THE WRITING I: RE-ARTICULATING FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Thesis
by
DEAN BLUMBERG

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ABSTRACT

THE WRITING I: RE-ARTICULATING FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM
(May 2010)

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This project analyzes the ways in which concepts of the student-writer have been

politicized and pedagogically polemicized as either primarily personal or social categories.

The pedagogical rhetoric of the personal narrative as a genre has followed the same divisive

path with expressivist and social-epistemic teaching models *appearing* to be at odds with

each other, and this terminological fragmentation of teaching philosophies and the

ideological framing of the personal narrative have constructed false pedagogical binaries.

Given the politics of personal writing within contested pedagogical perspectives, this thesis

examines the perception of the divided student-writer, exploring how postmodern

epistemologies and poststructural linguistics affect the way rhetoricians and composition

theorists view the place of the student-writer within a larger social network. The thesis

concludes with an investigation of student writing in one first-year composition course and

puts forth a rhetorical model using personal narrative to mediate fractures between

expressivist and social-epistemic approaches to composition instruction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis developed out of the conversations that took place in what I consider the two most important courses of my graduate education to this point. One was titled "Composition Theory, Practice and Pedagogy," and the other was "Writing Center Theory and Practice." Both classes were a nexus of inquiry, creativity and intense dialogue. Both were true learning communities. Collaboration was a critical aspect, as the instructors worked alongside the students, and our collective interests inspired new projects and topics for debate. They were also my first in-depth experiences with composition theory and the broader field of composition and rhetoric in general.

My fascination with theories about language and composition is attributed to their social and cultural nature. I have always surrounded myself with writing, and while it may seem at times to be a solitary act, the truth is that language creates community, and it is a product of community. However, writing is more than a tool that brings people together; it has the phenomenal power to bring about change, to make people feel, and to help us learn about ourselves and the world around us. But these vast musings about the power and potential of reading and writing can easily overlook the politics of literacy. One of the first things that I noticed in my first two graduate classes in composition theory was how overtly political teaching writing is. In our theory and pedagogy reader *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*, I was surprised to see the how approaches to writing instruction have been influenced by radical democratic politics, feminism, multiculturalism and queer theory.

At times the variety of pedagogical perspectives and methods can be overwhelming. Initially, I felt caught in the middle of the cross-talk, hesitant to choose a "side" in the overwhelming conversations about composition pedagogy. Luckily I realized that "choosing a side" was unnecessary, that my approach to writing and teaching writing would evolve. I could practice and revise, treating my teaching philosophy as a text perpetually in a state of revision. I could look outward to composition scholars to inform and revise my own ideas. To some extent, my initial concerns mirrored those of my future students as we both approached unfamiliar subjects with apprehension. It is somewhat ironic that I felt left out of the conversation for so long, especially considering that some of the texts that I was reading talked about authority and ethos, and the ways in which experience and specialization have been privatized and used as a source of control.

As a graduate student intent on a career in teaching writing, I am concerned with making the composition classroom a place of thoughtful dialogue, collaboration, self-discovery and expression, and most importantly, a place for students and teachers to mediate and negotiate problems. In order to do this, students must be the primary focus of the course, and their experiences, passions and struggles the starting places for inquiry and discovery.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the ways in which concepts of the student-writer have been politicized and pedagogically polemicized, as either primarily personal or social categories. The pedagogical rhetoric of the personal narrative as a genre has followed the same divisive path with expressivist and social-epistemic teaching models *appearing* to be at odds with each other. The terminological fragmentation of teaching philosophies and the ideological framing of the personal narrative construct false pedagogical binaries. Personal narrative as a genre has been employed by expressivist scholars as a completely

introspective and expressive act, angering scholars and teachers who feel that writing instruction should eschew personal composition and prepare students for the rigors of academic writing. These fractures are harmful since they battle rhetorically for the place of the individual within the construction of meaning and the nature of reality, obscuring more complex and more encompassing understandings of the student-writer, and more specifically, the personal narrative, in composition studies. This project repositions the student-writer and personal narrative for the purpose of mediating student apprehension to social issues. It also highlights how personal narrative and writing about the self can be used to make connections and mediate differences.

The ongoing conversations in composition studies have sought to rearticulate the place of the student-writer and the position of the personal narrative as a genre and frequently employed classroom assignment. Typically, the personal narrative is seen solely as a first-year writing assignment with little applicability to other areas of study in the university. Given this contextual history of the politics of personal writing within contested pedagogical perspectives, this thesis examines the perception of the divided student-writer, exploring how postmodern epistemologies and poststructural linguistics affect the way rhetoricians and composition theorists view the place of the student-writer within a larger social network.

The first chapter examines what some scholars term the "social turn" in composition studies. This chapter begins with the pedagogical and philosophical motives that have contributed to what is often perceived as a rift in the discipline. This section also highlights some of the key composition theorists that have written about the place of the student-writer and personal narrative within the changing politics of the university.

In the second chapter, I put forth a brief ontological review, highlighting critical theories which speak toward the construction of the self. I address the frequently encountered terminology including *self*, *subject*, and *identity*, and illustrate the way these terms and concepts inform pedagogical philosophy and praxis by offering examples of classroom application. This chapter explores some scholarship outside the discipline of composition pedagogy, and examines how understandings of rhetoric and reality influence how both teachers and students approach first-person narrative writing.

My third chapter offers rhetorical models for the role of the personal narrative in mediating pedagogical polemics. I argue for a redefinition of the student-writer within the learning process and advocate for a dialogic sense of self and an expanded idea of the purpose of narrative. This section looks at a cultural studies approach toward teaching writing, focusing on cultural studies as a method for repositioning the student-writer and personal experience as a rhetorical and critical text.

Chapter four examines the ways in which I have used personal narrative in two first-year composition classes. I present student writing and classroom observations and address the ways students position themselves and their narratives within larger social contexts. I also explore how the power of myth, the devaluing of personal experience as narrative evidence, and the persisting influence of modernist grand narratives have affected students' understanding of the position of themselves as student-writers.

By presenting readers with rhetorical models that encourage careful analyses of writing situations, I aim to challenge the contested place of personal narrative and first-person writing by arguing that all writing is both reflective of the individual and his or her social community. Moreover, I provide examples and visuals to show how even personal

writing sets forth a socially-informed construct of the self. The purpose of this thesis is

ultimately to aid composition instructors and students with academic writing by offering new

ways for students and teachers to think about the varying writing identities they inhabit, and

how to best employ those identities to make writing engaging, persuasive and meaningful.

CHAPTER 1: COMPOSITION THEORY GOES "SOCIAL"

The contested place of the student-writer is best exemplified by the tension, frustration, and fear present in Maxine Hairston's 1992 article, "Diversity, Ideology and Teaching Writing." Now a landmark essay in composition studies collections, it serves as a critical reaction to social-epistemic pedagogies which sought to infuse all writing instruction with social and cultural politics. Often seen as a critique of expressivism, Hairston's essay shows just what is at stake when politics and instructors' activism challenge the reflective and student-centered nature of expressivist pedagogy.

In the piece, Hairston identified what she saw as a major problem in the teaching of composition at four-year universities: a drastic shift in composition pedagogies, one that put "dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student" (180). Her essay received more written responses to *College Composition and Communication* than any other essay to date. At the heart of the essay is a concern over the politicization and ideological imperatives of contemporary writing instruction. Hairston's conclusion is that scholars in the field have conflated "conventional writing instruction with conventional literary studies" (184). The outcome is pedagogies founded upon critical theories by "authors that are chic—Foucault, Bakhtin, Giroux, Eagleton," among others. She posits the evolution of this critical composition theory in the development of rhetoric and composition as an academic field of merit—in the process of legitimatizing itself to the English department and the university,

composition scholars joined the "ideological fray" of the literature scholars "upstairs," and in Hairston's view, abandoned the needs of freshman writing students for their own ideological goals. While many of Hairston's claims are valid, what is significant is how her rhetoric is symbolic of serious ideological rifts taking place in the field. Hairston argues that courses which focus on "racial discrimination, economic injustices, and inequalities of class and gender" are a threat to first-year English courses. Her argument is indicative of a larger division between not only composition pedagogies, but also between writing and writing instruction as a personal expressive and social performance.

Hairston argues that the ideological and political component at the heart of critical theory pedagogies is at odds with the knowledge about how to best teach writing gained from the expressivist movement representative of Peter Elbow in the 1980s. She positions expressivist ideals against these changes in composition study, contending that politicized content in a writing class stifles students' freedom to write about whatever they choose and what is particularly meaningful to them. Reflecting expressivist philosophy, she also advocates for the use of personal writing that seeks to understand how each student's view of the world is shaped by personal experiences, commenting that "in order to communicate with others, we must learn to see through their lenses as well as try to explain to them what we see through ours" (190). Hairston concludes by offering a model for writing instruction that has student-chosen, experiential writing assignments at the center, which does not exclude political content but, at the same time, does not mandate it.

The pervasive mood behind Hairston's piece, and my attention to it in this introduction, is to highlight the fear associated with contesting pedagogies. Hairston's fear is that political, ideological, and primarily social issues will drown out the importance of

student-centered experiential writing. In 1992, she has seen the future, and it "disturbs [her] greatly" (180). Her highlighting of critical reactions to politicized pedagogy is representative of a highly political and theoretical battle over the role of the student-writer, and Hairston's fear, along with many others coming out of the expressivist movement to the rise of critical theory and cultural studies-influenced pedagogy, is that, ultimately, student-writers will lose their personal writing-voice to the voices of those on "social crusades." The argument centers on the questions of which are the best ways to teach writing, and how do we conceptualize the student-writer within larger contexts such as the academic institution or the democratic citizenry, for example.

The position of the student-writer to what I imagine as concentric circles (the student-writer within the classroom, within the university, within various religious or cultural groups, within a geographic region, etc.) is the connection between the student-writer and larger social communities. When critics like Hairston write of their pedagogical fears, they express a deep concern that somewhere during this transition the student-writer has been marginalized and replaced by social-rings of which they are not a part of, or are unfamiliar with, compassionate toward, or interested in. The real fear is not politics, for Hairston understands the importance of a plurality of voices and perspectives but rather a fear that the position of the student-writer to the larger social community will not be identifiable.

Unfortunately, these concerns and the ensuing debates took on limited pedagogical taxonomies, with the so-called expressivists at war with the so-called social-epistemics and those scholars who faulted expressivists for ignoring a philosophy of rhetoric that is intricately bound to sociopolitical contexts. In Karen Surman Paley's book *I Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Person Writing*, she begins with the rise of

expressivist pedagogy, questioning the validity of many opponents' representations of it. She opens with a chapter subheading titled "Is There 'Expressivist' Pedagogy?," highlighting the problematic nature of the term and the historical significance it holds, marking a distinctive move toward the importance of experiential learning and its impact on writing instruction. Paley defines expressivism as "a pedagogy that includes (but is by no means limited to) an openness to the use of personal narrative," adding that the narrational *I* may appear to be the actual voice of the author but that "sometimes the narrator may appear to isolate individual consciousness, and sometimes he or she may represent the self in one or more social contexts, such as the family or college community" (Paley 13). Paley's definition is an attempt to subvert critics' claims that expressivism ignores community or that it attempts to reinforce the idea of a unified and coherent self, overlooking the postmodern complexities of the relationship between the singular *I* and infinite sociopolitical power structures. I agree with most of what Paley writes, especially her defense of expressivism as a falsely characterized pedagogical philosophy. Her book inspired my own rhetorical concepts of the "writing I" and the "I that writes." However, Paley fails to provide an assertive claim as to how student-writers envision themselves as writers, and how they come to construct and understand their writing ethos, both questions explored fully in chapters three and four.

The critique of expressivist pedagogy is not just a critique over the location of the student-writer within various communities. It is a struggle of epistemology, one that argues the way meanings and realities are created and, more importantly, the philosophy by which we create ourselves, more commonly referred to as *ontology* or the study of being. The conflict over how to best develop student-writers parallels a larger theoretical conflict over the nature of reality and being. James Berlin and Lester Faigely are both characterized as

rhetoricians who took the "social turn." Berlin and Faigely rethought composition theory in light of the sociopolitical influence of postmodern literary theorists, and both are frequently cited as opponents of expressivism. Inseparable from the conflict over pedagogy and the student-writer is Berlin's expansive work *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. His book aligns with the Marxist cultural studies tradition of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, and he argues that pedagogy and methodology are not static categories to be applied but fluid and reactionary movements that are constantly shifting, typically in response to economic concerns. Berlin's text offers readers such as myself the terms with which to identify and analyze contemporary understandings of rhetoric and writing instruction. Whether expressivism, social-epistemicism, or social-constructivism, Berlin's work illustrates how writing and writing instruction in academic institutions reflects social ideas about what is good or bad, valuable or worthless, or simply what exists and what is possible in our culture.

In order to describe the ideological shifts in college writing instruction, Berlin outlines the progression of rhetoric in American institutions and links changes to general archetypal categories for the purpose of reconceptualizing history. Central to the differences in the categorical approaches to the teaching of writing are the differences between the ways in which one understands the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge. Berlin's epistemological categorization is grouped into three larger frameworks: the objective, which locates knowledge and truth in the outside world; the subjective, which places knowledge and truth within the subject; and the transactional, which stresses that the nature of reality and truth exist within the interaction of subject and object. Often these frameworks have become the umbrella under which specific approaches to writing have been placed. For

example, a current-traditional rhetoric is often aligned with an objective epistemology, expressivist-based rhetoric is linked with a subjective epistemology, and social-epistemic rhetoric, Berlin's preference, is associated, in a most general sense, with a transactional epistemology.

Berlin writes,

A particular rhetoric thus instructs students about the nature of genuine knowledge, or truth—sometimes, for example, located in the material world, sometimes in a private perception of a spiritual realm, sometimes in group acquiescence, sometimes in language itself, sometimes in one or another dialectical permutation of these elements. (4)

Berlin's overarching premise is the assertion that the way one understands the nature of truth and reality, commonly located in one of three general and popular approaches, determines the speaker, the audience and the nature of language. Moreover, the differences in rhetoric and the ways that college writing instructors reflect those changes is inextricably tied with, and is responsive to, changes in political, economic and social conditions.

While the work is admirably expansive, the dependence upon an essentialized categorical framework for classification carries with it the potential to reinscribe modernist notions of a rationalized objective epistemology, even if Berlin is fully aware of the way his project may be seen as reductionist for the sake of covering nearly one hundred years. Because of this categorization, Berlin has often come under attack from other scholars who advocate for one classification of rhetoric over another and others who view the taxonomy as exaggerated or fictional differences in epistemology. Sherrie Gradin, author of *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, provides helpful

commentary on the utility and limitations of these categories. Gradin's argument rests upon the necessity of categories within the field to assert dominance over another. Gradin calls for more to blend theory and practice, "to allow for the ways in which expressivism and social-epistemicism connect" (15). Paley's work follows similar lines, in which she references Gradin multiple times as a scholar who recognizes the similarities that exist between the rhetorical perspectives. To a certain degree, we have yet to let go of Berlin's categorization, using essentialized epistemological theories to repeatedly, and angrily, argue that writing that is considered expressive, writing based upon experiential learning, does not exclude social or political context.

The scholarship about classification and taxonomy is tremendous, and at times during my research it seemed inconsequential to my actual interactions with students in the classroom. However, it is important to this project because it demonstrates how pedagogy is always concerned with how people understand their environments and the world around them. John Trimbur enters this conversation in a way that I found extremely beneficial to my teaching philosophy and practice because he sees pedagogical classification as a narrative, a story about the life of composition studies as a discipline. Trimbur's essay "Articulation Theory and the Problem of Determination: A Reading of *Lives on the Boundary*," looks at how a text like Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, a commentary on American education using autobiographic narrative, coincides with the narrative of composition studies. His argument, like Gradin, is an attempt to reconceptualize the taxonomic grid of theoretical perspectives that plague the field of rhetoric and composition. Trimbur offers a construct that sees the taxonomies as components of composition studies' own narrative, a narrative that takes cues from pre-existing narratives in American culture. Similarly, Trimbur offers us

a model for thinking about how we see ourselves and our lives, drawing from socially shared narratives and experiences in the construction of our own identities.

Trimbur's works calls attention to the narrative of a field of study, and the significance of perceived pedagogical differences that accompany discrete taxonomic grids represents the conjuncture between the narrative of composition studies and the narratives of other significant cultural ideas and practices. Trimbur states,

> A conjuncture designates those moments when ideas (whether in the form of theories or narratives or other genres) are joined to other ideas, practices, institutions, interests and subjectivities. Conjunctures constitute the temporal and temporary moments at which ideas take on particular social weight, cultural meaning, and rhetorical effect not because of their intrinsic or essential identities (as specified categorically) but because of the way these ideas are articulated concretely by specific men and women and take on specific identities in specific historical settings and social contexts. (240)

The concept of the conjuncture illustrates how we piece together stories, weaving a social tapestry to wear ourselves and call our own. Personal narratives represent a temporary history for ordering our own lives within the context of the social narratives that surround us. The idea is interesting when you consider the personal narrative as a prompt frequently employed by teachers of writing. The narrative of one's life is given "social weight, cultural meaning, and rhetorical effect" in its relation to the narrative of the class, the context of the university as a social and cultural institution, and the variety of narratives, concepts, and ideas that are alive at the moment in which the personal narrative is articulated.

