seen as a “psychological reality” for the composers (Bereiter and Scardamalia). I restrict my definition of stories to written compositions in this dissertation in an effort to focus on specific long-form expressions that were circulated through digital mediums. Alphabetic text offers certain affordances of planning, composing, and revising on behalf of the sharer that are inherently different to oral histories or photographs. As the agential act of story sharing is of importance to this work, this limitation is purposeful and also emerges out of my own observations of people extemporaneously sitting down to write their stories for *Our Marathon* as opposed to the more careful and/or direct solicitation of other mediums.

To understand trends in the stories themselves, I turned to distant reading and text mining of the 280 stories publicly submitted to *Our Marathon*. The platform *Our Marathon* runs on—*Omeka*—has a built-in function that allows for the export of individual items and collections as XML files. XML files contain all of the necessary metadata fields embedded into tags, which makes it an easily searchable document.
Using Text Wrangler, a general-purpose text editor, I am able to isolate certain data, such as stories and specific types of identifying information.

I was able to “distantly read” the corpus—that is, look for trends amongst all of the stories at once—by creating phrase nets. Using Paper Machines—a plugin for Zotero, which is “a free and easy-to-use research tool that helps you collect, organize, and analyze research and lets you share it in a variety of ways”\(^\text{10}\)—one can easily generate phrase nets using TXT files. Like a word cloud, a phrase net offers visualizations of word frequencies: the size of word is relative to the word’s frequency. The difference is that it also shows word connections\(^\text{11}\). Phrase nets allow us to examine both the magnitude and directionality of word connections by linking word pairings with arrows of varying sizes. From there we can easily identify common word pairings across a given corpus. Moreover, Paper Machines allows us to vary the word or

\(^{10}\) [https://www.zotero.org/about/](https://www.zotero.org/about/)

\(^{11}\) As we do not have access to the actual count of these word frequencies in the phrase nets, we can pair these word connections with specific word counts through a tool such as Voyant to gain a deeper understanding of these connections.
characters that link terms. It functions on a simple syntax, “x [z] y,” where x is the first word, y is the second word, and z is either a space or a connecting word such as “and,” “or,” “is,” and “at.” These variations give us much more flexibility than just looking at traditional word pairings separated by a space. For example, when looking at a phrase net for *The Boston Globe* stories the archive absorbed—again, these stories are all first-hand accounts from those at the marathon on April 15, 2013 and were collected the week of the bombing—with the construction “x [space] y” we can see which words were most commonly written together in the stories:

From this data visualization, we can see that the phrase “finish line” appeared very frequently in this body of texts because of the size of the words and arrow. Also prominent were “people started,” “started running,” and “people running” as we see in the lower left side of the phrase net. Other interesting aspects are the stories’ attention to location (“Boylston street” or “Boylston st” is where the marathon bombings occurred; “newbury st,” “comm ave,” “mass ave,” and so on are also located near the marathon route) and time (“10 minutes,” “10 seconds,” “15 minutes,” and so on).
This type of text mining and distant reading gave me a sense of trends in the stories and prompted me to focus on exemplary stories through traditional close reading. For example, it prompted me to look for “hashtag Boston Strong” (e.g. #BostonStrong) in the stories themselves and other ways the digital medium impacted the stories themselves; it also helped aid in my considerations of the historical and memorial functions of storytelling and how these actions add to divergent results (e.g. history as an act of remembering; memorialization as an act of forgetting); lastly, particularly as seeing these stories as representing discourse communities, I developed a lens for reading the digital and historical/memorial as a representation of community and could further articulate how sponsoring community literacy impacted certain silences in the archive.

Reflections

In “Critical Reflection as Research Methodology,” Christine Morley discusses the purposes and dilemmas of the researcher’s position as directly impacting the findings. When exploring issues of power and positionality, reflective practice and reflexivity are used in research in order to make the roles and assumptions of researchers more explicit, which is integral to analyses. Reflective practices can aid in understanding the values and intentions of the researcher particularly when that research is personally challenging in light of the researcher’s own identity and experiences. Morley writes, “When using critical reflection as a way of knowing, deconstruction involves identifying the discourses that inform the participant’s initial ways of knowing about their critical incident or case” (271). One needs to deconstruct and then reconstruct their positionality and purposes. In this dissertation, I use one of my main foci—storytelling—as a mode of reflection and critical research method in order to account for my
underlying background experiences with the *Our Marathon* archive, which are difficult to disentangle from my research today. Rather than trying to bury my relationship to the archive, I share my own reflections when they directly inform my current thinking. In doing so, I aim to showcase the value of collaborative ways of knowing in the field.

**Chapter Overview**

In the following four chapters I explore the relationships between the creation of the archive, the use of the archive, the grand narratives the archive tells on its surface and in its stories. More specifically, I look at how *Our Marathon* adheres to/departs from traditional archives through its functions as a digital archive, an archive meant to historicize and memorialize an event, and a community archive. I unpack *Our Marathon* by thinking about how the project’s stated goals and realities intersect and the responsibilities of scholars as related to technology. I analyze this community space and complement/complicate these analyses with reflections from the archive’s team of creators, from the archive’s contributors, as well as from my experience as part of that team.

In Chapter 2, “The Archive and the Digital,” I think about traditional, physical archives and examine how *Our Marathon* adheres to/departs from how they function in terms of purpose, discourse community, access, location and preservation. As archives represent communities, there are different forms of archival silences in terms of who participates, what artifacts are archived, and so on. As part of my attempt to disrupt such silences, in examining *Our Marathon*’s functions I bring to light aspects of the process of building the archive and supplement my observations and analyses with those of the other creators of the site. I then consider how the digital impacts the stories in the archive themselves and account for new forms
of literate behavior not common to preconceived notions of storytelling, such as the use of hashtags within stories.

In Chapter 3, “The Archive and the Historial,” I unpack the term historial and build on threads of the digital from the previous chapter. In thinking of the complicated nature of creating an archive that set out to complete actions of history and memorialization simultaneously, I contend with how the historial demands real-time engagements through acts of literacy, pausing to look at stories that are representative of history and memory, and think about the power structures in place that sponsor one’s literate practices in the archive. I conclude that the action of simultaneously historicizing and memorializing this event highlighted the sponsoring relationship in different ways: not only were acts of literacy were manipulated by the conceptual space, and but the sponsoring roles and takeaways were impacted by the exigency of this space.

In Chapter 4, “The Archive and Community,” I argue that Our Marathon aimed to be a digital representation of community on the terms of the community members themselves; however, when thinking about how the digital, historial, and communal functions alter discourse and representation, the archive could not escape the thorny areas of sponsorship. In looking more closely at an example of sponsorship within sponsorship—i.e. the marathon team built a digital community space and sponsor literacy, but the marathon team is also sponsored by its institutions in addition to the reciprocal nature of the sponsored in this case—and look at the general identity of the community that contributed to Our Marathon with particular attention to race. In looking at what the archive’s community excludes, I conclude by drawing threads from Chapters 2 and 3 to think about the idea of archival silences.

In Chapter 5, “Conclusion” I draw the main threads of this dissertation together and how studying digital identity and memory in a site like Our Marathon is of interest for future scholars
because it is a digital site in which users have a specific type of agency: community members were actively pursuing an opportunity for civic engagement by leaving a historical record of their voices and experiences. But the creators of this archive, consciously or not, designed a particular interface and engaged in sponsoring relationships that would help determine how contributors would act in this space as well as who would be allowed participate. What do we ascertain from thinking about decolonial digital spaces and discourse communities? What can we learn from Our Marathon and take forward to future historical archives?
Works Cited


Chapter 2: The Archive and the Digital

Introduction

On one of the marathon team’s “field trips” to The Boston Globe, we were given a short tour of the building, which ended in their photography archive. It was located in the basement and consisted of wall-length shelves with folders of photographs arranged by topic.

A staff member unlocked one of the cabinets, so we could browse through the files I was thumbing through the Ws when I came across a folder titled “Women’s Liberation.”
Each photograph was affixed to a light piece of cardstock that included information such as the date, location, and a description of what had been captured. This particular photograph, shown above, was from 1975, and it pictured women going on strike. Details that the curator decided to include had to do with the UCLA campus and the women pushing strollers.

*The Boston Globe*’s photo archive is fairly representative of traditional, physical archives. It is a large repository for certain types of artifacts that have been curated based on their anticipated use. For example, if the *Globe* were to run a story about the anniversary of the strike pictured above, a staff member would have access to this photograph and select information. Because photographs are most often digitally produced today, and because we have the technology to digitize those that are not, *The Boston Globe* probably will not run out of room to house photographs. This is a “closed” archive to which no new items will be added; however, one can imagine that space and preservation might have been concerns for the archive at some point. Choices had to be made on which photographs would be kept, what information was essential, and how to preserve these documents; these choices were necessitated and addressed by the specific community who would access the photographs.

When thinking about the ways that digital archives create and represent communities, there are different forms of archival silences in terms of who participates, what artifacts are archived, and so on. In the “Forum” section of the Spring 2006 issue of *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, scholars engage with the concept of the “archival turn” in rhetorical studies and critique its opportunistic nature: “After all, any cursory survey of the field’s best scholarship, particularly in public address studies, reveals the archive as a long-standing habitat of the rhetorical critic and theorist” (Morris “Archival Turn” 113). Charles E. Morris draws attention instead to a “rhetorical (re)turn” of the archive, which he views as a “rhetorical construction that calls
attention to the archive as a rhetorical construction” (113). Yet, in the forum itself, the rhetorical construction stays at the level of the ideological and political constructions of archival spaces (see Finnegan; Biesecker; Houck; Stuckey; Morris “Archival Queer”) and does not consider the literal construction of these spaces themselves; this echoes an ongoing silence in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship at large where we often find discussions on using archives as opposed to constructing archives (see Glenn and Enoch; Kirsch and Rohan; McKee and Porter; Ramsey; Wells).

In this chapter, I think specifically about how the digital aspect of the archive impacts decisions. To begin, I address how this digital archive specifically adheres to, and departs from, traditional archives. I then examine how the digital influences the stories of the archive themselves. How does the digital impact this archive and participation in terms of purpose, audience, access, and preservation? How does the digital impact the literate actions of its participants? I argue that because most stories were composed for the archive itself—thus co-constructing a decolonized archive in which presumably most people could participate to challenge dominant historical narratives—and the participants had to engage with multiple digital literacies. I look at literacy sponsorships in light of the digital to show how the main sponsors—the creators of Our Marathon—made design choices that afforded certain acts of literacy and limited others; in this way, the community of story sharers, and the stories they shared, fell into certain standards provided by the archive in terms of writing and genre. These movements emphasize a particular discourse community with its own grammar and understanding of audience that were also permeated by the digital, such as the use of hashtags in stories. Its digital nature makes this archive highly visible, which increases the stakes for the Sponsors, and also reflects a cultural moment for healing.
Traditional (Physical) Archives and Our Marathon

When thinking about the construction of traditional archives, I see two motives for creating them: having a large amount of artifacts that need some order or desiring to collect a large amount of items with some order. For example when *The Boston Globe* started in 1872, photography was still a very expensive craft and the technology for mass printing photos was still to come. The staff members probably did not start filing their photographs the way we see them today. As technology progressed, and as the newspaper continued to succeed and grow, one might imagine that a system of curating their images became important. Thus, the artifacts themselves necessitated an archive, and the staff could create a system that made most sense for their anticipated work. On the other hand, some archives are less calculated. For example, Mary Hemingway donated crates of her deceased husband’s papers to the Kennedys upon suggestion of a mutual friend. Also a Boston-based archive, now housed at the JFK Memorial Library, *The Ernest Hemingway Collection* contains the initially donated drafts of his manuscripts and personal letters, but it has also collected other related materials such as newspaper clippings and audio recordings of the author. The archivists in charge of this collection have curated the materials in ways that make sense for potential researchers and have also created finding aids.

I draw attention to these two different archives here in order to exemplify key ideas to consider—purpose, discourse community, access, preservation location—and from which to compare how the digital impacts these terms in light of the archive of this case study. To think of this archive as a decolonized space, the digital aspect of the archive opens up greater possibility for participation logistically, which can be seen in terms of its intended discourse communities and access; this being said, this may lead to the misconception that archival authority is alleviated by its digital state when, in fact, it is exacerbated by the “silent” features of the
archive: its purposes influence its designs—in terms of its overall look and the paths one takes in order to participate—and these features also encourage a certain type of participation and story sharing resulting in an archive that represents limited discourse communities.

**Purpose(s):** How does the digital affect the purpose(s) of *Our Marathon*?

With the Photo Archive, the purpose is very clear: should a news story relate to something that happened in the past, the archivist has curated the photographs for ease of retrieval. With the Hemingway Collection, there are multiple purposes: to preserve an iconic author’s writing process, to educate people about this particular person and his life, and so on.

What is the purpose of *Our Marathon*, and how does its digital state affect its purpose?

From my research, I have found that the “purposes” of co-constructing *Our Marathon* functioned on three main levels, all of which were impacted by the digital aspect of the archive. The first two purposes highlight the archive’s decolonized nature of letting people speak from where they were already comfortable and also reducing barriers for participation: the digital mirrored how many “experienced” the bombings and their aftermath in terms of news, communication, and reflection; the digital also alleviated factors for participation such as proximity to Northeastern University (or even Boston). Taking into consideration the ways the digital opened up space for participation for potential contributors, the third purpose is that the archive it also opened avenues in which the creators of this space could directly benefit not only from their participation but the participation of others in their digitally sponsoring roles.

The first purpose for the archive was to capture a main way that people were experienced the Boston Marathon bombings. Whether or not one was physically present at the 2013 Boston Marathon, as a whole, most experienced the act of terrorism digitally. Even some of those who
ran the marathon that year did not know about the events until hearing about them on television and through digital communications:

**Dot:** The day of marathon, I finished, and everything seemed normal. I went on the subway, and everything was normal. I got on the shuttle bus, and everything was normal. I learned about the event when I got into my hotel room and turned on the TV. They said the marathon was canceled, and I thought, “What kind of joke is this?” But then I realized...I had all the email messages. People had been trying to call me and couldn’t get through.

The trauma of that day was not only experienced by those (still) on or near the course: the sights, sounds, smell, and emotions were captured in multiple digital media forms. These were consistently shared and re-shared due to the affordances of digital sharing in 2013. This secondary trauma elicited strong visceral reactions from many people not at the marathon that day who then took to places like social media to share their own thoughts and feelings. In other words, the violence of the Boston Marathon bombings were not the only acts of terror; the affordances of the digital allowed for greater impact of the tragedies thus prompting *Our Marathon*’s intervention in capturing these stories.

The digital also opened up the possibility to hear from as many people as possible. From the eyes of the creators of this archive, *Our Marathon* could provide a living memorial, a history and research archive, and a catalyst for community. As the bombing and the events that followed changed many lives in ways small and large, immediate and more enduring, the creators of *Our Marathon* firstly saw the archive as a place for those experiences to be shared so that we may understand the event in its broadest, community-wide dimensions. Maddock-Dillon recounts sitting down with a group of graduate students the day after the marathon bombing. They were meeting at an off-campus location not far from the marathon finish line to talk about their dissertations. She recalls, “We met, and everybody immediately started sharing stories of what had happened to them, which is what everybody was doing. I was really struck by how
profoundly everybody had been touched by the experience, how much their lives had been upended or affected.” The shift in discourse of this dissertation-writing group represented a shift all over Boston and other communities: people were sharing their stories—where they were, how they found out about the attacks—and making sense of the events with one another. Many of these recollections included text messages, emails, and social media sites.

The purpose for the archive also prompted a hands-on learning experience for the creators of the archive. DeCamp, at the time a student in the History department pursuing his Master’s degree, explains his interest in this work, which mirrors that of the other creators:

With this project in particular, I was very interested in the fact that it was so recent, so fresh, so new. I mean, as a historian, I’m constantly looking at things that are hundreds of years old…. This [project] gave an opportunity to create history as it was being made…and make a repository, a way to store these stories—not just the stories of key people involved in [the marathon bombing], but the day-to-day people who were around the corner from it when it happened…. It gave a way to peel back that archival authority that you have in traditional archives that prioritizes who speaks, whose words are important, whose words are not.

DeCamp, also the Technical Lead of the project, points to a common misconception of the digital archive: that archival authority is alleviated by its digital state. The creators of this archive sought to create a space for all of the unique groups affected by the bombing, which includes runners, medical personnel, members of the Muslim community, students, police and safety workers, among many others. They felt that gathering stories from as many perspectives as possible could enrich and strengthen the community in the wake of the trauma of the bombing.
In this way, they saw the archive as more than just a forum for shared experiences: it was a way of showing the world “our” united story, but, as will be shown in Chapter 4, the “our” of *Our Marathon* is far from the diverse, “Kumbaya” moment that the archivists imagined and that the archive promotes on its surface.

Furthermore, while DeCamp could superficially relate his history background directly to the archive’s purposes, most of the archive’s creators were working fairly far outside of their main foci thus benefitting in their sponsoring roles from the visibility and potential magnitude of the project. For example, McGrath, whose main academic interest had been on contemporary poetry, recounts actively campaigning to work on the project because of his interest in digital work. His personal interest in social media, one of the main vessels for communication and information during the bombings, aided in an extracurricular desire to explore a topic that greatly piqued his interest despite it not directly correlating to his dissertation research at the time:

I’d been interested in *Twitter’s* response to things for a while: the fact that you were getting not just news; the breaking news aspect… The stories that were coming out. What compels people to circulate information about where they were? And to circulate it in a particular context?

…I was interest[ed] in how people are using digital spaces to tell stories and then also what it means to take those stories, put them in a central location, and decontextualize them as archival material or build a space where you might get different kinds of stories… I even think [the more technical] questions [are of interest] like, “How do you archive tweets and things like that or Facebook posts and stuff?”
On the surface, the creators of this archive felt the archive would represent an important snapshot of life in Boston for researchers today and in the future: one that tracks the effects of new technology (Twitter, Instagram, and other social media), community responses to trauma, new modes of crowdsourcing information, and so on; they felt that this archive could be a tool for both teaching and learning where scholars and other interested minds could look to make sense of what happened and understand a community’s response to tragedy. Not only was this a learning experience but the work each student put into the archive was going to be highly visible to their peers, colleagues, and administrators both at Northeastern University and elsewhere.

As amateur academics, there were clear gains and advantages of working on such a highly visible project within the university. In addition to the summer paycheck—a necessity for graduate students on a 9-month stipend—this work mattered greatly to their future careers in hypothetical and proven ways. DeCamp touches on the importance of academically focused summer work as he saw an opportunity to work with the technical skills and tools he had been building during Cordell’s “Doing Digital Humanities” course:

Being able to develop this technical proficiency… and using these tools was definitely a motivation, but part of it was also the fact that I needed a summer job. This was an opportunity to get a summer job that, not only would I get paid for, but it would also benefit my CV: I would be able to put it there on my CV as a project that I worked on rather than working in a bar, or working in a retail store, just to get enough money to get by over the summer.

The digital nature of this archive meant high visibility of the labor that went into it—this was not simply a summer job with an academic focus but a rhetorically rigorous process that was new and interesting to academic communities; furthermore, it was a project unique to the digital
representations of Boston and the marathon as a community. DeCamp also draws our attention to a reality particularly true to Humanities graduate students today: with shrinking degree-completion timelines and an extremely competitive job market, there is a necessity to make the most of one’s time. The hired graduate students were all at various stages of their careers—dissertations, comprehensive exams, coursework—but, as is common with many graduate students, additional summer work was one important aspect of applying to work on this project.

In 2013, the Digital Humanities were clearly an area of interest for many higher education institutions, and creating a public digital archive that showcased the strengths of Northeastern University’s investments in this field were of import to those involved. Hopwood, the team member who was the “closest” to the event in terms of having a family member who was injured by one of the explosions, recounts getting the email from Maddock Dillon and Cordell about the chance to work on the digital archive: “I remember thinking when I got that [email] that it would be a good way to process what had happened and to contribute to something larger in a positive way. Also, honestly, I was looking for summer work within digital humanities.” Hopwood would be working on the Early Caribbean Digital Archive, which was digitizing pre-20th century pan-Caribbean texts, but she was looking to expand beyond this experience through specifically working on other digital projects.

She explains her thinking more upon receiving the marathon archive application in her email: “I thought, ‘Well, that seems like a win-win: I can help build this great community archive and also gain work experience.’” Coming from [a nearby town in Massachusetts] where there was a group of people in my graduating class who had been severely injured, my husband was already in talks of holding a fundraising 5K for those people, so I was already thinking in terms of the community.” As Hopwood illustrates specifically, the digital archive would allow
for a particular type of work experience within the digital that complemented the community-focused thinking she was already engaging in. Had *Our Marathon* been only a physical archive would there have been such interest in building it without the implicit visibility of its digital state and the opportunity to work with digital tools and methods that appeal to current larger institutional conversations? Were this not a community archive but a repository of public documents available on the web, would this have aided in the creators’ own healing? Would that have been a project worthy of immediate funding? In addition to the purposes for this archive—the decolonial spirit of co-constructing memory in the archive and the gains the creators could take from their sponsoring roles—the discourse communities for *Our Marathon*, although vague, were also prompted by the digital.

*Discourse Communities*: How does the digital affect the discourse communities of *Our Marathon*?

When *Our Marathon* was built, we spoke of two main “audiences” who would be accessing the digital archive through their devices: community members (who possibly needed a space for healing) and future researchers, but this was actually a loose term as *Our Marathon* prompts participation through discourse as opposed to the more passive nature of an audience—the archive was not meant to be “watched” as much as it was meant for interaction thus more productive to this dissertation’s focus, thinking of the two “audiences” as two different discourse communities better addresses the functions of the space.

We quickly found that these two discourse communities would both complement and complicate each other: for example, while researchers would want to know about community members’ experiences, the nature of a public digital archive might dissuade certain people from
participating. Because the creators intended for the archive to be mostly crowdsourced—a component that will be unpacked in Chapter 3—the overall design of the archive needed to be clean and user friendly. From the choice of words to the colors we used, there were many discussions on how the intended discourse communities would engage with the archive that would be absent if it were not digital. In essence, the archive itself had to sponsor a certain discourse community because of the intentionality of design elements. As opposed to a discourse community naturally forming, the creators of the archive had to make choices in terms of design; as will be shown in this section, these choices were informed by the events of the marathon bombings in direct and indirect ways. In this way, the sponsoring relationship dictates aspects of the discourse community the archive promotes and represents. In these choices there is potential for imperialist action the intentions of this digital archive sought to disrupt.

For example, when thinking about the digital and discourse communities, titles become even more striking: the digital draws attention to the title over and over again as it promotes itself on the site as well as in social media promotion, which was a key avenue for marketing the archive. To illustrate this point, first consider the physical space of *The Ernest Hemingway Collection*:

**HEMINGWAY AT THE JFK**

![Photograph depicts the entrance to The Ernest Hemingway Collection](https://www.hemingwaysociety.org/hemingway-jfk)

*The Ernest Hemingway Collection at the John F Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston is the most comprehensive Hemingway archives in the world and essential to anyone pursuing a definitive or in-depth study of Hemingway and his writing. In addition to the author's personal papers, the collection includes more than 10,000 photographs as well as the personal papers of Hemingway family members, friends, and scholars. For information about the Ernest Hemingway Research Room see [http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/The-Ernest-Hemingway-Collection/Research-Room.aspx](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/The-Ernest-Hemingway-Collection/Research-Room.aspx)*

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As one can see in the above photograph the Hemingway Room, where one would be given access to archival materials, does not draw attention to itself through any big banner or display of its title to its discourse community (potential Hemingway researchers). If someone has passed all of the gates to access Hemingway materials, they do not need to be reminded of where they are; still, the space itself makes certain appeals to its intended discourse community: the painting of the author, the game head on the wall, the furniture—both the upholstered chairs and wooden desks—are all specific design features of this room that are meant to create a certain environment for the researchers who are already part of a discourse community surrounding the author. With the digital, the design of the space can also create a certain environment: were Our Marathon to be an academic repository only, the design might even mirror some of the features of the pictured collection; it would be clean with minimal distraction but still a clear focus.

In thinking of the two main “audiences” of Our Marathon, again it is more apt to think about them as discourse communities with their own sets of standards and language practices, and the creators of the archive had to take these two communities’ potential needs into consideration at once. With the digital space, creating a certain environment is the product of much discussion and elements of design that also contend with specific understandings of the intended discourse communities. For example, while the official title of the archive is presently Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive & WBUR Oral History Project, when the team was first put together the unofficial name of the project was the Boston Marathon Digital Archive. This was immediately problematic in that we were not trying to archive all of the history around the Boston Marathon. “The Boston Bombing Digital Archive” made sense for future researchers (the same way “The Ernest Hemingway Collection” most directly describes the archive), but it lacked our community focus in its lackluster, clinical nature. By the first week
of May 2013, the team had decided that “Our Marathon” captured the spirit of our healing community. There was a great sense of camaraderie that we were noticing on digital platforms like Twitter, and so we wanted to capitalize on that sensation. In its first iteration, the Boston Marathon Digital Archive became Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive.

The word “our” signaled a sense of camaraderie in this time of healing. It is also representative of an explicit pride shown within the city in general that was only highlighted after the bombings:

**Penny:** I grew up in a very suburban area. Living in Boston is a little bit of a culture shock. Everyone has so much pride in that town. The sports fans, obviously, are notorious. Everyone who lives in that city is part of something that’s bigger than themselves.

In the above quote from a follow-up interview, story sharer Penny draws attention to the idea of pride that is furthered by a conception of something “bigger than” oneself. While this is not unique to Boston—having pride in a place is natural—the way that the digital emphasized such pride became interesting rhetorically.

For example, while I cannot say whether or not “our marathon” was influenced by a particular event on a subconscious level, an important baseball player in Boston also invoked the community with his use of the word “our” in a colorful, live moment that is still tweeted and
referred to on social media today in 2016. According to an archived tweet on *Our Marathon*, “On April 20th, Boston Red Sox player David Ortiz said ‘This is our fucking city’ at Fenway Park during an address to fans that was broadcast live and uncensored. Later that day, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Julius Genachowski used The FCC's official Twitter account to comment on the incident” (“The FCC on David Ortiz (Twitter)”).

This was a powerful moment for the city of Boston and viewers from all over the world. Within minutes, videos of David Ortiz’s speech were all over *Twitter* and *Facebook* prompting the FCC to tweet out their own response within an hour. While Ortiz’s expletive was surely compelling to many, his passion for “our” city represented a cultural response that highlights a caricature of the Boston Strong mentality: not known for being warm and fuzzy, Bostonians embraced the in-your-face passion of one of “our” guys representing “our” city. The rhetoric of “our” was important to a city coming together in a time of healing, and the archive picked up on a consistent digital invocation in their main title. As a decolonized archive, “our” signaled something to the discourse community of healing and history in Boston thus prompting a sense of pride and solidarity, which will be explored via the stories themselves later in this chapter.

