

## The Costs of Sharing: Attending to Contact in Composition Practices

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**Abstract:** “Sharing” is a ubiquitous yet largely unexamined term in composition scholarship and practice. Scholars and teachers use the term widely to talk about practices such as peer review, collaboration, and student-teacher conferences, all of which have been used to support the relevance of composition as a social and communal act. Yet, as this article demonstrates, sharing has been aligned historically with assumptions and values that emphasize individual productivity at the cost of exploring the affective and ethical costs of social engagement and interaction. This article investigates tensions in the historical practices of sharing that create openings for alternative ways to understand and value the complex encounters writers undergo when they interact in the space of the writing classroom. Specifically, the article explores how sharing might be revised in composition studies to draw attention to the affective, corporeal, and ethical consequences of interpersonal contact.

The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* developed by CWPA, NCTE, and NWP writing specialists suggests that one way for writing instructors to help student writers “produce final, polished texts” is by having students practice aspects of the writing process that include, among other activities, “sharing with others” (O’Neill et al. 531). Although it might be lost among other recommendations for developing flexible “habits of mind” and writing processes, this simple phrase referencing the practice of “sharing with others” actually describes a complex and relatively underexamined scene of ethical action within writing practice. The concept of “sharing,” used without further definition or explanation in the *Framework*, resonates within a long history of meaning in the field of composition studies that the *Framework* both relies upon and makes visible. It is significant, for this reason, that the *Framework* does not instruct readers further about the specific practices that make “sharing with others” productive. Readers of the *Framework* are not cued to understand “sharing” as a contested term, one that has been complicated through conversations about collaboration (Trimbur; Clark and Ede; McNenny and Roen), about vulnerability (Davis; Tayko and Tassoni), and about ethical practices in writing instruction (Schilb; Haswell et al.). For reasons that this essay will consider, the *Framework* draws on a tradition that makes it seem as though “sharing with others” aligns naturally with the stated goal of helping students learn to produce “final, polished texts.” In this way, the *Framework* takes up a long tradition in composition studies that has reinforced sharing as a way of developing writers’ control over the writing process.

Although we rarely acknowledge its frequency in our conversations, the terminology of sharing has been central to the development and progress of pedagogical practice in the field of composition studies. The citation of sharing in the CWPA *Framework* helps make visible a specific tradition of sharing that has reappeared at every major milestone in our field’s history, supporting everything from voice pedagogy to cultural studies approaches to, more recently, arguments for listening, silence, and other key social and communal investments in writing. Composition scholars and practitioners

have used the term “sharing” to describe practices that are now commonplace in composition classrooms, including collaboration, peer review, student-teacher conferences, and class discussions. Yet, it is worth considering that we often invoke a specific definition of sharing when we make use of it in composition pedagogy, using the term to refer to an act of interpersonal exchange that we take for granted as productive, constructive, and beneficial. Even though scholars of composition pedagogy have given thought to the social costs of collaboration (Yancey and Spooner; Durst and Stanforth) and the interpersonal dimensions of practices such as peer editing (Spigelman; Ritter), the opening example of the *CWPA Framework* helps demonstrate that sharing continues to emerge in our practices in ways that undercut the complexity of sharing as an ethical, social, and interpersonal act. In this essay, I focus on the effects of sharing within composition pedagogy, tracing its definition both as a *productive* pedagogical practice (as in the *Framework*) and as a radical ethical act that profoundly affects writers’ emotional and bodily experiences of contact. While sharing has been used widely to focus attention on the productive and controllable aspects of interpersonal contact between writers, I argue that alternative uses of sharing can help our field to continue developing the ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions of writing instruction beyond their use-value in an economy of productivity. If, as the opening example of the *CWPA Framework* makes visible, we have created a strong focus on productive and measurable aspects of sharing, then we need even more urgently to explore other, corporeal and emotional aspects of sharing that can draw new attention to the complexity of writing as a social, communal, and ethical act.