The essentialized versions of expressivist and social-issue-centered pedagogies coincide with other fractures, one being the split between the personal narrative, or expressive writing, and ideology. It is similarly seen as a personal and social or political split, or a private and public split, in which the specific stories that compose the narrative of one's life are devoid of political, ideological and social concerns. For example, many students in my English composition course choose to write about a family story that is important to them in what many find to be a traditional personal narrative prompt. The family narrative is popular because for most students, this is their first experience living away from a family unit of some kind, and the narrative is an opportunity for them to reflect upon the significance of family as they adjust to their new position as first-year college students. This writing always refers to larger social ideas of what constitutes family, or what makes family significant or meaningful, and oftentimes, their writing will directly address "family" as a social concept. Family narratives demonstrate how students understand and define family through comparisons or references to familiar families within a cultural context, including families on television or in the news. During peer workshops of family narratives, students have remarked that they've learned just how varied the concept of family is, and they come to understand how their family experiences are just one of many ways of experiencing the idea of family. The personal/social fracture is mediated by the social nature of the concept of family as a cultural institution.

The split between ideology and the personal narrative is perhaps a more troubling and more complex phenomena. Paley addresses this perceived fracture between the personal and the political in her examination of the social-construction of expressivist pedagogy. She states,

> Ideology is wrapped up in the family system and, in many cases, these
> systems are impacted by a variety of unhealthy behaviors, including substance
> abuse. Those who sever such stories from the political beliefs of their
> students miss out on their pathos and intellectual energy and fail to help these
> students make important connections between their personal lives and the
> society at large. Think of the energy that could be released for social change
> if our students were able to make these connections. (20)

For social-constructivists, this idea of the personal as necessarily connected to the ideology of social systems often follows alongside an argument about the social nature of language, whereas the personal experience is tied to social concerns via communal discourse. However, the language argument rarely leads to the energy that could lead to social change. Mary Ann Cain writes, "social constructivists, taking their cue from postmodern theories of language, often treat change more as a matter of altering language practices than as a matter of social intervention and emancipation" (qtd. in Paley 20). While social-constructivist concepts of language may help unify our experiences by understanding experience as a construction of social symbols in itself, Cain reduces social-constructivism similar to the way that expressivism has been reduced to a purely individual philosophy, cornering it with accusations of linguistic determinism, and arguing that our experiences are limited to the socially created symbols from which we can assemble the personal experience.

While the scholars previously mentioned offer various methods for thinking about how individuals use social experience and shared language in the process of constructing an identity, they rarely mention the political implications that arise when a culture, for whatever reason, attempts to segregate personal and social knowledge and experience. Nancy Welch

explores this phenomenon and places the personal/social fracture within a larger history of

political struggles and labor relations, looking at the ways in which the separation is

employed within power relations. Hers is a thoroughly Marxist critique, but her primary

research shows how her own composition students had internalized the segregation between

the personal and the political. Welch frames the fracture of sociopolitical implications from

expressive writing that centers upon personal experience by showing it as a product of a

privatized ethos, in which sociopolitical concerns become the property of neoliberals and

personal involvement in political matters are separated by the closure of public spaces and

public voices.

As Welch points out,

Standing between us and the lessons of such vibrant examples of rhetorical

action is a problem of *ethos* and, more specifically, a neoliberalized and

privatized *ethos* that aims to convince most people that it's just not their place,

it's just not within their means, to take on the issues—health care, economy,

war—that are also foremost on their minds. (126)

The personal narrative, or even more broadly, the personal experience of a student-writer, is

compounded by this privatization of ethos in which the writing subject is distanced from

making connections between his or her life and social issues such as health care, the

economy, or war. The neoliberalized influence that Welch describes is the closure of public

spaces and free speech zones, the overwhelming effect of media conglomeration and the

ways in which capitalism have bought and sold the airwaves and various media outlets, as

well as the influence of specialization of discourse and credibility, in which highly

specialized experts become the mouthpieces for issues that concern all people. The result is a silencing effect, and those who are silenced are typically the ones with the most at stake.

The privatization of ethos and the subsequent fragmentation between the lived experiences of our daily lives and the highly-specialized political discourse of social issues as presented in the academy and the media affects students as they encounter college writing assignments.   As Welch points out from her own classroom observations, student-writers often feel unable to comment about social issues because they have not mastered the disciplinary language that envelops the issues. She claims that expertise and authority must be earned via advanced degrees, and that this is a prerequisite for exploring the social issues that ultimately deeply affect their lives.

Despite the multitude of arguments that personal experience is culturally situated and socially informed, it is my experience that, as Welch points out, students still feel unable to engage in social and political conversations about issues that have resounding effects on their lives. The problem is not a real divide between student experience and the issues that make up academic writing, but a culture that devalues narrative experience as a legitimate way of knowing. Therefore, it is imperative that writing instructors help students negotiate academic writing challenges by helping them mediate the difference they perceive between the discourses of personal narrative and the discourses of the institution. The next chapter works toward the construction of a writing subjectivity that seeks not mastery of and over a discourse, as Welch's students find necessary, but understanding of and methods for negotiating competing discourses.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE, MODERN/POSTMODERN SELF AND

SUBJECTIVITY

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, rhetoric and composition theorists have

debated the role of the student-writer subject and his or her role within larger social networks

and communities. In the first-year composition classroom, students are often required to

explore their identity and articulate their lived experiences through various writing

assignments, frequently beginning with first-person narratives and moving outward toward

reading and writing about the experiences of others. Theorists have explored the function of

a writer's individual identity and how the construction of identity is always a socially-

informed process. As a result, in many composition classrooms teachers and theorists often

begin with personal narrative as a way to get students to reflect upon, first and foremost, their

own identity and then to question how that identity is socially defined and constructed.

These first writing assignments position narratives as both a mode of communication and

education as well as an external expression of the self. The personal narrative acts as a

proclamation of the self; it articulates a story to an audience and demonstrates the personal

voice within a moment of time.

While this type of writing is a cultural expression of the self, hence the personal, it is

also an expression of the cultural and social paradigm, revealing values and assumptions

particular to specific social concerns. For example, a recent student wrote a narrative about

her experiences as an individual with both biological and foster parents. Her paper begins

with an awareness of the dominant cultural and social paradigm, an awareness that arises from her position in relation to it. She writes,

> Mom is in the kitchen preparing Dad's usual breakfast of buttered toast with eggs and bacon. My siblings and I have come in one by one. The table is set for breakfast. Everyone's hair is combed to perfection, and our clothes are pressed and neat for school. Not! That would be how the picture perfect families start their days off, but not mine. (Lily)

Her experience is given meaning in relation to the pervasive and potent cultural myths about family institutions, frequently informed by television, movies and advertising, but also by politicians and government officials who create laws that attempt to define the family as a social institution subject to certain laws and policies. This student's narrative begins with the subversion of this cultural myth with her emphatic "Not!" and demonstrates an explicit awareness of the metanarratives associated with a dominant paradigm.

This example illustrates how our own experiences and identity are intrinsically bound to social and cultural experiences. The narrative as an experience-organizing performance is as Trimbur notes, a conjecture articulated in a place in time and space, an action and reaction to the complex matrices of social, political and cultural forces. This chapter articulates some of those conjectures, outlining ideas and theories for how the individual constructs and develops a sense of self, identity and subjectivity.

Composition theorist and educator Bruce McComiskey finds that assignments asking students to explore and express the position of the self in relation to larger social institutions often result in writings that fail to explore links and relationships that are significant to

pedagogies influenced by postmodern theories where sociopolitical context is always present. McComiskey writes,

> Students often view the cultural artifacts I bring to class and the social institutions we discuss each week as being either right or wrong, good or bad; and their responses to articles having to do with these artifacts and institutions can usually be summarized "I agree/disagree with the author(s)." This binary perspective through which students approach cultural artifacts and social institutions is attributable, I believe, to their perception of themselves and the authors of assigned texts as modernist Subjects. (356)

The reliance upon binary perspectives and the idea of the student self as a modernist subject is a common perspective, especially for those growing up in the era of 24-hour news punditry where social issues are presented as topics for polarized debate. My own students have often remarked that argument is two opposing sides of an issue, replacing more complex understandings of argument with those represented by a modern proposal-based type of argument wherein one is either "pro" or "con," or as McComiskey notes, "similar" or "different." The pervasiveness of this binary approach to social issues and politics is influenced and reinforced by modernist thinking of the self, which delineates identity and subjectivity as oppositional formulations that posit the self in antagonistic relationships to the other instead of negotiating difference for a larger, more encompassing and flexible identity relying upon pluralism and connection.

UNRAVELING TERMS: MODERN AND POSTMODERN

But what is the modernist self or subject to which McComiskey refers? In *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces*, authors

Michael Peters and Colin Lankshear approach the concept of the postmodern as a conjecture and reaction to the modern. The narrative of the self or the narrative of the subject must be seen as an articulation within the historical grand or metanarratives of a given time, pervasive cultural myths or cultural values and assumptions. Therefore, in order to understand the modern or postmodern self, one must understand modernism and postmodernism as taxonomic terms, problematic for the very reasons Berlin's epistemologically-based rhetorics are. Drawing upon the work of French poststructuralist philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, Peters and Lankshear articulate the concept of postmodernism by attempting to understand it as an epistemological shift, a change in the way in which we see reality, that gains meaning from its relation to modernism. The "narrative" of postmodern epistemology becomes the "counternarrative" to traditional modernist grand or metanarratives. The metanarratives that Peters, Lankshear and Lyotard all recognize are the grand, sweeping and generalized narratives that dominated the modernist period and the Enlightenment. In the university, I see this shift in the coursework that I take as a graduate student where new reading lists challenge the strongholds that "canonical" texts have had in literary studies. The purpose is to challenge narrow definition of what constitutes "American" literature by recovering texts from marginalized social groups. Counternarratives do not replace grand narratives; instead they enrich our idea of what American literature means, and offer additional ways to think about the nexus of literature, place and identity. Included in the modernist narrative are the capitalized concepts, representative of what Berlin would categorize as objective rhetoric—a stable, discernable "Truth" that exists external to the "Subject" and may be obtained through contemplation, religion, and civilized culture. The counternarrative of postmodernism is the

countercultural critique, issuing from a basic skepticism, of the philosophies of

history accompanying the grand claims concerning Man, Truth, Justice, and Beauty,

representing the West, and "America" as the last projection of European ideals, as the

apex of an unbroken, evolutionary development of two thousand years of civilization.

(Peters and Lankshear 2)

The counternarratives or countercultural critiques thus act as *petit recit* or "little stories," to

use Lyotard's terminology, that work to destabilize hegemonic narratives that make absolute

and totalizing claims. Counternarratives make visible the unrepresented, the marginalized

and the subjugated (Peters and Lankshear). The metanarrative of the "American Family" is a

pervasive cultural myth, and one that Lily, the student quoted earlier, is very familiar with as

she has seen depictions of American families that never quite fit her own experiences. When

the paper shifts with her exclamation, "Not!," she offers her own counternarrative and tells

the important story of growing up with foster parents and biological parents at different

stages of her life, an experience familiar to many, but rarely represented as a viable depiction

of family under the strict confines of the metanarratives.

Both Peters and Lankshear, along with Berlin, explore the rise of cultural

postmodernism within the context of the Second World War. Peters and Lankshear write,

"Western culture is seen to have undergone a process of accelerated cultural differentiation,

especially since the Second World War. The liberal myth of a common culture or form of

life, which functioned to assimilate difference and otherness, has split into a seemingly

endless proliferation of subcultures and groups" (3). Epistemologically, this shift moved

critics' understanding of reality and meaning-making from the "Truth" of objective rhetoric

to the truths of transactional rhetoric where reality is the product of exchange between

subjects, language, and cultural experience. The result was a loss of a transcendental meaning and the birth of cultural pluralism.

The liberating aspect of this shift is the ability to create viable alternatives to the metanarratives of modernism; however, even these possibilities still wrestle with familiar power struggles so that even though this young student-writer is able to construct a viable counternarrative to an essentialized and exclusionary metanarrative of the family, her counternarrative still struggles for legitimization. To this extent, the counternarrative of postmodernism exists in its relationship to a previously established master narrative, yet as the master narrative seeks to control, offering a universalized account of a subject or idea, the postmodern counternarrative seeks plurality, not displacement. Of the family narratives that I read in my course this year, many students offered counternarratives against the conservative and constrictive definition of an American nuclear family, yet many still looked toward that master narrative as an ideal institution. Their counternarratives did not seek a displacement of the master narrative, just equal representation and inclusion.

Berlin invokes John Schlib in his understanding of postmodernity. Berlin writes, "John Schlib has explained that postmodernism 'can designate a critique of traditional epistemology, a set of artistic practices, and an ensemble of larger social conditions'" ("Poststructuralism" 17-18). Part of the difficulty of the concept of the postmodern is its ability to act as a critique of traditional ways of thinking about knowledge and the production of meaning. Because of this, the term seems to always shift, gaining meaning from the critique of an equally mobile concept of traditionalism. Consequently, the meaning is related to a larger and more complex system of relationships, and following from Sassurean structuralist thinking, the concept derived from the signifier "postmodernism" is intrinsically

linked to the network of signs in which signs exist. In Derridean terms, the impossibility of

stability is the result of *differance*, meaning by signification is made by difference and

deferment, both of which are present in the French term. That is to say, the production of

meaning is created in part by the ability of speakers to discern difference from something.

This thing is *this* because it is not *that*. The act of differing is an act of *deference* where

meaning is the process of one idea yielding to another. One displaces meaning in the very act

of constructing it. For composition theorists Derridian deconstruction and epistemological

philosophies are extremely important for understanding the self in relation to larger networks

and for seeing the ways in which binary oppositions (the differing and deferring acts) are

critical to maintaining hierarchical relationships used for exploitation and the justification for

the status quo. The theory is almost ecological in some senses because it asserts that all

things possess an innate ability to hold contradiction. Therefore, my idea of a chair can exist

because it lives amongst a system of concepts to which it is different. Although Derridean

theory should ennable student-writers a way for seeing how their lives and stories are part of

a larger system of lives and stories, my experience is that it usually has an opposite effect.

As McComiskey notes, for students, difference is not an integral component to the

construction of meaning, but signifies ideas that are outside meaning and exclusionary. For

example, many of my students approach issues looking for binary opposition and "pro" and

"con" perspectives. Concepts and ideas that differ from "pro" or "con" are usually ignored

or rendered inconsequential because students are unfamiliar with engaging argument that

embraces contradiction.

Within the discipline of English, and more specifically rhetoric and composition,

postmodern thought has mainly played a "language game," to use Wittgenstein's term, where

conversations about the construction of meaning and knowledge are framed by poststructuralist notions of language systems. The application of poststructuralist language theories (De Man and Derrida, for example) result in contemporary explications of the postmodern culture, systems of integrated and differing networks, creating multiplicities of meaning from relationships. Thus, postmodern culture and identity is understood through poststructuralist theories of language including deconstruction.

POSTMODERNISM AND CULTURAL STUDIES

The cultural studies approach toward reading and writing is a practice most closely linked with the Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies and the Marxist cultural critiques of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. This school of analytical thought and practice rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, and many of the rhetoric and composition theorists cited in this thesis (James Berlin, Henry Giroux, and Peter McClaren, for example) were heavily influenced by this movement.

With postmodern counternarratives comes an increased interest in sociopolitical cultural forces. The postmodern subject writes within and against cultural codes and is conversely "written" by these cultural codes as well. John Clifford points toward the genesis of postmodern narrative by looking at the structuralist work of Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Clifford speaks of these stating, "The structuralist projects of Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes cast doubt on the autonomy of the freely choosing individual by positing instead a subject created or written by linguistic, sociological, and anthropological codes" (Clifford 40). Whereas the structuralists offered a theory of culture that looked for systematic patterns that reflected common social realities, poststructuralists, according to Clifford, were "more historically aware of the specificity of the contingencies of power and

struggle; consequently, this movement was and still is skeptical of general transhistorical systems of meaning" (40). Clifford's conclusion is that discourse is always situated within existing contexts, and its meaning is significant only within social and institutional practices. All meaning is thus dependent upon specific contexts; discourse cannot exist outside of institutional ideologies and power relations. Because discourse is always situated and contextual, writers are significantly implicated in sociopolitical concerns.