In addition to “Our Marathon,” the archive kept the academic subtitle “The Boston Bombing Digital Archive.” As described above, when the project started we referred to it as an archive, but we immediately understood how much words would matter in a site meant for
engagements through reading and writing; we had to be cognizant of the varied uses of the archive by our two main discourse communities. Hopwood explains, “We had to be careful about the language that we used in terms of people who were doing academic research—who would have an entirely different set of questions coming into it—whereas if it were just to be a community memorial. It would have to reach across a lot of different audiences and educational backgrounds.” This was a really important conversation in even naming the archive. Hopwood recounts, “We were even thinking about words like, ‘Do we use the words “digital archive?” Do we call it something else? What do we call it?’” Keeping the phrase “digital archive” lends the site academic credibility without harming the welcoming appearance the archive aims to portray.

More important changes occurred to the title as well as to the text below it. With funding from WBUR, the title grew to include information about the Oral History Project. Below this main banner, our other primary funder—Northeastern University—announces itself as the host for this “community project.”

While I argue that these additions to the title and overall website impact participation in terms of inviting and distancing certain communities, which will be explored in Chapter 4, in terms of an audience’s digital interaction with the archive, these markers add a level of credibility to the site. Those engaging with Our Marathon would also be engaging with these institutions in this digital
space. This was evidenced by our interactions with community members when promoting the archive. People often recognized Northeastern University and knew someone attending or who had attended; at one fundraising event, someone asked to take a photo of me at our promotional table so that she could share with her mother that she had “met someone from WBUR.” For future researchers, one can imagine that the archive’s credibility will be directly attached to perceptions of these institutions as well. In essence, the choice of language to name the archive was deliberate—to reach different discourse communities and span public/academic divide.

These institutional connections were also important to the archive financially, and they clearly impacted the overall “look” of the archive. In digital spaces, the aesthetics of a site matter greatly: the archive itself is not located in the dusty basement of a building, like *The Boston Globe*, nor does it take much effort to access, like the Hemingway Collection (which is actually in a very beautiful location and space, though the materials themselves live in closets). In this section of my dissertation, some of the adjectives I have used to describe *Our Marathon* are clean, friendly, and welcoming. As a Humanities-based team, we understood design in terms of the rhetoric of the site, but we reached out to volunteers to share our sketches for what the site would look like and accomplish. Pepper recounts how one of the volunteers told us about the “F pattern” in web design, which follows the natural eye movement of how people look at web texts (from top to bottom, scanning for important information, and then left to right). Having volunteers with even basic web design knowledge was useful, and eventually a professional web designer was hired to clean up the interface, but all of the texts of the website—from the name of the archive to the prompt to “Share” a story—and decisions of logo and colors (blue and yellow to represent the 2013 Boston Marathon’s colors, which change each year) were based on
branding ourselves in relation to those that would need a place to share and learn as well as a professional source for future researchers.

While there were clearly “audiences” for *Our Marathon* in terms of those “watching” the archive’s progress—larger sponsoring institutions like the university and radio station—because of the actions being asked of the community and research populations of the archive, thinking in terms of discourse communities is much more productive. A discourse community draws attention to the social view and action of its members; rather than passively viewing *Our Marathon*, the intention of its creation was to inspire participation both immediately and in the future, and the digital allowed for this dual-focus.

**Access:** How does the digital affect access to *Our Marathon*?

As a departure from traditional archives, memorial spaces can also be privileged sites in which people must obtain a certain type of access. For example, if one wants to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, they must be able to travel to Washington, D.C.; on a more localized level, the same is true for those wanting to visit memorial sites of their passed loved ones (e.g. cemeteries). To co-construct memory in a digital space, the intended discourse communities need to be able to access that space. When thinking about “access” to *Our Marathon*, there is the individual way one needs to engage with digital literacy in order to participate in the site, and there is also the “path” one must take to participate on the site. While the digital alleviates barriers in terms of access to participate, as was seen in the previous section, the choices of the creators of the archive can build other barriers. In this section I think through digital literacies in general before thinking specifically about how the
archive guides a participant on a digital path, which challenges notions of this archive’s decolonial spirit through its limitations.

To talk about digital literacy can mean everything from how to compose a multimodal text, to having a functional understanding of how to use or create technologies, to an understanding of the social and political forces surrounding such decisions as multimodal composing and using technologies (see Kress; Selber; Selfe). In Stuart Selber’s *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* he imagines digital literacy in three stages: functional, critical, and rhetorical. He essentially argues that, as technology progresses, one should not only have access to passive functional literacy; rather, technology users should be rhetorically and critically aware of their position as active agents in their own meaning-making practices and understanding of the world. Specifically with *Our Marathon*, contributors were engaging with the complicated task of entering a meta-community—a digital community that represents a physical community—and sharing a personal account of experience with tragedy through writing. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe explain that although an individual’s actions and technological literacies are shaped by his/her economical, cultural, and historical environment, so too is one’s cultural ecology13 shaped by one’s technological literacy. The modes of digital circulation matter in the mediation of relations among groups, communities, and nations, because this digital circulation often constructs and reinforces binary oppositions and rhetorics of superiority (Queen 472). The potential for broader audiences and situations here calls for individuals to consider how their writing selves are being mediated through technology and sent out into the world to engage with others through the concept of sharing. For example, while the process for writing in *Our

13 “With this term, we hope to suggest how literacy is related in complex ways to existing cultural milieu; educational practices and values; social formations like race, class, and gender; political and economic trends and events; family practices and experiences; and material conditions—among many other factors...we can understand literacy as a set of practices and values only when we properly situate out studies within the context of a particular historical period, a particular cultural milieu, and a specific cluster of material conditions” (Hawisher and Selfe 5).
Marathon is quite straightforward, the intended function of the site as an academic archive dissuaded some contributors from participating because they were uncomfortable imagining their stories potentially being interpreted in unintended ways.

At a glance Our Marathon is almost completely accessible should one have access to the Internet, but contributors do need to have a certain level of digital fluency to engage with the archive in terms of being able to follow the archive’s prompts for sharing stories as well as for understanding what it means to share. Before walking through the steps of contributing a story to Our Marathon, it should be noted that the archive is an Omeka installation. Omeka is “a free, flexible, and open source web-publishing platform for the display of library, museum, archives, and scholarly collections and exhibitions.” It was designed with non-IT specialists in mind, and it can be customized for one’s needs through a series of plugins, but specialists are able to manipulate code for their own purposes. Omeka was not specifically built for crowdsourced projects, but its interface—especially the way one could curate digital “exhibits”—was an attractive feature for shaping the archive.

To submit a story to the archive, upon visiting the homepage there are two buttons that prompt you to “Share” as seen below.

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14 While this is a key caveat, it is not the only caveat; I will revisit the idea of “access” in light of community participation in a later chapter.
15 https://omeka.org/about/
Two share buttons are circled in red in the image above.

From here, one is guided through a series of steps to contribute a story. The linear model was based on the same design style as Tumblr, a popular blogging platform.

After writing the title and story (or copying and pasting the text into the box), and uploading an optional photo to go with the story, the arrows guide the participant through the next steps, which
includes selecting where the story took place, when the story took place, details about the
contributor, and the final stages of sharing.

WHERE DID THIS HAPPEN?

Find a Location by Address:

Second step.

WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?

April 2013

Third step.
Fourth step.

The site was designed for public participation, which can be seen in the straightforward, 5-step process of submitting an artifact; however, for this to be a straightforward process, the contributors must have some fluency in their digitally literate practices. For example, in her
interview Olivia, a 60-year-old marathon runner from the Midwest (the 2013 Boston Marathon had been her 75th marathon), explained that she does not have Internet access from her home, though she does at work, and she does like to write things like Letters to the Editor and other communications for advocacy. When asked how she would describe the act of submitting her story to the archive, she draws attention to the fact that she was able even to do so in the library setting:

Olivia: I thought it was nice that people were invited to do that. Anybody could do it. It wasn’t an exclusive coverall. Being part of a group of people, not just me, but other people were there, typing away, and everything. I took a little longer. I hope I didn’t have any grammatical errors or typos; I just wanted it to be halfway decent.

When reflecting on being invited to participate in a Share-Your-Story Event at the Boston Public Library before the 2014 Boston, Olivia recounts not the actions she took on a computer to submit her story but the sensation of being a part of a group and the slight insecurity that many writers face when writing a story. The technology is absent from her reflection, which I read as a sign of success of the archive: had it been tenuous or difficult, Olivia’s recollections would be different. Furthermore, Olivia’s experience with the technology of the archive is representative of all of the women I interviewed: not one really commented on the archival space itself but rather focused on the community and healing aspect of story sharing. As will be shown in the following chapter, there were clear takeaways for those who chose to share stories with Our Marathon that associate an inherent trust in the archival space such as sharing stories for personal healing and sharing stories for larger historical purposes.

In thinking about access and Our Marathon, it was understood that potential participants had a certain digital fluency and access to the Internet. For this reason, the creators built a site that functioned in ways familiar to some other platforms that also walk participants down a specific path. While this affords certain ease, this uniformity can also limit participation in ways.
For example, because of its state as a born-digital archive looking to, at least initially, mostly curate born-digital artifacts, the archive’s use of the verb “share” can be seen as an important temporal cultural response: with billions of people on social-media networks, an understanding of “sharing” information is well within the cultural fabric of digital citizens; however, the connotations of sharing on social-media sites is fundamentally different than sharing with an archive. Moreover, without any prompts to aid in walking participants back through their memories—a key component of our oral history interview guides—the “clean” look of the plain white story box could be quite daunting: this was not the same as typing a reaction on social media via a phone application.

Preservation and Location: How does the digital affect issues of preservation and senses of location with Our Marathon?

On the surface, preservation and location may seem quite obvious for a digital archive: materials will be able to live in their digital form, seemingly forever, on the Internet. In this section I debate the validity of preservation and location being a given with a digital archive in its literal sense; then, in thinking about preservation and location in decolonial ways, I offer a larger interpretation of these terms looking forward.

When it comes to digital archives we understand that technology is not infallible and digitized and born-digital artifacts are in no less danger than their physical counterparts. With physical archives there is always the chance of an unavoidable disaster decimating a collection, but for the things archivists can control, there are plenty of best practices for handling archival material such as temperature-controlled rooms that are under lock and key and protocols for handling old paper so that the oils from one’s fingers do not affect the text.
With *Our Marathon*, one can assume that Northeastern University has committed to keeping the archive on its server space; however, Northeastern will need to be committed to updating the site as technology changes. For example, in her article “Digital Preservation: A Time Bomb for Digital Libraries,” Margaret Hedstrom reminds us that digital forms are vulnerable to technological obsolescence: “Devices, processes, and software for recording and storing information are being replaced with new products and methods on a regular three- to five-year cycle, driven primarily by market forces. Digital works which are created using new or emerging software applications are especially vulnerable to software obsolescence because standards for encoding, representation, retrieval, and other functions take time to develop” (191). In reality, digital preservation remains challenging because one is not usually aware that a change will impact digital artifacts until it actually happens. So while there might be broader access to the archive immediately, it is uncertain how the archive will fare in the future.

The first “location” for *Our Marathon* was on *Omeka*, but the archive was eventually moved to the Northeastern University Digital Repository Service. McGrath expounds on our initial decision to use *Omeka* as a platform:

Because we were interested in not just gathering items, but keeping them around, we has to think about long-term preservation and documenting various dimensions of this content: *Omeka* does a lot of that really well. *Omeka* could set up projects like ours pretty quickly…. You could do something like set up a contribution plugin, where people could click through a few things, with some modifications that we made, put in their content, and their content would be organized in a way it was legible.
If you’re gathering content through other partners and things like that, you could get large batches of content, like the stuff from the Boston City Archives, into *Omeka* really quickly. If there’s recurring metadata, you can put that stuff there, too. *Omeka* also allows for the creation of exhibits…. The other things that *Omeka* is useful for is you get people adding [metadata] to the content, [and if] you want it organized in a different way and to add tags to it, you can do that.

He then moves to speak about our migration into the Digital Repository Service:

The way that Northeastern has currently set up their repository and the Digital Scholarship Group [which officially came into being in January 2014] is that you’re putting stuff into their repository, and then you’re pulling it out and curating it in certain ways. It would be interesting to see if this project started in 2015: to see how a project of similar nature, God forbid, would look. Repositories tend to be where things are just all wrapped up and done.

[With *Omeka*] you get contributions from people who don’t have time to add metadata but have hundreds of pictures…. You can go and easily clean up large amounts of metadata in *Omeka*… Digital repositories and the people that run them tend not to like that much of messing around in them.

One affordance of the archive moving from *Omeka* to the Archives and Special Collections at Northeastern University is that we—those of us who created the archive—have had a relationship with these librarians throughout the project. In his interview, McGrath reflected specifically on one librarian—Giordana Mecagni, the Head of the Archives and Special Collections—and confidently concluded that while he knows she has her own limitations in terms of funding, she is also resourceful: “Around the five year anniversary, I wouldn't be
surprised if she had found some way of reopening it up and engaging with it or maybe like 10
years from now. It’s just a matter of making sure the stuff still exists long after the initial
participants have sort of move on to other things.”

It would be fair to assume that a university server would be a good place for the
preservation and location of an archive. When thinking about preservation and location in
decolonial ways, however, what makes Northeastern University the best place to house the
archive? What might be potentially lost or silenced by the university? As McGrath mentions
above, it would not be surprising to see the Digital Repository Service reopen Our Marathon at
particular historical moments, such as the 10-year anniversary of the bombing. The digital
allowed for many people to participate while the events were fresh in their memories, but my
data shows that about half of the participants who contributed their stories to Our Marathon did
so at a Share-Your-Story event meaning that they did not necessarily have to engage with the
archive on their own time/devices: moreover, story sharers would be prompted by their
surroundings, such as Boston Strong memorabilia and others typing their stories. There are
interesting borders here between university and community that beckon attention. Northeastern
University offers a particular viewpoint on the events, one that most likely will invite other
academics to continue recontextualizing the past memories of stories. Perhaps the next phase of
this archive needs to think through putting community partners in positions of power,
particularly if it is interested in underrepresented populations contributing their stories.

The Digital and the Stories

So far I have shown some of the affordances and limitations of the digital community
project of this case study through the archive’s pragmatic functions of aspects like preservation
as well as through its theoretical functions, such as its requests of digitally literate participants. In this way, I begin to start to disrupt some of the archival silences of *Our Marathon* by drawing explicit attention to its creation and utility—a perspective that was afforded to me through my participation in creating the archive. In the next section of this chapter, I look at the construction of the stories themselves. How does the *digital* nature of the archive impact the stories? What does it look like when the majority of story sharers *compose* their stories *for* the archive? In this section I look at a particular “grammar” of the Internet in which users were experiencing “the digital” as a writing space in this specific moment. For example, a few years before the marathon bombings, a hashtag (“#”) would not have been legible; during this event it was a punctuation mark, part of the grammar of the Internet that both writers and readers would understand.

As has been explained previously in this dissertation, many people found out about the marathon bombing events, and were recording their own thoughts, through social media sites. For example, consider this story about a local firefighter’s engagements with *Twitter* (emphases mine):

**Title:** *A Newton Firefighter's point of view* (mazzoladario)

**Text:** I am a firefighter in Newton stationed at the commonwealth Ave/Washington St. Station, station number 2. I was working the day of the 2013 Boston Marathon. We were not informed about the bombing at the time of the crisis. The police were driving the marathon route telling people they could not finish and to get on shuttles. We switched our radios to Boston fire and were able to piece together what happened. The police didn't want us sharing what happened with civilians, but we thought everyone should be aware. We started to inform the runners about what was happening. I went on Twitter to see what people were saying and hashtagged *BostonStrong* to show the Newton Firefighters support, remembering what all my friends went through with the devastations in Vermont (*#VermontStrong*). A few days later I was back on twitter and come to find out I was one of the first people to write *#BostonStrong*. I don't know why that of all the things happening that day and week, that's what made me proud. I am running the 2014 Boston Marathon with a team of 12 other Newton firefighters to show our support and to give back as much as we can.
Or the way this (much-abbreviated for this dissertation) story ends:

**Title:** Movie Day (jenelle.pope)
**Text:** I was planning on spending the day with my husband, Greg, and our friends...to watch friends roll by.... We picked a spot on the upslope of heartbreak hill and settled in with our picnic to watch and wait. It was actually a really nice day.... It was on the greenline that Kathy's phone rang and her voice went up 2 octaves.... Then started the movie version of the rest of my day....

Days later Greg and I woke up to his phone early in the morning. BU put campus on lockdown per the Boston police. The manhunt was underway. That was the day I felt most connected to everything that was going on. Everyone wanted this butt turd found and no one cared if it was dead or alive. We just wanted it to end. When they finally got the remaining man in the boat in some guy’s driveway, Tufts exploded. We lived blocks from campus and bars were just up the street. The night passed with drunken students yelling and celebrating in the streets. You would have thought the Sox won the World Series (oh wait that happened too).

#BostonStrong

These two stories offer first-hand accounts of how two people experienced the Boston Marathon bombings and include the phrase #BostonStrong. The firefighter’s inclusion of the hashtag in his story illustrates his use of it on Twitter in a personally prideful way; the “Movie Day” writer’s story is representative of how many other story sharers used the hashtag: it was a sign off to the stories that signaled solidarity. Hashtags are not traditionally found in “stories”—they are linking devices to connect certain ideas in digital environments through commonly used tags. However, in the archive—a digital space for writing—hashtags did surface as exemplified above, and they underscore the story ending high note. In a digital archival space, social conventions of the digital permeate the consciousness of those who experienced the marathon bombings and their aftermath. Despite being personal stories, these are also moments of connection for the writers. It is difficult to assess whether or not for certain the archive sponsored this type of linguistic choice—one could imagine a scenario in which someone learned about the archive through social media, which might include something like #BostonStrong in its promotion—but it is clear
that there is a certain discourse community being represented in such stories as these. Particularly in “Movie Day,” which is representative of how many invoked used hashtags, the hashtag is an intertextual feature that would read awkwardly in a different context: because of the archive’s commitment to memorializing the tragedy, and because of the digital cultural moment of the marathon bombings, hashtags find meaning as storytelling devices in a way they might not in a different kairotic moment.

Stories like these also represent certain knowledge of literacy in terms of knowing that a story typically follows an arc; however, whereas the Newton firefighter’s story is using a hashtag to specifically reflect on his use of the hashtag that day, the Movie Day writer shows how reactions to events can become behavioralized: “The performance of a social practice may require that participants smile, or look solemn, or even cry…. What matters here is not what the participants really feel—such ‘real feelings,’ if they figure in a text, can be considered elements added in the recontextualization—what matters is whether or not the participants act out their feelings in accordance with the social expectations or not” (van Leeuwen 19). For “Movie Day,” #BostonStrong shows an awareness of an Internet grammar that will allow her to recontextualize her thoughts amongst others’ stories; in other words, #BostonStrong was not part of the writer’s actual story of that day: it was essentially imported into her new rendering of such a story and her own expectations for audience and participation.

What becomes interesting about this is that sharing “your” story in the archive becomes sharing “our” story. While not everyone is a writer who can craft beautiful sentences and compose dramatic tension, this corpus of publicly submitted stories alerts a reader to how public writers showcase literacy through their conceptions of what a story is or what it is not. Although the digital allows space allows for all conceptions of story to “count” as part of the history, fairly
typical stories come through when reconstructed, and one can imagine that the dominant stories circulated by the media impacted individuals’ literate practices particularly when it comes to the punctuation mark of a hashtag.

“Boston Strong” was an important rallying cry for the city and those affected by the bombings, and the phrase functions as an extension of participants’ digitally literate senses. In James Paul Gee’s “What is Literacy?” he explains how one moves about different discourses that are comprised of shared background knowledge and ways of using language in certain social interactions. He refers to a discourse as an “identity kit” and explains how we “put on” different identities based on the expectancies of the specific interaction, which is a common thread we see in studies of writing (see Fishman, Lundsford, McGregor, and Otuteye; LeCourt; Kill). These identities happen naturally—the way a teacher interacts with a student is different from how she or he interacts with a friend—but in an online environment there is more room for choices in how one performs identity particularly through choices of discourse (see Almjed; Sabatino; Laflen and Fiorenza; Liang; Santos and Leahy; Vrooman). As most of our story collecting efforts circled around the one-year anniversary of the bombings, in the archive one finds a clear feeling of camaraderie and pride that came from those who felt impacted by the bombings as runners and spectators. Theo van Leeuwen draws our attention to the idea of recontextualization through discourse. He writes, “Recontextualization not only makes the recontextualized social practices explicit to a greater or lesser degree, it also makes them pass through the filter of the practices in which they are inserted. The way in which this happens is rarely transparent to the participants of the recontextualizing practice, and is usually embedded in their common sense, in their habits of relating to each other, and in what they take the purpose of recontextualizing practice to be” (12-
Van Leeuwen goes on to explain that recontextualization is also recursive meaning that the more one attempts to recontextualize a practice, the further away it can get from reality.

Title: Untitled (lindaw)
Text: ...I am back and whether I finish or not, getting to the start again is my defiance of violence and my support for all those affected and this incredible city of Boston.

Boston Strong forever.

Title: A Moment in History (bkwalsh7)
Text: ...My daughter ran in 2011 and 2012, and I sat in those bleachers at the finish line. This year she has come from Colorado to run Marathon 2014 in memory and honor and steadfast resiliency.

We are Boston Strong and will not be discouraged or defeated.

Title: Ignorance is Bliss (nancywinchester67)
Text: ...Undeterred, I am back again this year, running strong for Boston and for the freedoms we all share and sometimes take for granted in this great country we call the United States of America. Boston Strong.

During peak times of story collection, the phrase was quite prevalent in the archive. For example, on April 19, 2014, two days before the 118th running of the Boston Marathon, we finished our weeklong Share-Your-Story event at the Boston Public Library, which is right next to the finish line of the marathon; 54 stories were composed and shared with the archive, and the phrase “Boston Strong” appeared 18 times in 12 stories. In the stories themselves, it is often a unifying, rallying phrase that appears at the end of a story like a solidarity signoff.

In Literacy in the New Media Age Gunther Kress writes, “In the new communicational world there are now choices about how what is to be represented should be represented: in what mode, in what genre, in what ensembles of modes16 and genres and on what occasions” (117). As a venue for public writing, Our Marathon does not afford participants much choice in compositional modes—though this does not necessarily mean that the constrained modality

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16 The term “mode” is a little sticky as some scholarship seems to suggest that aspects of texts like color and font are modes, while others do not seem to include design elements like these and instead use the term mode to refer to things like images, videos, sounds, etc. (for more see Jewitt).
would constrain invention—but we do see an interesting intertextuality, that is the pieces of texts writers borrow and put together to form new discourse, that comes from engagements with genre conventions. When thinking about the use of hashtags or using the phrase “Boston Strong,” the stories themselves highlight an awareness of audience—particularly a digital audience who would engage with something like #BostonStrong on social media.

When participants were asked about the audiences that they imagined would be interested in their stories, the answers varied from students, to people who wanted to know what happened, to other people who are looking to heal. As will be examined more fully in the following chapter, understanding the rhetorical situation for writing was complicated by the archive’s historical and memorial functions. Furthermore, while many story sharers sat down and wrote stories at our Share-Your-Story events, some story sharers had written their stories previous to learning of the marathon archive—these contributors had written something for their own self-sponsored purposes. In *Literacy in American Lives*, Brandt discusses self-sponsored literacy as those occasions where people engage in literate acts outside of any constraints or expectations of any formal institution (171). While this can be likened to the “extracurriculum of composition” (Gere), when it comes to the contributors making choices of sharing their writing publicly, agency becomes a much larger focus and one’s digital literacy—including access to using the archive and an understanding of what contributing a story means—further complicates how the digital most impacts the archive. Stories that were once personal were now being given a “home” where story sharers could (meaningfully) forget about them, which will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

Other story sharers had previously written their stories for audiences like family and friends, and others had written for larger publication as well. For example, in “Running Boston:
A bittersweet accomplishment,” which ran on the blog for The Huffington Post, the author recounts the experience of finishing the Boston Marathon in 2013 for the first time and the short-lived sense of accomplishment.

Title: Running Boston: A bittersweet accomplishment (irvine.hea)
Text: The horrific event that occurred at the world's most coveted finish line has forever marked the Boston Marathon. For the 17,000 or so runners who crossed, their accomplishment is darkened by a coward's attack on the greatest spectators in the world. For the approximately 5,000 runners whose run to Boston was halted, they have unfinished business to take care of.

And for me, I carry my finisher's medal with a heavy heart. A bittersweet accomplishment, really....
I qualified for the 2013 race through the American Liver Foundation's Run for Research charity team. I raised more than $5,000 for liver research, something more difficult than the training itself....

The gun went off. Some 10 paces in, my eyes welled up. A smile came across my face. "I am running the Boston Marathon," I thought....
I enjoyed the last mile or two of downhill before making my way to Newton Wellesley Hospital (where I was born nearly 26 years ago). The American Liver Foundation had set up camp here, and I had been one of the first team members to run by in my orange "Run for Research" singlet....
I make the famous right turn onto Hereford Street. Slight uphill. And then the even more famous left turn onto Boylston Street. I check my watch. Well under four hours. I thought about slowing down. I had sub-four in the bag, why keep pushing? But then I remember something Steve "Pre" Prefontaine said. And fittingly, what a friend wrote on his sign back at Heartbreak Hill. "To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift." I had to leave it all on the course. The medics could take care of me if I collapsed. Sprint....
Once we were safely out of the city I came to the realization that we wouldn't celebrate my sub-four marathon (3:56:41). We could try, but it would be tainted....
My mind is resilient. The tears come less now. But it's hard to hear people call my finish line a crime scene. But I'm a marathoner. I will overcome. And more importantly, I will toe the line in Hopkinton in 2014.

Originally published on April 19, 2013 (with an update on June 19, 2013), this author’s text would most likely find a larger readership through The Huffington Post than with an academic archive, yet she still chose to submit the piece. During our follow-up interview, when I asked the author why she chose to submit her story to Our Marathon, she answered, “I had already written
a piece and when I saw that Our Marathon was looking for submissions, I thought that it was important to get it out there. We all have our stories. I bought the book by [Hal Higdon 4:09:43: Boston 2013 Through the Eyes of the Runners]... It was all different stories because we all have stories. I thought that wherever I can show mine, I want to be a part of it, and then remind people that it was a great race until it wasn’t” (Diana).

Although the author believes in story sharing for the sake of history and memory, the digital state of each compositional venue offers something different:

In the screenshots of The Huffington Post and Our Marathon above, there is a different rhetorical function of both the story and the author’s position to the story. In the newspaper’s byline, a small image of the author accompanies the author’s name, and the image shows a clear sky in Boston without any people. On the page for Our Marathon, the author’s own image is clear: it is more personal, less businesslike, and more or less distracting depending on your taste: do you
just want a story about running the marathon that day, or do you want to imagine yourself as this runner that marathon day? The design of these two pages gifts the reader two different experiences with the same story. When asked about sharing the story with the archive, the author repeats the phrase: “we all have [our] story” (Diana). When asked why stories are important, the author explains, “It’s history. Without projects like Our Marathon, without archives, without newspapers, there’s nothing. History can be rewritten, that whole thing” (Diana). In this context, the author signals to the idea that archives are somewhat neutral—they will not rewrite history—but we know this is simply not true and have to view archives as part of the history: a very specific part, as this dissertation aims to show.

