RESISTANCE AS NEGOTIATION: STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR REDEFINING
POWER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Rebekah Shultz Colby

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Committee:
Kristine Blair, Advisor
Donald S. Cooper
Graduate Faculty Representative
Sue Carter Wood
Ellen Berry
ABSTRACT

Kristine Blair, Advisor

From an educational perspective, student resistance is often defined as any oppositional student behavior that protests or undermines oppressive educational practices, specifically practices that hinder what and how students learn. However, most of the literature on resistance tends to define resistance as a reductive, static entity which can be possessed by one person and studied from only one perspective or context – usually that of the classroom. This dissertation complicated this definition through a case study of a first year composition class looking at not only the instructor but two of its students as not individually representative of resistant behavior but in a power relationship, extending Michel Foucault’s definition of power to resistance. In particular, I viewed resistance as an important part of the power relationship between student and teacher, which both teacher and student equally engage in to form a type of negotiation – a type of dialogue created either indirectly through responsive actions or directly through verbal discourse. Furthermore, in examining resistance as a relationship, I also examined how other socio-political institutions outside the classroom also affect this relationship, specifically examining how students’ previous roles and relationships with knowledge, other writing teachers, classrooms, and pedagogies, as well as their families and their communities shape their resistances of disengagement.

The conclusion of my case study emphasized the importance of instructors spending individual time with students to find out as much as possible about these previous relationships so that they can renegotiate relationships with students in ways that better fit the needs of the
class, lessening the student’s need to resist through disengagement. In other words, in negotiating with students, teachers need to help students resist those previous roles that keep them from successfully inhabiting the roles of their writing class. However, in doing this, teachers also need to resist overly rigid traditional academic roles that may prevent them from meeting students’ needs. In fact, to fully negotiate, both students and teachers need to be flexible enough to at least partially inhabit each other’s roles and put themselves in the other’s place.
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CHAPTER ONE
RESISTANCE AS RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

The definition of the phrase “student resistance” is complex, loaded as it is with many different connotations about the behaviors, attitudes, and motives of students, both positive and negative, and made no less complex by the myriad of definitions ascribed to it in the composition literature. Most often, resistance is defined as oppositional behavior that works to either actively undermine or at least protest oppressive social structures in some way. More specifically, resistance is oppositional behavior that communicates a critique that is “a means of signaling, generating, and building dialogue around particular power imbalances and inequalities” (Abowitz 878). From an educational perspective then, resistance is any oppositional student behavior that protests or undermines oppressive educational practices, specifically practices that hinder what and how students learn.

This may seem like a fairly straightforward definition of resistance. However, in my dissertation, I would like to complicate this definition of resistance by using Michel Foucault’s definition of power and extend it to resistance. Specifically, Foucault defines power as a complex relationship between players, which cannot exist alone as an innate and essential attribute possessed solely by one person. Furthermore, if power is to be defined as a relationship, then resistance becomes an important and integral part of the power relationship. In other words, resistance, as part of Foucault’s power relationship, cannot be solely possessed by either teachers, students, or the educational institution, but can only exist in a complex relational interplay among all three, as well as the surrounding socio-political institutions.
Resistance, too, as part of a relationship, is always part of an ongoing negotiation between student and teacher.

Consequently, in this dissertation, I conduct two case studies examining composition students’ attitudes, beliefs, and motives about writing and the rich interplay of institutional and cultural forces which shape these attitudes, beliefs, and motives both inside and outside the classroom, specifically examining the students’ relationships with the teacher, their peers, the educational institution, and other relevant social institutions. Working towards a contextual and relational, or negotiational, understanding of resistance for each student I study, I will explore the attitudes, beliefs, and motivations behind behavior which could be described as disengaged, specifically examining how and why this disengaged behavior works as a form of resistance for each student and in what ways both student and teacher can productively use this resistance to better learning conditions in the classroom.

Furthermore, my definition of resistance will also be slightly broader than that usually portrayed in the literature since I want to examine resistance of both majority and minority students. Usually, in the literature, educational oppression has referred to the increasing marginalization and even outright exclusion of oppressed minority groups in the classroom (Abowitz 808). However, while I will specifically examine the resistance of two minority students in my dissertation, examining in part how they are marginalized and/or excluded in the classroom, and while I agree that this is a particularly pertinent area of study for composition, for the purposes of my dissertation, my definition of student resistance will also include resistance from majority students, since many oppressive educational practices still negatively affect majority groups as well.
In direct contrast to my more Foucauldian definition of resistance, most of the literature on resistance tends to define resistance as a reductive, static state which can be possessed by one person and studied from only one perspective or context. For instance, Barbara Lindquist argues that there seem to be at least two main ways student resistance in the classroom tends to be viewed in the literature: the socio-political and the psychological. She further defines her use of the term “psychological” in relation to resistance by writing, “When the concept [of resistance] carries a psychological connotation, resistance usually implies some kind of inadequacy in the person labeled resistant; for example, a failure to understand her/his motives and actions, a lack of knowledge, or a refusal to acknowledge information in a given situation” (3). Nevertheless, while these domains of student resistance are usually viewed separately, when trying to interpret student behavior contextually, they quickly become intrinsically interrelated. Furthermore, since resistance tends to be viewed as a static, either/or construct which exists innately within students and which teachers need to overcome, the composition literature has usually portrayed students as obstacles possessing the essential trait of resistance whom teachers need to overcome with their newly improved pedagogy. In contrast, Eric Miraglia argues that this view of static, innate, and essential resistance also extends to teachers and the educational system itself as they are also portrayed as obstacles that students need to overcome. Consequently, in this chapter, I will further explore how, because of an overly reductive and essentialist view of resistance, most of the composition literature has missed more complicated aspects of resistance, which can be better explored by using my more contextual and relational view of resistance.

A Relational Definition of Resistance

According to Foucault’s specific historical analysis of the formation of modern power, power can exist only as a relationship. Thus, resistance is an integral part of the power
relationship between teacher, student, and the surrounding social institutions. Since Foucault defines power thus: “power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of the force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (History 92), resistance can be viewed in a similar way. Like resistance, Foucault adds that power “must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendant forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable” (History 93). So, power, or resistance, cannot simply emanate from a single source – either the student or the teacher – but, rather, resistance is a complex relationship that is dynamic but also unstable among the teacher, the students, and the surrounding social forces.

Resistance is a very important part of the power relations within the classroom. In fact, resistance is what makes power a relationship in the first place and not an absolute entity that can simply be bestowed on people. Foucault further defines power as a relationship by writing:

[A] power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that the “other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. . . . [Power is] a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions. (‘Subject” 427)

In other words, power relies on the actions, or power, of others to maintain itself, and, for power to exist, the other has to be equally able to act, or, in other words, equally able to resist. In a classroom then, for a teacher to be powerful, or to have the efficacy of teaching students, the
teacher must maintain students’ potential to have the fullest range of actions available to them. Although Foucault is careful to maintain that power is not only based on consent, students can definitely consent to or refuse the parameters of the class. And even though resistance is not the only response available to them, instead of a simple consent, refusal, or other type of action, more often than not, students participate in multiple forms of resistance – actions which are not outright acts of refusal but may not be full acts of consent to the teacher’s power. However, by participating in resistance, by exhibiting a wide range of actions, not just a simple refusal or acceptance, students actually affirm a teacher’s power since resistance shows that students have the widest range of actions available to them and that they are also powerful, autonomous individuals. In other words, for power to exist, both parties must be free to act, must be free to exert some form of power. In fact, power can only exist where there is freedom for both parties. As Foucault states about modern power formations, “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (“Subject” 428). However, since, as Foucault argues, power is also a “set of actions upon other actions,” every time someone acts in the classroom, either the teacher or the students, this action closes off the potential for some reciprocal actions while opening up the potential for others. Power, then, becomes a sort of dialogue of actions – a teacher’s actions both closing off and creating the potential for further action from students and vice versa.

In this way, resistance can be seen as an integral part of this power dialogue. In other words, resistance is always part of a power negotiation between teacher and student, part of an answer and response. With resistance, this dialogue often takes place through action instead of words. Regardless of whether or not students or teachers articulate their reasons for resistance though, it is still part of this dialogue of action. For instance, a student struggles to meet the
deadlines of a class since he or she must also meet other deadlines outside of class such as a
grueling work schedule, so in response to this restriction, the student resists by not always
meeting the deadlines of the class. The teacher, then, responds with a lower grade or other
penalty or, perhaps, gives the student some extra time. However, the details of this example are
irrelevant since, regardless of what path the student or teacher takes, each action, each act of
resistance, is part of this dialogue – this answer and response, or, in other words, this negotiation.

Of course, for my dissertation, I argue that the most productive negotiation, or form of
resistance, is when both parties can fully articulate the reasons informing their actions, since, by
doing this, they can hopefully better reach a solution, or at least a compromise, that best satisfies
the needs of both parties. Without this fully articulated dialogue, both parties can easily
misinterpret the reasons informing the other’s actions, which, of course, can lead to an
inappropriate response. However, in arguing that verbal dialogue is the most productive form of
resistance, I am not arguing that it is the only valid form of resistance, or that other forms of
resistance are not productive, especially in certain circumstances. For open, verbal dialogue to
exist, both parties must be able and willing to listen to each other and participate. Unfortunately,
in many cases, even in the classroom, this is not always the case and a dialogue of symbolic or
pragmatic action becomes the only recourse.

Michel de Certeau outlines in more depth Foucault’s theory of resistance as a
relationship, which both parties participate in, and also explains more clearly how both parties
can actually listen to each other. De Certeau defines two types of resistance: strategies and
tactics. Strategies belong to the domain of teachers since, according to de Certeau, they are “the
calculation or manipulation of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject
with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” (36).
Furthermore, they are characterized by a place, such as a classroom, which is characterized by overt, visible rules of conduct that codify these spaces, such as formal lesson plans and rules of classroom conduct, etc, within a classroom space. In contrast, tactics do not derive their power from authorized space or overt, formal rules because the “space of the tactic is the space of the other,” or, in this case, the student. Consequently, tactics derive their power from their invisibility and opportunistic versatility. De Certeau writes that a tactic “takes advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids” (37). Using de Certeau’s model, then, teachers most often resist with the use of strategies, using formal lesson plans and classroom rules to maintain order. Students, in contrast, resort to utilizing the opportunities that arise from kairos, the time and moment of a specific place, for resistance – a timely comment, a momentary disruption in the lesson plan, etc.

For true negotiation to occur, however, both teacher and student need to use both strategies and tactics to resist. In other words, for negotiation to work, they need to listen as closely as possible to each other by putting themselves in the other’s place and trying more reciprocal forms of resistance. In other words, teachers need to engage in tactics and, as much as they are able, students need to seize their authorizing role as students and use the formal, bureaucratic systems available to them, such as filing a formal complaint, and engage in strategies; both students and teachers need to engage with both sides of the power relationship. Foucault writes that “one must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work” (History 100). In other words, tactics and strategies depend upon each other in order to work within a relationship. Foucault writes that “no strategy could achieve comprehensive effects if it
did not gain support from precise and tenuous relations serving, not at its point of application or final outcome, but as its prop and anchor point” (History 99). It is this relationship, this ability to shift from one form of resistance to the other, regardless of role, that makes negotiation possible.

**Resistance as Fixed and Static**

This Foucauldian, interactional, and multidimensional definition of resistance in the classroom “in which the teacher, students, subject matter, and context all affect one another” (Lindquist 4) more broadly extends the discussion of resistance. Previous composition literature on student resistance has tended to rely on many narratives in which resistance is defined as a fixed entity located either within the teacher or, more often, the student, as Eric Miraglia succinctly points out. Barbara Lindquist expands, explaining that most of the previous composition literature on resistance has worked to locate “resistance inside students” in a way “that must be broken down, contravened, and flushed out in a contest between the teacher pushing for change and the students fighting against it” (4). For example, Miraglia cites Cheryl Glenn and Robert Connors’ *The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing* as an example of resistance posited in the student. In the book, Glen and Connors take the stance that “teachers should take an active role in suppressing behaviors which, in their judgment, threaten that meaningful purpose” of teaching (417). Conversely, Miraglia characterizes Jerry Farber’s essay “The Student as Nigger” as an example where resistance is located within teachers. In Farber’s piece, it is the students who are actively fighting for change and the teachers who are working against it. Consequently, students should work to actively overthrow teachers “because there exists on the part of college professors . . . an outright systematic effort to oppress students and such an effort damn well deserves to be resisted” (419). For Farber, students are resisting professors, but professors become the fixed entity that needs to be suppressed, “broken down,
contravened, and flushed out” (Lindquist 4). In Farber’s conception, students and teachers still do not exist in a relationship of resistance to each other. These examples illustrate an essentialist perception of resistance – one in which either students or teachers innately, by their very nature, possess all the essential traits of resistance, but never both together in a transaction. Thus, this definition of resistance creates an “us” versus “them” perception that stigmatizes and stereotypes the other. Unfortunately, this view can also end up stultifying all pedagogical growth since the teacher, as always above error, never has a reason to change or grow as a teacher and the students never have a reason to try to learn in different ways.

**Resistance as Lack**

Ultimately, a definition of resistance as a fixed and static entity located within students can also lead to a deficit pedagogy based on lack, and in much of the previous composition literature on resistance this seems to be the case. Specifically, teachers who believe in resistance as a static entity also can perceive that this entity exists out of a lack or absence in students that must be pedagogically overcome. More specifically, Marguerite Helmers writes that in these teaching narratives, “the instructor perceives a lack or absence in the students [which is also often labeled as resistance], the instructor ‘discovers’ a means of correcting that lack, the students are happy and fulfilled as a result of the instructor’s efforts” (20). However, unlike a more relational definition of resistance, this definition of lack casts both students and teachers in a problematic, double-bind relationship – one in which resistance from both parties is inevitable and self-perpetuating. If students resist the teacher’s definition of deficit or lack or his or her corresponding correctional pedagogy, the teacher promptly labels them as resistant, even though labeling students with this type of lack fundamentally creates an agonistic relationship between the teacher and the student. This labeling of course makes resistance from students almost
inevitable because if students perceive this label of lack as erroneous, they have no choice but to resist or completely refuse the teacher’s label as well as the teacher’s correctional pedagogy. With a relational definition of resistance though, resistance is openly acknowledged as created on both sides and, as a result, can be worked or negotiated through.

Furthermore, casting students as possessing some sort of lack that needs to be pedagogically fixed creates a faulty, elitist position for the teacher, especially if the teacher is teaching resistance as a subject matter along with writing. The teacher, who possesses all the knowledge, can teach resistance, but the students cannot really resist in any true sense. If they do, teachers are usually quick to cast their actions as a negative or thoughtless form of resistance. Consequently, students are forced to only superficially imitate or mime the teacher. While Richard Boyd posits that all teaching really consists of teaching students to imitate, whether they are imitating a model of a text or the writing process a teacher demonstrates, in a deeper form of imitation, they learn to fulfill the role the teacher performs and demonstrates in class and actually come to inhabit this role as well. However, those who also teach resistance as lack are again caught in a double bind. Boyd argues that those students who resist the teacher’s pedagogy in a movement of deeper resistance are in fact imitating the role of the teacher too well by resisting how the teacher has structured or taught the class itself. For instance, James Berlin details a problem-posing pedagogy in which students, along with the teacher, are supposed to become problem-posers. However, within the hierarchical structure of Berlin’s classroom, the teacher is still the only real problem-poser, setting an agenda which students dutifully imitate. If students become true problem-posers, posing problems with the class or with Berlin’s ideology for instance, Boyd writes that “Berlin reads these individuals as capable of both ‘passivity’ and ‘active and open opposition’ to this proffered identity as ‘problem solvers’” and “either way,
they are labeled as problems themselves” (600). Therefore, classroom resistance from students also needs to be treated as a legitimate form of resistance, not ignored as evidence of lack. Student resistance is also just as likely as other forms of resistance to serve as a constructive, albeit possibly painful, critique of the teacher’s pedagogy, and as a result, it needs to be seriously listened to.

Naturally, perceiving education as fulfilling a lack that students innately possess also falls under Paulo Freire’s banking concept of education and creates an erroneous perception of students. First of all, if knowledge is socially constructed, then the teacher creates knowledge through dialogue along with the students, in a similar way to how power exists within a relationship, and does not just “give” it through correctional pedagogy. As Freire writes, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry humans beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (53). So, in other words, not only is a better understanding of the relationship between student and teacher important for understanding resistance, but understanding this relationship is integral for understanding learning as well. A pedagogy based on student lack obscures not only an understanding of resistance, but learning as well.

**Reductive Definitions of Resistance: The Psychological Perspective**

Unfortunately, many studies of resistance have tended to be a bit reductive. They tend to focus exclusively either on the socio-political or the psychological instead of using a relational definition of resistance in which the complexity of the local and historical socio-political and psychological context is seen as existing together as part of the relationship between teacher and student. First of all, there have been a lot of studies on student resistance from more of a psychological perspective. Many have examined how psychological factors, such as motivation,
influence students’ resistance toward writing and writing instruction, although they have been largely published in education and psychology journals. For instance, Randall Gordon conducted an experiment published in *The Journal of Social Psychology* examining whether or not a scarcity of revision time would influence student motivation toward revision. He discovered that while it did not affect the number of students who revised, it did decrease the revision time for students who were already revising. In a meta-study published in *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, Frank Pajares examines previous studies on writing and concludes that more than any other factor such as gender, race, or ethnicity, students’ self-concepts about their writing efficacy predict their success in writing classes. In a study examining motivation and writing, J. D. Williams and Scott D. Alden concluded in *Research in the Teaching of English* that extrinsically motivated students were less likely to revise or value teacher and student comments on their writing than students who were intrinsically motivated. Lastly, in a similar study on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation published in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Tony Silva and John G. Nicholls found that intrinsically motivated students tended to respond best to an expressionist writing pedagogy, while extrinsically motivated students responded better to a pedagogy concerned with a concrete, right and wrong focus on surface-level grammar.

However, a view of resistance that purely focuses on the psychological, without incorporating the socio-political, can quickly become reductive, leading to an incomplete understanding of resistance. In the classroom, for example, teachers who focus solely on the psychological aspects of students’ behavior can perceive this behavior as a form of psychological pathology simply because students’ behavior does not fit within the teacher’s cultural and social norms. For instance, Joseph and Nancy Martinez found that basic writers from certain cultural backgrounds tend to privilege their family and community over school. As a result, students
thought that helping out family and friends were good reasons to miss school, while teachers saw this behavior as oppositional, especially since academic values tend to privilege solitary work and academic ambition over spending time with family and friends. This supposedly merely oppositional behavior, then, really becomes a critique of academic values and identity. This example shows that to really understand resistance relationally, the full context needs to be examined.

The psychological aspect of resistance in my dissertation will be defined and used as the study of individual subjectivity. As Foucault defines it, “there are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence: and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (“Subject” 420). In other words, by being subjugated to the various forms of control in the social world, for instance, by being a member of various discourse communities, the individual is shaped. However, since the individual is still an individual, he or she is forced to not only juggle multiple, contradictory forms of subjugation from various and, at times, competing social institutions, but is also forced to construct some sort of seemingly coherent self-identity from these multiple subjugations as well.

To illustrate how the individual constructs a seemingly coherent self from various, competing discourse communities, Patricia Bizzell constructs a multi-layered Venn diagram with each circle representing a separate discourse community: the school discourse, the work discourse, and the native discourse, which probably represents an individual’s home discourse community. This combined aggregate of circles represents the individual. However, the circles also intertwine, representing the individual’s struggle to construct a sense of coherency. While the circles intersect in some places, representing shared commonalities within discourse
communities, there are many areas where they do not intersect, representing differences within discourse communities – differences which conflict and make it difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to fully construct a cohesive, fully integrated self (Bizzell 391). However, it is this interaction with differing social institutions and the resulting struggle for cohesion and continuity which makes the individual unique and not just arbitrarily shaped by a monolithic social world. Naturally, this struggle for cohesion intensifies as social institutions, or discourse communities, conflict or as individuals come into contact with new social institutions. However, it is by interacting with these new and/or conflicting social institutions, or, specifically, the individuals who are largely shaped by them, that individuals create new meaning. Karen Burke LeFevre uses the social psychologist George Herbert Mead’s theory of the way meaning is made to further explain this phenomenon. According to Mead, meaning is created through interaction with another person in three steps: gesture, attribution or interpretation, and response. LeFevre writes, “One person acts, and in the act of making the gesture, calls out for a response in the other. Something new is created here.” She goes on to quote Mead, who writes, “The response of one organism to the gesture of another . . . is the meaning of that gesture, and is also responsible for the appearance or coming into being of the new object – or new content of an old object” (62). Thus, the individual is made unique, truly an individual, by coming into contact with different social institutions and struggling to form coherency despite differences.

Reductive Definitions of Resistance: The Socio-political Perspective

The socio-political perspective on student resistance in particular has been discussed at great length in composition research. Unfortunately, this view is also apt to be a bit reductive since it tends to focus exclusively on how the socio-political community has created resistance, leaving out or only partially focusing on the psychological aspects of resistance. For instance, in
Mark Hurlburt and Michael Blitz’s *Composition and Resistance*, Joseph Harris and Jay Rosen seem to attribute student resistance to more interactive types of pedagogy on television, which they claim has made students readily assume the passive role of lecture consumer. Also, in the same book, Marian Yee outlines a pedagogy for overcoming student resistance to her subjectivity as a Chinese-American English teacher. In *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition*, Joe Marshall Hardin argues for a pedagogy in which students become critical of culture by becoming aware of themselves as cultural producers through producing papers that challenge the distinction between legitimate authorship and student authorship. Finally, in probably the most cited example of a socio-political view of student resistance, Henry Giroux, in *Theory and Resistance in Education*, defines resistance as behavior which serves as a political critique and opposition as behavior which is merely oppositional because it attempts no such critique and, in fact, may invariably serve the ends of the status quo. He both argues that there needs to be a “theoretically precise” distinction between the two and that all forms of oppositional behavior “represent a focal point and a basis for dialogue and critical analysis” (110). However, just when he seems to say that all forms of oppositional behavior can operate as a form of resistance with this concession, he clearly distinguishes the two again by stating that “oppositional behavior needs to be analyzed to see if it constitutes a form of resistance, which, as I have mentioned, means uncovering its emancipatory interests” (110). Therefore, according to Giroux, there is definitely a clear-cut dichotomy between resistance and mere opposition even if he does concede that behavior that seems oppositional at first may actually be resistance if it serves an emancipatory interest.

By almost exclusively focusing on the socio-political at the expense of the psychological, Giroux, along with many other writers on resistance, seem to still fall into an essentialist trap by
constructing too narrow a view of resistance even though they carefully try not to. For instance, in rejecting a view of resistance that is mostly psychological, Giroux writes that “the concept of resistance represents a problematic governed by assumptions that shift the analysis of oppositional behavior from the theoretical terrains of mainstream educational psychology to those of political analysis” (107). While Giroux is careful not to fully dismiss the psychological perspective completely, his perspective still examines resistance predominantly from a socio-political perspective. However, in defining resistance as almost purely socio-political, Giroux, along with other resistance theorists, might miss out on examining important psychological motivations and reasons for resistance, especially since the political ideologies implicit within educational systems can have a profound psychological effect on students, shaping their identities and sense of self-efficacy. This may lead many purely politically focused theorists to dismiss behaviors as purely oppositional when, in fact, they may contain a sharp critique of oppressive social structures if examined from a more psychological perspective.

In fact, because psychological factors such as identity and desire are socially constructed and the political both influences and is formed by the social culture, it becomes impossible to separate the psychological from the political or the social. For instance, in examining why many Chicano students tend to have more disciplinary problems in high school, Rosa Henandez Sheets found that behavior that the administration found purely oppositional – a high absentee rate, talking in class, and a failure to do homework – was actually informed by a deep-seated critique against almost exclusively white instruction that the Chicano students found racist and alienating. For the Chicano students this alienation was psychologically created by years of political oppression. Long years of teachers casting them as poor, problem students since early elementary school had led many of them to hold this self-image of themselves as well. Thus,
their disengagement from school was both a political critiquing action and a psychological effect of oppression, proving that the psychological and the socio-political cannot be isolated and treated separately out of context from each other because they are interdependently related and both part of the context in which the student and teacher are involved. Thus, both the psychological and socio-political context shapes the student-teacher relationship.

Partial or Contradictory Forms of Resistance

Another reductivist danger in viewing the student-teacher relationship that comprises resistance solely from a socio-political perspective is that more complex forms of resistance that are partial or contradictory may be excluded. Specifically, a more complex, contradictory resistance occurs when people verbally adhere to a certain political ideology, while their behavior would indicate an alignment with a different political ideology. Antonio Gramsci writes, “And is it not frequently the case that there is a contradiction between one’s intellectual choice and one’s mode of conduct?” (62) In the classroom, partial or contradictory forms of resistance may occur when lower-class or racial minority students fail to turn in papers or are excessively absent. By not turning in work or missing an excessive amount of class time, they will inevitably fail their college course, reducing their chances for social mobility and validating racist political interests which may not believe that racial minorities should succeed in society. This behavior, then, contradicts any seemingly emancipatory self-interest. However, this type of disengaged behavior is only partially contradictory since it still serves to critique a pedagogy that may be alienating to those minority students, making it harder for them to succeed than their more privileged classmates. However, Giroux’s dichotomy between oppositional behavior and true resistance makes careful examination of contradictory or partial forms of resistance difficult, even though Giroux does admit that it is in fact this very area that needs to be studied further,
writing that “there have been too few attempts by educational theorists to understand how subordinate groups embody and express a combination of reactionary and progressive ideologies” (102). According to Giroux’s dichotomy, it may seem then that people engaging in a more contradictory type of resistance have not fully thought through a theory of resistance that informs their behavior and that they are only engaging in oppositional behavior since contradictory resistance rarely clearly serves the “emancipatory” interests of any one political agenda.

However, even though some people who engage in contradictory resistance may not be consciously aware of the ideology informing their actions, this does not mean that the ideology is not there. Unfortunately, this apparent thoughtlessness may occur for people with a long history of oppression. They may feel that if they voiced a critique in a fully thought-out act of resistance, their oppression would increase. Therefore, the articulated theory behind their acts of contradictory resistance may remain unsaid and/or forgotten. For instance, for students this seemingly uninformed disjunction between word and action may also exist because students might be afraid to voice any rationale for resistance period – even if it does not directly involve criticism of the educational system. Richard Miller writes, “Thus, it is a mistake to think that subordinates have been so thoroughly colonized that they cannot conceive of or desire a better world. It is more accurate to say that they have no access to the channels of social power that might bring this better world into being” (17). He goes on to say that subordinates “are powerless to change the system and know only too well its ability to punish them for not complying with its demands” (18). Students, then, may resort to contradictory forms of resistance because they do not want to be further oppressed or punished and they usually do not have access to the forms of acceptable, bureaucratic social power within the academy needed to
fully voice their resistance. In this way, seemingly oppositional behaviors can still be considered a form of resistance – the teacher just needs to be willing to listen and encourage students to articulate the critique embedded within their actions – actions which at first may seem contradictory and oppositional -- and take this critique seriously.

However, this dichotomy between oppositional and clear resistance also masks contradictory types of resistance that are fully thought out as well but may be identified as oppositional since they are partially or fully oppositional to the politics of the teacher. Thus, the teacher becomes consciously or unconsciously blind to the critique embedded within the acts of resistance. It is also for this reason that Susan Welsh agrees that the intolerance for any type oppositional behavior that this dichotomy creates makes it difficult to examine more complex forms of resistance. As an example she uses Carolyn Steedman’s historical *Memoir Landscape for a Good Woman*. In her book, Steedman talks about the contradictory consciousness of her working class mother who, although she relied on leftist social programs for financial support and her daughter’s education, remained staunchly conservative “for the left could not embody her desire for things to be really fair, for a full skirt that took twenty yards of cloth” (564). So, in this case, the subjectivity of gender, with all of the demands and desires of femininity, complicates an easy identification with a politics that would be more beneficial for the subjectivity of class and, according to Giroux’s definition, emancipatory. Consequently, from the perspective of Giroux’s dichotomy, this contradictory behavior, desiring a full skirt, was merely oppositional and not a true form of resistance because it did not work to subvert the status quo. However, by illegitimating this form of resistance, this binary perspective remains blind to a powerful critique of class politics. Without addressing the powerful desire to belong among multiple, often competing subjectivities, in this case gender and class subjectivities, liberal class
politics will not fully appeal to the very audience it is trying to reach – the working class --
despite its best intentions. Thus, this example also addresses a double standard in what it means
to be fair and equal. In this case, the basic needs of housing and education were provided for by
liberal politics; however, the need to be feminine, which was probably considered frivolous, was
not.

