COLLABORATION AND DIFFERENCE IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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"Interestingly enough, much bad writing comes from trying to write to doubters--
trying to blow a trumpet to an audience of lemon-suckers. The writer writes
nervously and defensively, continually trying to fend off objections, and as a result her writing is often tangled.
The main ideas are characteristically muffled and insulated. If the writer can be persuaded to write as though to sympathetic allies, to people who are ready to believe her, often her writing becomes much stronger: the main ideas are put out clearly on the table and the posture of the writing is no longer tentative and nervous but rather direct and firm."
--Peter Elbow, Embracing Contraries.

For those who believed me,
especially Andrew.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"If the questions theory raises are important, they must have consequences in praxis." Kathleen McCormick, "Theory in the Reader: Bleich, Holland, and Beyond"

Walk into any college-level writing class on any given day and there is a good chance you will see the desks arranged in loosely configured circles with small groups of students actively engaged in some kind of collaborative activity. Perhaps they are sharing ideas for an upcoming writing assignment, or discussing their responses to the assigned reading, or advising each other on how they might revise their drafts, or actually constructing a text together. Although some teachers might be skeptical about the appropriateness of the collaborative activities I've described, those skeptics for the most part reside outside of the field of composition studies--like the senior economics professor who observed my advanced composition class conducting a peer response workshop and asked, "What are they doing, playing kindie-garten?" For teachers of writing within
the field of composition studies, however, the use of collaborative response groups has become a common practice. One indication of the popularity of this pedagogical approach is the attention it receives in composition textbooks. For example, Kenneth Bruffee's *Short Course on Writing* and Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow's *A Community of Writers*, two composition textbooks based on collaborative response techniques, have gone through multiple editions, and even many writing handbooks, usually thought to promote the most conservative approach to teaching writing, include advice about responding in groups.¹

Like many teachers of writing, I was excited by the potential of collaborative responding to make my classrooms more student-centered, to give students a real audience for their writing, and to help them gain critical reading skills that would enable them to read and revise their own work with authority. And, like many other writing teachers, my early use of collaborative responding consisted primarily of peer response workshops during which students were asked to read each other's drafts and offer advice for revision, advice that I hoped would

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closely resemble what I might give. Even when I expanded the kind of work I asked student groups to do to include responding to assigned readings and eventually authoring a research paper collaboratively, I rarely questioned my belief that these collaborative activities could bring students to a better understanding of the norms of academic discourse and thus help them succeed in the writing they must do in college and beyond.

When I took these same collaborative activities into my introductory literature classes, however, my view of collaborative response became increasingly complicated. Most notable, perhaps, was my recognition that I held different expectations for collaborative response depending on whether groups were talking about literary texts or about student writing. When students were asked to respond collaboratively to a poem or short story, I expected—and encouraged—multiple interpretations of these texts. As an experienced reader of literature, literary criticism, and literary theory (I was especially interested in reader-response theory), I knew that readers were influenced both by their unique personal histories and their varying literary training to construct different interpretations in response to literary texts. And as a teacher, I was fascinated by these differences. In contrast, the goal of peer response, as I saw it then, was to bring students to a common understanding of what I
believed were the objective criteria I used to judge their writing: Is it focused? Is it logically organized? Is there adequate support for assertions? When students were collaboratively responding to each other’s writing, I expected them to more or less agree about how well a text met these criteria. But why? If a reader’s personal history affects response to literature—as David Bleich, Norman Holland, Louise Rosenblatt and others have argued—wouldn’t a reader’s personal history also affect his or her response to a student-authored draft? Similarly, if prior training—or in Stanley Fish’s terms, a reader’s membership in an interpretive community—affects response to literature, wouldn’t this prior training affect response to student-authored texts as well? The fact that students were responding in small groups that functioned to some extent outside of the teacher’s immediate control raised another important question: namely, if differences in students’ backgrounds lead them to respond differently to texts, how does the group make sense of these different responses? It is these questions, questions about the nature and effect of students’ differing responses to texts in the context of collaborative response groups, that motivated the study presented here.

Research on Collaborative Response
In "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing,"
John Trimbur describes collaborative learning—the more
general term for the pedagogical practice of asking
students to work together in small groups—as an important
trend in composition studies.² Although Anne Ruggles Gere
traces the history of what she calls writing groups—
groups of students who gather to work on each other’s
writing—to the undergraduate literary societies that were
active from at least the colonial period in America, and
Mara Holt describes collaborative pedagogies that were in
place in colleges and universities at the turn of this
century, Trimbur associates the more recent wave of
interest in collaborative learning with both practical and
theoretical shifts in the teaching of writing.³ On the
practical level, Trimbur connects the increased interest
in collaborative learning with the rash of educational
experimentation in the 1960s and 1970s; on the theoretical
level, Trimbur relates this interest in collaborative
learning to a turn in composition studies toward
theorizing writing as a social rather than an individual
act.

² The term "collaborative learning" is usually
attributed to Edwin Mason, a British educator who coined
the term in his book, Collaborative Learning, published in
1970.

³ For other historical overviews of collaborative
pedagogies as they relate to the teaching of writing see
Ede and Lunsford, pp. 107-121, and DiPardo and Freedman.
Much of the early work on collaborative response focused on the practical issue of whether this "new" pedagogical approach helped students to write better. Many compositionists made theoretical arguments for the benefits of collaborative responding in writing classrooms, relying on existing theories about the social nature of writing and on anecdotal evidence from their own classrooms (Bruffee "Brooklyn," Elbow Writing, Gebhardt, Hawkins, Healy, Spear). For example, in an early essay Kenneth Bruffee uses his experience with a peer tutoring program at Brooklyn College, CUNY, to support his contention that all students can learn to write better by working on their writing with peers. Peter Elbow (Writing), Thom Hawkins, Mary K. Healy, and Karen Spear offer practical advice for setting up writing groups based on their experiences with groups in their classrooms. Richard Gebhardt draws on the collaborative learning theories articulated by compositionists like Kenneth Bruffee and Peter Elbow and by theorists like Lev Vygotsky to argue that collaborative feedback should be made available to students at every stage of the writing process. He then makes practical suggestions about how teachers might do so.

Other researchers have made a case for the effectiveness of collaborative responding based on more systematically gathered evidence. In "Composing in
Stages: The Effects of a Collaborative Pedagogy," John Clifford reports on an experimental study which led him to conclude that the group of students who was exposed to peer response techniques had a more significant improvement in their writing than did the group who was taught by more traditional methods. Anne Ruggles Gere and Robert D. Abbott performed discourse analysis on transcriptions of audiotaped peer responding groups. They reported in "Talking about Writing: The Language of Writing Groups," that students spent most of their time talking productively about writing. Recently, Robert Brooke, Tom O'Connor, and Ruth Mirtz used naturalistic and teacher-research methods to explore the negotiation of leadership in student writing groups and found that successful groups have leaders who are able to imitate the responding practices of the teacher.

Another group of researchers have promoted collaboration in the classroom based on studies of writing in the workplace. According to survey and case study research conducted by Lester Faigley and Thomas Miller, and Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, much professional writing involves collaboration at some stage of the writing process. These researchers argue that because many workplace situations require collaboration, students will benefit from learning to collaborate in their writing classes. Although a few studies have focused on
collaborative groups in business writing classes (Forman and Katsky, Rogers and Horton), for the most part, these researchers' recommendations for how classroom-based collaboration should be organized have been based on studies of professional collaboration (Allen et. al., Doheny-Farina, Ede and Lunsford, Locker).

Although most of the research on collaboration in the classroom has emphasized the benefits of this pedagogical practice, a small number of researchers have found that collaborative pedagogies do not always work in the way teachers intend (Berkenkotter, George, Newkirk, Smit). Thomas Newkirk asked students and teachers to respond to several representative student essays and found that student responders used radically different criteria when evaluating student writing than did their teachers. Diane George observed over 100 writing groups in order to determine what caused some groups to fail and found that many groups exhibited poor leadership, poor task management, and poor social skills. Carol Berkenkotter discovered in her case studies of three students that some were unable to revise their writing effectively even when given sound advice by their peers. Based on a review of the literature on collaboration in writing classes, David Smit concluded that there is not sufficient empirical evidence to prove that the practice is effective, especially given the problems he argues are inherent in
collaboration, for example, the conflict between the urge for consensus and the right of individuals to voice their views.

As Trimbur points out, most of the research on collaborative response has focused largely on whether collaborative activities "works"--in terms of the teacher's goals for the activities--and has given little attention to how they work. According to Trimbur, this focus on the practical unnecessarily limits what we can learn by studying collaboration, and he recommends that researchers take a more theoretical interest in students' collaborative practices. Specifically, he lauds those collaborative response theorists who have drawn from anthropology, literary criticism, philosophy, and the sociology of science in order to conceptualize writing as a social process and texts as "the product of the social interaction between writers and readers" ("Collaborative" 89). More of this kind of work needs to be done, says Trimbur, which requires that "[compositionists] frame questions that treat collaborative learning not as a pedagogical technique to be compared to other techniques but as a 'naturalistic setting' that allows researchers to examine language development through social interaction" ("Collaborative" 106).

Much composition research in the last decade has adopted naturalistic methods and has focused on the
social nature of writing, especially on the degree to which the writing and interpretation of texts not only happen in the context of communities but, in fact, constitute those communities. For the most part, however, compositionists have occupied themselves with large questions of the nature of language practices within disciplinary communities (Bazerman, Brodkey), within the academic community in general (Bartholomae, Bizzell, Bruffee), or within classroom communities. Little research has been done on collaborative response groups within the composition classroom in terms of what these groups—sometimes seen as communities within communities—can reveal about the social nature of writing and reading.  

Similarly, although compositionists are increasingly attending to issues of difference, especially cultural differences such as race, class, and gender, within and among discourse communities, questions of the role of difference within collaborative response groups

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4 Several notable exceptions appear in a special issue of the *Journal of Advanced Composition* (Winter 1994) devoted to "Collaboration and Change in the Academy." These include Donna J. Qualley and Elizabeth Chisleri-Strater's "Collaboration as Reflexive Dialogue: A Knowing 'Deeper Than Reason';" Amy Goodburn and Beth Ina's "Collaboration, Critical Pedagogy, and Struggles Over Difference"; Julia M. Gergits and James J. Schramer, "The Collaborative Classroom as a Site of Difference"; and Meg Morgan's "Women as Emergent Leaders in Student Collaborative Writing Groups." These essays present the results of naturalistic research on student collaborative groups and highlight how much can be learned about the social nature of writing by studying such groups.
have rarely been taken up.5 This study takes up these questions by looking to the collaborative response group as a naturalistic setting where the social dimensions of writing and responding to texts can be studied and attention given to the role that differences in cultural background, personal history, and prior training play can play.

In saying that compositionists have not gone far enough in researching and theorizing about collaborative response, I do not want to suggest that only textbooks focused on practical issues have been written about the subject. In fact, a good deal of theory in composition has been devoted to collaborative response, from Peter Elbow’s Writing without Teachers (1973) to Kenneth Bruffee’s recent book, Collaborative Learning (1993). What characterizes this theory, however, and what makes it inadequate, is its generally prescriptive nature. Addressed primarily to teachers interested in implementing collaborative responding in their classrooms, theories of collaborative response describe collaboration as it ought to happen. Few of the oft-cited works on group response

5 Compositionists’ interest in issues of difference has only recently moved from a concern with differences in students’ writing and reading abilities to a concern with differences in students’ cultural background, especially to the extent that differences in race, class, gender, and so on, might result in differing approaches to reading and writing.
are based on systematic studies of what students actually do when asked to respond to each other's writing, and as a consequence, collaborative response is portrayed in somewhat idealistic terms, with little reference to issues such as student resistance, student conflict, and student subversion of the teacher's goals for the activity, except for advice about how to overcome these "problems." As John Trimbur and Lundy A. Braun noted in a recent article, "the term 'collaborative' has now entered into the discourse of studies of writing as a part of the conventional wisdom. The value of collaborative learning and collaborative writing has taken on a kind of self-evident and self-valorizing status" (21). In other words, theories of collaborative response in composition studies have been devoted primarily to making a case for the efficacy of this pedagogy; few have problematized it. Specifically, few have researched the effect that students' multiple and often conflicting responses to texts have on the work that teachers expect these groups to do. In order to contextualize my study, I will describe three prominent models of collaborative response, highlighting the ways in which these models conceptualize the effect of difference within groups, especially students' differing responses to texts.
Collaborative Response: Three Dominant Models

When Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, and Kenneth Bruffee began advocating peer response to writing in the 1970s, they did so as part of a major shift from what many compositionists now refer to as a current-traditional approach to writing instruction— one that focused on the form, structure, and surface features of the end product of writing—to a process-centered approach that focused on the complicated and recursive processes involved in the actual production of a text— invention, drafting, revising, editing. As a number of historians of composition have noted, this seemingly radical shift in what Maxine Hairston has called a "paradigm" for teaching writing was in part precipitated by the influx of students deemed "underprepared" during the advent of open admissions policies during the 1970s. The difficulty these students had with producing the kind of writing typically expected by universities led many compositionists to recognize the limits of existing methods of teaching writing and to seek new methods for helping students become better writers.