Conclusion

In the field of Rhetoric and Composition, scholars like Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe’s edited collections—such as Critical Perspectives on Computers and Composition Studies (1989) and Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies (1999)—almost act as a map as to which technologies are important to digital literacies and what questions they raise: in the 1980s, the burgeoning field of computers and composition was concerned with how computers change the way we see and construct meaning from texts (Selfe; Haas; Collins; Hawisher), the values of revision helpers like spellcheck (Theismeyer; Gerrard), and knowledge support (Herrmann; Holdstein); in the 1990s, scholars are concerned about the changing practices of literacy (Baron; Hesse; Kress; George and Shoos), ethical and feminist concerns (Romano; Hawisher and Sullivan), and the construction of identity (Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola; Eldred; Joyce).

Although we see a move from issues of working with computers themselves to larger concerns of changes in literacies more broadly and concerns of self in relation to technology, we
can see this work anchored in the complexities of literacy in general. Discussions of social, political, and economic issues in computers and composition align with Brandt’s work that was published just a couple years after Passions: in Literacy in American Lives, Brandt explores her research subjects’ facets of literacy acquisition and explains,

Literacy had proven to be a difficult and contentious topic of investigation largely because its place in American culture has become so complex and even conflicted. Expanding literacy undeniably has been an instrument for more democratic access to learning, political participation, and upward mobility. At the same time, it has become one of the sharpest tools for stratification and denial of opportunity (2).

Brandt does not spend much time discussing computer usage in her studies, but we see how these sentiments have only grown more conflicted as digital spaces of literacy practices become more common, and where at once we have a democratizing resource that also works to further societal disparities and heighten the capitalist interests Brandt concludes about literacy.

Although the working definition Brandt is using in her study is how her subjects learn to read and write, we understand that adding the word “digital” before literacy does not simply translate into learning how to read and write in digital environments because technology is inherently political (Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola; Selber; Hawisher and Selfe) and pencil and paper is a vastly different technology than a computer both economically and socially (Baron). To talk about digital literacy can mean everything from how to compose a multimodal text, to having a functional understanding of how to use or create technologies, to an understanding of the social and political forces surrounding such decisions as multimodal composing and using technologies.
While Brandt’s initial conception of literacy sponsorship has to do with her research subjects’ memories of learning how to read and write in the 20th century (i.e. exclusively in alphabetic-printed mediums), Selfe and Hawisher explore issues of literacy sponsorship through digital texts and computer-mediated literacies. Selfe and Hawisher find that it is not always one’s social or economic conditions that impact digitally-literate acts; rather, citing Pierre Bourdieu, the idea of “cultural capital” gives agency to participants in the information age (Selfe and Hawisher Literate Lives 56). Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital—symbolic, non-economic elements such as taste, values, and traditions—figures greatly into what Selfe and Hawisher term a cultural ecology, which is shaped by one’s technological literacy. The term cultural ecology is meant to suggest “how literacy is related in complex ways to existing cultural milieu; educational practices and values; social formations like race, class, and gender; political and economic trends and events; family practices and experiences; and material conditions—among many other factors…we can understand literacy as a set of practices and values only when we properly situate out studies within the context of a particular historical period, a particular cultural milieu, and a specific cluster of material conditions” (Hawisher and Selfe 5). Our Marathon sought to capitalize on the cultural factors of the marathon bombings in order to elicit literate actions of potential participants in an effort to co-construct memory and knowledge of an event.

Because we were anticipating community members wanting to share their stories on their own time, we wanted to make the process as straightforward as possible as can be seen in the breakdown of how one would share their story earlier in this chapter. In reality, however, more than half of the story sharers participated in this project due to some sort of direct contact with the creators of the archive. This interaction with the archive’s staff members changed the way some even viewed the archive as shown in this “story”:
This is not a typical “story” (in terms of stories themselves and in terms of stories found in the archive); however, it does highlight a major tension of the public’s perception of the archive: what does it mean to be a “digital” archive? What is the difference between calling it an archive as opposed to a website? Share-Your-Story events tended to include some physical artifacts that library patrons could look at, which created a certain atmosphere, but this also created confusion on whether or not we were an archive housed at Northeastern University and what a digital archive even is. In the story above, the contributor treated the digital space as digital guestbook that records his presence at the event. Again, while this is not a “typical” story—as in, it is not an account of the person’s past—it functions for a typical purpose of the archive and represents knowledge of digital literacy—that is how we use digital writing in our daily lives. Our Marathon participants were leaving records of their presence during and after these tragic events. While the contributors we observed mostly sat down and recorded their personal thoughts individually—as opposed to writing in an environment with drafts and feedback that might influence the writing itself—there tends to be somewhat classic variations of the marathon story that people submitted.

When we began discussions about the archive we were interesting in capturing all forms of stories, and we were really interested in capturing social media updates, as social media would give a look into people’s impulsive communications in a way that is fundamentally different from the longer stories I have been looking at in this chapter. In Joyce Walker’s “Narratives in the database: Memorializing September 11th online” she speaks to the public rhetoric of narratives in different types of digital databases surrounding September 11th, such as online
obituaries and news-related sites, and discusses the impulse to communicate when feeling a sense of loss (122). This was one reason that the *Our Marathon* team members were so interested in capturing social media updates: the way that people were connecting online could be seen as “microstories” that might be of importance to future scholars. Cordell reflects,

One of the things that we talked a lot about in the early days was that we wanted to able to archive social media. One enormous difference between an event like September 11th and the Boston Marathon bombing was that the latter was completely defined by this saturation of social media in the culture.

It was documented. It was tweeted. It was Instagrammed…. The story of that event was so defined by social media, and we wanted to capture that…. We didn’t have a lot of models to go after, to go on. We knew that the Library of Congress was supposedly archiving *Twitter*: we got in touch with the Library of Congress and found that their attempts to develop protocols for our archiving *Twitter* were not very far advanced.

While we did not end up archiving social media the way we had hoped to—we were able to accept screenshots and some other *Twitter* data—as a real-time archive, we actually do not know how future scholars will use the archival material we collected. In his highly influential work *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida argues, “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (11). Derrida likens the centrality of the archive to the existence of a democratic society. This notion of a democratic space was an impetus for archives like *Our Marathon*; however, even naming something an “archive” can cause friction against its
democratizing potential when thinking of other popular conceptions of what archives are: an archive of documents is static, never changing; an archive is under lock and key; an archive is of utmost important historical records (see Theimer).

While some popular notions may consider the archive apolitical, in academia the political nature of the archive is well documented through growing discourse from many academic disciplines that do not necessarily neatly align (see especially Manoff). The production of digital archives complicate this further for as much as the digital aspect helps alleviate certain aspects, it can also complicate the same aspects and offer new challenges such as when thinking about access. In this chapter, I have explored how the digital impacts the archive of this case study. The digital impacts the archive itself—in terms of purpose, discourse, access, location and preservation—in ways that alleviate issues of physical archives but also create new challenges. The digital format also impacts some of the stories as seen with the writers who used tagged phrases in their compositions despite the archive not functioning like a social media site. In the following chapter, I examine the complicated nature of a site as that aims to both historicize and memorialize a moment.
Works Cited


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Chapter 3: The Archive and the Historial

Introduction

Title: Laundry Mat (JRBrinker)

Text: Following the Boston Marathon bombings, the hotel where my family and I were staying was evacuated. We passed time by grabbing a bite to eat and wandering around the surrounding neighborhoods, but as time went on, my sisters, who finished the marathon about 30 minutes before the bombs went off and were still wrapped in their foil blankets, started to get cold and all of our phones were dead or quickly running out of battery. We came across a small, underground laundry mat on Columbus Ave. called Five Star Laundry and asked the owners if we could sit inside to keep warm and use their outlets to charge our phones. The owners did not speak much English, but their little kids did, and they translated our explanation of what had happened and our request to the owners who immediately welcomed us in. The kids became increasingly curious about my sisters and the rest of my family, and before we knew it, they were chatting up a storm with us, putting on my sisters' medals, and even sitting on their laps. As a gesture of gratitude, my husband went to the convenience store down the road and came back with candy for the children. This picture shows my sisters with the children, candy in hand. During such a dark time, it was reassuring and comforting to experience the hospitality and friendliness of the people at Five Star Laundry.

“Laundry Mat” represents a key moment for the digital archive of this case study: it was the first publicly submitted artifact that Our Marathon’s creators did not directly solicit. When we noticed that someone had found the archive and decided to share her story, it was a moment
of celebration: what we were setting out to accomplish was actually happening. When the artifact was submitted on May 22, 2014—less than a month after the archive was even conceptualized—although we had not officially launched the archive someone found our site and navigated through our contribution function, which was currently in beta at the time as can be seen in Chapter 2. “Laundry Mat” also represents a story that might be lost without an appropriate venue for memorialization; it is part of a supplementary historical narrative about how members of a community experienced the Boston Marathon bombings and their aftermath.

When thinking about the historical moment of the Boston Marathon bombings and the creation of *Our Marathon*, the digital was a key factor in communications about the marathon, methods of sharing and healing, and access to tools to create such a repository. The archive itself also came into being at a historical moment where various communities were finding legitimized empowerment through digital sharing. In the years leading up to the Boston Marathon bombings, many political actions were being taken through social media, especially through *Twitter*: the “Twitter Revolution” played a major role the Iranian election protests (2009-2010), the Egyptian Revolution (2011), and many other location-based events. During this time we also saw the growth of “hashtag activism”—digital campaigns to raise consciousness particularly when it comes to issues of social justice. Furthermore, with over a billion active users on *Facebook* and hundreds of millions on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, sharing personal sentiments within a digital network has become very common. It is so common, in fact, that in 2009 *Facebook* even had to come up with a protocol for deceased members’ pages.

Presently in 2016, we are critically aware of the convergence of the intimate act of sharing with the social-media act of sharing. When creating *Our Marathon* in May 2013, we wanted to gather as much information as possible around this event so that someone in the
future, looking back, would not only see the big outlines of the story that you get in the media—from who did it, where they hid, how the police found them—but also the various ways “regular” people experienced the event as well. When interacting with community members this was often a tension the archive staff encountered because potential story sharers did not know if their “regular” stories really mattered—a misconception the archive staff often had to explain. Others simply did not want their words out in “public”—a fair choice. Cordell reflects on these issues:

This is something that we know as collectors: historians are very interested in those [“regular”] things. But I think the general public doesn’t necessarily know or believe that. [Some people] think, “Well, nothing really happened to me. I just was living my life, and it was a weird week, and then it was over.” We know this, in fact.

Some people didn’t share because they felt that it was private. They didn’t want [their stories] to be out in the world—even the notion of contributing [so] it would only be seen by historians: it was not something they wanted to do, and that seems to me a perfectly reasonable response.

The slogan for *Our Marathon*—“no story too small”—represented a key motive for the creators of the archive: this site was meant to be a democratizing space in which anyone could participate and add their stories to the public history of the event; the more voices, the richer and more nuanced that formation of public memory would be. To solicit material, the archive team often had to pitch the idea that contributing was a public good and that sharing stories would be beneficial for historical and memorial purposes.

What does it mean for something to be a “public good?” What public, and what good? How do researchers’ ideas of public good align with those they seek to convince to contribute?
In thinking of a sponsoring relationship, story sharers would theoretically benefit from writing and contributing their stories, which, as my data mostly purports, is fairly accurate; in return, the creators of the archive would benefit from creating a repository for future academics like themselves. Furthermore, in this co-construction of memory, stories that would have disappeared—e.g. stories not covered by the media—would find a home in this decolonial space in which all participants’ voices would not only be preserved but would persevere in the sense that stories were being written by those who experienced them on their own terms. The discourse community that formed around the event and found representation in the archive believed that sharing their stories mattered for their own wellbeing and/or purposes of history. They bought into the archive’s promotion that participation was a public good for historicizing and memorializing an event. One of the biggest critiques of Our Marathon is in its historical and memorial function, which I term “historial” for purposes of this dissertation due to the fact that we chose to approach the archive in this dual fashion of simultaneously archiving for historical and memorial purposes. To unpack this term, I first contend with the rhetorical functions of history as a philosophic approach and memorial as a study of objects.

Given the complex nature of the term and discipline of history, and the plurality of voices within the philosophy of history, I turn to the linguistic-turn of the 1970s and 1980s marked by the work of scholars Hayden White and Louis Mink who both contend with narrative as a focus of history: “These philosophers emphasized the rhetoric of historical writing, the non-reducibility of historical narrative to a sequence of ‘facts,’ and the degree of construction that is involved in historical representation. Affinities with literature and anthropology came to eclipse examples from the natural sciences as guides for representing historical knowledge and historical understanding. The richness and texture of the historical narrative came in for greater attention
than the attempt to provide causal explanations of historical outcomes” (Little). This philosophy of history emphasizes historical narrative rather than historical causation and champions subjectivity and various interpretations over objectivity and singular truths. Daniel Little writes, “The prevalent perspective holds that human consciousness is itself a historical product, and that it is an important part of the historian's work to piece together the mentality and assumptions of actors in the past.”

*Our Marathon* aimed to collect material in real time in order to offer a picture of the mentality and assumptions of people during the timeframe of the Boston Marathon bombings and their aftermath. This is considered a speculative philosophy of history concerning the eventual significance of an event or time period. Maddock-Dillon recounts, “Realizing that the archive could provide resources for multiple kinds of research was really exciting. It’s not just this is a historical record, but this gives us a whole body of material that people might use for research purposes that we haven’t even thought of yet.” An example that the marathon team often brought up was from Dan Cohen, one of the leaders on the *September 11th Digital Archive*, who explains that linguists have been drawn to that archive’s collections because 2001 was about the time that “text speak”—internet shorthand like “OMG”—started to come about. In a philosophic approach to history, the archive aims to capture as much of an event as possible through the narratives of those who experienced the event or timeframe. Mink explains that “the significance of past occurrences is understandable only as they are locatable in the ensemble of interrelationships that can be grasped only in the construction of narrative form” (148). This calls for a recontextualization of temporally based narratives, which White argues allows for history to be meaningful; this also calls for trusting in the interpretive actions of those accessing the narratives in the future.
In this philosophical approach to historicizing a moment, subjectivity is key; however, to memorialize something means to create an object that serves as a focus for the memory of an event or person(s) in a more static fashion. In her chapter “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” Carole Blair writes, “Memorial sites, by their very existence, create communal spaces. Although it is possible to describe an individual’s encounter with a site, it is almost always part of a collective experience” (48). Blair is writing about physical memorial sites here, but her attention to communal space and collective experience resonates with those who contributed their stories to Our Marathon. In the archive’s aim to represent communities affected by the marathon bombings, Our Marathon also created a community of its own—though memorializing efforts can also be reductive and recontextualization in digital spaces can lead to reductive narratives that do not necessarily align with the philosophic approach to collecting historical narratives. In Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero, Marita Sturken chronicles the impulse to fill a void with memorialization efforts and memorabilia objects relating to the Twin Towers, firefighters, and New York City more generally. She explains that “objects that focus on loss and memory through narratives of redemption inevitably collapse history into simple narratives. The focus of such objects is invariably not the why of such events or the complexities of history so much as it is about producing feelings of memory” (217). As was seen in the previous chapter, the use of “#BostonStrong” as a kairotic grammar of the Internet in the archive is a spatial and temporal recontextualization.

If the archive itself is the memorial, it relies on the narratives of story sharers. To think of narratives as a public good, we can understand stories and other artifacts as goods or products, but what or who is the public that benefits from such goods? Is it just potential future researchers
that benefit from the digitally literate actions of story sharers? In this chapter, I explain the specific historical and memorial functions of *Our Marathon* as they depart from other archives. I argue that one of the biggest features of the archive—its crowdsourcing function—was a decolonial catalyst for community, but the speed of collection operates (rhetorically at least) as an active buttress against the problems of provenance. That is, historical archives must go to great lengths to verify the veracity and historicity of their collections—in the historial archive’s philosophic approach to history, the time-sensitive collection methods ensure the archive’s veracity and historicity.

To further understand veracity and historicity in the archive, I then contend with how the historial demands real-time engagements through acts of literacy, pausing to look at stories that are representative of history and memory, and think about the power structures in place that sponsor one’s literate practices in the archive. I conclude that the action of simultaneously historicizing and memorializing this event highlighted the sponsoring relationship in different ways: not only were acts of literacy were manipulated by the conceptual space, and but the sponsoring roles and takeaways were impacted by the exigency of this space. A better approach may have been to plan for phases of the archive in order to honor its memorial and historical functions separately before bringing them together.

**Traditional (Historical) Archives and *Our Marathon***

**Dot:** It’s not often that you get leave a personal mark, so I saw it as almost a privilege to be able to put something in the Archive.

At their basic level, historical archives are a collection of related artifacts that provide firsthand information about the past. Traditional historical archives are static by nature in terms of their artifacts. When we access historical archives, the point is to draw upon the primary
documents in order to understand something new; the documents themselves have been privileged through curation. A critical view of archives recognizes that power lies within the choices of the archivists who have to make decisions in regards to the following questions: what documents are considered significant, whose lives are worth preserving/remembering, how does one access the archive? While microfilm and other technologies aid in issues of space and preservation, researchers are at the liberties of the collection methods and decisions of the archivists at the time as well as the current archivists aims of preservation and access. For example in the 18th century only certain individuals’ lives were considered worthy of preservation, and so the Massachusetts Archives Collection, which houses artifacts from 1629-1799, points to a specific historical narrative. While this is a literal colonial archive in terms of time period, it is also a colonial archive in that the history is comprised of the worldviews of wealthy White men.

One of the major departures of the historical archive is in its affordance of crowdsourcing artifacts, which theoretically allows for a distribution of power as participants can contribute their own artifacts on their own terms, contextualized with their own words. While crowdsourcing obviously relies on the digital, it is in this historical moment that we are able to populate the archive in such a way in order to promote a decolonized space for future researchers; however, crowdsourcing is not a neutral action and relies on personal agency—the subjective awareness that one is in control of his or her own volitional actions.

In a June 2006 issue of *Wired Magazine*, Jeff Howe coined a new term when he wrote about “The Rise of Crowdsourcing” in light of its economic benefits: “Technological advances in everything from product design software to digital video cameras are breaking down the cost barriers that once separated amateurs from professionals…. The labor isn’t always free, but it
costs a lot less than paying traditional employees. It’s not outsourcing; it’s crowdsourcing.” Clearly written for a business-minded audience, crowdsourcing was a natural complement to outsourcing—both offer ways to save, and then make, more money. And anybody, with the appropriate level(s) of skill(s) and access to the business, could participate.

The downside of outsourcing and crowdsourcing is that as labor shifts, there are usually job causalities in terms of both lost jobs and inadequate pay for new workers; however, as Daren C. Brabham, a mass media scholar who has written extensively on crowdsourcing, points out, “To see it the other way, being part of the crowd is far from exploitation. Instead, it is an opportunity for the crowd, the Protestant self-help ethic rearing its head in a bootstrap, capitalist, global economy. Crowdsourcing offers individuals in the crowd a chance at entrepreneurship, or at the very least an outlet for creative energy” (84). Although conceived for different contexts, Howe’s attention to technological advancements and Brabham’s attention to creative outlets clearly speak back to the actions of the archive, and while the goal of Our Marathon does not have to do with economic compensation per se, my research findings suggest that contributors did indeed feel “compensated” in various ways, which will be discussed further in this chapter; moreover, were Our Marathon to not be crowdsourced, it would mean a great deal of work on behalf of the creators to collect these stories—though this may have benefitted the diversity of voices in the archive, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Crowdsourcing, particularly in the case of Our Marathon, relies on individuals taking agency over their participation: there were no conventional expectations for public writing of this

17 Brabham also wrote a post specifically on the Boston Marathon acts of terror and crowdsourcing on his blog, Culture Digitally, two days after the bombings (see: http://culturedigitally.org/2013/04/boston-marathon-bombing-and-emergency-crowdsourced-investigation/)
18 A clear example of this would be to look at the Oral History Project in which narrators were carefully selected by archive staff members based on potentially differing viewpoints; while not a perfect demographic representation, there is much more diversity in this part of the archive than we see in the written stories.
nature although, as explored in the previous chapter, one can see how social media approaches to discussing the event may impact story sharing. Unlike a traditional archive where already written stories might be pulled together into an historical repository, most of these stories were specifically written for the digital archive. In fact, most of the stories in *Our Marathon* would not exist in their current state if the archive had not prompted participants to share their stories. This draws attention back to the concept of sponsoring literacy in that the archive is not just a space to share stories but an actual compositional venue for historic and memorial purposes that could easily be promoted to or suppressed from particular communities based on the actions of the Sponsors.

Whereas the agential acts of sharing promote a decolonized approach for the archive, its attention to capturing acts of literacy complicates the space: in its departure from valuing specific narratives of the Boston Marathon bombings and their aftermath, and in line with its focus on collecting real-time stories specifically for the archive, the historial function gives power to those who participate. The memorial aspect invites participation that complements the philosophical approach to history the archive enacts, and the archive becomes a co-constructed space in which, rather than seeing power remaining mostly with the archivist, there is a strong agentive component of sharing personal accounts and documents. But still, this is somewhat illusionary as the power ultimately lies within the archive itself—in the form of archival design and promotion practices—and the Sponsors of this archive ultimately impact the actions of its memorial functions, which were the key motivations for participation and the more common notion of digitally composing (as opposed to writing something personal on the Internet for historical purposes).
The Historial and the Stories

**Interviewer:** I’d like to go back to something you brought up. You mentioned that you think storytelling is very important. I’m wondering if you could say more about that? What makes storytelling important? Why does it matter?

**Mary:** I’m not a scientist, but I think storytelling engages… It connects your brain and your emotion. It’s a more powerful way to try and connect with people. If I try—in Architecture, which is what I write about mostly—if I try to connect with a client on stats and figures, there’s no emotional connection there. People can get pretty uptight about money. They care about the budget. If you can move their souls, if you can move their spirit, if they can feel that they themselves have personally invested in the hopes and dreams of a particular project, then you figure out a way to solve…stuff. Storytelling is a very powerful tool to connect people with the ideas in a way. It’s intellectual. It’s emotional. It connects what you imagine to or the creative process. It doesn’t matter whether I’m talking with accountants or artists or contractors. Storytelling is a universal language. Not everybody knows accounting. Not everyone knows construction, but storytelling is the way to convey these powerful ideas in a way that people can really get.

In the case of *Our Marathon*, rather than simply collecting factual accounts of what happened during the events, personal, emotional, and sentimental stories were expected and welcomed, and, as Mary points out, this was a “very powerful tool” for connecting people. Memorial spaces, whether physical or digital, “can be locations to express sorrow, to establish (or re-establish) community, to share (or re-construct) values, to remember, and also to forget” (Walker 121). Like digital archives, the notion of a digital memorial space is becoming increasingly familiar although, as Cordell points out, that does not mean that it is immediately familiar: “Certainly, there’s interesting memorial practices growing up around things like social media, like what happens when a young person passes away and then their Facebook page becomes a memorial space? … I think that it’s increasingly familiar, but we did still have to do a fair amount of work to help people understand what it is we were building.” Cordell points to a major tension in the historial focus of *Our Marathon* when it came to explaining what the archive is/does: the act of memorialization—through the sharing of stories, photographs, videos,
etc.—becomes the historical archive—a supplemental historical account to the dominant accounts of the media.

Capturing the ways that people communicated would not only provide a memorial account of the events but also prove useful for future historical research. For potential contributors, the historical archive was not positioned as a vessel of power and ultimate truth but as a co-constructed space of the truth of the events on the terms of those who experienced them.

As a decolonial archive interested in disrupting the power relations of history and memory, the archive staff imagined that people would share the stories they had already impulsively communicated through social media and other venues rather than what actually happened: most story sharers sat down and composed their stories for the archive itself as opposed to contributing something they had already written or even told to somebody else. This not only changes the stakes of participating and what the archive was capturing, but it highlighted the positionality of the archive’s creators in their roles as Sponsors. Like a memorial site, the historical archive relies on personal sharing, which is often accomplished through written prose and images. In the following section I think through the act of sharing with this archive and examine the more types of stories contributors wrote. I then step back to grapple with the relationship between the Sponsored (e.g. story sharers) and the Sponsors of Literacy (e.g. the creators of *Our Marathon*).

**Sharing**

**Janet:** I was writing in order to help sort out all of my emotions and all the stuff that I went through. It helped me to look for positives in the whole situation, and also to share it with other people. I was really sharing it with my family and friends who were there and others who were following me and my story.
“Sharing” a story denotes a sense of intimacy, and a written story in particular denotes an intimate act through literacy. Participants shared stories—long form thoughts and reflections—with the archive to make sense of the world around them; they shared stories with others, even when those audiences are more abstract, less concrete. Through its attention to, and reliance on, crowdsourced personal writing, Our Marathon’s collection of publicly submitted stories gives scholars a window into particular acts of mind through the stories thus giving a particular history of the time. “Sharing” is a key term for Our Marathon: to solicit material from contributors, the archive continually prompts its participants to “share” their artifacts as opposed to using the verbs of its historic predecessors such as “contribute” or “add.” The use of this verb, much like all of the language and other “readables” of the website, is a product of much discussion particularly when it came to the memorializing/healing function of composing and sharing stories.

When thinking of the audiences of the archive—mainly members affected by the attacks and future researchers—choices were made, and certain communities were of more immediate concern: this project necessitated public input; therefore, we wanted our prompt be friendly and inviting, but this could also be limiting. For example, if Janet were actually imagining her audience as she wrote, would her thoughts and composition not be influenced by what she believes in appropriate for her friends and family to read? Is “sharing” a strong enough verb to encourage a narrative for historical purposes? Who, or what, else is influencing Janet and other story sharers’ experiences?

In Terms of Service: Social Media and the Price of Constant Connection, journalist Jacob Silverman describes social-media sharing as sincere action for attention and visibility. Social media site creators make the action of sharing second nature: in an environment of participation
and reciprocity through “likes” and comments—validating one’s phenomenological existence—quieter moments of consciousness are finding themselves more and more on the outside. Silverman writes, “Sharing itself becomes personhood, with activities taking on meaning not for their basic content but for the way they are turned into content, disseminated through the digital network, and responded to. In this context, your everyday experiences are only limited by your ability to share them and by your ability to package them appropriately.” Social-media networks and digital archives obviously diverge in many ways, but *Our Marathon* specifically grasped onto the concept of sharing to get at participants’ senses of personhood: these experiences are the history-in-the-making moments that seemed most fruitful to capture by the archivists. But how did the contributors themselves view their actions of sharing stories?

In the anonymous survey data that I collected from 48 participants who contributed their stories, there were five main responses to the following question: “Why did you choose to share your story with *Our Marathon*?” In the table below I map out those five reasons—from most prevalent to least prevalent—and highlight representative responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Sharing</th>
<th>Representative Responses</th>
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| Closure            | The Boston Marathon 2013 was my 75th lifetime marathon and my 22nd consecutive Boston Marathon, however, any short lived celebration I experienced was immediately erased upon hearing the news of the bombings. Sharing my experience was a way of dealing with the situation and moving on.  

I needed to share my experience to basically clear the air so that I could move on. I was running with two friends, and both went ahead when I stopped to talk to my daughter (a BU student) - they both finished as the 2nd bomb went off, and I was almost directly across from it at mile 26. It could have ended a lot differently and I’m not upset by the coverage that the victims received at all, but others need to know that it touched others who were on the course as well.  