This example also illustrates how a purely socio-political view of resistance could easily
focus on one form of subjectivity, in this case class, while excluding all other subjectivities such
as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Because the socio-political perspective is
usually tied up with critiquing only one form of social subjugation, it can miss the way other
types of socio-political subjugation can form and shape subjectivities and contradict as well.
And, finally, even if a purely socio-political perspective does take into account multiple
subjectivities, it often excludes places where these subjectivities may intersect in problematic
ways, leading to a contradictory consciousness or form of resistance. In other words, resistance
needs to be viewed from all aspects to be really understood – a view which integrates socio-
political and psychological viewpoints – and, within a relational understanding of resistance, that
one viewpoint by itself cannot be eschewed as merely creating opposition.

Unfortunately, another problem with a definition of resistance that maintains a fixed
dichotomy between merely oppositional behavior and true resistance is that it can also lead to a
definition of resistance based on lack. For instance, with this fixed definition of resistance as
only defined as an action that stems from an ideology that is the same as the teacher’s, the
teacher unwittingly attaches deficit to difference, without admitting that differing experiences
may create differences in ideology and that some of these differences might lead to a productive
critique of his or her own ideology, as in the case of Steedman’s mother. In other words, any
ideology which is motivated by a difference in subjectivity other than the teacher’s could be seen as a deficit that would need to be pedagogically addressed (Welsh 556). This is evident in Giroux’s distinction between oppositional and resistant behavior when he writes that while some behavior that seems oppositional may in fact be resistance, the behavior “needs to be analyzed to see if it constitutes a form of resistance, which . . . means uncovering its emancipatory interests” (110). Hidden by the passive voice, in other words, is the fact that an authorized person, probably a teacher who agrees with Giroux’s definition of emancipatory, needs to “find” and then authorize the resistance. Students, therefore, would not be allowed, as they should, to decide for themselves if they were engaging in legitimate acts of resistance or not.

Perceiving students as lacking the ability to define their own resistance is particularly problematic since, in interpreting the difference between opposition and resistance, the teacher is still constrained by his or her own subjectivity and cannot clearly see outside of this subjectivity. For instance, writing about how her own subjectivity impeded her abilities to emancipate her students from racism, Elizabeth Ellsworth writes, “My understanding and experience of racism will always be constrained by my white skin and middle-class privilege” (308). Instead of advocating a pedagogy of lack where she finds the pockets of legitimate resistance in her students and authorizes them, she practices a pedagogy in which she lets students define resistance for themselves. She writes, “I saw the necessity to take the voices of students and professors of difference at their word – as ‘valid’ – but not without response” (308). And instead of excluding or dismissing student expressions of resistance that were partial or contradictory, she writes:

[T]hey must be made problematic, but not because they have broken the rules of thought of the ideal rational person by grounding their knowledge in immediate emotional, social,
and psychic experiences of oppression, or are somehow lacking or too narrowly circumscribed. Rather, they must be critiqued because they hold implications for other social movements and their struggles for self-definition. (305)

So, critique in this case becomes not a validation of resistant behavior, but an effort to understand resistance and its further social implications from another’s perspective. Constrained within a certain subjectivity, teachers need to closely listen to alternate expressions of resistance from students to be better able to understand them, not rush to identify them as either resistance or oppositional, valid or invalid. In this way, all forms of oppositional behavior are forms of resistance, especially since the teacher does not have the omniscient knowledge of all subjectivities to be able to ascertain for all students what constitutes and what does not constitute “true” resistance.

Resistance as Part of Multiple Subjectivities

Instead of a contextually skewed view of resistance – a view which separates the psychological from the socio-political and which can also result in viewing resistance as a static, fixed entity that is often perceived as lack -- a better conceptualization of students, and also teachers, would be to see them both as possessing multiple subjectivities that can create knowledge in multiple and alternate ways while in an interactive relationship with each other. While these multiplicities may be fraught with contradictions, teachers and students can still engage with them in meaningful and constructive ways. In fact, it can be the struggle to create a seemingly cohesive self out of multiple and contradictory subjectivities that creates resistance in the first place. For example, James C. Field and Lori J. Olafson posit that student resistance is usually tied to a struggle for identity formation – a struggle to fulfill the multiple subject positions society demands of them while still forming a seemingly unique and cohesive identity.
They quote Bronwyn Davies who defines resistance as “the simultaneous struggle to be seamlessly meshed in the social fabric and to know and to signal oneself as a being with specificity” (70). Furthermore, Robert Brooke writes that often students resist the often narrowly limiting subjectivity placed upon them by the educational institution by engaging in behavior which he terms “underlife” -- writing notes in class, talking to friends, etc – because they have no other outlet for expressing the multiple sides of themselves that their school subjectivity excludes (141). In this way, student resistance, then, can be an effort by students to integrate multiple sides of themselves in more meaningful, cohesive ways. However, as Lindquist points out, instead of simply labeling this identity struggle as resistance and eschewing it, teachers should find a way to constructively utilize the knowledge produced by these multiple subjectivities, even if some of these subjectivities have been traditionally outlawed in the classroom. By helping students connect a school identity with an identity they may not associate with their school role, teachers may, through a dialogic relationship with students, be able to reach students in fundamental ways, helping students construct knowledge that has more powerful ties with their home and community life.

However, because teachers cannot see outside of their subjectivity, even educators who are aware of students’ multiple subjectivities and try to utilize them within their pedagogy can still fall into a pedagogy of lack. For instance, Patrick McGee, inspired by Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic dynamic of transference, outlines a pedagogy in which teachers, in the role of analysts, guide students from thinking of the teacher “as the subject who is supposed to know (675),” to realizing how language is not a “simple and direct expression” of knowledge or the objective, outside world, but is merely comprised of symbols that, although they are created through “the cultural frame and linguistic conventions,” refer only to themselves (674). Armed
with this realization, students are then supposed to interpret for themselves how these symbols have shaped their subjectivities. However, although the student is supposed to analyze his or her own subconscious, this process is still managed by the teacher who could easily see “true” analysis as only that which falls under the teacher’s definition of resistance – and within the teacher’s experience of subjectivity. Welsh writes that “this move only deepens and broadens the impact of deficit judgment, for it views that unconscious community of other voices as contributing to the present failures of consciousness. Not just the present individual, but everything he or she has been, is, and might want to become is implicated” (561). So, even with the goal of better understanding the student as inhabiting complex, multiple subjectivities, teachers can still associate deficit with difference and then, by appropriating the other, define the other as self. Ultimately, this refusal to see the other leads educators to recognize only certain forms of resistance that originate from their own subjectivities, blinding them to forms of resistance that originate from experiences other than their own or causing them to see alternative forms of resistance as illegitimate forms that need to be “fixed” with pedagogy.

It is because students’ perspectives on resistance, with all their contradictions, need to be seriously paid attention to that I conducted an exploratory study on student resistance to writing and writing instruction in the classroom, exploring what attitudes, beliefs, and motivations students, whom teachers could perceive as disengaged, hold about writing and writing instruction. Furthermore, within my case studies, I recorded as much as possible students’ own views on their resistance, letting them voice as much as possible the reasons and motivations behind their disengagement and, ultimately, letting them define their resistance as much as possible. I realize that students could be considered disengaged for various reasons, exhibiting a wide range of behaviors, and even traditionally “good” students who are not considered to be
resistant by their teachers can more covertly disengage from their classes to various degrees. For
the purposes of narrowing the scope of my study, however, I focused on students who seemed
overtly to disengage from writing and/or writing instruction by being absent from class more
than the syllabus allows, not turning in assignments by the due date or at all, frequently not
turning in homework, and not attending conferences. In other words, I explored why students
seem, at least from a teacher’s perspective, to stop trying, especially since these are the students
who tend to drop out of first-year writing courses, and, by and large, probably end up dropping
out of college altogether at a faster rate than other types of students. I listened especially to these
students since I think they may offer a vital critique of current writing instruction and how it is
not adequately serving them, and their insights may offer suggestions for significant change.
Finally, I wanted to know in what ways both students and teachers could use this resistance to
better learning conditions in the classroom.

Methodology

Overview of the Study

To understand why students sometimes seem to resist writing and writing instruction, I
explored the different attitudes, beliefs, and motives that students hold about writing to further
understand how the rich interplay of socio-political and psychological forces both inside and
outside the classroom shape the resistance relationship between students and teacher. To do this,
I used case study, participant observer, and ethnographic methods. Specifically, I was interested
in studying why students act disengaged during a course. The questions about disengagement
that I explored included why students are absent from class more than the syllabus allows, why
they miss due dates, why they do not turn in work, why they do not do the assigned reading, and
why they do not engage in class activities. I also wanted to know what surrounding socio-
political institutions outside of the classroom influenced resistance and why they did so. Finally, I wanted to know in what ways students and teachers could productively use resistance to better learning conditions in the classroom. I then analyzed this data using qualitative coding methods, using each of these types of disengaged behaviors as a domain. Following in a similar fashion the case study research conducted by Francine Falk-Ross (2000) my data included audio-taped interviews with the instructor and two students, audio-taped transcripts from a third of their classes, observer field notes from this class, and any material artifacts in the way of handouts and assignments that the instructor gave to his class.

Selection of Participants

To better study the relational aspects of resistance, I chose participants for both the observation portion and the interviews from an eight-week summer Composition II (Comp II) class -- an instructor and thirteen students. I chose to conduct my study in a Comp II class because it was the most academically rigorous course in the composition series. Students in Comp II were required to not only conduct research in writing research papers, but they were also required to synthesize their sources. Comp I, on the other hand, focused mainly on the basics of helping students learn to focus, organize, and support an academic argument. Consequently, with the more rigorous focus on research and synthesis, success in Comp II seemed to be a better indicator of success with academic writing in college in general. I chose to conduct my research on a summer class because of the need for expediency with my dissertation but also because summer students are more diverse than most students taking composition classes during the school year. Many of the students are retaking the class, a situation which creates an interesting opportunity to learn about resistance particularly because the students are also more motivated to stay in the summer class since they are sacrificing part of their summer
vacation to do so. Consequently, I had a larger pool of willing participants to choose from who were motivated to finish up the semester and fully participate in my study but who had also previously resisted the course by probably becoming disengaged to some degree (Stake 4).

The participating instructor was chosen based on his willingness to participate in the study and his amount of teaching experience (Stake 4). Because pedagogy is often a large factor in influencing the relational aspects of resistance toward writing, I picked an instructor who was fairly experienced at working with students. The instructor had already spent several years teaching English abroad before teaching at Bowling Green for three years. For my two student interviews, I selected students, a male and a female, based on their willingness to participate and on evidence of behavior that seemed disengaged with the class -- missing class, not turning in assignments or homework, not doing the assigned reading, etc. Also, I selected them because they both exhibited diverse types of resistance as well as different reasons and motivations for this resistance. Also, since my participants were chosen on their willingness to participate, this did limit my research on resistance since the students had to finish out the semester. Although students who just stopped coming to class or who dropped the class half-way through the semester exhibited more extreme forms of disengaged resistance, they were not good subjects since I was able to obtain only limited data about them. This meant that my subjects were only partially engaging in a disengaged form of resistance while in the class; however, both of my subjects had engaged in more extreme forms of disengaged resistance in their past writing classes, which I also tried to explore in depth.

Interview Process

Three interviews with both the instructor and two students were especially crucial in understanding the inter-relational dynamics between students and teacher. To gain more of the
relational perspective on resistance, the interviews still followed more of an open-ended approach, although I still covered the overall agenda outlined in my interview script and previous methodological interview description (Yin 83). In other words, although as the researcher, I had a general idea of what questions I was asking, I worded the questions for the context of the situation and posed follow-up questions where necessary to gain a richer understanding of resistance. Furthermore, without giving away my research question, I tried to enlist as much insight into reasons for resistance as possible from all the informants.

To understand resistance better from the instructor’s perspective, I used the first instructor interview to explore his initial experiences and insights teaching students who seem to resist writing and writing instruction, as well as his attitudes toward these students and these experiences. I also wanted to explore the instructor’s own attitudes, motivations, and beliefs about writing and writing instruction as well, although unfortunately I was only able to do this to a limited degree. I conducted this interview in the second week of class. To understand resistance from the students’ perspective, I also used the first student interview to explore their previous experiences with writing and writing instruction, and to examine their attitudes, beliefs, and attitudes about them, examining in particular outside influences such as family, class, ethnicity, attitudes toward and histories with school in general, etc. To ensure that I elicited as many insights as possible into possible reasons for resistance from both students and the instructor, I kept questions as flexible as possible, always asking informants to explain their responses further or rephrasing a question, often more than once, so that the informant might better understand what I was asking. I conducted this interview in the second and third week of class to give me time to observe the class as a whole and find students who seem to be disengaging from their writing or the writing instruction in the class.
The second interview was conducted before midterms, on the fourth or fifth week of class, when the instructor typically has a better gauge of the dynamics of his or her class and the students have a better understanding of what class expectations are. This interview again gauged attitudes, beliefs, and motivations toward writing and writing instruction of both the instructor and the students. However, the instructor’s interview asked questions about the instructor’s perceptions and insights about any current resistance toward writing or writing instruction from students in the class. The student’s interview also asked for specific attitudes, motivations, and beliefs about writing and writing instruction in the class itself. Since the second interview asked both the instructor and students questions about specific reactions to the class, it was probably even more open-ended and flexible than the first interview.

The third interview occurred right before the end of the semester, in the sixth and seventh week of class, and served as a final gauge for attitudes, beliefs, and motivations toward writing and writing instruction from both the students and the instructor. In the instructor’s interview, I asked again for specific ways that he changed his pedagogy or tried other strategies in response to perceived resistance and if he also changed any of his previous attitudes, motivations, or beliefs about students in the process. I also asked him what motivated any change that occurred either in his perceptions or in his behavior toward students. In the student interview, I also asked students if they changed their behavior, attitudes, motivations, or beliefs about writing or writing instruction and asked them for insight on why this change occurred or not. These interviews were also particularly flexible so that I could gain more insight into why any changes or lack of changes in behavior occurred. The interviews were taped and then transcribed to gain a large database (Yin 85).
Observation Process

To triangulate my interview data in an effort to view the teacher-student relationship from as many perspectives as possible, I observed, tape-recorded, and transcribed a third of the class for the entire semester, thus obtaining several sources of evidence to increase the validity of my study (Yin 79; Lauer and Asher 40, 42). My observational role in the class was basically one of passive participant. Although I did not actively participate in the class unless invited to by the instructor or students, staying on the sidelines most of the time, I was still there in the class, in the midst of the action (Spradley 59-60). I observed the class over the course of the semester, comparing and contrasting how the instructor’s behavior or attitudes changed towards students in response to perceptions of resistance from the beginning of the semester to the end and examining students for any change that occurred in their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations toward writing and writing instruction, exploring in particular their reasons for why change did or did not happen. Even though I know that to really gather a rich ethnographic perspective on the many reasons students seem to resist writing and writing instruction I would have to observe interactions between many students and writing teachers for several years (Lauer and Asher 39), time inhibited me from this type of depth.

In each classroom setting, I taped and then transcribed a third of the classes to get as accurate a record of the actual classroom proceedings as I could. However, to record the rich nuance of detail and culture occurring in the classroom, I also wrote notes of “thick description.” While I tried to stay as factual as I could, trying to avoid direct evaluative judgments or even judgments of what was or was not resistance while recording these notes, I inevitably still interpreted behavior and made inferences about it, attempting more of what Clifford Geertz terms “thick description” than an attempt at a more objective labeling of the facts, or “thin
description” (6-7). In addition, I collected any material artifacts, including all handouts and paper documents handed out by the teacher, as well as obtaining, with student permission, copies of student writing. Also, after every class session, I wrote “cooked” notes – a reflective, immediate record of the day’s occurrences and how they relate to my research question (Falk-Ross 508-509; Spradley 58). In my cooked notes, I did make judgments and analyses about what I perceived as resistance in the classroom.

Options for Interpretation and Analysis

Although I conducted an in-depth study on student attitudes toward writing and writing instruction as well as instructor perceptions of resistance, I also tried to examine the larger social forces inside and outside of the classroom which possibly shaped both teacher and student attitudes and, consequently, the relationship between them. To do this, I tried to gather as much data as possible, recording a rich ethnographic log of the classroom culture as a whole and then triangulating that data with a more specific but equally rich recording of student and teacher backgrounds, histories, and experiences in general during the interviews, as well as gathering more specific information about both student and teachers attitudes, beliefs, and motivations toward writing and writing instruction. Then I analyzed and coded this data, looking for any emergent patterns or themes that seemed to arise or recur in all of this data. The specific steps for my observation and coding included: 1) Selecting my classroom settings, 2) Doing participant observation, 3) Making an ethnographic record, 4) Making descriptive observations, 6) Making focused observations, 7) Making a taxonomic analysis, 8) Making selective observations, 9) Making a theme analysis, 10) Writing the case study (Spradley, 1979).

In an effort to get the richest, most complex perspective possible on the relational aspects of resistance between student and teacher, my coding categories were rather fluid, although I
used types of disengaged behaviors – not turning in work on time or at all, not coming to class, not participating in class discussion, and not doing the assigned reading – loosely as over-arching domains of resistance. I looked for different patterns of inter-relational resistance, and I did not employ a strict taxonomic coding system since it would not allow for overlap among categories or multiple interpretations of one set of data. For instance, Keith Grant-Davie argues that taxonomic coding can be too reductive, causing the researcher to miss out on complexities in the data.

Theoretically, the most sensitive taxonomy would recognize such fine distinctions among the units that no two units could be classified in the same category... Therefore, to be both manageable and useful as a means of observing patterns in the data, a taxonomy must be somewhat reductive... However, the more reductive the coding system, the greater the threat to its validity – to its faithfulness to the data. (277)

Also, while Lauer and Asher advocate a strict taxonomic coding of data, which at least two separate coders separately agree upon so that they see the same patterns in the data, to achieve validity (31), all this method really ensures is that two coders can code in the same way (Davie 283). It does not ensure that data will be interpreted accurately. It definitely does not ensure that the researcher will be able to collect or interpret ethnographic data from multiple perspectives. In fact, as Thomas Newkirk argues, during data interpretation, it is impossible for researchers to refrain from imposing a narrative structure on their data, with or without a rigorous coding system (135).

So, instead of arguing that I employed a valid coding system that ensured the reliability of the findings in my data, I would rather argue that my data was a text – a specific text, which, like any other text, I, as the reader, imposed an interpretation on which is limited to my specific
subjectivity and my perspective as a researcher. This also means that, as a text, my data may be read in several different ways and elicit multiple interpretations, that, while they may be illuminating in their own way, are not necessarily more correct than another.

Of course, my interpretations will also inevitably be influenced by my position as an observer. While I was not observing my own class, I was still not new to the discourse community I was observing. As a teacher, I knew all the educational terms used, and I was definitely an insider within this community. While my insider status meant that I could understand the cultural context of most of the terms used by my informants, it also meant that there was a danger that, as an insider, I could over-interpret data or, conversely, miss data that seemed so natural to the context of teaching, that they were invisible to me. For instance, discussing some of the dangers inherent in familiarity, Beverly J. Moss writes, “As insiders, we too must deal with our own ethnocentrism and the mental baggage we carry, precisely because of our memberships in the communities we study” (168). So, while a researcher’s preconceived interpretations can blind him or her to more accurate interpretations of a discourse in which he or she is not a part, a researcher who is well versed in this discourse still may encounter similar problems for the same reasons.

However, being an insider still offers a researcher an important perspective to learn from, even if it does not ensure complete reliability. As Glenda Bissex argues, a researcher involved within the community he or she is studying can offer insights that an outsider would not be able to make because, as she quotes Paul Diesing, “An observer who is not emotionally involved will be unable to empathize, to see things from the perspective of his [or her] subject, and therefore will miss much of the meaning of what he sees. Consequently he [or she] will not know how to ask the right questions and look in the right places” (qtd. in 13). So, while I was not as
emotionally involved with my subjects as I would have been had they been my own students, as a teacher, I was still able to imagine them as my students and, in this way, was better able to empathize with both the students and the instructor. Consequently, my status as insider did not necessarily entitle me to an omniscient perspective or interpretation; however, it did yield potentially illuminating and possibly more intuitive interpretations than I otherwise would have had.

With my dissertation, then, I explore student resistance from a more global perspective than has commonly been done in the past since I define resistance in a Foucauldian sense as part of a power dynamic which is comprised of many players and many aspects. To gain a full understanding of the multiple components of this resistance relationship, I look at as many aspects of student experience as I can without limiting my perspective to only one aspect. Doing this is important since students’ struggle to define a coherent identity within the multiple and often conflicting roles that different power relationships force on them is often labeled resistance. In this way, I also hope to be more attuned to the multiple subjectivities, or multiple societal power relationships, students possess, noticing when they conflict in ways that could be labeled as resistance, but also noting ways that these multiple subjectivities can be utilized to create knowledge in unique and engaging ways.

In both the next chapter and chapter three, I will present and partially analyze my two case studies, drawing from a more dynamic, multi-faceted, Foucauldian definition of resistance. In the final chapter, I will also use a relational, Foucauldian lens with which to view resistance, drawing potential implications from my case studies about student resistance at Bowling Green and paying special attention to their local context. However, since this is only an exploratory study, using only two specific cases, drawing out broader implications for writing instruction and
student resistance across the board, even for Bowling Green, is limited. Because the scope of my research is so limited, however, my study will point to further research to be done on a broader scale that could lead to larger implications for instruction on at least a local scale. Chapter two will examine how my subject resisted an oppressive role model identity and an overly rigid gendered identity he had imposed on his teacher and his role as a student.
“I also like to call myself Chosen,” my African-American informant told me as he sat back in his chair. He looked exactly like most college boys, wearing the standard baggy black T-shirt with baggy shorts, black high-tops, and a chain around his neck, except that the chain was attached to a pendant with a picture of Jesus on it. “I am so unperfect, and I feel that God has chosen me to do his will and chosen me to be able to help other people,” he continued. In this and many other ways, Chosen was an apt name for my informant. His family had chosen him to be the first person to go to college as a role model for his brothers, sisters, and cousins. The pressures of chosen role model also extended to Chosen’s relationships with his African-American Toledo community as well since he felt chosen to be a role model for other African-American boys both at his mother’s day care center, at which he regularly helped out, and also at his Baptist church.

Because Chosen defined his relationship within all his different communities – school, church, family, and work – as one of role model, it made fully inhabiting the role of student extremely difficult, if not impossible, for him. To complicate inhabiting the role of student even more for Chosen was the fact that his perceptions of how he and others, particularly the instructor, should successfully inhabit that role were inevitably influenced by his past experiences in school, straining his relationships with the instructor and, to a certain extent, the students in the class. In this chapter, I will show how Chosen initially resisted fully and constructively inhabiting the role of student because of his difficulty juggling multiple exemplary
roles and his misperceptions about what his and others’ roles in the writing classroom were supposed to be.

**Multiple Subjectivities**

Chosen’s subjectivity, like that of any postmodern subject, was not unified or necessarily coherent. He continually shifted from fulfilling multiple, often contradictory roles in many areas of his life: school, work, family, and church. However, Foucault argues that it is not the roles themselves that form subjectivity, but the positions within these roles that a person chooses to take. In defining the power relationship of subjugation that defines subjectivity, Foucault argues, “It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions . . . It is nevertheless, always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action” (“Subject” 427). In this way, subjectivity becomes defined through the action that a person chooses to take that is selected from an array of possible, though not limitless, actions he or she could have taken. It is this choice that ultimately defines the subjectivity of the individual. Furthermore, the position, or choice of actions, someone takes is often defined by that person’s sense of responsibility to the “other,” simultaneously creating a shifting relationship and subjectivity. While discussing Zygmunt Bauman and Emmanuel Levinas’ work on subjectivity, Marilyn Cooper writes, “The proximity of the ‘face’ of the unknown Other imposes an obligation on an individual, and this obligation is the grounding of both signification and subjectivity: responding to the other is the reason for speaking; responsibility for the other (subjecting one self to the other) is the act that establishes subjectivity” (151). In Chosen’s case, his subjectivity was defined primarily by his relationship and sense of responsibility to his family, especially his mother, who seemed to be the predominant “other” in his life. Out of a sense of family responsibility, he took up the position of exemplar, which seemed to be the
primary unifying theme defining his subjectivity. However, because the demands of being a role model were often multiple and conflicting, what at first seemed to be only resistance was partially also his inability to physically meet all of these demands.

A Role Model at School

The first reason that Chosen felt the responsibility to take up the subject position of role model, defining his relationship with his school community in this way, was because of his relationship with his family. He knew he was the first person in his immediate family to go to college, thus making him strive toward becoming a role model student. First of all, he was very aware that his parents, particularly his mother, had sacrificed and worked hard their whole lives to not only send him to college, but to send him to preparatory school -- a private Catholic school in Toledo – so that he would have the skills to succeed in college once he got there. Because of this sacrifice, Chosen felt he had no choice but to succeed in college, saying, “I didn’t get any scholarships. My parents are pretty much paying for college with the help of a loan that I took out . . . and I feel the pressure of doing well and getting on my feet enough so that way I can get a job -- so that way my parents don’t have to worry about it. I feel like, you know, a burden on them just a little bit.” Succeeding in college, then, was a way for Chosen to pay his parents back financially, but also a way of proving to them that their sacrifice had been worth it.

A Role Model at Home

However, it also seemed that part of Chosen’s sense of responsibility came from his position as a first-born son – a position which he negotiated by becoming a role model in his relationships at home as well. “You know, I’m supposed to have had the glory life compared to everybody else. You know, I am one of the first grandsons, or one of the oldest grandsons, and you know, it’s just a lot of stuff like that that I’m the first. I’m the first child in my family. . . .
You know I feel pressure in that in trying to do well.” So, as the first born male, not only did his family expect him to succeed, but his parents expected him to influence his brothers, sisters, and cousins to be successful too, blazing the trail of success for them in a way that perpetually defined his relationship towards his family as a role model.

A Role Model at Work

His sense of responsibility to his family positioned him in a role model relationship to his work as well, forcing him to juggle even more multiple responsibilities. At work, he was expected to help his mother with her day care center, at least while he was staying at home in Toledo. The day care center was open from six o’clock in the morning until eight-thirty in the evening when the last child went home, and Chosen was expected to help his mother continuously with breaks only for class and his physical therapy sessions, partially because he knew that it was the money from this business that was sending him to school in the first place. He said, “So, I feel like even if she didn’t ask me to be over there, I feel like I have an obligation to my mom because, you know, it’s a family business. That’s what’s really helping me to come to school anyway.” However, it was not enough that he merely help her out at her work. Here too he was supposed to be a role model, especially to the African-American boys he took care of, saying “But I love kids now, I guess because I can see how kids now, me being a young, adult black male, especially the little kids . . . [see] an African-American male that’s positive and not, you know, fulfilling all the stereotypes a lot of people have. I feel I can have an impact on the little kids, especially the little boys.” It is in this way that Chosen’s sense of responsibility towards his family positioned him in a role model relationship towards his work as well where he responsibly helped his mother and acted as role model to the children he took care of.
A Role Model at Church

The pressure to be a role model also extended to Chosen’s spiritual life as well. His family, especially his mother, expected him to be a spiritual leader, positioning him in a role model relationship here too. For instance, when his teenage cousin unexpectedly had a brain aneurysm, Chosen’s mother chose him -- not anyone else in the family – to drive down to the Cleveland hospital specifically so that Chosen could pray for him. “She made me drive up there, and of all the other siblings that were able to go up there, I was the only one that was able to go up there. . . . I was going to have to go up there and pray over him.” Nevertheless, the pressure to be a spiritual role model also took its toll, although in somewhat different ways. Like the pressure to help his mom at his work, being a spiritual role model also took time away from school. For example, he missed his basic writing classes while he was up in Cleveland praying for his cousin. As a result, he missed a due date to turn in a paper, although in this particular instance, his teacher was understanding about his family emergency and extended the due date for his paper.