Revisiting what sharing means in the context of writing instruction is an especially important task given the pressures composition studies faces to streamline and economize the scene of writing instruction. In an environment where writing instruction is increasingly linked with the “management” of writers as “marketable commodities”(Carter 189), positioning sharing as an act of simple, productive exchange may be especially risky. When we do not problematize the link between sharing and productivity, we risk minimizing the complex ethical, social, and interpersonal negotiations that are required in order to “share” writing within the scene of composition practice. Neglecting the complexity of sharing may in this way make writing instruction even more adaptable to the “business culture” of the university that Carter and others have critiqued (Carter 191). Given this sense of urgency, it is helpful to remember that the word “sharing” literally derives from *shearing*—to cut into parts or “cleave” (OED). This etymological connection to cutting and cleaving draws out the potential disruption of sharing as an act that forces writers to expose their personal ideas and feelings to others. Sharing, in its role in shaping “ethos,” requires us to incline our bodies towards others and often demands the “shearing” of our most comfortable habits and feelings in order to understand the differences between ourselves and others. Paying attention to these other, emotional and bodily dimensions of sharing/shearing is important in composition studies because it helps us focus on aspects of writing practice that are vital to the development of writers as ethical subjects—that is, individuals whose “ethos” is shaped powerfully through interactions in the writing classroom. [\[1\]](#) [\[#note1\]](#) As writing programs face increasing pressure to develop learning environments that can produce measurable, assessable products of writing, the act of dwelling on the ethical and emotional consequences of sharing can help us to understand more deeply how the scene of writing affects writers’ relational and communal interactions.

My goal in this essay, therefore, is to uncover and explore a specific history within composition studies that has defined sharing as a productive, uncomplicated exchange of knowledge, skills, and expectations between writers. In the paragraphs that follow, I look specifically to three dimensions of sharing that offer a chance to revise how we understand and use interpersonal contact in composition practice. By giving attention here to ethical, emotional, and corporeal aspects of “shared” interactions, I aim not to critique but rather to extend and augment the ways that previous generations of

composition scholars have put sharing to use. I argue that understanding the history of sharing invites current scholars and practitioners of composition to see how our practices of sharing draw on values and assumptions that we may not wish to continue supporting. Recognizing our place in this history gives us ground to develop new practices that can engage different values and assumptions. I briefly consider several practices centered on the concept of “shearing” at the close of this essay. First, however, I turn to a deeper consideration of how sharing has been taken up in the field of composition studies, focusing on definitions of sharing that have aligned writing practices with growing political and economic pressures to increase student pass rates, quantify the success of our writing programs, and measure our curricula according to state and national learning outcomes. The urgency of these outside pressures, as I will show, makes it all the more important for scholars and practitioners in composition studies to account for the ways that we put sharing to use in our writing environments and to begin developing new accounts of how sharing can be used to foster writers as ethical and social human beings.

## The Simple Ethics of Sharing

As I have already stated above, sharing as a term is cited frequently throughout the history of composition studies as a discipline and emerges in support of some of the most important “paradigm shifts” in our discipline’s lifespan. While it is beyond the scope of this article to fully consider the complex history of sharing in composition studies, I focus here on several representative examples that provide a glimpse of a tradition that has continued to align sharing with values of productivity and control. My goal is not to provide an exhaustive account of the complex ways that sharing has been put to use in composition studies, but rather to trace the emergence of a dominant strain of thought about sharing that continues to influence composition practice. This dominant strain positions shared contact as productive at the cost of opening up its affective, ethical, and corporeal dimensions. As I will show in more detail below, I recognize that this dominant narrative is not the *only* way to define sharing; in fact, I hope to create openings for other scholars and practitioners to explore the complexity of sharing as it has been contested in subsequent scholarship. However, as the introductory example of the CWPA *Framework* suggests, this deeper complexity continues to be submerged in practices that encourage us to link sharing with acts of knowledge exchange directed towards skill-building. Because this dominant tradition of defining sharing through its *productive* capacities persists even in the face of more complicated discussions of collaboration, I argue that we need to look at sharing on its own terms. We need to confront sharing as a concept that *seems* to vary widely in its usage in composition pedagogy and yet retains a strong connection to values of mastery and control over writing. Recognizing this enduring legacy of productive sharing is a vital first step towards opening our practices of writing instruction to other ethical, affective, and corporeal dimensions of interpersonal contact. I turn towards discussing each of these dimensions of sharing in the sections that follow.

I begin with the “ethical” tensions that sharing has produced. Defining ethics as the development of “ethos” (character, identity, habit) through intersubjective exchange, I look first at how sharing has entered composition pedagogy as an act of aligning writers’ ethos with values of mastery and control over writing. Jacqueline Jones Royster has written that “cooperation and collaboration” have been part of the ethos of composition scholars “from the start” (366); yet, it is worth considering here that the language of sharing first articulated in our field envisions writerly interaction as a resource for transforming the complexity of interpersonal contact into the product of better writing.<sup>[2]</sup> [\[#note2\]](#) Phrases distributed throughout the earliest pages of *CCC*, for example, mold sharing into a useful strategy for making composition pedagogy and practice coherent: sharing helps to control reading “efficiency” and reading “effectiveness” (*CCCC*, “Improving” 142); sharing “induc[es]”