I wanted to share my experience as a runner who was stopped 10k from the finish with a daughter waiting for me at the finish. I did this at the 2014 Marathon to help with closure of the 2013 experience.  

It was part therapeutic and part fueled by the memories of our 2013 experience. The Our Marathon space allowed me the chance to vocalize those feelings that I had kept bottled up for over a year. Our daughter, the runner, was emotionally scarred by the experience as she watched the bombings from less than a block away, suffering from a leg cramp that saved her...
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research and Historical Purposes</th>
<th>The bombing was and is a part of history. It needs to be recorded from all who were impacted by the events of that fateful day.</th>
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<td>I thought of this as an opportunity for my personal experience to be catalogued and capsuled in time.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I wanted people to know. It's important for these stories to be remembered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Particular Point of View</td>
<td>I thought that everyone's story is important. I was the leader of the veterans group on campus and wanted to show how veterans responded to the crisis. People usually have ideas of veterans as either being heroes or broken and I wanted to tell the real story.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Since I'm a Swede and was not in Boston during the bombing but read about it and followed the news from Sweden, I thought my views could be interesting as from someone not directly affected.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bombings affected not only the individuals at the sites but also the community. As a community member, I wanted to share my perspective as a distant participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wanted to contribute to the broad view and understanding of the impact of the marathon bombings on Boston and the surrounding community. I was fortunate not to be directly affected; a friend of a friend was injured, I was terrified for the few hours that my close friends in attendance were unreachable, and I was a part of the citywide lock down on Friday, but my life was not significantly altered by the bombings. I contributed because I thought I could add the voice of someone who as a student is not a permanent member of the community but nonetheless very involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Record</td>
<td>I shared my story about the Marathon bombing because I felt deeply about the event. I felt saddened and violated by the people who caused the bombing, and by the fact that a pall would forever be attached to what should be a joyous day. As a Watertown resident I wanted to record my jetlag-induced confusion during a phone conversation with my son. I hoped recording that conversation would remind us that funny things still happened in the midst of deadly chaos.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I just wanted to document my story. I was already at the hotel when I heard about the bombing, so it really didn’t affect me as much as it did to others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For a Class (i.e. not optional)</td>
<td>Contributed for Advanced Writing Class, had to for a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My English class had a project to create an archive about anything we wanted. I chose to do mine on the Boston Marathon. She showed us the Our Marathon archive and we became familiar with it. I chose to do it because I had so many connections with the marathon and because it really was so close to home, physically and mentally. My professor encouraged me to post my story on the actual archive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I chose to share my story as a part of a classroom project.</td>
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While these answers are separated here to highlight themes, one might notice that these responses could be categorized in multiple ways; in other words, story sharers had multiple reasons for participating in this project though the “memorial” function is not explicitly stated—it can be deduced. What is interesting to note about these reasons is that the story sharers take ownership over their efforts as evidenced by the verbs: “I needed,” “I wanted,” “I shared,” and
so on. Very rarely is the archive positioned as agentive, though we do see it in sentences like,

“The Our Marathon space allowed me the chance to vocalize those feelings that I had kept bottled up for over a year.” Moreover, despite story sharing in a collective community space, very rarely did survey respondents consider their peer story sharers, or those who created the archive, in their responses though we do see invocations of others prompting participation in the “non-optional” submissions: “My professor encouraged me” and “had to for a grade.” What this suggests is that rather than viewing the archive/archivists as the holders of power in this archive, the participants themselves were in control and felt authorized to share their stories. Who feels this authority is not without problem, however, and a few of my research participants explained that they had hesitations:

**Interviewer**: In your survey, you mentioned that you were a little concerned that your story didn’t matter since you weren’t impacted by the event. Could you say more about that?

**Dot**: It did have an impact to my friends, who knew I was there, but to the public I wasn’t one of the people on the streets or that got stopped by the running. I escaped pretty unscathed from the whole event. I didn’t experience the losses, or the danger, or really any of the negative effects that a lot of the other participants did.

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**Interviewer**: In your survey you mentioned that you were hesitant to share your story because you hadn’t actually experienced physical trauma. What do you make of an archive that aims to capture all stories of different experiences?

**Colleen**: I think it’s valuable. I think overall we’re understanding of how different people experience things. It is helping me to come to accept the fact that there was not physical trauma, [but it] was something that I was still a part of. That’s just as valid as some other forms of trauma. I think it’s really good—it’s really good for other people who haven’t participated in experiences like that or something that can be...What am looking for...not necessarily traumatic but challenging to understand that different people handle different things in different ways.

**Interviewer**: How would you describe the act of submitting your story to the archive, for you personally?

**Colleen**: It was hard. It was unexpected. I don’t know if I wrote this in my survey or not, but I was at the library that day for something else. Somebody had approached me and asked if I’d be willing to do it. I said, “Sure.” I had said to her the same thing, “Yes I was down there, but I
wasn’t right there.” She said, “Well, that’s fine.” It started off OK, but the more writing I did, the more the emotions and the memories of the event started to come up. It was much harder for me than I thought it was going to be in the end.

**Interviewer:** In your survey, you mentioned that it might have been too soon to share your story and not the right environment.

**Colleen:** That was an afterthought. I hadn’t realized how deeply it had affected me until afterwards.

Despite the archive’s function as facilitating and representing community, story sharers tended to reflect on their contribution in individualistic ways that do not neatly reconcile with its participatory function. Collecting these stories for historical purposes made a lot of sense, but the vision of the archive was not just for history: the archive was created as an instrument of healing and a place for all community members to feel free to add their voices and share their parts of the story, but this was not immediately apparent to potential story sharers. As Dot and Colleen highlight, the historical function of the archive allowed their voices to count: Dot—a lifelong marathon runner—and Colleen—someone who was clearly traumatized by the events despite not having any scars—were given a space to share for their own immediate benefit and the longer term benefit of future researchers.

Like many of the other story sharers that I was in contact with, Dot and Colleen expressed gaining something from their experiences in contributing their stories to the archive; in fact, story sharers often expressed much gratitude to the archive’s staff in person, and, even in my follow-up interviews two years after the events, many expressed gratitude to me for listening to their stories and thoughts. In this way, the decolonial space may be reread as not just a repository for culture and memory but as an actual affirmation of self, knowledge, and worth. When thinking about the stakes involved in this sponsoring relationships, sharing a story was not just something nice to do: for some, it was a meaningful act of literacy and community.
Before delving into Brandt’s conception of sponsorship, it is interesting to note the survey responses to the following question: “Did the archive capture your expectations after submitting? Some people found it useful to see their own stories among others’ stories… others did not really have expectations” (see Appendix). 60% (n=28) of survey respondents reported something similar to “Yes, it captured my expectations,” and 10% (n=5) reported something similar to “No expectations.” The remaining 20% (n=13) offered the following responses:

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<th>Responses</th>
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| It gave my story a “home” | *I appreciate having a permanent home for this story and the stories of those who were also impacted. I have poked around the site a little, but honestly it is painful to look at, so I haven't read a whole lot. I do wonder how much it has been accessed and if the general community, researchers, journalists, have found it useful.*

*It was and is a good place to park those bad and good memories.*

*I felt that it was just another piece of the puzzle. Boston is such a giant community and all these stories of people you don't even know, combined with my own just made a whole big puzzle come together.*

*It felt great to have it there, and I continue to feel good about having it there, knowing that I contributed to this piece of history. It almost makes me feel like this story I wrote about my feelings, which was immensely difficult to write, now has a “home.” Up until Our Marathon, my story was just kind of floating on my computer for just me and a few relatives to see. Now it has purpose and meaning, and I feel validated.*

**Sharing felt good**

*I enjoyed the process of writing out my story. It was nice to see my story among other stories--it made me feel like my experience "counted". By sharing my story via social media, I was also able to share my experiences others who may not have understood the profound impact the events had on me and the city. As a researcher myself, I had hoped/expected that Our Story would be used by researchers/students interested in studying the experiences and reactions of those who submitted their stories, so I was happy to receive this invitation to complete this survey!*

*I saw my story online. I felt proud that it would be available to researchers in the future.*

*Contributing felt rewarding and I'll always remember that a part of my life is archived somewhere. For some reason I find comfort in that thought. Maybe it has to do with feeling validated.*

*I felt like sharing my story, allow express about my experience. Sharing my story allowed me to feel stronger and more connected to the Boston Strong community, which I feel I will forever be a part of.*

**Forgot about it**

*I nearly forgot about the experience of submitting. I was spurred to do it in the moment, but did not return to the Our Marathon page to look at the shared stories.*
I was glad to be part of it but have actually forgotten about it which is actually too bad
I have not been thinking about it since.

To be honest, I forgot completely that I had done this. After submitting the story I didn't ever go back to see it posted and honestly don't know if it was. Much was a blur at that time, and my focus shifted to other things. I was happy to share, but wasn't seeking anything in return.

Honestly, I hadn't really thought about the archive or what I wrote that day until I received the email inviting me to participate in this revived group project about the archive and what we were thinking about on the day of the bombing. I hadn't had a chance to go back and re-examine the archive for a long time, but perhaps someday I will. The trial of the surviving bomber had brought back a few memories of that time some good, some bad. And with the trial being over, perhaps we, as a city, can finally begin to move past this traumatic event and start living again.

The connotation of the word “home” invokes a social overtone, a cultural implication, and an emotional meaning. A discourse community who values history could interpret “home” as a space for one’s true self and consider this a comment of validity. A discourse community who values memory might have a more emotional reading of the word “home” in that this is a site of unification. This is a clear memorial function—like a monument or a gravestone—where the materialization of the event or person stands in for communal healing and memory. In light of Our Marathon, sharing was an emotional act for many—it was “enjoyable,” “felt rewarding,” for it was “cathartic.” Viewed in this way, the archive is positioned as offering something a particular opportunity for participants through sponsoring their literate practices. We can read words like “closure” and “moving on” as designating a way of meaningfully forgetting, or a movement to drop the mental weight of the trauma, which is a function of the memorial that would seem to oppose history (as history is about remembering, not forgetting).

In the field of Rhetoric and Composition we often find scholarship on writing and trauma from perspectives on veterans (see Weigel, Bekah, Howrat, and Miller; Corley), prisoners (see Burzynski; Kerr), and first-year personal essay writers (see Wood; Haswell and Haswell); however, following large, devastating events, we do see specific scholarship related to “shared
traumas” or traumas not necessarily individually based. For example, post-9/11 we see scholars engaged with teaching and the rhetoric of September 11th documents found on the Internet (see especially Losh; Walker). Post-Hurricane Katrina, composition instructors19 affected by the devastation reflected on how they addressed the event through writing exercises in their classrooms (see especially Louth; Piano et al).

In the aforementioned texts, Brandt’s work would provide an interesting lens because of the power dynamics of the classroom; in teaching and learning situations it is difficult to disrupt the fact that students are being asked to think and write about things artificially or not, and so their roles as the Sponsored become influenced as they appropriate the proper literate identity as positioned by the instructor. Using the lens of sponsorship with story sharers in Our Marathon allows me to think through the choices these public writers made with their texts while being sponsored.

From my research, the digital space helped participants to connect to communities that might be otherwise unreachable when thinking about the global nature of the Boston Marathon, and the memorial function of the archive convinced participants that their stories were valid even if not well formed due to the difficulty of the subject material. Using personal writing to make sense of difficult events is not something new: Haswell and Haswell explain that this method of healing, sometimes referred to as writing therapy, comes about from “the telling of the trauma by the trauma victim to others in a receptive, re-accepting social setting” (203). They go on to explain, “[U]sually in trauma therapy healing is figured as a reinserting of the shattered victim

19 It should be noted that while this is not a dissertation focused on writing pedagogy, post-traumatic pedagogy is a recent development in the field that emerges from a number of discussions, including expressivist pedagogy, cognitive psychology, and the social roots of basic writing (Rogers). Scholars as wide-ranging as Peter Elbow, Mina Shaughnessy, and Mike Rose are invoked in relation to post-traumatic writing pedagogy; however, as Scott L. Rogers thinks through in Writing Out the Storm: Trauma and the Work of Composition, its functional origins in the field may be traced to two articles from the mid-1990s: Wendy Bishop’s “Writing Is/As Therapy?” and Richard Miller’s “Faultlines in the Contact Zone.”
back into preexisting social wholes. Hence the value of the victim’s retelling of the trauma event, because narrative plotlines offer familiar constructs that will fit the pieces back into a unitary shape” (205).

**Interviewer:** In your survey, you mentioned that, “Sharing writing on a social media site made me seem connected to a larger community during a time of terrible pain.” Could you say more about that?

**Anita:** Shortly after I wrote, I started noticing other people’s writing, that other people were posting as well to the same site and sharing their experiences. It was interesting to see as many different people as experienced this at different locations, that many stories were being expressed and shared. I found that helpful not to be stuck on what we’d gone through but to hear other people’s perspective on the same event, where they were, who they were, what happened to them, or what they heard, and helped put it into perspective. What we had gone through was bad, but other people had gone through worse and still are. It helped with the process. It helped to work through the process and not be stuck, something that wasn’t a pleasant experience.

**Interviewer:** Working through the process of this terrible thing that had happened? Is that what you mean?

**Anita:** Yes and being able to share it because I know in the days afterwards, it felt like I was telling almost too many people. Other people who haven’t gone through something like that don’t understand it. You don’t get the response that you expect, whatever that means. It’s not satisfying enough to alleviate whatever stress you’re going through with it. I certainly told the story orally, verbally, to people, but it was good to put it on paper to have a way to know that I was sharing it for myself, and maybe with other people, and to read other people’s stories. It wasn’t a selfish thing. I wasn’t stuck in myself going through this experience but sharing it with others. I don't know. It’s almost a safer way to express it.

**Interviewer:** That’s interesting. Can you say more about that?

**Anita:** In terms of feeling safer?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Anita:** Because you’re getting a chance to edit it as you go, and filter what you’re writing, and reread it, and edit it, and really perfect what you want to share with the rest of the world as opposed to, in the moment, when you’re emotional, you have this verbal diarrhea about a tragedy. You’re wondering...You’re getting other people’s visual responses, but sometimes you almost wish you hadn’t said certain things, or you said too much. The people who are listening aren’t really appreciating it, or understanding it, or giving you the therapy that you’re expecting. It doesn’t feel satisfying. It feels like it’s more frustrating, but then what do you expect? How many people have ever gone through something like this as in lots of things in life? It’s somewhat satisfying and safer to write it because I could perfect what I wanted to say, and make sure I wasn’t saying too much that was self-centered. Sure it was difficult, but other people went through far more difficult things. I wasn’t saying it for sympathy. I was saying it to get it off my
chest because it’s a difficult thing to be stuck with, to walk around with. Once you say it, or share it, or write it, it makes it that much easier to deal with.

Anita draws attention to the historical and memorial functions of the archive: she describes being around others who had different experiences than her in terms of facts—“where they were, who they were, what happened to them, or what they heard”—as well as sharing in order to make sense of her own memories. My research is particularly drawn to the fact that this type of personal writing does not stop with the individual but necessitates a receptive audience to validate itself. While I do not think story sharers like Anita and others who contributed to *Our Marathon* necessarily fall into the “shattered victim” category that Haswell and Haswell term, I do think story sharers’ search for “preexisting social wholes” accounts for the narratives of the archive. Anita draws attention to her peer story sharers and how the culminating action of these stories offered her perspective. On a personal level, Anita also draws attention to the idea of writing as a “safer” way to express her story because not only is there the chance to revise before presenting a story, but there is an alleviation in terms of the immediate audience, and this helped her to “deal” with her thoughts and emotions more productively.

*The Stories*

Because of the agency the Sponsored had over their literate activity, reciprocity became a key factor in somewhat evening the disparate power relations often associated with Brandt’s term: the Sponsored chose to share their stories, and the stories would be beneficial for academics. For the Sponsored, unsurprisingly, many of the survey respondents talked about the idea of writing and contributing their stories as acts of closure, therapy, healing, and/or forgetting, and, as Anita expressed, writing was a safe way of expressing emotion. But this was not part of the intended collection process for *Our Marathon*: the archive’s creators assumed that
people would share stories that they had previously composed (such as emails or social media updates), and the crowdsourcing function would alleviate barriers for participation. The reality of this archive showed that while people were comfortable sharing within their own networks, sharing for the archive did not have mass appeal. In the actions of composing stories for the archive, we were mostly not capturing veracious accounts of the marathon events but recontextualizations that are impacted by cultural memory. To think about this more in depth, I first offer a story that represents what the marathon creators first sought to collect and examine its historical function; I then look at a recontextualized story to examine its historical function.

Here is a story written the week of the marathon bombings and submitted to the archive on February 5, 2014 on the volition of the story sharer:

**Title:** My experience at the Boston Marathon (lots of detail, may be difficult for some to read) April 17, 2013 at 5:55pm (Whelan)

**Text:** (Originally shared on my Facebook page on April 17, 2013)

I wanted to write all this down while it's fresh. In the process, I found this to be extremely helpful for me. While not necessarily explicitly graphic, it does contain a lot of detail and may be difficult for some people to read.

We stopped at Niketown to try to use the bathroom (found out it was closed) and to buy the marathon t-shirt like I do every year (they didn't have one this year). Disappointed, we headed out of there. Around 2:00, we walked up Exeter Street, paused near the flags at the finish line for a moment, but then I really had to pee, so we decided to walk up Boylston and planned to head back to the finish line a little while later. We walked past Forum (which is the restaurant right by where the second explosion went off...two doors down from Crate & Barrel) and I remember a table of four 20-something women, drinking beers and talking about how they were kind of cold (silly details we remember...). We stopped by Crate because there was a lot of open space between the curb and building and figured we could use their bathroom. I went inside and up the escalator, asked for the code to get into the bathroom, and then had to enter the code 3 separate times before the door finally unlocked for me.... After that, I went outside.... We took some pics/video with our camera and then I snapped that pic you all saw on FB with my phone. At that moment, my connection was fine and the photo uploaded quickly. I then decided to try to track my friend, Colleen, to see how close she was to finishing.

At that point, I couldn't get my phone to connect to her FB page to get her number and the link to track her. I tried a couple of times and finally gave up. Lukas got himself buckled into the stroller, and I was putting Zachary into his
seat (the lower/back seat on the Phil & Ted). I somehow smacked his face into the handlebar (never did that before!) and he started to cry. I held him and kissed his face and then carefully put him into the seat. I got one side buckled when we heard this loud "BOOM!” in the distance. I paused and stood and said, "What was THAT?" Erik tried to look down the street, but didn't see anything and was just saying, "I don't know...it sounded like a cannon." Within seconds, I saw a burst before my eyes....a flash of red, smoke and debris. Everyone around us was yelling and people either froze or started to run. I grabbed the stroller and just shouted, "NO! Not this...not my kids...please....they are my whole world...NO!" as I tried to shield the stroller from one side, while Erik put his body around the other side.... [story sharer goes on to explain the rest of the day]

I keep seeing things about how to explain this to kids, how to shield them from it. I can't even believe that my 5 year old actually saw it in real life. That he was there. He saw the smoke. He saw the people running, crying and screaming. I am a school psychologist. I am trained to help kids deal with tragedy and crisis. I still never thought I'd be facing something like this with my own children....

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I feel a little better every time I tell my story. It's difficult, though, because not everyone wants to or can deal with hearing it. Writing it out is an important part of the process for me. I'm sure you've heard lots of similar stories, as there were so many people there that day, and I think everyone on Boylston Street has been deeply and directly impacted by this in some way.

The author of this story did not write it for Our Marathon: as she draws awareness to in her opening parenthetical, she wrote it on her Facebook page first and chose to submit it to the archive later. She is writing for a specific audience—her social network—and to aid in her own healing. She thanks her social network for reading her story and illuminates the grand impetus for Our Marathon’s collection efforts when she says, “I’m sure you’ve heard lots of similar stories, as there were so many people there that day…”

For the intents and purposes of the archive, this is a historical account of one person’s experience that day. One can assume that, when the author heard of the archive and decided to contribute, she copy and pasted her text into the contribution box, added her opening remark, and shared her story that includes her fresh feelings from two days after the bombings. Even in its abbreviated form here, we recognize this as a story—once a long-form status update—that attempts to make sense of the events that day. This is not a #BostonStrong remembrance or an
account that drips with local pride: it is a different genre, a factual account of what she can remember (and perhaps wants to forget), the questions this event raised for her, and an impulse to communicate/desire to connect. The fact that it was written so soon after the bombings and reproduced for the archive gives researchers insight into the thoughts of someone during that week who was confronting hard, confusing realities of safety and mortality.

In other stories, we see a genre in which story sharers are attempting to draw larger meaning from their memories and offering their supplemental stories that include key figures from dominant historical accounts. The following story, also submitted on behalf of the own volition of the contributor, was submitted on December 23, 2013:

**Title: Running Home (My Story) (Korim)**

**Text:** I watched the race with my daughter at Coolidge Corner a few blocks from where I grew up. It was the most beautiful Marathon day I can remember; I never felt more mesmerized or euphoric; I never cheered louder. When the police evacuated Beacon Street, runners were still pouring through....

The next morning I walked the course from Coolidge Corner to the finish line, photographing and recording conversations with runners and wheelchair racers from all over the country and the world, some still wearing their blue and gold colors. So many important stories of courage and camaraderie were lost in the media's fear-mongering and obsession with the violence and perpetrators.

Happily the extraordinary Carlos Arredondo had his 15 minutes of fame. I met him as a fellow peace activist during the Iraq war, and Carlos was also a familiar presence at Boston Occupy home base near South Station....

I am not a runner, but the runners I watched and spoke with inspired me to walk many, many miles that week; they continue to inspire me, and keep me walking, if not running.

This historical account gives a unique point of view in the writer’s personal account of her day as a spectator; however, without much context as to why, the writer also invokes a familiar person: perhaps the most-celebrated hero of the Boston Marathon bombings, Carlos Arredondo ran into the chaos of the events to help and became part of an iconic photograph wherein he was helping a victim named Jeff Bauman who lost both legs to the blasts. Written eight months after the
events, this story is a recontextualization of an event; as a narrative, this is a philosophically
historical document that invokes a larger cultural memory of the marathon bombing events and
their aftermath.

“A photograph of Carlos Arredondo and other first responders assisting Jeff Bauman following the bombing is
projected over Fenway Park before a game on May 28, 2013” (sandy.bonfiglio).

While the story sharer starts with the fairly typical move to chronologically describe what she
experienced on April 15, 2013, she validates herself with her connections to the larger, dominant
story by accounting for her connections to Arredondo in a way that would not have been possible
had she written her story on April 15th. The historical space offered her the opportunity to work
through her memories, and one might imagine a different story, and perhaps different level of
participation, should the archive had prompted contributors to share their “historical accounts” of
what happened that day and week.

In both “My experience” and “Running Home” the writers express what happened that
day with different results: the first writer works through her fresh memories to help herself make
something meaning out of the senseless acts of violence; the second writer is removed from the
events but also seeks a larger understanding of what happened that day. According to my follow-
up interviews, taking shattered memories and sewing them into a narrative was helpful for those
who were most shocked by the trauma:
**Interviewer:** You had mentioned in your survey that it was a cathartic exercise to write the story out for yourself. Could you say more about that?

**Sharon:** It just helped me to take what was in my head and put it down on paper and make it more real I guess. You think things, and then when you’re able to...It’s a way to verbalize them without actually speaking them.

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**Interviewer:** In your survey, you mentioned, “Giving my story to *Our Marathon* made me feel validated and made me feel like my story had a purpose.” Could you say more about this?

**Janet:** Sure. I wrote it before I found out about the archives. I wrote it the day after the marathon in the airport. After I did, I shared it with people I knew, but it was just a story that I had. Other than my family, who went through a very different experience than me, I didn’t really know anybody else who had a similar story or felt similarly. The reason I think the archive made me feel so validated was that it happened, it was created sometime after the marathon, like a while after, when I was still feeling a lot of those things and I felt like other people were not. When I shared it there and saw all of the other stories, it was very encouraging to me because it made me recognize that other people were still feeling the feelings that I was feeling and might even read my story. It gave a purpose because it was comforting for me to see other people’s stories or even know they were there. I was hopeful that my story would make other people feel that same way.

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**Interviewer:** In your story you wrote about cramping up at mile 25 and seeing terrible things after the bombing. How would you describe the act of submitting this story to the archive for you personally?

**Kerry:** I thought, “It’s really good. It’s really therapeutic for me to be able to discuss it.” I have a therapist currently. Right now we do a lot of therapy around the images, the nightmares, and the type of visuals that I have from it. I thought it was really good for me to put pen to paper and talk about what I was feeling that day. Also, preserving it.

**Interviewer:** You mean specifically preserving it in the archive?

**Kerry:** Yes. I also wrote for me and people who are not directly affected by it. I live in California, and when I came back people were sympathetic, but they didn’t really get it, what I’d been through. I’m honoring to keep that memory alive in myself and as well as...I don’t want people to forget, years from now, what happened.

In these reflections on sharing stories, these three women speak of writing as an effective way to think through their memories of that day. First, Sharon draws attention to the “safe” aspect of
writing as a form of healing that allows time and revision as Anita did earlier in this chapter. Janet and Kerry draw more attention to the archive itself as facilitating healing: Janet recounts feeling that her story now had “purpose” amongst the other stories; Kerry draws attention to preserving her story for others who could perhaps appreciate it more than her immediate social circle.

In my research, sharing stories for memorial purposes was perceived as beneficial by the story sharers for personal reasons that were emphasized by the collective actions of the archive. The concept of sharing gave both purpose and validation in terms of the memorial functions of the archive. While story sharers did not express themselves as such, they were also co-constructing knowledge for historical purposes. For the story sharers, it seems that collecting stories for memorial purposes would have been enough to prompt participation, but given the archive’s place in an academic setting, branding the site as space just for memory would not appeal to the academic community as much. The academic community needed the archival/historical aspect to validate its own work. How else did the creators of the archive—e.g. the people who sponsored these historical actions—benefit from this work? How specifically do the historical and memorial matter to the sponsors, and what advantages did they gain from collecting such stories?

The Sponsors
In thinking about the collection of stories—artifacts to aid in historicizing and memorializing the tragedy—actions of literacy are highlighted. In Brandt’s conception of literacy sponsors, there is an ideological view of the literate practices of the Sponsored. In her work, literacy is representative of cultural practices and values. I agree with her and feel that this can be
a productive way to especially think about classrooms where authority and power relations are more explicit. Brandt also makes it clear that Sponsors must gain advantage in some way because of the Sponsored. This has been a contentious part of Brandt’s definition, one that Brandt herself has since responded to in terms of people leaving this part of her definition out; other scholars have critiqued this part of Brandt’s definition and argued that there is a certain subjectivity to the term “gain” (see Goldblatt and Jolliffe). In a decolonial approach to the archive, the advantages the Sponsors gain become highlighted because the “gains” theoretically should be somewhat even amongst all of those involved if power relations are being alleviated.