Collaborative response—the practice of asking small groups of students to respond to each other's writing—was touted by its earliest proponents as a means of overcoming the limits of existing writing pedagogies by giving students more authority over their writing. Two of these
early proponents, whose models of collaborative response continue to be influential, are Peter Elbow and Kenneth Bruffee. Although both Elbow and Bruffee turned to peer response as a means of helping their students write better, their goals for collaborative response differ in important ways.⁶

Throughout his career, Peter Elbow has argued against the privileging of academic writing over writing that might be described as personal, creative, or expressive ("Reflection", "Foreword"). In theorizing collaborative response, then, it has been important for Elbow to make a space for differing approaches to writing and to try to loosen the constraints that narrow conceptions of academic writing have imposed on students. Because of Elbow's concern that individual difference be preserved, I will refer to his model of collaborative response as "Individualistic." In contrast, Kenneth Bruffee believes that students need help overcoming the limits of their individual approaches to reading and writing. Bruffee assumes that students who attend college do so because they wish to become members of the community represented by the university, and he sees collaborative responding as

⁶ See Mara Holt, "Dewey and the 'Cult of Efficiency': Competing Ideologies in Collaborative Pedagogies of the 1920s" for another discussion of the ways in which collaborative response activities can serve conflicting ideological functions.
a primary means of helping students gain facility with the reading and writing practices valued by this community—an important mark of community membership. Bruffee thus recommends that student groups work towards agreement about what constitutes academic reading and writing. Because of Bruffee’s emphasis on agreement, which he calls consensus, I will be referring to Bruffee’s model of collaborative response as the "Consensus Model." The third model I will examine is represented by the work of several theorists who have critiqued Bruffee’s notion of community consensus as one that masks the unequal distribution of power and the hierarchical organization of difference that characterize most groups. These theorists argue that collaboration can be the means by which students learn to interrogate group hierarchies and imagine ways to transform them. Because these theorists emphasize the need to highlight rather than resolve differences within the group, I am calling this model, often associated with the work of John Trimbur and Greg Myers, the "Dissensus Model." In describing each of these models, I will be focusing on how each model conceptualizes the role that differences among group members might play in the process and product of collaboration.
The Individualistic Model

Peter Elbow has often been identified as a major proponent of what is now widely called an expressionist theory of writing, one in which writing is conceived of as a means of expressing a writer's unique perceptions and experience. Although Elbow emphasizes writers' personal purposes for writing, he also acknowledges the social dimension of writing by pointing out that the meaning of texts is determined not by the writer alone but through interactions with readers. As Elbow puts it, "The meaning of my utterances cannot be judged by me alone, but only by me in collaboration with my audience. I get to decide what I intended to say, but not what I succeeded in saying" (Embracing 293). The role of the collaborative response group is to give writers feedback about the ways in which their words were experienced by readers. In describing the work of collaborative response groups, Elbow seeks to value not just the unique experience of the writer, but the unique experience of the reader as well. For example, Elbow makes it clear that readers are not to judge the writer's words by applying a set of universal criteria for effective writing; rather, the reader's only goal is to tell the writer "what happened in you when you read the words this time" (Writing 85, emphasis in original). As Elbow sees it, this approach to responding benefits both writers and readers by helping them to
overcome status-quo approaches to texts that can be stale and inhibiting to experience texts more fully and honestly. In his advice to readers, Elbow explains:

Don’t try to filter out the nutty parts and give only the "sensible" reactions. In fact, it helps if you slightly exaggerate the craziness. It helps the writer break his habit of listening to feedback as though he were listening to his teacher. It makes him automatically realize he’s not listening to evenhanded judgements, conclusions, and advice—just one unique person’s perceptions and experience. And it automatically helps you realize you are not trying to be God or a more competent-than-everyone-else critic—just one person giving a slant that probably no one else could give.  

(Writing 95)

According to Elbow, once writers and readers learn to get beyond narrow assumptions about writing and reading, they will be able to both experience more and say more.

Although Elbow acknowledges that not all responses will be equally helpful to writers, he argues that what is helpful is having detailed reports of the effect a writer’s words have had on a number of different readers. One reason that writers need to hear a variety of responses is that readers (and writers) always have a limited perception of a text, in part because of their positions in relation to the text and in part because of the nature of language. As Elbow describes it in Writing without Teachers,

If someone reports something [in their response to the text] that seems crazy, listen to him openly. Try to have his experience. Maybe what you see is truly there and he’s blind. But
maybe what he sees is there too. Even if it contradicts what you see. It is common for words to carry contradictory meanings and effects. What he sees may not be the main thing in the words, but because of his particular mood, temperament, or experience, it drowns out for him what you are seeing. Your position may blind you to what he sees. 94

According to Elbow, one way that writers can experience many different perspectives on their work is by participating in writing groups made up of different kinds of people working on different kinds of writing. For Elbow, differences among students in collaborative response groups can help the group meet the goal of encouraging individual approaches to texts and overcoming limiting status quo standards. In Elbow's model of collaborative response, all members of a writing group present their writing to the group and listen—without arguing—to their readers' experiences of their words. Similarly, every member of the group is responsible for giving a response to the writing they read. In this way, group members get to experience a wide variety of perspectives, and individual approaches to reading and writing are validated.

More important than simply being exposed to these different perspectives, Elbow argues, is learning to try on perspectives that may conflict with those one initially holds. This process of trying on opposing views is one way that new knowledge is created. As Elbow explains,
Since perception and cognition are processes in which the organism "constructs" what it sees or thinks according to models already there, the organism tends to throw away or distort material that does not fit this model. The surest way to get hold of what your present frame blinds you to is to try to adopt the opposite frame. A person who can live with contradiction and exploit it—who can use conflicting models—can simply see and think more. (Embracing 241).

Elbow calls this temporary adoption of alternate views "methodological believing," which he defines as "the disciplined procedure of not just listening but actually trying to believe any view or hypothesis that a participant seriously wants to advance" (Embracing 260). Although Elbow admits that doubting also plays an important role in writing, in learning, and in knowledge-making, he argues that doubting or critical thinking alone can lead people to become entrenched in their own limited perspectives. By practicing methodological believing as well as doubting, group members can expand their perspectives.

In addition to advancing an individual's thinking, playing what Elbow calls "the believing game" also yields an important benefit to the group by providing the necessary corrective to the consequences of playing "the doubting game." While doubting serves to separate individuals from others, believing results in an alliance with others. As Elbow puts it, "Doubting is the act of separating or differentiating and thus correlates with
individualism: it permits the loner to hold out against the crowd or even—with logic—to conquer. Belief involves merging and participating in a community; indeed a community is created—and creates shared beliefs" (Embracing 264). Playing the believing game thus yields positive results for the collaborative response group as well as for its individual members. In particular, Elbow claims that students who practice methodological belief "reach some agreement that they hadn’t been able to reach before," experience "some improvement in their ability to read—that is, to see things they couldn’t see before, or to experience interpretations that don’t easily fit their predisposition" and show "some improvement in polity or how they offer interpretations and listen to those of others" (Embracing 260, emphasis in original). In other words, the practice of methodological believing in response to differing perspectives ideally helps group members practice civility toward one another and perhaps even achieve some common ground—two important social benefits.

Although Elbow’s prescription for effective collaborative response theoretically applies to any well-functioning group, he does admit that methodological belief happens most easily in groups with specific characteristics. For example, Elbow suggests that the best setting is a small group of people "who trust each
other" and that the most suitable occasions are ones in which "the issue is in some sense a matter of interpretation. . . . In such situations, most people already accept the idea that there is no single simple right answer. . . (Embracing 273, emphasis in original). Conversely, it is difficult to practice methodological belief in debate-type settings where "people are already too invested or polarized into dug-in positions" or on issues where people assume there is a "correct" answer (Embracing 274). Thus, although Elbow values the inclusion of differing perspectives within collaborative responding groups, he represents the ideal collaborative response group as one in which group members share the goal of advancing their knowledge and share a commitment to engage the perceptions of others. Behind this model of collaborative response is an assumption that group members are different but equal and that in their shared pursuit of knowledge, the group values each member's perspective equally. Elbow does consider for a moment that group members may not stand in equal relation to one another when he argues that although methodological belief happens most easily among equals, it can also happen in both an "upward" and a "downward" motion (Embracing 271-272). As an example, he refers to children's willingness to believe their parents and other adults in authority (an upward motion) and parents' willingness to believe their children
(a downward motion). His use of the parent-child metaphor suggests that commitment and a sense of responsibility are also a part of the practice of methodological belief.

Elbow argues for the efficacy of his model of collaborative response—especially his advocacy of methodological believing—by making connections between his model and current ideas about the communal nature of language and knowledge. Relying on the work of Stephen Toulmin, Thomas Kuhn, Wayne Booth, and Stanley Fish, Elbow asserts an essentially nonfoundationalist epistemology: knowledge is constituted by a body of valid or trustworthy interpretations that according to Elbow are the result of "good readers" playing the believing game over time (Embracing 289). In other words, if smart people all try to believe everything that anyone wants to assert, those things that they end up agreeing to believe (once the game is over) constitute knowledge for that group. The communal nature of knowledge is closely related to the communal nature of what Elbow calls "natural language" (Embracing 293). As Elbow puts it, "We need methodological belief because meaning is a result of collaboration between speaker and readers. No one gets a free hand. The meaning is not objectively 'there' apart from the interpretation of readers, but readers don't get to make it up apart from how well it fits the speaker and text. The resulting community agreement must be right for the
speaker, the text, and the readers" (Embracing 294-295). The rules communities use to determine what an utterance means are represented by "unstated and constantly shifting agreements or shared assumptions among community members," and these agreements and assumptions are always up for renegotiation. Elbow allows for changing rules of interpretation within the group by acknowledging that "a particularly powerful speaker (or subcommunity) can blow the meaning of a word into a new shape" (Embracing 294).

In spite of Elbow's contention that knowledge and meaning are determined by community agreement, it is important to note the ways in which Elbow continues to situate knowledge and meaning within individuals who are members of that community. For example, in spite of his assertion that meaning is determined by communities who share assumptions and rules for interpretation, he does not discuss the process whereby members of groups negotiate these rules, beyond noting that a powerful speaker can, alone, change the rules for determining what an utterance means. Similarly, though Elbow alludes to the fact that it is communities who make knowledge through their practice of methodological belief, most of Elbow's discussion focuses on the ways in which an individual's thinking will be enlarged by trying on the perceptions of others. He does not discuss the relationship between what individuals think and the shared thinking that he believes
characterizes communities. Perhaps most obviously, although Elbow purports to be making a case for the important role that groups can and should play in inquiry, especially inquiry through writing and reading, his discussion of group work focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of individuals within the group, with very little attention given to group issues such as leadership, authority, and conflict resolution.

Elbow’s collaborative response groups seem to be on the one hand an aggregate of individuals with unassailable rights to their private approaches to reading and writing and on the other hand a community with shared meaning-making practices, and he fails to consider how these two functions of collaborative groups might conflict. Within his Individualistic Model, Elbow acknowledges and, indeed, welcomes difference, for he conceptualizes the consequences of difference in exclusively positive terms, just as he glosses over the tensions that might arise between individual group members’ writing and reading practices and practices identified by the community as the norm. Elbow sees differences among group members as contributing to his goals for collaboration, namely, to overcome the limits of imposed standards and to preserve individual approaches to texts while at the same time yielding a shared commitment to practice methodological
believing a shared commitment to work to value and respect the perspectives of others.

The Consensus Model

Like Elbow, Kenneth Bruffee’s earliest writing about collaborative response grew directly out of his very practical concern with how to help students write better. However, unlike Elbow, who felt that writers needed to be encouraged to develop personal approaches to reading and writing, Bruffee felt that students’ personal approaches were what kept them from succeeding in school in the ways they wished. Specifically, Bruffee was concerned with the special difficulties experienced by students who entered Brooklyn College of the City University of New York during its period of open admissions in the 1970s. As Bruffee describes it, these students’ difficulties were so profound that teachers were compelled to cast off traditional writing pedagogies and come up with new approaches to the teaching of writing. For Bruffee, collaborative learning was that new approach. Although Bruffee recognized that his students’ differing social and cultural backgrounds—different from those of traditional white middle class students—was a contributing factor in their struggles to do the kind of work expected by the university, for Bruffee, the more consequential difference was the one these students shared: that of being outsiders
to the university community. Because these students' life experiences were limited almost exclusively to the local communities in which they had grown up, they were shut out from the "broader, highly diverse, integrated American (or for that matter international) community at large." As Bruffee puts it, "Their worlds were closed by walls of words" (Collaborative 19). Given what he felt was at stake, Bruffee began to conceptualize the job of university writing teachers as one of "reacculturation." In Bruffee's words, "We should think of [education] as a process of cultural change. And we should think of college and university teachers as agents of cultural change" (Collaborative vii). Since facility with a culture's language practices is central to being a functioning member of that culture, writing teachers bear a special responsibility for initiating students into the acceptable discourse practices of academic culture. And according to Bruffee, collaborative learning can and should play a central role in that process of initiation. Thus, Bruffee's goals for student collaboration are in some ways opposed to Elbow's. Whereas for Elbow, collaboration is a means of pushing the limits of status quo standards and enhancing individual approaches to texts, for Bruffee, collaboration enables students to overcome the limits of their personal approaches and gain familiarity with established standards.
Although Elbow makes some connections between his model of collaborative response, with its emphasis on methodological believing, and community-based theories of language, Bruffee represents the connection between collaborative response pedagogies and social theories of language and knowledge-production in even stronger terms. Specifically, Bruffee draws on the work of Thomas Kuhn, Richard Rorty, Lev Vygotsky, and Clifford Geertz in order to assert that collaborative learning follows logically from and is the necessary enactment of a nonfoundational social constructionist epistemology. In Bruffee’s terms, "Nonfoundational social construction and collaborative learning are related. . . by virtue of their common assumption that knowledge is a socially constructed, sociolinguistic entity and that learning is inherently an interdependent, sociolinguistic process" (Collaborative 8). Borrowing primarily from the philosopher Richard Rorty’s work, Bruffee sees knowledge as created by communities of like-minded peers who negotiate and renegotiate through language what will count as knowledge in their community. Bruffee, after Rorty, uses the term "conversation" to refer to this process of negotiation. From this definition of knowledge, Bruffee reasons that in

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7 For a more detailed account of the influence of these and other theorists on Bruffee’s conception of social constructionism see "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographical Essay."
order for students to become knowers, they need to learn to "converse better" using the "normal discourse" of these established knowledge-making communities (Conversation 643).