students to adopt their teachers' "points of view" (Patterson 121-22); sharing makes students feel as though they have "unlimited resources" (Drennan 533); and sharing "increase[s] the effectiveness of human communication" (Bird 145). Altogether, sharing proves its utility to composition practice in these early examples by offering writers a way to perfect their writing abilities without remaining isolated and alone. But exactly what happens when individuals share social space with one another is not openly discussed in these early references to sharing. Concerned primarily with the logistics of organizing composition as a field, early scholars instead compress the ethical dimensions of sharing by defining shared encounters as transparent and always-productive exchanges of resources (information, values, and skills) between individuals. Little attention is given in these articles to the social and cultural complexities that must be negotiated in order for sharing to produce positive results.

Yet, it is not sufficient to say that compositionists have been completely ignorant of the wider ethical implications of sharing. In other early scholarship, we find writers complicating this production-centered definition of sharing by exploring intimacy and relationality as important aspects of writing. As early as 1953, James Platt and Russell Jenkins were arguing that communication is "a social act, involving at least two people, characterized by the sharing of ideas, experiences, and feelings" (97). Platt and Jenkins pause in their scholarship to consider sharing as more than a transaction between equivalent subjects, openly questioning how human relations are formed and maintained through contact that has immediate, participatory, and affective consequences. In this way, Platt and Jenkins offer the possibility that sharing affects us as much through its dimensions of "attitude" and of "adjustment to others" than it does through its capacity to produce better communicators (100). The intervention of Platt and Jenkins invites questions about the costs of making sharing productive: if sharing involves the different feelings and experiences of different people, then something is lost when our practices transform these differences into resources for proficiency and improvement (97). Ironically, the fate of Platt's and Jenkins' scholarship reinforces just how powerfully this transformative, productive potential of sharing has affected our field. Despite appearing in a 1953 CCC article highlighting "Some of the Year's Work in College Composition and Communication" (67), the work of Platt and Jenkins has been overshadowed by scholarship offering more concrete methods for putting sharing into practice. The loss of this perspective is significant and also instructive for contemporary composition scholars: as interest in the immediacy and intimacy of shared contact has faded, the disruptive question of the ethical consequences of sharing has been easier to overlook.

Recognizing the conflicts and tensions that complicate the ethics of sharing is important for contemporary scholars of composition: these sites of tension offer us the opportunity to see our own ethical practices of sharing and writing as part of a long lineage of scholarship that has used sharing to define interpersonal contact as a simple exchange of resources. Of course, the apparent simplicity of this definition has been challenged by scholars such as John Trimbur, who writes that collaborative composition practices can mask regulative operations of "instrumental control and rational efficiency" that determine what gets counted as productive discourse (610). Diane Davis, addressing similar concerns, cautions that focusing on sharing exclusively as a knowledge-producing act may leave writing scholars unable to attune to ethical differences that writing also produces. Davis suggests that at stake in our "obligation to share" is an inherent risk that our habits of sharing may collapse the "surplus" and "exposedness" of the shared encounter, promoting interaction as a translation of other into self (198). For Davis, the moment of sharing is more than a moment to appropriate something valuable from others: sharing also faces us with exposure of our human finitude, vulnerability, and nakedness to others (205). That we typically turn away from exposure towards more comfortable and familiar methods of sharing reflects our pragmatic need to get things done in the world (208). But this

pragmatic focus, Davis urges, should not lead us to believe that the ethical demand of others has been satisfied once we get the information, skills, experience, or knowledge we need from our shared encounters.

This last construction is vitally important to helping us understand why the ethical dimensions of sharing still need to be pursued. If we are to learn to share in ways that attune us to the needs and expectations of other human beings, then we must not assume that simply by employing sharing in our pedagogies, we are describing an action that helps writers (and scholars) listen more hospitably and attentively to one another. [\[3\]](#) [\[#note3\]](#) In fact, whenever we look to sharing to stand for an action that always produces better, more intelligent individuals, we risk erasing the consequences of difference from the scene of shared contact. Productive, transactional sharing is risky in ways that our practices rarely make visible: it positions writers to assimilate others uncritically as a means of channeling differences into productive action. In order to avoid making sharing a process of strict assimilation, we need to develop practices that call attention to sharing as an ethical act—an act of vulnerability, exposure, and even uncertainty. These values push back against the historical tradition that puts sharing to work in composition practices, minimizing the ethical complexity of shared contact between writers. From Trimbur, Davis, and other scholars who address the ethical complexity of sharing, we can see the vital importance of augmenting our understanding of writing with questions that press the limits of what we can know about others by virtue of sharing space with them.