In *Our Marathon*, what is most interesting about the gains of the Sponsors is that, while they rest on the literate actions of the Sponsored, the advantages afforded to the Sponsors rest are actually quite afar from the purposes of the archive. For the Sponsored, this archive was a space of memory, healing, and the co-construction of history; for the Sponsors, the archive afforded opportunities for building a digital space for healing, community, and history; however, in addition to altruistic reasons for participating in this project, the Sponsors also had personal reasons. In Chapter 2, I recounted how the work on this digital project mattered for graduate students who were interested in extra financial support and extracurricular learning opportunities, which were afforded to them through their work on the archive, but the students working on this project were also being sponsored by the professors on this project. In this section, I look at how the professors specifically gained some advantage through this work in terms of professional visibility.

As employees at a Boston-area university located very close to the Boston Marathon, the first motivation for the Sponsors of this space had to do with the healing of a city. Informal in-person story sharing was the initial catalyst for the archive, but collecting stories for historical
record was not the only potential for this archive. Maddock-Dillon saw a need and a vessel for communal healing: “People need to share these stories—for the good of themselves and the good of this community.” Her university colleagues agreed.

Although he had never led a project like this in the past, Cordell volunteered to serve as an initial Project Manager since he had worked on big digital projects before as a graduate student at the University of Virginia. Cordell and Maddock-Dillon quickly put together an advertisement to hire graduate students who would be interested in working on the project. Most of the graduate students working on the project were very familiar with the NU student body in their roles as instructors, and this desire to help their students heal—particularly through the process of writing—acted as an impetus for working on the project. These motivations for others rested upon the two main audiences we saw utilizing the archive: community members who might find some sense of communal healing through sharing and future researchers who wanted to understand this cultural moment through the eyes of a broad audience. In essence, the archive’s creators had a particular discourse community in mind—those finding healing through digital mediums such as social media—and in capturing this discourse community there would be an academic repository of information for future scholars. While commendable, these are not the only gains and advantages the Sponsors came away with from their work with the archive.

Professional visibility for the professors came about from aspects inherent to the archive itself. For Maddock-Dillon, a founding member of Northeastern University’s NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks (NU’s center for Digital Humanities), this was a great opportunity to make use of the expertise in digital texts and archives that had been built at the university over the past few years, which included the hiring of Cordell who was in his first year as an Assistant Professor at NU and teaching a graduate course titled “Doing Digital Humanities” at the time of
the bombings. Creating a memorial and record of what had happened would not only be good for collective healing, but it would showcase the department and university’s investments in Digital Humanities tools and methods in important, tangible ways. Moreover, hiring a group of graduate students would not only be cost (and time) appropriate, but the English professors in charge of this project were offering an incredible learning opportunity for graduate students collaborating with them, the way we more commonly think of professor-student relationships in experiment-based studies and scholarship. In thinking of Brandt, this is illustrative of a more common application of sponsorship in which the professors, in their capacities as university employees with enough power (and/or familiarity with those who hold power), are making room for their students to become more (digitally) literate as they work on this project. The project itself is being sponsored financially by the institution, but it becomes more complicated with these sponsorships within sponsorships: as the graduate students began to take over more and more of the work of the archive, which included sponsoring the literate activities of story sharers, they too were practicing new digital literacies and being sponsored by their superiors.

There is a sense of urgency that comes along with a project intending to preserve history in the making: not only is immediate funding an issue, but the work of the archive needed to be delegated appropriately, and strong leadership was essential. During the summer of 2013, Cordell led the five graduate research assistants as we brainstormed what the archive would do, how it would technically function, how it would socially function, and so on. As Cordell explains,

Because [the archive] was such an interesting “thing”—a lot of people felt that it was a good “thing”—but there were also concerns about what exactly it was, or who would be speaking to, or how it would be received. And we wanted to build
it, so we needed support of all kinds: we needed support of people who wanted to contribute to it; we needed the support of people who might fund aspects of it; we needed the support of people who would help us spread the word.

For Cordell, this meant a lot of meetings with his staff and various members of the Northeastern and Boston community—a departure from his typical duties as an Assistant Professor of English. Maddock-Dillon stepped in to assist with funding, which involved its own challenges and learning experience for her:

I ended up doing a lot of meetings with development [at Northeastern], quite a bit of work with WBUR with getting that funding, with Iron Mountain getting that funding, which it was awfully complicated, partly because… I don’t usually deal in outside funding and grants. Part of that is just a learning curve of becoming involved in Digital Humanities, which is a much more grant-funded world, but [I spent] an awful lot of time figuring out who we could hire, how much it would cost, who would pay them, what forms needed to be filed, what contracts needed to be filed…

As Maddock-Dillon explains, this work, and the work of the archive in general, is quite afar from these professors’ academic interests²⁰, yet it afforded her the opportunity to practice in genres and disciplines outside of the English department (i.e. through securing outside funding and grants), and it looks good to her employers for someone in an English department to be securing such funds.

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²⁰ This work, however, it is not far from their roles as teachers, and both cite being very proud of the work the graduate students took as we all learned together. Cordell notes, “I think for me the proudest aspect of the Marathon project was the extent which all of the grad students who worked on the project were able to completely take ownership with some aspect of it, which I hope will be of benefit to each of them in the future.”
As community members themselves, the opportunity to memorialize the tragedy through building a space for healing was important to the professors on this project as well as the other marathon archive team members; as academics, the chance to preserve history-in-the-making made sense for future research purposes. In either case, the creators of Our Marathon were sponsoring literate actions and gaining advantage based on the literate action of the archive. What first drew the academic team members to this project was the idea of archiving the stories of a tragic event that took place so close to our home institution. While the professors who worked on this project were more likely to be publicly lauded for their efforts, as evidenced in various local publications\textsuperscript{21}, they consistently recognized the labor of the graduate students and were voices of encouragement in their new roles as supervisors as opposed to their regular sponsoring roles as advisors and instructors.

Conclusion

Interviewer: How would you describe the act of submitting your story to the archive for you personally?

Leslie: It was cathartic…. I just felt like I’d been carrying this huge rock on my back for a year, and now I could stretch it. My ordeal was traumatic, maybe the most traumatic thing that ever happened in my life, or right up there.

In its simultaneous attempt to both historicize and memorialize a tragedy, Our Marathon first sought to simply capture the stories of those who had been impacted by the Boston Marathon bombings. As the site gained traction, it became apparent that opportunity to write and share stories could offer catharses for people like Leslie who felt as if they had been carrying an emotional burden. There could have been more work done to promote this option for others impacted by the marathon bombings had the space been branded as such. The dual-focus of the

\textsuperscript{21} See http://marathon.neu.edu/news
archive changed the relationship of promotion and solicitation, and it was months after the creation of the archive that we realized Share-Your-Story events were integral to the collection. Had we begun the archive as a memorial site, perhaps we would have come to this conclusion earlier thus integrating ourselves in various community spaces; perhaps a separate project could have been collecting public artifacts for historical purposes, such as the work we were simultaneously doing to digitize notes and letters sent to the city. Because of the agency that story sharers had over contributing, we should have had prompts to aid in walking participants back through their memories as well as different language to solicit personal “historical” artifacts such as impulsive status updates, emails, or text messages and other material specifically from that time period.

The exigency for this project meant that the creators were learning on the job, which proved beneficial in multiple ways. As was shown in the previous chapter, this work was immediately beneficial for some of the graduate students in terms of finding summer work that would engage their academic interests. It also led to funding for those whose fellowships had ended. Financial gain was important to graduate students, but the public-facing work of the archive provided much more: “The act of telling a story, the act of writing it down, the act of seeing other people is very therapeutic in itself. I was really excited to be a part of making that happen for more people than it would have been possible before” (Decamp). Not only was this an opportunity for extra money and extracurricular learning, but various people and institutions—including the students’ and professors’ home institution of Northeastern University—believed in the mission and goals of the archive. Put most simply: it looked good to be a part of this historical and memorial project.
These opportunities were afforded to the Our Marathon team on the basis that the archive could actually collect and store materials. In other words, it rested on the digitally literate practices of both the builders of the site and its intended community audience. In the process of trying to solicit stories and other materials, the Sponsors found gains from not only the act of collecting stories from the Sponsored but from also imagining their audiences and working to build a site for digitally literate people. This rigorous rhetorical work, although not valued in this way by traditional academic standards, is a publication of much critical thought and primary research. In building a historical archive with the community, we were also engaging in a decolonized act in which knowledge could be co-constructed through participation, negotiation, and literate actions; however, as will be explored more fully in the next chapter, not all communities were sponsored equally, and there is a sense of re-colonization through the archive only capturing perspectives from certain discourse communities.
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Chapter 4: The Community and the Archive

Introduction

In the above handwritten letter Stephanie, a high school student in California, expresses her condolences to the Corcorans and assures the women: “You will get through this together because of your strength as a community.” Stephanie’s invocation of the word “community” here is not clear: is she referring to the community of Boston, the community of survivors, the community of the family?

From the outset Our Marathon aimed to be a digital representation of community on the terms of the community members itself. Through crowdsourcing and other outreach efforts, in their roles as literacy sponsors, the creators of Our Marathon sought to design a space in which those who experienced the Boston Marathon bombings and their aftermath could share their own stories and contribute to the overall memory and history of the events; however, when thinking about how the digital and historial functions alter representation, the archive cannot escape the thorny areas of sponsorship that are exacerbated by such functions. Furthermore, while individuals did report seeing themselves as part of a physical and digital community—for
example, the #BostonStrong community—the way individuals speak of their experiences of sharing stories with *Our Marathon* invokes much more solitary actions. Rather than expressing the recognition of community and the reciprocal nature of belonging, participants reported a much more inward experience for why they shared their stories.

So far in this dissertation, I have mostly shown the inclusive nature of community in this digital archive through the digital, the historical, the stories, and the experiences of those who created and contributed to *Our Marathon*. This chapter aims to show the exclusive side of community and pays particular attention to various sponsoring roles: although we were creating a community/representation of community through the archive through sponsoring literate actions, the marathon team members were also being sponsored by outside institutions. In looking at sponsorships-within-sponsorships, one can see how misalignments may begin to form, which necessitates attention in this project.

By calling this attention here, I aim to unpack a major critique of the archive in terms of diversity and representations: who is the “our” of *Our Marathon*? How does the digital, historical, and conceptual community impact these demographics? To unpack community in this chapter, I look to the identities that shared stories with this archive. In finding that the archive houses mostly by well-educated, financially-sound, White people, I think through how the archive’s sponsoring relationships may have impacted this homogenous participation. If an archive is co-constructed with the (diverse) community it seeks to represent and fails, is the archive in danger of essentially re-colonizing such spaces through only recognizing certain communities of discourse? In this chapter I look at who’s memory is being secured for future researchers by examining the demographics of story sharers in *Our Marathon* and looking at potential reasons for limited demographic representation in light of the marathon itself as well as city of Boston.
Creating Community

As was introduced in Chapter 1 and suggested in subsequent chapters, a major failure of this archive is its lack of diverse voices, which may be accounted for in part by the physical spaces the marathon team entered and the digital space provided by the archive. The following section accounts for three main reasons the archive might represent limited demographics.

First, the marathon team simply did not enter as many diverse community spaces as we would have liked. When thinking of “community” spaces, we focused on libraries. Why did we not focus more on schools, community organizations, and/or the streets themselves? First, libraries offered a place where people voluntarily wanted to read and write. Second, as we assumed the bulk of our artifacts would come from students—particularly Northeastern University students—we wanted to expand beyond schools; similarly, we felt that we could reach potential school-aged contributors through digital means. Third, as will be more fully explored in this chapter, our sources of funding came with specific parameters. Lastly, we did attempt to start from the ground up, but the concept of a digital archive that aimed to capture people’s stories was not an easy “sell”: perhaps because of the fundraising opportunities inundating Boston at the time, when we attempted to talk to strangers about the archive, there was an immediate misconception that we were looking for money. Public libraries afforded us with an appropriate venue for requesting literate actions on the spot.

In addition to the week-long event at the Boston Public Library leading up to the 2014 Marathon, where we gathered many stories from marathon runners, in-person “Share Your Story” events took place at the following locations: the Cambridge Public Library, the Public Library of Brookline, the Newton Free Library, the Watertown Free Public Library, and the Pollard Memorial Library in Lowell, Massachusetts. The archive team directly reached out to
two of these libraries—Cambridge and Watertown—because of their proximity to the events; however, dozens and dozens of packets were sent to libraries all around the Boston area to promote the archive and potential partnerships for story-sharing events:

[When approaching libraries,] first we were just sending materials: we sent a bunch of our bookmarks, for instance, that we had designed specifically for public libraries. We just sent out a lot of those materials and said, “If anyone has questions, get in touch.”

We also posted on some library blogs…. There wasn’t actually a real selection process [of which libraries we hosted events in]. It was basically…

There were people who reached out to us, which was very few (Peaker).

While libraries, as sites of literacy, were natural places for us to hold events, with our attention on the one-year anniversary of the marathon bombings, and the subsequent “end” of most team members’ official work on the project, we relied on libraries to “get in touch” with us. To hold events in the library, there would have to be interest, as indicated by a librarian, and space. Public libraries are perfect places when thinking about moving in between university and community spaces: not only are they steeped in educational opportunities, but also they are generally free to enter. This being said, not every library is as glamorous as the central branch of the Boston Public Library: they are on budgets and have their own constraints. Because of our own time and funding constraints, we were not quite able to incentivize the extra work it would take a librarian or staff to promote story-sharing events.

Second, the digital space we provided could have also led to a lack of diversity. Presently in 2016, everything from ordering your coffee to augmented reality gaming happens through a phone application. When asked about the best devices to access Our Marathon from, DeCamp
recounts, “Computers were a way to access [Our Marathon], but I think a significant amount of people actually were doing it from tablets, and mobile devices, and looking through it. If it was designed a bit better in terms of the mobile layout or maybe if we approached the design from the mobile layout first, we might have been able to get [more participation].” The biggest barrier here was the technical expertise: “We didn’t have the money to hire an app developer. I’m not an app developer. If I were to try app development, I would not want this to be my first attempt because this is a big project that’s important” (DeCamp).

Third, while the archive was interested in capturing as many stories as possible, not all stories were deemed appropriate. When sharing stories in this archive, although I view agency—one’s personal choice of action—as staying with the contributors when thinking about Our Marathon as a historical archive, as a historical archive the Our Marathon team had to make decisions in terms of certain “parts” of the story that we did not feel comfortable capturing. Cordell reflects on these decisions:

After the Marathon bombing, because the Internet exists, there were a lot of people who thought about the event in a very different way. There were a lot of people who made memes that were making fun of victims or that were praising the actions of the bombers. Historically, those things are really, really important. If you want to think about this event that happened, you can’t only think about the narrative of memorial and remembrance and grieving and mourning and celebration, ultimately, that you’re going to get through the news media.

People who think that it was a justified event—that’s part of the historical narrative. People who make fun of the victims—that’s a part of what happened.
Cordell discusses how if the audience for the archive might include people in the city who are grieving, then it is difficult to justify including every part of the historical narrative:

One of the things I often imagined was a family member. What would happen if a family member of one of the victims pulled up our site, and the first thing that appeared was a meme making fun of the victims? That seems to me like a horrifying scenario. It would just increase the trauma.

They would have been coming to this place that they thought was the safe space and encounter this ugly counter narrative, I guess. We did not want that to be a possibility. But at the same time, I think we were all very conscious that by foreclosing that possibility, we were perpetuating one very specific viewpoint about the event.

Cordell also offers a more complex example of communities within Boston who resented the amount of attention that this event was receiving when the violence in their communities was also horrific:

[Many members of] the African-American community in Boston… pointed out that people were dying in their communities every day. They were not getting this kind of attention, whereas the people who died at the Marathon were getting this enormous amount of attention. If your audience is a historian who wants to understand what this event meant in Boston—5 years ago, 10 years ago, 50 years ago—then all of those things are really important, essential parts of what you need to capture in the archive.
The city of Boston has had a fraught relationship with race in the past, and it is an issue that continues to impact the city today. For anyone interested in learning about the people of Boston during the time of the marathon bombing, this story is ultimately nonexistent.

In viewing *Our Marathon* as a site that represents a community, there was a shortcoming in thinking about how our anticipated contributors experienced the tragedy and how they would feel inclined to share, but there were also a lot of deeper, cultural issues that would not immediately surface for the marathon team until the project was on its way. Moreover, as capital was a major issue for the archive, despite many conversations and best intentions when it came to diversity in the archive, the interests of the sponsors’ sponsors (i.e. our sources of funding) often took precedent, and their institutional interests also impacted participation in the archive.

**Sponsoring the Sponsors**

As I have been arguing, those who created the archive are digital literacy Sponsors, and those who contributed to the archive are the Sponsored. With *Our Marathon* there were also sponsorships within sponsorships: not only were the creators of *Our Marathon* sponsoring and benefitting from literate actions, but the site and staff itself were being sponsored by much larger institutions, which adds another layer to sponsoring the story sharers.

More specifically, the sponsors’ sponsors might also influence the homogenous digital identity we see in this community archive. *Our Marathon* is described as a “community project” hosted by Northeastern University on its homepage immediately under its banner. Its mission on the homepage invokes the global mindset the university itself often portrays: “We believe that sharing stories from survivors, families, witnesses, visitors to the city, and everyone around the world touched by the event will speed the healing process. This is the place to share those
images, emotions, and experiences to help us understand the bombing and its aftermath” (“Our Marathon”). Having worked on the project since its inception, I can say that the team who created this archive were as committed to “everyone around the world” as they were to their own connections here in Boston, and the archive does showcase this global identity quite proudly via a map of geo-tagged metadata:

The above map shows quite a success story for a minimally funded project in that it was able to capture artifacts from all over the world; however, as my data suggests, this is actually a limited representation of diversity in a complex, globalizing world.

As a digital community project, the sponsors of Our Marathon impacted the overall archival identity in direct and indirect ways in terms of who would feel comfortable in the realm of an academic space, how potential contributors would hear about the project, and how a corporate sponsorship would perhaps dissuade story sharers. There were three main financial sponsors of the archive: Northeastern University, 90.9 WBUR, and Iron Mountain. As described in Chapter 2, the archive’s earliest sponsors, Northeastern University and WBUR, most directly
shaped much of what the archive would look physically look like, which, in this chapter, I argue has implications for participation in terms of having large institutional brandings that might dissuade potential contributors who did not engage with higher education; the company Iron Mountain would impact archival identity in terms of artifacts that would be housed in the archive, which would limit how we could use that significant sum of money.

First, the university was immediately supportive of this archive: colleagues in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities believed in its importance and agreed that our institution should host the project—although interviewing the Dean was outside of the IRB-scope of this dissertation, one can imagine that the expeditious financial support for the archive stemmed not from just the nature of the event itself but also from securing “rights” to this form of academic preservation from area institutional competitors. Furthermore, not only would this be an important public repository, the experience for students to work on building such a repository would be invaluable. As a university with a well-known commitment to experiential learning and a growing interest and expertise in Digital Humanities, this was an opportunity to display strengths of NU. As expressed earlier in this dissertation the word “archive” is not immediately inviting, but it does lend a level of academic credibility, which is enhanced by the project’s “host”:

Even from the lightest engagement with the archive, such as simply loading the page on one’s browser, the outward rhetoric of Our Marathon that we encounter—specifically its designations
as a “Digital Archive” and “A Community Project Hosted by Northeastern University”—invites the participation of those who understand the function of archives and/or value the institutional affiliation as will be seen later in this chapter.

As can be seen above in the subtitle of the archive, the second major financial sponsor was WBUR: Boston’s local National Public Radio (“NPR”) station. The radio station was primarily interested in funding the Oral History Project. They understood that media fatigue had set in: *Our Marathon* not only served as a refreshing venue, but oral histories were distinctly different from the shorter interviews their reporters were able to conduct, and our academic affiliation would afford us entrance into places and stories they otherwise might not have had access to. In the same vein, a WBUR affiliation would be something we could play up or down based on the participants we sought for the project. With the hiring of professional oral historians Jayne Guberman and Joanna Shea-O’Brien, and with the guidance of George Hicks, one of WBUR’s technical producers who trained me on best practices for audio recording with our equipment, the radio station felt comfortable sponsoring *Our Marathon*; for very little work on their end, they would be highly visible on our website and have access to that much more material as they prepared for the anniversary.

Both WBUR and Northeastern University were aware of the potentials and drawbacks of this partnership: such an affiliation had the capability of reaching more people as well as turning some people away. Looking back, we might have acquired different community contributions had we sought to also work with radio stations such as KISS 108, a pop music station, or JAM’N 94.5, a hip-hop music station. An NPR audience was limiting, but the financial sponsorship inevitably shut down the potential to work with other broadcast channels. Although we assumed
an oral history project would be beneficial to the project, following a different path may have led to stories, photos, and such from a wider swathe of Boston’s demographics.

The third financial sponsor, who mostly influences the future researcher audience of the archive, was Iron Mountain—an information management services company that is headquartered in Boston. As compared to WBUR, Iron Mountain is a company that makes billions of dollars in revenue each year, and its stakes in the project were personal and philanthropic. Volunteers from Iron Mountain had already been working with the Boston City Archives to sort through the various artifacts that had been placed at a makeshift memorial in Copley Square (near the marathon finish line) and sent to the Mayor’s office. According to Boston Magazine,

Volunteers spent more than 350 hours on the project, and it didn’t stop at just carefully placing things into designated spots. The sorting included digitizing many of the paper items—letters that flooded then-mayor Tom Menino’s mailbox by the thousands—so they could be included in an online database hosted by Northeastern University. Those smaller pieces of the memorial will be viewable from anywhere in the world, beginning on April 15. “The effort to digitize each letter and card in a way that captured the spirit of it in its physical form was extensive,” said [Samantha Joseph, the company’s director of corporate responsibility and sustainability] (Annear).

This philanthropic effort, paired with a popular magazine’s coverage, highlights two institutions that are committed to a particular narrative of the Boston Marathon bombings. Iron Mountain’s financial contributions, which came later in the project’s timeline, impacted what work could be done; because of their business, it made sense to fund the digitizing of artifacts.
When it comes to the work of *Our Marathon*, these three forces in particular help to shape public activity—from actions of literacy to negotiations of public memory—but they also aided in shaping the identity of the archive as a whole. Iron Mountain has impacted the overall identity of the archive as its allocation of funds went to digitizing physical objects. It was also a corporate sponsor that would have different expectations than an academic institution. The other two sponsors directly impacted participation in the archive when it comes to story sharing. Most obvious is the academic audience that Northeastern University has access to in terms of students, alumni, professionals, and staff.

Similarly, WBUR draws a particular kind of audience. According to National Public Media, the agency behind NPR and PBS, the audience profiles for NPR are categorized into seven main groups: the Affluent Business Leader, the Cultural Connoisseur, the Educated Lifelong Learner, the Civic Leader, the Sustainability Champion, the Curious Explorer, and the Tech Trendsetter (“NPR Audience”). In their audience profiles, National Public Media proudly documents facts about NPR listeners as opposed to non-NPR listeners such as that NPR listeners are 146% more likely to be top management, 99% more likely to attend two or more concerts per month, 461% more likely to have a doctorate degree, and 79% more likely to purchase organic food (“NPR Audience”). In addition to these facts on their website, National Public Media points you towards an NPR Audience PDF titled “This is NPR: Cross-platform Audience Profiles,” which alerts readers to other important facts about this particular audience:
Neither the website nor the PDF comment on demographic information such as race or gender, though assumptions can be made based on their reported percentages. One affordance of studying a digital community in real time is being able to cull information about identity in these spaces to get a sense of who comprises the community, which, again, is a term that necessitates both inclusion and exclusion. In the following section I look at what this community’s overall digital identity looks like for those who contributed their stories to *Our Marathon*.

**Community and *Our Marathon***

To better understand those who contributed their written stories to *Our Marathon*, I surveyed this population to get a more explicit idea of demographics in this archive and found that story sharers were mostly over the age of 35, female, and white:

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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>65% over the age of 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>72% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
<td>93% white</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these demographics, I surveyed story sharers’ level of education, annual income levels, and location also add layers to the overall identity one encounters when using the archive.
Story sharers tended to be educated\textsuperscript{22} and well off financially\textsuperscript{23}; in other words, these demographics seemed to be in line with the “NPR Audience Profiles” previously discussed. Moreover, most story sharers identified as having some current or past experience living within proximity to the physical home of the digital archive in Boston. Drawing from these data, we see a specific type of community representing the public sphere of the Boston Marathon bombings.

For comparison, here is the overall demographic breakdown of Boston:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Profiles</th>
<th>In Our Marathon</th>
<th>In Boston\textsuperscript{24}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (18+)</td>
<td>65% over the age of 35</td>
<td>36% over the age of 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>72% female</td>
<td>52% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
<td>93% white</td>
<td>54% white</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boston is considered a “young” city, which is impacted by its abundance of colleges and universities and overall size—once families start having children, it is relatively easy to move to a suburb and commute into the city. In fact, 46% of the city is in the age range of 18-34, which was the archive team’s intended target audience, as, according to Peaker, we wanted to start with our own students and alumni to spread word of the project.

When looking at a digital community space that is archiving a Boston-based event that, in itself, is rich with privilege and philanthropy it is perhaps not so shocking to find the grand narrative of \textit{Our Marathon} has a specific racial identity when it comes to the intimate act of story sharing; however, popular conceptions of the Boston Marathon are often globally focused with particular attention paid to the elite runners from all over the world with most of the marathon winners hailing from Kenya and Ethiopia over the past 10 years.

\textsuperscript{22} 49\% of those who answered my survey have a degree higher than a Bachelor’s.
\textsuperscript{23} In 2013, the U.S. median household income was $52,250 (in Massachusetts, the median household income was $66,768); 47\% of those who answered my survey reported a household income of $100,000 and higher (30\% reported more than $150,000).
\textsuperscript{24} Statistics as of 2015 from The United States Census Bureau and SuburbanStats.org.
Digital Community

Our Marathon straddles the line of being an academic and community space and attempts to allow as many identities as possible the chance to participate in the construction of the history of an event through the venue of the digital archive. In Rhetoric and Composition scholarship we see separate conversations on the digital and the archive mostly when it comes to identity and performance in digital spaces (see Nakamura; Pagnucci and Muriello; Powell; Williams) and identity in archival researcher positions and methods (see Glenn and Enoch; Kirsch and Rohan; McKee and Porter). For example, in the 1999 *Computers and Composition* article “The Masquerade: Gender, Identity, and Writing for the Web,” Gian S. Pagnucci and Nicholas Mauriello present a case study of how they viewed gender functioning in online peer critiques of student papers. In these “masked” critiques where identity had been blurred by the digital, they found that students still fell into stabilized discourses of gender power when it came to the objectification of women and privileged position of men (146). On the other hand, in a *Computers and Composition* article a decade later, Bronwyn Williams looks at student agency in digital social media platforms where identity can be more carefully curated for their own public audiences—as opposed to the limited classroom audience—and finds that the intertextual nature of students engaging with popular culture texts creates opportunities for multiple readings of their personal archives in ways that destabilize the identities students believe they have created.