Clifford describes this shift toward poststructuralism as a period where writing, as well as the self, becomes destabilized and decentered. *Decentered* and *destabilized* are familiar terms to most postmodern scholars, yet their meaning is difficult to pinpoint; the terms are as slippery and fluid as the concepts themselves. The terms are often employed, as noted above with Lyotard, in a critique of the coherent and autonomous being of the Enlightenment. Poststructuralism, as well as postmodernism and cultural studies, are invested in a study of the culture of language, with multiple competing discourses, as a fluid exchange of power. The emphasis upon power relations and discourse decenter the modernist claim of an objective knowledge. Clifford cites poststructuralist Michel Foucault as representative of such claims, stating that Foucault denies "the possibility of objective knowledge by claiming that only discourses exists, some more powerful than others" (Clifford 40). The arguments that Clifford presents are those of early poststructuralist theorists over ideology and discourse, concluding with Althusser whose work *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* destigmatizes the term *ideology*, to see it not just in a negative light, but as an inevitable power of value that inhabits all discourse.

Althusser's investigation of ideology draws from Italian cultural critic Antonio Gramsci. For Althusser and Raymond Williams, Gramsci's work sought to understand

culture as exchanges in power relations that existed outside the early materialist critiques of

Marxist thought that explored culture through the terminology of the *base* and

superstructure. Instead, Gramsci theorized how inequalities between classes were the result

of the entanglement of political, social and cultural forces. Whereas class inequalities in

Marxism were the result of domination of the working classes by the ruling, Gramsci's

notion of hegemony argues that class inequalities were caused by more than the overt

practices of domination and subordination (base and superstructure). Instead he argued that

class inequalities were the result of subtle power relationships internalized in human

consciousness and weaved into personal, social and cultural identity. Thus, hegemony is

power relations manifested in our lived experiences, never outside of ideology, and

experienced by acts of cultural life. Hegemony is often used as a term to indicate oppression,

yet this use is somewhat misleading. Power relations may be oppressive, but they are

culturally constructed by means of persuasion, coercion, and to a certain level, conscious and

unconscious acceptance and are transmitted via social-educative relationships.

Moreover, hegemony as a concept is also able to speak to social and cultural practices

that may be seen as removed from productive forces characterized by traditional Marxist

analyses. Of hegemony, Williams writes,

> [Hegemony] sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms
>
> as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of
>
> living—not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest
>
> social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships,
>
> to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as

a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the

pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense. (110)

Building from Gramsci and Williams, cultural studies becomes a method of investigating

how power-relationships are often forcefully imposed, and culturally reinforced by means of

coercive consent. Additionally, power-relationships are reciprocated in aspects of our lives

that we may feel resides outside of such relationships, such as entertainment and those

activities we define as part of our personal and private lives. Williams continues,

There is a whole different way of seeing cultural activity, both as tradition and

as practice. Cultural work and activity are not now, in any ordinary sense, a

superstructure: not only because of the depth and thoroughness at which any

cultural hegemony is lived, but because cultural tradition and practice are seen

as much more than superstructural expression—reflections, mediations, or

typifications—of a formed social and economic structure. On the contrary,

they are among the basic processes of the formation itself and, further, related

to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of "social" and

"economic" experience. People seeing themselves and each other in directly

personal relationships; people seeing the natural world and themselves in it;

people using their physical and material resources for what one kind of society

specializes to "leisure" and "entertainment" and "art." (111)

Williams' scholarship was integral to my composition pedagogy. My family narrative

assignment was constructed in such a way as to encourage students to look for social,

economic and political structures in deeply personal relationships.

While the writings of Gramsci, Williams, and Althusser may not be suitable or appropriate for first-year composition students, class assignments and discussions that explore the ways in which people construct identities within cultural contexts often lead to larger conversations about power-relationships. Studying and teaching in a rural Southern community, students are very aware of the perceptions of what is typically deemed "low culture," a term they often enjoy discussing as many are interested in NASCAR, country music, rap and other activities and practices that they bring up when describing who they are in terms of what activities they enjoy participating in. They are fully aware of the cultural capital of certain lived experiences and can point toward music, television and film to show how aspects of cultural are framed within political and economic terms.

Cultural studies and composition studies intersect with a focus in power structures embedded within discourse, seeing all sign systems as inherently political and social, the very systems that we use for the most personal of reasons. Hairston's concern, back in 1992, was that the teaching of composition would be replaced with the teaching of liberal social concerns important to the instructor. Her fear is a very real one and one I have experienced at faculty meetings and in hallway conversations as a graduate teaching assistant in an English department. Though I think Hairston is accurate in that some misguided instructors will replace composition instruction with social politics, the narrative of cultural studies and its influence on composition suggests just the opposite. Sociopolitical concerns do not become the content of a course, but language and its application in composition become the content of which sociopolitical concerns are inseparable. Giroux notes that "cultural studies places a major emphasis on the study of language and power, particularly in terms of how language is used to fashion social identities and secure specific forms of authority" (48). The

cultural studies composition classroom presents an opportunity for students to write about

what they know and what they are interested in, but it also allows them to think critically and

to find connections between themselves and larger cultural constructs, always reflecting

ideology and power-relations.

WAYS OF SEEING ME: MODERN AND POSTMODERN SUBJECT AND

SUBJECTIVITIES

        "Postmodernism" and "identity" are terms that have already become tangled up in

each other. Postmodernism is a term so pervasive in academic scholarship and popular

culture alike, used to describe anything from identity to music. Heinrich Klotz describes

postmodern architecture by stating that "postmodernism relies not on the symbolic value of

the machine and of construction as defining progress in architecture, but on a multiplicity of

meanings" (421). In essence, postmodernity becomes the questioning of the stable, coherent

and singular and the acceptance of multiplicity, pluralism, and contradictory coexistence.

The postmodern subject then becomes the individual that is both singular and plural, that is

both public and private, and that is always personal and social. The postmodern subject

becomes a signifier in itself, deriving meaning from the multiplicities of postmodern culture.

In *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*, Berlin describes this

subject, writing that our "signifying practices," which are the acts of lived experience or

experiential texts,

           are languages that tell us who we are and how we should behave in terms of

           such categories as gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and the like. The result

           is that each of us is heterogeneously made up of various competing

discourses, conflicted and contradictory scripts, that make our consciousness

anything but unified, coherent, and autonomous. (18)

The implication for Berlin is the advent of social-epistemic rhetoric which is birthed from

postmodern theories of language and culture.

For the student-writer, the metanarratives of the modernist period are constrictive and

often alienating. While postmodernism offers the possibility of constructing a diverse

identity from a variety of social ideals made personal, the competing "scripts" of

postmodernism that Berlin mentions are complicated. The implicated postmodern subject

must somehow reconcile competing ideologies often ascribed to competing social categories

that we use to define ourselves. One student, whose writing I will look at later, wrote a paper

about family which wrestled with the concepts of same-sex families and same-sex marriage.

Her definition of family was centered on acceptance, love and sacrifice, arguing for a more

open interpretation beyond blood relation, a concept of family that included friends and

extended relatives and was deeply important to her own identity. In this paper, she found

examples of loving families in same-sex partnerships from some of the readings she had

encountered in the course textbook. Yet her identity that was based upon her Christian faith

could not fully embrace the concept of a family with same-sex parents. The social ideologies

of competing discourses were bound up not only in herself, but in her paper as well.

What best defines postmodern and poststructuralist theories and their influence on

rhetoric and composition studies is the role of signifying systems and discourse in the

creation of reality. The understanding of one's own being becomes inseparable from the

discourse it inhabits. This epistemic quality of rhetoric mirrors linguistic theories and

identity philosophies that build heavily upon Sassurean linguistics and the ideas of language

as a social performance and the epicenter of meaning and understanding. While modern ideas of the subject saw it as autonomous and reasoned, a figure that transcended language systems and other social tools, postmodern reasoning viewed the subject as unable to transcend language and, moreover, its very existence as a performance of social signifying practices. The shift from theories of language systems to personal and social identity is an interesting one, and I am not quite sure how well individuals are able to rationalize the complexity of lived experience within the discursive terminology of poststructuralist philosophy.

Rhetoric and aesthetic scholar Kenneth Burke explores the nature of personal and social identity in linguistic terms in a pair of essays titled "Definitions of Man" and "Terministic Screens." Burke's understanding of identity is rooted in an anthropological and sociological understanding of the nature of humans. He writes that man is "the symbol using, making, and misusing animal, inventor of the negative, separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy, and rotten with perfection" ("Definition of Man" 16). While this definition foregrounds the important nature of symbols, it still possesses what modernist philosophies hold dear, namely, the human nature that may live apart from symbols and language systems. Burke's quote reads much like a fall from Eden; he relies upon archetypal literary tropes, casting language systems as man's prison fetters. Our Edenic fall from our "natural conditions by instruments of [our] own making" is the result of symbolic use and misuse and the hierarchy referred to may be the relationship between symbols, the creation of difference and negation, the necessary evil that accompanies the need for discernment, clarification, definition and taxonomy. Burke is a rather important transitional figure. Although his philosophies apply

structuralist thinking to studies of social behavior and epistemology, beneath it all is a modernist foundation that seeks to explain postmodern crises of fragmentation with logical fractures between reality and the symbols and signs which are tools to communicate reality.

Writing of this fracture, Burke highlights the glimpse of the natural condition that leaves humans aware of their separation from reality at the hands of social symbol systems: "And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced firsthand, the whole overall 'picture' is but a construct of our symbol systems. To mediate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss" (5). The implication of postmodern identity theories that borrow heavily from structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy is that the identity of the individual becomes the thing peering over the edge into an ultimate abyss, with the self as the product of symbol systems. In theory, the social text of the self becomes the performance of the interplay between signifying practices between the self and larger social communities throughout history. In "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice," James Berlin explains how the postmodern conception of the self challenges the Modernist notion of a stable, transcendent, and autonomous self previously discussed. He challenges the "unencumbered," Modern subject where the "individual is regarded as the author of all her actions, moving in complete freedom in deciding how she will live" with a postmodern idea of the self as a product of social discourse and material conditions (18).

Berlin asserts,

> The subject is considered the construction of the various signifying practices,
> the uses of language, of a given historical moment (see, for example,

Benveniste, Barthes, Foucault). This means that each person is formed by the various discourses, sign systems that surround her. These include both everyday uses of language in the home, school, the media, and other institutions, as well as the material conditions that are arranged in the manner of languages—that is, semiotically (like a sign system), such as the clothes we wear, the way we carry our bodies, the way our school and home environments are arranged. (Berlin 18)

Launching from Burkean social studies of symbols and human behavior, Berlin posits the nature of the self as an entirely signifying performance. The signifying performance, the act of oral and written discourse, of nonverbal and symbolic practices, becomes an enlarged text, wherein the author of one's life becomes the social construction that each negotiates. To understand the self by means of a social-constructivist view of sign systems is to see the language of the self as an extension of a larger social reality. In other words, the language that we use is one that we live with (in Burkean notions of language as a tool) and within (in poststructuralist and postmodern notions of the self as a product of language). Language joins and creates communities in the process of creating the subject. It makes our realities larger, more expansive, and places our own firsthand realities, subjectivities and experiences within a larger context and framework, giving rise to the notion of a personal self by the assimilation and resistance to a variety of social selves. For example, who I am as a unique individual is the product of the linguistic and symbolic performances that exist within the context of what is means to be human, a man, an American, a graduate student, a brother, and so on and so forth.

Student-writers compose themselves in texts and within cultural contexts. They present themselves as writers when they compose for an audience. Student-writers' construction of ethos and identity in writing is bound to cultural contexts and writing situations. Clearly influenced by postmodern literary theory and cultural studies of the past fifty years, composition theorists look to critics such as Edward Said, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault to explain how one's understanding of himself or herself is embedded in powerful social institutions that rely heavily upon problematic fractures between the self and, to borrow from Said, the Other. That is to say, "I" is not composed of something in and of itself, but "I" is composed by a process of relations and networking where "I" constructs meaning and identity in relation to that which is "not I." McComiskey sees these identities as those that employ "identity/difference" binaries, modeled after a modernist notion of the subject. He writes, "the modernist Subject is defined in terms of its objective relationship to reality and its opposition to 'Other' subjects, and the construction of the modernist Subject (autonomous and sovereign) is an effect of ethno-centric formulations (frames, constructions) of identity/difference oppositions" (350). The textual and experiential frames are the cultural windows through which the subject-writer reads, writes and interprets reality. Instruction and education in composition and rhetoric, especially those courses that are socially and politically aware, seek to understand the writing-subject, the cultural text and the role of the audience in terms of larger social institutions and power structures.

Diana George and Diana Shoos write of the role of subjectivity and cultural studies in composition stating that "cultural studies is especially suited to a course like composition, which calls upon the students to write about what they remember, what they are currently experiencing, and what they discover through observation, research and critique. As a

critical discipline, cultural studies insists on the relevance of all texts as objects of cultural analysis" (200). Moreover George and Shoos acknowledge that composition classrooms that embrace cultural studies examine the ways in which subjectivity is not natural or given, but rather a "text" whose production is socially and culturally anchored. Not only is the cultural text a social construction, but the cultural studies student's interpretation is equally a social production. George and Shoos echo collaborator and fellow composition theorist John Trimbur, locating the primary "concerns of cultural studies right at 'the intersection of cultural forms and the reader's subjectivity'" (Trimbur qtd. in George and Shoos 202). The role of subjectivity is inherently bound in social practices and cultural forms. The textual and cultural frames spoken of before are subjective and personal as well as shared and social. The window which frames the cultural text that I interpret is both a cultural product and social tool for understanding the world. These frames are composed and maintained by the very intersections of cultural forms and subjectivities that Trimbur references.

SUBJECTIVITY, IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

The way one sees him or herself is by a process of identification. To be a subject is to identify, since subjectivity is not created in and of itself but in relation to culture. But how does one create identity by means of identification? Jacques Derrida offers a possible answer in *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. In this monograph Jacques Derrida studies the phenomena of national and cultural identity in the wake of French deconstruction, postmodern philosophy, European unification, and the demise of the Soviet Union. Central to Derrida's thesis is the idea that identity is inherently ideological and that the logic of identity is also a struggle for political power (6-10). While Derrida has been accused of

obscurantism, his logic of identity employs poststructuralist and postmodern methods for understanding the construction of the self.

For all of Derrida's philosophical meandering, he opens with an extremely real and clear problem:

> Hope, fear, and trembling are commensurate with the signs that are coming to us from everywhere in Europe, where, precisely in the name of identity, be it cultural or not, the worst violences, those that we recognize all too well without yet having thought them through, the crimes of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, religious or nationalist fanaticism, are being unleashed. (6)

The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the cultural divisions that prevent dialogue at recent forums and town meetings on health care reform, the hateful speech unleashed in response to same-sex marriage laws are just a few of the national headlines that grace the morning editions and nightly news on a daily basis. The perceived threat upon identity is responsible for some of the most heinous crimes committed. McComiskey again accounts for problems "in the name of identity" with identity/difference oppositions that present a sense of self at the hands of discursive formations that employ discrimination and stifle pluralism. Drawing upon Foucault's work of identity and difference, McComiskey aligns himself with the French philosopher, finding that identity is the construction not of "drawing things together" or negotiating diverse subjectivities but "in discriminating, that is, in establishing their identities" (Foucault qtd. in McComiskey 351).

The entire process of constructing identity through the "gathering of differences" is the act of constituting the self by means of negation. In other words, my conception of myself is built upon my understanding of perceived differences in others. An identity built by

negation and opposition ("I am the opposite of this") results in an identity that builds substance from absence ("I am that which is not"). Derrida elaborates upon this notion in terms of cultural or national identity, writing that

> *What is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "me" or "we;" to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself, or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself*. (9, italics in original).

His theoretical move is to highlight the impossibility of a relation to oneself within oneself. In other words, the conception of the self cannot be constructed within a reflexive system of the self, for the very presence and the ability to hypothesize the composition of the self presupposes a relationship to that which is outside the self. Moreover, Derrida's thesis is mirrored in his delivery with the very phrasing of his idea, since it relies heavily upon the use of the negative, never stating what something is in the affirmative, but relying upon negation, continually constructing the substance of an idea with words and modifiers like "not" and "non."

While I can understand the ways in which poststructuralist theories of language and subsequent postmodern philosophies helped to complicate the way in which theorists in the humanities theorize the construction of the self or subject, I believe that both Derrida, and McComiskey's use of Derrida are incomplete. The focus upon difference is perhaps misleading in describing the way in which identity is created through networks and connections. In most of the student drafts that I collected for the project, students began by finding connection between their lives and things they found in others' works. Their narratives about themselves were complimented and given contextual meaning by similar

narratives they found in research and in our course textbook. For example, Lily's portfolio begins with her family narrative about growing up with both biological and foster families. Interestingly, Lily's narrative about foster families is how she engages in the debates about gay marriage and families with same-sex partners. Lily develops her own narrative as she seeks to understand others' narratives. She draws connections between foster families and families with same-sex parents based on the idea that each represents types of non-traditional families that are foreign to the myth of the mainstream nuclear family.