## The “Chaos” of Sharing Emotions

If the earliest accounts of sharing in composition scholarship make visible an ethical complexity to the act of sharing that composition studies must continue to address, studying the history of sharing faces us with another significant dimension of interpersonal contact that also impacts how we approach the study and practice of writing: the dimension of affect. Focusing on affect, we find that composition pedagogy has tended to adopt shared practices as a way of helping writers to *overcome* their fears and anxieties about writing. This definition of sharing positions interpersonal contact as most valuable when it transforms all chaotic and non-rational experiences of writing into rational, orderly, and thus more socially valuable forms of communication. This transformative potential of sharing is part of what Donald Murray, for instance, explores in his 1969 article, “Finding Your Own Voice.” When Murray writes of the need for students to share responsibility with one another, he suggests that sharing is an appropriate way to navigate the pain, vulnerability, and “chaos” that writers often experience: “Slowly, painfully,” writes Murray, “the student will discover he can achieve an audience. If he has something to say, [...] if he brings order to chaos, if he entertains, if he is able to give the reader information or an esthetic experience, he will be read” (122). For Murray, sharing ensures that students will find a voice and an audience; yet, careful readers will also notice that sharing provides a normative mechanism for shaping this voice to fit the overarching “order” expected by the academy (118). In his struggle to make sharing a resource for productivity, Murray subtly but importantly aligns sharing with values of orderly discourse that we recognize today as part of a tradition that has avoided emotion and reinforced what Laura Micciche calls a “logos-centered conception of rhetoric” (164).

Even while his discourse takes up a definition of sharing that transforms affective uncertainty into productive writing, however, Murray also struggles with the scene of anxiety, conflict, and frustration that underlie this shared “responsibility” between students and teachers. In fact, Murray’s struggle with the affective costs of “order” creates an opening to explore shared contact as a scene of difficult, even painful emotional exchange (122). The painful risks of sharing are visible when Murray acknowledges criticism, failure, and “the agonies of exposure on the printed page” as part of the scene



of sharing facing all writers (123). In most of his essay, Murray holds these qualities of affect in tension with an underlying need to fulfill the university's mission of producing learning and "responsible argument" from the embers of failure and dissent (123). At other moments, Murray seems to give unique importance to the "glory" of contradiction, cacophony, and chaos, which he believes can help students take responsibility for themselves and their writing (118). We can read into these scenes of tension the traces of a profound struggle to come to terms with sharing as an act that powerfully shapes writers' emotional engagement with one another. Murray shows us that shared encounters generate consequences for writers' development as sensitive, expressive human beings. In giving attention to what it costs writers to transform chaos into order, Murray invites us to recognize that how we feel as we negotiate our writing with others profoundly affects both what we write and how we engage with other human beings. Even though Murray often seems to channel emotions into "constructive chaos" to be managed by composition pedagogy (119), he leaves behind openings to reconsider the ways that our emotional investments in others shape how we develop our goals and purposes for writing.

Yet, Murray's recognition of anxiety, fear, and pain as part of the scene of writing instruction has not always been recognized in the wider field of composition practice. In fact, early references to commonplace practices such as peer editing and student-teacher conferences show little of the complexity that Murray gives to the emotions writers face when they interact. [\[4\]](#) [\[#note4\]](#) In Peter Schiff's early work with writing conferences, for instance, sharing (through student-teacher conferencing) is defined as a method for managing writers' emotional responses in order to better control the exchange between teachers and students. Schiff gives significant attention to the idea that writing conferences are "both enjoyable and productive," but his argument reinforces the assumption that the intimacy of the conference is valuable precisely because it realigns students' affect with the goal of achieving success through writing (294). Similarly, when Donald Nemanich discusses his method of having graduate student instructors share their essay assignments with one another in his teaching methods course, he argues that "students seem to like the enlarged audience, rather than having only me reading their papers" (48). For both Nemanich and Schiff, sharing is an appealing method because it norms students emotionally with the challenges of academic writing: students *like* writing more when they are asked to share it. Both scholars seem convinced that sharing produces better writing through its management of emotions, and thus neither Schiff nor Nemanich questions what it costs writers affectively to align themselves with the academy in this way.

This excitement over the *effects* of sharing covers over its *affects*—the possibility that writers might also experience significant fear, anxiety, anger, and confusion as part of the experience of peer review or conferences. Compared to Murray, who seems to recognize that the contact of sharing may produce chaos as well as order, Nemanich and Schiff are more eager to collapse the emotional tensions of sharing in favor of arguments that justify sharing as a means of making writing instruction more fun and more effective. While scholars have further complicated the practices that Nemanich and Schiff discuss over the past decades, it is important that we attend to this vital early connection between practices of sharing (such as peer editing) and their roots in values of mastery, control, and productivity.