Although Williams and Pagnucci and Mauriello are looking at a specific population here—college students of seemingly traditional ages—my thinking here is quite influenced by

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25 Both Pagnucci and Mauriello and Williams rely on qualitative interviewing as a key method to understanding the choices their populations were making and found that digital identity works as a somewhat pure representation of an idealized self for the rhetorical situation presented. The audiences, contexts, and purposes in that of an online component in a classroom or a social media page are seemingly clear to their research subjects, and the technologies’ roles in aiding these decisions are seemingly clear to the researchers. I draw attention to these two studies here because of the boundaries of the personal and the academic are deeply influenced by the perceived publics these populations are engaging with in order to accomplish their goals.
the concepts of stabilized and destabilized identities and how these platforms influence the decision making afforded to the digital community. For example, as explored in Chapter 2, in order to submit a story to *Our Marathon*, participants must have a certain level of digital competency—even if just in the form of basic internet and word processing literacies. Although not explicitly surveyed in this research, one can speculate that contributors to a site like *Our Marathon* already have digital identities that engage with personal archiving daily, although someone might not think of a *Facebook* status, tweet, or *Instagram* photo as personal archiving.

Although we were working in the digital realm with this archive, with such proximity to the events we were also bound to the physical aspects of the marathon bombings and their aftermath; in other words, we wanted the digital space to represent the physical space. For example, when first conceptualizing the archive, the first audience we had in mind was our own students. Most of the graduate students working on the project were also instructors of record for the various writing courses required by Northeastern University’s Writing Program. Other team members who were working face-to-face with their students were privy to the ephemeral sharing of stories happening in their classrooms and elsewhere. Cordell, at the time a newly hired Assistant Professor of English who was also new to the Boston area, recounts, “An awful lot of students were watching the marathon… Many of them lived in the areas that were cordoned off as the investigations were proceeding. Some of them couldn’t get into their apartments. Others were there with this immense police presence.”

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26 Personally, when I initially learned of an explosion at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, many thoughts began to swirl in my head, but one would stay with me all week: “I hope my kids are all right.” That spring I had been teaching an online version of an advanced writing course, and it struck me that I felt connected to this group of students who I had never met face-to-face before: it was in this virtual world that I felt nervous that “my kids” had been affected by this confusing tragedy, and it was in this virtual world that I realized these students were not responsible for checking in with me the way they would with a parent. I offered what I could through email, optional changes to my final assignments, and trying to be generally understanding of any extenuating circumstances.
Peaker, then doctoral candidate at Northeastern University and now postdoc at Middlebury College, reflects on the imagined users of the archive:

We knew the people who were most likely to come [to the archive] in the beginning: we figured it would be Northeastern community, primarily Northeastern students—people related to the project through the library and so on. We were thinking maybe the next ripple out would be young professionals in the Boston area or other students. We were thinking a younger crowd, which was something that we reassessed very quickly because we realized that’s a very limited perspective—especially if we are designing for [a younger crowd]: that’s going to be who is contributing, and that’s not the [whole] story.

While we expected that many of our story contributors would be of (traditional) college ages, only 15% identified as being 18-24 years old. In fact our largest story sharing population (33%) identified as being 45-54 years old. What happened to our anticipated contributors?

As Peaker points out, we were designing the archive for people who had a certain digital fluency; we wanted to create something that would be familiar to our anticipated contributors, firstly students. Peaker also points to potential oversaturation by an anticipated audience: if we only thought about students as primary contributors to the digital archive, then we would not be collecting the whole story. We branched out through connections with local media sources, such as The Boston Globe, WCVB (Channel 5: “Boston’s News Leader”), and WBUR. Although we wanted the digital archive to be self-sustained in the digital realm, this simply did not always work as assumed, so even the potentially democratizing digital space became, at times, upended by the limitations of the physical spaces we were able to enter.
Lastly, findings have shown that African-American and Latino youths are outpacing their White and Asian peers in media usage, but how they are using media is what keeps the divide going (“Closing Digital Divide, Expanding Digital Literacy”). It is difficult to name what are “meaningful” digitally literate practices because there is not as much literature on how minority students are engaging in these practices (though we may point to scholars like Lihn Dich for some examples); however, there are facts that show that about 41% of U.S. Twitter users are minorities (Koh). In other words, more minority youths are engaging in digitally literate practices where they have access to technology and are becoming citizens of the digital spaces they enter, but, as is key with popular social media sites, one can access these spaces through their smartphones, which is different than having access to a computer.

**Racial Reality and Community**

Boston has had a contentious history with race relations in the past: in particular, the desegregation of Boston public schools through busing, implemented in 1974, led to a number of acts of violence and outspoken hatred that still cast shadows over community members today\(^ {27} \) and has also impacted the racial makeup of Boston\(^ {28} \). Boston is known as a city of neighborhoods with lines drawn between among racial and class borders, but even the events that draw neighborhood members together have a contentious history: a diehard sports town, the Boston Red Sox were the last major league baseball team to integrate, allegedly due to the resistance of the still celebrated team owner Tom Yawkey (Bryant); Boston Celtics basketball

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\(^{27}\) The last remnants of the busing system were done away with in March 2013. At the time, Mayor Thomas Menino cited that keeping students closer to home would encourage more parental involvement, which would develop neighborhood cohesion and thus improve the schools. This was met with resistance as the lowest-performing schools were serving mostly Black and Hispanic student populations (Seyle).

\(^{28}\) Bruce Gellerman writes, “The year busing began, there were 86,000 students enrolled in Boston public schools, more than half of them white. Today there are 54,000 students, and less than 14 percent are white.”
legend Bill Russell consistently faced prejudice from the sports press and only started to embrace the city upon returning for an event in 1999, thirty years after his basketball career ended (Goudsouzian 349). From schools to sports, major social, cultural, and environmental aspects of Boston’s history are steeped in racial tension.

For our purposes as community archivists, data on race/ethnicity that shows only particular types of voices being “significant” to the project may seem somewhat disappointing, but it also highlights the Boston Marathon bombings as a “raced” tragedy. When thinking of communities as tied to memory, it is difficult to separate Boston from its racial memory. This section examines three forms of community memory that may help account for the minority voices missing from the archive. The first reason is that minorities were implicated in the acts of terror, and this could have led to a distancing from the aftermath. The second two reasons have to do with the Boston Marathon as a longstanding charitable race in the city: minorities have a strained relationship with running in general, and there are particular perceptions of minorities’ relationships with charity.

In addition to the contentious history the city has with racial relations, race and religion were major issues for the Boston Marathon bombing specifically. With Internet vigilantism running rampant through Twitter and Reddit feeds, speculations were made quickly and carelessly, and fingers were pointed as people wanted insta-answers. Going to bed on April 15, 2013, the news reported that this had been the action of Sunil Tripathi, a student who had went missing from Brown University the month before. Waking up the next morning, we came to find

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29 Even our major construction (woes) invited such discussion: in King of the Court, Aram Goudsouzian writes, “During the construction of Boston’s ‘Big Dig,’ various citizens and editorialists proposed naming a soaring, cable-stayed bridge after Bill Russell—an appropriate bookend to the Ted Williams Tunnel. It would honor another athlete with an independent spirit, and it would symbolically bridge a racial chasm. The suggestion never gained ground. Many perceived a racial double standard. ‘Look,’ said Tom Heinsohn, ‘all I know is the guy won two NCAA championships, 50-some college games in a row, the Olympics, then he came to Boston and won 11 championships in 13 years, and they named a fucking tunnel after Ted Williams’” (348). Bill Russell was honored with a statue in 2013.
that the bombers are Chechens from the Caucus region (“literally Caucasian” we would read in
the same news feeds as “radicalized Muslims”). While not always the focus of many news
reports, an underlying discussion of race/ethnicity was continually taking place as digital maps
pointed out to us where Chechnya lies in the Russian Federation (as opposed to the Czech
Republic in central Europe); “White-ness” and “Non White-ness” were explored through
conversations of their schooling (“they went to the same affluent high school as Matt Damon”)
and their extracurricular activities (“they were into the most violent sports: boxing and
wrestling”); and concerns over anti-Muslim actions were raised. Race quickly became conflated
with other aspects of identity yet still played a prominent role in how the terrorists would be
viewed.

As with any domestic attack, the demographic identity of the terrorist(s) is part of the
conversation, and there is often fear of reactionary violence. In the corpus of texts I analyzed,
race is not usually invoked in the stories themselves, and only two stories mention “Muslim”:

**Title:** Marathon never ended. (Mohsen)
**Text:** It was a weird day….
...After days, some evidences were discovered and some people were
accused and prosecuted. As an Iranian, I was always asking god that please,
please those bombers not to be Muslim. Otherwise, Islam including my people
would be condemned for that Bombing....

Every day I pass through the Boylston street, I remind that terrible attack
and those terrible days. I hope nothing similar happens not only here but around
the world.

Hope to peace be settled in the entire world.

**Title:** Memories from the Boston Marathon Bombing (Doyle)
**Text:** I immediately texted my friend to ask how her daughter was, and she said
fine. She thanked me for praying for her that morning…. 

...One of my students last year told a story of how she was harassed in a
local bodega because she was wearing her muslim ‘hijab’ – which is the
traditional head scarf worn by women. I told her that that man was ignorant and
that not all Americans are hateful. This young lady spoke at a school assembly
shortly after the Boston Marathon bombing, because on the news the mother of
the boys who bombed Boston wore a hijab and she did not want this to stir hate
for muslims --- she talked to the assembly about how difficult it is for muslim women and how it is simply a religious symbol. The assembly gave her a standing ovation she told me....

In these two stories, we feel sympathy for those who may face persecution because they are of the same religion as the Boston Marathon terrorists. In “Marathon never ended.” (submitted on the 6-month anniversary of the bombing, October 15, 2013) readers are given a glimpse into the thoughts of a person of the Muslim faith, yet the writer still fall into the discourse community of the archive in the recontextualized story that falls into specific genre conventions. Although the part of the story excerpted here from “Memories of the Boston Marathon Bombing” (submitted on March 14, 2014) includes a story about a woman of Muslim faith, it was not written by that woman but rather by someone who instructs her; this being said, we are given a small glimpse into this faith in Boston. As faith became a popular topic around the terrorists, it is curious that it does not come through much in the stories of the archive. This discourse community was not captured.

Another discourse community not captured is minority runners. The Boston Marathon itself presents both class and racial complications when it comes to participation. For example, on its surface, running seems like a fairly apolitical sport: anyone who is able-bodied and desires to run can do so; however, as individual as “going for a run” may be, running as a sport is often a group exercise. Running groups offer community, motivation, and safety. Co-founder of Black Girls RUN!, Toni Carey, reflects on her first experience going for a group run and how it acted as an impetus to start promoting safe spaces for Black women:

We showed up and no one said hello. They kind of were looking at us like, “What are these two girls doing here in their running clothes?” So no one talked with us the entire time. For me to love running as much as I did I was like, “If this is what
the rest of the runners are like, I’m not sure if this is for me.” They were subtly saying you’re not welcome to running. That still kind of haunts me that that happened to me, because I’m sure if that happened to me, I’m sure it happens to other people (Knox).

More specifically, marathon training requires dedicated time and resources for running, recovery, and nutrition. Although African runners dominate professional running, amateur running is more open. There are many marathoners who have made a career or hobby out of the sport through consistent regimens, but most interested marathoners who do not meet the qualifying time for the Boston Marathon can try to secure a spot running for a charity, and many stories do touch upon the aspect of charity around the race.

Charity is a very common theme in the archive, with many runners and supporters having some sort of charitable connection. For example, in the following story a Northeastern University student accounts for a three-day charity event for his fraternity.

**Title:** The Beach Ball (Fenuccio)

**Text:** We had just approached the end of a three-day charity event that our fraternity, ZBT, was hosting at the finish line for the Boston Marathon. The charity we were working for was "Get on the Ball," where we rolled a giant 6 foot beach ball around the city all weekend gathering signatures and donations for the Boston Children's Hospital. We had support from several generous individuals and organizations who agreed to donate based on how many signatures we could get onto the beach ball, so we planned on going to the most dense area in the city at the time, which was the Boston Marathon finish line at Copley.

Our priorities had shifted from raising money for a charity to helping the situation at hand. We quickly made the best of the circumstances by rolling this giant beach ball throughout an awe-struck crowd and just talking to people as we were herded away from Copley towards Boston Common, saying "follow the beach ball and everything will be fine" to little kids walking past just trying to crack a small smile and take peoples' minds of things for an instant since we were such an unexpected site in a crisis....

*Boston Strong!*
This story was also submitted on the 6-month anniversary, presumably at Northeastern University as the writer specifically speaks of the university in his story, and he identifies himself as being of a typical college age. When inputting his racial identity per the archive’s request, this writer put “Bostonian ;)” suggesting a resistance to racial identification. What matters most to this writer’s story is the charity, the ball, and the way he and his fraternity brothers could help with what they had in front of them. This is typical of story sharers who were at the marathon for charitable reasons: charity became is very much a part of the race.

The charity aspect of the marathon also offers a complication when it comes to the city’s engagement with the event, and charity contains racial and socioeconomic biases as well. Locally, in addition to the excitement (and sometimes annoyances) it brings to the city, the Boston Marathon has a philanthropic connotation. The Boston Athletic Association and John Hancock, a financial services company who is the Boston Marathon’s principal sponsor and reportedly contributed $18.1 million dollars\(^{30}\) to the marathon in 2016\(^{31}\), set aside a few thousand spots for charity runners each year. Most of these charities have a minimum fundraising goal of $5,000 per runner, and a few of the charities specifically look to aid underserved populations in the city. Adding to the complexity of race in Boston and the Boston Marathon, charity also contains racial biases. In an article for *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Holly Hall cites from a 2015 study released by fundraising software company BlackBaud, which reports that white donors are overrepresented in charitable donations as compared to their overall proportion of the population:

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\(^{30}\) See “2016 Boston Marathon by the Numbers, presented by WalletHub,” which also reports that the Boston Marathon had a $181.9 million impact in 2015.

\(^{31}\) For reference, John Hancock made $1.1 billion of net income in 2015 and had assets under management/administration of $392 billion as of 3/31/2016 (“John Hancock Fact Sheet”).
Many solicitations, particularly to recruit new donors, are sent to people who share numerous characteristics with supporters of the past, who were mostly white... Both African-American and Hispanic donors in the study reported getting fewer charitable solicitations... People may assume that Hispanics and African-Americans are less likely to give because they have fewer resources or for cultural reasons, the researchers said, but their findings suggest otherwise.

Hall reports that race is not a major factor in indicators of giving; unsurprisingly, income is the best predictor of giving. More important to the concept of community, however, is that if minority populations are overlooked when it comes to charitable donations, they are less likely to be exposed to participating in those charities. Also, should a runner commit to running for charity, that runner is responsible for meeting the fundraising minimum, which could be quite daunting to someone who perhaps has not fundraised before. In response to the question “What if I don’t meet my fundraising obligation?” CharityTeams.org answers, “Runners who don't meet the fundraising minimum will be contacted and their situation will be discussed. Worst case scenario a runner's credit card will be charged” (“FAQ’s on Boston 26.2”).

Boston has a racial memory, and various communities are impacted by these memories as can be seen through the marathon and the events of 2013. In Our Marathon, there came to be a privileged discourse community in terms of the stories told and the rhetoric used. Having the privilege of running and/or raising money for charity prompted certain individuals to be there, and even many of those individuals were unsure if their stories “counted”; how might someone who was not physically there, someone who feels inconvenienced by the marathon, or someone

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32 That being said, Hall also reports that there are subtle differences among ethnic groups in terms of trends in giving: for African-American donors religion is an important factor in giving, and there is greater response from in-person solicitations for charities that support youths and/or anti-hate or anti-discrimination groups; Asian donors are more likely to give to disaster relief efforts through technology-based crowdfunding efforts; and Hispanic donors are more spontaneous in their giving and more likely to purchase an item in which the proceeds go to a charitable cause.
who feels angry towards the marathon remember the events, and what would prompt them to submit to an academic archive? They are not invited to the discourse community—those who value the marathon, those who feel “Boston Strong”—therefore, they are shut out from participating in the memory of the events even though they lived nearby. As a decolonized archive, the fact that a limited discourse community is represented in the archive is a major failure.

**Boston Strong and Community**

As a discourse community of memory, the recontextualization of stories allows the community to distance itself from concerns like running and philanthropy—again the major aspects of the Boston Marathon—as well as the acts of terror. In the stories one will not see the terrorists named very often or much discussion about them. The community is polite in ways; however, we do see the use of #BostonStrong coming through to denote pride, connection, and a particular memory. The hashtag and phrase “Boston Strong” represented a wide range of emotions that, as a whole, shifted toward the positive, but that is not the whole story either. From a distance, it is a complicated rhetorical formation that excludes a lot of people. Maddock-Dillon reflects on her feelings toward the phrase:

> It’s a little mixed. Boston Strong is a powerful phrase because it connects people: “I feel like I’m part of this community, and that we can be strong together.” It’s a meme that allows you to hold hands with the community. The negative aspect of it is the extent to which it became associated with jingoistic/racist associations. It cuts both ways.
Peaker echoes Maddock-Dillon’s mixed feelings on the phrase: “What I like about it is the way it connects people. The way that I am critical of it sometimes is that it particularly seems to connect white people in Boston and has also been tied occasionally… [to] racist remarks and inflammatory things said about different religions, particularly Islam. I have troubled relationship with it I should say.”

Within one week of the marathon bombings, there were eight patents out on the phrase “Boston Strong” (Sadowski). Cordell expresses his mixed emotions toward the phrase in terms of its commodification:

As someone who was a relative outsider, I was also just really learning what the marathon was. It’s not just a sporting event that happens in Boston: it’s a huge community thing. In the initial days after the event, “Boston Strong” became this hissy way of expressing defiance or pride… I think it was very difficult to be not swept up in that a bit. Now when I go to the city and see that one of the biggest things for us to buy in Boston is a “Boston Strong” t-shirt, it feels a little bit less salient… It has become now a trinket, and mostly it’s a salable good.

From these academic points of view, there are conflicting feelings on this pervasive phrase mostly in terms of seeing the benefits and drawbacks of having this sort of rallying cry; from the public’s point of view, however, “Boston Strong” presents as even more complicated than the academic binaries explored above:

**Dot:** For me, it’s been “Boston Strong” before the solidarity and people coming together because to run Boston you have to be strong. Boston’s always been a fantastic supporter of the Marathon even before this event. I tell people it’s like you’re an Olympic athlete when come to Boston—you go to the New York Marathon, and you’re in the way of people: you’re ruining their Sunday, and they can’t get to their coffee shop. But you come to Boston and the whole city stops with the Marathon. Even before the Marathon bombings, Boston’s support of the Marathon was strong, and then how everyone came together afterward… It just exemplified something they already had in them.
Janet: The phrase to me is extremely meaningful because it became the phrase about this marathon. It was a phrase of solidarity, not only within the city but with everyone who was there from all over the world. People all over the country who are especially near...way afterward, who were showing their support did so by using the phrase, “Boston Strong.” It became, for me, probably like many others, almost like my catchphrase to keep me going, knowing that that was other people’s catchphrase. I didn’t finish the marathon, so I was able to run the following year, and that phrase was very meaningful to me as I was training. The training was very hard, both emotionally and physically, and that phrase was very helpful to me. The phrase was symbolic of how many people were surrounding me. People that I knew, people all around the country who didn't know me, and around the world who didn't know me, but were all solid in this phrase, in staying strong.

Tracy: My immediate answer is resilience. My second answer is community in the sense of belonging… I was at Boston University then. Boston University of course lost a student so I think solidarity is part of it, part of a common shared experience that can’t be ignored, can’t be changed but also not to diminish the effect that it has on everybody, some kind of solidarity and some kind of remembrance such as doesn’t say, “Oh, that was two years ago, forget it.”

Colleen: That’s a mixed emotion there...I cringe when I hear it and I see it. For me, it’s still a reminder of that event, not in a positive way. It’s better now. There was a time where if I saw it, I would just shake because I felt like as if I were right back in that, at that day, at the Marathon. Now there’s some mixed emotions… I don’t want to diminish what happened, but I also know that there are people in the world who have gone through so much worse, and we don’t share their stories. We don’t rally around...we don’t make as much of a big deal over it…. I think because it happened in an area, in Boston, in which people don’t have to deal with that kind of violence on a regular basis. It was magnified and intensified for the community. I think that people use it as a rallying point, but I think we’re not used to it. It was always gaining control over this uncontrollable situation.

In these answers, there are various invocations of communities from the marathon bombing itself, to the Boston community, to the running community, and the community that supports the Marathon; even when finding it cringe inducing, there is a sense of coming together. “Boston Strong” has become a form of cultural capital that was once (somewhat) unique to the Boston marathon bombings and their aftermath but that also figures into the establishment of public memory in the archive. It is an important signal of solidarity to some of my research participants; it is a nod to its own discourse community as Boston Strong was never spoken of in personal terms—even in Colleen’s negative reactions to the term, she invokes the idea of community.
This particular Internet grammar from the time period is remembered; it is skewed and repurposed and recontextualized in literal and figurative ways. To these women, the commodification of the phrase “Boston Strong” went far beyond selling t-shirts. In particular, #BostonStrong became a ubiquitous rallying cry on social media platforms during the course of the healing of a city offering a sense of resilience, as Tracy points out.

Of interest to the concept of community, finding the phrase “boston is strong” in the stories seems to resonate with the collective experience of the story sharers: I see this phrase as a response to the overused, problematic, commodified trope. Although “Boston is strong” did not achieve the same hashtag success as “Boston Strong,” it does have a presence on Twitter. In fact, because it was not as widely used as #BostonStrong, one can very easily trace the first public uses of the term on Twitter:
Two and a half years before the Boston Marathon bombings, someone used the hashtag #Bostonisstrong in Mattapan, a Boston neighborhood that is currently made up of 81% African Americans that had been a primarily Jewish community in the mid-20th century. The Boston Herald referred to the tragedy as the Mattapan Massacre, and as the tweet reports, four people were killed including a 2-year-old boy, and one person survived. While it is unclear if this single tweet was meant in anguish or irony, it highlights one of the largest stories untold in the archive: violence persists in Boston, particularly violence that harms minority children and families.

In the #Bostonisstrong tweets we see in light of the marathon bombings, while we can see in the image above that anger existed, there were far more messages of love and positivity for the city of Boston and its people accompanying this hashtag. These were the clear conventions of the discourse community that formed in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings, and this is the discourse community that is prominently featured in the archive. To understand Our Marathon as a representation of community, one has to contend with the archival silences in both creating and contributing to this space. Our Marathon finds itself in a very complicated realm because of its precarious position between digital and physical, historical and memorial, and community and university. As much as it tries to be inclusive—“no story too small”—as a community, it is necessarily exclusive; moreover, because of its position as a representation of community, we recognize that some exclusions were made purposefully while others were made unintentionally.

As is highlighted by the demographic information collected from Our Marathon, it is difficult to approach discussions of race in digital environments without also taking on class.

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34 Note: When I went to look back into this story on June 21, 2016, Jan Ransom and Maria Cramer of The Boston Globe reported the following on Andrew Flornory, the survivor of the Mattapan Massacre: “In a tragic twist, Flornory, 31, was shot and killed on Astoria Street in Mattapan Saturday night, less than a mile from where his 21-year-old sister, Eyanna Flornory, and her son, Amani Smith, were executed on Sept. 28, 2010. Police identified Andrew Flornory on Monday.” Flornory had been in Boston’s Franklin Park for Juneteenth—a celebration commemorating the end of slavery in America.
Lisa Nakamura writes, “In these post-Internet times, it may be true that possessing access to the Internet no longer guarantees one a place at the ‘cutting edge of history.’ However, lack of access to the Internet—often found along raced, classed, and still, to a narrowing extent, gendered lines—continues to cut particular bodies out of various histories in the making” (xii). Nakamura describes race as something that is “happening”; thus, it is important for scholars to understand the ideological and cultural work that race is doing in digital environments.

Like other scholars interested in this topic, Nakamura takes up a discussion of the digital divide, which Barbara Monroe focuses on in her book *Crossing the Digital Divide: Race, Writing, and Technology in the Classroom.* Monroe diligently discusses the nuances of the term digital divide in important ways by offering her readers an important discussion of why it is so difficult to discuss the race versus class binary. For example Monroe writes, “To talk about race as a determining factor for anything—from expressive culture to economics—is to run the risk of perpetuating racist stereotypes” (20). To Monroe, it is unfair to talk about a race of people as a monolithic group, but alternatives—such as talking in terms of ethnicity—are equally as problematic when discussing these issues. She situates the conversation by attempting to complicate racist and classist binary metaphors of the have’s and have-not’s in order to think in more holistic ways and uses political and economic terms about the situation of teaching and technological literacy, especially where it concerns poor and/or minority students.

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35 The digital divide is the metaphorical chasm between those who had access to the World Wide Web and those who did not, which is a concept that arose in the mid-1990s when access to technology and the Internet entered public conversation via statements issued by the Department of Commerce.

36 Interestingly enough, although the digital divide texts cited here were written in the past decade or so, the conversation on the digital divide has shifted a bit in popular discussion. In a 2011 *NPR* interview on “closing the digital divide,” Craig Watkins, a sociologist who studies youth minorities’ digital experiences in America, explains that we are no longer talking about the access to technology when we use the term digital divide; rather, it is less about access and more about participation: the quality of engagement with technology and what people are doing with technology is much more important now that statistics in how many people have access to technology have risen (see “Computer and Internet Use 1984-2012”).
Conclusion

**Interviewer:** You said that your connections to Northeastern prompted you to share that personal writing with the Archive. How would you describe the act of submitting your story to the Archive for you personally?

**Sharon:** It felt like the right thing to do. What I realized, as we went through the healing process after the bombs, was that we were very, very close. We were literally across the street from where the second bomb went off. What I realized was how many other people were also impacted in so many different ways. We were very lucky none of us had any injuries whatsoever, other than emotional scarring. We had no physical injuries, none of us. I realized how lucky we were, but I also realized that there was so many people that were impacted by that day in so many different ways that I felt almost responsible to share how I felt and how it was impacting me. They still are—two years later—there’s still the impact of certain noises, sirens, and big, huge crowds that still make me a little uncomfortable.

This chapter has aimed to look beyond the binaries of technology narratives and think about the deeper social and cultural issues surrounding the Boston Marathon and the archive. As described in Chapter 2, the digital affords greater access to multiple audiences; however, we know that with such affordances comes limitations as well: when thinking of participation in *The September 11th Digital Archive*, we understand that there is a silencing in terms of who had access to digital databases as well as who did not (e.g. the World Trade Center’s undocumented workers); with *Our Marathon*, there is also silencing in terms of access, but this case study uncovers another type of silencing: there are important stories that the archive staff did not feel comfortable actively seeking for the archive because of its memorial status. Walker writes, “In addition to sharing many of the complicated processes of remembering and forgetting that shape our experience of public memorial spaces in the ‘real’ world, mourning in online spaces also responds to the particular affordances of networked communications…. [P]articular online spaces shape the ability of human beings to receive or to disperse ideas and information as well as, ultimately, to connect to other human beings” (122). The affordances of digitally networked
online communities facilitate actions such as forgetting—a privileged form of community action—as was seen in Chapter 3.