Role Model Complications: Lack of Time

All these competing roles in which he was expected to be exemplary, gave Chosen little time to actually be the model student, even though this was one of the areas where he most strived to be a role model. He was often extremely tired and had little time to do homework or write his papers. Often he would have no chance to write his papers until after 8:30 at night, and, because he often still had even more family responsibilities when he got home, usually he would not get his homework started until after everyone else in the family had gone to bed. “Maybe it’s not good to stay up all night, probably not. Probably I should do it more during the day, but for me and the way my household is, it’s hard to do it during the day. . . . I mean too many
people joking and laughing and calling my name and asking me to go do this, asking me to go do that. . . . And at night time everyone’s asleep, I can focus. I can just sit there.” Because of all these pressures to be the model son in every aspect of his life – at school, home, work, and church -- it was very hard for Chosen to always be the model student, even though he fully intended to be. In an effort to juggle his roles then, he would hastily write papers or, sometimes, not turn work in at all just because he did not physically have enough time. As the semester neared to a close and finals drew near, Chosen told me, “because of the papers I was trying to do . . . I probably got 12 hours of sleep it seems like all week last week. That and being sick. You know, just everything else. It’s just been, I was up, I’ve been up like all night for like three nights straight trying to write papers, trying to make sure I got them right, and revisions and stuff like that. Just trying to make sure I got them right.” In other words, at times, what seemed to be procrastination or some form of resistance -- not turning in work on time -- was largely due to just not having enough time to do everything in perfectly fulfilling his multiple roles and relationships as a role model.

**Role Model Complications: Procrastination**

Nevertheless, even though he often did not have a lot of time to begin with, there also were times when, overwhelmed with the demanding pressures of inhabiting a role model subjectivity and maintaining all of these role model relationships, Chosen resisted the pressures of his subjectivity and these relationships by procrastinating. For instance, Chosen equated his role model pressure to do it all and be everything to everyone as being Superman, ruefully joking about it since he knew that the ability to be a role model in every single part of his life was usually impossible. “I wear a little dog’s tag that says Superman, but it doesn’t mean that I’m really Superman.” Naturally, all this pressure took its toll, so to resist the oppressive pressure to
succeed, Chosen would procrastinate with assignments, often turning them in late or, at times, not at all, explaining that sometimes the pressure to do so much for so many got so overwhelming that he wanted to give up. “So, it gets a little hard and makes me want to say I just want to take a break. It makes me say I just don’t want to do that. I’ll just go to sleep instead of doing homework sometimes.” With the class, although he never completely gave up, he would resist the overwhelming pressure to succeed by giving himself little breaks – rarely turning in his exploratory drafts and often turning in rough and final drafts late.

By procrastinating, Chosen, in fact, seemed to be resisting oppressive aspects of his role model subjectivity and relationships, engaging in procrastination as a way of renegotiating his subjectivity or redefining his identity within these relationships in a way that was less oppressive for him. In fact, it is this struggle for identity that, according to Field and Olafson, is at the core of most acts of student resistance. As already mentioned in my introduction, they write, “[Bronwyn] Davies characterizes the struggle [for identity] as a central tension of childhood that comes from ‘the simultaneous struggle to be seamlessly meshed in the social fabric and to know and to signal oneself as a being with specificity’” (70). Thus, through procrastination, Chosen was resisting the role model role and relationships with his social world – his social spheres of school, home, work, and church. Procrastination, then, became a way of opting out of this role, if only temporarily, giving him a space where he felt freer to define himself in alternate ways.

Positive Aspects of Procrastination

With writing specifically, Chosen procrastinated because it was a way of resisting the perfectionism that came from constantly striving to be a role model. He was afraid that his perfectionism would cause him to get so immersed in the details that he would become overwhelmed and muddle or confuse his writing somehow. He told me, “I mean I think I over
think things, and I can want to do some much. To do a good job, I end up trying so hard that I end up messing it up in the first place.” His particular fear was that he would over write by repeating himself, which made him hesitant in offering supporting details in his papers. Unfortunately, this fear of repetition meant that he often under developed his points, and even though he was very aware that under development was often a problem in his writing, he did not seem to know how to solve it. “And like even now writing this critique paper, [the instructor] put on there, developing my points. I’ve had problems developing my points where I guess, and actually when I’m writing I can feel myself do it, I will go to start to develop it, and I don’t want to put too much, so I back off a little bit, and I end up under doing it.” In an effort to cope with his perfectionism, Chosen tended to back off, rather than become too overly immersed in his writing, saying, “I try not to, you know, think about my writing too much because if I do, then it will really be bad.” He would often put off writing his papers until the very last minute – usually late the night before the paper was due. In this way, he was forced to pay only the bare minimum of attention to his writing and could not overwhelm himself with the details. For instance, for the final draft of his critique paper, the first paper he was assigned to write, he told me that he purposefully put off revising the paper until the night before. “So, the night before, it was actually due for the final draft, that was when I went in to fix it. I didn’t really bother.” By procrastinating, he could overcome his fear that perfectionism would drive him to get overwhelmed in the details because he simply did not have enough time. In this way, he could overcome his fear of overwhelming details enough to at least finish his paper – even if it was not perfect.

For Chosen, procrastination was a successful form of resistance because it renegotiated his identity as a perfectionistic writer, causing him to distance himself from his writing in a way
that reshaped his relationship to writing in a more functional way. In a way, Chosen’s procrastination could be considered a form of resistance that Brooke terms “contained underlife”: “behaviors which undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation” (141), but “which attempt to fit into ‘existing institutional structures without introducing pressure for radical change’” (143). By procrastinating, Chosen was undercutting, lessening, his role or his identity as a writer. In some way, he may have been afraid of identifying too closely with the role of a writer because, to him, that would also mean becoming lost in the role of perpetually becoming a role model writer or the perfect writer – a role which would simultaneously consume his identity while thrusting him toward inevitable failure. After all, no one can be perfect, especially when it comes to writing. By procrastinating though, he was able to distance himself from this destructive identity and redefine himself as a more pragmatic writer who just needed to get his paper finished, even if the details were not all perfect. And, although his procrastination made him resist the role of role model writer – a role writing teachers challenge students to strive for – it still let him remain within the school system; he was able to finish the paper without becoming consumed by his writing role and losing other aspects of his identity.

Procrastination was also a positive form of resistance for Chosen in some other ways as well. While not giving himself enough time to pay close attention to detail at least helped him cope with his perfectionism enough to get the paper finished, it also gave him more time to think about his paper. In his mind, he would rehearse how he was going to write his paper, working out for himself a mental outline of his points. When it came time to actually write his paper at the last minute, he found it was often easier since he didn’t have to think so hard. His points were already there in his mind, and he did not have to think about them as much while he was actually writing; he just had to write down what he had already mentally rehearsed. He
explained, “Well, I guess sometimes procrastination is kind of good, but only to a certain extent. If I think about it, think about it, then I will have an idea to go just type it. It’s all coming straight, you know, instead of thinking about it, writing it down, and chang[ing it].” To Chosen, this ability to spend time rehearsing his writing freed him and made his writing seem more spontaneous and natural. In fact, he compared his rehearsed school writing, which was usually labored and difficult, to his spontaneous personal writing which he loved. For instance, he particularly enjoyed writing poems and songs about God, which he called spreading his message, since there were no seemingly arbitrary rules he had to follow. Instead, he simply wrote what he felt. By rehearsing his school writing beforehand, he felt freer to write what he felt, writing spontaneously as he did in his personal writing, because he already knew what he was going to say. He told me, “It’s almost like it allows me to be more free, like free-writing, and just, like, you know, like I said with my regular writing, with my message or whatever, it’s kind of like just me straight from my brain right onto the paper.” Consequently, in some ways, procrastination for Chosen was also very positive. It gave him the time to think about what he was going to say and put it all together so that his writing was more fluent and natural. -- a process which Peter Elbow calls “cooking” (40) and Donald Murray calls rehearsal (22).

Because procrastination enabled Chosen to write more naturally, this form of resistance to his role model subjectivity may also have helped him become freer in his thinking, more creative in his writing, and ultimately better able to inhabit the role of writer. For instance, Brooke argues that good writing “involves being able to challenge one’s assigned roles long enough that one can think originally; it involves living in conflict with accepted (expected) thought and action” (141). Certainly, procrastination gave Chosen the time to rehearse his writing long enough so that he could begin to make his writing truly his own. In this way, he
could resist the often formulaic thought patterns that often correspond to formulaic writing structures academic writing can impose and write in a way that was more genuine, original, and meaningful. Through this time of rehearsal, he could also challenge his assigned subjectivity as a dutiful, role model student who, because he is always trying to please others, can never truly think for himself and reach for a role he felt more comfortable with – that of poet, musician, and lyricist. Finally, procrastination enabled him to more fully inhabit the role of writer by giving him the ability to enrich his student writer role with aspects of writing that he had more personal ownership and control over.

**Negative Aspects of Procrastination**

However, procrastination was not always a successful form of resistance. Chosen was also very aware that procrastination hurt his grades and that he was often capable of writing better papers than he actually turned in. About his hastily written critique paper, he said, “And it might not, you know, be to the best of my ability. And honestly, this last paper, the critique paper, I got a B-, and I was actually surprised that I got that because, honestly, the rough draft I did 3:00 in the morning the day before it was due.” In fact, he was also very aware that his procrastination hurt him in other classes as well, not just English, saying, “I would say that I’m a 4.0 student who settles for a 2.5 because I procrastinate.” Procrastination, then, did not always lead to better writing but, instead, often led to hastily written work that was not as clearly thought out as it should have been.

Finally, procrastination did not always help him successfully resist the negative impact of perfectionism that his role model subjectivity and relationships engendered. Even with the time and distance from his writing that procrastination gave him, his perfectionism would sometimes drive him to simply not turn in papers, even if he had finished drafting or revising them. It is for
this reason that Elbow calls this type of writing a “dangerous method” and refers to it as “pressure cooking.” Elbow admits that while procrastination can often decrease perfectionistic pressures, sometimes it only increases them as the writer, strapped for time, realizes that he or she simply does not have enough time to do an adequate job and, so, simply gives up (41-42).

This was particularly the case with the final draft of Chosen’s third assigned paper – a research paper with synthesis in which he was supposed to use both assigned readings and research he had found on his own. He simply never turned it in. When I asked him why, he replied:

It was, you know, when I had wrote [sic] pretty much the whole paper, and I read it, and it was terrible. I thought it was terrible. [The instructor] didn’t think it was terrible [as a rough draft]. So, if I thought it was terrible, I couldn’t even imagine what [the instructor] was going to think of it [as a final draft]. So, I was like, okay, I’m going to ask him for more time. And he gave me more time. But it still got to the point where it was still very hard to write the paper, and writing it, writing it out. . . . In the way that [the paper] was going, I couldn’t revise it. I couldn’t even really write the paper in the first place.

When I asked him why he thought the paper was so terrible, he responded by using a rap metaphor – the paper was freestyle, but none of the parts went together.

My little brother likes to rap. . . . And he just takes any word . . . it doesn’t have to make any sense. It’s just words that rhyme and words that go together in a certain way. To me, that was kind of the way my paper was. I was talking about peer pressure. I was talking about all these different things about peer pressure, but it really wasn’t an argumentative paper. It really wasn’t making any kind of sense. It was just, you know, trying to look for something that wasn’t there almost.
Overcome with the details of his paper, Chosen could not see the overall picture of how all the
details worked together to build a cohesive, argumentative point. It was if he saw each piece of
the paper separately and didn’t know how to put them all together. Unable to see the big picture,
he simply gave up. Although both the instructor and I persuaded him to finally turn in his final
draft, it was the one paper in the class that he did not pass. And after finally turning it in, he
never revised it further, choosing instead to simply take a No Pass.

For Chosen, then, procrastination was ultimately a partial or contradictory form of
resistance. While it did allow him to negotiate his role as a writer and his relationship to writing
in often positive ways, it did not always work and, in fact, it often ended up back-firing, creating
the very situation that Chosen’s role model perfectionism was striving to avoid – failure. By not
finishing his work or not doing adequate work, he was creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, not
empowering or emancipating himself in constructive ways. If as Giroux writes, “resistance must
have a revealing function, one that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical
opportunities for self-reflection and for struggle in the interest of self-emancipation and social
emancipation” (109), then Chosen was not completely successful in his resistance. In fact, in his
failure, he may have been more complicit than resistant towards the negative stereotypes that
cast African-Americans as unsuccessful as well as complicit with staying within working class
boundaries. Not turning in work, then, becomes a resistance of complicity, a form of resistance
that Giroux and Stanley Aronowitz claim often happens to working class students. “Their
rebellion against school authority . . . insures that they will get working class jobs rather than
make it up the ladder of economic and social mobility” (170).

Nevertheless, even though using procrastination as a strategy of resistance sometimes
backfired and failed in empowering Chosen, it was still a legitimate form of resistance because it
offered a critique of a school system that often runs on a schedule that does not make room for or even acknowledge the many responsibilities working class students often deal with. Colleges often work off of a liberal education assumption that everyone who comes to college can completely devote themselves to the life of the mind and that economic need is only a peripheral issue that should never interfere with school’s demanding pace. Adrienne Rich describes the difficulties of working class students best when she describes the economic plight of most of the basic writing students who entered New York’s City College during the 1970’s open admissions policy:

The student who leaves the campus at three or four o’clock after a day of classes, goes to work as a waitress, or clerk, or hash-slinger, or guard, comes home at ten or eleven o’clock to a crowded apartment with TV audible in every corner – what does it feel like to this student to be reading say, Byron’s ‘Don Juan’ or Jane Austen for a class the next day? . . . How does one compare this experience of college with that of the Columbia students down at 116th Street in their quadrangle of gray stone dormitories, marble steps, flowered borders, wide spaces of time and architecture in which to talk and think? (7)

Unfortunately for Chosen, his time was cut even shorter by the fact that he was taking a summer school course – trying to cram over sixteen weeks into a little less than eight while still helping his mother at the daycare center, taking care of his siblings, and also taking another class. School often runs on a mercilessly demanding and short schedule, teaching students more that learning is actually about learning on time if they are to learn at all, as if a student were in a race, than it teaches them about actual learning. With summer school this pace was even more intensified than in usual class work.
Finally, even though Chosen’s procrastination was a resistance strategy that failed in some ways, the failure was only partial. In some cases, the strategy worked for him by helping him construct a more functional relationship with writing and with his multiple communities. Furthermore, the fact that Chosen’s resistance was partial and contradictory creates a tension that shows learning. While Chosen sometimes resisted the rigidly inflexible school schedule by not turning in papers at all, engaging in a form of resistance that was complicit with the status quo of his race and class, this resistance still acted as a critique of schooling. At other times, his other acts of resistance such as procrastination and rehearsal enabled him to turn in better papers than he normally would have, which were fully successful forms of resistance even though they worked within the system of schooling without inciting radical change.

**Gendered Teachers, Gendered Classes**

Although the pressures and constraints of inhabiting multiple role model relationships simultaneously interfered with Chosen’s ability to fully inhabit the role of writing student, misperceptions about his own role as a student as well as the instructor’s role also interfered as well, affecting his relationship with both his teacher and his classmates. Most of these role misperceptions were formed from previous relationships he had with other writing teachers in the past. The most prominent misperception he had about the role of the teacher was that he perceived teachers in extremely gendered ways and, consequently, defined his relationships with them in these gendered ways as well.

He seemed to perceive male teachers as so extremely rule-oriented that they were more concerned with matters of correctness than they were with content. These rules were also strict, with little or no room for negotiation, writer agency, or choice. The male teacher ran the classroom with efficient, time-on-task authoritarian control. The teacher spoke and students
listened. When this was not the case, students worked silently and individually because individual achievement was of paramount importance. Finally, a male teacher was primarily concerned with preparing his students for the “real world.” There was no room for debate or discussion because he was teaching students how it was to be done in the “real” professional world or, at least, the real academic world of college. Consequently, there was a major emphasis placed on writing correctness, especially grammar. For instance, Chosen had this to say about his male tenth grade teacher: “My sophomore year, I barely passed that class, and he, he was more challenging. . . . Now, it’s not that he did anything wrong. It’s just that he, he always talked to us about preparing us for college and how college would be. . . . When the final paper came, it was like, regardless of, I mean, this is how he felt about it. . . . I tried really hard and there was nothing I could do to get any better grade.” When I asked him why he consistently did poorly on tenth grade papers, he said it was because his grammar and the format of the paper were never correct. “With the format, I just couldn’t pass this paper. . . . I always have problems with sometimes grammar.” Consequently, Chosen seemed to perceive that because of the male teacher’s authoritarian control, there was no real room for resistance in male classrooms. Instead, students were supposed to inhabit learning roles of passive recipients of knowledge, blindly accepting all authority.

Because the Comp II instructor was male, Chosen also seemed to attribute to him male traits of strictness and time-on-task, authoritarian control, especially over tasks that showcased individual achievement. He told me that his Comp II instructor initially reminded him of his tenth grade teacher, whom, although he respected, he also resented and feared. Describing how he initially saw the Comp II instructor, he said:
Well, he comes across very strong. . . [T]he activities that he does as far as getting us into groups . . . whereas in some classes they say, ‘Get into groups,’ and then you do the work for like 10 seconds and then talk and chit chat, it’s not like that. The way the activities are set up is where you do the activity but you’re really kind of working by yourself anyway to kind of do it so that way you can understand. . . . He makes sure that there’s no play time in class. It’s like work. If you’re going to be in school to learn, you’re going to learn. And that’s kind of how the other guy [the tenth grade teacher] is.

So, while the Comp II instructor did assign group work, Chosen still thought of this group work as a veiled way to assess individual achievement. The group was not important. His individualized response was, and, really, he felt responsible to finish the group projects on his own, not within the group. This class work also holds primary importance in Chosen’s mind. In the emphasis on promptly finishing work and learning, he equates it with the work of the “real world.”

In contrast, Chosen seemed to perceive female teachers as more flexible in their rules. They seemed more concerned with fantasy, play, and meaning in both writing and in the classroom. Grammar and correctness were secondary to imagination and creativity. Work was shared communally. Group achievement was stressed over individual achievement. For instance, he described his female ninth grade teacher in strictly feminine terms, equating the same traits with his female basic writing teacher as well.

My teacher, well first of all, she was a female. . . . I guess it was a little different in the sense that . . . girls kind of like to do dress up stuff a little bit. Like she did a lot of where we read a story . . . [and] we actually acted it out in class. . . . She had more games like
you know where she gave us prizes, more like I guess elementary type stuff, you know to make it seem more interesting, to make it seem like it’s not so much work, work, work.

In stark contrast to how Chosen perceived his Comp II instructor, the female teacher was primarily concerned with fantasy and play. However, this type of learning does not seem important to Chosen. He writes this feminine pedagogy off as elementary -- a frivolous, vain activity that girls like to engage in. The emphasis on fantasy was far removed from any “real world” significance. It may be fun, but Chosen did not seem to think it will help him later in life, or, at least, in college.

Finally, Chosen seemed to perceive his female teachers as genuinely caring about their students. They liked to chat with students and wanted to know how they were doing. Concessions were made for due dates if family or personal crises occurred. For instance, Chosen said that his female basic writing teacher was “very genuinely concerned about the students. She really wanted us to pass. She really cared about us doing the work.” However, because of their concessions, female teachers could be taken advantage of while male teachers could not. Chosen said that his female basic writing teacher “got a little bit frustrated sometimes because people sometimes took her niceness for weakness a little bit. I have to admit, I kind of did a little bit. I wasn’t disrespecting or anything, but sometimes I would be a little late to class because I knew she wouldn’t say anything.” But even while the female teachers’ concessions could be perceived as a form of weakness, they also in a way encouraged active resistance or active negotiation of how students learned in a way that Chosen’s perceptions of male-led classes did not.

Of course, part of the reason Chosen gendered his teachers and instruction was because of a disconnect between literature and writing instruction. His ninth grade class was most likely a literature class in which they read Shakespearean plays like Macbeth, discussed them, and
acted them out. However, Chosen equated literature with fantasy and seemed to see no purpose to it other than entertainment. It certainly had no purpose in the “real world” outside of the classroom. In contrast, his tenth grade class was a writing class – a class which was all about the rules of correct writing and so seemed to have a direct connection with the “real world.” Therefore, to Chosen, the study of literature seemed to be a feminine pursuit, while composition and writing instruction was a masculine one.

Because Comp II was concerned primarily with synthesis and engaging in more academic types of writing and research than what he had done in the past, Chosen also immediately equated his male teacher with the attributes he associated with his previous male writing teacher. For instance, in describing why he felt his Comp II class was more masculine, he told me:

Like we’re not really reading stories. . . . I remember in high school reading Macbeth. You know, it’s different things like that. Understanding, you know just taking information from there and trying to understand what the author was doing. Pretty much there’s nothing like that. In this class, it’s pretty much, okay, the different types of writing, you know, for the most part, and understanding how to write an effective paper in an argument or a critique, you know, and different aspects of that. Just pretty much just straight forward writing.

Chosen, then, masculinized his writing classes while feminizing his literature classes.

Of course, Chosen’s dichotomy between feminine literature classes and masculine writing classes seems at first to directly oppose how composition and literature have historically been represented within the English department. As Susan Miller argues, because pedagogical work was largely feminized, perceived as it was as under-theorized and given a handmaiden status to knowledge production (Mentzell Ryder et al 43), the teaching of writing was largely
ignored within English departments that were primarily concerned with studying and teaching literature (128). Consequently, composition was primarily taught by women who could be hired temporarily at a moment’s notice and then conveniently let go if no longer needed. Miller writes, “As Sue Ellen Holbrook infers, from her statistical analysis of this “Women’s Work,” it is likely that about two-thirds of those who teach writing are women” (123). Men, however, usually taught literature classes and, with the luxury of tenure, had fewer teaching obligations so that, following in Francis Child’s tradition, they could focus on their “real work” of literary scholarship (126).

However, although it seems as if literature took a dominating masculine role over the feminized position of composition, for the rest of the academy and the outside public these clear distinctions were often muddled if not reversed completely. Because it is the hard sciences that really take the legitimized, masculine position of true knowledge production within the academy, the academy has traditionally perceived English studies as a whole as a dilettantish, non-serious and therefore feminized area of work. Miller writes, “The cultural identity of anyone in English shared the upstart, nonserious, vulgar (as in vernacular), dilettantish, and certainly nonscientific qualities ascribed to their new pursuits” (127). And certainly, because the academy does not generally take literary studies seriously, certainly not as seriously as it does the sciences, the public does not recognize it as serious either, seeing it more as play or a fun pursuit or hobby rather than any type of serious knowledge production. In contrast, while the English department historically has rarely formally recognized composition studies in its own right, it is composition that holds primary importance for the public. Certainly, literacy issues have always taken and still do take primary importance in the public mind when it comes to shaping educational policy, as is evident with the “new” literacy crises that seem to spring up about every ten years (143),
even though the public does not recognize any difference between the teaching of literature and the teaching of composition (127). Therefore, it is not at all surprising that Chosen would not distinguish a literature class from a writing class, and, instead, lump them both under the category of English. Because he saw no difference between them, he inadvertently privileged writing as masculine since he perceived it as giving him the important written literacy skills that he, and the rest of the public, thought were needed.

Chosen’s dichotomy between feminine literature classes and masculine writing classes started to break down, however, with his Basic Writing class – a class that he seemed to identify as feminine even though it was a writing class. However, he may have feminized this class because it was a basic writing class. This feminization seems to follow the analysis of Miller, Mentzell Ryder, et al. that composition has always been feminized within the academy because, instead of attending to belletristic literary texts, it attends to the low, error-ridden texts of students. Miller writes, “As in many instances in cultural history when ordinary language has been taken into an organized vision that defines it as the language of “outsiders,” composition offered a way to suppress, while noticing, ‘the body.’” She goes on to offer as an example the Harvard Board of Overseers’ report where “the grotesqueries of handwriting and of paragraphing . . . were gleefully found and reported,” reinforcing composition students as decidedly other and existing definitely outside of mainstream academic discourse (55). Therefore, if composition signifies an outsider relationship with academe, then basic writing only intensifies this relationship, signifying to both the student and the university that the student is marginal to an already outsider position.

Because of basic writing’s extreme marginalization, Chosen may have wished for the more normative position of composition, downplaying its significance by feminizing it and
questioning his place as a marginal by emphasizing that it was a review of high school, a review of what he already knew. In other words, by saying it was a review, he was also arguing that he did not really belong there. He was not really a marginal outsider to the academy – only a regular outsider. When I asked him specifically how his Basic Writing class went for him, he said, “Actually it was really easy . . . [I]f it gets to be super easy, I’ll get bored with it. . . .[I]t was extremely easy for me.” Therefore, even though this class was a writing class, a class he usually ascribed as a masculine preparatory class for the “real world,” because it was a basic writing class – a class which automatically stigmatized him as unready for academic writing -- he thought of it more as an easy, elementary review and, therefore, saw it in feminized terms. Of course, the fact that his teacher was also female probably added to his feminized perception as well.

To be fair to Chosen though, feminizing his Basic Writing class was probably a form of resistance. First of all, basic writing may have been more of a review for him than anything else. Although he did struggle in Comp II with building and supporting argumentative claims and, of course, meta-discourse, these were also issues that many of his white, middle-class Comp II classmates also struggled with as well. These are also larger global writing concerns that are thoroughly covered in Comp I. Therefore, Chosen probably was placed in basic writing, not because he was a poorer writer than his white, middle-class peers, but because he spoke more of an African-American dialect. Therefore, he had “grammar” issues that needed to be addressed in basic writing, effectively marginalizing him because of his class and racial background. For instance, when I asked him why he did so poorly in his tenth grade writing class, he said it was because “I always have problems with sometimes grammar.” Consequently, feminizing as unimportant a class which marginalized and even attempted to erase part of his racial identity,
his African-American speech patterns, may have been one clear strategy of resistance for Chosen.

Of course, as a researcher, since I did not have access to Chosen’s placement essay or basic writing papers, I do not know if this was the case. However, from reading his work in Comp II and talking to his Comp II instructor about his work, this could have been the case. For instance, when I asked Chosen’s Comp II instructor specifically about his work, he never mentioned grammar, but only mentioned that in Chosen’s second essay he “doesn’t explain why his thesis is valid. He just gives examples of what he started giving examples of in the intro. So, it just needs a bit more depth so to speak” – a problem that many other Comp II writers who did not take basic writing also had.

Gendered Student/Teacher Relationships

Even though Chosen seemed to respect male teachers since their pedagogy seemed to do more with the rules of the “real world,” his relationship with them was shaped more by distrust and even dislike because their rules were both often unclear and too rigidly enforced. Consequently, instead of actively resisting rules he did not always understand, he would resist by passively and politely disengaging. First of all, he strongly disliked his tenth grade teacher, and, at the beginning of the semester at least, had a profound distrust of his Comp II instructor. Even more significantly, however, he did extremely poorly in his tenth grade writing class, getting a D and almost failing. As a whole, since his tenth grade teacher rigidly enforced the rules in a way that left little room for making exceptions for individual student needs, he found his tenth grade teacher to be cold and uncaring. His frustration was exacerbated by the fact that he kept almost failing his papers but did not have a clear idea of what he did wrong or how he could improve future papers. “That whole year -- it was pretty bad. There was one time, I don’t remember
what the paper was, but I mean, I worked really hard on it, and I thought, I just knew that I was
going to get an A. I was like, okay, ‘This paper can not get worse than a B+, because I worked
hard on this paper. I did the research. I did everything he wants.’ And I got a D-.’’ So, because
Chosen did not have a clear sense of actually what the rules of good writing were for his basic
writing teacher, they seemed arbitrary, deepening his distrust and disengagement with his male
teacher even more.

While for the most part Chosen never actively resisted receiving these poor grades
because he seemed to think that he deserved them even though he may not have clearly
understood why he deserved them, there was one paper in particular on which he at least began
to actively resist his grade. In this case, he felt that the teacher was so uncaring, he completely
misread his paper and wrongly failed him. For this particular paper, Chosen was supposed to
describe something without naming it. The teacher, then, would grade the paper on how well he
could identify this person, place, or thing based on the description. Of course, always attracted
to writing about religious topics, Chosen decided to describe God, using the Bible or “the word”
as part of his description.