While the perspectives on subjectivity and the construction and definition of the self are varying, they all argue for an "I" that gains meaning from social interaction and signification. The postmodern self is capable of seeking connections with those that may appear different from them, and is aware of social, political and cultural links that inform what may be commonly seen as a personal and private experience. The postmodern "I" is better able to engage in negotiation and seeks understanding in place of mastery. Finally, the postmodern "I" is able to understand the competing discourses comprising the self, often a source of personal and social tension, and is able to revise, redefine and resist the ideological discourses that may be problematic.

CHAPTER 3: MAKING IDENTIFICATIONS AND RE-IMAGINING THE NARRATIVE

"I" IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

In chapter two I looked to poststructuralist and postmodern theory to explain how identity and meaning are always socially situated. Scholars and teachers such as Berlin, Trimbur and McComiskey offer writing instructors teaching methods that emphasize cultural context and rhetorical situation. Moreover, they present pedagogies that challenge students to seek the relationship and connectivity between rhetorical situations and meaning. In other words, they challenge students to question how authorship, audience, purpose and context situate meaning. This chapter builds upon both social-epistemic and expressivist pedagogies. My purpose is to offer students and instructors new terms and an enhanced rhetorical model for understanding how social experiences and social contexts influence the self and the self as an author. My primary objective is to diagram the diverse social contexts that help determine the rhetorical stance of a student-writer.

This chapter also examines the social construction of one's writing subjectivity, looking specifically at the way social situations construct the unique "writing subject" present in texts. I am especially interested in analyzing the "I" of academic writing, seeking to understand the connection between the "writing I" of academic composition and the other various subjectivities possessed by an individual in different situations. Concretely speaking, I'm interested in the various personas we inhabit as we present facets of ourselves in our writings aimed at a variety of audiences. Building from postmodern and poststructuralist

theories of language and identity, I now shift specifically to one's writing identity, which I term the "writing I." This writing-specific identity reflects how we think of ourselves as authors. My term is contrasted with "the I that writes" which is the amalgamation of roles and relationships we maintain. "The I that writes" is many things, of which a writer is just a part. The following chapter explores how the "writing I" is both a personal and social construct, and a mediating stance between familiar and unfamiliar discourses in student writing. I further argue that discourse and experience both appropriate and are appropriated by the writer as he or she constructs new, adaptive writing subjectivities via public composition situated in social contexts like an expository writing class, for example.

In *A Pedagogy of Possibility: Bakhtinian Perspectives on Composition Studies* Kay Halasek redefines the student-writer by applying Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic and heteroglossia to the composing process. Halasek begins by responding to Peter Elbow's model of doubting and believing, an internal process which asks the reader and writer to assume various positions for response to texts, creating the impetus for an imagined internal dialogue within the student-writer. Halasek argues that Elbow's approach relies too heavily upon what I described earlier as a modernist notion of the individual subject, referring to Elbow as one who "posits the writer as an autonomous individual existing in a relatively stable social system for whom social forces only provide a minor disruption" (30). While I believe this to be an essentialized reading of Elbow's pedagogy, a believing and doubting exercise to prompt what Volosinov would term "inner speech" within the student-writer, I think Halasek is correct in challenging Elbow's supposition that a distinct inner voice can be found through this dialogue, to then be accessed and channeled by the student to express his or her unique voice.

Halasek's issue, and mine as well, is that Elbow's expressivist philosophy implies that there exists a singular writerly voice, lurking somewhere between the imagined voices in our minds. Arguments like this one reinforce the polemical pedagogical debates explored in chapter one. They fight over the place of the student-writer by arguing for either a separate and solitary voice that is deeply personal or a solely social voice that speaks the various discourses of the academy. Either way both tend to wrestle for one type of voice over another, refusing to look for ways to incorporate many voices, personal and social, familiar and unfamiliar, in student writing. Elbow does offer a method for engaging in dialogue with oneself. Finding a voice, or perhaps a subjective stance, inside conversations of believing and doubting is a useful method for invention. I feel that Elbow's believing and doubting strategy is easily misinterpreted by Halasek as she conveniently argues that believing equates to an absence of critical inquiry for the sake of understanding and doubting sacrifices understanding for the pursuit of logical fallacies (31). She concludes this claim by stating that Elbow's methods "function as neither knowledge generating, epistemic, politically nor ideologically motivated activities," which is at odds with prior claims that "Elbow acknowledges social influences when discussing invention, and he also maintains a social element in his schema by recognizing what LeFevre refers to as a writer's 'internalized social codes and values'" (30-31). Halasek appears to be working through a Bakhtinian reading of Elbow by means of Elbow's very methods, first looking for lines of reasoning that synthesize with Bakhtin's dialogic and then asserting an agonistic opposition to those she deems incompatible, such as the notion of an autonomous, singular voice.

Halasek rightfully challenges Elbow's occasional inferences of a writer's "real" voice, a claim that may be at odds with the way changing socio-political situations inform the

multiplicity of voices a writer has at his or her disposal, and Halasek implores that her critique of Elbow exists primarily to recognize the "generative effect" of others' work on her own thinking, an admirable "follow-my-socially-informed-line-of-reasoning" move. For the most part, I agree with Halasek's argument that writers always carry a dialogue whether internal or voiced that is an appropriated amalgamation of various external forces. Essentially, what Elbow may mistake for the singular voice inside one's head is merely one of many constructed voices that are inexplicably linked to the dialogue of shared human experience. For example, the critical voice that writes this master's thesis is at once individual, since I may claim it as my own, but also dialogic and social in nature as I rely upon an anticipated audience and frame my thoughts, style, and language upon those of others, whether experienced by way of reading, classroom conversation, or observed action.

Interestingly, Halasek also questions the equation of the concept of voice with the concept of self. Responding to Elbow's idea of a writer's unique voice in *Embracing Contraries*, she asks, "How can a writing instructor be sure which style, which perspective is that of the 'real' self as a student writes?" (Halasek 32). Halasek's rhetorical question not only challenges the assumption that a writing instructor has some ability to locate the most authentic voice in a student's writing, but that the variety of writing voices at a student's disposal are always a negotiation between the student and the social context, the discourse, and the subject or topic. However, she doesn't address the difference between *voice* and *self* and instead leaves the reader with an endnote to explore Cherry's writing on the difference of ethos and persona. She proceeds to draw upon Bakhtin and others in an explication of multivocality, but I think her unanswered question, and the terms she uses, *voice* and *self*, calls for further investigation. Many social-constructivist and social-epistemic theories argue

that writers have a multitude of voices, and that no singular voice exists to the exclusion of others. I believe that Voice with a capital "V" is conflated with self because the terms connote monolithic, modernist senses. When scholars shift to terms such as multivocality, for instance, then we approach theory about writing with less baggage and can see how voice(s) may be both unified and plural. My rhetorical terms, the "writing I" and the "I that writes" are used to distinguish between *voice* and *self* by offering new terms that think about voice and self as rhetorical constructs without antiquated connotations.

Self is a more complicated term. To think of the self as a composition of identities, adapting and shifting to meet situational needs, may challenge a subject's claim to some kind of singular ownership. One of my main practices in composition courses is to apply the concept of a plurality of voices to the notion of the self, to re-see ourselves as capable of fulfilling multiple roles. The goal is to read the experience of the self in rhetorical terms so as to better facilitate dialogue between oneself and a larger social context.

Halasek's work opens up new avenues for teaching student-writers to be aware of how their own constructed position, in writing, is informed and influenced by the conventions of different social arenas. Of the conflation of the terms *voice* and *self*, both seem problematic because neither carries with it the sense of dialogism and conversation that a term like multivocality does. Halasek's plea for the dialogic in composition pedagogy compliments the ideas of postmodern identity explored in previous chapters by arguing for writing that engages the relationships between personal, social and political spheres. As I argue later, the "writing I" and the "I that writes" represent socially-informed identities employed in rhetorical situations for purposes of understanding, persuasion and argument.

CAN I USE I?: THE "WRITING I"

The "writing I" is the writer as he presents himself in a text. Whether a writer uses the first-person pronoun or not, the text presents a voice, and that voice which the audience hears (whether aurally in oration, or silently in reading) is a writerly voice. That writerly voice in the text represents the "writing I." Many first-year writing students will inevitably ask an instructor, "is it okay to use I in this paper?" While the student usually expects a yes or no response to such an inquiry, it in part represents the student's desire to establish some sort of agreed upon convention in terms of style and formality. The question is extremely complex, and I know because I've asked my teachers the same question many times before as I became comfortable with the conventions of academic writing. Part of the complexity is the interplay between the first-person pronoun as a stylistic convention related to tone and voice and the first-person pronoun as a placeholder for the mind and ideas of the student-writer.

The explicit "I" of a paper is more permissible in some fields of study than others. For example, while an argumentative position paper in a communication course may convey a sense of authority and personality with an explicit "I," a biology report may suffer from such a move, sacrificing the appearance of universal objectivism with an explicit subjectivity. As Bartholomae's "Inventing the University" exemplifies, student-writers entering the new arenas of more specialized academic discourses are eager to figure out the "rules of the game," and a simple question like "Can I use I?" shows how knowledge of the conventional ground rules, or discursive commonplaces, will dictate not only how they approach a topic or writing assignment, but also how they will think and ultimately write about it.

When students ask if they can use the first-person pronoun in a writing assignment, they indicate a desire to comply with the conventions of a discourse, as well as a desire to be provided with structured rules and forms for composition. As a teacher, I struggle to find a good response to such questions as "Can I use I?" Since I have heard this question at least once following every writing assignment and paper prompt I have handed out, I feel as though I understand what a student implies by such a question. If I interpret "Can I use I?" as "Does this genre value the writing subject made explicit?," then I can respond by saying that "Yes, position papers often make use of 'I'" or "It is commonly omitted in social science papers in favor of an impersonal third person, such as 'the researcher.'" Even these answers do not address all of a student's implied questions.

"Can I use I?" may also carry with it permission to speak informally or perhaps, more importantly, permission to draw upon experiential learning as evidence and research. If the student's topic is the American Family as a social institution, which happens to be the first chapter of my preferred first-year composition textbook, then an affirmative answer to "Can I use I?" allows the student to approach the topic from an experiential framework, analyzing the characteristics of an archetypal fixture of American culture by measuring personal experiences against the perspectives presented in textbooks, film, television, and consumer culture.

It has also been my experience that students tend to prefer when instructors allow for an explicit "I" in a paper. "I" is equated with narrative voice and provides many students a perceived control and authority. "I" also implies an increased presence of the student in the paper, where the focus is not simply the issue the student writes about, but rather the issue as it becomes a part of his or her life. In Margaret Kantz's article "Helping Students Use

Textual Sources Persuasively," an article I have all of my students read, Kantz discusses how

students approach topics as narratives. When students approach all texts as narratives,

reading them for the "facts" of the issue instead of specific "claims" about an issue, their

papers end up representing what she sees as the narrative of a research essay. It is a common

approach for students, and papers end up following the format of "The first source I read was

X and it said Y. The second source I read was…," and so forth. While this is indicative of

the unique way in which first-year student read texts, it also shows that there is some

comfortability in "I-writing."

The explicit "I" of an academic paper is both the placeholder for the writer of the

paper and is itself a topic of composition. The "I" explicitly stated makes the connection

between the writer's life and the topic apparent to the reader. Additionally, the way I employ

"I" in a paper reveals only certain aspects of myself to a reader. I have used "I" frequently in

this project, and in my introduction, I framed my project with my experience as a graduate

student. In the process of writing about my topic, I have chosen to reveal parts of who I am,

and as a reader, you will draw your own conclusions about the "I" of this project by my use

of certain writing conventions, my style and voice(s). My paper takes on an additional

narrative quality, and my use of "I" in this work helps to compose the narrative of my thesis

writing and my graduate studies as a student and teaching assistant. The topic of discussion,

composition theory and pedagogy as it relates to narrative writing, is the topic around which I

construct my "writing I."

While the inclusion or exclusion of "I" in student writing carries with it many

assumptions and values, perhaps the most consequential is the association that some students

see between an overtly present "I" in an essay and the understanding that their essay should

present their own, unique assertions, claims, and arguments. More consequential is when students equate a lack of an "I" in an essay with an understanding that their own unique assertions, claims, and arguments should be omitted in favor of a more objective, reporting-only tone that relies heavily on re-presenting the ideas of authorities. For example, the implications of first-person in academic writing recently came up in a teacher-student conference. Each semester I meet individually with students for fifteen minutes each and we talk about their work and some of the things that they are especially proud of as well as areas where they would like to improve. In a one-to-one session with a first-year composition student named Dan, he asked if I, as his composition teacher, could take a look at an essay he was re-writing for another class. Dan asked how he might revise a paper for his history class in which his teacher had repeatedly scratched out each occurrence of "I" in a short paper about ancient Greek warfare. Familiar with similar concerns from my work in the writing center, the simplest solution I offered him was to replace the "I" of the sentence with the idea or thought he had discovered. For example, he could easily re-write a sentence that said "I think that the ancient Greek army would have done better against Sparta if they abandoned hoplite strategies earlier…" by removing the "I think" and simply beginning the sentence with an assertive "The ancient Greek army."

In Dan's case, the construction of the "writing I" present in a sentence like the one above serves a somewhat different purpose here—one related to ethos and authority. The "I" that thinks, believes, hopes, and suggests acts as a buffer among the ideas presented, the actual writer (in this example, Dan) and the reader. This "writing I" makes itself explicit as a way to establish the claim as personal or subjective, a move which I believe (there, I've done it myself) protects the student-writer from inappropriately engaging in the new discourse. It

is paradoxical since the "I" of that example both expresses possession or ownership of an idea, and also displays what the teacher may interpret as hesitancy to make a strong claim.

Dan's knowledge of Greek hoplite warfare was apparent during this conference, and much like a writing center consultation between a student and a tutor, his comprehension and analysis of the subject was clearly demonstrated in our conversation. Dan employed a familiar discourse and, in doing so, presented his ideas on the subject in a thoughtful way. So what happens between the student-centered, informal conversation of our conference and the final paper? Here is an excerpt from his final draft, typical in tone and style to the rest of the essay:

> The Athenians still had a steady supply of food coming in and were not planning to engage the Spartans but to outlast them. The Corinthians then told the Spartans they needed to change their old war strategy if they were to destroy a city like Athens (pg.16). The Athenian phalanx was never intended to face anything like Spartan Hoplites but was set for naval battle (pg.27). Sparta and its allies were unprepared in their naval fleet with no capital, few ships, and almost no cavalry or light armored troops (pg.22).
>
> What replaced the old phalanx warfare? The traditional Hoplite was not really cut out for this type of war with their heavy armor and lack of speed. True hoplites were used on ships but due to new warfare lightened their panopolies and questioned traditional training (pg.91). New types of combatants began to emerge such as the light armored warrior, known as the "Peltasts" because they carried small crescent-shaped shields called *pelete* (pg.91). The light armored troops could out maneuver armored combatants,

who were vulnerable outside of rank. By the end of the war Athens was regularly hiring and deploying its own light-armored forces, with great implications for future Greek warfare (pg.91). (Dan)

Dan's paragraphs tended to begin with questions that set him up for answers that simply reported. Opening paragraphs with a question is an interesting move, and one that makes explicit the relationship between the writer and the audience. The direct questioning replaced Dan's explicit "I" presence in the paper. What is most surprising is the absence of his analysis of the hoplite warfare that was present in our conversation and in parts of his earlier draft, which unfortunately were replaced and re-saved with final draft above.

In assuming what he interprets as the scholarly voice which values the omission of first-person, Dan replaced or deleted all of his analysis and interpretation of Greek history. I was surprised to see this choice for his final revision, given our conversation about putting forth claims for analysis and interpretation without using the first-person pronoun. Through our conversation I thought we had reached an understanding about academic writing's need for strong, assertive claims, presented in a formal discourse which traditionally omits the use of "I." In Dan's case, the formal convention of omitting "I" was equated with the omission of the concept of "I," resulting in a paper almost completely lacking perspective, analysis, and interpretation. The textual presence of "I" created the space for Dan's ideas as a writer and interpreter of history to exist. In his revision, his understanding of genre conventions leads to his erasure of the most important parts of his original draft. What remains is simply a detailed summary in which the student-writer represents the textbook author's depiction of hoplite warfare.