The sponsoring relationships of this project are also complex, and not only do the external forces bear on the literate practices of story sharers in Our Marathon and the discourses they use, but they impact the overall identity of the archive as well. The body is an important facet of stabilizing identity: in face-to-face contact, it signals ideas of race, gender, ethnicity, age, and so on; furthermore, it includes your “performance” through facial expressions, your dress, gestures, your manner of speaking, etc. The “body does not disappear in virtual space. It is certainly constructed differently, but it is there in all its non-virtual manifestations: gender, race, sexual preference, social class, age, etc.” (Porter 212). In this way, the body itself is a text—collecting these texts in a digital archive represent a community. Is the community of Our Marathon meant to only include White people? There is much to interrogate about the site itself—its interface, its prose, etc.—that this dissertation has begun to unpack to understand the racialization of the digital space itself and how this site amplifies the inequities scholars have described in the larger digital ecosystems, but there is also something to be said for the actual communities surrounding the literal and figurative location of the archive that this chapter aimed to uncover for this case study.

When thinking of digital community projects that specifically ask participants to share written stories, one cannot ignore the role of sponsorship in the archive when it comes to acts of literacy or the way memory functions in the recontextualized stories. To wrap up this dissertation, the next and final chapter concludes by thinking across sponsoring relationships, decoloniality, and discourse communities in Our Marathon. It then seeks to offer pragmatic advice for others who may build and study these types of spaces.
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Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

April 19, 2013

“I just had to serve a bunch of people cake, and I was like, ‘Ugh, get your own people. I have non-investigative work to do!’”

This is the second time we’ve thought of the movie Office Space today, which is strangely comforting as we feel a little sense of helplessness amidst a small chaos. Lo is in London, five hours ahead of me; it’s just around lunchtime here when her workday ends in celebratory birthday cake for a colleague.

Four days ago, two bombs went off at the finish line of the world’s oldest annual marathon. Hundreds were injured. Two young women and one little boy were killed. His name was Martin Richard, and he was eight years old. I fell asleep with the tv on last night, and sometime around 3am, blinking cloudy wetness from my eyes, a suspect had been named. I remember him as the missing Brown student. I turned off the tv only to immediately turn it back on when I woke.

When Lo becomes available at 7:54am, I message her the word “Russians.” She tells me that there were rumors of a missing Brown student all morning. She spells “rumours” like a true expat. We feel bad for the student’s family. I tell her of my 3am recollections of it all being so “middle eastern-y.” “Well, to be fair,” she writes back, “Chechnya ain’t far, so the coloring is similar.” To be fair, I know nothing about Chechnya. “But dude,” she continues, “It’s a big, fat game of ‘Jump to Conclusions!’” She sends a link to an image of the jump-to-conclusions mat from Office Space.
Tom: You see, it would be this mat that you would put on the floor, and would have different CONCLUSIONS written on it that you could JUMP to!

Michael: That’s the worst idea I’ve ever heard in my life, Tom.

Samir: Yes, this is horrible, this idea.

Lo does digital media something-or-another for a big marketing company in London. Since the bombing on Monday, she has been my go-to person to talk about it with. She has at least 12 different tabs open in her browser right now, which will grow to 19 tabs by the end of the day and includes a new link to a police scanner (the first one she had isn’t working anymore); I know this because she has sent me all of her links—most of them Twitter-based—so I have them open, too. We started learning how to share with each other when we were 5.

I work about a mile away from the finish line. I tell Lo about the text my mom sent me yesterday: “Are you okay? Are you going home soon? They are looking for 2 very Indian looking guys, and you know...”

I tell Lo, “I was like, ‘On my phone they looked pretty light...’”

I then tell her that they called the cops on my uncle the other day for looking at fertilizer at Home Depot. As my mom explained it, “If he wasn’t kind of a jerk, we’d prob be sympathetic...”

“A brown dude can’t maintain a nice lawn and garden any more? Oh, people. How crazy. I mean, I’m assuming he wasn’t buying a van load...” Lo makes me smile.

The tv is still on, volume turned low, as I triangulate myself between what the local stations are saying and what Twitter is saying much faster. The police scanner makes me feel weird. “They are showing an interview with the kid’s mechanic... The guy is crying,” I tell Lo.

Mechanic: You know, if I knew, man... I love Boston...
I don’t know why this kid’s mechanic is resonating with me so much, but I feel tears coming up from my gut. He just saw him on Tuesday. If he had known. It’s the guilt in his voice that gets to me, I think. I’ve never felt that kind of guilt. It’s not your fault, man.

Lo sends me a Buzzfeed article on “16 Eerie Images of Boston on Lockdown.” I’ve already seen it. “A day off for traffic reporters,” she jokes. “Do you have the Cliff’s Notes on CISPA?” I ask. Freshman year of high school, I read the Cliff’s Notes on *A Tale of Two Cities*. I think she actually read the whole book. I didn’t feel guilty about it. “I know little to nothing about it,” she tells me. “Same,” I respond, “Because we’re distracted, conspiracyyyyyyy.” We’re not conspiracy theorists at all, but once in a while the shoe fits for at least a joke.

“And then you get this type of status,” I tell Lo, “‘All this shit in Watertown is exactly why good people need to be armed in their own homes.’ NO ONE IS TRYING TO TAKE AWAY PEOPLE’S GUNS.” I know Lo appreciates my all-caps; she uses them a lot when she’s pointing out ridiculous political and/or racist shit on Facebook. It’s 2013, and the rhetoric around guns is basically insane.

Lo has to go home soon. The doors will lock in 15 minutes, so she’s made plans to take her tabs with her, and we’ve agreed to keep each other updated. I remember leaving for college and then leaving for Costa Rica four years later; both times we said goodbye in my mother’s driveway. Adult Lo will get on the Tube, its own fresh history of terrorist bombings and 52 ghosts coming up on its 8-year anniversary. When she gets home, she will come right back to me, courtesy of Google, and we’ll watch and listen to the death of a man and the capture of a boy distantly together.

* * *
In *Writing Technology: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy*, Christina Haas argues, “Until we are willing to recognize the symbiotic and systemic relationship between technology, culture, and individuals, willing to explore the implications of technology on our own literate practice and mental lives, and willing to enter fully into the various discourses of technology, scholars and teachers of literacy... are abdicating responsibility and power in helping to determine how technology and literacy are made, through use, in our culture” (230). In looking at the creation of *Our Marathon*, we see that stakeholders in digital community spaces are able to impact participation; we also see that the site the sponsorship of literate actions is multi-layered. Scholars interested in these types of community archives understand the stakes of digital literacy, as it is easy for many to be passive users of technology who do not consider things like power relations in these areas. Although one of the impetuses for going out into the community to solicit contributions was to break some of the demographic barriers we knew we might encounter, our efforts fell short, and the embodied identity of the archive became more homogenous, which I will redress in the second half of this conclusion.

The embodiment of our stories—in my case a story not only about the week of the marathon bombings but also about race, age, gender, and so forth—comes through the action of telling our stories: we cannot erase the body from our stories as the body is an integral part to our meaning-making processes. Archives that function as both sites of memorializing and historicizing events are complicated sites of memory and knowledge, and their crowdsourced nature, which one might imagine would alleviate power relationships due to their democratizing potential, only exacerbates these issues further. As has been examined in this dissertation, power relations in the archive—from aspects of identity and literacy sponsorship—highlight the contested nature of populating historial archives for the archive is embodied through our stories
and through our research. A decolonial approach to archives invites collaboration in terms of letting the populations that the archive seeks to represent essentially represent themselves through the co-construction of the space.

As has been shown throughout my chapters, communities are simultaneously inclusive, exclusive, and bound in the power relations of discourse. As a site of literacy, *Our Marathon* offers a complex example of a digital, historial space in which a specific discourse community operates. Studying digital community and memory in a site like *Our Marathon* is of interest for future scholars because it is a digital site in which users have a specific type of agency: community members were actively pursuing an opportunity for civic engagement by leaving a historical record of their voices and experiences. But the creators of this archive, consciously or not, designed a particular interface that would help determine how contributors would act in this space as well as who would be allowed participate. The creators relied on our digital culture’s constant desire to “share”—whether that is through photos on *Instagram* or links on *Facebook*—but without the straightforward reciprocity of sharing on social media sites wherein content creators are immediately validated with “likes” and comments. Instead, contributors were drawn to a hypothetical idea of community that in turn replicated the power structures of the physical communities *Our Marathon* sought to represent.

This dissertation has offered a case study of *Our Marathon* by exploring the relationships between the design of the archive, the use of the archive, and the narratives the archive tells on its surface and in its stories. In has looked at how *Our Marathon* adheres to/departs from traditional archives through its state as a digital archive, its attempt to both historicize and memorialize an event, and its focus as a community project. I have taken advantage of being able to offer a real-time examination of the digital archive’s role in capturing the artifacts and
reflective practices of people affected by the tragic events of the Boston Marathon bombings through a mixed-methods approach, which draws upon primary research, the archive itself, and my own participation in designing and building the space. To conclude, I consider the failures and successes of the attempted decolonized archive by further thinking through sponsorships and offer some pragmatic suggestions for future historical archives.

**Sponsorships and the Failure of Community**

As explored throughout this dissertation, an examination of sponsors of literacy is multi-leveled in digital community projects: it is an examination of the relations of power that exist not only between the Sponsors and the Sponsored but also within the parameters of the digital space itself—a space sponsored by specific institutions with specific goals and motivations. When looking at the archive through the theoretical lens of a discourse community, one can see that the digital and the historical influence the language practices of participants in *Our Marathon* in terms of the stories’ content and specific terminology. There is a specific type of discourse community represented that understands its own membership and grammar. In the case of *Our Marathon*, the concept of “community” came up often, but the reality is that it came second to individuality: the discourse of this community and attention to itself as such added to the complexities of the literate practices of the space.

Literacy sponsorship is fundamentally ideological as a concept, and in the literate actions of the Sponsored in this case we see not only the practice of submitting writing with a digital community project but also a chance for the Sponsored to take positions of power in writing a historical record for future researchers. Without careful considerations of the sponsors roles and participation, this is a potentially re-colonizing move that emphasizes the expert codification of
knowledge by operating through specific linguistic and cultural traditions. If those linguistic and cultural traditions are only representative of certain communities, the archive will fail to capture the fuller story—the actual decolonized archive that is rich with diversity and perspectives that shape our understanding of an event—and this has been the case with *Our Marathon*.

For example, in looking at all of the examples of “Boston Strong” within this dissertation, it reads as a sort of currency or, at the very least, something to be exchanged among friends. As a verbal meme, it proliferated everything from social media to t-shirts to the MBTA buses’ LED signs like a “post-disaster brand” (Zimmer). As part of the cultural ecology of Boston and this archive, its cultural capital lies within its ability to easily be manipulated for social connections.

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“‘Boston Strong’ message on public bus” (Elena Agapie)

Marine Dumortier
@Marinexo

Wrong city to mess with

#BostonStrong

4/15/13, 20:11

2 RETWEETS

“Boston Strong” (marinedumortier)
As is evidenced in these photographs from the archive, the meme was not simply a phrase but a literate act of solidarity and expression of emotion. From sidewalks to skin, “Boston Strong” became an important linguistic aspect of this discourse community—particularly as a community not limited by the geographical bounds of the city but by the assumed integrity, perseverance, and determination of those affiliated with the marathon. As was shown in various interview responses in this dissertation, “Boston Strong” was an important phrase during a time of healing and moving forward—as Maddock Dillon put it, it was a way to “hold hands” with the community. As has been shown throughout this dissertation, “Boston Strong” was a key part of the cultural memory surrounding the marathon bombings, and it permeated the literate practices of those who participated in the archive. This is also another level of literacy sponsorship in which the term has become stabilized in a repository that creates and represents community.

As Brandt contended in *Literacy in American Lives*, literacy has become a location of stratification in society. Fifteen years later, digital literacy has only become a more complex system of stratification not only when it comes to reading and writing in public spaces but also when it comes to creating those spaces. Digital literacy is one component of being a digital
citizen—a person who is responsible for how they utilize technology to interact with the world around them—and creators of spaces that promote digital citizenry have to make choices about those spaces, which can be influenced by different parties. In the homogenous community represented in Our Marathon, there is a particular grand narrative that is exemplified by the Boston Strong artifacts above. In a decolonized archive, capturing the Boston Strong discourse community is only part of the history particularly as it has been used against minorities in popular usage (for reference, as of the summer of 2016, one can search #BostonStrong on Twitter and find the phrase still being appropriated in discussions of “radical Islam,” Donald Trump’s town hall meetings for his presidential race, and many other thinly veiled raced and classed discussions). The archive offers silence on the less savory aspects of this phrase, which may be indicative of not going into diverse communities and/or the actual interface of the archive, which invites a certain attitude when discussing the events. The face of the project itself may have also potentially excluded potential participants. While the site and paths for participation were as clean and clear as we could make them, even the project’s institutional branding could out some people off. For example, one must imagine that the university branding can be an alienating symbol to some potential participants who might feel unprepared or cautious about such spaces (because they never attended college, for instance). A tie to Northeastern University may help to explain—at least in small part—some of the demographic realities of who did and did not contribute, but the academic institutional branding—much like WBUR’s presence—had to become a focus due to their financial investments in the project. Despite the challenges of funding and branding, the academic community who created this archive came away with many advantages from designing such a space, despite the failures explored here.
Sponsorships and the Successes of the Academic Community

In Brandt’s conception of literacy sponsorship, the stakes are seemingly always quite high for the Sponsored, and the stakes for Sponsors—who are already in positions of power and can extend or withhold opportunities for literate actions—can fluctuate based on their particular circumstances. In this project, however, there seems to be more of a reversal in terms of stakes; when looking at what the Sponsors learned in the process of creating and populating a space for literate actions and understanding what was in it for the Sponsored, there is a form of communal reciprocity that perhaps we do not see in traditional spaces of literacy sponsorship, like classrooms.

For the Sponsors, the stakes for this project to be successful were quite high, but what “success” looks like is hard to determine and relies on both those sponsoring and being sponsored by the archive. For our sponsors, do we have an aesthetically pleasing archive that showcases their brands effectively? We do. For those we sponsor, in terms of their abilities to share their stories do we have an archive that is easy to navigate and easy to contribute to? We definitely do in ways; with more funding we could have hired someone to make mobile use of the site easier as this would most likely be a better way to capture social media posts and digital images from cell phones. For those we sponsor in terms of future researchers, do we have enough items to be considered an archive, and are these items fully searchable with the appropriate metadata? Our Marathon currently houses nearly 10,000 items, although only about 7% of the artifacts were user-submitted through our website; also, while there is great metadata attached to the items we added to the archive, its search function is a little flimsy if you do not know exactly what you are looking for (and, even then, it is not great). Were the Sponsors able to gain some advantage through the literate acts of others? Definitely.
From my research, the digital space helped participants to connect to communities that might be otherwise unreachable when thinking about the global nature of the Boston Marathon. Because of the agency the Sponsored had over their literate activity, reciprocity became a key factor in somewhat evening the disparate power relations often associated with Brandt’s term: the Sponsored chose to share their stories for closure, and the stories would be beneficial for academics or other interested minds. There was also a sense of community in building the digital archive that represented the community building happening in the physical realm, and these actions were being sponsored by the stakeholders of this archive: mainly Northeastern University, WBUR, Iron Mountain, and the creators of the archive.

When thinking of public writing in digital community spaces, one needs to consider the multi-varied levels of sponsorship within that community. This framework encourages scholars to account for their positions in building these types of spaces as well as to understand who is sponsoring their own interests; it also encourages scholars to think more deeply about the work they are doing when accessing archives, as has been suggested by scholars like Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette in the past, but my work calls for a particular kind of sensitivity and understanding of digital historial archives as representing communities and fair, nuanced methodologies that account for such communities in ongoing scholarship.

Throughout this dissertation, I have recognized what literacy sponsors were gaining out of *Our Marathon*: at their base levels Northeastern University was furthering its reputation, WBUR was accessing stories through a certain disguise, and Iron Mountain was furthering its philanthropic mission through a publicly available site. At a university, a place for knowledge and meaning making, we felt a responsibility to our students who were experiencing and trying to understand what was happening. As members of the English department whose lives revolve
around stories, we in particular felt a necessity to encourage and engage in story-sharing opportunities with our students. Had this project stayed in our classrooms, sponsorship would have looked somewhat different. In opening up the archive for community participation, we aimed to sponsor literacy practices of the community in much larger ways. In sponsoring relationships, Brandt reminds us that the most important aspect of the concept is that the sponsors gain some advantage from the literate acts of the sponsored. What else did the immediate sponsors—the creators of the archive who solicited artifacts—get out of sponsoring this community’s literacy practices?

As a whole Our Marathon and its creators have been recognized in many different ways, from being featured in multiple presentations at Northeastern University and in the Boston area, to being recognized on local news stations and international webcasts, to presence at both national and international academic conferences. As a whole Our Marathon draws positive attention to its home institution and its other sponsors. When asked if this project has affected her at all academically or professionally, Maddock-Dillon recounts receiving an award from the university:

Last year, I got this big award from the Northeastern: the Researcher of the Year Award. There’s this big ceremony… I had just published a book… [but] it was clear that what the university really cared about was Our Marathon.

I feel like it’s been a project for which I’ve been professionally rewarded. Sometimes, I feel like more than I should be [laughs] because I feel like so many other people did so much more work than I did. It’s certainly something that I've received a lot of praise and recognition for.
This slight unease was not uncommon for others who felt that this work had unlocked specific doors for them. Now as a postdoc at Middlebury College reflecting back on her experience, Peaker cites her work on this project as a key to her current career:

Part of me wants to push back on [the takeaways]… I feel like this project has given me so much… Professionally, it has been really important for me. It’s a project that has had a lot of resonance… I think it’s at least partially responsible for the position I have now at Middlebury. The project management experience that I got from it, especially the work I had to do with people outside [our department]… English graduate students don’t often get to work with [community members], get invited to press conferences with the mayor and things like that, appear on TV (Peaker).

Whereas Maddock-Dillon seems to resists some of the recognition she has gained from the archive due to its collaborative nature and the amount of work multiple people put in, Peaker seems resistant on a more personal level. Both women are very proud of their accomplishments yet still show slight hesitations in their answers. Were this project about something more “light,” would these hesitations still exist? As Sponsors gaining recognition from the work of the Sponsored—in this case, both women were sponsoring the community of team members through their leadership as well as those who came to participate in story sharing—the gains are positive but also unexpected.

Like Peaker, McGrath also cites Our Marathon as being part of his job acquisition, but he draws attention to the intellectual work this project inspired for him: “[Our Marathon] got me a job. I don’t mean that in the glib way that it came out. It got me interested in this kind of work and more public modes of engagement outside of academics talking to other academics. I
like…thinking about how people are thinking about recent history.” These lines of inquiry have helped in his role as a postdoc in Public Humanities at Brown University where his practical knowledge of public digital archives aids in his roles as a colleague and instructor. DeCamp and Hopwood also cite how practical knowledge has helped their academic and professional lives:

Working on this project and learning the technical and design skills, [like] being familiar with PHP, opened up the door to multiple jobs that I’ve had since then…Through my experience on Our Marathon, I’ve been able to expand to other projects, and become more familiar with…any online tool that’s built using PHP, HTML, CSS, a little bit of JavaScript… I’m able to even run workshops on these tools, which I think is very important for me as someone who wants to go into teaching…

I was able to fully integrate a digital project, using Omeka, into a syllabus for a course I was TAing for last semester… [The professor] brought me on to do a digital project: he wanted to do it, he wanted a TA who was knowledgeable about it, and I was able to put into the syllabus… I gave three or four lectures throughout the year on how to use the tool (DeCamp).

Academically and sort of professionally, it allowed me more work within the digital and to get more comfortable working with different technologies and being able to speak about it in a way that says that I know what I’m talking about. I think that helped me then move into other projects like Digital Humanities Quarterly. I think it helped make me a better project manager for the Early Caribbean Digital Archive because then…I had other experience that I could
compare and contrast with. It’s cool on my CV or when I meet people to say that I worked on this project because it is a project that some people do recognize (Hopwood).

For the graduate students working on this project, it is understandable that the focus of their takeaways would be career oriented. For me personally, it was not my intention to participate in this project so that I could later write a dissertation on it, and I recognize that I view my takeaways as a Sponsor quite differently than my colleagues because of this work. That being said, my gains are still in progress but include multiple major conference presentations and unique topics to bring up in job interviews. The major work I completed with Our Marathon—most during the Oral History Project and Share-Your-Story events—connected me to the community in terms of outreach; it also strengthened my proficiencies with qualitative interviewing, which has been useful for my academic and professional roles. It has also put me in the role as a mentor for others: for example, when a fellow graduate student was interested in conducting oral-history style interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals, her professors sent her my way. From these personal experiences, I can say that it feels good to be recognized for what we have built and the skills I have developed; however, like Maddock-Dillon and Peaker, there is also the unease that our work rests on such tragic events—my academic lens and position eases the discomfort of my sponsoring role yet my role as a community member, particularly one who sat down at kitchen tables and semi-private rooms in libraries and institutions around Boston with those who felt most impacted by the events, alters my lens.

Throughout this dissertation, I took moments to reflect on my experiences working on Our Marathon in an attempt to remember my position and to remind my readers of the human aspects of story collecting and sharing. In my attempt to theorize how this type of archive acts as
an important space for discourse and community literacy, I wanted to honor my position
to/within this project particularly as these experiences have informed the many questions of this
project. To end this dissertation, I offer some of my own stories of working on this project and
advice for those who want to build, populate, and promote similar spaces.

My Stories and Suggestions

As a case study, *Our Marathon* offers an opportunity to look into how socially situated
digital archives function as rhetorical spaces for civic engagement. The digital archive does not
offer an apolitical space, and this project has looked to understand what it means to participate in
this space, who is able to participate, and how design matters for participation. In taking up Ellen
Cushman’s suggestion that the digital archive can be seen as a “a place-based learning center
where knowledge unfolds through stories told in and on the people’s terms” (132), the storyteller
and those that facilitate the storytelling are equally as important to me as the stories of the
archive themselves. In this way, this dissertation may be read to offer future creators a sense of
how to engage in decolonization through the design process of these kinds of spaces.

This archive in particular created and represented a discourse community, and it is
important to step back and “strategically contemplate” the effects of this digital representation of
a community. Although Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette are thinking specifically about
traditional recovery practices of feminist historiographers when using the term “strategic
contemplation,” this concept is useful in thinking beyond just gender (639). Borrowing this
phrase from Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New
Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, Enoch and Bessette describe strategic
contemplation as the necessity to meaningfully reflect on exactly what is present and what is not
present when dealing with a large body of knowledge such as a digital archive, which may seem infinite, and argue that “we must do more than just draw from its riches; we must also consider how digital archivization affects our relationship to the rhetorical pasts we seek to make visible” (Enoch and Bessette 639). Here Enoch and Bessette are only thinking of archives as tools of recovery and as tools that concern the past with some temporal distance; however, future archivists may want to engage in strategic contemplation when archiving in real time. From looking at a project like *Our Marathon*, we understand that there are ethical issues that, although in the forefront of archivists’ minds at points during the project, can sometimes slide by the wayside and impact future scholars’ research in problematic ways.

As a basis for this dissertation, I argue that this mode of preservation—large, crowdsourced, public archives that rely on digital literacies and focus on collecting stories (both written and oral) from as many voices as possible—is only in its beginning stages and that we will see more and more “historial” archives come into focus as valid, meaningful spaces for scholars and non-scholars alike. In the face of this growth, scholars should comport themselves in ways that are appropriate to their subject matter and the overall missions and goals of co-construction of a space for history and memory by anticipating potential silences in all avenues of the project from its digital state to its community function. In the tradition of sharing a story—the heart of this dissertation—I offer you a few stories to illustrate the following topics to consider when building historial archives:

1) To think about where you collect material
2) To be sensitive to the nature of healing and appropriate timing
3) To look for real stories outside of “safe” (e.g. academic) spaces
4) To be aware of your own positionality and interest in the project
5) To be aware of what your sponsoring relationships will include and preclude
First Questions: Where are you soliciting participation? Who, generally, accesses these places and spaces?

April 17, 2014

“Could you help me with this? I just want to make sure I’m doing it right,” Mary Ellen, an eager, sweet elderly lady looks at me through her small wire-rimmed glasses. Her white turtleneck and dark green sweater vest, that I imagine she knitted herself, remind me of soft-baked cookies and warm hugs, though I fear her slight frame might break if I tried to embrace her.

“Of course! What can I help you with?” I have already forgotten her name, even though we had just spoken fifteen minutes earlier. When I had asked if she wanted to share her story, and she was unsure if hers “counted” because she had actually been visiting her son in Germany during the bombing. She seemed genuinely excited to share her experience—a story about watching the images from the marathon bombing on her son’s “iPod” before flying home just in time for the Shelter-in-Place Order—and, when she was done writing, I walked her through the next steps of entering information about herself.

“Oh do I need to tell you that I’m 74-years old?” she laughed.

“It’s actually very helpful for us to know!”

She was happy to share her text “publicly” and wished us well with the archive. Unexpectedly, she gave me a hug before she left, thanking me for letting her participate. She didn’t break.

When Mary Ellen was carefully typing her short, 184-word story, not only was she sharing her experience with the archive, but she was also engaging in a civic process of voicing her part of the collective history. Her identity was now intersecting with those of other participants thus mediating, and being mediated by, the digital public space being occupied. Her identity was compressed in ways for the archive—age, gender, ethnicity, and so on—but her story highlights her role as a mother, traveler, and resident. For Mary Ellen, sharing her quantifiable identity factors felt different than sharing the illustrative details of her experience as we see in her lighthearted question: “Oh do I need to tell you that I’m 74-years old?”

To a future academic, the fact that Mary Ellen is 74-years-old (or a woman or a Watertown resident) could be of utmost importance, though at the time of constructing and soliciting materials for the archive, we can only speculate what that importance might be for a specific project. A major part of the “identity” of this archive comes from where the marathon
team chose to solicit stories: mainly public libraries in the area including the Cambridge Public Library, the Brookline Public Library, the Newton Free Library, the Stoneham Public Library, and the weeklong event at the central branch of the Boston Public Library. To be fair, our materials—bookmarks and a “one sheet” about the archive—were sent to libraries all over Boston area; we relied on libraries reaching out to us to set up events and only targeted the communities that were closely related to the main stories of the events. This being said, these towns in particular have particular populations: we were not receiving contact from libraries in towns with larger minority populations or of overall lower socioeconomic status. It is not that these populations were not of import or on our minds. In fact, in my student email Drafts folder, I have an unfinished note that was last edited on 4/14/14 and intended to be sent to the director of the Boston Busing/Desegregation Project. The last lines read, “As I start to reflect on the project and where we’ve come, I’m sensing that there’s limited representation in the archive from minority populations and wonder if you have any advice on how to encourage people to share with a digital archive. I know it’s ambitious to want to collect as many voices as possible in the archive,“

If you are creating a historical archive meant to represent the experiences of people, it is really easy to fall into the trap of only capturing one discourse community from the event. Sponsorships and time constraints will impact your methods of collection and what you are able to accomplish—we unofficially recognized that this project would be “over” by the time of the next Boston Marathon, though that was not the case at all. I suggest going into the communities as much as possible, as we saw that in-person sharing was much more successful than self-sponsored online sharing. Set aside money and create actual events for story sharing. Use the beneficial aspects of your sponsorships to your advantage: a StoryCorps event or an event where
representatives from Northeastern University could speak with area high school students about writing and processing could have made use of our affiliations in dynamic ways. Be strategic. Be aware. And be vocal. I still regret not having a “Boston Strong” essay contest for area high schoolers that would have matched our photo contest and given back to these communities in terms of community literacy sponsorship with financial recognition for the students and high schools.