When we realize that sharing has played a part in regulating the uses of emotion in composition studies, we can begin to understand why it is so important that composition scholars and teachers continue to explore alternative practices that confront, rather than simply utilize, the emotional engagement of writers through "shared" practices of writing instruction. Laura Micciche writes in "Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action" that composition scholarship has been affected by theories and practices of rhetoric that position emotion as "a dangerous ground of unreason, chaos, and blurred

judgment” (165). For Micciche and other scholars who theorize emotion, the result of not attending to the affective relations produced by the study of writing is that we close off a crucial line of inquiry into any aspects of our contact with others that appear irrational and disorderly. The history of sharing constructed here suggests that our habits of sharing have played an important and underexamined role in the orderly management of affect that Micciche describes.

As we have seen in examples from Murray, Schiff, and Nemanich, sharing in composition practice has provided a useful way to manage affect because it places the responsibility on writers for transforming one another’s emotions into the product of better skills and abilities. By aligning shared practices with productivity, we risk managing affect so well that emotions and feelings no longer appear as consequential to the problems of writing we are pursuing. The very effectiveness of our methods of sharing may keep scholars and practitioners of composition from confronting a deep anxiety about the threat that emotions pose to the stability of our knowledge about the world. Because the contact of sharing can also draw writers’ attention to the risks we take by entering social and public spaces, it is important that we make this anxiety visible and refuse to allow our language of sharing to perpetuate the schooling of emotions that Micciche and others in our field have critiqued.

[\[5\]](#) [\[#note5\]](#)

## The Body as a Shared Resource

Having explored in the preceding sections why attending to dimensions of ethics and affect may help us understand what aspects of sharing merit more careful attention in composition practice, in this final section I want to look at perhaps the most important and visible dimension of sharing that still needs to be traced—the dimension of the body. As with emotions and ethics, employments of the body in conversations about sharing have tended to deflect attention away from the corporeal and material consequences of shared contact in order to simplify the collision of bodies as an act of exchange that produces better knowledge and enhanced writing abilities. The productive version of sharing has tended to treat our bodies as “stable, static, stonelike objects that can be measured, evaluated, and discharged according to fixed criteria” (T.R. Johnson 641). This tradition has strongly influenced the ways that sharing has been practiced: for this reason, confronting the alignment of sharing with productivity allows us to open up new ways to complicate sharing as a bodily and material act. In this final section, I suggest that recognizing the physicality of sharing can provide an opportunity to study how writers learn to posture and incline their bodies towards one another through “shared” practices of composition instruction.

The alignment of sharing with productivity has construed the physical and material realities of interpersonal contact as problems that composition instruction can overcome rather than as opportunities to refocus our attention on the importance of bodies to the scene of writing instruction. This narrative has been articulated in important articles such as James Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” (1988), in which Berlin attacks Murray and other “expressionists” for ignoring the role of community in the construction of writing. In order to make space for his own social-epistemic rhetoric, Berlin argues that cognitivist and expressionist versions of sharing do not attend to the “complexity” of human behavior; yet, the “dialectical” definition of sharing that Berlin promotes does not give anything more than passing attention to what happens physically, emotionally, or psychologically to teachers or students as they posture themselves to share “dialectically” (492).

In fact, Berlin’s social-epistemic rhetoric as a whole seems to imagine writers as physically isolated from one another: while it affirms sharing as a method of encouraging “the liberated consciousness of students,” it shows more interest in the sharing of minds than in the bodies that are left behind in the

process (492). The near-invisibility of physical tensions within Berlin's narrative of sharing reinforces the idea that the corporeality of contact is a problem effectively managed by “dialectical” and other methods of sharing.<sup>[6]</sup> <sup>[#note6]</sup> Although Berlin never acknowledges it, his emphasis on shared *consciousness* subtly reinforces sharing as an effective disciplinary mechanism for increasing the productivity of our bodies. We learn from the kinds of sharing Berlin defines to interact in ways that minimize the interference of our bodies so that the critical work of our minds can flourish.