The ways in which students perceive and interpret the conventions of academic discourses and the power and cultural capital that such discourse communities wield are at the center of David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University." Bartholomae's study is a landmark text in terms of re-seeing the relationship between the student-writer and the academic discourses of the university. Within the language, or languages, of the academy are cultural power structures. Foucauldian concepts of power-knowledge lie behind Bartholomae's study, which looks at how students attempt to appropriate the form and style of specialized academic discourses for the purpose of gaining entry, as well as the accompanying authority, to a privileged discourse community that carries with it the power associated with the university. To illustrate this point Bartholomae presents a sample freshman essay used for academic placement. In his example the student is confronted with a writing prompt that asks him to describe a time when he did something creative and then to speak generally about creativity. The student chooses to write about his experience creating a clay model of the earth. The student's writing is emblematic of those written to faculty evaluators in which the student attempts to display the qualities that he imagines faculty to value in the university setting, namely the use of specialized language and scientific analytical skills. Bartholomae observes,

> [The student] is trying on the discourse even though he doesn't have the
> knowledge that would make the discourse more than a routine set of
> conventional rituals and gestures…He defines himself as a researcher working
> systematically, and not as a kid in a high school class…He moves quickly into
> a specialized language (his approximation of our jargon) and draws both a
> general, textbook-like conclusion. (625)

In Bartholomae's analysis, the student-writer invents the university by constructing his or her interpretation of the discourse of English or anthropology or political science. The student-writer appropriates the specialized discourses as best as he can, and through linguistic mimicry, specific jargon and cadence of the academic discourse, the student-writer writes him or herself into an imagined, but also very real, community. On one hand, the student is imagining or re-imagining himself within a new rhetorical situation, specifically, the university. On the other hand, the student runs the risk of feeling completely alienated by such a constructed persona. It is possible that re-imagining his creative experiences with a foreign and unfamiliar discourse will cause him to actually lose himself and his understanding of his experiences in the process. For example, while Bartholomae's student shows the reader how he built a model of the earth, the significance and meaning of his experience is lost when he tries to convey it in scientific-sounding discourse. In order to mediate the fracture between personal narrative writing and academic writing, it is important to move students between the discourses associated with each, allowing them to speak about themselves and the university. A rhetorical approach to writing instruction calls attention to the fact that students already inhabit a number of discourses, some closer to their personal lives than others.

To the student's credit, the kind of writing that Bartholomae highlights displays a keen awareness of rhetorical situation as the student-writer analyzes the audience (faculty placement exam readers) and anticipates readers' desires (since the readers of members themselves of a specialized academic discourse community, the student may seek to construct a persona of an academic peer). In this process, student-writers present themselves inside the frame of the university and attempt to use appropriate terminology as they write.

Bartholomae argues that many of the pieces written by student-writers that attempt this sort of rhetorical move fall between dramatizations of student-writer as "fellow researcher" and student-writer as teacher instructing a reader with limited knowledge. Bartholomae's observation is fascinating because it shows how "basic writers," which is his term, place their experience (such as the depiction of a creative act) in an academic setting (the discourse of the university) without including the academic conclusions offered by the discourse community he or she is appropriating.

Bartholomae examines many essays that shift into an instructive style, where writers' authority emerges from declarations and prescriptions instead of academic analysis and research. This prescriptive authority may be attributed to the willingness of the writer to embody authority as he or she understands it, namely "the voice of a teacher giving a lesson or the voice of a parent lecturing at the dinner table" (625). Speaking of the clay model essay, Bartholomae accurately asserts that the writer of the essay has "located himself (more precisely the 'I' on the page) in a context that is finally beyond him, not his own and not available to his immediate procedures for inventing and arranging text" (627). In the process of inventing the university, this student has seemingly lost himself in the foreign discourse of perceived academic writing. Interestingly, the prompt calls for a personal narrative (the story of the time you did something creative) and then an analysis of the experience in terms of creativity in general. In the quest to employ the academic discourse and, more importantly, the ethos it embodies, the student-writer moves away from the more familiar discourse with which he is far better able to analyze and interpret an experience.

The "writing I" Bartholomae explores is the student's construction of himself as a student-academic. It is the process of "inventing the university," for Bartholomae, where

first-year writers best exhibit the writerly voice in transition. However, I add that in addition to "inventing" or writing the university, the student-writer is also taking part in a reimaging of oneself within a new or unfamiliar discourse. The presence of "I" within the context of an academic written work is the result of the student's own remaking of his or her ethos, an act informed by prior encounters and the student's concept of what constitutes the credible, authoritative academic "writing I."

As a graduate student and composition instructor, I see the value as well as the pedagogy behind the writing prompt about creativity. I have used similar prompts in my first-year writing courses. The placement prompt asks the student-writer to relate an event that he or she felt to be creative, shifting the topic of composition from fields of study the student-writer anticipates (Bartholomae's example draws heavily upon earth sciences) to the personal experiences of the individual. The idea of "starting where the student is" is a common philosophy in composition pedagogy since, to composition scholars, it makes the subject of writing one where the student has great familiarity. To write of personal experience implies the informalities and intimateness of expressivist "I writing." The prompt also attempts to offer authority to student-writers by making them the experts on the subject of their own lives.

The second part of the prompt asks the student to make general conclusions and observations about creativity. It is here that the writing placement readers hope the student-writer will transition from the explication of a specific event to a commentary on the qualities of creativity within a larger frame. The prompt still allows for analysis or commentary derived from personal experience, which counts as evidence and research, but it hints at movement away from localized, personal experience to wider, more socially-aware

perspectives. The writing situation indirectly asks the student to construct a rhetorical stance that recognizes both the "writing I" of the personal experience, one's intimate recollection of a subjective lived experience, and the "writing I" suited for a college placement exam essay. Even though the prompt "starts with where the student is" and is therefore engaging a common student-centered pedagogical model, it may be quite challenging for students to re-present their experiences in an unfamiliar academic discourse. The implication is that the personal nature and significance of the experience may be erased in the process. Or, like Dan, the erasure of the personal discourse, which values "I writing," results in the erasure of all critical thought and analysis unique to the student. The "I" that ends up on the page reflects a very specific construction of the self, governed by academic expectations and discourse conventions.

THE "I THAT WRITES"

In this section I'd like to offer a rudimentary diagram to aid my discussion of the "writing I" and how it differs from what I'd like to call the "I that writes."

LANGUAGE OF ALL EXPERIENCE

The "I" That Writes

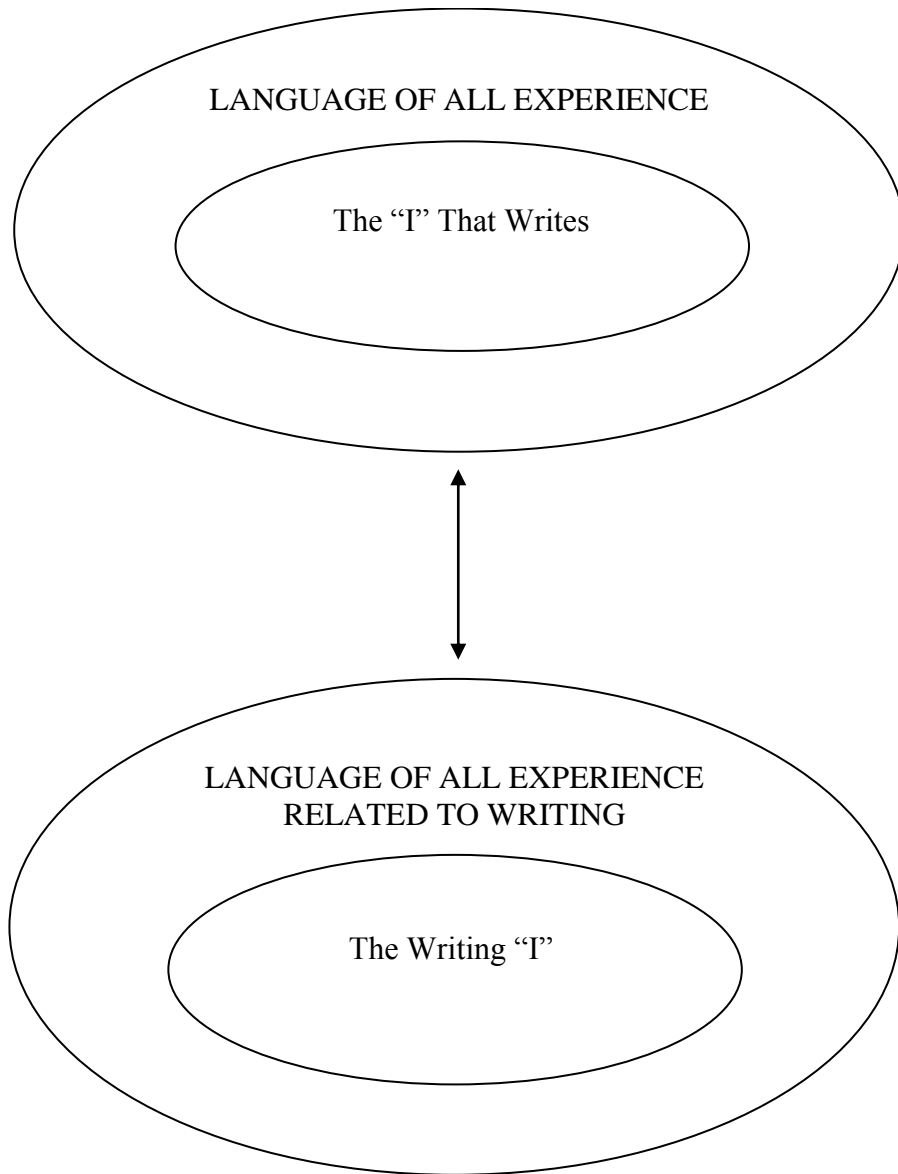LANGUAGE OF ALL EXPERIENCE
RELATED TO WRITING

The Writing "I"

Figure 1

The first part of the model depicts what I referred to earlier as the "I that writes." This may also be thought of as a subject's own understanding of his or herself. As I've argued throughout this work, one's sense of self is at once unique, personal and highly social.

In the process of understanding who we are (and who we are not), we compose an identity based upon past experiences, future hopes and relationships to others. Since this identity is composed of a network of different relationships and experiences (my role as a family member, a friend, a video game player, a mother, a jazz listener, etc), it is infinitely expandable and highly adaptable. It is able to absorb contradictions since value and meaning are situational. For example, many of my male friends, myself included, may value and gain pleasure from the crudeness of male-centric humor in Judd Apatow movies as we view them within the context of a group of guys hanging out on a Friday night. Part of my sense of self comes from these situated experiences. Yet, come Monday morning, in the context of our lives as graduate students, as critical readers of culture, we may view the same films as potentially harmful, perpetuating the male-gaze and gender stereotypes. The "I that writes" is represented by the detailed and diverse mixture of our different roles, values and experiences. I do not aim to define the "I that writes" in static terms, but rather understand in a manner akin to Judith Butler's foundational concept of an "I" that is engaged in a perpetual "process of becoming." The process of becoming implies a path or trajectory, a road toward, yet it also emphasizes that the "I" is not defined by the object of the process, but by the process itself.

The "I that writes" is the author of the self. Although Butler focuses on identity studies in regards to gender, her philosophy that gender is learned, performed and acknowledged by community is particularly helpful when looking at how student-writers construct, inhabit and perform writing identities. Beginning with "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex" and explored more fully in *Gender Trouble* and *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that gender is not static, it is not an object to be attained and completed in full,

but rather a set of normative and constraining roles that we enact, "a daily act of reconstitution and interpretation" ("Sex and Gender" 40). The "I's" process of becoming is also dependent upon one's ability to recognize oneself *as something* and to be recognized by others in a similar fashion. The process of becoming *something* is emblematic of the individual's relation to a larger community, wherein the acts of recognition by a social group re-inscribe or reject recognizable forms and structures. Given my example above concerning teen sex comedies like Judd Apatow's *Knocked Up* or *The Forty Year Old Virgin*, my conception of my identity is a social process in which I write myself through recognizable social structures such as a "male comedy viewer" or a "critical graduate student." The "writing I" is also a performance; when I compose for an audience, I align myself more closely to some recognizable social structures than others. For example, while writing this thesis, I align most closely with the recognizable characteristics of a graduate student, and distance myself from the recognizable characteristics of the teen sex comedy viewer. Both are very much a part of who I am, or the "I that writes." But given the audience, purpose and context of the rhetorical situation for a Master's thesis, the "I" presented in this work, or my "writing I," is a construction of recognizable characteristics and conventions associated with scholars, graduate students, and professionals in the field of composition studies.

The second oval containing "the language of all experience" is best understood as the language and ideas that we use for thinking about and describing who we are in a variety of different contexts. This includes the language of not only the workplace, but the language of the family, sports, or music, politics or any of the discourses in which we participate that contribute to our idea of who we are. The large oval embodies my construction of self because it holds the vast array of social concepts that I have internalized and recognized as

uniquely individual. It is the public and social made private and the individual made public and social again. The key is that these concepts do not exist simply as terms, as solely graphic representations of things, but rather as symbols of the actions and experiences of daily life. For student-writers, the top part of the model comprises many of the experiences and acts in their lives that we as teachers are unaware of. Whereas we might try to construct plausible experiences and histories to gain a more complete picture of "the I that writes," like assuming students have some shared experiences based on age or region or some other kind of categorization, most of the lived experiences that inform a student's full self-conception remains hidden or compartmentalized. As writing instructors, we come to know our students mainly through their drafts to our assignments and classroom interaction. Even as students explore genres like the personal narrative, a form that places themselves and their experiences at the center, they do so from the perspective of a college student writing about a personal experience, which is an interesting vantage point because they are the writing and written subject.

The concept of the "writing I" is depicted in the concentric ovals in the lower half of the diagram. It is important to state that this construction is not separate from the one above but a unique part of it. The "writing I," as explained earlier, is the constructed ethos that one uses in written discourse. This ethos may be the explicit first-person "I" of a paper or an implied narrator or persona. The "writing I" is the rhetorical stance that a writer takes, a performance of ethos that uses the text and subject to communicate with both real and implied audiences. In the center of the inner oval is the "writing I," which can also be described as authorial subjectivity. This subjectivity is the product of the writer's sense of self as an author and writing subject. An example is the repeated use of "I" in this thesis.

The "writing I" of this thesis is my presentation of self as a relatively new, but informed member of a composition studies discourse community. I demonstrate my understanding of major changes in the field and my comprehension of the community's discursive conventions, and in the process, develop the part of myself that identifies as an academic and scholar.

The "writing I" diagram that I originally conceived had many off-shooting oval balloons indicating the things that influence one's conception of self as an author. Even with reflexive arrows like this ← →, which I temporarily used to indicate reciprocal relationships, the diagram quickly became cluttered and incomprehensible. The very separation of concepts felt too organized. It perpetuated inside/outside and personal/social binaries which were counter to my understanding of the public nature and social presence of what I consider deeply personal. If the "I that writes" is social experience interpreted, internalized and represented, then it follows that the "writing I" is a part of the process, and not something separated or distanced from our more encompassing concept of identity. The diagram must present separated concepts in order to depict accurately the components at play when we compose ourselves and writing subjects. But in reality, the components of the diagram are lived out in the unity of daily existence, where my interactions as a husband, a comic book reader, or a child of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother are relationships and repeated actions that lead me to think of myself as *me* and also characteristics that influence how I see myself as a writer.

In the previous diagram I enveloped the concept of authorial subjectivity, also referred to as the "writing I," within the cloud of "THE LANGUAGE OF ALL

EXPERIENCE RELATED TO WRITING." The detailed diagram below signals examples

of experiences related to writing.

The Writing I

(Self as Author)

Author as Reader

Author's perception of Others as
Authors

Awareness of Rhetorical
Construction of Ethos

Awareness of Self as Implied
Reader

Author's Perception of the
Discourse Community in which
Author is Situated

Awareness of Commonplaces
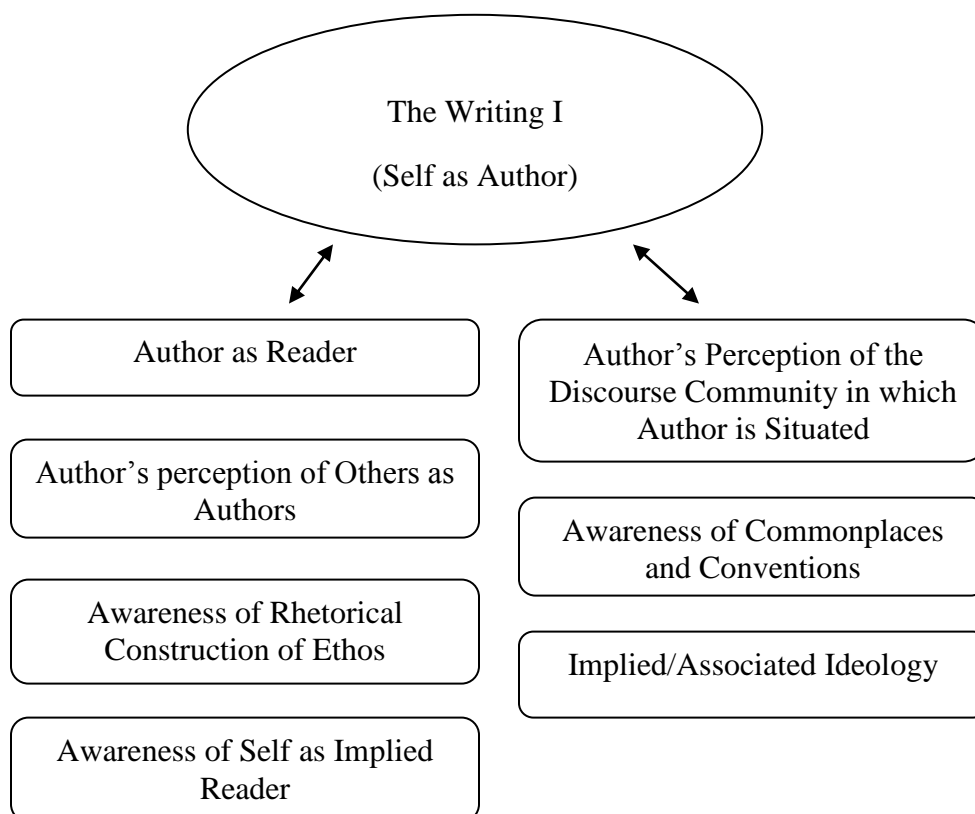and Conventions

Implied/Associated Ideology

Figure 2

The most immediate influence is the writer's role as a reader of both his or her own work and

perhaps, more importantly, the work of others. In order to write about oneself as a writer (a

common approach to expository writing classes and specifically literacy narrative

assignments), one must possess some kind of knowledge about what a writer or author is.