It is this conception of the social construction of knowledge that provides the key terms in Bruffee's model of collaborative response and that also distinguishes his model from that of Peter Elbow. Unlike Elbow, who made a space for individual writers to produce writing that expressed their authentic selves, Bruffee once said that what students need most is to overcome their "rampant individualism" and learn to do the kind of writing deemed acceptable by the communities responsible for creating and maintaining knowledge (The Way Out 464). And unlike Elbow, who advocated that readers respond to writing not by applying the objective criteria that teachers would apply but by describing their unique experience of the writer's words, Bruffee argues that readers' responses should be guided by the criteria already in place in the academic community. For Bruffee, students gain access to these criteria through the guidance of the teacher who functions as a representative of an established knowledge-making community. The teacher's job is to create tasks that will help student groups apply acceptable criteria as they respond to texts. The teacher is also responsible for evaluating the results of students' collaborative work
by comparing them to those the established community would expect. The authoritative role played by the teacher in Bruffee’s model contrasts with Elbow’s depiction of a leaderless group where writers may best learn to write "without teachers."

Bruffee is perhaps best known for his emphasis on group consensus as a model of how knowledge is created in established discourse communities. As Bruffee puts it, "Collaborative learning assumes that knowledge is a consensus among the members of a community of knowledgeable peers—something constructed by talking together and reaching agreement" (Collaborative 3). In the absence of any objective ground for knowing or believing, knowledge becomes authoritative when it is agreed to by successively larger and more powerful communities. Bruffee’s model of collaborative response attempts to imitate this process of authorizing knowledge through consensus by asking students to negotiate agreement first within their collaborative response groups, then within the class as a whole, and finally, with the teacher’s guidance, within a larger knowledge community. For example, students may negotiate agreement about what makes an argument effective first in a small group discussion, then in a whole class discussion, and then in the context of current thinking about the rhetoric of argument within the field of Rhetoric and Composition.
In addition to the practical value of reinforcing the learning of established principles, Bruffee believes that asking students to come to consensus also leads them to a "firmer" and "more sophisticated" knowledge of the subject by throwing students "headlong into the knottiest and most sophisticated issues of any discipline" (Collaborative 41). In other words, as they go through the process of negotiating an agreement regarding the subject at hand, students gain special insight into the complexity of their subject, an insight not possible if the subject were simply presented as a given body of facts or principles.

In Bruffee's early formulation of collaborative learning, this emphasis on the value of consensus led him to say relatively little about the role of difference or dissent within knowledge-making communities in general or collaborative response groups in particular. In describing his goals for collaborative learning, Bruffee relied almost exclusively on Rorty's notion of "normal discourse" or the shared language practices of communities that are going about their business of making and sustaining knowledge. As Bruffee defines it, "normal discourse is pointed: it is explanatory and argumentative. Its purpose is to justify belief to the satisfaction of other people within the author's community of knowledgeable peers" (Conversation 643). In his early
work, Bruffee does acknowledge the existence of what Rorty calls "abnormal discourse," the kind of discourse that erupts within communities when "consensus no longer exists with regard to rules, assumptions, goals, values, or mores." For Rorty and for Bruffee, abnormal discourse is important because it "sniffs out stale unproductive knowledge and challenges. . . the authority of the community which that knowledge constitutes (Conversation 648). Although Bruffee concedes that, when necessary, students should be able to "turn to abnormal discourse in order to undermine their own and other people's reliance on the canonical conventions and vocabulary of normal discourse" (Conversation 648), he gives no advice about how to teach students to practice this kind of dissent, nor does he recommend that students within collaborative response groups actively seek and encourage conflicting views in the way that Elbow does.

More recently, however, perhaps in response to critiques of his emphasis on consensus, Bruffee has attempted to make space for dissent in his model of collaborative response. For example, in Collaborative Learning, published in 1993, he take pains to distinguish between the kind of disagreement that can be resolved by appealing to a higher authority (say, by using a dictionary to determine the meaning of a word) and disagreements that originate because of differences in
group members' cultural backgrounds, which he concedes cannot be so easily resolved. In the case of unresolvable differences, Bruffee recommends that groups agree to disagree and that they record the source of their disagreement in their group reports to the class. Beyond merely allowing for dissent, however, Bruffee argues that dissent can play an important role in collaborative learning by moving the group and the class toward a better or more complete or more acceptable understanding of the subject at hand. As Bruffee puts it,

A split opinion within or between groups may be just what is needed to disrupt complacent or trivial decisions arrived at by the rest of the class. . . . [O]ne lonely voice of dissent in a class can eventually. . . turn the whole class around, leading it out of a quandary and toward a more satisfactory consensus of the whole or toward a more correct or acceptable view--that is, toward the view that is currently regarded as correct or acceptable by the teacher's disciplinary community. (Collaborative 46)

Unlike Rorty's "abnormal discourse" which works to upset the status quo, in Bruffee's conception, dissent can support the status quo by moving students closer to the kind of thinking teachers (and knowledge-making communities) value. Bruffee also identifies another important benefit of dissent within collaborative groups: namely, it helps teach students "the craft of interdependence" which Bruffee feels is especially important in a world where "diversity is increasingly
evident, tenacious, and threatening" (Collaborative 46). Here Bruffee reveals his hope that collaboration can help students overcome the potentially negative effects of their differences by learning to depend on each other. Thus, like Elbow, Bruffee contends that the presence of difference within collaborative response groups can benefit students by improving their thinking and by advancing their social skills.

Bruffee also seems to share with Elbow a view of collaborative response groups—and the communities they emulate—as made up of individuals who are in relatively equal positions in relation to one another. For example, Bruffee explicitly compares the kind of intellectual support he claims students can gain from collaborative learning to the emotional and psychological support provided by their extracurricular peer groups, those voluntary associations whose functioning in part depends on an assumption of equality. And although Bruffee recognizes that group members will have different degrees of facility with the normal discourse of the community whose language they are seeking to learn, he assumes that students desire equally to increase their facility and to know more. He also assumes that all members of the group have something to learn from their negotiations with each other. Bruffee does not consider the differing power relations that might exist within the collaborative
response group because for Bruffee, power is located outside of the group, in the established discourse communities of which the teacher is a representative member.

Ultimately, then, the collaborative response group as Bruffee has conceptualized it serves the interests of those group members with the unquestioned goal of joining an established discourse community. And since the collaborative response group focuses on gaining facility with the normal discourse of these established communities—students are taught to imitate but not to question established norms—the collaborative response group also serves these communities by reproducing the status quo. Although differences are allowed for, they seem not to have a significant effect on the process of acculturation that is the goal of collaborative responding in Bruffee's model. Students who do not or cannot agree to adopt the normal discourse of established communities are invited to report their dissenting positions, but Bruffee does not explain how this dissent can or should affect the collaborative response group, the classroom, or the larger academic community. Although he acknowledges the potentially transformative function of abnormal discourse within established knowledge-making communities, he does not explore the ways in which student dissent (or the dissent of initiates rather than practicing members of
a group) can challenge and transform established norms. For Bruffee, power remains in community norms rather than in the differing perspectives of individuals.

The Dissensus Model

As I have already noted, Bruffee’s model of collaborative response, with its emphasis on the value of consensus, has come under fire by compositionists who have begun complicating the relationship between the norms and values that can be said to constitute a specific discourse community and those held by individual members of that community. In particular, compositionists have become increasingly concerned with the hierarchical nature of most groups which results from an uneven distribution of power among community members. For example, Greg Myers and John Trimbur have argued that Bruffee’s model of peer response is problematic in that although it gives students practice in how to become members of established knowledge-making communities without giving them a mechanism for critiquing those communities. Basing their views on a Marxist analysis of knowledge production in a capitalist culture, both Myers and Trimbur argue for an approach to collaborative learning that pays greater attention to the ways in which dissent within groups highlights the hierarchical nature of those groups. Such an approach would enable teachers and students to go
beyond a mere replication of established knowledge-making communities to a critique of those communities whose practices inevitably include the silencing of dissent and the maintenance of status quo hierarchies. For Myers and Trimbur, the ultimate goal of this kind of critique is the transformation of these communities and their practices.

In "Reality, Consensus, and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching," Myers critiques the appeals to "reality" and to "consensus" that lay behind the collaborative response models offered by both Elbow and Bruffee. Although Myers would agree that the pedagogies prescribed by Elbow and Bruffee do parallel the meaning-making and knowledge-making practices of American culture, he points out that advocating pedagogies on the grounds that they imitate the "real" world evades the issue of how, in Myers' terms, "ideology structures our perception of the nature of the real world" (156). Citing such Marxist critics of education as Michael Apple, Stanley Aronowitz, and Henry Giroux, Myers notes that education participates in the reproduction of ideology, blinding people to their oppression by representing the uneven distribution of wealth, power, and knowledge in society as just the way things are. Myers' critique of the work of Elbow and Bruffee focuses on the ways in which their emphases on, in Elbow's case, the primacy of the individual, and in Bruffee's case, the consensus of
groups, participates in this reproduction of the status quo.

Myers identifies himself with radical teachers who recognize that their interests are not the same as the interests of educational institutions. These teachers have begun to question whether school can be a place "where people can resist the reproduction of ideology" by focusing on "the ways students and teachers can break the unthinking acceptance of ideas that support the way things are" (156). Although Myers would like to see collaborative response groups be a site of this kind of resistance, he admits that he has not come up with the kind of systematic pedagogy that Elbow and Bruffee offer. In Myers' words, "I am asking, not for a new kind of assignment, but for more skepticism about what assignments do to reproduce the structures of our society" (170). Myers recommends that teachers adopt a critical stance toward their teaching, "an awareness that one's course is part of an ideological structure that keeps people from thinking about their situation, but also a belief that one can resist this structure and help students to criticize it" (169). Any model of collaborative response that Myers might offer would have to include this kind of mechanism for self-criticism. In his critique of Bruffee's model, Myers does hint at one way in which collaborative response could be made to serve this function. In contrast with
Bruffee, who sees the limited thinking that stems from ethnocentrism and self-interest as a bad habit to be overcome, Myers contends that these limited perceptions are the consequence of "whole systems of ideas that people take for granted and use to make sense of the world." He concludes that "One cannot escape from one's economic interests and ethnic background, but one can try to understand how they shape one's thinking and social actions" (168). If the business of the collaborative response group became just such an analysis of the limited perceptions of group members and the ways in which perceptions are structured by the dominant ideology, then the practice of collaborative response could provide a site of resistance or at least critique.

In "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," John Trimbur extends Myers' leftist critique of Bruffee's work by proposing a model of collaborative response based on a revised notion of consensus, one that can take collaborative learning one step closer to being "a critical practice." Specifically, Trimbur proposes that "Consensus . . . can be a powerful instrument for students to generate difference, to identify the systems of authority that organize these differences, and to transform the relations of power that determine who may speak and what counts as a meaningful statement" (603). Collaborative response groups that operate with this new
idea of consensus can thus play both a critical and a transformative role.

Trimbur's revised notion of consensus depends on a rereading of Richard Rorty's (and Kenneth Bruffee's) discussion of normal and abnormal discourse. Like Myers, Trimbur is critical of Rorty's conception of abnormal discourse as ultimately advancing the functioning of normal discourse. In Rorty's formulation, abnormal discourse serves initially to disrupt normal discourse by challenging its canonical language and its established values. Eventually, however, this disruption produces a modification of normal discourse. Thus, abnormal discourse serves as only a temporary interruption in the workings of normal discourse; once a new normal discourse is established, abnormal discourse disappears. As Trimbur puts it, "At just the moment Rorty seems to introduce difference and destabilize the conversation, he turns crisis, conflict, and contradiction into homeostatic gestures whose very expression restabilizes the conversation" (608). In contrast, Trimbur proposes that abnormal discourse be seen not as the necessary compliment to normal discourse but as an ever-present disruption that reveals at any given time the power relations at work in normal discourse. In Trimbur's formulation, abnormal discourse is not likely to be communally negotiated into a new version of normal discourse but instead represents the
"dissensus," "marginalized voices," "resistance," and "contestation" that inevitably exist within any discourse community (608).

In spite of the ways in which communities seek to normalize themselves, Trimbur argues, the eruption of abnormal discourse is inevitable because "struggle" is a part of everyday social existence. Trimbur traces the source of this struggle to the fact that people are members of multiple overlapping communities that exist in hierarchical relations to one another. As a result, these communities--and the language practices that constitute them--are always competing for one's allegiance and for power.

Trimbur argues that the practice of collaborative response can be the means by which students come to see the hierarchical power relations that exist among the competing discourses present in any community. An important part of Trimbur's revised notion of consensus calls for this kind of analysis; since any act of consensus results in the marginalization or erasure of dissenting voices, consensus provides a site for investigating which voices prevail, which are marginalized, and why. Trimbur relates this notion of consensus to the practice of collaboration in the classroom by proposing that "The consensus that we ask students to reach in the collaborative classroom will be
based not so much on collective agreements as on collective explanations of how people differ, where their differences come from, and whether they can live and work together with these differences" (610). Trimbur thus extends Bruffee’s recommendation that students include a description of their differences in those cases where they are unable to agree, first, by arguing that any agreement involves some disagreement and, second, by asking students not just to describe their differences but to analyze them in terms of the power relations that determine which perspectives are privileged.