I just chose to do something about God, you know. . . John 1 says, “In the beginning,
there was the word. And the word was with God and the word was God.” And I used
that in there without saying that it was God. And on the back, we were supposed to put
what the name was, and I put God, but in the actual describing of it, I was saying the
Bible or “the word.” And he thought that that’s what it was [the Bible], and I failed that
assignment without him looking on the back to see that what I really was saying was
God.
So, although Chosen seemed to respect his male teacher’s emphasis on rules since they were supposed to prepare him for the real world, he seemed to begin to realize that this emphasis on rules also was too rigid since it did not allow for multiple interpretations of a biblical text, for instance. It left little room for his agency as a writer and the ability to negotiate with his teacher over the meaning of his text. The teacher was only capable of reading his own literal interpretation of the text without seeing any further symbolism in it. Furthermore, the teacher’s emphasis on correctness seemed to be so extreme that there was no room for revision. A performance with no rehearsal, writing was simply supposed to be perfect the first time.

Consequently, Chosen began to resist, actively asking his teacher to change his grade instead of passively accepting it. “And I told him about it. And he said he didn’t know. And it was too late to change the grades. It was in the computer, so I was stuck now. So I was like, okay, now what do I do?” Even though this request was ultimately denied, this resistance was still constructive since it enabled Chosen to finally begin asking the instructor about his grading criteria when he asked him why he initially received a low grade. Finally, with this active questioning, Chosen started becoming more actively involved in his learning process as well.

Part of the reason Chosen’s tenth grade teacher may have misread his text is because a teacher’s reading of a student’s text is always also a reading of the student, the teacher, and the teacher’s perception of his or her relationship with the teacher. In “Reading Students, Reading Ourselves: Revising the Teacher’s Role in the Writing Class,” Lad Tobin writes, “While we have come to see writing as socially constructed, we have failed to understand the teacher’s role in the construction of that meaning. We need to develop a theory of reading student’s texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and, finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the teacher-student
relationship” (79). In some ways, then, because teachers inevitably grade students based on these initial readings of them as students, teachers often start grading students as soon as they walk into their classrooms. To make it even worse, because of all these multiple readings that play into the reading of a student’s text, a teacher’s reading is always in some ways a misreading, and, in some ways, a misgrading as well. Nevertheless, sometimes this misreading can be positive since, as Tobin explains, at times this reading is intentional as teachers can purposefully misread student texts to find potential in them. In this way, they misread by seeing what could be there instead of what actually is. Tobin writes, “We must misread every student text in order to help students say what we think they really mean” (79). And, even though these misreadings are motivated by a teacher’s reading of students as lacking in some way, a reading that inevitably creates a deficit in student texts, if this type of misreading comes from a teacher-relationship of trust and a clear communication of expectations, this type of misreading can be somewhat beneficial. Students can learn to see their texts and themselves in different ways through the teacher’s eyes -- ways that might more accurately reflect the discourse conventions of their respective disciplines as well as the disciplinary roles they are expected to take.

However, when this misreading is also coded with a reading and misgrading of students that views them as not having any real potential but only perpetually lacking, this misreading can become detrimental, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for many students, especially, if, like Chosen, they do not readily resist this erroneous reading of themselves, but, instead, become what their teachers misread. Unfortunately, this misreading of students as perpetually lacking is also reproduced throughout educational literature and teacher lore. About these narratives of student lack, Marguerite Helmers writes, “Successive references to the student have produced an essential student, a generalized entity whose primary characteristic is lack” (28). So, even
though almost all teacher narratives read students and their texts as lacking in some way, it is not hard to imagine, with the sheer weight of these countless student lack narratives, how teachers can begin to read students as perpetually and only lacking – lacking even in potential. Therefore, in this way, Chosen’s teacher probably read him as lacking in potential and, consequently, never saw a need to tell Chosen how he could improve his papers or give him a chance to revise. This type of misreading was so entrenched that when Chosen’s writing had obvious potential, as in his “word” assignment -- such obvious potential that even Chosen, who was used to having his potential overlooked, could see it for himself -- the teacher simply never saw it. After all, because he was reading for lack and only lack, that is what he found. Therefore, Chosen’s relationship with his teacher was also one of lack, and, Chosen, naturally, distrusted this definition and relationship.

In contrast, even though Chosen may not have respected his female teachers as much, his relationship with them was defined more by a mutual caring and trust. He could actively resist in that he could openly negotiate his learning conditions with them. Consequently, he liked his female teachers and tended to do well in their classes. He got an A in his ninth grade class and clearly passed in his basic writing class. He may have felt that their classes were too easy, but their ease probably came in part from the fact that he also felt like they cared about him as a person, and, as a result, were able to bend their rules to meet his individual needs as a student. For instance, about his basic writing teacher he said, “She was very genuinely concerned about the students. She really wanted us to pass. She really cared about us doing the work.” Furthermore, she demonstrated this caring by bending her due date policy for Chosen when his cousin was ill, allowing him to turn in his final draft late so that he could spend time with him in the hospital.
Naturally, since Chosen’s previous relationships with teachers had reinforced a strict binary between male and female pedagogy, Chosen was initially distrustful of his male Comp II teacher. First of all, reinforcing Chosen’s dichotomy of composition as masculine work, Comp II was supposed to prepare him for more rigorous types of academic scholarship. In this class, he was supposed to use synthesis and conduct thorough academic research for the first time. For instance, Chosen told me, “My sophomore year, I barely passed that class, and he, he was more challenging. The way he did things was the way [the Comp II instructor] does things. That’s why in this [Comp II] class, you know, after the first two weeks, it’s making me a little nervous because it kind of reminds me of that.” Furthermore, the Comp II teacher initially did nothing to help break down this dichotomy, which would have eased some of Chosen’s fear and mistrust, especially since he handed out a syllabus that was over 10 pages long on the first day of class and initially expressed little tolerance for late work, and, with seemingly no exceptions, only allowed two absences from class. When Chosen was late turning in the rough draft of his second essay after his car had been broken into the night before it was due and, as a result, missed class the next morning, the teacher still accepted Chosen’s late paper; however, he sternly told Chosen that it could not happen again, implying that Chosen would be expelled from the class if he missed class on another due date or failed to turn in his future papers on time. Further explaining his fear of the Comp II teacher, Chosen said, “First, I already missed one day, so I already had one other day to miss before I am, what am I going to say, kicked out. And that was the day that I didn’t, I had to turn in my paper. He already seemed like he was somewhat pissed, you know.”

Because of his initial apprehension that his relationship with his Comp II teacher would be similar to that of his tenth grade teacher – a relationship that seemed to define Chosen as a passive recipient of his tenth grade teacher’s lecture knowledge -- Chosen was initially very quiet
and passive in class, the form of passive resistance he had enacted with his other male writing teacher. In a class in which he was supposed to be actively engaged in both writing and discussion, this quiet reluctance to participate was definitely a resistance of disengagement, which, of course, defined his relationship with his classmates as well. For instance, from my observations of the class, I noticed that he rarely volunteered information in class, and while he dutifully took part in group activities, he only did what was expected of him, never more. Often in groups, he would sit on the side, looking on, only answering questions and never volunteering information on his own. Rarely did he actively lead a group discussion or heatedly discuss a topic with any of his classmates. His Comp II instructor also shared similar observations of him as well, saying that “you do not hear much from [Chosen], unless, you know, he has to.” In other words, Chosen’s participation was politely responsible, but never fully engaged.

While he was quick to say that his lack of active class involvement was not because he was afraid of the instructor, initially at least, he definitely did not feel comfortable with him either since he seemed to expect him to act with arbitrary authoritarian rule, just as his first writing teacher had. When I asked him why he was not actively participating in class discussions more, he responded:

And it’s not just because I’m scared to speak or anything. It’s just, I don’t know; I just don’t. . . . I guess, like I really haven’t felt comfortable, you know. I mean, it’s a class, and I wasn’t really comfortable with [the instructor]. It kind of seems like at first like he thought I wasn’t really trying to do anything, so he would kind of pick on me a little bit it kind of felt like, and be like, well, “Who are you working with? And talk to this person.” And I would be like, “Yeah. I just did that. I was talking to him.”
In other words, Chosen was too used to being read as perpetually lacking by his male teacher and expected this reading of his class involvement from his Comp II instructor as well. Because he probably did not want honest engagement to be read as lack, as not “really trying to do anything,” it was probably easier for him to offer only half-hearted yet dutiful engagement that did not create any real danger of being misread in fundamental ways.

But even while Chosen was more guarded in his class participation, demonstrating an uneasiness that informed the disengaged resistance he had learned from his previous writing class, he was quite aware that participating more would also probably put him more at ease, make him feel more a part of the class, and help him learn more. He said, “I guess if I got more involved, I would feel more right in it, so I would have to, you know, do better and have to think about it more.” Good intentions, though, were not enough for Chosen to become engaged. Even though he did realize that there were better roles for him to perform as a student than those he had previously learned, his relationship with his male teachers as passive, apprehensive recipient of knowledge were too well entrenched. For Chosen to become more engaged, it would take more than his good intentions; it would take a total renegotiation and redefinition of his relationship with his instructor.

However, at first it was hard for Chosen to even begin to redefine his relationship with his instructor. Chosen’s deep distrust of all male teachers made him more resistant toward conferencing with him about his papers, even though seeing his instructor earlier would have probably helped him find better meta-discursive connections among the overwhelming details in his papers and formulate sharper arguments, not to mention helping both of them renegotiate a more beneficial relationship. In fact, as with more active participation in the classroom, Chosen seemed to be quite aware of how talking to his instructor would help him when he told me, “I
really didn’t sit down and talk to him, which I probably should have done, should have did [sic] earlier.” But once again, good intentions were not enough to change the expectations he thought all male teachers would share of him as a passive student who did not actively seek out help or who wanted to make no more personal contact with the teacher than was absolutely necessary in class. Certainly, since Chosen seemed to perceive his tenth grade teacher as uncaring and forbidding, he probably was not encouraged to engage in the kind of interpersonal contact outside of class that a conference would necessitate.

**Renegotiating the Student-Teacher Relationship**

Ironically, though, a conference was exactly what Chosen needed to redefine his relationship with his instructor in more mutually beneficial ways. When Chosen finally met with his Comp II instructor, probably largely because the conference was a mandatory part of his grade, he started to redefine his relationship with him. As a result, his preconceptions of how male teachers taught began to change, and, with that change, his preconceptions of his role as a student in a male-led classroom changed as well. In this way, he could change his student role as passive recipient of the teacher’s mandates to become a more active participant in shaping classroom knowledge. For instance, after talking to the instructor, he said:

> Well, I guess since yesterday, since I actually sat down and had a talk with, me and [the instructor] one on one, it made me feel a little bit more comfortable about maybe going to class tomorrow. Like I really didn’t have that relationship with him. I really didn’t sit down and talk to him . . . but since I actually talked to him, it seems like we have more of an understanding, and it seems like I might be a little more comfortable with the class, which might hopefully help me feel and do a little better in the class.
First of all, because he got to know the instructor better in the conference, he realized that while his instructor might seem to be more concerned with the rules of the class – maintaining strict due dates and attendance policies – than with Chosen as a person – a person who might need some flexibility in those rules so that his own learning needs could be met – this was an unfounded preconception. While his Comp II instructor was concerned with maintaining the rules of the classroom, his concern was based on a genuine care for student learning, not a “masculine” love of rules for their own sake – for the seeming power and order that they brought. In conference, Chosen was able to see that his instructor did care about him as an individual, and, as a result, would make allowances in the rules to better accommodate Chosen’s individual learning difficulties. He realized that his instructor cared more about Chosen’s ability to pass the class than his ability to make perfect attendance or turn all his papers in on time. For instance, after meeting with his instructor for the first time, Chosen said:

We actually talked, and I explained to him about my previous teachers and my relationships with them, and how I had problems with writing in the past, and how, in turn, it made me not really want to go to the teacher, maybe not really want to talk to the teacher, and I just try to do it myself. If it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t, it doesn’t. And he said, “You know, you can’t assume that because I’m nothing like that.” You know, and actually we started talking and everything, and actually it was a lot better. There’s more of an understanding.

It was talking to his Comp II instructor that made Chosen better able to realize that his fixed dichotomy between male and female instructors was not entirely accurate. His male Comp II instructor was more of a mix of Chosen’s idealized ideas about masculine and feminine roles for teaching. His instructor was masculine in that he did care about students abiding by the rules of
the class and certainly he did care about them writing competent academic papers, but, at the same time, his instructor was more feminine in that he was also able to make adjustments in those rules as needed if they better helped students learn. Chosen told me that after meeting with his Comp II instructor, his instructor “seems like he’s a little nicer than that guy [the tenth grade teacher]. He’s strict in the fact that he wants you to do your work, but he will work with you, you know what I’m saying, when things get difficult. He definitely does not mind helping you to pass because he wants you to pass. He wants everyone to do well.”

Chosen also learned that caring was not solely a part of the domain of female teachers; male teachers could care individually about students as well. For Chosen especially, the Comp II instructor’s willingness to make time outside of class to individually help students with their work also demonstrated this caring. He told me, that he appreciated his teacher’s willingness to help “as a student because getting that [help], I’m telling you, that guy in tenth grade, it didn’t seem he cared at all. It was like, ‘Well, that’s what you got. I didn’t like the paper, so, well . . .’” Unlike his tenth grade teacher who was so unengaged with helping students with their work he did not seem to care about them at all, his Comp II instructor was definitely available and actively invested in helping students with their writing so that their writing would improve and they would not have to just sit by and passively accept their grades. In fact, in contrast, his Comp II instructor was so invested in helping students learn that he even scheduled conferences on weekends if students had a busy work and school schedule during the week.

Definitely this change in his relationship with his instructor helped Chosen feel more engaged with the class and, as a result, he felt quite a bit more comfortable about actively participating in class. “And [getting to know the instructor better] makes me more receptive and more willing to be a part of the class, not that I didn’t before, but it kinda, you know, like I said,
made me more comfortable.” He also felt like the instructor was not nagging him to participate. And just as he was aware that the teacher actually did personally care about his progress as a student and was invested in individually helping him, the teacher also had a better understanding of him as a student as well and knew that the fact that he did not seem to participate actively in class like the other students did not mean that he did not care about working hard and doing well in the class.

Furthermore, the teacher was aware of the busy life Chosen led and the multiple roles he had to juggle, which sometimes forced Chosen to miss due dates or class occasionally. After he had reached more of a reciprocal understanding with the teacher, Chosen told me:

Well, I feel I have a place where there’s an understanding. So that way it’s not like I feel, okay, it’s me trying to get it done, and the teacher’s over there expecting me to get it done, thinking that I just don’t care and I’m just slacking off. Now it’s like, well, I have this situation that’s hard for me. The teacher’s understanding. We’re working together to do it. So, I don’t feel like I’m stressed out trying to you know just get it done. I feel like I’m trying to get it done, but I got help. It’s easier that way.

Thus, Chosen had reached a more reciprocal understanding with his teacher. He better understood his instructor’s pedagogical role as an involved coach of his writing and, as a result, was more aware of the active role his teacher wanted him to take in the classroom as a student. However, the teacher was also more aware that Chosen, even though he was more passive in the classroom and did not always meet deadlines or attend class, was still invested in both the class and his writing. So, both reached an understanding that helped them better fulfill their respective roles in a more constructive way.
So, by originally assuming that his male teacher would also have a very male class, Chosen was essentializing his teacher. In fact, it could be argued that Chosen misread the gendered text of his Comp II teacher and his class in much the same way as Chosen’s tenth grade English teacher misread his text on the Bible and God. Consequently, he was unable at first to see where his teacher’s more complicated subjectivity as a teacher disrupted this easy gendered pedagogical binary. However, as Lad Tobin points out in “Car Wrecks, Baseball Caps, and Man to Man Defense: The Personal Narratives of Adolescent Males,” teachers of both genders often make these essentializing mistakes in reading male narratives as well, missing the nuanced struggles that break easy essentialized notions of the male gender and actually show an underlying uneasiness with it rather than a full complicity. Part of this misreading occurs because both male and female teachers may not understand the complexities of the male culture that inscribes these narratives in the first place. Tobin writes, “We often look in the wrong places and miss the central point because we do not know enough about the culture of, say, sports victories, car wrecks, and sexual anxiety in which it is embedded” (168). However, Tobin goes on to write that often the issues that make reading these male narratives so difficult for him are because the struggles with authority that the male student is usually also actively enacting within the classroom are actually displaced struggles with the father – the person who is supposed to role model gender in the first place (173-174). In Chosen’s case, then, his struggle with his tenth grade teacher could also have been a displaced struggle with his father as well. Of course, this analysis becomes problematic because, while his mother actively shaped his role model expectations throughout his many social spheres, his father was noticeably absent in his interviews with me, and I, as the researcher, never asked him anything more about his father. However, there are obvious parallels between an absent father and the rigidly uncaring teacher
who seemed equally inaccessible as a real teacher or mentor. Consequently, it also seems probable that Chosen could have internalized the gender coding of an absent father and use it to read subsequent classes taught by males.

**A More Constructive Power Relationship**

Fortunately, through negotiation and communication, his Comp II instructor was able to disrupt this essentialized gender coding in more constructive ways, thus illustrating Foucault’s theory that power is a relationship and, by extension, resistance is a very important part of this relationship. Foucault writes that “a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements . . . : that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts, and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up” (“Subject” 427). Thus, in defining his relationship with his teacher in essentialized male terms, Chosen seemed at first to be giving his Comp II instructor the position of absolute power and authority. This positioning is exemplified by his relationship with his tenth grade teacher whose word was absolute law, even though it may not have been entirely understood, and there was no room for negotiation, compromise, or active resistance. However, as a teacher, this absolute position holds the least amount of power if a teacher defines his or her efficacy or power as the ability to teach or, in other words, to engage students in a discourse of knowledge construction. First of all, as a mute and passive member of the class, Chosen was not engaged in any form of discussion. Furthermore, no productive learning occurred if Chosen did not fully understand why he received the grades he did or how to make his writing better in the future. In other words, because students must have the largest field of responses available to them if they are to learn, this relationship was not a powerful one for either teacher or student. However,
engaging students in a discourse of knowledge production means allowing students to “talk back,” to have a voice, to verbally and textually resist, putting teachers, paradoxically, in a more powerful position – if only because they grant this positioning to their students as well. And, so in this relationship, students are thoroughly “recognized and maintained” as people who act. For instance, if teachers value critical thinking, then critical thinking entails questioning authority – all authority – even if inevitably students question the teacher’s authority as well, as they would if they questioned the teacher’s reasons behind assigning a certain grade. Resistance, then, is a valuable part of the learning process, of the learning relationship. To deny this power is to deny learning, questioning, and critiquing. While teachers may worry that their power is being undermined, it is this supposedly undermining process and relationship that actually affirms the teacher’s very presence, authority, and power – their efficacy as teachers – in the first place.

In Chosen’s case, it was engaging in such a discussion with his instructor in a conference that enabled him to make a breakthrough as a student in that class and begin to renegotiate his gendered perceptions of his teacher and his subsequent positioning as a passive student. Again, by taking the seemingly weaker position – asking Chosen about why he was unable to make due dates and then adjusting those due dates so that Chosen could better meet them – the teacher actually took a more powerful position because, through this negotiation, Chosen was able to write better papers than he probably would have if he had been rushed. And, even though Chosen originally failed to turn in the final draft of his third paper, by being able to negotiate due dates, he finally received the confidence to at least turn it in – something he had been too afraid to do before. So, through discussion and negotiation, both players were able to accommodate each other and take more powerful positions within their relationship. Chosen was able to learn more about writing by having the time to think through and compose better papers and, by
allowing Chosen more time to write these papers, the instructor was ultimately able to teach Chosen more about writing.

Consequently, the more reciprocal relationship Chosen had with his teacher eased some of the pressures he felt from the demands that fulfilling conflicting role model roles created. By talking to Chosen about all the demands and responsibilities placed on him, his teacher, at least, was able to see the amount of pressure he was under and agreed to ease some of that pressure by being more flexible with due dates. While the teacher still demanded a high quality of writing from Chosen, working with him to revise multiple drafts, he became more flexible on when and where these drafts were supposed to be completed, often giving Chosen more time if he was particularly stuck with a paper, needed to do more substantial revisions than the rest of the class, or had a personal crisis. Since Chosen was not under as much pressure, he also was not as apt to resist this pressure by doing his work hastily at the last minute or, even worse, completely giving up, but was able to more patiently revise his work gradually over time – or at least over the time that summer school allowed. Granted, since this was summer school, flexible deadlines only slightly increased the amount of time Chosen had to work on his writing, but it did ease some of the immediate pressures Chosen felt and, at the very least, it allowed Chosen to see that his instructor genuinely cared about him passing the course and that he was not going to fail him just for turning a few papers in late.

Nevertheless, this increased flexibility did not necessarily mean that Chosen immediately stopped the patterns of resistant behavior he had used to cope with the pressures he felt. He still, for instance, did not turn in his final draft of his third essay until it was too late to revise it further. However, possibly, the flexible deadlines did ease enough of the pressure so that Chosen was at least able to cope well enough so that he could turn in his final research paper in time to
pass the course and, at least, finally did turn in that third paper at the last minute – even if it was too late to revise.

**No Magical Transformation**

Even though Chosen had reached a more reciprocal understanding with his instructor, no magical transformation occurred in his participation. He still was a bit reticent in group discussions and rarely volunteered information in whole class discussions. Part of the reason he was so hesitant to talk in class was because he did not always do all of the readings since he saw most of the readings as meaningless busy work, thereby creating fear that he did not have as thorough an understanding of the readings as some of his classmates.

Still, it’s still a lot of busy work -- a lot of reading. And honestly, I don’t even read all of it . . . Most of them, I’m just skimming through to get the main points so that way . . . because I don’t really talk in class anyway, but if [the instructor] does call on me, you know, I can respond and actually know what he’s talking about.

Merely skimming through the readings, then, did not make Chosen go out of his way to enter into class discussions. As always, he read enough so that he could dutifully participate if asked, politely deferring to authority, but his engagement still did not really extend beyond this point.

 But while having a more reciprocal understanding with the teacher may not have caused any sudden, dramatic transformations, it did cause shifts in Chosen’s thinking that did lead in more subtle, but, in the long run, more substantial ways toward fuller classroom engagement. For instance, while Chosen still resisted class reading that he did not see an immediate purpose for, further talking to his instructor about his essays did impress on him the need to do more thorough research than he had done in the past. Before meeting with the instructor, he had not only skimmed the assigned readings, but also skimmed most of the articles he used to support his
paper. However, after talking with his professor specifically about how his articles were going to support his argument, he realized how vital fully understanding at least his research articles was.

I’ve been doing a lot more reading of my sources. Like the other papers, I kind of read my sources kind of skimming through, and you know, I don’t know, kind of BSing a little bit [laughs], but this one I’m actually reading, you know, and getting an idea of what I want to do with it, and trying to find how I’m going to tie them in.

Thus, he changed his mind about thoroughly reading his research and no longer saw it as mere busy work, but as a vital part of building tighter, more informed arguments. Also, by realizing the importance of closely reading his research, he became more personally invested in it, learning to possess it as his own, starting on a path that would lead to more personally fulfilling engagement with his research work in other future classes. This personal investment with his research hopefully might also lead him to spontaneously speak out about it more in future classes if given the chance.

Discussion as a Productive Form of Resistance

For Chosen, then, resistance was directly tied in some way to his identity, as Field and Olafson suggest (70), since he used specific strategies or forms of resistance that allowed him to resist definitions of himself that he felt were unreasonable or that he simply did not completely agree with. For instance, procrastination was a resistance strategy to resist the Superman identity since Chosen knew it was physically impossible for him to fulfill multiple, conflicting role model roles both simultaneously and perfectly. He knew this was an unreasonable identity for him. Unfortunately, procrastination was only a partial form of resistance since it only worked to empower him with more clearly and forcefully written papers some of the time. At other times,
procrastination only led to hastily written papers that resulted in poorer grades, fulfilling a racial and class identity that satisfied only the status quo without transcending it and achieving his full potential.

A better form of identity resistance was negotiating with the instructor. For instance, by negotiating with the instructor about his role as a student, Chosen learned that the rigid gender roles he was also imposing on his Comp II instructor were just as wrong as the passive student role or identity he thought he needed to fulfill. This strategy of resistance is probably the most successful since it more clearly follows Foucault’s definition of power as a relationship. Although resistance is always an integral part of the power relationship, as Giroux writes, “the value of the resistance construct lies in its critical function, in its potential to speak to the radical possibilities embedded in its own logic and to the interests contained in the object of its expression” (109). In other words, all resistance, even contradictory resistance, acts in some way as a form of protest. It is this protest that can change the power relationship, opening up further avenues of action. But for the power relationship to be redefined in constructive ways for the resister, the resister must also ensure that his or her acts of resistance are more or less accurately interpreted. If the message is not clearly communicated, the resister can also create a shift in the power relationship that is not beneficial. As I have previously argued about Giroux’s definition of oppositional behavior – his distinction between valid and invalid forms of resistance -- often acts of resistance are not accurately interpreted by teachers or those in authority, and, therefore, the status quo in the power relationship is maintained or shifted in a less beneficial way. Negotiation, though, is a particularly powerful form of resistance because it works through direct communication, thereby honoring both parties within the power relationship. Furthermore, with direct communication, there is no danger that the message of resistance will be misinterpreted.
Therefore, it is the most direct form. In fact, it could be argued that negotiation through direct discussion was the only way to successfully communicate something as heavily coded and complex as gender roles. Procrastination, on the other hand, does not directly communicate a message. While it creates conditions that enable Chosen to resist an oppressive identity, it does not clearly communicate this message to the teacher, forcing the teacher to interpret the message for the student instead. Negotiation, though, creates more advantageous conditions for both teacher and student by directly communicating both parties’ needs.

Nevertheless, although negotiation is the most powerful form of resistance, it is only as powerful as the relationship it exists within. In other words, for negotiation to work as a form of resistance, both parties must be willing to listen to each other and to form some type of compromise. If not, then the resister is probably better off resorting to indirect forms of resistance that, while they may not as directly communicate a message, at least in some way create more advantageous conditions for the resister. In this way, resisters can shift the power relationships in more beneficial ways, even though they are not doing it through direct communication.

Consequently, having a more personal, reciprocal relationship with the teacher through open negotiation, then, is what helped Chosen find more constructive ways of resisting oppressive educational structures. For instance, instead of simply giving up because he felt overwhelmed from the pressures of home, work, and school, he was able to ease some of these pressures by talking to the teacher instead and working out a better schedule for his schoolwork. Through talking to his teacher, he was also able to reconceptualize his teacher’s role and, therefore, his own role as a student, instead of just falling back on older, less constructive preconceptions from high school. Also, with a better understanding of both the teacher’s role
and his own, there was no longer a need for him to resist an overly authoritarian and pedantic
teaching style through polite but passive disengagement. Instead, with a more reciprocal
relationship with his teacher in which both worked together, he was able to take a more engaged
role in his own learning. Chapter three will detail my second case study on student resistance,
examining how a student’s desire for a freer, more relaxed learning atmosphere and assessment
system shaped her resistance to certain types of writing pedagogy and how her epistemological
misunderstanding of knowledge construction shaped her resistance to academic reading and
writing.
CHAPTER THREE
RESISTING THE ACADEMY

The Second Case Study

A telecommunications/radio broadcast major who was also an accomplished vocalist, Angelina often DJed on the Internet and also did sound mixing in her spare time. In short, she was a performer. And with a quick wit and a ready laugh, she also loved to improvise. In fact, her big dream was to one day host her own radio show in the style of either Love Lines or 1360 AM’s Danny Shafer. She explained, “I always wanted to be a DJ on the radio stations. Ever since I was little, I used to call the DJs and just talk to them.” Thus, Angelina strove to both create and entertain in almost everything she did.

It was this desire for the freedom to both be creative and to entertain that defined Angelina as a student. She tended to resist the restrictive structures and tight decorum necessary to maintain the hierarchy of most traditional classrooms, preferring instead classes where she had the freedom to speak and laugh openly. Because of this desire for freedom, she was resistant towards the assessment strategies used in order to maintain grades. Also, this love of freedom caused her to dislike and, in some ways resist, the confining structures of academic discourse, preferring creative writing instead. In this chapter, I will show how Angelina’s resistance towards traditional academic hierarchy, assessment, and discourse placed her in a position of feminization within these masculinized structures of the academy. I will then show how this desire for freedom shaped her resistance as a student, affecting her relationship with both her teacher and her classmates.
Resistance towards Hierarchical Rules in Traditional Classrooms

Because she tended to resist the overly restrictive structures inherent within classroom hierarchy, Angelina tended not to excel in most traditional classroom settings where she was required to raise her hand before she spoke and where her student role was to passively sit and take lecture notes. In this way, her inability to perform to the best of her ability within these masculinized hierarchical structures feminized her, placing her at a distinct disadvantage outside these structures. For instance, even though she was a sociology minor, she got a C in one of her core sociology classes mostly because she disliked its restrictive learning atmosphere; she just stopped coming to class and ended up being absent for about four weeks. Explaining her dislike of the class, she said, “It was very ‘you sit at your desk and raise your hand and then you can talk. And, I will stand in front of you and I will do a lecture, and then you will take notes,’ and it was very stiff. It was very traditional, uh, traditional classroom setting. And I just don’t do well in those traditional classroom settings.”