From the awareness of others as writers or authors comes a more keen understanding

of the construction of ethos that a writer employs in a given text. For example, early on in

school I remember being told not to assume that the "I" or speaker of a poem or a short story

was the author himself or herself, but rather a character constructed by the author. When talking about fiction and the craft of writing fiction we often talk about creating compelling characters and in literary analyses, how these imagined characters are persuasive because of their relation to social experiences of the real world. It is therefore not a far leap to approach the "I" in science reports, political science arguments, and historical analyses the same way one approaches the "I" of non-fiction and the "I" present in personal and literacy narratives. Analyzing the character and position of the "writing I" of academic texts is a rhetorical approach that students can employ as a starting place for thinking about a piece of writing and what it means.

The influence of poststructuralist and postmodern theories of language and subjectivity have been employed to challenge modernist notions of the self. An individual in a writing situation brings with her the same "conflicted and contradictory scripts that make our consciousness anything but unified, cohesive and autonomous" (Berlin, "Poststructualism" 18). The challenges and confusion that we face as we try to navigate the compartmentalized facets of our lives, our lives as students, parents, teachers, partners and so forth, all loom behind the writer as she presents part of herself in a written work. When teaching, I believe that a rhetorical approach best helps students discover their voice and their connection to a subject and an audience. I teach how the "I" of one's paper is a rhetorical presentation of oneself, and may reflect little of how a writer chooses to identify him or herself outside the writing situation, a statement familiar to many students who have been given writing assignments about topics in which they find little connection to their lives or little interest in. Using a model like the one above helps students imagine ways in which

writers and readers are joined by a text, and how different writer and reader roles can obscure

one's understanding of the intended author or audience of a text.

CHAPTER 4: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

This chapter looks at how I have employed rhetorical approaches to composition in my classrooms. I show how social-constructivist and expressivist pedagogies have influenced the way I teach composition and will focus specifically on how students use narrative as a way of engaging with social issues. Additionally, this chapter looks at how student-writers reflect upon the various roles they hold. I demonstrate how I incorporate narrative and experiential learning within my classes and I use this section to look at examples of student writing that I collected over the course of a semester. My aim is ultimately to demonstrate a rhetorical approach toward writing instruction that respects the space of the student-writer in the act of composition. This final chapter illustrates how a social approach toward personal narrative allows students greater access and connection to unfamiliar topics and discourses. While many of the sources I draw from in previous chapters omit specific classroom practices and activities, I hope to provide my readers, primarily composition instructors and especially graduate teaching assistants, with tangible models to adapt and use in their writing classes.

It is important to note that my strong belief in the importance of personal narrative in academic writing was not present when I first began teaching. In fact, it was something that was unfamiliar and a bit unnerving. During my first semester as a Graduate Teaching Assistant I was responsible for one section of expository writing. Modeling my class after sample syllabi and course schedules in the department, I planned it so that we began with a

personal narrative, and after a thorough drafting process for the narrative (three or so drafts to experiment with a variety of revision techniques), we would move on to a rhetorical analysis and finally to an argumentative paper. As I initially saw it, the narrative was an early assignment that allowed students to write about subjects close to them. Additionally, I originally viewed personal narrative as a genre associated with informal types of writing, taking the form of a "good story" rather than a highly analytical and academic piece of writing. In that way, it was a low-stakes first paper, one that students could have some fun with.

At the end of the semester, students started putting together their writing portfolios with final drafts for two papers, all of their process and draft work, and a reflective cover letter. My grading rubric for the portfolio was holistic, taking into account students' willingness to revise and develop work based upon peer revision and student-teacher conferences. As a class we decided that out of the four formal papers we did throughout the semester, two would be selected for evaluation as polished products. In order to give students some choice and autonomy with the portfolio, I decided that they could choose which two papers would undergo a final revision, provided that one of the two was the larger research paper students worked on the second half of the class. I was surprised when nearly the entire class selected their narrative for the second paper. It was difficult as a new teacher to be presented with papers unlike any academic writing that I had been familiar with. I found it difficult to "grade" and "evaluate" the personal narratives because I felt like part of the task was an evaluation of how students perceive their own lives. Who was I to grade that?

I was critical in my formal critique and evaluation of the research papers, using my rubric to justify higher or lower grades depending on the development and analysis of ideas and topics, the organization of material, and the smoothness of the writer's prose as they move between others' ideas and their own. But nearly everyone in the class received an A for their narrative, even if revision was minimal. At the time, I had doubts about even letting students choose the narrative as a polished piece for formal evaluation in future classes, and I had long conversations with my teaching mentor about how to best handle this assignment in the following semester. Even though I just gave everyone A's for their narrative in the end, I learned just how important it is to give students the space to write about themselves. Almost unanimously, they declared that the personal narrative was their favorite assignment, the paper they were most proud of, even though I felt that, for many students, the research paper was the strongest and best developed piece of writing for the course (which is typical since it is the last paper of the semester and many improve rather quickly in their first semester of college writing).

After that first semester concluded and I had read and graded all 22 portfolios, I began to rethink how to best employ narrative in the course so that it wasn't just an enjoyable first assignment to kick off the semester before moving on to the more familiarly academic writing of the second half. Clearly, the significance of narrative and experience could be used as a bridge as students become acclimated with new genres, conventions and commonplaces in academic writing. Before planning my next course, I decided to revisit a lot of the composition theory and pedagogy articles that I had read in one of my first semester graduate courses.

In the fall of 2007 I took English 5100, a course about composition theory, practice and pedagogy which helps prepare new graduate students for future positions as teaching assistants in the English Department. The course readings mostly came from *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*, a large collection of landmark texts, representative of many theoretical perspectives, from which we were to read and respond in weekly journals. In a journal response to Kenneth Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" I wrote,

> I agree with the foundation of Bruffee's exploration into the world of collaboration: that knowledge is a socially constructed thing and that it is always bound to a social and historical context—thus it is always shifting and being challenged… and Bruffee raises good questions when he begins to talk of the varying discourse communities and the ways in which they maintain, challenge and create new knowledge. I agree most strongly with the third quotation on my list. Perhaps the greatest thing I was taught in school was how I could converse internally with myself while writing and reading. I am in constant debate with myself as I write. I challenge my own assumptions and ask myself how I know this or why I believe it to be true. I think that this kind of mental conversing while reading and writing develops a thorough way of thinking of things.   ("Journal")

Rereading selections from other journal responses, I discovered that one of the most prevalent ideas that I kept returning to, journal after journal, was the concept of the student-writer internalizing outside conversations and using writing as a way of making that conversation external and public again.

In another journal entry, I responded to Christopher Burnham's "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice":

> I've concluded that Burnham believes [the composition classroom's] aim should be to foster an individual voice, whatever that may be. It is essential to the development of the individual. What this essay works against, is the current-traditional methods that assume that there is a knowable body of knowledge and that those that learn it can then simply translate it to others. Some expressivists see this method as stifling the student voice. But, if the student is to become a practitioner of a specific discourse community, should they begin by finding their voice within that discourse? ("Journal")

Even with the essays that are explicitly expressivist, my journal entries interpret them within social arenas such as a university or a place of work. I won't quote all my writings at length, but looking back to these responses, which are my first encounters with composition theory, they exhibit the very concept that I decided that I need to teach: it is imperative to experiment within a new discourse community, to read and internalize the voices in the texts, in order to enter it and contribute to it. Moreover, it is necessary that the link between the individual student, as he sees himself, and the social community which he now finds himself a part of or in proximity to, is made explicit. The dialogue of voices that a student-writer interprets, and the unique voices that a student-writer later finds within a writing community, all assume that a student-writer has found a connection to the writing community.

My conclusion was that the difficulty of getting students to engage critically with and participate in academic writing was instrinsically linked to a perceived split between who they are and how they see themselves, as well as how they interpret the form, style,

conventions and ultimately topics of college-level writing. My first semester students' frustration with argumentative and analytical academic writing did not reflect apathy for the material or prompts which asked them to engage, analyze and argue about contemporary political and cultural issues, but rather reflected their inability to see themselves as individuals with 1) a stake and connection to political issues and 2) an authoratative ethos with which to enter the dialogue. I wanted to plan for my next class so that students had the flexibility and room to write about themselves and things close to them as a way of fostering an expressive voice through drafting, revision and low-stakes writing assignments, yet I also wanted students to engage critically with social and cultural issues presented in a variety of course texts and to engage with them in ways that reflected the more traditional conventions of academic writing.

DETERMINING OUTCOMES AND GOALS

It was over the summer of 2008 that I first began to plan for my next English 1000 Expository Writing course. In the spring semester before I had taught a pilot course titled Introduction to Writing Across the Curriculum and had also signed on to work for a second year in the university writing center, two positions that had helped me rethink how I would teach Expository Writing this time around. It also happened that the university was in the process of a curriculum overhaul, revamping the general education requirements drastically. The Composition Program and the new Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative collaborated with General Education to develop a new four-year writing model. The vertical writing model required all incoming students to take at least one writing course per year, beginning with Expository Writing and Introduction to Writing Across the Curriculum in the first two years and then building upon those courses with Writing in the Discipline (WID)

and Senior Capstone projects in the final two years. Before drafting my syllabus I reviewed

the outcomes for English 1000 Expository Writing listed on the vertical model, outcomes

described as "gateway skills" for academic writing. According to the document, by the end

of the course a student has learned to do the following:

- Write to discover

- Draft, revise, and edit effectively

- Write with strong voice and authority

- Gather and interpret data

- Analyze writing situations rhetorically

- Demonstrate primary and secondary research and writing skills

- Reflect critical thinking and choice in writing projects

- Participate actively in writing community

- Reflect upon semester writing with ability to evaluate own work and of

  community (General Education Task Force "Vertical Writing")

The "gateway skills" are not linked to specific content to a specific discipline, despite the

English Department prefix for the course. Rather, the gateway skills highlight important

transferable qualities—the ability to locate, interpret and evaluation information, to indentify

writing communities and to write with a strong voice and authority.

Additionally, since English 1000 is a General Education course, it also fulfills several

of the Learning Outcomes stipulated in the University's General Education program outline:

Goal 1: Thinking critically and creatively

Goal 2: Communicating Effectively

Goal 3: Making local to global connections

Goal 4: Understanding responsibilities of community membership (General

Education Task Force "Curriculum Map")

Goals one and two are similarly stated in the vertical writing model's outcomes for English

1000. But goal 3, "making local to global connections," addressed what I saw as the biggest

hurdle to engaging students in the rigors of academic writing, even at the first-year level. But

while the over-arching theme of the goal, making connections, was applicable, General

Education's bullet points for the category stressed a way of thinking that was surprisingly

discipline-specific. The goal's outcomes include the ability to:

IIIA. Analyze past and present relationships between humans and the natural

and physical environment;

IIIB. Evaluate community, natural, and global change through the lens of

sustainability;

IIIC. Demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively about the

relationship between local regions and global issues, processes, trends, and

systems;

IIID. Demonstrate knowledge of contemporary issues related to cultural

diversity in the United States and other areas of the world;

IIIE. Employ appropriate and increasingly sophisticated means for

communicating with people of other cultures. (General Education Task Force

"Curriculum Map")

While the points are broad, some tend to imply a stronger connection to environmental

science disciplines. However, I found points C, D, and E particularly applicable to

Expository Writing as they focus on critical thinking, communication and, most importantly,

relationships to other people and places. I decided that I could design a class that would make recognizing local to global connections one of the primary goals.

My reasoning for honing in on goal three was that I began to see the distance that both the students and I felt between the personal narrative and the analytical papers about more social issues. Why did the "personal" remain apart from the "social?" The vertical writing model's goal of "writing with voice and authority" is really directed toward a specific kind of voice and authority, namely one that most traditionally embodies an academic essay and, consequently, devalues personal narrative as evidence and a mode of learning. If I learned anything from my first semester, it was that my students already possessed authority and voice, well, at least in their narrative essays. And my theory was that, if I could get student-writers to find links between their experiences, which they wrote about with confidence, clarity and authority, with the social and cultural concerns found in our textbook, then they could begin to integrate more formal kinds of research, reading and interpretation with the stories of their lives.

REWRITING THE SYLLABUS

When I rewrote my ENG 1000 syllabus, schedule and major assignments, I did so with the vertical writing model and General Education outcomes in mind. Below is my revised course objectives that restate some of the major goals and outcomes for the course in the language and terminology that I hoped to use throughout the course:

> **Course Objectives:** Expository Writing is a course designed to introduce you to writing and interpreting at the university level. This course will give you experience in **all stages of the writing process: invention, drafting, critiquing, revising, editing, and proofreading**. We will practice a variety of

writing styles so that you will be able to develop your composition skills in a way that will be most useful and rewarding *to you* throughout college and in your life.

- To develop a rhetorical approach to reading and writing that accounts for the writers relationship to an audience and a writing/discourse community.

- To develop critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is a key component to good college writing. Therefore, one of the goals of this class is to enhance critical thinking skills and become comfortable sharing ideas and insights in a college setting.

- To become familiar with the process approach to writing and learn to adapt recursive practices to individual writing challenges.

- To learn the basics of college-level research that includes electronic and bound resources.

- To gain experience giving and receiving constructive feedback on writing to/from one's peers, self, and instructor.

- To compile a final portfolio that presents polished, proficient writing and the process of achieving that writing.

Classes will consist of reading, discussion, writing, and in-class workshops. Each member of the class will compose at least **four original essays with multiple drafts** throughout the semester and submit polished texts as part of a final portfolio. **As this specific section will focus on cultural studies, you will be "reading" popular culture as a text. Since you are all already experts in various aspects of cultures and subcultures, you will help shape**

the content of this course by bringing in cultural artifacts and experiences from your own life to be "read." Ultimately, these readings will lead back to a discussion of writing and will be the basis for your writing assignments. Making this class a meaningful experience, for yourself and your peers, is as much your job as it is mine. ("Syllabus")

The first page of my syllabus addresses some of the major goals of the course, as well as describing my specific cultural studies approach to instruction. The first bullet point stresses making connections to audiences, communities and topics of discourse, and the rhetorical approach urges students to think about how writers and texts are culturally situated.

The focus is on transferable skills, and the method for teaching critical thinking and writing is cultural studies. This approach aides the development of voice by doing a couple of things. First, it allows students to choose cultural topics that they deem important. Students often choose areas of inquiry that are meaningful to their lives, such as family and education, and the cultural approach allows room for the inward-looking expressive writing that Peter Elbow and others identify as critical to students' development of voice and authority, aspects of writing identified in both the vertical writing model and the General Education report. Additionally, the syllabus indicates that students will be expected to help contribute to the "content" of the course, bringing in cultural artifacts to analyze and discuss as a class, furthering their authority as students responsible for their own education. Finally, the first page of the syllabus stresses that writing is situational, and that students will "learn to adapt recursive practices to individual writing challenges" ("Syllabus").

One of the things that I learned early on, especially with my work in the writing center, is that the terminology writing teachers and writing center consultants use to talk

about writing it largely unfamiliar to first year students. "Rhetorical approaches," "recursive strategies," and differences between "revising" and "editing" all fall under the large umbrella term of "proofreading" for many students. In order for the objectives and goals on the syllabus to be realized, it is necessary that enough time is spent in class equipping students with the language and concepts with which to talk about writing. While many of the terms appearing on the syllabus will be puzzling to new students, it is imperative that these bulleted goals and the terminology in them, are not lost after the first week of class. Just as students seek to make connections between their lives, their writing, and the subjects and communities in which they write, composition instruction must make connections between the goals listed on the syllabus and the class work apparent. I have found that making the syllabus a reoccurring text is the best way to address how specific writing assignments and class activities teach the transferable skills. The sheer repetition of revisiting the syllabus helps cement specific concepts and terms with students and teachers, and I have found that this is the best way to equip students with a specific language with which to talk about writing. I have found that when students are taught some of the discourse from composition studies, they begin to talk about their own writing not only with clarity and specificity, but with an accompanying authority. Revisiting the language of your syllabi helps students transition to seeing writing in new and complex ways, which undoubtedly changes the way they approach writing assignments. With the interconnectivity between rhetoric and reality, language helps determines how one sees the world and oneself. By equipping students with a new discourse unique to writing and writers, they are able to further develop their identities as writers.