In addition to the critical function that consensus, seen in this way, can serve, Trimbur argues that his revised notion of consensus can also serve a transformative function. Trimbur proposes that consensus be thought of not as a process of coming to agreement that parallels a "real world" practice, but as "a necessary fiction of reciprocity and mutual recognition"—a "utopian dream" (612). By asking students to investigate collaboratively the way that difference is structured through acts of consensus, Trimbur believes that students will also be able to imagine ways "to change the relations of production" so that the language practices of communities can be based not on a consensus that erases difference but on "reciprocity and the mutual recognition of the participants and their differences" (614). In
other words, students' collaborative analysis of the workings of consensus can yield not just insight into the way things are but also insight into the way things ought to be, "a dream of difference without domination" (615).

The Dissensus Model of collaborative response, then, takes as its goal not the empowering of individual writers, nor the initiation of students into the normal or status quo language practices of established discourse communities, but the critiquing of these communities and an understanding of the hierarchical positioning of individuals (and the social groups they represent) in relation to these communities. Like Bruffee, Myers and Trimbur give teachers primary responsibility for organizing the classroom and collaborative groups toward this end. As Trimbur puts it, "The politics of consensus depends on the teacher's practice" (603). And, presumably, so do the politics of dissensus. Although Trimbur does not offer the kind of detailed advice to teachers that Elbow and Bruffee do, he does contend that collaborative learning can serve to organize students "non-hierarchically so that all discursive roles are available to all the participants in the group," and he describes students' experience in the collaborative classroom as one of "non-domination" (615). Behind this description of the ways in which collaborative response groups should function is an assumption that teachers can
enact a pedagogy of resistance by making their classrooms
a space where students can momentarily step outside of the
hierarchical relations that characterize the normal
workings of established knowledge-making communities in
order to critique these communities. Thus, although
Trimbur acknowledges that differences—structured
hierarchically—pervade all communities, he suggests that
within the collaborative response group (at least as he
would organize it), students can somehow transcend their
differing positions.

**Limits of the Dominant Models**

These models of collaborative response offer
important—but limited—theoretical grounds from which to
pursue a study of students' collaborative practices,
especially the ways in which differences among students
affect their collaboration. Perhaps most importantly,
they illustrate how theories of collaborative responding
can and should go beyond a mere concern with the
practical—how many students to assign to a group, how to
design collaborative activities, how to evaluate
collaborative work—to theorize about writing and reading
as communal acts. In addition, the models of
collaborative response presented here represent a complex
set of assumptions about the nature of writing and
reading, the purpose of university education, the
relationship between communities (from the concrete community of the classroom to the more abstract community known as the academy) and the individuals who inhabit these communities, and the consequences of difference, whether they be thought of as individual differences or sociocultural differences, for writing, reading, and learning. These models draw explicitly on community-based concepts of writing and reading and make it clear that collaborative responding is not just a useful classroom activity but a site where important questions about the nature of reading and writing can be investigated.

In spite of these strengths, however, the models are limited. Although they are based on fairly complex conceptualizations of collaborative response, they do not draw on systematic studies of students working collaboratively. Thus, the act of collaborative response that these models describe remains only an ideal, or perhaps more accurately, three somewhat conflicting ideals. In order to gain some insight into how collaborative response really works, we need to turn the theories offered by these models into questions to be asked about how actual students respond to actual texts in the context of actual classrooms. For example, a logical question to be asked in light of the Individualistic Model is, how do student responses to texts reflect the reader’s unique perceptions and experience? Or, put another way,
what factors in a student's personal history affect response to texts in the context of a collaborative response group? The Consensus Model raises questions about the extent to which collaborative responding functions as a form of reacculturation. Questions that need to be asked include, how do students' present community memberships affect their responses to texts? And what rules of response characterize the "new" that community students are purportedly being initiated into? What kind of consensus is reached by students and how do they come to consensus? What is gained and what is lost in the process? The Dissensus Model leads us to ask to what extent dissensus does pervade all groups. How do collaborative response groups handle dissensus and how do these moments of dissensus reveal relations of power? Although ultimately we might want to ask which of these models provides the most satisfying account of collaborative response, we might also want to ask whether John Trimbur was right when he argued that collaborative response can take many different forms, depending on the teachers' goals for the activity. Does the teacher have the power to determine the politics of collaborative response? None of these questions can be answered completely with theorizing alone. What is called for is close attention to the actual process of collaborative response.
As a teacher of writing who was both committed to the use of collaborative responding in my classes and fascinated by the complexity of what I was asking students to do, I felt compelled to take up the kinds of questions raised by prominent theories of collaborative response in a more thorough way than is possible merely by reflecting on the practices of students in my classes--practices that, as a teacher, I am restricted from observing closely. In order to discover the ways in which students' collaborative responses to texts are affected by their personal histories, by their memberships in multiple communities, and by their need to make sense of the differing responses presented in the context of their collaborative response group, I wanted to study collaborative responding as it happened in a particular classroom context and over time. More importantly, I needed to study student response not as a teacher who has a vested interest in seeing collaborative responding work in the way I intend, nor as a theorist interested in building a better (ideal) model of response, but as an observer open to the unanticipated complexities of response. Only from this perspective could I hope ultimately to build a more complete model of collaborative response and to begin to think about how this practice might be effectively implemented in the classroom.
CHAPTER II
DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

"In principal, if not in practice, all scholarship recognizes that researchers are implicated in their own research." Linda Brodkey, "What Is Ethnography?"

In the previous chapter, I surveyed three dominant models of collaborative responding and noted the limitations of theories not based on a systematic study of the phenomenon theorized about. I also noted the limitations of empirical studies of classroom-based collaboration that treat collaboration as an isolated activity and that evaluate those activities primarily in terms of how well they worked from the teacher’s point of view. In order to extend empirical studies of classroom collaboration, I proposed that researchers being to focus on how students experience collaboration.

In designing the study reported here, I was especially interested in learning more about how small groups of students make sense of their differences in the context of responding collaboratively to texts. My study was thus intended to be exploratory and to provide
primarily descriptive findings. But explorers do not go into new territory without a map to guide them. In exploring the nature of students' collaborative practices, I was inevitably guided by those theories of collaborative response offered by Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur. My goal was not to test the validity of any one theory of collaborative responding, or to measure one against the other, but to examine actual students' collaboration in light of these theories, to see how far these theories would take me in my attempt to understand what I saw happening among students. These theories thus provided a framework for viewing collaborative responding activities; at the same time, I wanted to be open to the ways in which the actual experiences of students might complicate or expose the limits of that framework.⁸

In setting out to study students' collaborative practices in actual composition classrooms, I began with questions, but I also began with assumptions. These assumptions were a product of my reading of the literature

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⁸ In explaining the stance of the ethnographic researcher, Beverly Moss writes, "While an ethnographer may begin with a set of research questions, new questions should emerge and old questions be reshaped as data are collected and analyzed. As much as possible, research questions and hypotheses are context-dependent and, therefore, should emerge from the social situation being studied" (157). Although I did not set out to conduct an ethnography, my use of ethnographic methods of data collection was informed by discussions such as Moss's on ethnographic research.
on collaborative pedagogies, the bulk of which emphasizes the benefits of this approach to teaching writing, and of my experience as a writing teacher who regularly employed collaborative pedagogies. Some of the assumptions that initially determined my research perspective included first, that students naturally have differing responses to all kinds of texts, and second, that collaborative responding benefits students' learning by giving them opportunities to engage the perspectives of others. My initial research questions reflect these assumptions: What personal, social, and institutional factors affect students' collaborative response to texts, especially student-authored texts? When differences arise within the collaborative response group, how do students respond to or make sense of those differences? Once engaged in the study, however, additional questions emerged: Why don't students provide substantive response to texts, especially peer-authored texts? Why don't students seem to engage the differing perspectives offered by their peers? What forces are preventing students from having the productive collaborative experiences that their teachers hope for and that theorists argue are possible?

**Defining Terms**

For the purposes of this study, I am defining "collaborative response" as any activity in which students
are asked within the context of a small group to present and discuss their reactions to, interpretations of, and/or evaluations of a text. Because collaborative response activities can take many forms and serve many purposes, even within the same class, I did not want to limit my study by focusing on only one form of collaborative response, for example, peer response workshops. Fortunately, the particular classes I chose to study allowed me to explore collaborative response to different kinds of texts including published texts, film, and the nondiscursive "text" of American culture, as well as peer-authored texts. I also did not want to limit my focus to only those activities in which students were asked to come to consensus or write up a group report. For my purposes, any activity in which a small group of students responded to a text, regardless of the goal of the activity, was considered a collaborative response situation.

I am calling this kind of group activity "collaborative" in part because it is the term most frequently used in composition studies to describe what many compositionists see as the inevitably social nature of writing and reading. As many compositionists argue, even when writers and readers are not working with others who are physically present (as the students in my study were), the production and interpretation of texts is always done in the context of other texts and of other
writers and readers and is therefore "collaborative."\textsuperscript{9}

Thus, in this study the term "collaborative" refers not to a specific end product such as a group-authored text but to a social process that involves discussion and negotiation among group members, a process in which individuals' responses to texts are articulated in and inevitably influenced by the presence of others.

By asking questions about personal, social, and institutional factors that influence collaborative response, I hoped to enlarge my scope of vision beyond that of a teacher who often sees classroom practices as largely in her control. As a researcher, I wanted to consider those forces outside of teacher instruction that might affect the work students do in the classroom. I am considering "personal" factors any assumptions, values, or experiences that students bring with them from outside the class that might influence their response to texts in the context of the collaborative response group. These assumptions and values might be a product of a student's social or cultural background—gender, race, ethnicity, social class. They might also be a product of a student's

\textsuperscript{9} Some of the studies that argue this point most forcibly include Deborah Brandt's \textit{Literacy as Involvement}, Linda Brodkey's \textit{Academic Writing as Social Practice}, Karen Burke LeFevre's \textit{Invention as a Social Act}, and Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holzman's \textit{Writing as Social Action}. 
specific history as a writer or reader or a student’s past experience with collaborative response.

"Social" factors that influence response arise from students’ memberships in a particular collaborative response group. These factors might include the role students play in their groups—a leadership role or a follower role, for example—or the degree to which students adjust their responses given their sense of how group members might react and their own desire to resist conflict or to engage it. Another factor that might be considered "social" is students’ attitudes toward the differing race, class, and gender identities represented by members of their group, especially when those attitudes affect students’ group processes and thus affect their collaborative response to texts.

"Institutional" factors result from the fact that the collaborative response activities I am studying happen in the context of a university classroom. They might include "local" considerations, such as the ways in which collaborative response work is evaluated by the teacher and counts toward a student’s final grade, as well as the more "global" influence exerted by the norms of academic discourse on collaborative response.10

10 My sense of the norms of academic discourse comes primarily from Kenneth Bruffee’s descriptions of academic discourse in "Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’," Peter Elbow’s "Reflections on Academic
As these definitions suggest, the terms "personal," "social," and "institutional" do not represent distinct influences on collaborative response but rather circles of influence that overlap and cannot be easily separated. In asking questions about the personal, social, and institutional factors that influence collaborative response, my purpose was not to isolate them or compare them; instead, I sought to recognize the complexity of collaborative response by acknowledging the ways it is affected by the experiences students bring with them to the classroom, by their participation in a specific collaborative responding group, and by their enrollment in a specific writing course in a university. By being as conscious as possible of these three axes of influence, I was hoping to complicate conceptualizations of the collaborative response group as ultimately within the teacher's control.

My definition of "differences" is also necessarily broad. In asking how students respond to differences within their group, I am referring, of course, to readily identifiable differences in their responses to or interpretations of texts, for example, disagreements about

Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues," and David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University." I will discuss the specific norms that seemed to affect collaborative response in Chapters III, IV, and V.
the effectiveness of a peer's introduction or conflicting interpretations of the main point of a published essay. But I am also interested in differences that are not so clearly marked but that might also influence collaborative response--differences in writing or responding styles, differences in personalities, differences in political positions. Although Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur suggest that students can benefit from their peers' differing perspectives, I wanted to see what kinds of differences emerge in the context of collaborative response, how students actually do respond to these differences, and whether students themselves find beneficial the experience of dealing with differences within their groups.

Given the nature of my research questions, I opted to study closely the collaborative response practices of a limited number of students by conducting participant-observation research informed by ethnographic methods of data collection. Specifically, I chose to study the workings of one collaborative response group in each of two different classes by entering first the classroom and then the small group as a participant-observer. Assuming this position gave me the opportunity to explore many of the factors that influence collaborative response, including the group's efforts to deal with their differences.
Choosing the Site of Investigation

During the spring and summer of 1992, I studied collaborative responding in two sections of Ohio State University's required second-level writing course, English 367. The course is part of the University's General Education Curriculum which mandates a three-tiered writing requirement for all undergraduate students. English 367 also meets the University's requirement for a course that focuses on diversity in American culture, with special attention given to issues of race, class, and gender.

I chose to study collaborative response in English 367 rather than another writing course for several reasons. First, English 367 is taught only by experienced graduate teaching associates, instructors, and faculty, and I thought that an experienced teacher might be more comfortable with a researcher in the classroom than would a fairly new teacher. I also thought that an experienced teacher would be better able to articulate her goals for using collaborative response groups. Similarly, I anticipated that the students enrolled in English 367, most of them sophomores or juniors, might have more experience with collaborative activities and might therefore be better able to analyze their experience than would beginning college students.

The course content of English 367 also made it an interesting site for the study of students' collaborative
responding. First of all, the course called for writing to be done in response to reading. This component of the course made it possible for me to consider the relationship between students' responses to published texts and their responses to student-authored texts. Second, the particular reading (and writing) students do in English 367 focuses on issues of cultural difference, and this kind of reading seemed likely to elicit differing responses from students, responses that might be attributed to students' differing cultural backgrounds and personal histories. In the context of English 367, then, I could extend my study of collaborative response to include a consideration of how students respond to their differing perspectives when the subject of their discussions is cultural difference.