Angelina’s absentee form of resistance to the hierarchy of traditional classroom pedagogy, however, was derived from a fear that even if she did go to class, she would still not do well. The strict decorum and pedantic pedagogical style of the lecture required for hierarchy tended to put her under a great deal of stress, which hindered her ability to pay attention to the lecture and put her under even greater stress. Consequently, caught in a vicious cycle of stress, she would inevitably do poorly on tests. Frustrated with her inability to pay attention, she eventually got tested for ADD, as well as other learning disabilities, and found that she not only did not have any learning disabilities, but that she actually had quite a high IQ. “I actually have, was told, I have an extremely high IQ. . . . I just have some attention problems due to stress. . . . When I get stressed out, I could be talking to you, and then all of a sudden I’m just walking
away. I look like I have ADD, but I don’t. I’m just really that stressed.” So, in certain classes, she just gave up even going to class, resisting both the class and the vicious cycle of inevitable failure that stress created for her.

**The Freedom of Play**

Most of Angelina’s stress could probably be prevented in a more relaxed classroom setting where hierarchy was considerably flattened and she was allowed to ask questions when she needed, asking the teacher for personal help if she felt that she was behind in the lecture material. Certainly, she did the best in classes in which she felt free to not only ask questions, but where she could perform in some way: laughing and telling jokes in a way that built an easy sense of camaraderie with her teacher and classmates. For instance, in her Comp I class, where she felt this sense of relaxation and sense of camaraderie with her teacher and classmates, she not only passed but she passed as exemplary and, according to her teacher, was one of the best students in the class. Angelina described this class that attempted to flatten traditional classroom hierarchies and encouraged engaged participation through a relaxed atmosphere thus:

We giggled all the time. [The teacher] would make jokes with us. Uhm, there really was no hand-raising in class. We just kind of talked when we had a question. It was just a talk-out-loud kind of class. There was no calling on somebody. If you had to go to the bathroom, you just got up to go to the bathroom, and then you came back. . . . It was like, the only structure that there really was were the due dates. That was really it. Uhm, we still worked on things in class, but it was, it was a lot of fun to work on those things in class because we would joke around.

Free to ask questions and be herself, Angelina did not feel overwhelmed with anxiety. With a more flattened hierarchy, she specifically felt free to ask her teacher anything in class, even if it
was not a problem specifically related to writing but was more of a personal nature, and, of course, she felt free to ask her teacher questions via email and send her drafts of her writing at any time as well. With the ability to feel fully at ease and ask questions, she was able to excel. Motivated by her ability to succeed in this setting, she also regularly came to class, which helped her succeed even more. “I went to every class that semester, well, except for the ones when I was so sick. But I never chose not to go unless there was a good reason not to go. . . . And that was probably why I was able to pass exceptionally. You know, that, that high level of passing because I did connect so well with that class.” Empowered by her ability to succeed and her enjoyment of her teacher and classmates, she went on to explain that she came to class because she wanted to, not because she was forced to by the attendance requirements. “I love a relaxed setting. It, it helps me want to go to the class.” Because Angelina felt relaxed and confident in her ability to succeed, there was no need for her to resist coming to class.

It is because a relaxed classroom which flattens hierarchies often frees students to think in more creative ways, inhibiting their thinking and questioning less, that Albert Rouzie argues that teachers should challenge the play/work split inherent within the traditional academy and work to create freer classrooms that integrate play into the work of the classroom. He uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of the carnival that “like play . . . is set off from official reality” (256) as a metaphor for his conception of the classroom. He argues that classroom occurrences such as student laughter “are carnival moments in composition classes. . . . [O]pportunities for critical thinking because they open up ideas, discourse, and subject positions to freer play” (257). Greater freedom for critical and creative thought is possible because, as Bakhtin writes, “This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank creates during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special
forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other” (88). Since play, like the carnival, is considered an activity set apart from the real work of the real world, it creates a space where students can experiment with ideas without the fear of the negative consequences that a more structured and traditional classroom usually brings. Play, in other words, is never high-stakes, so nothing is lost through play; however, because students can integrate the ideas they gain through play into their academic work, everything is gained. Of course, with the ever-present hierarchy of the teacher as the final arbiter of grades, no classroom is ever completely decentered or flattened of all hierarchy; true carnival, as long as traditional institutional structures of academic authority remain, will never be completely possible within the classroom. However, teachers and students can still work together to integrate play into the work of the classroom, creating classroom spaces that are still much freer and less hierarchical than traditional ones.

Of course, in a more carnivalesque classroom of integrated play, there is always the danger that students such as Chosen, who are used to the strict work/play split, will not take seriously the ideas the class explores through play since those students do not think that play could benefit work or that the two could ever be interrelated or even the same thing. However, since Chosen was still successful in classes that placed more of an emphasis on play, he, and probably other students like him, still benefited from those classes whether they recognized it or not. Certainly, freer classrooms would benefit students like Angelina who, in more traditional classrooms, are often too afraid to creatively play with ideas, let alone talk about them.

Resistance towards Assessment

Like hierarchy, Angelina also shared a distrust and an open resistance towards traditional forms of assessment such as grades, especially the blind competition that grades inspire. This
distrust also placed her in a feminized position in relation to the masculinized norms of the academy. She explained that she did not receive good grades in high school and always hated school because she hated grades. “[G]rades to me were like the bane of my existence because it was like why should I have to measure my intelligence by what someone else thinks of me? . . . I didn’t get 3.0s in high school. I graduated with like a 2.4.” Unfortunately, because she did not have the institutional power to pedagogically resist the oppression of grades, she chose a resistance strategy of disengagement – failing to do her homework, do the readings, and come to class.

Through various acts of disengagement, Angelina resisted the hidden curriculum that traditional classrooms actually teach -- the unquestioning acceptance of authority and the hierarchy of power structures that sustain them and blind competition for grades for competition’s sake, which is inspired by traditional forms of assessment. This hidden curriculum gave her little opportunity to engage meaningfully with class material. The hidden curriculum is defined by Giroux as “those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life,” (47). Certainly, it was a concern that the hidden curriculum taught blind acceptance of authority and competition that led Kenneth Burke to develop an alternative pedagogy based on analyzing how language operates within discourse and debate so that, instead of merely rushing into debate for competition’s sake, students would carefully analyze how the two sides were discursively constructed as well as what was at stake within them. In this way, they would learn to value contemplation and reflection over agonistic competition for its own sake. Writing during the Cold War, Burke was concerned that the hidden curriculum of blind competition, fostered within the classroom by competition for grades and agonistic debate,
would easily lead to a national population who possessed an overly aggressive propensity for war, in which all too easily “national ‘differences’ may become national ‘conflicts’” (qtd. in Enoch 280).

And certainly, this hidden curriculum also does a good job of further oppressing students like Angelina since its insistence on engagement through agonistic conflict along with the enforced impersonality of hierarchy forces them to withdraw further. For instance, even though Angelina was able to win a scholarship to a prestigious Ohio music school to study singing, she dropped out after only one term, explaining that there was just too much competition. “[I] didn’t like it like at all. There’s too much competition, especially at a private, music-focused school. My main instrument is voice, which made there be even more competition. I ended up dropping out.” Because Angelina disliked the agonistic conflict of strident competition so completely, she preferred to withdraw rather than compete, even if it meant dropping out and forgoing her potential as a vocalist.

The strategy of resistance that Angelina chose, disengagement through not coming to class or dropping out completely, also worked to increase her oppression. She did not learn the material as well as she could have in traditional classes and did not continue to learn or develop her potential to its fullest. Consequently, Giroux would probably claim that her actions were not truly resistant but only oppositional, claiming that at best a teacher would need to find or articulate any resistance located within her actions (109). However, Angelina was able to articulate the reasons for her resistance, clearly stating that she did not come to class because she did not believe in the arbitrary standards set on grades. She was also very clear in her critique of the hierarchy in traditional classrooms because it so rigorously controlled her ability to speak. In this way, Angelina was quite aware of the critique informing her resistant actions; what she did
not have, however, was the means to express this critique in any other way than passive
disengagement.

Certainly, the strict rules, such as hand raising, which govern who gets to speak in a
traditional classroom, limited her ability to articulate this critique in an open discussion with her
teacher or classmate. In fact, it is this very discussion of classroom critique that traditional
classroom decorum is probably trying to limit in the first place. For instance, as quoted by
Richard Miller, James Scott writes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* that it is
more accurate to consider subordinate classes less constrained at the level of thought and
ideology [than the dominant classes], since they can in secluded settings speak with
comparative safety, and more constrained at the level of political action and struggle,
where the daily exercise of power sharply limits the options available to them. (qtd in
Miller 17)

Angelina, then, certainly had enough freedom to articulate her critique of authority structures
embedded within a traditional classroom with her friends – or a young, fairly sympathetic
researcher who had no power over her grades – but she had no opportunity to do so in the
traditional classroom since it was these very structures she was critiquing that prevented her from
discussing her critique in the first place.

However, even if she had been given the opportunity to freely discuss her critique, the
reasons for her resistance, she may have been too afraid of the teacher’s punishment, receiving a
lower grade perhaps, to do so. In fact, Richard Miller writes that students are “powerless to
change the system and know only too well its ability to punish them for not complying to its
demands” (18). He goes on to say that even in a more non-traditional composition classroom in
which a teacher works to decenter authority and encourages freer discussion among students,
students “never forget where they are, no matter how carefully [teachers] arrange the desks in the classroom, how casually [teachers] dress, how open [teachers] are to disagreement [and critique] . . . They don’t forget; [teachers] often do” (18). So, while Angelina’s form of resistance may not have been in her best interest, it was not simply a blind form of oppositional behavior. Rather it was the only form of resistance open to her at the time. Certainly, she did not have the institutional power to organize a pedagogy that would have articulated her critique as Burke did. Therefore, by simply not always coming to class, she could articulate her critique without seriously jeopardizing her chances to pass the class, as openly discussing her critique of the classroom structures with the teacher may have done. So, she opted more for a resistance of compromise -- not coming to class or doing the work enough so that she made her statement while only slightly lowering her grade so that she still passed the course.

Speaking Roles Renegotiated

Unfortunately, Angelina did not immediately feel comfortable in her Comp II class because the class seemed too much like a traditional lecture class to her, with its implicit insistence on maintaining hierarchy and traditional forms of assessment. Like Chosen, she initially found the teacher to be intimidating. She felt stifled with the strict attendance policy and other classroom rules laid out in the over 10-page syllabus and, also like Chosen, felt that the teacher strictly enforced the rules with no exception for personal emergencies.

When I saw his class requirements, his academic requirement sheet that’s like 12 pages long, it scared the hell out of me. I’m thinking to myself, “This man is the most strict man I’ve ever seen in my life. He’s going to be a horrible professor.” . . . [The syllabus] scared me. . . . That thing scared me to death because I’m thinking to myself, “Oh my
God, how much is he going to require of us?” And I’m sure I’m not the only one who thought that either.

Because both she and classmates like Chosen were intimidated by the teacher, they were hesitant to talk at first. Even though the teacher did not want to do all the talking in the class and, in fact, commented on it to the class during the first week of class according to my observation notes, he ended up lecturing more than he led class discussions, at least at first.

At first, then, the class seemed to follow the strict rules of a traditional classroom, implicitly encouraging a hierarchical distance between student and teacher, which did not put Angelina at ease or make her feel confident of excelling in the class. In fact, Angelina at first described her Comp II class by negatively comparing it with her Comp I class. “I like [my Comp II instructor] a lot, but, uhm, but he’s much more structured than [my Comp I instructor] was. A lot more structured actually, so it puts a lot more pressure on me, which I really don’t enjoy pressure, but who really does. So, that’s really where this [Comp II] class falls short of what that Comp I class was.” Because the Comp II instructor initially intimidated Angelina, and probably the rest of the class as well, Angelina did not enjoy an easy sense of camaraderie with her classmates or the freedom to express opinions in the class. Instead, she, along with many of the other students, was afraid to talk to the teacher, which of course only perpetuated the oppressiveness of the class.

Although she did not overtly resist coming to her Comp II class, as she had with her sociology class, she admitted that the only reason she initially even came was because, like Chosen, she thought the instructor was going to be so strict with his attendance rules that if she missed more than the time allowed she would automatically fail the class. She definitely did not initially come because she enjoyed the class, as she had with her Comp I class, but came out of
fear alone. This put an immense amount of pressure on her, which of course, did not put her at ease, or, other than forcing her to come to class, help her succeed. For instance, during the first few weeks of class, she lived in constant fear that her Multiple Sclerosis (MS), which she had just been diagnosed with a few months before, would act up, paralyzing her so severely that she would not be able to come to class and, thus, she would unfairly but automatically fail. As a volunteer fire person, she also lived with the constant dread that her fire emergency beeper would go off in the middle of class, also creating another unavoidable absence that would unfairly cause her to fail the class. And, inevitably, because most of July was hot and dry, her beeper did eventually go off during class, forcing her to quickly hand in her paper but leave class for the day. Inevitably, this absence created more anxiety because it created one more absence – one more grace period she did not have to fall back on if she had an MS attack. She explained:

I guess that is my biggest fear, having to go to the fire. Because I was planning on not using the one because I was so, I couldn’t move that day. I had an MS attack where I couldn’t even feel my legs. There was no way I was driving to class. So I was planning, you know, that I won’t use this, this other [absence] day. That way I will have some kind of leeway. Well, when the fire pager went off, if it was an EMS [Emergency Medical Service], run, I wouldn’t have gone, but the fact that it was a field fire meant I had to be there. So, that really, that really put me at a disadvantage. So, that’s, that’s my biggest worry. What if something happens, and I can’t get to class? What if I fail this class because something happens? So, that’s, that’s my biggest fear. It’s like, it’s like you don’t want to tell [the Comp II instructor] that because then he’ll just be like, take [the class] again.
As with Chosen, she initially came to class out of fear of failure, rather than actual enjoyment or desire to go to class. Her fear of failure also exacerbated her dislike of the class, making the class seem even more traditionally rigid and formal. However, it was her anxiety of not being able to make it to class because of a legitimate crisis that made the class especially oppressive to her at first.

Because Angelina was initially so intimidated by her instructor, she was also like Chosen in that she initially did not want to talk to the instructor about her anxieties and problems with the class. For instance, she did not even try to tell the instructor that she had MS because she thought that if she had an attack, he would only make her retake the class, making no accommodations for her illness or disability. However, as with Chosen, she initially got to know the instructor better because of his mandatory conference policies and found that he did care about her passing the class and was willing to make accommodations for her if they would help her do better in the class. Consequently, after conferencing with her instructor several times, she completely changed her opinion about him, saying:

He really does want all of his students to pass. He tries so hard to get everybody to pass. And I really admire that about him because there are some teachers who are like, “I don’t care. You just come to my class, and if you don’t pass, you don’t pass. That’s your problem, not mine.” And he does. I mean, he will work with you. He will meet with you as many times as you need to. He will try and change the paper to what you need it to be so you can revise it.

Just as with Chosen, then, getting to know the instructor eased some of her anxiety about the class and, therefore, her resistance towards it.
As the semester progressed and Angelina and her classmates got to know the instructor and each other better, Angelina gradually relaxed as the atmosphere in the class also relaxed. The hierarchical distance between student and teacher decreased. The instructor, whose sense of humor may have come off at the beginning of the term as cynical to some students, also relaxed, and students laughed and bantered back and forth with him, knowing how to interpret his humor, with a more casual sense of play. In a telling example of this playful banter, the instructor said as he was passing out handouts, “And let’s look at one of the handouts. I’m buried in paper today.” While students in the beginning of the term may have interpreted this last statement as a complaint meaning that the instructor felt too busy with all the papers he needed to grade to teach them, by the end of the semester, students had both the context and the comfort level with the instructor to know how to correctly interpret this statement and countered with “Killing trees now” and “The tree killing is on your shoulders.” Through my observations, I also found that as students gained a greater sense of comfort and play, discussions grew much livelier both as a class and during group work. Furthermore, toward the end of the semester, Angelina no longer resisted going to class but said that she came because she wanted to – she enjoyed the playful banter and camaraderie of her classmates and instructor. “I really did enjoy the class by the end. Like at the beginning, I didn’t enjoy it so much. It was a chore, but now it’s like gotta go to class, and I have fun. And I enjoy it.” Since Angelina enjoyed her instructor and her classmates, she also felt more of a connection with them and became more deeply engaged with the class.

Her increased engagement also meant that she did better in the class as she grew more comfortable with it as well. She knew she could ask questions and get help with her writing in class, and she took advantage of that. Also, as she grew more comfortable, she participated more
heatedly in class discussions, leading to a fuller richer understanding of the writing she was asked to do in the class.

I was just really relaxed in this class, and I think that really helped with my writing. Yeah, there was pressure, but it was still a really relaxed setting instead of that really strict setting of you know “raise your hand when you want to ask me a question.”

Because of the relaxed setting, I felt at ease with the class, and it was a lot better for me to go to. And a lot easier for me to really understand what he was talking about. Because generally in lecture classes, I start tuning people out and that’s, that’s just my own personality. If I’m having fun, and I’m having, you know, if I’m relaxed, then I feel good, then I will most definitely be more . . . easily . . . [able] to understand and to pay attention and listen. So, I learned a lot more than I would have had he just stood in front of the class and told us what to do.

With the increased engagement that more relaxation with the class brought, Angelina steadily did better in the class and ended up excelling in it. For example, while she did well on her first paper, a critique of an article, she struggled with her second paper – a synthesis paper using multiple sources. By her research essay though, a paper she wrote about legalizing ferrets and a topic she deeply cared about, she got a strong A. In fact, she enjoyed writing the paper as much as her instructor enjoyed reading it. He wrote on her rough draft, “Just as I expected, this is a very interesting paper.”

Angelina, just like Chosen, was finally able to find a more successful strategy of resistance by personally talking with, and, in a way, negotiating with her instructor during a conference. While it was unclear from my interview whether or not she actually was able to articulate her critique of the traditional classroom to the instructor, through discussion she was
still able to redefine her relationship with her instructor in more productive ways. For instance, because she knew that her professor cared about her success in the class and was actively working with her to succeed, she felt freer to ask for help in class. She was also able to learn more about her instructor’s sense of humor and, in this way, redefine their relationship in freer, more reciprocal terms. They both could tell jokes that related to the course material in class. Consequently, this redefinition of her relationship produced effects that she needed in order to learn better: a freer classroom atmosphere and the ability to ask for help. This redefinition helped both the instructor and Angelina to become more powerful since Angelina was able to learn more and the instructor was able to teach more. Furthermore, this redefinition also changed her relationship with her peers since she was now freer to have fun and entertain them, and this freedom in turn changed her classmates’ relationship with the instructor as they also joined in and freely joked with him as well. In this way, this redefinition of power relations with her teacher, this renegotiation of them, also transformed the power relations between her and her peers, as well as between her peers and her instructor. As Foucault writes, “Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are ‘matrices of transformation’” (History 99). Consequently, through the redefinition of her power-knowledge relationship with her instructor, Angelina was able to produce a ripple-effect, changing the matrix of power relationships for others in the classroom as well, especially since as others in the classroom became more comfortable, they also felt more at ease asking for help both from the instructor and from each other.

Resistance towards Academic Writing

Angelina’s desire for the freedom for fuller self-expression and creativity was also the reason she loved creative writing, but hated writing academic argumentative papers, which she
termed “technical papers.” In fact, when I first asked her what she thought of her Comp II class, she quickly said, “I hate writing. [laughs] I mean I’m just going to say it, I hate writing.” However, she quickly clarified this statement by making a binary between creative and technical writing, admitting that she did not hate creative writing but hated technical writing. “I always have, I don’t know why. I always have a hard time putting my thoughts on to paper when it’s technical writing. When it’s creative writing, I have no problem.” And even though she ended up loving her Comp II class by the end of the semester, she still disliked the work: writing the technical papers. “I don’t enjoy the writing and the papers. I don’t. I’m not a technical writer. It’s not something I like to do. I like the class as in the people.”

Part of the reason Angelina disliked “technical” writing so much was because it was difficult for her, forcing her to struggle as a writer, even while she admitted that she tended to do quite well on those papers. “But technical writing . . . my papers always come out really well, I just have like, I struggle. And it’s like, I mean I struggled with Comp I, and I’ll probably end up struggling with this class really bad just because I’m not a technical writer.” She further explained that with “technical” writing, she struggled to find the words to put on the page, to know what to say, but with creative writing, where she felt freer to express herself as she wanted, she did not have this difficulty. Even though Angelina managed to be fairly successful with her academic writing, her struggles and deep dislike of it meant that she could never fully excel as much as she was capable of; therefore, academic discourse also feminized her.

Epistemological Misunderstandings

Angelina’s difficulty with technical writing, her inability to find the right words and her deep dislike of it, probably came from her inexperience with rhetorical, argumentative types of writing, which created a deeper epistemological misconception of how knowledge is constructed.
In high school, most of Angelina’s education consisted of taking multiple-choice tests where she merely repeated facts instead of using them to problem-solve, construct meaning-making arguments, or analyze how these facts worked within a larger conceptual and discursive framework. Explaining her high school education further, Angelina said, “[I was] taught to the proficiency tests and taught to the SATs with the writing portion. We were never really taught to critically think. We were always taught to basically regurgitate answers. It was memorization and regurgitation. And that wasn’t really learning. But in that school, and I’m finding out in many schools, it was.”

Certainly, in this type of learning environment there was little or no acknowledgment of how most “facts,” from the sciences to the humanities, are theoretically built or contested. Thomas Kuhn’s language of competing theories and paradigms was certainly not part of her high school educational discourse, let alone the recognition that the data-theory fit that establishes facts in science in the first place is usually imperfect or, as Kuhn writes, “If any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times” (378). She was probably never made aware of how facts are socially constructed, created through the persuasion of community discourse rather than a pure demonstration of “just the facts.” For instance, as Kuhn points out, Copernicus’ groundbreaking scientific ideas were completely rejected by his scientific peers within his lifetime (381) and although Newton’s ideas were generally accepted, they were still surrounded by controversy and debate. Both their ideas were seen as abnormal discourse within certain discourse communities (Kuhn 381; Greenberg).

Furthermore, Kuhn argues that most changes in scientific paradigms come about less from a demonstration of the facts than from what Kuhn terms a “conversion” experience, quoting Max Planck who cynically writes that “a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its
opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a
new generation grows up that is familiar with [the new discourse]” (382). Without this rich
epistemological background in her education, it is unsurprising that to Angelina facts were
monolithic entities of pure truth that were not to be questioned but just accepted and memorized.

In an effort to construct a learning environment that gives students a better picture of
knowledge construction, Giroux and Aronowitz suggest a John Dewey-inspired pedagogy based
on doing, or applying “the facts,” rather than just memorizing them by rote. For instance, they
critique traditional math instruction because students memorize math theorems and formulas by
repeating the same math problem over and over instead of learning how to discover how the
math theorems are constructed so that they can use them, or synthesize them in a sort of
mathematical argument or proof, to solve more complicated math problems on their own. They
write that “math pedagogy as currently practiced does not necessarily develop an ability to use
and discover mathematical concepts among nonspecialists. On the contrary, it encourages the
student to learn the logical processes that follow from accepting the axioms of the discipline and
its postulates” (16). Without this type of instruction then, students do not really learn how to
think on their own. Without knowing how mathematical knowledge, or math theorems, are
constructed or how they work together in a larger conceptual framework, students are unable to
solve more sophisticated math problems independently of the teacher.

Unfortunately, the little bit of writing instruction Angelina received in high school
consisted also of just memorizing and regurgitating the facts by writing informative papers
instead of critiquing or constructing the facts, or knowledge-building, through argumentation.

All through high school and all through junior high school, it was always informative
papers. We never did anything argumentative. . . . And then come to college and it’s all
argumentative papers, and I’m going, “What?” [laughs] because it was just nothing I’d ever done before. And I really just have a hard time with it. And I’m not sure, because it’s not really like regurgitating facts and putting them on paper. You have to actually critically think, which is not something my generation was ever taught around high school or around junior high school.

With this lack of experience with argumentative writing, Angelina had little opportunity to develop the creative, critical thinking that such rhetorical writing encourages. Unsurprisingly, Angelina seemed to have little confidence in how to find her own creative voice and build her own arguments within the different academic discourses she found herself within in college.

The writing pedagogy of just reporting on the facts is also inherently problematic not just because it fails to show students how facts are actually constructed but also because all language use is inherently rhetorical, inherently argumentative. In other words, writing an informative paper pretends to achieve an objectivity that it cannot attain. All writers form judgments about their material and present these judgments through word choice, selection, and organization of material. Even the pretense of objectivity is inherently an argument – an epistemological argument that argues for a certain reality. It is for this reason that Burke argues for a pedagogy that would make students aware of the hidden arguments within seemingly objective reports, especially within news reports. As Jessica Enoch writes, “This exercise exposes students to the idea that seemingly ‘factual’ news stories always produce a pronounced attitude for or against certain positions” (284). In an example of this exercise in “Rhetoric – Old and New,” Burke writes: “[I]magine a prize fight reported in the style regularly used for news of international disputes: one fighter’s blows would be reported as threats and provocations, while the other’s
were mentioned in the tonalities proper to long-suffering and calm retaliation regrettably made necessary by the outlandish aggressiveness of the opponent." (qtd. in Enoch 285)

In doing this exercise, then, students would realize that the same event can be reported in many different ways, making the actions and motives of one agent look very different if reported in a different light. By doing this exercise, Burke hoped that “students would . . . discover the problematic nature of meaning-making” (Enoch 285). Also, in doing Burke’s rhetorical exercise, students would learn how seemingly “objective” reporting of the facts is actually a cleverly subtle argument for a certain way of interpreting or seeing those facts. Students would then learn to be inherently distrustful of anything that claimed to be purely objective or informative and learn instead to read closely and critically to discover how the information was being presented so that they could discover the interpretation or argument implicit within this particular presentation. Unfortunately, Angelina was not presented with Burke’s writing pedagogy in high school and so thought of writing informative papers as writing “just the facts.”

Because of Angelina’s lack of critical writing and thinking experience in high school, part of Angelina’s resistance toward argumentative writing probably arose from her fundamental misunderstanding of how facts are constructed. This misunderstanding caused her to see argumentative writing as not creative at all, or even really argumentative, but merely a repetition of facts. Because facts to her were meant to be merely repeated, not debated with competing theories or used to build larger arguments, which, then, could also be contested, her very conception of argumentation itself seemed to also be based on a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong, fact or non-fact. In fact, her substitution of merely regurgitated and uncontested fact for argument is evident in her use of “technical” to describe argumentative writing. She seemed to think of argument, or rhetoric in other words, as merely technical with clear right and
wrong rules that she had to unquestioningly abide by with little room for creativity or originality. She explained that she enjoyed creative writing more because “there’s not the pressure that you have in technical writing to have everything spot-on, directly how you have to have it. With creative writing, it’s more of a creative process of whatever you’re thinking.” She certainly did not see rhetoric as the ability to think creatively in order to construct unique arguments that persuade a particular audience in a particular time and place, part of a process that is intrinsically linked both to creativity and personal thought and opinion. Rather, she saw argument more as the ability to fill out the formula for a certain essay.