LEADING UP TO THE FIRST ASSIGNMENT: STARTING WITH NARRATIVE

In order to make writing-identities a cornerstone of the course, I decided to begin the class with a narrative. A narrative about students' lives asked them to bridge the gap between home life and school life. It was an early assignment to get students thinking about family and personal issues within the context of the university. The assignment also asked students to present a "writing I" that was extremely familiar. The "I" of their narrative would be themselves as they best saw themselves. The "Family Narrative" assignment thematically coincided with a unit about the "Myth of the American Family" in our *Rereading America* textbook. The prompt follows:

> In the first couple weeks of class we have begun a discussion about the American Family. The first paper we will work on this semester will allow you to write about your family—however you choose to define it. This first paper has two objectives. The first objective is to tell a story about your family and why this story is important, both to you and your family and to us as readers. The second is to continue to think about the way that you write and how it is working for you (a.k.a. your writing process).
>
> Although you may work on invention and pre-writing by doodling with a pen and paper, you will want to type your drafts and draft letters on the computer. Please double-space your paper and use 12-point font and 1'' margins. For your first draft, feel free to draw from material in your journal, class-notes and in-class writing assignments. Your paper will most likely turn out to be 4-6 pages long once it's finished.

Draft Policy: As noted on the syllabus, in order to receive full-credit your draft must be completed on time. Late drafts may be reduced by 1 letter grade each day they are late. Additionally, having your draft on time and being present in class for workshops is crucial to your grade. Please talk to me if you have questions about the draft policy.

Topics:

(1) Think about a moment in the life of your family that has become a story told within the family or even to others outside of the family. The story may be romantic (how your parents met), tragic (the loss of a pet or family member), frightening (surviving a hurricane), historical (how your grandparents arrived in this country), humorous (the first time you went water-skiing) or cautionary (that time we didn't tie the food up while camping). It could also tell about a certain family tradition that you do together during a holiday. As you select your story, give a little bit of thought as to how it illustrates something about what is important, different, or otherwise memorable. Note: This prompt is borrowed from Lynn Searfoss.

(2) A slightly different approach is to write a personal narrative about your role within your family. You may be siblings, children, friends, students, church members, writers, advocates, athletes, or artists, etc. Who you are is a complex network of different personas that ultimately comprise your unique identity. This narrative may examine your "family" role in relation to your other roles in other contexts. What are the challenges of balancing

family life with all of your other interests and roles? When was a time

that there was a particular conflict between who you are or who you are

expected to be for your family and who you are to others, or even to

yourself? Or, how does your experience as a family member help you in

other aspects of your life? For example, did you learn about academic

debate from arguing with your parents or the importance of sharing from

growing up with siblings?

(3) Finally, another way to approach this paper would be to use Question 9 on

page 31 in *Rereading America*: "Write about a time when you wished your

family were somehow different. What caused your dissatisfaction? What

did you want your family to be like? Was your dissatisfaction ever

resolved?" ("Narrative Prompt")

The three options may take student-writers in different directions as they tell their stories, but

they all ultimately reflect upon the significance of family. The first prompt asked students to

think about how storytelling may be used to bring family together or to illustrate events that

are used to teach, entertain, remember or reflect. The second prompt was surprisingly the

most popular with my class. Many students felt very strong ties to their families, which were

now altered considering most students had moved out of their parents' homes to attend

college. Many students used this prompt to examine different facets of their lives that are

important to them and how situational contexts demand different things from them. The

third prompt was the least popular with only one student choosing to write about a time she

wished her family were different. While this theme sometimes came up in the other prompts,

only one chose to write solely about her dissatisfaction with her family.

In order to prepare students for their first formal paper, we did a number of pre-writing and invention activities in class. We began by discussing narrative as a genre and had a group discussion about characteristics associated with narrative. One of our in-class activities was a free-writing exercise where students wrote about someone they know who is an effective story-teller. We all have a friend or family member who is notorious for telling engaging stories, even about the most mundane topics, and likewise, we also know people who seem to ruin every story they tell, losing listeners as they tell it. Students wrote informally in journals for ten minutes, and then we reconvened to discuss how people tell stories effectively and why their stories are particularly good. This activity asked students to consider the "writing I" and how writers choose to present themselves within the context of storytelling. While class discussions the first week were difficult, this short exercise was lively and exciting. Students identified characteristics of narrative like plot development, tone, style and dialogue. They also talked about why stories are told in their social groups— to make people laugh, to bond, and to share events that are important to them. One of the unexpected goals of this classroom writing activity and subsequent discussion was the development of a classroom community. The discussion was actually carried into the next class because students overwhelmingly wanted to talk about their friends and family and the narratives that help define those relationships. It helped students learn each other's names and provided them details of their classmates' lives outside of the classroom that were significant to who they were. I found that narrative was an engaging way to get students to talk about writing in terms of voice, style, structure and audience. Discussion about narrative and the concept of the "storyteller" or "writing I" also urged students to think about rhetorical situation and context.

I also developed another short, creative in-class writing exercise which students enjoyed and which helped them think about ways of writing a creative family narrative. It involved two students (or the instructor, if no one is willing) standing in front of the class, told only to non-verbally display a feeling or an emotion with only their body to express it. One student took a pensive stance, clouding his line of sight with long hair. The other was more timid, and her sideways stance and lowered head came across as defensive and self-critical. The rest of the class observed the two actors, and they were responsible for writing about who these characters were with as much detail as possible. Afterward, students shared their creative depictions, often creating back-stories, fleshing out the character with context and purpose and, in essence, creating a world for that character to inhabit. Some students realized how these depictions at times represented stereotypes, some taking cues from the male's hard-rock/goth attire and using that as a point of reference from which they drew upon contemporary depictions of this subculture in the media for their character sketch. While the exercise could have gone horribly awry, with students potentially drafting hurtful generalizations based upon appearance (which is something I would not have been prepared for), I was glad to see students "reading" so deeply into a visual text (the presentation of a human body). This exercise coincided with a discussion of character and how students might alter their own stories if told out of the mouth of the character they just described. Questions posed to the class included, "How would the language or tone change by using this character? How might the purpose be altered? What experiences helped inform your understanding of this character?

We then turned to "Looking for Work," a short family narrative by Gary Soto, to discuss how Soto's perspective affects the narrative. Having taught this story the previous

year to my first Expository Writing class, I was impressed how our in-class writing exercise helped students to see more clearly Soto's complex perspective in "Looking for Work," something my first class was slow to pick up on. Students saw that Soto chose to narrate a story from his youth from the perspective of a grown man remembering his childhood. They saw how this perspective allowed Soto to include an adult's perspective and reflection, as well as a more sophisticated language. The goal of this exercise and Soto's story was to get students to consider their vantage point or perspective when writing. Since writing is situational, they too get to position themselves as a writer. These exercises and discussions led some students to choose a narrational stance that differed tremendously from the position they write from in most school-related essays. This allowed students to re-see themselves and to determine how a specific vantage point might alter their work. It also led students to see their writing personas as a character they use for particular purposes, within specific contexts. The exercises helped reinforce my models of the "writing I" and the "I that writes" as they allowed students the freedom to develop ethos and writing perspectives for effect and offered them new ways for engaging in academic conversation.

ANALYSES OF STUDENT DRAFTS: FAMILY NARRATIVE

Lauren is a first-year student at Appalachian State University. She was one of the few students to pick the third option of the family narrative prompt. In her pre-writing for the paper, Kristin made a list of ideas under the banner of "Dissatisfaction: Labor Day Weekend 2009." Beneath this title was the following:

-First weekend home from college

-knew it would be bad

-parents drove 6 hours to get us and back

-eating with parents that night…fighting over going out

-mom=w/e---dad=don't know how to show affection

-feel like more than one person

-feel like a child

-everyone wanted to be with me at the same time

-seemed like all my friends' families were perfect the whole weekend

(Lauren)

Lauren's jotted notes continue, exploring little details and tangents, tying her emotions and her reactions to how her family responds to her on her first weekend home to what she perceives to be the norm amongst her friends. Even at this rough stage it is apparent that her "dissatisfaction" with her family is linked to her awareness of her own transitional roles, from child to adult, and from high school student living at home to college student living apart from her family.

Her first draft reflects much of what she originally outlined, namely her frustration with members of her family. When she asks her father for the car keys she writes, "He accused me of doing something wrong and said 'No'. Instead of backing down, I continued asking and started a fuss between my family. This was only the first day back in little Eden, North Carolina and there had already been drama" (Lauren). Her paper continues, and Lauren vents about her sister and her horrible boyfriend, her father's reaction to her sister's boyfriend, and the tension among all three. She writes, "I felt trapped, like I couldn't get even a breath of fresh air in without being gassed." Her prose is very informal, reflecting her

small-town dialect. In fact, Eden is the town she has spent her entire life in, and it's a place where her entire extended family resides, "where everyone knows everyone" (Lauren).

Lauren then relates the part of her weekend when she and her family meet her grandparents at a local steakhouse for dinner. The family frustrations end when Lauren and her parents meet her grandparents for dinner. Lauren feels great discomfort as she is "afraid to be herself" around her grandparents. She notes that, in the presence of her grandparents, her entire family "pretended to be 'the perfect family,' which was bullshit." From here Lauren meanders between little side stories about different family members and her frustration over what has become her first weekend home from college. This first draft appears to be somewhat therapeutic for Lauren, yet her closeness to the subject of writing (she wrote the first draft the week after her trip home) makes it so that the entire draft is clouded by frustration. She refers often to feeling "stretched way too thin" and "not being able to handle it." It isn't until the very end of the draft that Lauren offers some sort of reflection in an attempt to understand her emotions. She says,

> It was interesting and more than eventful, but I do love my family. Even though my name is Lauren and I still look the same, I have become more than one person. I am the Lauren that my family knows me as and I am the Lauren that I want to be in college. They are almost the same person, but have been distinguished by child and adult. In Eden I feel like a child, but at college I truly feel that I have become someone important, an adult. I want my family to understand that and to notice that I am their baby, but I have also become a woman. (Lauren)

It is only in the last paragraph that Lauren distances herself from the reactionary, in-the-moment emotion of the narrative to reflect upon her "dissatisfaction" within a larger context of her life. It's here that her paper moves from option three of the family narrative prompt to option two, and her authority and analysis in recognizing the way her personal transition has made family life now more stressful is reminiscent of Gary Soto's perspective in "Looking for Work." Lauren's process with the narrative assignment had her thinking about the various roles she inhabits. The conflict of her narrative centers on her new ways of defining herself. The "writing I" of her paper wants to be seen as an independent adult. Conflict arises when Lauren's identity as an adult is challenged by how she believes her parents perceive her. The assignment led Lauren to explore how identity is changing and situational, an exercise that will ultimately help her develop a new academic and writerly identity within the context of the university.

In a mid-semester writing assignment, students revisited their family narratives and were prompted to offer a rhetorical analysis of their own work. The purpose was to shift thinking about others' work rhetorically (which we did weekly with class readings) to thinking about one's own work rhetorically. I presented students with a prompt including figure 3, the rhetorical triangle presented below:
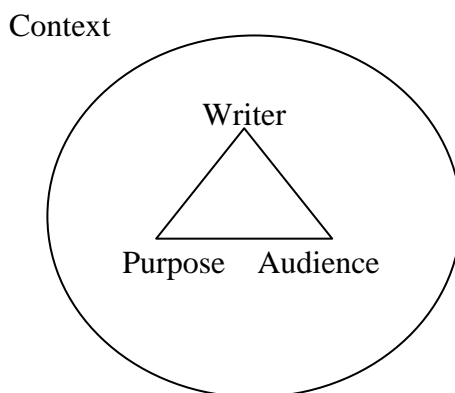
Context

Writer

Purpose   Audience

Figure 3

Following the diagram of the rhetorical triangle was the following explanation, adapted from

writing center Director Dr. Beth Carroll:

> Each element of the rhetorical triangle is in relationship with every other
>
> element, and a change in one part of the triangle shifts all of the others. A
>
> change in audience, for example, affects all other aspects of the rhetorical
>
> situation. (Consider how differently you might tell the same story to three
>
> different audiences: your best friend, your grandmother, and the president of
>
> the US. You would naturally adjust your tone, word choice, details of the
>
> story to highlight or leave out, etc, depending on which of these three
>
> audiences you are talking or writing to and why you are telling the story to
>
> one of them on a particular occasion.) The choices a writer makes about
>
> design, layout, and genre are also influenced by the rhetorical situation. And
>
> the context (political, social, historical, personal) in which a particular piece of
>
> writing emerges plays a large role in shaping its elements. In short, effective
>
> communication depends on a writer making the right choices for a particular
>
> rhetorical situation, which includes all of the elements in the rhetorical
>
> triangle in direct relationship. A rhetorical analysis focuses our attention on
>
> one (or several related) aspect(s) of a rhetorical situation. (Blumberg)

The assignment asked students to analyze if their own writing was particularly effective.

Students were presented with the task of re-reading a text of their own creation from the

perspective of a reader. While it may not be possible to divorce oneself of authorship

completely, reading one's work from the imagined perspective of an audience challenged

students to reconsider the "writing I." Students were asked to respond to the question, "Who is the writer of this piece?" Their task was to approach their narrative as an outsider and to analyze how they present themselves as the narrator of a text in the same way they approached the two silent students presenting a persona non-verbally. During this exercise, Lauren saw that she was actually presenting two different personas in her narrative, and following her peer revision group's discussion and advice on the issue, she decided to reframe her narrative and, in a way, altered the purpose. Her paper then shifted from family conflicts and fighting to how conflict arises of her different personas at school and at home. Reflecting on the drafting process and what came of her analysis of her own work, she writes,

> I started by brainstorming…and listed how my family functioned. I concluded that they all liked to fight or argue, so I picked my first weekend home from college. By looking at my peer's points of revision, I decided to add dialogue, perspectives, and "side stories." I changed my first draft by looking at myself in two perspectives toward the end. After finishing my second draft, I decided to agree with my peers and open up with thinking I was two different people. I completely changed my family narrative paper in the final draft, and even though I took a risk by doing it, I wanted to see how it worked. (Lauren)

Lauren's development of this piece demonstrates an awareness of rhetorical situations in her own life and how her various roles dictate certain conventions and characteristics that may be the source of conflict and frustration. She also demonstrates an ability to recognize and mediate contradiction.

While concepts of plurality and postmodern philosophy riddle composition theory, it has been my experience that most first-year students tend to see issues in binary and either/or terms. It is rare that I go a day without hearing a student in my class or in the writing center tell me that there are "two sides to an issue." Even when they use a clichéd phrase like "there are lots of shades of gray with this issue," they show that the subject is complex and complicated, but they do so in a way that often hints that they are not quite sure how to approach it. Binary thinking is a limiting trap, for students can only approach issues and events from a pro/con or like/dislike stance. And even though Lauren focuses on "two sides" of herself, she does not do so to the exclusion of other "sides." It is through the narrative complexity of their own lives and their subsequent analysis of their own lives that my students demonstrated how to approach topics in more complex ways than pro/con or like/dislike. An assignment that looks at contradiction in students' own lives is a method for mediating absolutist thinking.

Lily is another student who used the family narrative to explain how multiple families and multiple roles may contradict at times, but demonstrates that all are an invaluable part of who she is. Lily is the student I briefly mentioned in chapter two, the one whose idyllic opening to her family narrative, a descriptive image of a family happily sitting down to a routine family breakfast, is rudely interrupted by the exclamation that this is not her family. Lily moves into paragraph two by stating that she is one "of over 510,000 children in foster care" (Lily). She begins her narrative, "Not Just One Family Role," by sharing how she came to have two families—her biological family and her foster family. Hers is a difficult story to read, as she relates experiences of seeing her mother inject heroin through a cracked door, of her biological father's imprisonment and addiction problems, and of her constant

travels between her biological and foster families. Lily's story moves so fast that it is hard to keep up, as her "untraditional lifestyle [moves] back and forth from living with my mother, to living with boyfriends" (Lily).

Her story begins to stabilize as her foster family helps her focus on her school work. Lily's goal is to be the first out of both her families to attend college. She realizes that for both her families she has "become their role model." With this new role comes additional stress and each of her families react differently to her academic successes and create additional roles for Lily to fill. Her foster family's constant praise created unrealistic expectations, and Lily says that in this role she felt as if she "was expected to keep cool when a problem came up. I was the one who never did anything wrong; I felt like if I made one wrong move, I would let my dad down" (Lily). Conflictingly, she felt like her biological family was now trying to claim responsibility for her successes, and she was now supposed to see them as supportive, even though it was at odds with her childhood.

Lily then turns to her recent role as a college student, the first of her families, but she is quick to point out that her college student status is still different from many others. As a child of an abusive family and as a child of a foster home, she is now an "inspiration," and

> not only do I have duties to both my families, but to everyone I come in contact with. Grandfather Home for Children, the foster home agency that licensed my foster parents, heard of my story…my teachers at my high school knew my story and relayed it to quite a few people, who in turn asked me to give a speech, and have published my story in the newspaper. (Lily)

Lily shows how her non-traditional family life and her academic achievements have now made her personal life the talk of the community, and she now serves her community as a role model to students in foster care.