If the values of sharing represented by Berlin have contributed to the control of the body through practices of collaboration and interaction, it is worth considering other moments in our field's scholarship when the interruption of bodies reflects back to composition scholars and practitioners the costs of defining sharing too narrowly as a mental rather than physical operation. For the most part, contemporary composition textbooks continue to re-present sharing through collaborative practices that are aimed at producing better written products.<sup>[7]</sup> <sup>[#note7]</sup> An exception worth considering in more detail is *Sharing and Responding*, Peter Elbow's and Pat Belanoff's 1989 writing textbook, which gives a surprisingly candid glimpse at its authors' struggles to reconcile shared contact with the goal of producing better writing. From the perspective of corporeality, the most interesting moments of *Sharing and Responding* are the discontinuities of contact bursting through the veneer of control that otherwise protects the book's status as a valuable guide to productive interaction. In several sidebars written in the first-person by Elbow and Belanoff, the margins of *Sharing and Responding* expose the body, with all of its messiness and unpredictability, in direct conflict with the otherwise well-groomed and orderly image of writing as a method of sharing corporeal exchange productively. Belanoff, for instance, registers in one sidebar her explosive reaction when confronted with Elbow's criticism of one of the text's early chapters. The powerful aftershocks of contact resonant in this passage make it worth quoting at length:

I'm revising according to feedback and angry. Why doesn't he [Elbow] write the damn thing himself if he knows so surely what he wants. It's insulting—giving it back to me to do *his* way. I can't do it. I feel as though I'm not into it, not into the ideas—just into superficial stuff, trying to make it what someone else wants it to be. I'd like to just give it back to him and say that: “Here, you have such a sure idea about what this should be, why give it to me to do? I'm not a typist.” Does he think I'm inept? stupid? (46, original emphasis)

In contrast with the neat social processes that describe sharing elsewhere in *Sharing and Responding*, here, the messy reality of the writers' attempts to make sharing productive is fully exposed. Sharing is not productive in this moment; it is a physical battle that leaves its marks on Belanoff and Elbow both emotionally and corporeally. Even while Belanoff imagines walking away from the project entirely, Elbow writes that he is “upset and unable to sleep or relax” (33). Both writers give glimpses of a side of sharing that seems in no way recoverable within the model of productive exchange advocated elsewhere in *Sharing and Responding*. Sharing, as both Elbow and Belanoff confess, actually upsets the rhythms and movements of their bodies, troubling their progress towards the rational goal of completing their book project together. The margins of *Sharing and Responding* thus privilege the shared body as a significant influence on how, when, and why we write. In this way, Elbow and Belanoff draw attention to what it costs writers to produce writing at the expense of shared contact that may deprive us of comfort, rest, pleasure, and other physical needs.

I would argue that the corporeal fireworks in the margins of *Sharing and Responding* show us how the conflict of sharing, to borrow a phrase from Michel Foucault, “attaches itself to the body,” and in this way shapes the rituals and rhythms through which we learn to make sense of our encounters with others (147). While most contemporary writing textbooks address bodies indirectly (if at all) through



advice about “tact” and “respect” (Bullock, *Norton Field Guide to Writing* 215), Elbow and Belanoff directly explore what it feels like to have one’s body forced into a situation where it must overcome the marks of contact in order to produce. Strong attempts are made by both authors to repurpose their bodily urges to fight, cry, and seethe in order to make their interactions look more like a stable and productive resource instead of a site of sleeplessness, vulnerability, and physical discomfort. In this narrative, Elbow and Belanoff ultimately suggest that writers must confront the weaknesses of the body as something to be worked through and ultimately overcome. This complexity makes *Sharing and Responding* an instructive resource in more ways than one. In addition to providing a methodology of sharing for managing affect and bodies, *Sharing and Responding* also confronts us with the strength of an underlying regulatory power that reclaims the use-value of shared bodies at the moment when the experiences of contact threaten to send the body out of control. Elbow and Belanoff thus make visible to student writers the physical conflict of sharing that contemporary textbooks often fail to confront. By drawing attention to their own physical reactions, Elbow and Belanoff expose the limitations of writing as a habit that absorbs and deflects the contact of others.

Tensions of pain, grief, hurt, silence, and distance that emerge at the scene of sharing in composition studies ultimately expose why this revisionary work with the corporeality of sharing needs to be addressed more directly in composition practice. It falls to us to explore the relationship between sharing and writing in terms of how it postures writers to engage one another physically. We need to develop practices that expose how this posture reflects the rhythm, motion, and “messiness” of writing (Hawhee 157). We also need to reconsider how our physical responses to one another bear impressions of the “pulse and beat” of our family-based values (Fleckenstein 302), and how the “revulsion” of the body molds our practices of sharing to fit “discursive norms” (Miller 277). Kristie Fleckenstein argues that so long as this work is ignored, composition studies will continue to depend upon “conceptual or epistemological frameworks that disregard physical bodies” (281). Yet, each time we foreground the effects of sharing on the bodies that are put into motion by methods of collaboration, interaction, and dialogue, we expose the operations of the body that contemporary uses of sharing too often take for granted. We are still in many ways living with the legacy of sharing as a method of organizing bodily resources: the history considered here helps make this connection clearer. By understanding how this legacy opens up alternative ways of exploring corporeal contact in composition practice, we can begin to develop new practices that foreground the values and actions described by Fleckenstein, Miller, and others. The disruptive and sometimes uncomfortable experience of having our bodies shaped and changed by the act of sharing does not have to be a problem writing scholars must *solve*; instead, the physicality of sharing can provide new motivation to look to the body as a site where the marks of collision and contact call our attention to the ways we form relationships through writing.