With her misconception of argumentative, academic writing as filling out the facts within a formulaic essay format, Anglina probably felt that her own ideas held little or no importance, and, even if they did, they were still supposed to be mindlessly repeated, not analyzed or debated, so that they could be placed within the correct format. This misconception led to even more writing resistance, especially when she was assigned the task of explaining and exploring her own views. For example, she had an excruciating time writing her women’s studies paper on gender stereotypes in the media, describing it as her worst writing experience. When I asked her why this particular paper was so difficult for her, she said it was because there was only so much to say on the topic, as if there could only be one view, the correct view, or, in this case, the teacher’s view, about women’s experience. She grew frustrated because, even though the paper was supposed to be argumentative, to her it was merely informative since she was only mimicking the teacher’s statements in class. “[For the women’s studies paper], we had to write, watch two movies, compare the movies and the roles and things like that, and then discuss that. And it was just like, ‘How do I be wordy with this? This is how it was.’ Like how do I elaborate on that? It was very hard for me to elaborate on the facts. It’s a lot easier for me to elaborate on
an opinion than for me to elaborate on this is how it is.” So, with her conception of argument as merely repeating facts instead of supporting her opinion, beliefs, or position, even though Angelina tended to agree with the teacher, agreeing that gender stereotypes were usually harmful, she was unable to articulate how her unique experience and opinions might differ from the teacher’s or how her difference as a fuller-figured female with a disability might actually lead to a richer understanding of gender for her teacher, her peers, and, most importantly, herself. Reinforcing her conception of facts as argument, she said, “You really had to grasp the entire year . . . [that] gender stereotypes are wrong, and this is why they’re wrong, and it’s like you can only say that so many ways. And you can only disagree with something so many ways.”

Without a better epistemological understanding, she struggled to write her women’s study paper. Her paper was so short she barely met the required number of pages, saying “it was supposed to be five pages, and I barely got three,” and described her whole writing process as slow and painful, repeating that she just did not have anything to say.

It was like, by the time I got to the end of the third page, it was like I had nothing else to say. It was like I had said my piece, I said why, I mean, I explained the gender stereotypes within the movies, I explained why they’re wrong, and I explained how we are going to correct them as a society. What else am I going to say? It was just, it was, really, I lost sleep at night over this paper. I stressed out over this paper, especially because it was like, for 25 percent of our final grade.

She struggled with her writing because she was unable to see how the facts about women’s experience are grounded in personal, lived experience, not in an abstract textbook or lecture that is supposed to be memorized by rote. To her, her opinions, her experiences as a woman, were not related to the facts she read in her textbook or the facts she heard in class. Angelina told me,
“If it comes from your own experiences, it’s really hard to back that up with sources.” And with this disconnect between how the “facts” or theories she was reading about were grounded in her own real life experience, she completely saw her own life and her own opinions about gender as irrelevant to the instructor’s “facts.” Sadly, with this misperception, she was unable to see how her own unique perceptions, opinions, and interpretations could build on and enrich, or perhaps counter, these facts.

Unsurprisingly, with her conception of argument as merely a reflection of unquestionable facts, Angelina’s biggest problems with argumentative writing were that she was often unable to tell an argumentative thesis from a descriptive or non-argumentative one and that she struggled with choosing a side, almost as if choosing a side was a veiled test to choose the “right” one. And, of course, once she chose a side, she tended to write about the topic by reporting what she thought of as uncontested facts, describing rather than analyzing or critiquing. “But argumentative papers, I really have a hard time choosing a side, and then it ends up turning into an informative paper anyways, and then I have to revise it to make it argumentative again.”

**Resistance towards Reading Academic Discourse**

Angelina’s conception of argument also made it very difficult for her to read more scientific and formally academic types of texts. When reading these types of texts, which she also termed “technical,” she was often unable to ground the theories and facts she was reading about in experience or figure out how they would work in a real life situation. With a view of facts as absolute truths that had to be memorized by rote, not used, applied, or analyzed, and a limited conception of how facts are constructed, it was difficult for her to make connections among different facts, to extrapolate or synthesize an argument, or to follow how all the facts worked together in the larger conceptual framework of the disciplinary discourse. She thus
found the reading she was doing to be extremely alienating and disorienting because she had nothing to relate it to. She often could not see how one reading worked together with other readings she was assigned in the same course and often could not connect it to any previous frame of reference – previous knowledge or experience in or out of the class. In fact, Giroux and Aronowitz critique science education for this very same reason – it fails to relate scientific knowledge to students’ actual lived experience. As a result, students think of science in abstract, decontextualized ways and “high school students . . . are often intimidated by the formulaic law-like pedagogy of even the most dedicated teachers” (16). Without these more personal connections, Angelina, like so many other high school students, could not put the abstract theories and information in any type of context that would help her make better sense of it.

If the reading made this relational and contextual leap for Angelina, however, giving her real life examples and illustrations and showing her in concrete ways how the facts worked together in the field as a whole, she could understand the material much better. For instance, in her sociology class, she explained that:

There was a chapter on sex, prostitutes, and pornography and homosexuality, and it was written in a way that was very, very interesting. It presented facts that maybe I didn’t know. It had stories and examples and was a very interesting chapter. The next chapter was on the health system, and you know, basically the problems in our medical fields. It wasn’t written in a way that was easy to understand. It wasn’t written interestingly. There was no examples, there was no experience; it was just like facts. And I couldn’t read it. I had a really hard time reading that one.

In a way, then, because she saw “facts” as isolated right and wrong entities, she lacked the ability to make creative links and put them together within a larger conceptual or experiential
framework. Of course, part of this inability probably arose because, with a right and wrong view of facts, she probably did not know that she was allowed to make her own creative, conceptual connections, fearing instead that she would only be wrong if she tried.

As a result of her difficulties making these contextual connections, she tended to resist reading “technical” writing and often gave up reading it entirely after the first few pages rather than become hopelessly lost and confused. At first she said that she did not do the readings because of a lack of time, saying, “I’m still not reading the [Comp II] readings when I’m supposed to be reading the readings. I just don’t have time.” However, when questioned further, she explained that it was really because of her difficulty making sense of writing that she found dense and disorienting. For instance, in Comp II she struggled with writing her first multiple source, synthesis essay because, to write the paper, she had to construct her argument by synthesizing selected readings from the course’s textbook, and she felt she could clearly understand only a few of the selections and entirely gave up reading the rest. She explained that she used one of the article selections “because it reads like a storybook. I couldn’t read the other two. I got about half way through and I was like, ‘Screw this. I’m not reading this anymore.’” Of course, this severely limited how she could construct or support her argument. She struggled to write the paper about the dangers of online relationships and received a No Pass on her first final draft, although she was eventually able to revise it for a better grade. When I questioned her about why she thought she received such a low grade on her first final draft, she admitted it was because she did not have a wide enough range of sources to choose from because there were certain sources that were too difficult for her to read.

It’s because of the sources that we were given. I think it was a lot harder to write the paper because not all the sources were talking about the same things. They all talked
about [anonymity]. . . . But the two that did [discuss anonymity] were really hard for me to read because I don’t read academic journals. I have a really hard time with scientific papers, and that was what those two were written in. So . . . [it] would have been harder for me to choose [anonymity] than to choose what I did. And I noticed that the people who chose the anonymity . . . got the Bs on their papers. And it’s just not something that I would have been able to pull off. So because of the range of the sources, not being able to talk about one thing, it really made it hard to narrow down a specific topic and then write about it. And then you had to use four of [the sources].

Because Angelina’s substitution of argument for fact made the critical thinking necessary for understanding more scientific and theoretical writing difficult, it also made her own writing difficult as well, further decreasing the amount of freedom she had to creatively synthesize and use sources to support her argument.

Redefining Relationships towards Classroom Knowledge

To become a more flexible and creative critical thinker, Angelina definitely needed to know that it was acceptable to make connections between disparate facts and know how and why they connected to aspects of her lived experience and previous knowledge. Certainly, she also needed a more flexible view of argument, one in which she could incorporate her own views and ideas instead of just the teacher’s. While it is impossible to tell to what degree she made this shift in her thinking in Comp II, by talking to the instructor she was at least able to start making this change. By talking to him, she realized that he took more of a negotiational approach to her arguments and writing, respecting her agency as a writer and meaning-maker. She said, “He . . . puts me at ease that we can basically write whatever we, we want. And he even said today, ‘I will never tell you that you don’t have an argument if you truly think you have an argument.’” He
said, ‘But I will help you develop it.’” By not taking a right and wrong approach to argument and respecting the writer’s agency to find his or her own arguments, the instructor was instilling a more rhetorical approach to argument and meaning-making than Angelina had probably been exposed to in the past. While this probably did not solve all of Angelina’s misconceptions about facts and knowledge, it did allow for more creativity with meaning-making, which, with more encouragement and support from other future teachers, could lead to a more theory-based, rhetorical conception of knowledge and facts. It certainly gave her more freedom to be creative and flexible in how she used her ideas to construct arguments, which probably helped her begin to develop more flexible critical thinking skills as well.

Conversing with her instructor, negotiating with him through verbal discussion, then became Angelina’s most productive form of resistance for beginning to understand difficult scientific material and better writing about it in academic ways. Her initial strategies of resistance, not doing the reading of abstract, technical material and only reluctantly writing academic, “technical” papers, did not stem from a simple desire to not do the work but from a frustration that stemmed from a misunderstanding of how facts were constructed, used, and interrelated within more scientific and abstract forms of academic discourse. She wanted to learn to better understand and work with this type of academic discourse but did not know how to do so in productive, sophisticated ways. Her resistance, then, was never a simple negation or refusal of the teacher’s power, but rather came from a frustrated desire to meet the teacher’s demands for more sophisticated discourse. Her frustration was heightened by a realization that in some crucial way she did not understand an important aspect of academic discourse, which is evident when she explained that she just did not have the experience she needed with critical thinking, although she could still not explain exactly what aspects of critical thinking she still
needed more experience with. In this way, her acts of resistance echo Foucault, who writes that resistance has no “locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbably . . . still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial” (History 96). While at first glance it might appear that Angelina’s refusal to do academic reading stemmed from a simple refusal of the teacher’s authority, her resistance was a lot more complex, stemming as it did from a misrecognition of knowledge that her previous relationships with school and learning had given her, other matrices of previous power relationships, but also from a frustrated desire, which she also shared with the teacher, to learn. In actuality, then, rather than refusal, Angelina shared the same goals as her teacher; her power in this sense was his power. She was just frustrated in her attempts to reach these shared goals.

So, in this case, part of the way that Angelina needed to redefine her relationship with her instructor was also how she needed to redefine her relationship to knowledge. Instead of seeing the instructor as the source of all knowledge, which he merely bestowed on her as a passive recipient, she needed to redefine her relationship with him in more reciprocal terms. Both were active learners who had a hand in constructing knowledge, and, in this way, both could learn from each other. As Freire writes, “The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication” (58). By stating that Angelina’s arguments were valid in and of themselves, they just needed to be further fleshed out or defined through further discussion – a discussion that both writer and teacher could engage in
-- the instructor was beginning to establish this reciprocal relationship both with knowledge and with Angelina. With Angelina’s ferret paper, he also admitted that he knew nothing about ferrets and wanted to learn all about them from Angelina, further establishing their relationship as co-knowledge creators. For instance, she told me about her ferret paper, “I’m not really worried about [the instructor] judging it and tearing it apart because he said to me, you know, pretty bluntly, ‘I know nothing about ferrets, so anything you tell me I’m just going to take as truth’ because he knows nothing about it.” Once again, then, negotiation through personal discussion with the instructor became a successful method of resistance for Angelina because, through discussion, she could redefine her relationship with the teacher and with knowledge, and, in doing so, begin to find the means to write in a more creative, invested way about her experiences.

It may seem contradictory, if not a bit trite and utopic, to say that direct conversation, especially student-teacher conferencing, works as a form of resistance. After all, teaching would be heavenly if all students strove to talk freely with their teachers whenever they had a problem, no matter how insignificant their problem was. However, if resistance is to be defined as part of the power relationship between student and teacher, which both student and teacher engage in equally, then it makes sense to claim that direct discussion also works as a form of resistance – a form of resistance that most directly offers up a critique of oppression in an effort to begin negotiation with others to resolve it. In other words, as Foucault writes, resistance works as a dialogue, a type of negotiation, because resistance, as part of the power relationship, is “a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions . . . A set of actions upon other actions” (“Power” 427). There is a type of answer and response to resistance. It is true that instead of direct dialogue, which can be more directly interpreted, resistance usually takes the form of
action; however, these actions also impart their own semiotic message, their own embedded
critique of oppression, even if this message must be interpreted to find “the notion of interest that
underlies its often hidden logic, a logic which must also be interpreted through the historical and
cultural mediations that shape it” (Giroux 110). Of course, since there can always be errors in
interpretation, direct dialogue is the most productive form of resistance since it offers the most
direct form of communication. Although all discourse still must be interpreted, this
interpretation is not as great as it is with interpreting the semiotic message embedded within pure
action. It is also true that the negotiations of the resister might fail. Even if the resister’s
message is interpreted correctly, “the whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible
inventions [that] open up” (Foucault, “Power” 427), may not meet the resister’s demands or even
be in his or her best interest. However, as long as there is still resistance, negotiations are still
always underway. Therefore, direct one-on-one discussion between student and teacher becomes
the most equitable and productive form of resistance because it can be the most directly
interpreted, as long as both parties keep insisting on dialogue and negotiation and neither party
completely or passively just acquiesces to the other.

Ironically, just as discussion may have been the best form of resistance for Angelina’s
problems with learning in a traditional classroom, since it is the most direct form of critique, the
very reasons for her difficulty with traditional classrooms, the strict decorum and hierarchy, not
only made this critique impossible but it also established an implicitly false message about
knowledge as well. Definitely an atmosphere where students cannot speak but only listen
inherently sets up Freire’s banking system and a false hierarchy of knowledge – the teacher has
all the knowledge, the students none, and students can only merely hope to memorize these
“objective” facts. Since there is little communication in the classroom, students have no
opportunity to apply these facts in creative ways or engage in a discussion of knowledge creation with the instructor. As Freire writes, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world” (54). Thus, students like Angelina see knowledge as something only their teachers can really know, thinking that if knowledge can be sought at all, then it can only be found by scientists or other people far removed from them – people these students can never hope to be. Since there never really is an open discussion, students can never see how knowledge is created through such discussions or see themselves as knowledge creators too. In other words, verbal resistance through discussion is vital not only for a needed educational critique, to negotiate for better learning conditions or redefine a more productive relationship with the instructor, but it is also necessary for learning and knowledge production.

**Gender and Resistance**

As a researcher, I do not want to essentialize Angelina’s resistance towards traditional pedagogy, with its emphasis on hierarchy and competitive forms of assessment and academic discourse, as a wholly feminine response to the masculine rigors of academe, and I actually resisted reading gender into her experience for this reason. However, as I continue to do research on gender and learning, I have discovered a definite link between her resistance, her experience, and a body of literature about feminine oppression in school, prompting me not to completely ignore this link. For instance, in his article, “Sexism in Academic Styles of Learning,” David Bleich identifies hierarchy, competition, and the objectification of knowledge that often results from traditional academic discourse as a set of traditionally masculine values that has historically defined the academy as masculine and helped to exclude women. He writes:
science and intellectual life . . . are marked not only by the exclusion of women but also by certain styles of thought, ways of reasoning, procedures for identifying problems, conventions of dealing with opposition, and prioritizing of subject matters, all of which have been appropriated by and have contributed to the ideology of classical sexism: *the belief that men as a class are superior to women as a class.*” (160)

Specifically, Bleich classifies the obsession with competition as a form of assessment as masculine, writing, “The tests and grades that contaminate each person’s contact with texts and with other students derive from the masculine interest in games, rules, and winning.” And even though he singles composition out as academically unique “in its desire to be politically responsible and responsive,” he still argues that only a small minority of compositionists have worked toward more wholistic, less competitive forms of grading – forms that make all review processes “of students’ and of teachers’ work into occasions for collective and mutual learning” (173). He also goes on to classify the obsession with hierarchy in the classroom as male as well, continuing his critique of composition by saying that even with a move toward decentered classrooms, “the hierarchical structure of the [student-teacher] relationship continues to keep the student in a compliant position,” stating that by maintaining this relationship, even a female teacher “has unintentionally gone along with a socially masculine style” (173).

Lastly, Bleich explains how Angelina’s epistemological misunderstanding of knowledge – her understanding of knowledge as facts to be memorized instead of something that she can help construct or connect to her own experience – is actually linked to the epistemological belief in objectivity, which has been “historically appropriated by a combined masculine ideology and social arrangement” (163). Objectivity is the epistemological belief that the objective world can be essentialized and classified in such a way that the essentialized class which labels the object
becomes the object itself. The outside world can be essentialized in such a way because the outside world, the known, is believed to remain completely separate from the self, or the knower. In other words, there is no relationship between subject and object, and if there is, this relationship can still be completely separated and contained. As Bleich writes, the epistemological belief in objectivity “is to essentialize the object of knowledge, to use language that indicates a strong boundary between the knower and the known, and a strong boundary between knowledge of something and the thing ‘in itself’” (161-162). With a strong belief in the objectivity, there is little wonder how Angelina could easily conceive of knowledge as absolute truths to be merely memorized without any construction from herself or anyone else since, in objectivity, there is little connection between facts, or knowledge, and the self, and, as a result, learning becomes solely memorization since a fact carries an absolute, essentialized truth and there is no interaction between that fact and the individual. Certainly, there is no discussion of what methodologies and social or political processes brought certain knowledge into being, as the feminist scientist, Sandra Harding, urges in an effort to bring into effect a “strong objectivity” in the scientific community (Olson and Hirsh 32).

It was this masculinized belief in objectivity, however, that oppressed Angelina, causing her to resist academic discourse since it did not offer any way for her as the learner or knower to insert herself into its discourse. As Bleich writes, objectivity entails using “language that indicates a strong boundary between the knower and the known and a strong boundary between knowledge of something and the thing ‘in itself’” (162). With this divide between subject and object, knower and known knowledge, then, it was no wonder that Angelina viewed academic writing in strictly right or wrong terms and that she could not enter into it in a way that connected her to it. Furthermore, the creativity of persuasive argument plays little part in such
writing. To confound the situation further, Angelina probably was not encouraged by teachers to insert herself into her academic writing, particularly if they too shared a belief in objectivity. As Mary Kupiec Cayton writes about women’s academic writing, “women (particularly women who take their own experiences seriously) may be more likely than their male counterparts to receive questionable responses or no response at all from individuals operating out of male-centered disciplinary communities” (55).

I definitely do not want to define Angelina’s difficulties and resistance towards academic hierarchy, assessment, and discourse as essentially a feminine response to an equally essentialized male academy. After all, as Jacqueline Rhodes writes, “What happens if compositionists attempt to look beyond the particular ideology that attempts to gender (in remarkably stereotypical ways) structures and technologies?” (127). She also goes on to find fault with a feminist body of literature that valorizes but also essentializes “women’s ways” of knowing and learning, rendering invisible women’s experiences that do not correspond to what has been established as “women’s ways” of knowing within the literature (121). In other words, there are women who have no problem with academic discourse, competitive forms of assessment, or classroom hierarchy, while there are men who do. Similarly, Bleich is careful to qualify that the traits of competition, academic discourse, and hierarchy are not essentially male traits. These features of academe have been appropriated by an academic system that has historically been dominated by males, and, in an effort to remain dominant, these males have used these features to actively exclude women (163).

Angelina’s experience and corresponding resistance to the academy can be defined as feminine though in that her experience lies outside of the dominant, established norms of an academic system that has been socially constructed as masculine; therefore, her marginalization
and corresponding resistance to this system becomes feminized. In other words, because her experience of academic oppression makes her unable to optimally work within that system, she becomes feminized if to be feminized is defined as Donna Haraway defines it: “To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited.” In fact, Chosen, too, was feminized in such a way as well since he was far from excelling in his tenth grade writing class – a masculinized class in which the student-teacher relationship was defined by a strict hierarchy and he was not allowed to actively discuss or construct knowledge but could only passively sit and accept the teacher’s word as sole knowledge.

Because such feminization exists for many students, not just females, it becomes even more important for teachers to spend as much one-on-one time with students as possible in order to find out what students’ personal needs and problems with a masculinized school system are and to negotiate with them in ways that constructively resist these debilitating structures. In fact, it is because teachers cannot rely on gender, class, or ethnic and racial stereotypes that they must find out as much as possible about what their students actually are experiencing and struggling with. This may entail simply talking with them in class or it may take the form of a series of out-of-class conferences. Whatever form it takes, though, it is important that personal, one-on-one discussions with individual students occur because of how differences in gender, class, or ethnicity can shape their responses to how they are feminized by the academy, especially with academic writing, assessment, and hierarchy in particular. Chapter Four will discuss in more depth the significance for composition pedagogy of personally talking with students, conferencing in particular, as the most productive form of resistance because it is the most direct form of negotiation.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESISTANCE AS NEGOTIATION

Conclusion

While I cannot pretend that my two case studies of two unique individuals have significance about resistance that can generally be applied to the composition classroom, these case studies do point to a larger significance in that they show how students’ relationships with their composition classrooms and their resistance to them are always already shaped by previous roles and relationships – previous roles and relationships with knowledge, other writing teachers, classrooms, and pedagogies, as well as their families and their communities. It is these previous roles and relationships that shape students’ resistance of disengagement – not turning in work on time, not fully participating in class, not doing the reading, and not coming to class. Consequently, my case studies are also significant in that they point towards the need for instructors to spend individual time with students to find out as much as possible about these previous relationships so that they can renegotiate relationships with students in ways that better fit the needs of the class, lessening the student’s need to disengage. In other words, in negotiating with students, teachers need to help students resist those previous roles that keep them from successfully inhabiting the roles of their writing class. However, in doing this, teachers also need to resist overly rigid traditional academic roles that may prevent them from meeting students’ needs. In fact, to fully negotiate, both students and teachers need to be flexible enough to at least partially inhabit each other’s roles and put themselves in the other’s place. Students need to take full responsibility for their learning and demand the best and teachers need to be more flexible in meeting students’ individual needs.
Resistance Shaped Through Family and Community Roles

The roles students take in a classroom are often shaped by previous roles they have learned to inhabit in communities outside of the classroom. Chosen’s disengagement from writing, specifically his procrastination and occasional lapses in turning work in on time, was a form of resistance that arose from Chosen’s need to resist the Superman role his family and community pressured him to live up to in all aspects of his life, not just school. He told me, “I wear a little dog’s tag that says Superman, but it doesn’t mean that I’m really Superman.” Being pressured to be exemplary in all areas – work, church, and home, as well as school – left him little energy or time to be the exemplary student. Often he would sacrifice one area of his life to make room for another, and often this sacrifice was school. However, he also needed to resist this exemplar role to make time for himself – time where he could define himself in his own terms. He said, “So, it gets a little hard and makes me want to say I just want to take a break. It makes me say I just don’t want to do that. I’ll just go to sleep instead of doing homework sometimes.” In writing, of course, this need to make time for himself caused him to procrastinate.

While procrastination often helped his writing, giving him time to fully think through and rehearse his writing so that he could write more naturally and fluidly, it had a negative side as well. Pressured as he was to be the perfect role model, he would sometimes freeze with his writing and then fail to turn it in on time or at all, particularly if he had procrastinated until he no longer had enough time to achieve the high standards that he had set for himself on his paper. For instance, when I asked him why he did not turn in the revision of his third paper, he explained:
When I had wrote pretty much the whole paper, and I read it, and it was terrible. I thought it was terrible. . . . So, if I thought it was terrible, I couldn’t even imagine what [the instructor] was going to think of it. So, I was like, okay, I’m going to ask him for more time. And he gave me more time. But it still got to the point where it was still very hard to write the paper, and writing it, writing it out.

Because procrastination at times caused him not to turn in papers, it also became a form of resistance that exacerbated his problem of overcoming his writer’s block and fear of writing, rather than helping him become a more skillful, confident writer. If as Giroux writes, “resistance must have a revealing function, one that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and for struggle in the interest of self-emancipation and social emancipation” (109), then Chosen was not completely successful in his resistance. Through this type of resistance he was not emancipating himself beyond the negative stereotypes that cast African-Americans and working-class people as unsuccessful and, in fact, became complicit with staying within them.

Resistance Shaped Through Previous Classroom Roles

The roles students take in a classroom are often shaped by previous roles they have learned to inhabit in previous classes. While students may try to resist new role expectations, this resistance often stems from students’ misunderstanding or inexperience at inhabiting this new role. For instance, Chosen’s resistance through disengagement in his Comp II writing class – his reluctance to speak in class – stemmed from different classroom role expectations. He had come to expect a role or a relationship with the teacher that was defined by passive acceptance, especially in classes with male teachers. The teacher dictated what he wanted and Chosen did whatever he asked without asking questions or engaging in any sort of discussion. Even if the
grading criteria seemed arbitrary or, at best, mysterious, Chosen did not feel he had the right to question the teacher or negotiate with him in any real way about his grades. He just silently accepted his position in their relationship. For instance, in his tenth grade English class, his male teacher made him feel that he could not question his grades. About his writing in that class, he told me, “I just couldn’t pass this paper. I don’t know why.”

Once Chosen entered Comp II though, he resisted the more active role the teacher expected him to take because of different role expectations. Used to silent acceptance, Chosen was not expecting to actively discuss his writing with the teacher, or even other students. He certainly did not expect to have a more active, reciprocal relationship with his instructor where he could negotiate the grading criteria or otherwise discuss his writing. For instance, in his Comp II class, he told me, “I don’t really talk in class anyway, but if [the instructor] does call on me, you know, I can respond and actually know what he’s talking about.” So, in this way, Chosen’s quiet passivity was a form of resistance to active participation and involvement in his learning through discussing and questioning his writing with his instructor and peers. However, this resistance also came from a misunderstanding of what the teacher expected his role in the classroom and their relationship to be.

Angelina’s resistance of disengagement, her high absenteeism and reluctance to freely talk and participate in the classroom, also stemmed from previous roles she had learned to inhabit from other teachers’ pedagogies in other classrooms. Like Chosen, she had learned to quietly and passively sit in classrooms, accepting all teacher authority and knowledge without question. However, unlike Chosen, she actively resisted this role, avoiding it by missing these types of classes whenever she could. For example, about her sociology class, she told me:
It was very you sit at your desk and raise your hand and then you can talk. And, I will stand in front of you and I will do a lecture, and then you will take notes, and it was very stiff. It was very... traditional classroom setting. And I just don’t do well in those traditional classroom settings. ... I went to like four weeks of classes and just didn’t go to any of the other classes. So I just didn’t do well in the class and like the classroom setting.

Unlike Chosen though, she did not really resist taking an active role in the classroom once she learned what her role expectations in the class were supposed to be. Thinking that she was supposed to be passively silent, she was initially hesitant to talk in class because she also misinterpreted what her role in the class was supposed to be. This behavior changed as soon as she learned that her role was to be more of an active participant, even though at first the only reason she did not resist her Comp II class through absenteeism was the attendance policy.

At first, Angelina thought that she would fail Comp II if she missed it more than twice. She told me, “[The instructor] has a very strict attendance policy. I’ve already missed my two days of class so I have to go to everything now.” However, once the teacher, by joking and encouraging free discussion in groups and within the larger classroom, authorized a more active role for her to take, she readily accepted it and came to class, not because she was afraid of the attendance policy, but because she enjoyed it. She said, “[The class] was a lot more structured in the beginning. It was a lot more, you know, you’re going to listen to me and you’re going to do this, then, if you don’t do this, I’m going to fail you. And, uh, then once he got to know us and we got to know him, it got a lot more relaxed and it was a lot easier to go and a lot easier to learn.”
Unfortunately, she was not able to constructively resist and enact this role in other classes where she was expected to be more passive unless the teacher, an authority figure, was complicit with her in authorizing a more active role. If she did not actively miss class, she would start to miss it in other ways by tuning the teacher out. The traditional classroom structure and her own passive role would make her so anxious she would not be able to pay attention. For instance, she said, “generally in lecture classes, I start tuning people out and that’s, that’s just my own personality. If I’m having fun, and I’m having, you know, if I’m relaxed, then I feel good, then I will most definitely be more . . . easily [sic] . . . to understand and to pay attention and listen.” In this way, then, she chose a less constructive form of resistance, one that ensured her complicity within gendered stereotypes that females do not excel in school.