In choosing specific English 367 classes to study, I used the following criteria:

1. The teacher of the class must be a committed and experienced user of collaborative pedagogies and must be planning to use collaborative response activities throughout the course;
2. The teacher should assign students to collaborative response groups and those groups should remain together throughout the course;
3. The teacher should require that students participate in collaborative response activities and reward students for participating. These criteria were important because teachers who are experienced and committed users of collaborative response pedagogies are more likely to be able to articulate (to me and to their students) the purpose of collaborative response in their classrooms, especially as it relates to the goals of the course. They are also more likely to use group activities frequently and to continue using them even if some group activities seem to fail. For the purposes of my study, it was important that students have the opportunity to work in groups several times during the quarter, so that they would have time to build trust (an important factor in both Elbow's and Bruffee's models) and to develop strategies for working as a group.

Having the teacher assign students to groups, rather than allowing students to select groups themselves, makes it more likely that groups will be composed of students who do not know each other well. Although it would be interesting to consider what influence prior friendship has on collaborative response, in my experience, most teachers assign students to groups trying consciously not to group together friends, roommates, and so on. As it turns out, the two teachers whose classes I studied ordinarily assign groups in this way. This criterion for
choosing my research site allowed me to study how students who begin as virtual strangers come to function as a group.

Finally, in choosing the classes I would study, it was important that students be required to participate and rewarded for participating in collaborative response activities. Group work can be difficult, and many students resist it. Since I hoped to gather as much data as possible about student response, I sought classes where teachers built into their syllabi some mechanism for eliciting students' regular participation in collaborative response activities.

In the Spring Quarter of 1992, the focus of my study was English 367.03, "African American Voices in Literature: Intermediate Essay Writing"; in the Summer Quarter of 1992, I studied English 367.01, "The American Experience: Intermediate Essay Writing" (See Appendix A, Course Syllabi). Although both courses were approved versions of English 367--both involved writing in response to reading and both dealt with diversity in American culture--they represented distinct contexts in which to study collaborative response.

"African American Voices in Literature" was taught by MJ, a tenure-line faculty member whose academic specialty is Rhetoric and Composition. MJ is also an experienced ethnographer, which made it more likely she would be
comfortable with my entering her classroom. Although MJ had written the original course proposal for the African American literature version of English 367, she was teaching it for the first time during the quarter that I studied her class.

In the class, all of the reading and writing that students did focused on the African American experience as portrayed in literature by African Americans. As a consequence, the issue of racial difference was central, though issues of gender and class differences would also be taken up. The makeup of the class made this research site somewhat unusual. At a university where most classes of 20 would include only one or two African American students, of the nineteen students enrolled in "African American Voices," eleven were African American women, five were African American men, two were white women and one was an Asian-American woman.

"African American Voices" met twice a week, from 11:00-1:00, in a computer-supported classroom equipped with 20 Macintosh computers. Before the class began, however, MJ acknowledged that she would not be using the computers extensively. Still, it was reasonable to expect that the mere presence of the computers in the classroom and their occasional use might affect the group work students were asked to do. For example, the computers were set up on tables that lined the perimeter of the
room, and students sat in chairs with casters, making it easy for students to move in and out of groups.

MJ was an experienced user of collaborative activities, having relied on peer response workshops in her writing classes since graduate school. In "African American Voices," MJ required that students participate in a collaborative response session for each of the four essays they wrote. Although students were occasionally asked to meet in their groups to discuss assigned readings and were required to prepare a group presentation on one of the films viewed in class, most of the collaborative work in this class took the form of peer response to individually-authored texts. MJ ensured that students would be motivated to participate in peer response by making it a policy that students who did not participate would have their grade on the essay assigned during that unit lowered one-half of a letter grade.

"The American Experience" version of English 367 provided a somewhat different context for studying students' collaborative response to texts. Although it was similar to "African American Voices" in its focus on writing in response to reading and in its concern with issues of cultural diversity, in this course racial difference was just one of the subjects taken up. Other subjects included the myth of the American dream, the immigrant experience, the Native American experience, and
gender and the American family. Denise, the instructor of "The American Experience," was in her fourth year in the PhD program, concentrating in Rhetoric and Composition. Although she was an experienced teacher, this was the first time she had taught English 367. Denise and I had begun the PhD program together and were good friends. As a consequence, she too was fairly comfortable with the idea of my studying her class.

The gender and racial make-up of Denise's class was fairly typical of a small class at Ohio State. The class enrolled 22 students; 20 were white--ten men and ten women--and two were African American--both women. The class met twice a week, from 8:00-10:00 a.m., in a large, comfortable classroom with movable chairs, an optimal setting for assigning small group activities.

Like MJ, Denise had been using collaborative response activities in her classes for some time. She admitted, however, that she did not feel she had success with peer response workshops, although she continued to require them. She did like using small group discussions as a way to get all of the students involved in generating productive whole class discussions. In "The American Experience," Denise assigned students to groups in the first week and students worked in their groups during some part of almost every class meeting. In addition, Denise decided for the first time to ask these small groups to
author a research paper collaboratively. To help ensure that students would participate in these collaborative activities, Denise explicitly stated in her syllabus that absences on peer response days would not be excused and that more than two unexcused absences would result in a lower grade for the course. Denise also reserved 10% of the final grade for participation, which included participation in class discussion and in group work. The collaborative research paper was worth 30% of the final grade, and all of the students in the group would receive the same grade for the paper.

"African American Voices" and "The American Experience" thus represented similar but distinct sites for studying students' collaborative response to texts. Although my in-depth look at collaborative response in each of these separate and unique contexts was based on a sample size too small to allow me to generalize, similarities in the collaborative processes of the two groups I studied could suggest useful questions for researchers to pursue who are interested in generalizing about the nature of classroom-based collaboration (e.g. model-building) or in determining the efficacy of collaborative pedagogies.
Collecting the Data

In choosing ethnographic methods as a means of investigating my research questions, I did not set out to do an ethnography of the classroom, the purpose of which would have been to study the classroom as a culture or community with an identifiable set of beliefs, values, and language practices.  Although given my conceptualization of the collaborative response group, it might be said that I was studying the group as a community, it is more accurate to say that I was raising the question of whether the collaborative response group constitutes a community—one of many potentially operating in the classroom—with identifiable beliefs, values, and language practices.

Toward this end, I assumed the role of participant-observer in each of the classes I studied, which involved attending and audiotaping class meetings and taking fieldnotes. In observing these classes, I paid special attention to those aspects of the class context that might inform my understanding of students' collaborative

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11 Although researchers interested in studying classroom practices are relying increasingly on ethnographic methods, Shirley Brice Heath, in "Ethnography in Education: Defining the Essentials" and Deli Hymes, in "What Is Ethnography" raise important questions about the degree to which classrooms can be considered communities in and of themselves. Both Heath and Hymes emphasize that classrooms represent only one part of a large and complex educational system. Thus, researchers who wish to pursue ethnographies of education need to see the classroom in relation to both the institution and the community it is a part of.
response to texts, for example, the teacher's modeling of response strategies, the teacher's explicit directions for collaborative response activities, comments students made in class that seemed to reveal their assumptions about texts, as well as students' responses to each other's remarks.

After observing several class meetings and sitting in on small group discussions with several different groups, I chose one group in each class for close study. In both classes, the group I chose was the one that seemed to exhibit the most differences among group members, both in terms of gender and race and in terms of group members' characteristic responses to texts as evidenced by their participation in small group and whole class discussions and by the writing they had done thus far in the class. By focusing on a group with obvious differences among group members, I hoped that the personal and social factors that influence collaborative response would be easier to discern and that the group's need to respond to these differences would be especially pronounced.

With the group's permission, I became a participant-observer in the group, which involved audiotaping and taking notes on each group discussion. In these notes, I tried to record as much of the group's discussion as possible. I also attempted to construct a careful account of group processes including such things as who
initiated the discussion, who assumed leadership, who participated, how group members responded to each other, and so on. Although I initially intended to limit my participation in the group as much as possible, I felt it necessary to offer the group something in exchange for their permission to study them. Consequently, in both groups I offered to present my response to the texts being discussed if and when someone in the group asked for it. In MJ’s class, the group I studied rarely asked for my response; in Denise’s class I participated more often.

A number of factors contributed to the somewhat different roles I played in these two groups. Because MJ’s class was the first one I studied, I tended to be more reticent in my relationship with the group. I was also more cautious about "interfering" because although I had known MJ prior to studying her class, I did not know her well, and she was a faculty member while I was a graduate student. I was thus less comfortable acting as an insider in her class. In addition, the group that I studied included a senior English major who easily acted as an authority in the group and who rarely turned to others (even her own group members) for advice about her writing.\(^{12}\) Her leadership in the group contributed to my limited participation.

\(^{12}\) This student and the role she played in her collaborative response group is the focus of Chapter III.
In Denise's class, I participated more actively in the small group I studied. After my experience of studying MJ's class, I was more comfortable with my role as a researcher in the classroom and felt freer to interact with the students. In addition, as Denise's friend and peer, I did not feel as reluctant to become involved in her class. The fact that Denise's groups worked together almost every class period meant that I had more contact with the group and thus became more easily a member of the group. The specific group that I studied also made it possible for me to be more involved in their group processes. As Denise described it, the group was the most dysfunctional one in the class, and they often turned to me in moments of difficulty. Although I resisted playing the role of the teacher in the group (or the teacher's representative--everyone knew Denise and I were friends), when the group asked for my response, I tried to participate in the way that I imagined a concerned and responsible group member would.

In addition to observing the groups, I also conducted one formal interview with each group member and talked with group members informally whenever the opportunity arose. The formal interviews were structured around seven to fourteen open-ended questions and lasted from 30-60
minutes (See Appendix B). Although throughout the quarter I focused primarily on one collaborative response group, I interviewed a number of other students in each class (at least one from each of the other collaborative response groups) in order to gain an additional perspective on the collaborative experiences of the students I had chosen for close study.

Early in the quarter, I conducted a formal interview lasting 45-60 minutes with each teacher. During these interviews, I asked teachers open-ended questions about their goals for the course, about their reasons for using collaborative pedagogies, about the relationship between reading and writing in the course, and so on. This formal interview was followed by many informal, sometimes brief, discussions of particular class meetings, particular assignments, and particular students. The formal interview was audiotaped; the substance of the informal discussions was recorded in my notes.

To supplement my notes and the audiotapes of interviews, class discussions, and group work, I collected as much of each student's writing as possible. In "African American Voices," this writing included drafts on which peers had commented and final drafts with the

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13 Because my interview questions were related to the collaborative activities students participated in, I asked somewhat different questions in each class. Students in the same class were asked the same questions.
teacher's comments and grade. In "The American Experience," I collected response papers, drafts and final versions of essays, and all of the material related to the collaborative research paper. Both teachers also gave me access to their students' evaluations of the course, which provided another means for locating the experience of the students I studied in the context of the whole class's experience.

Interpreting the Data

In attempting to answer my research questions regarding the nature of students' collaborative response activities, I had available to me data that included my fieldnotes describing class meetings and collaborative response group discussions, transcripts produced from the audiotapes of a select portion of those meetings and discussions, transcripts of the interviews with the teachers and students, and copies of the writing students had produced in the class. Anyone who has worked with these kinds of data inevitably finds them rich but incomplete, complex but incoherent, the raw material of a story but not the story itself. As numerous writers on ethnography have pointed out, in writing up the results of ethnographic research, the researcher is not merely
reporting results but actively constructing them. This act of construction, like any act of writing, requires that the researcher find a way to focus his or her attention, construct relationships among seemingly disparate pieces of evidence, and develop a sustained and logical argument. But in doing participant-observation research, the act of construction begins not with writing up the results of the study but with the observation itself, for like readers whose interpretations of texts are always interested and partial, the participant-observer’s view is also always limited and partial. The acts of observation and interpretation necessitate, in Kenneth Burke’s terms, "a selection of reality" that also functions as "a deflection of reality" (45). Thus, in interpreting my data, I was forced to recognize two facts about my research: first, that although my data said a great deal—more than I could write up—about the collaborative response groups I studied, it did not and could not say everything, and second, that my data, in and

14 The work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz has been especially influential in this regard. See, for example, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. James Clifford and George Marcus also discuss the ways in which ethnographers construct the cultures they observe in Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. For a discussion of the dilemma compositionists face in writing up ethnographic research, see Linda Brodkey, "Writing Ethnographic Narratives" and Carl G. Herndl, "Writing Ethnography: Representation, Rhetoric, and Institutional Practice."
of itself, did not and could not "say" anything. Only I could say what I interpreted my data to mean. Other researchers conducting the same study might very well have interpreted events differently. But their interpretations would also have been limited by their perspectives.

Given that this study began with a conceptualization of writing and reading as socially-situated constructive acts influenced by people's personal histories and by their multiple community memberships, it seems important to acknowledge that my reading of the collaborative response groups I studied--and my writing about them--are inevitably acts of construction influenced by my personal history and my multiple community memberships. For example, although I wanted to be open to whatever occurred during collaborative response activities, my interpretation of these groups' processes was colored by my knowledge of existing theories of collaboration and by my desire to complicate those theories. In addition, my experience as a teacher who relies on collaborative pedagogies inevitably led me to see group processes in terms of whether they enabled the group to fulfill the teacher's expectations for the activity. These and other community alliances (for example, with the teachers, with women, with members of the working class) affected my response to the "text" I was reading. Thus, the act of interpreting my data required that I consider not just
multiple influences on students' collaborative responses but multiple influences on my own responses as well.