Interestingly, Lily decides to end her final draft on a note that is at odds with her story. Instead of concluding with her many family roles, which now extend to a greater community, she ends with generic statements, but ones that are reflective of pervasive cultural attitudes. She ends, "I do believe that I have great families. Just because we're not the nuclear family, it doesn't mean we are bad. Being different is sometimes a good thing. Besides, our society wouldn't be healthy if everyone did everything the same way" (Lily). Her conclusion acts in part as a justification, and the sense that there is a large, cultural attitude that views families like Lily's as bad lurks behind her narrative. Much of Lily's course work identifies what she perceives as dominant cultural attitudes that speak against and devalue her experience (her research paper was about the working-class and strong family values in "redneck" culture).

In Lily's portfolio letter, she talks about her narrative briefly, writing,

> I liked writing about a personal matter at the beginning of the semester because it helps the professor get to know the students. This paper prompted me to explain the role I held within my family…[With this paper] I have found that generalizing can lead to great confusion for the audience. This led to an interesting paper, and I learned something about myself in the process. (Lily)

Lily's letter illustrates the importance of narrative in developing relationships between teachers and students. Although Lily did not mention it, her story also helped create

relationships with her fellow classmates. Most importantly, Lily, like many others, was able to develop a personal narrative that displayed a careful analysis of an identity dependent upon relationships. She reaches past binary and absolutist thinking to offer a careful analysis of herself that is situation-specific. While some might look past essays like Lauren's and Lily's as simply personal narrative, they illustrate students' thinking about experiences in complicated and rhetorical ways. Moreover, both draw conclusions that who they are is a pastiche of experiences, some in contradiction with each other.

Lauren and Lily have very different stories to tell, but their stories were not lost on their audiences. Groups shared drafts in peer workshops, and we often came back to their narratives as ways in to other writing assignments (which will be described in the next section). The most pervasive characteristic of all the family narratives was a constant awareness of what the "model American family" is. Both offer counternarrative to the grand narrative of the American family. Whether students felt that their family what typical or not, nearly every essay referred briefly to the myth of the American family. Because of this, students began to see their own lives in terms of social attitudes and myths about family. Students wrote about their lives in light of cultural myths and expectations. They demonstrated a willingness to consider how social myths influence how they think about their families and their lives.

MOVING FROM NARRATIVE TO ARGUMENT AND PERSONAL TO SOCIAL

In order to transition students from writing about issues in their lives to writing about social issues, which is more characteristic of the type of writing they will do in college, I decided to let them shift from narrative to short position papers, which called for an analysis of at least two readings from class. Since they had already completed some readings

pertaining to family, I presented them with a prompt adapted from an assignment shared by

Bruce McComiskey in his article "Composing Postmodern Subjectivities." The assignment

is as follows:

> Early on in the semester, you will write two **"position papers"—short**
> **writing experiences (3-pages minimum, you'll probably write more)**
> designed to help you develop active reading strategies in response to assigned
> texts that argue varying perspectives of a cultural issue. Each position paper
> requires you to pick two assigned readings and one outside reading that
> represents a different perspective from the assigned readings and **critique the**
> **articles from your own perspective, accommodating and acknowledging**
> **good ideas (and explaining why they are good), resisting and rejecting**
> **bad ideas (and explaining why they are bad), and most importantly,**
> **negotiating and revising ideas (and explaining how they might best be**
> **revised), referring always to your own cultural experiences**.
> Accommodation and resistance in position papers only require us to state our
> agreement or disagreement with the ideas that are already present in the
> assigned texts. **But negotiation, a far more valuable critical reading**
> **strategy, requires us to establish our own position in the ground among**
> **competing texts.** In other words, when we negotiate assigned texts, we
> **articulate the points of intersection among both the texts themselves and**
> **our own cultural experiences**. In order to discover these points of
> intersection, though, we must do more than simply read to ascertain the
> content of the assigned essays; we must read instead to understand their lives

as texts—their spirit, their politics, their history, their investments—and how

their lives as texts intersect with our own lives as readers. In other words, we

must learn to think critically about what we are reading.

Note: This assignment borrows liberally from one presented in "Composing

Postmodern Subjectivities in the Aporia between Identity and Difference" by

Bruce McComiskey. (Blumberg, position paper prompt, emphasis in original)

McComiskey's prompt was especially appealing for a couple of reasons. First, it asked

students to think about texts in ways other than pro/con or like/dislike by challenging them to

revise ideas and to seek places for mediation. It asked them to actually do something with

ideas presented in works—revise them! I made sure to bold face the parts of the prompt that

I found most important. Secondly, his assignment let students argue in conversation with

texts with simply their cultural experience. This stipulation was particularly liberating for

my students, and they were happy to know that their ideas did not need to be restated by a

source from an academic book to be validated.

My students wrote with the most authority and voice when they felt like they were in

a writing situation where their experiences mattered. Also, since students had just completed

two drafts of their family narratives, many chose to continue with the topic, picking two

readings from the class textbook about family. The students who chose to stick with the

family theme, which was a majority of the class, displayed rigorous analyses of specific

family issues, with many choosing to talk about same-sex marriage and adoption. Most drew

from experiences in their family narratives, and an in-class attempt to come up with a

definition of family collaboratively pushed students to think about the issue in more

complicated ways.

Both Lauren and Lily chose to write their position papers about family as well. Lauren's position paper engages conservative former Senator Rick Santorum and civil rights attorney Evan Wolfson in a dialogue about same-sex families and constitutional rights. Lauren begins by identifying the different approaches that each author employs, noting that "Santorum's ideas were focused on 'the traditional family,' whereas Wolfson's ideas leaned more toward the importance and the meaning of marriage" (Lauren). Lauren saw Wolfson as less hostile, arguing for a definition of marriage and family that did not identify any specific demographic but centered on love as the essence of any union. However, Lauren felt as though Wolfson was too liberal with the term love and argued directly with Wolfson for applying the term "to tangible objects" as well as people. While it is clear that Lauren's thoughts about same-sex marriage and families align more closely with Wolfson's, she finds points of disagreement and invites her own experiences to the paper as a way of modifying Wolfson's argument. She says, "I agree with Wolfson's passage. He gives many examples of couples who don't have the same rights as heterosexuals. Even though I am a Christian, and I personally have not chosen the same-sex lifestyle, I still take pride in believing that it is okay" (Lauren). Lauren's position exhibits a number of implied arguments, one of them being that homosexuality is a choice. Her Christian foundation and implied conservative view that homosexuality is a choice are often depicted in popular culture as characteristics of one extreme. In her conclusion she states, "I'm stuck between both of them." Lauren's conclusion embodies neither of the polarizing "sides" of the issue. Instead, she finds herself appropriating various facets of her sources and finds that she can engage others' ideas and argue amongst them without subscribing to one or the other.

Moreover, Lauren states that Wolfson's use of narrative resonated most strongly with her. She writes,

> When Wolfson started giving examples of how same-sex couples do not have the same rights as traditional couples, it really made me sad. There was an example of a woman who couldn't get in to see her newborn daughter when she was born. This situation broke my heart, because even though they were a lesbian couple, they should have gotten the same rights as everyone else.
> (Lauren)

It was Wolfson's use of pathos, students said, that was most persuasive. The passage Lauren refers to uses narrative to show how policies that exclude homosexual partners from "next-of-kin" status have extremely painful effects for "non-traditional" families. As students like Lauren moved from family narratives to position papers, writing amongst authors like Santorum and Wolfson, the concept of family expanded as it moved from the narrative of their experiences to their political and economic implications. Student writing made strong connections between personal and social lives, and I was pleased with how students used their experiences and narratives as support in nuanced arguments that worked between sources instead of simply aligning completely with one. Students' writing mediated personal and social fractures by creating an argumentative "writing I" that embraced narrative and experience.

Lily also chose to write her family-themed position paper about traditional and gay families, and like Lauren, she touched upon issues such as the government's role in defining family. She was primarily concerned with how definitions of family implicate issues like children custody, marriage rights and benefits, death and end of life rights and healthcare.

Titled "Rethinking Family & Marriage," Lily's paper approached family as a social institution which carries with it certain social and economic powers and privileges. Lily, who mentions in her paper that she is Bapstist, identifies partially with Santorum's conservative views. She says, "Rick Santorum's views are valuable in that they advocate for a safe environment for families to grow; he promotes they grow under the sanction of marriage" (Lily). She also asserts that children are more apt to succeed when they feel safe in their environments, a point Santorum uses to argue for families with heterosexual married couples.

As Lily enters the discourse, she finds a way to agree with Santorum while still accommodating a more open stance in light of reading Wolfson's essay. She does so within the context of her family narrative. Lily writes,

> When I was a young child my family was separated into different groups at different times. Sometimes I would be with my father's parents, sometimes with my father, and for the most part with only my mother and her boyfriend or husband (whatever it was at the time). There was a lot of change and not enough stability, creating a sense of insecurity. I agree with Santorum's beliefs that it is important for children to be raised in a stable married household. Growing up in a healthy family helps children focus on more important things…I believe that children can benefit more from a family environment versus a broken home, [but one must] consider that the correct model of a family in today's time is changing. Family is no longer about the nuclear family. (Lily)

Even though Lily finds Santorum's idea of a traditional family appealing, her own experiences show that alternative family models can provide the love and support that children need as well. Like Lauren, Lily also rethinks the idea of family within the context of state-recognized legal unions. She sees "health care, medical decisions, immigration, inheritance, taxation, social security and other benefits" as family issues. She concludes that laws that fail to recognize non-traditional families puts some families, "no matter how *unnatural* they are, at risk" (Lily).

Lily's response was characteristic of many of my students' in that she initially felt very conflicted with this topic. Since my students were predominantly Christian and from conservative households, I feared that an essay like Wolfson's would be challenging for some since homosexuality and LGBT rights are often in contention with the values of southern religious communities. Writing experiences like the family narrative opened up ways for students to think about their competing roles in their daily lives. For Lauren and Lily, as well as many other students in the course, the approach to the narrative assignment helped transition their writing outward. What was helpful about this sequencing of assignments was how students approached political and social issues with the same willingness to negotiate difficult social, cultural and political situations as they did in their lived experiences.

Lily expressed a view widely shared by her classmates in her portfolio letter when she writes,

> I really enjoyed this assignment because I learned that people don't have to keep one set opinion. For example, I am in favor of traditional families, which means I believe families should consist of a married male and female,

and their children. On the other hand, I understand that people are different. I

am open-minded, and can see that people are different and have their own

beliefs. I feel that this paper in particular, helped me grow as a person, and

am appreciative of this learning experience. This paper shows my ability to

adapt to new ideas. It shows that I can be open and be willing to listen to

what others have to say. (Lily)

As a new composition teacher, I was surprised to hear that students find it refreshing and

strangely novel that they can engage an issue without "one set opinion." The modernist

perception of the "real" individual as an autonomous, coherent, and unified self leads to

perceptions that the only "real" perspectives are autonomous, coherent, and unified

themselves. For my students, the writing experiences that had them look at multiplicity,

pluralism and contradictory coexistence in their own lives was a mediating factor for seeing

these same ideas in the world around them. Just as Lauren embodies different roles at school

and at home and different audiences interpret her roles within a defining context, a rhetorical

approach to composition instruction moves students to look for meaning in texts by

considering context and situation.

CONCLUSION

I began this work with Maxine Hairston's concerned lament in 1992 that the composition classroom was changing and the ramifications were substantial. The fear, and it is a real one, was that a new model would put "dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational goals of the student" (180). The social and political theories that ushered in this "new model" to which Hairston speaks do not have to be in competition with "student voices" and "process-oriented, low-risk, student-centered classroom[s]" (180). Rather, process-based writing instruction can allow students to develop voice and authority in writing assignments that are familiar and close to them, namely narratives that draw from their experiences. In these writing activities students can explore the "I that writes," examining and analyzing the complexities in their own lives. From personal narrative students can move to position papers which ask students to analyze, argue and mediate positions on social issues. Position paper prompts that allow students to draw freely from experience and employ narrative help students negotiate between their lives and social and cultural situations.

The postmodern and poststructuralist theories that prompted a new understanding of the self as a complex nexus of social, political and cultural forces and relationships can be a very abstract way of thinking about identity. The discourse of identity theory is often complex and difficult to comprehend. The language of critical and literary theory is typically at odds with the language found in personal narrative. While theorists employ these concepts

in ways to challenge hegemonic discourse and create space for counternarratives, composition theory is often lacking when it comes to introducing these concepts to traditional first-year students. It is imperative that students are presented with concepts and models for thinking critically about identity and culture that use the language and discourse they are most familiar with. The concepts of the "I that writes" and the "writing I" are helpful when asking students to think about their personal and social lives and how they relate to their lives as writers. It has been my experience that the composition theory texts that expound postmodern theories most heavily are often the ones that present readers with little in the way of classroom application. Although my thesis also does this to some extent, I believe that the problem is the result of the actual language involved. The language of theory is often far removed from the language of the classroom. In order to get the two to "speak" to each other, it is important that terms overlap. I fear that bringing in terms like *postmodern* and *identity politics* to a classroom will only frustrate students more. Students already live "postmodern" lives, we all do. The problem is that students lack the terminology that the university ascribes to our lives.

Students frequently approach issues, whether political or otherwise, in writing assignments with a very modernist understanding of how this issue can be engaged in a paper. McComiskey rightly identifies student tendencies to default to pro or con, or like or dislike stances, approaches informed by worldviews that cannot accommodate difference, pluralism or contradiction. However, students present this modernist approach in papers because they have been taught to do so. Poor writing assignments, standardized testing and polarized political commentary on cable have all encouraged binary thinking. Personal

narrative and analysis of narrative is a way to move students away from the limits of binary thinking.

Rhetorical approaches that emphasize the connection of texts to social and political contexts challenge modernist notions of texts in isolation. I have found that a rhetorical model on the whiteboard or a class handout for each class period helps students begin to talk about texts by considering their authors, readers, histories, contexts, and purposes. The most important aspect of the rhetorical approach is the consideration of what the student brings to the act of reading or writing. Using reflective letters and incorporating narrative components to draft work helps reinforce the personal to social connections that may exist as a student writes.

Reflective letters challenge students to see themselves as writers, and creating a space to account for low-stake, "student-centered" writing can help mediate fractures between student identity as a student (what they expect a student-writer to be) and how they perceive themselves in other facets of their lives. Adapting and incorporating a model like the models of the "Writing I" and the "I that writes" may move student-writers to considering how they employ ethos and authority not only in academic writing situations, but in various social situations in their lives.

To develop authority and voice, one must find connections to one's writing and the subjects of which they write about. Writing assignments that build from narratives of students' families and personal lives emphasize the importance of making initial connections. Using writing as a place to explore social concerns through narrative and personal experience draws equally from expressivist and social constructivist pedagogies, and seeks to accommodate and revise rather than completely reject.

Additionally, postmodern theories of the self embrace multiplicity and plurality and reject ideas that identity and voice are isolated, static and singular. Applied to composition studies, these theories explain how all writing represents characteristics of the individual as well as the social and political arena in which the individual is situated. Therefore, many voices speak from one and student writing is no exception. Providing students with terms and prompts that encourage them to employ a variety of voices (both real and imagined), students can practice constructing context-specific writing personas. This experience is valuable as students find themselves in new rhetorical situations that demand that they adopt new writing personas for new audiences.

Finally, it is important that I acknowledge that, while this work is concluding, my larger project is not. I am currently co-teaching a section of Expository Writing this semester with a fellow graduate student. Our course has continued to revise writing activities to help our students move between their stories and the stories that affect us all. Our approach has also embraced new technologies, and a similar unit on the "family" has led to a collaborative wiki project.

My greatest hope is that this work resonates with composition instructors, especially Graduate Teaching Assistants. It has been my intent to balance a scholarly review and critique of postmodern composition theory with ethnographic research and an approachable method of composition instruction for future teachers. Theories of the self that are dependent upon the social nature of language and experience speak directly to the goals of a liberal arts education, of which one is the intent of making local to global connections. The discovery of the connections between the self, or student-writer, and the social context of a writing topic gives student-writers and their writing purpose, personal and social significance.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dean Blumberg was born on September 1, 1981 in Hartford, Connecticut to John and Tracy Blumberg. After graduating from Simsbury High School he met Sara, the love of his life, in North Carolina, and they proceeded to run away to Burlington, Vermont. He graduated from the University of Vermont in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in Speech. After working for four years as a coordinator for an AmeriCorps program at Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, he and his wife returned to North Carolina where he began graduate studies at Appalachian State University. He expects to earn his Master of Arts degree in English in May 2010 and plans to pursue a career in teaching and writing center administration. Mr. Blumberg and his spouse are patiently awaiting the arrival of their first child. In his free time, he writes about cultural issues for 10listens.com and popmatters.com.