Second Questions: What is the nature of the thing you are trying to archive? When will it be appropriate to capture those artifacts?

May 25, 2013

The first official public event that the marathon team attended was the “#OneRun for Boston,” which took place 40 days after the Boston Marathon bombings. It was a free event that was collaboratively organized by several representatives from running clubs, teams, events, businesses, and organizations in and around Boston. According to their Facebook page, the main goals for the #OneRun were “to offer runners and spectators an opportunity to experience the magic of the final mile of the Boston Marathon while also attracting thousands of consumers into the Back Bay.”

The event was planned specifically for those marathoners who were stopped short of completing the race; however, all interested and able parties were invited to run that iconic final mile from Boston’s Kenmore Square to the finish line on Boylston Street. We found out about this event less than a week before it was to occur, and using my keen research skill of stalking people on the internet, I was able to connect with the head of the #OneRun and secure space for the Our Marathon team to reach out to potential contributors.

Although it was still being constructed, the #OneRun gave us an opportunity to (unofficially) introduce the archive to the public and to solicit material. Once we gained permission from the #OneRun staff to have such a space at their event, three days before the event, an email chain grew with more interested parties displaying their stakes. First, there was the Our Marathon team: having spent many hours in a windowless conference room sketching, designing, and building the site, the team was ready for community members to start sharing their artifacts, and we needed an “official” space at the event that would help immediately brand and legitimize ourselves. We needed a 10x10 tent and a table, and we hoped that Northeastern University had something we could borrow. Second, at the departmental level, this was an opportunity to showcase our academic developments and institutional collaborations: not only had we had successful meetings with WBUR as a potential partner, but we had an upcoming meeting in the Mayor’s Office about how we could work with City Hall, and we had offers to collaborate on this project from colleagues at MIT, Harvard Medical School, Simmons College, Boston University, Brandeis University, and Wellesley College. In short, a socially and politically significant community was growing around this project, which would reflect well on NU’s growing leadership in both the community and the digital humanities.
Because of our request for a tent and table—things we incorrectly assumed NU owned and would be able to lend us without strife—two days before the event, we were in communication with the Chair of the English Department, NU’s Media Relations Specialist, the Senior Writer and Communications Coordinator for the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), NU’s Graphic Design and Marketing Coordinator, and the Dean of CSSH. Public representation of the university was clearly important—this was publicity in action.

That morning, I loaded up my Jeep with the tables, tent, and chairs we had rented; I put the Our Marathon banner that was donated to us by a print shop on Boylston Street securely in my passenger’s seat; I made sure the recording equipment that I borrowed from the library was safe. I met the team in Kenmore Square. We set up everything we had. We collected zero stories that day, though perhaps we did encourage some to share their stories later or to tell another person about the archive.

Looking back, it is unsurprising that this even was a failure on behalf of the marathon team. The event itself was a success—despite the dreary, cold day, many runners came out in support, and even local celebrities like Walter McCarty and Shane Victorino spoke to the crowd. I chatted about the archive with McCarty and was excited when I received notification that he started following me on Twitter after.

When dealing with sensitive subject material, timing becomes an important issue: while one may want to collect stories while they are fresh in people’s minds, telling stories denotes an intimate act, and the psychological reality is a possible re-traumatization through sharing. Not everyone wants to share, nor is everyone ready to share at the same time. The story above represents other awkward times when I was sent out into different community events—often times positive, happy events—and the vibe of the archive and the vibe of the event clashed. Still, collecting stories in person was our strongest method, so there may have to be some trial and error on part of the future historial archive: is it okay to collect stories right away? Is six months better? Is one year better?

Similarly, if your archive contends with an issue that could be sensitive to particular demographics, think about how you might interact with the populations who might not feel immediately comfortable with the archive or their own positions. Collecting stories at a large running event that was mostly attended by “Boston Strong” runners who fit certain
demographics would not have diversified our archive even if it were a more appropriate venue for story collection.

Third Questions: What is your position to the project? What new things are you learning about yourself in relation to this work? Which prior interests and reinvigorated through this new project?

November 23, 2013

It was an unseasonably warm, sunny November afternoon that time it felt like my advisor punched me in the gut. Chris’s office had been across the hall from mine, and it wasn’t uncommon for me to poke my head in and ask quick questions or solicit advice. This afternoon, however, was a scheduled meeting: as his Assistant Writing Program Director, we wanted to talk about some of the initiatives we were working on for the program; we also wanted to check in about the progress of my comprehensive exams and such. I was pretty much only half looking forward to this meeting.

After at least an hour of talking through things like protocols, and collecting student work, and the oral history project I had been managing, and the exam lists that were setting me up for a dissertation on multilingual students, we were wrapping up. As I shuffled papers into folders, I told him about some of the other things that were keeping me busy, such as some of the events I had been a part of surrounding the 6-month anniversary of the marathon bombing.

Chris paused and gave me kind of a funny look. "Nah—I probably shouldn’t say this…"

“What?” I should have been more defensive than quizzical. “You kind of have to say it now…”

“Should you be doing your dissertation on the marathon project? You have such a spark when you talk about it that I just don’t see with the multilingual writer stuff…”

As if his fist were now deep in my belly, “Oh…” I managed to get out.

I remember exactly what I had been excited about at that particular moment: public writing. During one of our first official “Share Your Story” events at our own library at Northeastern University on October 15, 2013—6 months after the marathon bombing—we had set up a table in “the hub” of the library where students were consistently passing by. We had some display cases with artifacts such as a pair of shoes with a message of hope written on them from a marathon runner and some other notes and cards that had been sent to the city from all over. We had a teddy bear that was left at the makeshift memorial site for the bombing’s youngest victim.

We also had tables with laptops set up where students could browse the archive that we were telling them about, and they could share their stories, too, if they felt like it. “We honestly believe that no story is too small, and we’d love for you to share your experience, if you want to,” we’d tell them. There were also private video and audio rooms set up for anyone who would rather talk about their story rather than write it. Students who weren’t initially drawn in by our poster and table setup were drawn in by the free swag and random local media attention we were getting.
While promoting the archive and being interviewed by local news channels were fun, it was something else that generated excitement for me: most students who wanted to contribute their stories wanted to write them down, and they wanted to do it here and now with us, on our laptops, in the middle of our library. “Talk about public writing,” I’d nonchalantly tell Chris a month later, “I mean, they were actually writing in public because they wanted to. It was a really cool experience.”

Starting a university-sponsored, crowdsourced, digital community project that addresses an emotionally and politically charged event in a large, diverse metropolis clearly has its challenges. What made this project “work”—in the sense that it actually became a thing that people could use—did not just come from the digital tools and methods we had at our disposal; *Our Marathon* came into fruition because of each team member’s awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as they were learning by doing. Although I find it interesting, I was not on the technical side of the archive for a reason, but I was still invited into conversations about these aspects. I was obviously interested in the literate actions being prompted by the archive. If one takes on a role as a community literacy sponsor, she or he should be cognizant of what that action means and how one’s own positionality impacts the work they are doing when building and/or accessing a digital archive of this nature.

The idea to conduct oral histories with the creators of *Our Marathon* came about fairly early in the project, though it never came into fruition during the duration of the project. As each of our team members had various levels of education and training in the Digital Humanities, we felt that the “story” of how our archive came to be may be important to the field and/or for those interested in starting their own digital archives. We were pushing back against the “more hack; less yack” mantra that has been critiqued by scholars like Adeline Koh and Bethany Nowviskie. Koh writes, “As Digital Humanists, we have the responsibility to interrogate and to understand what kind of world, and what kind of civilization, our computational languages and forms create for us.” Cultural theorist Alan Liu asserts, “We digital humanists develop tools, data, metadata,
and archives critically; and we have also developed critical positions on the nature of such resources…. But rarely do we extend the issues involved into the register of society, economics, politics, or culture in the vintage manner…. How the digital humanities advance, channel, or resist the great postindustrial, neoliberal, corporatist, and globalist flows of information-cum-capital, for instance, is a question rarely heard in the digital humanities.” Reflection, a key term for those of us in writing studies, seemed absent in place of open access/open source. Conducting exit interviews or eventually including a supplemental narrative on the archive itself that accounts for the realities of the project will not only be useful context for future researchers, but it will aid in the creation of such sites in the future: with only a couple models for the type of project we wanted to complete, we had to essentially “reverse engineer” some of the aspects we were seeing in their archives without any sense of what worked or did not work in its creation.

Fourth Questions: Where exactly are the “real” stories happening? How do you access those?

October 30, 2014

There are 38,445 fans in attendance at tonight’s game, and I wonder how many others have been falling in love over the past week. If we were in St. Louis, there would be at least 8,000 more people around us. I see a couple of their fans sprinkled about, and we’re all hoping this series doesn’t go back there.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now time to throw out the ceremonial first pitch. When we think of perhaps the greatest Game 6 in World Series history, our minds travel back to 1975 and what one writer called, “One of the most spellbinding in baseball history.” The images are still vivid of the beloved Cuban pitcher with the corkscrew deliveries starting the game. And the images are still vivid of the Red Sox slugging catcher, after launching a ball towards the left-field foul pole that now bears his name, waving the ball fair, like a little boy, believing it would help. And maybe it did. Won’t you please welcome back the two men who started and ended the last Game 6 of a World Series played at Fenway Park: the right-hander, who we hope will soon take his rightful place in Cooperstown, and his battery mate who is already there. Ladies and gentlemen, “El Tiante” Luis Tiant and #27 Carlton Fisk!

Tiant still has a great mustache that looks even cooler in white. He rubs his foot on the pitcher’s mound. It takes me a minute to get what Fisk is doing, and I look up to the jumbotron to
see him attaching a ceremonial fake beard to his face. It reminds of what a fun team the 2013 Boston Red Sox were and how much they pulled through, how much joy they brought on and off the field, during a time when a city needed it most. Fisk stops to wave to the crowd and then adjusts the hole where his mouth is supposed to go amidst all the fake hair. Both of their jerseys rest snug against their bellies, and it reminds me of the time of life before toddlers hit that growth spurt. They throw their pitches out in unison. As every good Red Sox fan knows, we lost the 1975 World Series to the Reds in Game 7, but we just don’t think about that, thanks to the performances of these men here tonight. Legends are funny like that, right? We hold onto the details that we need.

Officer Steve Horgan, also known as the “Bullpen Cop” after Big Papi hit a game-tying grand slam in Game 2 of the ALCS sending Detroit Tiger Torii Hunter flying feet-over-head over the bullpen wall, also receives a warm reception. He puts up his arms recalling his “It’s good!” pose from that game, and the crowd loves it. The National Anthem is up next, and everybody sings along. Everybody. I’m reminded of a YouTube video I saw after the Boston Marathon bombings: Rene Rancourt, who has been singing the national anthems at Boston Bruins games for the past 35 years, put down his microphone as the entire crowd drowned him out, proudly singing our National Anthem.

In addition to the spaces and places we naturally flock to as academics—libraries, classrooms, and so on—think about the spaces and places that are most important to your communities. Even in writing this dissertation, it sometimes felt strange to allude to larger conversations involving professional sports in Boston, but sports are very much a part of the social fabric of this community and are a topic that supersedes aspects of individual identities in Boston, the marathon, and around the world. Our archive does pay attention to sports in its overall narrative, and there is even an official exhibit just around the Boston Red Sox.

In the case of Our Marathon, with more funding, we could have continued to approach the communities we wanted to hear from: runners, students, community groups, religious groups, businesses, and so on. With more time, perhaps we could have made more concerted efforts to capture more stories. Looking for more events that are tied to the location and culture of the archive could have provided a much broader array of stories. Looking back, had we pitched the archive to one of the many philanthropic ventures supported by the area’s sports teams, might we have benefitted from a social sponsorship—that is the non-financial sponsoring commitment—in
which a connection to the Boston Red Sox may have appealed to more diverse crowds than a connection to Northeastern University or WBUR would allow? As a community project with a strong institutional backing promoted on its surface, could we have engaged with more organizations that actually appeal to community in broader ways?

**Fifth Questions: Who are your sponsors? What are their interests?**

*February 27, 2014*

“And um, boys aren’t real big on, you know, ‘I love you, mom,’” we hear Alicia Shambo’s voice start to crack from the speaker attached to Joanna’s iPad, “But he sent me this beautiful text that said, ‘It really sucks when it takes a bomb going off right by your mom to reach out and tell her how much you love her. I love you, mom.’”

Part of the oral history team is meeting with the Program Manager and a producer in a small meeting space at 90.9 WBUR: Boston’s NPR station. At this point, all of us are tearing up while listening to a beautiful clip of a marathon finish line volunteer finally connecting with her three children on that horrific day. “I was able to text them and say ‘thank you, I love you guys, and I am okay… I am okay.’” Her voice trails off, and the clip finishes.

“That’s some powerful stuff,” the producer comments, “We can definitely use it.”

It’s February, and preparations for the one-year later programming are underway. Joanna and I came prepared with more clips than the WBUR folks had time for—of course, they were more concerned with the sound being of broadcast quality. I recorded this interview, and I know that it is.

Of the four women meeting today, I am the only one who has met Alicia. I sat in her kitchen in Hopkinton, Massachusetts—the Athletes’ Village, where the marathoners hang out before starting the race, is basically in her backyard. I listened with great intent as she talked to us about her four years of active duty in the U.S. Navy; I held my breath as she discussed holding Victoria McGrath’s hand in the ambulance, telling her that she’d be okay—Victoria, a Northeastern University student whom we interviewed two weeks before, had been seriously injured by the blasts; and I held back tears as Alicia’s face flushed as she described with pride the sentimental text from her teenaged son. As I have been trained by WBUR, with your oral historian hat on all instincts to offer a consoling word—a “wow” or “amazing” or “that is so special”—must be replaced with nonverbal actions: a sympathetic nod, wide eyes, concerned hands covering your mouth.

When the interview was over, Alicia offered us some homemade cranberry bread that had been baking while we spoke in her kitchen. Her children popped in as she showed us some of her personal artifacts from the military and the marathon bombings. We all hugged before leaving, and it’s not long before I added her on Facebook.

I did not join the project with intentions of leading the *WBUR Oral History Project*. Soon after being hired as a research assistant on what was then being called the Boston Marathon
Digital Archive, I found myself with a few of my colleagues in one of the conference rooms at WBUR. We were hoping for a partnership—funding—to get our digital archive up and running. If we could connect with community members through our archive—a university-sponsored space as opposed to a media-sponsored space—and produce radiobroadcast quality audio, WBUR would provide training on recording equipment and funding for the project. This sponsorship worked reciprocally: WBUR’s one true goal was to sponsor the Oral History Project for the aforementioned reasons, but we assumed that the exposure they were giving *Our Marathon* would also help to further the project’s mission and goals to collect as many stories as possible.

As has been discussed in this dissertation, when an archive enters a particular sponsoring relationship, it may be precluding other potential partnerships. As newly minted archivists, we were excited by what this partnership could bring, but we were not thinking through what an NPR-based audience would be limiting. This relationship did not only impact potential audiences on the ground, but the amount of money we were granted also came with a revision of our name: our once catchy title with academic subtitle now included the lengthy addition of “& WBUR Oral History Project.” If you find yourself on a project that needs to move quickly, make sure to discuss (and negotiate if appropriate) what your sponsoring relationships means for the project overall. To evaluate potential sponsoring relationships, I would suggest using the following heuristic, \textit{ABBS}:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A - Allowances</strong></th>
<th><strong>B - Benefits</strong></th>
<th><strong>B – Blocks</strong></th>
<th><strong>S – Systemic</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What will this sponsorship allow? Will it give you access to certain communities or artifacts that would be difficult to enter on your own?</td>
<td>What is the benefit? Who benefits most from this partnership? Is the benefit short or long term? How does this relationship further the goals of your project?</td>
<td>What will this sponsorship disallow? Who, or what, may be left out by putting effort into this partnership? Will this partnership block you from seeking other project support?</td>
<td>What are the systemic concerns to keep in mind? What are the institutional concerns of the sponsor and of your relationship to them? What might be the unintended message given by engaging in this sponsoring relationship?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sponsoring relationships can be key for visibility and funding opportunities for digital community projects, but it is important to understand what certain relationships afford and limit.

**Final Thoughts**

Discussions of community in the digital archive—in this case study, who represents the “our” in *Our Marathon*—necessitate a nuanced interdisciplinary dialogue. Rhetoric and Composition scholars are accustomed to re-seeing ontologies based on discipline-specific lenses, and the digital literacy practices of those contributing to digital communal spaces offers a rich landscape into understanding how identity and public memory are presented online in particular through writing. As our field continues to engage with the public turn in writing, we can adapt the methods of our discipline to the sites and spaces that invite personal, born-digital material; we can also learn from one another about what it takes to build digital community spaces. Lastly, we can critically reflect on our practices and disrupt archival silences particularly when it comes to representing communities.
Works Cited


APPENDIX

Web-Based Online Survey Questions

Sharing a Story with Our Marathon
Before completing, please make sure you have read and understand the consent form attached to the email you were sent.
* Required

_ By clicking this box, I acknowledge that I have read the consent form and give permission to use this data anonymously in a scholarly research project. *

Why did you choose to share your story with Our Marathon? *
[Some people have explained that sharing their story felt like a cathartic act to process a terrible thing that happened in their community—or in a community they felt connected to in some way—and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to a historical archive. These contributors often cite personal reasons for their decisions to sit down and record their thoughts for this venue. Others have explained that they felt the media was focusing too much on the bombers and the destruction of the Marathon bombings and the aftermath and wanted to make sure that their voices (i.e. the “real” stories of Boston at this time) were recorded in an effort to give a more broad view of what this tragedy meant to the city.]

What was your writing process like in contributing your story to Our Marathon? *
[Some people have explained that they came across Our Marathon and knew right away that they wanted to share a story that they had already written or wanted to write. Some took their time and drafted ideas before settling on a text they wanted to submit. Others have explained that the energy surrounding the 2014 marathon acted as a motivator to share their stories, especially during Share-Your-Story events, and they imagined audiences that wanted to know what their experience was like in 2013. Some felt a little shy sharing their accounts and were not sure if their stories “counted” in this context because they felt they were not severely impacted by the bombings in ways other community members were.]

Did the archive capture your expectations after submitting? *
[Some people found it useful to see their own stories among other’s stories; some appreciated having a “permanent home” for their reflections that they could share with friends and family; others did not really have expectations and almost forgot about the experience after submitting—citing that they felt good about contributing to this community project but had no expectations of thinking about it again.]

How did you hear about Our Marathon? *
Select the best answer.
_ Through a friend
_ Media (television, newspaper, or radio)
_ Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
_ At an event
_ Through an interaction with someone working on Our Marathon
_ Other: ____________________
Are you from Boston or the Metro area? *
Select the best answer.
_ Yes, and I currently live here.
_ Yes, but I currently live somewhere else.
_ Yes, but I only live here for school.
_ No, I am not from the Boston or Metro area.

What, if any, is your relation to the Boston Marathon bombing? *
Click all that apply.
_ I was at the marathon.
_ I associate with Boston.
_ I am a runner.
_ I was or know someone who was injured by the bombing.
_ I was affected by the stories on the news.
_ I watch the marathon on television.
_ I have no relation to the Boston Marathon bombing.
_ Other: ____________________

Where did you contribute your story from? *
_ My place of residence
_ My place of employment
_ A friend or relative’s residence
_ A “Share-Your-Story” Event (e.g. at a library or other venue where staff members were available to assist you)
_ Other (please explain):

What is your gender? *
_ Female
_ Male
_ Other

What is your age? *
_ 18-24 years old
_ 25-34 years old
_ 35-44 years old
_ 45-54 years old
_ 55-64 years old
_ 65-74 years old
_ 75 years or older

How do you identify racially/ethnically? *
What is your highest level of education? *
  _ No schooling completed
  _ Nursery school to 8th grade
  _ Some high school, no diploma
  _ High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
  _ Some college credit, no degree
  _ Trade/technical/vocational training
  _ Associate degree
  _ Bachelor’s degree
  _ Master’s degree
  _ Professional degree
  _ Doctorate degree

What is the average annual income of your household? *
  _ Under $25,000
  _ $25,001 - $49,999
  _ $50,000 - $74,999
  _ $75,000 - $99,999
  _ $100,000 - $149,999
  _ $150,000 and over

What is your current zip code? *
_________________

Final words:

As a Rhetoric and Composition scholar, and as a teacher of writing, I appreciate you taking the time to share your writing with Our Marathon. To better understand “public writing” in my research and teaching, I would love to follow up with you about your writing process and your submission to the digital archive. If you are interested in potentially being contacted for a brief follow-up interview, please leave your preferred email address here; if not, please leave this field blank. In either case, I extend my deepest gratitude to you for completing this survey and wish you well! Thank you!

Email address: __________________
Follow-up Interview Questions

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. As we discussed before, this brief interview is meant to gain an understanding of public writing with someone who chose to share his/her written story with the Our Marathon archive. [Person’s name], do you give me permission to record this interview today and to use this research anonymously in my research project? …

We’ll touch on 3 subjects briefly today: a little bit about yourself, some questions about writing in your life and for the marathon archive, and your thoughts on the writing in the archive I’ve noticed in the archive’s stories.

PART 1: ~3-5 minutes on the interviewee’s background (brief warm-up questions)

- Could you tell me a little about yourself? [Where did you grow up? What do you do with your life? Follow-up questions based on the information received in the initial survey or email exchanges.]

PART 2: ~5-10 minutes on the interviewee’s writing and writing process

- How often do you write? What kinds of writing do you do in your life? What motivates you to write? What mediums do you rely on for writing (electronic, paper, etc.)? What’s your writing process like? What kinds of feedback do you seek out on your writing? What is an ideal writing situation like for you?
- You mentioned ___________ [observations from the interviewee’s survey data that is specific to writing for Our Marathon]; could you say more about ______? [These questions may touch on motivations, experiences, or expectations.]
- What did you write for Our Marathon? Who do you think your audience was? What was your purpose in writing?

PART 3: ~5-7 minutes on story trends and the writer’s submissions

- One major trend I have seen in the archive is the use of the phrase “BOSTON STRONG”; what does this phrase mean to you? Is that representative of your experience with Boston and/or the Marathon?
- In your submission, you wrote about ___________. Why did you choose to write about this topic/submit this story? Who do you think will benefit from this work or find it most meaningful?
- How would you describe the act of submitting your story to the archive for you personally?

Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Do you have any questions for me, or is there anything else you’d like to mention that I didn’t ask you about here?

Thank you so much for your time.
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

This is Kristi Girdharry and today is [date]. I am here with [interviewee’s full name] in [location, i.e. Holmes Hall at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts]. We are going to record an interview as part of the “Composing Digital Community Spaces: Design and Literacy Practices in/of the Archive” research project. [Name], do I have your permission to record this interview?

We are conducting this interview to understand scholars’ motivations and experiences in building a digital archive like Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive & WBUR Oral History Project. We’ll spend part of our time together today talking about your experiences of what happened around the marathon that day and in the days, weeks, and months that followed, and then we’ll spend some time thinking about the marathon archive itself in relation to design, participation, and what you’ve gotten out of working on this project. To understand your position with Our Marathon and what motivated you, first I’d like to understand a bit of your personal background.

PART I: Background

• Could you begin by telling me about yourself, who you are, where you are from?
• Where you grew up and/or your family
• Your academic/professional path/history
• How did you end up at Northeastern/working with Northeastern?
• What are your research interests?
• What other jobs do you have?
• Are you part of committees/groups on campus or in the community?

PART II: Relationship to the Boston Marathon in the past

• Before Our Marathon, did you have any relationship to the Boston Marathon in the past?  
  o Do you identify as a runner, athlete, Boston enthusiast, etc.?
• Northeastern is just about a mile away from the Finish Line. Does Marathon day generally impact you or your students in any way?

Part III: Events of 2013 Boston Marathon

• Where were you and what were you doing when you heard about the bombing at the 2013 Boston Marathon?
• What was your reaction?
• Did anything change for you that day or week? What was that week like?
• Is there anything you specifically remember from the bombing or the days after?

PART IV: Designing/Building a digital archive

• Where did the idea for a digital archive come from?  
  o What interested you about that?
  o If you interviewed for the summer job, what was that process like?
  o What were your qualifications to build such a project?
• What kind of work did you put into the archive?  
  o What would a typical day look like for you surrounding this work?
• What do you remember from the earliest days of creating the digital archive? Sketches? Devices? What strikes you about the page layouts of the archive?
  o In Design Studies, we talk about the concept of “familiarity in design” — is this phrase something that resonates with you when thinking back to the initial conceptualizations of the archive? [If anything about “patterns” comes up, press for more.]
  o What kinds of research did you and/or the team undertake to build the archive? How would you describe the process [linear, conversational, other Tidwell terms]? How is data organized?
• In Design, we spend a lot of time talking about how “looking good matters” (Tidwell): What kind of experience do you want your users to have? Did you consider your brand identity? How did you choose colors, fonts, etc.?
• A major element of design is creativity, and some scholars argue that creativity is culturally informed (Balsamo 3); do you think elements of Our Marathon are culturally informed?
• What design elements were reproduced from elsewhere? What were created new? (Balsamo 3) What types of sites did you reverse engineer? (Balsamo 5)
• Why did we choose Omeka as a design platform? What can you tell me about Omeka? How did the predetermined options help/hinder your progress?
• What devices work best with Our Marathon? What devices do you think most people accessed Our Marathon from? Did you consider ever making an app (Levin)?
• What surprised you about the design process?
• What critical tradeoffs were there in the design process? In other words, how did you work together? Collaborative design decisions?
• What roadblocks, annoyances, or hardships did you face during this project?
• How do you characterize the people who would use Our Marathon?
• Why do you think people contribute/don’t contribute to a project like this?
  o What kinds of outreach did you personally do to get people to contribute? How much hinting or prompting does the archive do on its own?
  o Do you have any particular memories when it comes to observing people interacting with the archive?
• Do you consider Our Marathon innovative in any ways? (Balsamo 3)
• What did you take from participating in this project?
• How has this work affected you academically, professionally, personally?
  o Have you presented on it, been interviewed, etc.? What were those experiences like?

PART V: Stories of the archive
• “BOSTON STRONG”: two-word trope that spread like crazy in the weeks after the bombings
  o Does this phrase resonate for you?
  o How does it make you feel? What does it represent?
• Did you meet any people during this project that impacted you in any way?
• Are there any artifacts that specifically come to mind when you think about the archive?
PART VI: Academic and Professional Development
- What did you learn from the project?
- How has your experience with the archive affected your academic/professional career?
- What would you do differently if you were to start all over?
- Would you be interested in building another digital archive?
- What are your best or favorite memories of working on this project?

PART VII: End matter
- As time has passed, would you say that the marathon bombings and/or your archival work have changed you in any fundamental ways?
- Has it changed the way you think of yourself as a person?
- Has it changed or affected how you have been thinking about what you want to do with your life in the future?
- What would you say are the most important things you’ve learned as a result of this experience?
- Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about?

THANK YOU!