As I read closely the data that I collected, I found myself most interested in those moments during collaborative response when groups were faced with differing and conflicting responses to the text at hand, differences that were reflected in students' spoken comments during group discussion and/or in their writing. In order to understand these moments, I sought to understand first, what led students to respond differently to a particular text and second, how the group dealt with their differences. These concerns led me to perform close readings of my interviews with these students and of my notes from and transcripts of class meetings, looking for evidence of students' beliefs, values, or assumptions about reading, writing, and texts. I also read carefully the writing students did in the class looking for similar kinds of evidence. Although students sometimes stated their views explicitly, I also considered evidence that seemed to reflect an implicit view. For example, if a student referred to his or her personal experience in all or most of his or her writing, I might hypothesize that this student believes that relating texts to personal experience is important. In seeking evidence of students' differing assumptions and beliefs about texts, I also asked whether these differences could be attributed to
personal, social, or institutional factors—or some combination of these. Thus, a student's belief that one should relate texts to personal experience might be attributed to his or her personal history as a reader/writer (a personal factor), or to the teacher's valuing of this approach to texts (an institutional factor)—or both.

My interpretations of students' responses to each other depended largely on my reading of group discussions, although I also drew on student interviews and informal comments from students whenever possible. In analyzing the group discussions, I was interested in determining—from my point of view and from the point of view of students in the group—what students' various perspectives were, which perspectives were valued by the group and which were marginalized, and how students responded to conflict within the group. These questions led me to take into consideration who was acting as leader of the group, what role the leader played in determining which perspectives were valued and how conflicts were dealt with, and whether group members were satisfied with the outcome of a particular group discussion. Additional questions grew out of the specific situation I was trying to understand. Occasionally, the questions I asked about students' collaborative responses were answered by students directly, but often answering them required me to
perform strong readings of the available data in order to propose tentative answers.

The process of interpreting my data, then, involved identifying in transcripts of collaborative response discussions moments in which students were faced with differences within their groups; performing close readings of interviews, class discussions, and student writing in order to better understand what I saw happening; turning back to the group discussion to "test" my understanding; returning to other sources of data for more evidence that would confirm or disconfirm and ultimately complicate my understanding; and so on. By undertaking this recursive process of reading and rereading my data, I hoped to see students' collaborative responding from as many angles as possible.

Presenting the Data

Because the study I undertook was essentially exploratory, the presentation of my findings must be largely descriptive. By drawing on multiple sources of data—student writing, interviews, collaborative response sessions, and class discussions—I tried to construct a detailed depiction—a "thick description," to use Geertz's frequently cited term—of student groups in the process of articulating and responding to their differing perspectives. My decision to render a few events in
detail, rather than draw from a number of events in order to support generalizations about students' collaborative activities was motivated by my sense that what is missing from research on student groups is an awareness of the incredible challenge some students face when they are asked to read and write collaboratively. In choosing which events to describe, I selected those that from my perspective seemed both representative of the groups' collaborative activities and that reflected the challenge of collaboration for these students.

**Limitations**

By designing a study that relied on participant-observer methods to explore the collaborative responding activities of two student groups over the course of their group membership, I was hoping to fill some gaps in compositionists' knowledge about student collaboration in the writing classroom. Unfortunately, because of the time required to do a close study of student collaboration in even two classes, the scope of my study is necessarily limited. In addition, because I chose to use ethnographic methods to study student groups, the conclusions I draw are limited by my perspective as a researcher: my view of these groups was constrained by the questions I asked, by the knowledge of collaborative processes I brought to the study, by my own experience with collaboration. My view
of student collaboration was also constrained by the particulars of my research setting. Students worked in groups for typically an hour or less a week over only a ten-week period, which limited the number and variety of group activities I could observe. All of these limits make it impossible to generalize about the nature of student collaboration beyond the experiences of the students who were part of this study.

The value of this study will be determined largely by my ability to represent for readers the experiences of the students I observed and to bring student perspectives into the ongoing conversation about the benefits—and costs—of employing collaborative pedagogies in writing classes. In addition, this study may suggest ways in which theories of collaborative responding and the assumptions those theories rest on might be complicated by students’ experiences working together. The experiences of the students I studied may also raise questions for future research on classroom-based collaboration, which is only beginning to conceptualize student collaboration as a complex phenomenon. Although collaborative reading and writing activities have become a staple in most composition classes, at least on the college level, studies such as the one reported here can and should remind us of the importance of continuing to interrogate
our classroom practices, especially those we take for granted.
CHAPTER III

PEER RESPONSE IN "AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICES IN LITERATURE"

Peer response to students' individually-authored texts is perhaps the most common form of collaborative response in college composition classrooms. In this activity, students are usually asked to work in small groups to respond to drafts of each other's writing with the goal of helping writers revise their texts. Although the focus in peer responding is usually on individual writers and individual texts--and individual readers' responses to those texts--the activity remains collaborative in the way I have defined it: students' personal assumptions about texts are articulated in and, it might be assumed, influenced by the presence of others whose assumptions may differ or perhaps even conflict with theirs. Since the goal of peer response is to help students revise their writing, they must find some way to make sense of the various responses to their texts. In addition, readers whose assumptions about texts differ from those of their peers must also deal with those differences if they want to be able to continue to feel that they are responding appropriately. And since readers
often respond to their peers' texts using the same criteria they apply to their own writing, conflicts among readers may affect the reader's writing as well. Differences that arise within the peer response group thus have real consequences for every member of the group.

A number of personal, social, and institutional factors seem likely to affect students' responses to their peers' writing in the context of a peer response group. Personal factors are perhaps the most obvious. First of all, students come to their peer response group with personal assumptions about effective writing in general or academic writing specifically, and these assumptions are likely to have a strong effect on students' initial responses to their peers' texts. Similarly, students' personal attitudes toward themselves as writers—especially the degree of confidence they feel—may also influence the kind of response they give other writers. For example, students who do not think of themselves as good writers may be reluctant to give advice about writing to their peers. In addition, students' past experience (or lack of experience) with peer response may also affect their response. If students are inexperienced peer responders and dislike having their writing read by others, they may be reluctant to make extensive or critical comments in response to their peers' texts. Another personal factor that might affect response is a
student's attitude toward the specific course in which peer responding takes place. Students who dislike or resent the work they have to do in a class may resent peer responding as well.

Social factors are also likely to affect peer responding. It is reasonable to assume that the particular group of students who make up the peer response group will have some effect on how individual students respond to their group members' texts. Students sometimes give different kinds of response to members of their group because of their differing relationships with those individuals or because they perceive that different students need or want or are willing to accept different kinds of response. A more obvious social factor affecting peer response is group dynamics---who assumes leadership of the group, who participates, whose contributions are valued, what implicit (or explicit) rules are established for group work. As a number of researchers have found, group dynamics can be affected by cultural differences such as race and gender (Ede and Lunsford, Lay "Androgynous," "Interpersonal"; Lunsford and Ede, Morgan). Although personal factors may lead group members to construct quite different responses to peer texts, it is the social workings of the group that determine to a large extent what happens to those personal responses once they are made public. For example, does the group allow all
responses to be heard and treated equally or are certain responses given more attention or more value? Does the group work toward consensus or stage debates or allow an easy pluralism, and who is responsible for determining these outcomes? Answering these questions requires a close look at social factors.

Because peer responding has concrete consequences in terms of students’ grades on individually-authored papers, institutional factors also inevitably affect this collaborative activity. For example, since teachers usually tell students that the purpose of peer response is to help them improve their write in the course, students may try to respond to other’s writing as they imagine their teacher would. In terms of resolving differences within the group, at least differences in assumptions and beliefs about writing, students’ ideas about the teachers’ values seem likely to be important. In trying to assess what kind of writing will be valued in a particular class, students are also likely to draw on more general ideas about what constitutes effective academic writing, ideas passed on not by a single teacher but through an accumulation of institutional forces including teachers, reading and writing assignments, standardized tests, and so on. Other institutional factors that might affect peer responding include the directions teachers give regarding peer response activities, the credit students receive for
participating in peer response, and the amount of time they are given for the activity.

The prominent models of collaborative response outlined in Chapter I include provisions for students’ differing responses to texts that highlight the degree to which students’ differences might yield positive results. In his Individualistic Model, Elbow assumes that readers will have unique and thus differing experiences of the writer’s text and that individuals and the group as a whole will benefit from listening and accepting each reader’s response, even if responses seem to conflict with each other. Bruffee’s Consensus Model implies that differences that can be resolved by appealing to the standards of the established community students wish to join—the academic discourse community—should be resolved; differences that result from group members’ differing cultural backgrounds should be allowed to stand. In the Dissensus Model associated with Myers and Trimbur, differences within a group are seen as inevitable, and any resolution of those differences is illusory since it usually involves the marginalization of some point of view. According to Trimbur, however, it is possible for student groups to function outside of the hierarchical relations that characterize typical communities—if, rather than asking students to come to consensus, teachers
would teach students to analyze consensus for the dissensus that it hides.

As I have already noted, these models of collaborative response represent idealized conceptions of student collaboration. Specifically, these models are based on two assumptions: first, that differences can be productive for individual group members and the group as a whole and second, that teachers and/or group members themselves can organize group activities in a way that will make productive response to difference possible. These ideas are compelling for teachers who are attracted by the potential benefits of collaborative pedagogies but who also worry that conflicts within groups could have negative consequences. However, as I suggested in Chapter I, these assumptions need to be turned into questions: In what ways do students benefit from being exposed to differing perspectives within a peer response group? Can teachers and students direct collaborative activities to make possible a productive response to differences within groups? By becoming a participant observer in one peer response group, I hoped to explore—in a way that teachers and theorists cannot—how these questions might be answered in light of the experiences of particular students. Although what is true for these students may not be true for all, it is still important to examine the
consequences of our assumptions as they play themselves out, one student at a time.

"African American Voices": Competing Contexts

One way to highlight the complexity of peer response as a collaborative response activity is to see the peer response group as a site of overlapping communities with potentially conflicting sets of assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the nature of texts and the writing and reading of those texts. Because peer responding in "African American Voices" took place in a university writing course, norms of the academic community provided one set of assumptions that were likely to influence students' responses to their peers' texts. These norms may have been especially important in "African American Voices" since it was designed as a part of the University's relatively new General Education Curriculum. According to the University's guidelines, the second-level writing course should emphasize the skills of expository writing and oral presentation, with the ultimate goal of extending students' ability to read carefully and express ideas effectively. MJ included references to these University goals in her syllabus, noting that "Even though we will spend much of our class time discussing literature, this is first and foremost a writing course."
The major objective of this course is to improve your writing skills." In addition to these traditional goals for a university writing course, the University's guidelines for English 367 state that the second-level writing course should focus on cultural diversity in America with special attention given to issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Academic norms for reading and writing about such issues might also be expected to influence students.

Although "African American Voices" was a part of this larger academic community and was thus obligated to follow the rules established by that community, the particular class I studied established its own rules for writing and reading texts. These rules include the ones stated explicitly by the teacher but also those negotiated between teacher and students. MJ's goals for the course differed somewhat from those prescribed by the institution.

Although she felt obligated to give students greater facility with academic discourse, she also wanted to challenge what she saw as the institution's exclusionary norms. As one of the few female African-Americans on the faculty, MJ was especially sensitive to the ways in which academic norms can alienate students who have been traditionally shut out of the university altogether.

One of the ways in which MJ sought to challenge the norms of the University was by giving students access to
literature not normally taught in the English Department. In the class I observed, the reading list included only works by African American authors ranging from Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl to the film Straight out of Brooklyn. MJ defined literature broadly, to include not just canonical African American literature such as Ralph Ellison’s fiction and Langston Hughes’ poetry but also nonfiction prose by Frederick Douglass, Maya Angelou, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as film.

MJ also challenged the established standards of the institution in the kind of writing she asked students to do. On the first day of class, MJ made it clear that although they would be reading literature, this would not be a traditional literature class focused on the interpretation of texts. Instead, students would be writing about the issues raised in the texts, and they would be permitted to use their own experience, in addition to the texts, as support for their ideas. MJ intended this dual validation of authority to be both liberating and challenging for students. She explained,

As we got started talking about the issues, I realized many of the people in the class don’t have a lot of experience talking about texts so to get them to move from [talking about their experience to talking about texts] might be harder. Or all their experience would be outside of texts and the whole idea of using texts as support for your position would be something that we would have to learn over time. . . . I’m one of those people who actually thinks that in the academy lived experiences
always get pushed aside as invalid, and I am not the kind of scholar who likes to call on texts all the time. I think lived experiences have to find a place in the academy or you just exclude a whole group of people. . . . [A]s far as I’m concerned, though, the goal is to bring the two together.

MJ was committed to giving her students, and especially her African American students, the opportunity to feel that their experience counted, an opportunity she believed rarely happened in "normal" academic practice. But MJ did not want students to reject academic ways of thinking and writing altogether. MJ commented, "I’m really trying to affirm their own experience while at the same time trying to move them to a more balanced view of academic ways of thinking." For example, she felt obligated to teach them to use textual authority in ways that were deemed acceptable by the academy—and mandated by the university’s guidelines for the second-level writing course. Thus, while MJ wanted to complicate and extend notions of academic authority, she did not discount that authority. In this sense, MJ took exactly the stance that Greg Myers recommends. She saw herself as obligated by virtue of her employment in the institution to pass on the institution’s values. But she also sought to teach students to question those values. While class discussion often focused on analyzing literary texts, for example, MJ encouraged students to draw on their experience in understanding those texts. In one class discussion, MJ was
particularly pleased when a student compared Langston Hughes' folk philosopher Semple to Mr. Gaines, a character from the television show "A Different World," remarking that in most English classes students don't dare admit that they watch television.