## Conclusions

With the consideration of Elbow, Berlin, and Belanoff in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we are not far from where this essay began, with a focus on the economic pressures that shape the influence of sharing on contemporary composition practice. As sharing has evolved, composition scholars have continued to look to sharing as a means of framing the writing process (O’Neill et al.), promoting “radical” change (Wardle 783), and developing “stronger” methods of teaching (Bauer et al. 92). Whether this change takes the form of Writing about Writing courses (Wardle), friendship (Gregory), listening (Bauer et al.), or any of the numerous other terms that have been promoted as new ways to frame interaction in writing instruction, we must be attentive to the long tradition that has defined sharing as an act of productivity, mastery, and control. The history of sharing that I have outlined above helps scholars and practitioners of writing understand that even practices which *seem* to engage

writers in mutual, ethical engagement can rely on sharing as a technique for reinforcing mastery and control.<sup>[8]</sup> <sup>[#note8]</sup> I do not mean to suggest, of course, that composition studies as a field has not recognized any other ways of valuing interpersonal engagement. Recent scholarship on listening, hospitality, sensitivity, and responsibility offers a rich and complex understanding of writing as an intersubjective act (see Jacobs; Haswell et al.; Glenn; Ratcliffe; Worsham). My point is that we (scholars, teachers, and administrators of composition) frequently employ sharing and talk about sharing within composition practice in ways that may not open up to this wider complexity. Instead, our commonplace usage of sharing may reinforce a version of writing that positions writers as “marketable commodities” (to echo Carter again) despite our best intentions otherwise. The history of sharing as it has traveled through our field reflects this trajectory. Given this context, whether or not we make room for other definitions of sharing to inflect composition pedagogy is a question of responsibility and opportunity that confronts us with great urgency.

In the end, creating space for alternative dimensions of sharing to shape composition practice does not have to require massive, ground-shaking change in our orientation towards writers. This space can be opened up through the vigilance and enthusiasm of composition practitioners who are willing to experiment with new practices and share results. One such opportunity may be to frame sharing in composition instruction as a radical act of “shearing.” This reframing would confront the assumption that sharing is an always-positive act that leads writers naturally to produce the outcomes we desire. We might, instead, try beginning from the assumption that sharing is an act of *cleaving*, an act that can create room for writers to change their habits in response to the potentially jarring and disruptive consequences of contact. We might develop new practices that allow writers to track their emotional and bodily experiences as they are sheared from comfortable habits and beliefs through the act of sharing ideas with other writers. One effective practice might be a “sharing journal” that asks writers to track their thoughts and feelings over time as they learn to share ethically while also learning to write instrumentally. We might also help to open up this scene of self-reflection by having writers read existing accounts of how sharing has *affected* other writers: Suresh Canagarajah’s narrative of collaborating with others in Sri Lanka during its civil war offers one interesting way to explore the emotional and bodily consequences of sharing (see *Geopolitics* 220-224). Julie Jung’s introspective look at her own emotional response to shared encounters with graduate students in her advanced rhetoric course provides another discussion of sharing as an experience of “shearing” away from comfortable habits (*Revisionary Rhetoric* 117-150). Whatever the resources we use or practices we develop, our focus should be on creating new openings for the ethical, affective, and corporeal dimensions of sharing to resonate alongside its familiar and commonplace dimension of reinforcing “instrumental control” over writing (Trimbur 601).

My use of these limited examples here should not be taken as a new directive for replacing the tradition of sharing with a new tradition of “shearing” in composition studies. Instead, I believe that the responsibility and opportunity for rethinking what it means to share confronts us at the local level of our choices as instructors and administrators of writing. As a field, composition studies has engaged in wider conversations about the ethical, affective, and corporeal dimensions of writing. But, as I have shown in the paragraphs above, these larger theoretical insights continue to be resisted in composition pedagogy by practices that put sharing to use as a means of increasing student productivity. It therefore falls to each of us as teachers and administrators of writing to be vigilant about what we assume when we encourage writers to share. We have the opportunity to invent new practices that can make room for the social and ethical dimensions of sharing to resonate in our pedagogies. When we are receptive to the chaos of sharing, its unpredictability and contingency, then we can better understand writing as an act that shapes how we respond to the world we already share with others.