**Resistance Shaped Through Previous Relationships to Knowledge**

Angelina’s resistance towards academic writing, her reluctance to read and write certain academic texts, also stemmed from a misunderstanding of her role as a student; however, instead of misunderstanding her relationship with the instructor, this was an epistemological misunderstanding of her relationship to knowledge and her role as a student towards it. For instance, in Comp II, Angelina resisted writing academic papers by procrastinating and often writing them at the last minute. About a paper she particularly disliked, she told me, “I have until 7:00 tonight to finish it. I’ve been putting it off because I despise the subject, despise the paper.” However, part of the reason she had problems with this paper was that, because of her resistance towards reading academic prose, she did not do all of the assigned reading she needed to fully develop the paper. “I chose the last [source] “Boy You Fight like a Girl” because it reads like a storybook. I couldn’t read the other two. I got about half way through and I was like, ‘Screw this. I’m not reading this anymore.’” Like Chosen, her experience in other classes had
taught her that her student role was to passively and quietly accept the instructor’s facts without question and discussion or the opportunity to synthesize and relate this information to her previous knowledge or experience. Consequently, she found academic prose alienating and disorienting to read and write; she did not know how to place herself into it and connect it with her previous learning and experiences in meaningful ways. She said, “At the time I went through school, we weren’t challenged. It was when . . . the whole idea started that you teach to the test. You know, there was no critical thinking. . . . There were critical thinking questions in the book; we skipped over them. It was never an issue in high school.”

Although she realized that her role in college had to be more active, that she had to resist this previous role and relationship toward knowledge, she was not quite sure how to change her role as a student or her relationship to knowledge in productive ways. As she told me, “[In college papers], you have to actually critically think, which is not something my generation was ever taught around high school or around junior high school.” Unable to fully resist this misconception in productive ways, she could only resist through disengagement from academic prose – procrastinating with her writing and refusing to read particularly difficult academic texts.

Both students’ resistance actually stemmed from their experiences with other roles and relationships outside the immediate composition classroom, namely family and other classrooms, a fact that also illustrates Foucault’s point that power, and by extension resistance as power’s “irreducible opposite” (History 96), never emanates from one place. Rather power and resistance are always part of a matrix of previous power relationships. He writes that there is an “omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces
everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (History 93). Resistance, then, as an important part of the power relationship, comes from everywhere. Like power, resistances “too are distributed in irregular fashion” since “they are the odd terms in relations of power” (History 96). The teacher and the student are both caught up in a web of past power relationships and past, present, and future resistances, which these previous power relationships have created. Foucault does warn against trying to locate one central point for this resistance since this central point does not exist. Nevertheless, past power relationships with instructors are still an important place for a teacher or researcher to start in analyzing resistance since, along with countless other power relationships within and outside of dominant institutions such as the academy, this relationship does play an important role in shaping students and their relationships with teachers.

Resistance and Feminization

Because both Chosen and Angelina were almost always resisting the masculinized structures of the university – the authoritarian, arbitrary, and uncaring teacher who expects a silent, passive, and recipient role from students – and since they often did so in ways that did not empower them but left them complicit with the status quo and their own oppression, they were both feminized. This feminization is possible if to be feminized is defined as Donna Haraway defines it: “To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited.” Both Chosen and Angelina became feminized in trying to resist masculinized structures and ended up becoming further exploited by them.

Masculinized school structures feminized Chosen when he equated his distant, authoritarian tenth grade teacher with his Comp II teacher, and, as a result, resisted taking a more active role in the class. He resisted, partially because when he had tried to actively resist the arbitrary grading in his tenth grade class, the teacher completely denied his claims and refused
further discussion of his writing. About that paper, Chosen said, “I told him about it. And he said he didn’t know and it was too late to change the grades. It was in the computer, so I was stuck now, so I was like, okay, now what do I do?” Despite this attempt at resistance, Chosen, ultimately, still ended up doing poorly in that class with no real knowledge of how to improve his writing further. In this way, the class feminized him, especially when this feminized role of passive student made Chosen feel that it was futile to discuss his writing or otherwise take an active role in his Comp II class -- especially when doing so would have helped him substantially improve his writing.

Angelina actively resisted these masculinized structures – the impersonal lectures and the classroom hierarchy that made it impossible for her to ask questions or enter into a real discussion about the knowledge or material presented during class. However, since Angelina would resist by either missing class or tuning out the lecture, her resistance still made it difficult for her to succeed in those classes or otherwise find a more constructive form of resistance that enabled her to succeed. For instance, about her sociology class which was structured in this masculinized way, Angelina said, “I still got a C in the class, but I went to like four weeks of classes and just didn’t go to any of the other classes so, just, I didn’t do well in the class and like the classroom setting. . . . I force myself to go to class, but I hate it, and I usually don’t do as well in those classes.” Thus, just like Chosen, Angelina was feminized by these masculinized structures.

Resistance as *La Perruque*

Even though both Chosen and Angelina’s methods of resistance often back-fired, some other forms of Chosen’s resistance still illustrate what Michel de Certeau defines as a tactic. Tactics are ways of not necessarily overthrowing the system, but subverting or using the system
in ways it was not originally intended to be used in order to make it meet individual, personal needs. De Certeau specifically calls this type of resistance *la perruque* and defines it thus: “the worker who indulges in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods since [the worker] only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” (25). In this way, *la perruque* is also a form of what Brooke’s terms “underlife” – “behaviors which undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation,” especially since, in an educational context, both underlife and *la perruque* work to “undercut the traditional roles of the American educational system in order to substitute more complex identities in their place” (Brooke 141). Thus, *la perruque* also illustrates Brooke’s concept of underlife as a way of making the system serve students’ own needs.

**Forms of *la Perruque***

Just as Chosen accepted the student roles he had learned from previous classes and from family and community, he also resisted them in certain cases in ways that illustrate *la perruque*. In these cases of *la perruque*, his resistance made him a better writing student. For instance, Chosen resisted the all-around role model, Superman role that his family and community thrust upon him by not always being the perfect, role model student. With writing, he would procrastinate, creating little pockets of time for himself and, momentarily at least, resisting the pressures of perfection. While, as mentioned previously, this procrastination would backfire, blocking him with his writing because it exacerbated his pressure to be perfect, in some cases his procrastination was a successful form of *la perruque*. In these cases, procrastination helped him write more freely and naturally in a way that better incorporated his voice and identity. For instance, he said, “Well, I guess sometimes procrastination is kind of good, but only to a certain extent. If I think about it, think about it, then I will have an idea to go just type it. It’s all
coming straight, you know, instead of thinking about it, writing it down and change.” Because procrastination often gave him the time he needed to think through and rehearse his writing, it also made his writing more fluent and natural and, most importantly, more his own. It gave him time to own his writing, to write in a more natural way that better complemented his identity and sense of self. The clearer sense of ownership and mastery that the time snatched out of procrastination afforded him definitely makes his procrastination a form of *la perruque* as well as illustrating Brooke’s concept of underlife as a way of making the system serve students’ own needs so that they can redefine more complex identities for themselves.

Angelina’s resistance, at least the resistance she used to overcome the alienating hierarchy of the traditional classroom, was not a positive example of *la perruque*. She readily enjoyed the classes where she was able to ask questions, actively debate and discuss topics with her teacher and classmates during class time, and laugh and tell jokes. This type of classroom atmosphere definitely helped position her as a more active, engaged student. For instance, she excelled in her Comp I class, saying, “I actually passed exemplarily for [Comp I].” Explaining why she did so well in that class, she said, “We giggled all the time. [The instructor] would make jokes with us. Uhm, there really was no hand-raising in class. We just kind of talked when we had a question. It was just a talk-out-loud kind of class. There was no calling on somebody.” However, she definitely saw the ability to talk and laugh out of turn as a transgression of the norms of the traditional classroom, not as a more involving way to learn, and felt crippled in classes where discussion was not freely allowed with no way to directly or constructively resist. She needed an authority figure to sanction talking and laughing out of turn and could not initiate it on her own in order to create a classroom atmosphere that would better utilize her identity and, so, be a form of *la perruque*. As a result, she had no way of
reconstructing her role in traditional classes in ways that enabled her to learn better, even though she embraced the role differences in her writing classes when it was sanctioned. Instead, she would merely stop coming to class and, as a result, would end up only succeeding at the bare minimum to pass the class or would drop out entirely. For instance, she changed her psychology major to telecommunications because of a teacher who only lectured and inhibited questions or discussion. She said that the teacher was “just a really bad teacher. She just, she would talk in circles. She wouldn’t explain anything. She basically taught off power point. . . . I was a psych major, and I just dropped that major because of that class.” She also struggled to connect how becoming a more active member of a classroom could also make her a more active knowledge-maker in those more traditional classrooms as well. So, unfortunately, she was only able to resist traditional classroom norms in settings where the teacher allowed and, in fact, was complicit with this sort of resistance. In classes where this was not the case, she was not able to fully resist classroom norms in a truly constructive way that would be a clear instance of la perruque.

In classifying some forms of resistance as more productive than other forms, I realize that I may be making the same sort of near-sighted judgments that Giroux makes in separating resistance from oppositional behavior. While I am not making Giroux’s particular distinction, I am, like Giroux, an authorizing other who is making claims about what are legitimate forms of resistance, at least in saying that certain forms of resistance are more productive than others, without completely letting students speak for themselves and define their own forms of resistance for themselves. In saying that certain forms of resistance are more productive, I am making an evaluation which is definitely informed by my subjectivity as a teacher. The forms of resistance that I see as productive are forms that enable students to learn better, to stay in school, and, ultimately, to finish their college degrees. However, this may be an elitist assumption
informed by a narrow definition of success – that of graduating from college. There are many other ways of becoming successfully empowered that do not necessarily involve academics. Engaging in forms of resistance that do not help an academic career may not necessarily be unproductive or disempowering. However, as a teacher conducting this study, it is still in my best interest to help students stay in school and to be successful there in as many ways as possible. That is my job; that is my mission. Certainly, although there may be many non-academic avenues towards emancipatory empowerment that do not include college, college should not hinder people from achieving these goals either. Therefore, that is why I am choosing to classify certain acts of resistance as more productive than others, even though my classification may not necessarily hold in all instances for all students.

Resistance as Negotiation

Even though all forms of resistance are a form of dialogue, a negotiation of sorts, the most productive form of resistance is open, verbal negotiation with students either in class or in a one-on-one conference outside of class. Again, it may seem overly simplistic and utopic to say that negotiation through discourse is the most productive form of resistance. Verbal discussion is the most direct form of resistance because it can be directly communicated instead of only interpreted semiotically as it is with resistant actions. However, direct discussion can still be one of the most complex forms of resistance as Foucault argues:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (History 101)
In other words, in conferences, both students and teachers can still argue, ignore, or in more subtle ways resist each other. In fact, for true negotiation to occur, some resistance from both students and teacher must be possible since both parties must “be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts” (“Subject” 427). Students, then, should not quietly acquiesce to all teacher demands. Instead, they must question and redefine their learning conditions in ways that are most advantageous for them. In similar ways, though, teachers should not just acquiesce to any and all student demands, especially if they are unreasonable or would not be advantageous to student learning. For instance, not holding students responsible for a high standard of work would be irresponsible on the teacher’s part. On the other hand, if students do have unusual demands they must meet outside of the classroom or have a physical or mental disability in some way, then it is advantageous for the teacher to give in to some of the student’s demands so that the student can be capable of a high level of work. In other words, teachers certainly should not meet unreasonable student demands, but students should also not have to passively just accept arbitrary, unreasonable, or confusing demands from teachers.

Both case studies reinforce this definition of resistance as a negotiational relationship because both students noticeably changed their perceptions of the teacher after he initiated a one-on-one conference, making it a requirement of the class, so that both student and teacher could engage in a more open dialogue with each other. In other words, this direct communication, this direct dialogue of negotiation, can occur most often in conferences where both students and teachers have the most time to listen to each other. Conferences improved the student-teacher relationship in both cases. In Chosen’s case, he was initially quite intimidated by the instructor because he thought that, like his other male writing teacher in tenth grade, his Comp II instructor would be rigid, inflexible, and uncaring, setting up arbitrary grades that Chosen did not clearly
understand while not taking the time to help him understand or work with him on his writing. For instance, in the beginning of the semester, he told me, “The way [my tenth grade teacher] did things was the way [my Comp II instructor] does things. That’s why in this class, you know, after the first two weeks, it’s making me a little nervous because it kind of reminds me of that.” Because of his preconception of his male Comp II teacher as just like his authoritarian, uncaring tenth grade teacher, Chosen was certainly not willing to talk to his instructor about his papers in class, to say nothing of going out of his way to initiate a conference on his own. However, after seeing the instructor in conference several times, Chosen’s perceptions of his Comp II teacher noticeably changed. By the end of the semester, he saw his Comp II instructor as completely different from his tenth grade teacher and, in stark contrast to his tenth grade teacher, said that if he emailed his Comp II instructor one year later and asked for help with a paper, well after the class was over, “I think he would help me. You know, I think he would take the time out to help. I think he cares. I think he’s a very nice guy.” Thus, Chosen’s complete change in how he perceived his Comp II instructor, specifically after he conferenced with him several times, seems to enforce the idea of resistance as negotiational and that the most constructive form of resistance is an open, direct dialogue in which this negotiation can take place.

Just like Chosen, Angelina also completely changed her perceptions of the instructor by the end of the semester after conferencing with him several times, giving her the most chance for this open negotiation to take place. At first, she too was quite intimidated by the instructor, misreading the teacher as strictly traditional and her role as a traditional, passive student who was afraid to ask questions, talk, and, especially, laugh in class. For instance, she said, “when I saw his class requirements [on the first day of class], his academic requirement sheet that’s like 12 pages long, it scared the hell out of me. I’m thinking to myself, ‘This man is the most strict
man I’ve ever seen in my life. He’s going to be a horrible professor.’’ However, through his actions, the teacher was eventually able to convey that questions, talking, and even laughter were allowed. Just like Chosen, by the end of the semester, after meeting with him in several conferences, she saw her teacher as someone who definitely cared about how she did in the class and was willing to help her in any way possible. For instance, later in the semester she told me,

I’ve always thought he was very helpful . . . . He tries so hard to get everybody to pass.

And I really admire that about him because there are some teachers who are like, “I don’t care. You just come to my class, and if you don’t pass, you don’t pass. That’s your problem, not mine.” . . . And he does. I mean, he will work with you. He will meet with you as many times as you need to. He will try and change the paper to what you need it to be so you can revise it.

Once again, Angelina’s complete reversal in her perceptions of the instructor, just as with Chosen, reinforces the idea that resistance is negotiational and the most constructive form of resistance is verbal dialogue, such as during a conference, where this negotiation can be most directly stated.

Of course, it could also be argued that Chosen and Angelina’s changed perceptions of their teacher were due more to the natural progression of a variable because of likeability than to the effect of open, direct dialogue in a conference. Because people will often grow fonder of others as they become more familiar with them, both Chosen and Angelina’s changes in perception, in which they both tended to see the instructor in more favorable terms as the semester progressed, could have been caused by this natural progression instead of the conferences and the direct dialogue. It is impossible in this study to completely isolate this
variable of familiarity and test its effects conclusively, and familiarity may have played some role in causing both case studies to like the class and the instructor more.

However, it is also significant that both Chosen and Angelina directly credit the open dialogue they had with the instructor in conferences specifically with helping them see the instructor and the class in a different light, and, as a result, helping them enjoy the class more.

About the conferences, Chosen told me:

I appreciate [the conferences] as a student because getting that, I’m telling you, that guy in tenth grade, it didn’t seem he cared at all. It was like, “Well, that’s what you got. I didn’t like the paper, so, well” . . . And it makes me more receptive and more willing to be a part of the class, not that I didn’t before, but it kinda, you know, like I said, made me more comfortable.

Chosen, then, credits the one-on-one discussion with his instructor that he got in conferences as not only changing his perception of his instructor but also helping him enjoy and feel more engaged with the class as a whole. Angelina also repeated Chosen’s observation about the benefits of conferencing, saying, “I definitely think requiring the conferences as a part to pass the class is a wonderful thing. . . . I know many students if they’re not required just won’t go. And I think that they are always beneficial. They are never negative. It helps him to get to know us, us get to know him, and it helps us with our writing.” So, even if there is a familiarity effect that causes some of the changes in the way Chosen and Angelina perceived the instructor, the conference still also played a large part in shaping their perceptions, reinforcing the fact that the open, direct dialogue that can occur during conferences between student and teacher is the most productive form of resistance.
Conferences made such an impact on Chosen and Angelina because, through open, direct dialogue during the conferences, the instructor and the student were both able to renegotiate their roles by redefining their relationship as directly as possible, creating an important type of resistance. In Chosen’s case, both student and teacher were reciprocal in initiating pivotal parts of their dialogue. The teacher was pivotal in requiring a conference, opening up the opportunity for dialogue, something that Chosen, who was quite intimidated by the instructor in the beginning, was reluctant to do on his own. However, once this opportunity for direct dialogue was presented, Chosen was pivotal in seizing the opportunity to tell the instructor about his previous experiences as a student, giving the instructor the background for why he had learned that his student role, at least with male writing instructors, must be passive. In this way, the instructor was able to directly counter Chosen’s beliefs, explaining that he was different from his previous male writing instructors and expected Chosen to have a more active role in the classroom and more reciprocal relationship with him. Chosen told me:

I explained to him about my previous teachers and my relationships with them, and how I had problems with writing in the past, and how, in turn, it made me not really want to go to the teacher, maybe not really want to talk to the teacher, and I just try to do it myself. If it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t, it doesn’t. And he said, “You know, you can’t assume that because I’m nothing like that.”

The instructor was then able to clearly explain that his role was more like that of an active coach or mentor but, reciprocally, that he expected Chosen’s classroom role to be that of an active participant as well – someone who asked questions and discussed his writing with both his peers and the instructor. For instance, after conferencing with Chosen, the instructor said, “I personally ask them to be more active in class. I tell them that there’s nothing they can say that
is stupid.” Thus, a direct negotiation did take place during Chosen’s conferences: Chosen explained his previous teacher and student role and the instructor was able to counter this experience by explaining that he was a different teacher and directly stating what his expectations for Chosen were.

Although Angelina found conferences beneficial because she was able to get to know the instructor better and learn more about what his expectations of her student role were supposed to be, she was not as reciprocal in initiating pivotal parts of the dialogue during them and was not able to articulate her role misunderstandings as well as Chosen did. While she did realize that she lacked previous school experience with critical thinking, it was also not as clear from any of my interviews or observations whether or not she was able to articulate the past student experiences that had shaped her understanding of her role towards knowledge as Chosen did. However, by requiring conferences and then redefining his relationship with her during these conferences, as well as in classroom interactions, the instructor was still able to reposition Angelina in a more active stance towards knowledge-making. For instance, he told her in a conference that he would never tell her she did not have an argument, communicating to her that he respected her ability to engage in knowledge-making for herself. Also, although he suggested strategies in her writing, they were suggested more as options, not as the only way to write the paper. About his comments on her writing, she said, “I never felt that way with him, which was . . . this is one way to do this. . . . He, in his comments, was a lot more understanding [than other teachers]. He would say, maybe let’s do this or let’s try this instead. Or this isn’t clear. . . . I mean, he would give . . . options.”

Also, although he did not as directly discuss her role as a student in the classroom as he did with Chosen, through his actions in the classroom – allowing questions, playful banter and
laughter, and open discussion about any writing topic students brought up – the instructor clearly communicated to Angelina that he expected her to take a more active role as a student and have a more reciprocal relationship with him as well. For instance, by the end of the class, she told me, “We turned into nobody talking in the beginning to now we just go in there and have a blast. . . . Once he got to know us and we got to know him, it got a lot more relaxed and it was a lot easier to go and a lot easier to learn.” So, although the negotiation between Angelina and the instructor was not as direct during conferences, it still happened in more subtle ways. The teacher was still able to communicate his expectations of Angelina and position her in a more active knowledge-making role.

Productive Resistance: Strategies and Tactics Intertwined

Through interpersonal and class discussion, then, both instructor and student were better able to redefine their roles in more productive ways, achieving a more constructive form of resistance, even if this form of resistance was only partial for Angelina. However, this resistance was only achieved by a reciprocity on both sides. Both sides had to be willing to at least partially imagine inhabiting each other’s roles and engage in reciprocal forms of resistance. For instance, de Certeau defines a teacher’s authorized form of resistance as a strategy. Strategies, as he defines them, depend on authorized spaces, authorized uses for this space, and a constant surveillance of this space to ensure enforcement of this use. De Certeau writes that “Strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place” (30). In other words, it is the space of the classroom that gives teachers their traditional power. Within this space, teachers can use authorized strategies in the way of classroom requirements and penalties if students do not fulfill these requirements to make sure that order is maintained. Of course, constant surveillance is needed to enforce these requirements. Constant visibility of the
teacher, the authorized classroom space, and the rules that maintain this classroom space are also required. The classroom is the teacher’s authorized place, and in it, the teacher can impose whatever rule he or she wishes.

On the other hand, students resort, as mentioned previously, to tactics. Tactics follow no rule. They are not authorized actions. Instead of visibility, their effectiveness relies on invisibility. They are kairotic in that they depend on circumstance and the opportunity of time and place to be effective, not the structure of rules. De Certeau writes that “tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces . . . Although they remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it” (29-30). Although tactics are a part of any space, they are not part of the authorization of that space, so tactics do not rely on space for their power. Instead, they rely on a rhizomatic ability to spring up anywhere in any space and subvert this space at any time. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write, “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (9). In this analysis, students traditionally rely on tactics to resist. They do not define the rules of classroom space, but must remain dependent on the right combination of circumstances to subvert the rules of classroom space to meet their needs.

Just as these are the roles of resistance that teachers and students most traditionally engage in, for a more productive form of resistance, both parties need to be willing to let go of these traditional roles of resistance – to resist them in a way. For real negotiation to take place, teachers need to engage in tactics and students need to engage in strategies. For instance, for real learning to take place, teachers need to seize the kairos of time and place and take advantage of learning moments – free moments that occur spontaneously in classrooms that can create a
special significance for students. For instance, this might be a time when something goes wrong in the usual structured plan of the class. The teacher could, instead of fighting the moment, embrace it and use it to illustrate a point or in some way build it into a lesson. In a conference, the use of tactics could happen when, while discussing something with a student, a teacher has a flash of insight into why this particular student is having difficulty.

During my observation of the Comp II class, such a learning moment occurred when the instructor had the students all discuss their research topics as a class. He started out by announcing that Angelina was going to write a research paper on the legalization of ferrets. Naturally, there was considerable interest but also ignorance about this topic in the class since no one else really seemed to know much about ferrets. Some of these comments included: “They don’t have spines do they? . . . Ferrets gross me out. They’re like snakes with legs” and that making ferrets illegal in New York City was understandable “because they don’t want to have a bunch of ferrets running around. Those things repopulate like rats.” Angelina emphatically protested these comments, showing her classmates how they were misconceptions and not legitimate reasons for ferrets to be illegal. She answered with: “They do [have spines], they’re just really flexible” and “They’re in the mustelid family. . . They’ve been so domesticated that they can’t survive but a few days without anything.” With this discussion, which may have appeared spontaneously chaotic and unfocused to the casual observer, Angelina actually learned first-hand what some of the biases and misconceptions against ferrets were and figured out how to counter them for her counter-argument. In fact, during this exchange, the instructor pointed this out to her with “you already have a counter-argument.” He also used this occasion to emphasize her relationship to knowledge, reinforcing her position as an active knowledge-maker when he said, “But look, it [this discussion about ferrets] is a perfect example of an issue that
you can explore. Personally, you have some experience and it’s, it’s all coming in one piece.”

Like this discussion about ferrets, there is no structure or plan to these moments. They are effective only because they rely on time and place and the subversion of authorized, planned structure. They are illuminating breaks in a way that can also be moments of breakthrough.

In negotiating with students, using tactics means letting go and allowing empathy, resisting using authorized power in certain circumstances so that students have better learning conditions. In other words, for teachers, using tactics entails judging the needs of the student and the situation and making the best judgment for it, even if this judgment may not meet the prescribed rules the teacher has set out for the class or that have been established by tradition within the academy. An example of this would be giving in to a strict deadline policy if a student has a busy, possibly conflicting schedule like Chosen did. In fact, this is just what the Comp II instructor did when Chosen was struggling with his third essay, after Chosen explained how busy his schedule was. Chosen explained, “And [my third essay] was just difficult for me to write. I had problems finding sources and finding things to back my sources. And we finally figured out, okay, this is what we’re going to do. It was after the actual deadline it was due. And [the instructor] was like, ‘Okay, you can turn it in.’” In other words, teachers using tactics might be what de Certeau calls giving a gift – giving “generosities for which one expects a return” (26). In other words, by bending the rules for a student, the teacher, in a true negotiation, expects a return – expects that the student will be better able to meet the demands of the class and complete a higher quality of work. However, this gift is not authorized. It is freely given by the teacher according to the needs of that particular time, place, and student. But without this ability to give in at crucial times and resist the safety of sanctioned authority, negotiation becomes impossible.
While the letting go tactics entail may seem risky, especially emotionally, by allowing these free, tactical moments to occur while resisting the urge to always hide behind the safety of the visible rules inherent within strategies, teachers are practicing what Paul Kameen calls “Teaching . . . [as] the means by which we may become other than ourselves” (qtd. in Lindquist 206). In other words, by becoming more open to students by placing themselves in students’ places emotionally as well as in a more rational, logical context, teachers can better perceive the needs of their students. As Julie Lindquist further explains:

[T]o insist that teachers must be willing to be other than themselves, that they be willing to do risky emotion work, is no more, and no less, than the kind of emotional labor working-class students are asked to do all the time in changing characters to fit the scripts of new rhetorical situations and institutional contexts. . . [This] is a necessary practice of the working classes, as these are obligations of the powerless. (204)

In other words, to put themselves in students’ shoes, teachers need to do so literally by allowing the risky emotional interchange to occur for themselves in the same way that they demand emotional risk and emotional perceptiveness from students. After all, this is only fair since this emotional imagining and interplay is the very thing teachers ask students who are not from middle-class, white, or otherwise normative backgrounds to do when students come to school and must learn to perform a subjectivity that is not their own. This way of genuinely caring and listening to students becomes a way to resist their traditional rigid academic roles in order to be more helpful to students.

This type of teacher resistance is crucial because only by putting themselves in the place of their students can real dialogue or negotiation occur since this is the only way teachers can perceive what the needs of their students actually are. However, to do this, as Freire says, is an
act of love. Freire goes on to say that “Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and
dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a
relationship of domination (70). . . . Dialogue cannot exist without humility (71).” While
dialogue can exist within other acts of resistance, these acts always have a chance of being
misinterpreted, thus thwarting the dialogue. While direct dialogue, the direct dialogue that
comes from putting yourself in the place of the other, still has a chance of misinterpretation and
miscommunication, this chance is greatly reduced. Thus, this type of direct dialogue – a
dialogue in which teachers put themselves in the place of their students and vice versa – becomes
a much clearer dialogue and, as such, a much more productive form of resistance than other
types where the negotiation between parties is more indirect.

Teachers may also be concerned that allowing this risky emotional exchange to occur
will take too much work and time. Certainly, individual conferences take time, especially when
a teacher has over 20 students. However, what is most important is not the conference per se,
but the individual time with each student and the allowance for actual dialogue with students,
regardless of whether this occurs inside or outside of the classroom. This negotiational dialogue
can still occur during a whole-class discussion. Also, there are ways of making individual time
for students during class that do not necessarily take away from time outside of class. For
instance, in a writing class, teachers can have in-class drafting sessions where students spend
time at a computer actually writing their papers. The teacher can then go around the classroom
and answer any questions, spending as much time as needed with each individual student. The
teacher can also not hold a formal class but instead use class time for scheduling conferences as
Donald Murray suggests (174-175). If several students are having similar problems, either with
their writing or with disengagement, teachers can schedule group conferences. Lastly, teachers
can also make time either before or after class to meet with students, working this time into their class schedule so that the conferences do not necessarily take away that much of their time outside of class. While conferences do take some extra time and effort, there are ways to facilitate open dialogue and negotiation with students that minimize this extra time and effort.

At the same time, students need to rely on strategies as well. While they are not traditionally authorized to form the rules of classroom space, as students, their identity authorizes that learning must take place. They need to embrace this authorizing identity to demand that they learn in ways that are most productive for them. These demands could be verbally discussing with a teacher that he or she make sensible classroom rules that are enforced fairly. These demands could also take more authorized, bureaucratic means such as issuing a formal complaint to the department chair or dean. Because students are using authorized, bureaucratic forms of resistance, it may not seem that the students are actually resisting. However, in demanding change from their teacher, they are still resisting that teacher, even if they do so in more conventionally acceptable ways. Also, this type of resistance is vital for student resistance because, by accepting their authorizing identities as students, students can realize that they have legitimate needs that have to be met by the university and that they need to fight for these needs. If this awareness does not happen, students will either just passively accept everything or just resist without consciously understanding the reasons for their resistance. In either case, clear negotiation with the teacher becomes impossible.