We can also see MJ's dual stance toward the norms of the institution in one of the prompts she gave students for their second critical essay:

Many people believe that one criterion of good literature is that it is timeless (i.e. has universal appeal across time and audience). Pick two poems from our selection of readings which, though written many decades ago, speak to (or articulate) a contemporary issue(s). Explain the issue(s) and how the poems illustrate this universality.

This prompt reveals MJ's careful attempt to validate both the textual authority that is normally valued by the university and the authority of lived experience that is typically devalued. The notion that good literature is timeless or universal, that it can articulate an enduring truth, is a traditional literary one that grants certain texts a kind of transcendent power. However, by asking students to discuss the ways in which a poem might speak to (as distinguished from articulate) a contemporary issue, she is asking them to use their own sense of relevance in determining what makes a text "timeless" or "universal." In other words, she is suggesting that texts are not universal in and of themselves but have relevance
to contemporary readers only because those readers designate them as relevant.

By extending academic authority to include the authority of lived experience, MJ implicitly allowed multiple grounds of authority to coexist in her classroom. Such a move challenges the rules of "normal" academic discourse that privileges the authority of texts. MJ reinforced her acceptance of multiple grounds of authority in a note she included at the bottom of the assignment sheet for Essay Two. Here, again, she invites students to refer to both texts and personal experience:

Each topic leaves a great deal of room for you to make decisions about your focus. You will have to narrow the topic, choose an effective thesis, and provide adequate support for your thesis. Refer to the reading selections and to personal experience for your evidence. Pay attention to details; don’t make generalizations for which you have no evidence, and please edit or have someone help you edit your essay.

This note to students reveals MJ’s desire to extend the kinds of evidence typically associated with academic writing, but it also reveals her sense of obligation to some of the other rules of academic discourse: the need for a thesis, for example, and attention to editing according to the rules of Standard English.

In addition to the community standards articulated by MJ, the students in "African American Voices" also contributed to the norms and values that might be said to characterize this class. Perhaps because the majority of
students were African American, the class often expressed values that challenged those of the dominant culture, including the dominant academic community. For example, on the first day of class, MJ initiated a discussion of the kinds of texts students liked to read, and many of the students described their frustration at being asked to read texts like *The Great Gatsby*, which represented experiences that were totally foreign—and irrelevant—to them as African Americans.

Many students expressed a preference for reading texts by African Americans because those texts were easier to relate to their experience, with one student arguing that these texts were thus more "true." In discussing the reading assigned in class, students often focused on the ways in which the texts expressed truths about their experience as African Americans, and they felt comfortable talking openly about the oppression of blacks by a dominant white culture. Although MJ frequently warned students against making generalizations about "all blacks" and "all whites," students continued throughout the quarter to respond to the readings in this polarized way.

Within this class context, the peer response groups represented yet another set of norms for reading and writing texts. Although it is reasonable to expect that these groups would be influenced by the norms of the class, the values espoused by MJ, and the standards of
academic discourse, students may find it difficult to determine the rules that should govern their responses to peer texts in this complicated context. In addition to the rules about texts articulated by the class, by MJ, and by the academic community, students in peer response groups bring their personal values to the group, adding another layer of complexity to the act of peer response.

Peer Response in "African American Voices"

Since writing was to be the central focus of this course, more central than the reading of African American literature, MJ made peer response to student writing an important part of the course. MJ assigned students to peer response groups early in the quarter and provided opportunities for groups to respond to each of the four essays students were asked to write. Participation in these peer response sessions was required, and failure to participate resulted in a lowered grade on the essay for that unit. MJ’s conceptualization of peer response was similar to her stance toward the course: she recognized peer response as a forum where students could get help bringing their writing into line with the established norms of academic discourse—a position similar to that of Kenneth Bruffee—but she also wanted peer response to serve students’ individual needs as writers, however they defined them—a position similar to Peter Elbow’s. Thus,
although MJ had informal class discussions about peer responding during which students described the different kinds of response they needed, she also emphasized that everyone needed help with staying on their subject, avoiding generalizations, and providing adequate evidence—fairly traditional academic values. Similarly, for the first peer response session, MJ distributed a list of ten questions that each responder should answer about each piece of writing (See Appendix C). These questions also emphasized traditional values such as focus, organization, evidence, and grammar. In subsequent peer response sessions, however, MJ left it up to group members to decide how to respond to their peers' writing, requiring only that they provide some kind of written response that could be turned in and evaluated by MJ. Students in these responding sessions were expected to come up with their own rules for responding, but to do so inevitably required that they somehow choose among the many rules that were competing for their alliance in this class.

In putting the groups together, MJ did not choose members who were notably different; instead, she tried to be sure that each group had at least one strong writer or leader and that there were no apparent conflicts among group members. But because I was particularly interested in the role that "difference" would play in students' responses to their peers' texts, I chose to study closely
the peer response group that seemed the most diverse, both in terms of gender and racial difference, but also in terms of the students’ assumptions about texts, in as much as I could infer those assumptions from the comments students made in class discussions. The group that I chose had four members: Beth, a white woman who was a senior majoring in English; Carol, an African American woman and sophomore honors student; Patricia, a Korean American woman and senior history major; and Robert, an African American man who was a well-known college athlete majoring in business. This group was clearly the most racially diverse one in the class, but its group members also expressed markedly different assumptions about texts. Beth, for example, was a very active participant in class discussion. She was frequently the one who answered MJ’s questions, and she did so with a sense of authority that seemed to come, at least in part, from her familiarity with a wide range of literature and from her ability to generalize from the particular text at hand to literature not by African Americans. Perhaps as a consequence, Beth’s comments were often challenged by her classmates, who were especially critical of her claims that good literature transcends racial difference. Carol, an extremely soft-spoken woman whom the class sometimes taunted to speak up, also contributed in class, but in contrast with Beth’s authoritative answering of questions,
Carol usually asked questions. She also often remarked on her reactions to the reading, rather than focusing on matters of interpretation. Patricia spoke in class occasionally but tentatively, and her remarks were rarely taken up by the rest of the class. Patricia, too, asked questions and described her reactions to the readings, but she often commented on aspects of the text that were not unique to African American experience. For example, in several of her comments Patricia focused on relationships between mothers and their children. Robert was more or less a non-participant in the class—and in the peer response group. He rarely attended class, and when he did, he was usually silent.

When these students, with their differing approaches to texts, were brought together as a peer responding group in a context already complicated by overlapping sets of assumptions about texts, it seems likely that the group would experience moments of conflict. And, in fact, during three of their four peer response sessions and in several group discussions of assigned reading and films viewed in class, differences in students' assumptions about texts did emerge.

The group's response to these differences, however, did not correspond with any of those proposed by the models of collaborative response I surveyed earlier. Students did not practice "methodological believing" by
accepting as "true" their peers' differing perspectives. Nor did they carry on conversations with the goal of reaching consensus about how to apply the established standards of the community they were seeking to join. They also did not analyze the standards of the community in order to discover the power relations that determine which perspectives were valued and which ones marginalized, and they certainly didn't imagine how these power relations might be changed. For the issue of power—and authority—seemed to be the factor that most constrained this group's response to their differing perspectives. Although group members may have held different assumptions about how to read and write the kinds of texts assigned in "African American Voices," in the context of competing assumptions, one set of assumptions seemed to speak more loudly and to have more power to demand adherence than the others—the set of assumptions most clearly associated with narrow norms of academic discourse. In particular, these were the values espoused throughout the quarter by Beth.

To illustrate this group's differing assumptions about texts and their response to those differences, I have chosen to analyze closely one peer responding session
that seemed characteristic. For the peer responding session that is my focus here, Beth, Carol, and Patricia were present. Of three writing prompts, each had chosen to respond to the one that invited students to consider the universality or timelessness of the poems they had read. They did so, however, in strikingly different ways. Beth wrote a fairly traditional literary essay, one based on a close reading of the texts and organized around a single thesis. In this essay, entitled "Feminist Interpretations," she argued that Jean Toomer's "Karintha" and Langston Hughes' "Harlem (A Dream Deferred)" are universal in that they deal with what she calls "the keeping down of women." Beth made her case for the universality of these texts by comparing them to Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar and Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen," two frequently taught literary works by white

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15 My decision to focus on this particular peer response session was motivated by the complexity of what I observed happening here, but it was also motivated by the limits of the data gathered from the other peer response sessions. During the first peer response session, I was observing a number of groups, and only Patricia and Carol were present from this group. During the third responding session, Carol, Beth, and Robert were present, but only Carol and Beth had drafts. Carol, Beth, and Patricia were again present for the final peer response session, and all of them had drafts, but that session for the most part went like this one—and like all of the others at which Beth was present.

16 This prompt is the one that appears in full earlier in this chapter.
women. This essay was fairly characteristic of Beth's approach to all of the reading and writing assigned in the class. For Beth, what made a piece of literature "good" was not its relevance to her personal experience—as a white woman, none of the literature read in class spoke directly to her experience—but its appeal to what she called "universal human emotion." As an English major, Beth had been trained to read and value literature for its transcendent qualities; and as a writer of fiction, Beth tried to create literature that she imagined would have universal appeal. Because Beth valued the power of literary texts, it is not surprising that she used her knowledge of literature to construct herself as an authority in her writing, providing as support for her arguments textual evidence gleaned not only from the texts assigned in class but also from texts she read elsewhere, texts that were often unfamiliar to her classmates. Significantly, she seemed to see her approach not as one option among many but as the "right" way to write about texts.

Carol took a much more experience-based approach in her essay about the universality of literature. In "Going Out With a Bang," Carol wrote in response to the poems "If We Must Die" by Claude McKay and "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Dunbar. For Carol, what made these poems universal was not their appeal across audiences but their relevance
across time. Carol argued that McKay's call for African Americans to struggle to their deaths for freedom is as compelling today as it was when the poem was written, citing the Rodney King case as support for her claim. Whereas Beth relied on texts by white women as her source of authority, Carol relied on examples from contemporary African American experience; and while for Beth, "universal" necessarily implied an erasure of race-specific appeals, for Carol there could be no such erasure. In an interview, Carol admitted that even in her first-year writing course where she was the only African American student and where the only text by an African American that they read was a poem by Langston Hughes, she still managed to write exclusively about racial issues.

Patricia's essay was different from Beth's and Carol's most notably in its multiple focuses. In her paper, titled simply "Toomer and Cullen," Patricia asserted two unrelated theses, each with a different kind of support. In the first part of her essay, Patricia argued that Toomer's "Karintha" is universal because it illustrates the devastating consequences of sexual abuse. This part of her paper was composed largely of generalizations--Patricia cited neither textual support nor personal experience to lend authority to her assertions. In the second half, Patricia argued that what makes Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage" universal is that
it describes the problem of being torn between two cultures, which Patricia saw as a continuing problem for minorities in the U.S. Here, Patricia supported her discussion of the problem of double consciousness by referring to her experience as a Korean American who came to the U.S. when she was ten years old. This essay was typical of much of Patricia's writing in the class. Whereas Beth relied on the authority of literary texts and Carol relied on her perspective as an African American, Patricia struggled throughout the quarter to find a way to speak authoritatively in response to the African American literature she was reading. In her "Toomer and Cullen" essay, Patricia took what came to be a characteristically dual stance toward the issue of African American experience. On the one hand, like Beth, Patricia wanted to erase or downplay an emphasis on racial difference. According to Patricia, one of the problems with these "culture classes" as she called them--and here she included the one she had taken on Korean American experience--was that there was too much emphasis on difference and not enough on commonalities. On the other hand, Patricia was sympathetic with the special problems faced by minorities in the U.S., often comparing the problems of African Americans to the problems of Asian Americans. In this sense, she was like Carol, who relied on her lived experience as a source of authority in her
reading and writing about texts. But of course, she was also not like Carol: she was not an African American whose perspective was especially validated by the course content, class dynamics, or the instructor. In this class, perhaps as much as or more than in a class dominated by members of the majority culture—Patricia felt herself to be an outsider.

By MJ's standards, all three writers based their arguments on acceptable types of authority. However, Beth, in assuming that she knew the correct way to write about texts, tried to convince her group members that these multiple authorities were inadequate. Because Beth's group members acknowledged her experience with texts, they allowed her to subvert the local contexts MJ set up in the class and granted authority to what they intuited as her more authoritative voice.

**Reading Difference(s) in a Peer Response Session**

In the peer response discussion of this group's drafts of Essay Two, a number of differences emerged. As the summary of their drafts reveals, Beth, Carol, and Patricia seemed to make different assumptions about the kind of writing called for by the prompt. But the degree to which these differing assumptions were acknowledged and valued depended on other differences within the group, most notably the differing degrees of authority with which
each group member asserted her values. This difference in authority can be attributed to the forcefulness of these students' personalities and to the different levels of experience each student had with peer responding. But it can also be attributed to the different status each set of assumptions held in the academic community at large. Beth, who had the most forceful personality in the group, also had the most experience as a responder to peer texts. And the values she asserted were clearly the values associated with normal academic discourse. As a consequence, she positioned herself as the authority in the group, and on the surface, at least, her group members granted her that authority.

From the moment peer response began, Beth seemed completely comfortable acting as an authoritative reader of her peers' writing. Beth opened the peer response session--the group's second but her first--by telling Carol and Patricia, "Before we start this, I do a lot of workshopping and used to tutor writing students, O.K? So I'm not being harsh when I'm saying stuff on your papers. I don't mean it that way." In response to Beth's announcement, Patricia said, "I think that's kind [of] good," and Carol added, "Yeah." Since both Carol and Patricia had described the first peer response session as difficult primarily because they were inexperienced as responders, it seems likely they found Beth's
authoritative stance comforting: certainly she would know what they were supposed to do. After all, Beth’s claim to authority in peer responding was based on her certification by the institution—she had taken the University’s peer tutoring course and had been authorized by the institution to advise other students about their writing. And perhaps more important, Beth had taken the peer tutoring course from MJ.