## Notes

1. My sense of “ethics” here is influenced by the more complicated treatment of *ethos* developed by Stephen Yarbrough in *Inventive Intercourse*. For Yarbrough, *ethos* is continuously shaped through interactions that shift our relationships with others as well as our sense of how the world works. ([Return to text. \[#note1\\_ref\]](#))
2. For a more detailed description of the climate of early CCC scholarship, see Lindemann, who writes that early college teachers were particularly interested in using CCC to voice their “dissatisfaction with the first-year composition course” and to look for ways to “improve” it (519). This observation helps explain why sharing would enter composition scholarship in the 1950s as an activity unquestioned in its ethical consequences: early scholars had little incentive to explore the ethics of sharing when its productive capacities were much more relevant to the project of improvement. ([Return to text. \[#note2\\_ref\]](#))
3. Listening has been positioned as a strong model for hospitality and receptivity in composition studies (see Ratcliffe 29; Bauer et al. 190; Jung 15-17; Haswell et al. 716-17). With this tradition in mind, I argue that attending to the terminology of sharing helps us to expand these concepts within composition pedagogy. ([Return to text. \[#note3\\_ref\]](#))
4. Scholarship from the 1970s frequently uses sharing to refer to properties or resources held in common by a group (“profit sharing,” “revenue sharing,” etc.). Using this definition, James Squire addresses other English scholars in 1968 as those who, with him, “share a common concern with the learning of our native language” (419). (See also Wardhaugh [306] and Mitchell [547].) Inasmuch as sharing defined in this way inflects interpersonal contact with the language of business transaction, it is worth considering how this enduring association between sharing and productivity makes it much less likely that the emotional and physical consequences of sharing are recognized. ([Return to text. \[#note4\\_ref\]](#))
5. See also Lynn Worsham’s “Going Postal” for an elaboration of the consequences of schooling and emotion. ([Return to text. \[#note5\\_ref\]](#))
6. It is important to recognize Berlin’s “social epistemic” sharing in the context of a wider trend during the 1980s defining sharing in ways that supported the management of student bodies. Martha Cummings suggests in a 1982 *College English* article that a “Writing Idea Bank”—a “mutual idea-sharing system”—would help scholars avoid the “feeling of isolation” that comes as a cost of intellectual freedom (417). Cummings argues that sharing resources helps scholars cope with the individualism of the academy, yet she aligns this coping mechanism with the further production of “innovations” in teaching practices (417). Similarly, Gail Reisin notes the success of peer review in producing students who are “more confident, more thoughtful, more skillful in their use of language in writing and speaking, and more insightful and perceptive in their interpretation of literature” (64). In a different setting, Nona Smolko describes her experiments with sharing in an 11th grade English class as effective in producing “originality and effectiveness” in her students (84). In each of these examples, what emerges is an underlying belief in the positive, productive potential of sharing rather than descriptions of how writers and scholars actually engage one another as individuals. Thus, confidence, originality, and inclusiveness are ultimately valued as evidence of the progress sharing produces rather than as insights into the costs of interpersonal contact. ([Return to text. \[#note6\\_ref\]](#))
7. The *Norton Field Guide to Writing* for instance includes a section on collaboration that focuses on “ground rules” for writers working together (Bullock 215). These “ground rules” include emphasis on “thoughtfulness, respect, and tact” (215), but do not invite students to explore the experience of collaborative contact beyond its role in the process of producing final written texts. ([Return to text. \[#note7\\_ref\]](#))

8. For reasons of space, I have had to leave out other key moments in the past few decades when sharing has also been at the center of important arguments for process pedagogy, particularly in its deployment through forms such as collaboration (see Bleich; Trimbur; Bruffee, “Sharing Our Toys” and “Comments”), peer editing (Wiener; Fulwiler; Kail; Harris), and relationships between students and teachers (see Bizzell; Tobin). The microdynamics of sharing have also been a key component of post-process theory, and the consequences of “sharing a world” are examined at length by Thomas Kent in his interview with language philosopher Donald Davidson (7). Each of these discussions repositions sharing in ways that are important to track, but overall, few of our most well known articles explore sharing in the dimensions of ethics, emotions, and bodies I have attempted to describe above. ([Return to text. \[#note8\\_ref\]](#))

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