In this type of negotiation, both teacher and students resist in reciprocal ways; they do not simply just follow one form of resistance, but both follow a resistance of tactics and strategies simultaneously to make each work. As Foucault writes, “one must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic
envelope that makes them work” (History 100). In other words, tactics and strategies need each other in order to work. Tactics anchor strategies and vice versa. Foucault writes, “No strategy could achieve comprehensive effects if it did not gain support from precise and tenuous relations serving, not at its point of application or final outcome, but as its prop and anchor point” (99). It is this relationship and this ability to shift from one to the other, regardless of role, that makes negotiation or interchange possible. With the ability to shift between the two types of resistance, an interplay or negotiation between student and teacher occurs that de Certeau terms “potlatch” – “an interplay of voluntary allowances that counts on reciprocity and organizes a social network articulated by the ‘obligation to give’” (27). Both students and teachers, then, participate in what de Certeau terms a gift exchange, both giving something to the other in order that both remain powerful – the teacher can effectively teach and the student can effectively learn.

Of course, this willingness to give to the other what the other needs could be interpreted as a form of social transgression in that it may go beyond the norms of the traditional university. De Certeau writes that “the gift economy is transformed into a transgression in a profit economy: it appears as an excess (a waste), a challenge (a rejection of profit), or a crime (an attack on property)” (27). Certainly, where the teacher is concerned, this gift exchange may appear to be a transgression because it may go beyond the boundaries of prescribed rules or may be seen as a challenge to the traditional authority structures of the university. Also, students may transgress their traditional role – instead of just passively accepting everything, the student questions and challenges, but in doing so, also paves the way for learning and achieving above and beyond what is traditionally expected of the student.

In changing places and engaging in each other’s type of resistance, they are both resisting their prescribed roles – the student as tactician and the teacher as strategist. However, in doing
this, they both may also resort to their normative resistances if needed. In other words, as a negotiation, no party should always completely acquiesce to all the others’ demands. This is not resistance but passive acceptance and, if this happens, negotiation also becomes impossible. The teacher always reserves the right to draw the line and resort to the strategic classroom rules to maintain order if student demands are unreasonable. For instance, with their use of tactics, in no way should students resort to physical or sexual intimidation, and, in this case, the teacher is well justified in resorting to conventional institutional strategies for protection, including calling the campus police. However, the same goes for students as well if teacher demands are unreasonable. Students should also never passively accept physical or sexual intimidation from teachers as well. As Foucault writes:

> Obviously the bringing into play of power relations does not exclude the use of violence any more than it does the obtaining of consent; no doubt the exercise of power can never do without one or the other, often both at the same time. But even though consensus and violence are the instruments or the results, they do not constitute the principle of power. . . [Power] is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions. (“Subject” 427)

In other words, while it is true that both violence and, the opposite, acquiescence, are often a part of power relations, the negotiation relationship that constitutes resistance, they do not constitute power or resistance in and of themselves. Like power, resistance exists in a relationship, in a negotiation. For this negotiation to progress most productively, both parties should work towards better learning conditions so that teachers can better teach and students can better learn. No one can teach or learn well in an atmosphere colored with physical or sexual harassment and intimidation.
In the class, then, the instructor and Chosen at least were able to negotiate better by switching de Certeau’s resistance roles and resisting their traditional roles of teacher as strategist and student as tactician. For instance, Chosen was able to assert his authorizing role as a student and, by doing that, articulate his needs. He explained to the instructor the extent of time constraints he was under, arguing that he needed more time to do a good job on his paper. By doing this, he was using a strategy of resistance – using his authorized position as student to claim what he needed. On the other hand, for this negotiation to work, the instructor needed to resort to tactics, seeing the limit of time constraints that Chosen was under at the time, quickly assessing the situation, and then making an exception for deadlines based on the details of this circumstance rather than just relying on a fixed rule as he would do if he was utilizing a strategy. In this way, they were both able to achieve a truer negotiation, which Chosen explained when he said:

Well, I feel I have a place where, there’s an understanding. So that way it’s not like I feel, okay, it’s me trying to get it done, and the teacher’s over there expecting me to get it done, thinking that I just don’t care and I’m just slacking off. Now it’s like, well, I have this situation that’s hard for me. The teacher’s understanding. We’re working together to do it. So, I don’t feel like I’m stressed out trying to you know just get it done. I feel like I’m trying to get it done, but I got help. It’s easier that way.

Angelina, however, had a more problematic negotiation since she was not as clearly able to use her authorizing power as student to assert her needs for becoming more comfortable with critical thinking. Therefore, it was not as clear whether she was able to resist her traditional role of tactician and use a strategy. However, even in this instance, the instructor was able to start a more implicit negotiation by once again utilizing tactics – relying on the circumstances of the
classroom, its time and place, not the traditional rules of classroom space – to tell jokes and allow free questions and comments, as he did in the class discussion of her ferret paper. In fact, to allow this much classroom freedom demanded a strong reliance on tactics from the instructor, since to do this, the teacher must at least partially give up the security and control of traditional classroom structures and strategies in favor of utilizing what may naturally arise from free discussion with students, as he did in the rather chaotic ferret discussion. While, of course, the instructor still utilized the strategic structure of lesson plans – he did eventually open the discussion up to other research paper topics from other students for instance -- by allowing this free exchange of discussion, he still opened himself up to the use of tactics. More importantly, though, by giving Angelina the chance to freely speak, he subtly created a more active role for Angelina to take in the classroom. In this role, Angelina had the freedom to express her knowledge about ferrets and freely argue with her classmates, asserting her authority and knowledge-making abilities. Furthermore, the instructor subtly reinforced her knowledge-making abilities by saying, “Personally, you have some experience and it’s, it’s all coming in one piece” during the ferret argument and then telling Angelina, “I will never tell you that you don’t have an argument if you truly think you have an argument” during a conference. This subtle positioning of Angelina as active knowledge-maker could help her begin to overcome her difficulties with critical thinking despite the fact that she was not as able to clearly articulate her difficulties with him as Chosen; with more of a conception of herself as active knowledge-maker, Angelina could begin to question other’s ideas instead of just blindly accepting them since she was beginning to see herself as an authority in her own right.

By classifying certain types of resistance by separating strategies and tactics and then showing how they work together, de Certeau defines more clearly Foucault’s power relationship,
particularly as it relates to resistance. Since Foucault defines power and thus resistance as a relationship or a type of negotiation – “A set of actions upon other actions” – de Certeau defines more specifically what these actions can be. In doing this, it also becomes clearer how resistance can come from both sides – even from those in positions of authorized power. For instance, by using strategies, teachers are still participating in a relationship of resistance with their students, even if strategies are authorized forms of resistance and so, at first, may appear invisible and not initially seem to be forms of “true” resistance. Penalizing a student for not turning work in on time is still an act of resistance on the teacher’s part; the teacher is resisting the student’s late work, even if these penalties are authorized by a visible and formal code of rules. In other words, in resorting to strategies, teachers are still engaged in a “set of actions upon other actions,” reacting to, or, in other words, resisting, student actions. Thus, de Certeau, in this way, also helps to clarify the dynamics behind Foucault’s relationship of resistance.

Study Limits

There are limits to the significance of my research. Actually, to study resistance, I was caught in a methodological double-bind. On one hand, to really discover the subtleties and complications inherent within a student-teacher relationship, I needed to carefully analyze both students and the teacher. The qualitative case study gave me both the descriptive and analytical power to really explore the complexities within student-teacher relationships. On the other hand, because of the scope of such a study, I could only study a few subjects, which meant, of course, that I do not have a large enough sample size to apply my findings to the relationship between teachers and students in general. However, one of the main points of my study is that resistance is a relationship between specific students and specific teachers. As such, it is always contextual to that specific relationship, and it is impossible to find generalizable findings about a
relationship that is so context-specific. For instance, if I had done a quantitative study, such as a survey, asking thousands of students and teachers around the country about their reasons for resistance, I would have lost in depth of analysis what I gained in breadth, especially the parts of my case study that were specific to only that student’s subjectivity and other relationships outside of the composition classroom. I certainly would not have been able to notice how an absent father figure in Chosen’s interviews may have complicated his relationship with his male teachers as well, possibly causing him to also perceive them as so rigid and authoritarian that they were absent as real teaching, caring mentors. I certainly would not have noticed how Angelina’s resistance towards writing academic papers actually stemmed from an epistemological misunderstanding of knowledge-making since this analysis came after several hours of dialogue with her about her perceptions of school and writing, something she would not have been able to fully demonstrate in a few sentences on a questionnaire or, even worse, a multiple choice answer sheet.

Possibly, future research on resistance could include a triangulation of both in-depth case-study research and a broader survey. However, even with this triangulation, it is impossible for the entire broad picture of resistance between students and teachers to ever be fully known and generalized to all students and teachers in composition. Although it may provide a fuller picture, even this triangulation will never be entirely accurate since the details of student-teacher relationships are so singular and context-specific.

Furthermore, my research was complicated even more by the fact that, in studying resistance, I am most interested in anomalies – students who may not fit into the statistical averages of a quantitative study. In my experience teaching, most students are not usually that resistant. They come to class, they do their work, and they turn in their papers on time almost
without exception. However, there are always those exceptions – students who drop out without notice, suddenly stop coming to class or turning in papers, or just drift away, often before I am even aware there is a problem. So, I am interested in a small minority. I want to see the students who normally get lost between the cracks, who get silenced in a normal probability curve (Gall, Gall, and Borg 134) or who might get lost in the calculations for the probability of error -- students who do not show up statistically because they are averaged out and are not considered statistically significant (Gall, Gall, and Borg 136-137). Specifically, I am so interested in studying these anomalies because I think all students, no matter who they are, deserve a chance to succeed in college and to be successful in life in general. However, often these minorities that can get averaged out in educational studies are students who fall outside of the traditional group of college-going students – students who are not white, middle-class, or male. So, in my case study, I wanted to pay as much attention as my own white, middle-class subjectivity would allow to these students’ differences. For instance, I wanted to pay as much detailed attention as possible to Chosen, who is African-American and not necessarily from a middle-class background, and to Angelina, who although white and fairly middle-class, is female and has disabilities.

But just as I wanted to pay as much attention as possible to the differences these students had and how, possibly, these differences affected their resistances to writing and composition, I did not want to generalize or essentialize their differences in every case study, especially in case studies such as that of Chosen, who has a radically different subjectivity from my own. For instance, while Chosen was a first generation college student and, as such, had pressure from his family and community to excel in all areas, I am not sure that this is a uniquely African-American phenomenon directly tied to his race. Where I did feel more comfortable in addressing
these differences, these variables of race and gender, etc, was in addressing empowerment and oppression, specifically stereotypes that keep people of a certain subjectivity oppressed. Education, while not necessarily the only road to success, will greatly help. So, while my case studies were not engaging in types of resistance that helped their education, I did make the claim that this did not ease the negative stereotypes about their particular subjectivity and that, more importantly, it only added to the oppression of that particular subjectivity. While I believe that is important for teachers to pay attention to individual student differences, these differences will inevitably differ within subjectivities and, as a result, cannot be generalized. Once again, the difficulty in generalizing about difference means that teachers need to spend as much individual time as possible with their students to learn about these differences so that they can help all their students, despite any differences in subjectivity.

Another factor limiting the significance of my research was the fact that I was able to only obtain a limited amount of information from my instructor informant. Therefore, while I fully intended to study resistance from both sides of the student-teacher relationship, I focused mainly on student perceptions of that relationship, adding only a few insights from the instructor. Part of the reason this happened was that I did not always know the pertinent questions to ask the instructor about the students until after I analyzed my data and noticed corresponding patterns in how both students perceived the instructor. However, by this time the study was over, and, by HSRB guidelines, I could not ask the instructor any further questions. For instance, one of the patterns I did not notice until after my analysis was that both Angelina and Chosen described the instructor in rather strict terms and were both hesitant to have a closer interpersonal relationship with him at the beginning of the semester. However, they both markedly changed their perceptions of him by the end, setting up a definite contrast by describing him as caring and
helpful. Because the study was over though by this point, I could not ask the instructor why he thought there was this change in perception and whether or not he did this on purpose for some pedagogical reason or whether or not he was even aware of this perceptual change in his students. So, if I were to do the study again, I would definitely plan with the HSRB to have follow-up questions after the initial study so that I could ask these kinds of questions after my analysis was complete.

However, another reason my instructor data was so limited was because the instructor was quite resistant towards answering personal questions about his previous education and previous resistance towards his own education and teaching. Of course, this resistance was still very two-sided and definitely stemmed from power imbalances within our relationship. For instance, as a subject, he seemed to feel exposed since as an instructor he had a level of visibility that students did not have. He was concerned that within a small graduate department, graduate students and teachers would find out I was conducting my study on him. Certainly, he knew that while working with me on my dissertation, many of the graduate faculty would know that I was conducting my study on him. As a graduate student, he existed in rather a precarious position in the academic hierarchy: a part of the hierarchy where older faculty with the luxury of tenure constantly evaluated his graduate work, possibly in ways that could jeopardize his future. In this case, he may have felt that they would negatively evaluate his teaching as well. In fact, he did not want me to use any distinguishing descriptive markers to describe his identity at all. After much negotiation, we finally settled on my describing him as an instructor who had spent some time teaching abroad; however, he was uneasy with even this fairly nondescript denotation since in our small graduate department, there are not that many graduate teachers with international teaching experience. So, in my next study with instructor informants, I will be more careful and
clear about protecting instructor anonymity since instructors do tend to be more visible than students, and I will definitely negotiate more clearly with instructors about what sort of personal information they feel comfortable providing before I actually conduct the study.

Even with all these limitations, however, this study still does hold potential for further research into student resistance and disengagement to improve teaching. For instance, this study does hold particular significance for teacher education. From my experience mentoring new graduate teachers, I have learned that new teachers in particular tend to want to close off all chance for student resistance with strict, authoritarian rules, which they tend to want to rigidly adhere by regardless of the circumstance of the student. Resistance represents potential chaos, chaos they know they do not necessarily have the experience to successfully navigate, particularly since they do not have the experience to always judge the situation and be appropriately flexible in meeting each student’s needs. This need for control is often exacerbated by the feeling that resistance equals teaching failure instead of an often healthy learning moment for both student and teacher. Resistance means that critical thinking and questioning is taking place. However, in a composition pedagogy class or support group, teachers could openly talk about resistance, acknowledging that resistance, instead of simply being suppressed, is often a healthy, normal part of learning. Instead of trying to find methods of suppressing resistance, teachers could discuss ways that they could use resistance as a negotiation to better meet their own teaching needs and their students learning needs, as well as discussing how to utilize resistance as a deeper moment of learning. Instead of looking at resistance as automatic failure, they could come to see resistance as a healthy aspect of teaching – a moment where both students and teacher can learn together.
In my case study, students resisted writing and writing pedagogies through disengagement because of conflicting role expectations outside the classroom, other previous classroom roles and relationships to teachers, and, finally, a different understanding of their role and relationship to knowledge. Because of my case study size, I cannot generalize these reasons for resistance to all composition students, especially in regard to variables such as gender, race, etc. This inability to generalize reinforces the importance of paying attention to the dynamics and local contexts which construct individual student-teacher relationships within the classroom. Even with these limitations however, my study does show the importance of clear student-teacher communication in negotiating resistances on both sides, especially in ways that more constructively redefine these student-teacher relationships and classroom roles. For this negotiation to occur, both students and teachers need to be flexible enough to resist their usual types of resistance and put themselves in the other’s place, not only in perceiving how and why they resist, but also in participating in the other’s forms of resistance, even while the specifics of these forms may vary across local contexts and variables. While the specific dynamics of these relationships and the negotiations that define them may change, the need to learn as much as possible about individual students remains.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Student Interview #1

1. Describe your experiences with school.

2. Describe yourself as a student.

3. What influenced you to enter college?

4. What is your major?

5. What do you plan to do with your major in the future?

6. What influenced you to pick your major?

7. What other classes are you taking?

8. Do you enjoy these other classes? Why or why not?

9. How much time do you spend with your writing class compared to your other classes?

10. Would you classify your writing class as harder or easier than your other classes? Why?

11. Did your parents go to college?

12. Are there members in your family who are supportive of you going to college? Why do you think they are so supportive?

13. Are there members in your family who are not supportive of you going to college? Why do you think they are not supportive?

14. In what ways is this class similar or different to writing classes that you’ve taken before?

15. What do you think of your writing class so far? Why?

16. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?

17. What would you consider your best writing experience? Why?

18. What would you consider your worst writing experience? Why?

19. Do you ever feel frustrated with writing? Why or why not?
20. Describe the perfect writing class.

21. Why do you think that this would be an ideal writing class? What makes it the ideal writing class?

   Student Interview #2

1. What do you think of your classes now?

2. In what ways have you changed your mind?

3. In what ways have you not changed your mind?

4. Why have you changed your mind? Why do you think you have not changed your mind?

5. What do you think of English 112 now? Why?

6. In what ways have you changed your mind?

7. In what ways have you not changed your mind? Why do you think you have changed your mind? Why do you think you have not changed your mind?

8. What aspects of English 112 do you really enjoy? Why?


10. What would you do to improve the aspects of the class that you do not enjoy? Why would you do this?

11. In what ways could you be doing better in 112?

12. What things could you do to improve? Why would this help you?

   Student Interview #3

1. What do you think of your classes now?

2. In what ways have you changed your mind?

3. In what ways have you not changed your mind?

4. Why have you changed your mind? Why do you think you have not changed your mind?

5. What do you think of English 112 now? Why?

6. In what ways have you changed your mind?
7. In what ways have you not changed your mind?

8. Why have you changed your mind? Why do you think you have not changed your mind?

9. What aspects of English 112 do you really enjoy? Why do you feel this way?

10. Has anything changed in your enjoyment of the class since our last interview? If so, what is the change and what has caused it? If not, why do you think your enjoyment of the class has not changed?

11. What aspects of English 112 do you not enjoy? Why do you feel this way?

12. Has anything changed in your enjoyment of the class since our last interview? If so, what is the change and what has caused it? If not, why do you think your enjoyment of the class has not changed?

13. What would you do to improve the aspects of the class that you do not enjoy? Why would you do this?

14. In what ways do you think you are doing well in 112? Why do you think you are being successful in these areas?

15. In what ways could you be doing better in 112?

16. What things could you do to improve? Why would this help you?

17. Have you done anything to improve since our last interview? If so, what did you do? Was it effective? Why or why not? If not, why did you make this choice?

Instructor Interview #1

1. Have you encountered resistant students in the past?

2. How would you define student resistance?

3. Describe some of the previous student resistance you encountered in the past.

4. Why do you think the students were resistant? What, in your opinion, were the reasons behind these examples of resistance?

5. How would you describe yourself as a student?

6. Did you change at all when you went to college? Why or why not?

7. Were you resistant to any of your college classes in any way? How? Why or why not?
8. What did you think of your composition course? Would you classify yourself as resistant to them in any way?

9. Did you enjoy any of your college writing courses? Why or why not?

10. a. In your opinion, what aspects of English 112 do students tend to be the most resistant towards? b. What do you think are the reasons for this resistance?

Instructor Interview #2

1. How many students do you have in your current class?

2. In what ways are students in your class doing well?

3. What do you think are the reasons behind their success?

4. Are there any students in your class who are doing poorly?

5. Why do you think that they are doing poorly?

6. Are there any students in your class so far that you would classify as resistant? Why?

7. What kind of contact have you made with them such as conferences, in class questions, comments, etc?

8. Has their behavior changed from the beginning of the class? In what ways has it changed? In what ways has it stayed the same?

9. Why do you think their behavior changed and/or why do you think their behavior has stayed the same?

10. What do you think could possibly be the reasons for this resistance?

11. In what ways do you plan to deal with this resistance?

12. In what ways will your plan be effective in helping the students?

Instructor Interview #3

1. How are the students who were doing well during our last interview doing now?

2. In what ways has their performance changed? In what ways has their performance stayed the same?
3. What are the reasons behind any change? What are the reasons behind any lack of change?

4. How are the students who were doing poorly during our last interview doing now?

5. In what ways has their performance changed? In what ways has their performance stayed the same?

6. What are the reasons behind any change? What are the reasons behind any lack of change?

7. How are the students that you classified as resistant doing? What do you think are the reasons for their change or their lack of change?

8. What kind of contact have you made with them such as conferences, in class questions, comments, etc?

9. How did you end up dealing with their resistance? How effective do you think you were in dealing with them? Why?
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Instructor

Dear instructor,

As a Ph.D. student at Bowling Green University, I am asking for your consent to observe and audio tape record your class sessions, as well as conduct interviews with you and two to three students, for a research project I am conducting for my dissertation. This study will examine student attitudes toward writing and will benefit both students and teachers in the future by giving teachers more information to help them understand student attitudes towards writing and their writing classes, thereby helping teachers to be able to better help students more fully with their writing in the future. Participation in the class observations and the interviews are completely voluntary, and you can withdraw from them at any time. In no way will your or your students’ participation in the study impact your employment status in GSW.

If more than two or three of your students consent to be interviewed, I will gather data from all participants. However, I will only selectively use data from two or three students for my dissertation because of page limits, etc. Therefore, if a student consents to be interviewed, there is no guarantee that I will use the data I collect from that interview for my dissertation. However, students will be notified if I use the data from their interviews in my dissertation.

Since students may decline to be observed and audio taped at any time for any reason during this study, if any student declines participation, I will still observe your class, but I will not audio tape it, and I will just take notes. Furthermore, I will omit any mention of this student in my notes of the class.

If you consent to me observing and audio tape recording your class sessions, you will be consenting to me viewing and taking notes of your class sessions and to having a third of your classes audio tape recorded. Also, I will always inform you of any audio tape recording I do before I do it. I will place one audio tape recorder in the front of the room in full view of the rest of the class. Also, I will always inform you ahead of time of any tape recording I do before I do it. If you do not want me to audio tape record a certain class session, just tell me, and I will not tape it. There will be no hidden audio tape recorders, and students will be fully informed that they are being audio taped as well. The total study will take no longer than the semester you will be teaching English 112.

If you consent to be interviewed, you will be taking part in three hour-long audio tape-recorded interviews. The first will take place in the beginning of the semester sometime before the third week of class, the second around mid-terms, and the third right before final exam week. The total study will take no longer than the semester you will be teaching English 112.

During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about your reactions and insights into student attitudes toward writing and writing instruction. During the interview, you do not
have to answer any questions that you think are too personal and that you do not want to answer. Also, you can leave at any time during the interview.

Like the class observations, the interviews will also be audio taped. However, the audio tapes for both the class observations and the interviews will only be used to verify my notes. Only my dissertation advisor, Professor Kristine Blair, and I will listen to them. I will keep the audio tapes until I am done with my dissertation, and then they will be erased. I will always remind you before the interview that you are being tape recorded, and, if at any time during the interview you tell me that you want me to turn off the tape recorder, I will.

If you consent to participate in these class observations and interviews, you also have the right to confidentiality. As the researcher, I will protect your confidentiality by referring to you with a pseudonym in all my notes and my dissertation. Also, you have the right to read the final transcripts of my tape recorded observations and interviews and can omit any part that you wish. Finally, you have the right to ask me any questions you have about the research study, and, at the end of the study, can request a summary or a copy of the results of the study, as well as copies of any other consent forms that your students have signed.

If you have any questions about the study during or after the study, please contact Rebekah Shultz, English Department, (419) 372-0338, rshultz@bgnet.bgsu.edu or my dissertation advisor, Kristine Blair, English Department, (419) 372-8033, kblair@bgnet.bgsu.edu

If you have any further concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the HSRB at: Office of Research Compliance, 201 South Hall, (419) 372-7716, hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu

By signing this document, you are showing that you have been informed of what it means to participate in this study, you have read this document, you have had all your questions answered, and you fully agree to participate in this study. Please keep the extra signed consent form for your records.

_________________________________________         _____________
Signature               Date

Student Interview

Dear student,

As a Ph.D. student at Bowling Green University, I am asking for your consent, as well as one or two of your other classmates, to be interviewed for a research project I am conducting for my dissertation, which will study student resistance towards writing. This study will examine student attitudes toward writing and will benefit both students and teachers in the future by giving teachers more information to help them understand student attitudes towards writing and their writing classes, thereby helping teachers to to be able to better help students more fully with their writing in the future. Participation in the interview is completely voluntary and you can
withdraw from it at any time. Whether you decide to participate or not, your decision will have no impact on your grades or class standing. **You must be over 18 to be able to participate.**

If you consent to be interviewed, you will be taking part in three hour-long audio tape-recorded interviews. The first will take place in the beginning of the semester sometime before the third week of class, the second around mid-terms, and the third right before final exam week. The total study will take no longer than the semester you will be enrolled in English 112.

During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences and outlook on writing and writing instruction. During the interview, you do not have to answer any questions that you think are too personal and that you do not want to answer. Also, you can leave at any time during the interview.

The interviews will be audio taped, but the audio tapes will only be used to verify my notes. No one but me and my dissertation advisor, Professor Kristine Blair, will listen to them. I will keep the audio tapes until I am done with my dissertation, and then they will be erased. I will always remind you before the interview that you are being audio tape recorded, and, if at any time during the interview you tell me that you want me to turn off the audio tape recorder, I will.

If you consent to participate in these interviews, you also have the right to confidentiality. As the researcher, I will protect your confidentiality by referring to you with a pseudonym during the interview, as well as in my notes and my dissertation. Also, you have the right to read the final transcripts of your interviews and can omit any part that you wish. Finally, you have the right to ask me any questions you have about the research study, and, at the end of the study, can request a summary or a copy of the results of the study.

If you and more than two or three of your classmates consent to be interviewed, I will gather data from all participants. However, I will only selectively use data from two or three students for my dissertation because of page limits, etc. Therefore, if you consent to be interviewed, there is also no guarantee that I will use the data I collect from your interview for my dissertation. You will be informed if I use the data from your interview in my dissertation.

If you have any questions about the study during or after the study, please contact Rebekah Shultz, English Department, (419) 372-0338, rshultz@bgnet.bgsu.edu or my dissertation advisor, Kristine Blair, English Department, (419) 372-8033, kblair@bgnet.bgsu.edu

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Dear student,

As a Ph.D. student at Bowling Green University, I am asking for your consent to observe and audio tape record your class sessions for a research project I am conducting for my dissertation. This study will examine student attitudes toward writing and will benefit both students and teachers in the future by giving teachers more information to help them understand student attitudes towards writing and their writing classes, thereby helping teachers to be able to better help students more fully with their writing in the future. Participation in class observation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw from it at any time. Whether you decide to participate or not, your decision will have no impact on your grades or class standing. **You must be over 18 years old to be able to participate.** If you or any of your other 23 classmates are not 18 yet, I will be unable to observe your class.

If you consent to me observing and tape recording your class sessions, you will be consenting to me viewing and taking notes of your class sessions and to having a third of your classes audio recorded. I am using the audio tape recorder only to verify my notes, and no one else but my dissertation advisor, Professor Kristine Blair, and I will listen to them. I will keep the audio tapes until I am done with my dissertation, and then I will erase them. Also, I will always inform you of any audio tape recording I do before I do it. I will place one audio tape recorder in the front of the room in full view of the rest of the class. There will never be any hidden tape recorders. The total study will take no longer than the semester you will be enrolled in English 112. Finally, during the course of this observation, you may be asked to participate in a series of audio taped interviews, which you may decline for any reason.

If you consent to participate in these class observations, you also have the right to confidentiality. As the researcher, I will protect your confidentiality by referring to you with a pseudonym in all my notes and my dissertation. Also, you have the right to read the final transcripts of my tape recorded observations and can omit any part that you are uncomfortable with. Finally, you have the right to ask me any questions you have about the research study, and, at the end of the study, can request a summary or a copy of the results of the study.

Since you may decline to be observed and audio taped at any time for any reason during this study, if you decline to participate, I will still observe your class, but I will not audio tape it, and I will just take notes. Furthermore, I will omit any mention of you in my notes of the class.

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By signing this document, you are showing that you have been informed of what it means to participate in this study, you have read this document, you have had all your questions answered, and you fully agree to participate in this study. Please keep the extra signed consent form for your records.

_____________________________________         _____________
Signature               Date