Beth’s statement also reveals that she is accustomed not just to responding but to issuing criticism in response to others’ writing, criticism that is sometimes considered "harsh." By assuring Carol and Patricia that she doesn’t intend her remarks to hurt their feelings, she is setting them up to expect negative comments while also warning them not to take those comments personally and to see her criticism as in their best interest. She is thus putting them in a position of having to take whatever she says without questioning it. In an interview, Beth told me that she disliked peer response in classes like "African American Voices" because she felt she had to hold back her criticism. As a creative writing major, Beth was used to workshops in which people felt free to criticize each other’s writing without worrying about hurting people’s feelings. In fact, in the creative writing workshops Beth had experienced, readers were instructed to be both demanding and critical. While her sensitivity to
Carol and Patricia's feelings might be seen as a good thing, it resulted, by her own admission, from a sense that her classmates were not up to her standards of critiquing. Beth commented, "Maybe it's just because I'm impatient, I don't know, but being older than most of these students I'm in class with, and having much more writing experience than they do really gets frustrating."

After these introductory remarks from Beth, the group agreed to read and then discuss one paper at a time, writing comments directly on the draft. They decided to start with Patricia's paper. In her written comments, Beth continued to assert her values authoritatively, both in the number and kind of comments she made. For example, Beth covered Patricia's texts with marks, crossing out sentences, correcting verb tenses, changing words, and underlining and circling words and phrases that she then commented on in the margins. In addition, Beth's discursive comments on Patricia's draft were written in an explicitly authoritative tone. Beth often gave instructions for revision, for example, "This needs clarifying!" By using the imperative voice, Beth further established herself as an authority whose advice must be obeyed. More important than Beth's tone, however, was the nature of the commentary she uttered so forcibly: in both her written comments and discussion of Patricia's draft, she constantly searched for the textual authority that
she—and the institution—valued. For example, Beth questioned Patricia’s assertion that "Cullens had become an example for the black people," asking if she had gotten this information from the poem.

In the group’s discussion of Patricia’s draft, Beth continued playing the role of the authority. She initiated and controlled the discussion, the bulk of which was devoted to Beth’s explanation of her written comments. Although Beth began her critique of Patricia’s paper by commenting on what she called "superficial things" like inconsistent verb tenses, she quickly extended her criticism to the content of Patricia’s paper, questioning Patricia’s interpretations of "Karintha" and "We Wear the Mask." For example, Beth asked Patricia if she really meant to say that Karintha felt worthless, adding that she had not interpreted Karintha that way. She then told Patricia, "You have to quote directly from the text to back up your idea." In this exchange, Beth took the position of the skeptical academic reader who requires textual evidence in order to be convinced. But she also seemed to be acting as the "teacher" who has the "right" interpretation confronting the student who is "wrong." Beth assumed a similar stance when she asked Patricia, "In Dunbar’s ‘We Wear the Mask,’ remember? Who do you say wears the mask?" Here is a classic "teacher’s question," one which the teacher already knows the answer to. And
Patricia reacted much like a student who has been put on the spot. Recognizing by Beth's tone that Beth thinks she made an interpretive error, Patricia responded not by looking at her draft to see what she had written but by declaring that she didn't know and would have to reread the poem. Even though Patricia acknowledged a need to reconsider her interpretation, Beth "corrected" her reading of the poem, saying directly to Patricia: "It is 'we' who are wearing the mask. 'They' may be wearing the mask but that's not the issue. That's not what the poem was about; that's not what the poet was talking about. So, you are forced to deal with what the poet is talking about. . . . You've got to stick with the text." Beth did not seem to trust Patricia to "get it right" even on a second reading and thus felt compelled to give her the "right" answer and to remind her that "right" answers can be found only through a correct reading of the text.

In addition to presenting herself as an authority in the interpretation of literature, Beth also presented herself as an experienced member of the academic discourse community, at least the one that values textual evidence above all. Beth told Patricia, "I wrote this everywhere [on your paper]. The text is your authority. The text is always your starting point." Commenting on one of Patricia's unsupported generalizations, Beth warned, "You have to get that out of the text. If you don't, you're
not allowed to put that in. It’s against the rules, whatever rules there are. . . ." Near the end of the response session, Beth advised Patricia to draw more explicit parallels between her experience as an Asian American and the double consciousness Dunbar describes in "We Wear the Mask." Said Beth,

All the time, I wrote this all over the place, you need comparable parallels to the text. The text is your authority and you’re reaching from the text out to find examples from what you are to bring back to the text and compare it. The text is always your starting point. The text is your authority. Either you have it from the media or literature or everyday life but you need something to prove it, O.K., and that’s what the text is. That’s why you have to stay with it.

Here, Beth seemed on the verge of allowing that something other than literature could stand as support for Patricia’s ideas—media or everyday life, she suggested. But such a suggestion was buried in the middle of a long comment that began and ended with an assertion of the authority of texts.

It is not surprising that Beth was able to act as an authority in response to Patricia’s writing. During whole class discussions of the readings, Patricia’s comments were often tentative, exhibiting neither the authority of experience with literary interpretation nor the authority of personal experience with African American issues. As a consequence, Beth might easily have felt herself to be a more authoritative reader than Patricia, even before she
read her writing. And because English was Patricia’s second language, her writing contained many surface errors not common in the writing of native speakers—problems with word endings, prepositions, verb tenses—that might have reinforced Beth’s sense that she was a more authoritative writer as well. What is more important than Beth’s assertion of authority, however, is Patricia’s recognition and acceptance of it. Patricia described herself as someone who has difficulty writing and admitted that she had limited experience writing in response to literature. She was thus anxious for the kind of explicit, directive advice Beth gave. When asked how helpful she found her peer response group to be, Patricia commented, "[Beth] knows what she’s doing, she’s very qualified, I think, . . . she just tells me a lot of things that I can do better."

What is somewhat surprising is the ease with which Beth asserted authority over Carol’s writing. Given that "African American Voices" focused exclusively on literature by African Americans, enrolled a clear majority of African American students, and was taught by an African American instructor who valued responses to texts based on experience, one might expect Beth to acknowledge Carol’s authority as an African American, an authority that Beth herself could not presume to assert. But Beth proceeded to judge Carol’s writing according to the same standards
she used to judge Patricia—and presumably herself: the established standards of "normal" academic writing that privilege textual authority and devalue the authority of lived experience.

In her written comments on Carol’s draft, Beth assumed her characteristic authoritative stance, circling and underlining questionable words and phrases and using the imperative voice to warn Carol against making unsupported generalizations: "These are vague references to the text. You’ve got something here, make it concrete." A careful reading of Beth’s comments, however, suggests that she may have expected Carol to resist her authoritative stance. For example, in response to Carol’s sentence, "Also, these white people have purposely planned to continuously enslave African Americans economically," Beth circled "purposely" and wrote, "might try ‘seemingly.’ Makes the sentence less generalized. Quote from MJ: ‘Don’t make generalizations for which you have no evidence.’" Although Beth could have registered her objection to Carol’s statement—a statement that implicitly implicates her—by noting that differences in a reader’s perspective (for example, her own) might lead readers to require more evidence in order to be convinced, Beth instead bolstered her authority for questioning this statement by explicitly aligning herself with the teacher. Doing so may have made it less likely she would be seen as
personally objecting to Carol's statement and her advice rejected as implicitly racist and more likely that her advice would be accepted because it represents both the institution's standards and those of MJ.

Beth did seem on the verge of validating some of the features of Carol's writing that might be attributed to race or culture when she praised what she called Carol's "rhetoric," comparing it to that of Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition to making positive comments next to particular words and phrases on Carol's draft, Beth wrote at the end of Carol's paper:

> Your opening and closing are simply close to brilliant. There's a lot of rhetoric working here, and you must use the text to back up that rhetoric. Make your text as powerful as you want by basing it in the poem! You have a touch for some of this--explore it! Watch generalizations. If you dare use them, back them up with concrete evidence.

In these remarks, Beth seemed to praise qualities of Carol's writing that would not necessarily have been valued by the academy. Her praise of Carol is undercut, however, by her continued insistence that rhetoric cannot stand alone, that it must be backed up not just by examples but by textual evidence. Note in this regard Beth's instruction to Carol that she make her text as powerful as she wants by "basing it in the poem." Here Beth conflated Carol's standards with her own and with those of the academy, which allowed her to continue to
believe and assert that there is only one way to construct a powerful argument.

The group discussion of Carol’s draft proceeded in much the same way as did the discussion of Patricia’s writing. Beth initiated and dominated the discussion, explaining her comments paragraph by paragraph. Although Beth complimented Carol more than she did Patricia, which might suggest that she did grant Carol’s approach to texts more authority than she did Patricia’s, she still emphasized Carol’s need to provide textual support for her assertions. For example, after pointing out an effective generalization, Beth told Carol, "Keep parts like that so that you can compare them with the text. Compare it to the text constantly." And again, she explicitly aligned herself with the instructor when she reminded Carol that MJ had said, "You cannot make generalizations without having [support]."

For a number of reasons, Beth’s authority went more or less unquestioned in this peer response session. Throughout Beth’s lengthy and detailed discussion of their papers, Patricia and Carol listened quietly, occasionally rephrasing one of Beth’s suggestions to be sure they understood what she wanted them to do. And although Carol and Patricia had read and written comments on each other’s drafts, Beth’s analysis of their work left them with little to add but agreement. At the end of Beth’s
discussion of Patricia's draft, for example, Carol simply added, "That's the same thing I got out of it. You need an introduction, and after some of the things you were saying, it was, like, how do you know? Then when you were saying your problems as an Asian American, it's, like, well, how does that relate to the poem?" Although Carol had written specific questions and advice for revision on Patricia's draft, she did not even look at her comments when it came time to offer her response, perhaps because they were so few in comparison to Beth's. Carol's oral response to Patricia's draft revealed some concern with academic standards such as having a clear introduction and providing adequate evidence, standards that Beth also advocated. In this respect, Beth and Carol seemed to be asserting a consensus regarding standards for effective writing. But their remarks can also be read as representing somewhat different rules for responding to peer texts. For example, by phrasing her concerns as questions, Carol's responses seem more readerly than institutional; they seem to represent a reader's request to know more about how Patricia's experience relates to Dunbar's poem as well as a reminder of academic standards for effective writing.

Beth's extensive response to Carol's paper also left Patricia with little to say. Patricia's written response to Carol included a few suggestions for mostly sentence-
level revision, but Patricia made a number of positive comments on Carol’s draft as well. For example, Patricia wrote that she liked the introduction as well as the phrasing of particular sentences and the expression of certain ideas. In the peer response discussion, however, Patricia did not praise Carol’s draft but instead reiterated Beth’s caution against overgeneralizing and agreed with her recommendation that Carol provide more examples. But unlike Beth, who positioned herself as more knowledgeable than her peers, Patricia addressed Carol as a peer. Patricia said to Carol, "You’re a lot like me. I try to get my feelings in there so hard and then you forget that other people reading this are not going to get the same ideas I am. Like she’s saying, use a lot of examples, because you do generalize a lot—and so do I."

Although Patricia saw Carol’s writing as similar to her own, she defined that similarity primarily in terms of their failure to measure up to existing standards for academic writing, standards that include a narrow focus, emotional distance, and extensive textual support. Together, Carol and Patricia might have been able to challenge the values asserted authoritatively by Beth, but they did not—or were not able to—ally themselves in this way. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the similarities in their positions in relation to Beth and her normalizing discourse, Patricia and Carol accepted Beth’s criticism of
their writing and thus seemed to accede to her values regarding texts. In separate interviews, Patricia and Carol both claimed they had a problem with wanting to make their papers "too big" by going beyond the texts discussed in class. Patricia said that one important lesson she had learned from Beth was that writing had to be based on the texts as "the facts" because "If you start with your own opinion, you can get into trouble."

I have discussed Beth's responses at length because her remarks dominated the peer response session. One reason Beth might have felt the need to explain her comments in such detail was that her handwriting was almost unreadable. But given the nature of her explanations--asking Patricia if she knew what a colloquialism was and asking Carol if she knew what "rhetoric" meant, for example--it is also likely that Beth saw her peer group members as incapable of understanding her comments.

When it came time to discuss Beth's draft, Beth managed to control that discussion as well. Because Beth had brought to class only one handwritten copy of a partial draft that consisted of an outline of her ideas and a list of possible examples, Carol and Patricia, in effect, had no writing to respond to. While Beth was out of the room, Carol and Patricia conferred about what their
response to Beth should be. Both expressed their frustration with being unable to respond:

Carol: It’s very, very rough.

Patricia: That’s why, I’m like, I don’t know what to say. I have no idea what to say.

Carol: It’s just like fragments of what she wants.

Patricia: Cause she’s going to elaborate on all this. So, it’s kind of like, should I even say anything about it?

Carol: She knows what she’s gonna do, but the thing is, she shouldn’t have brought it in like this.

When Beth returned, she asked her peers what they thought of her draft. Before they could respond, Beth explained at length what she planned to do in the paper, something that she hadn’t invited either Carol or Patricia to do. Perhaps the most striking part of her explanation was her reflection on the kind of evidence she would provide in support of her ideas. She began by asking Carol and Patricia if they had read the book Backlash. When they said they hadn’t, Beth explained that "it has examples galore in it of what I’m talking about in [my paper]."

Beth then pointed out that "[MJ] is very interested in our own personal experiences which is very interesting, and it’s a good idea for a class like this." Reading aloud from the prompt that all three group members had chosen, Beth concluded, "So she wants text and personal
[experience], so I made it a point to do that. I mean, you can do one or the other, but I made it a point to do both, to get the point across better." Here Beth showed her awareness of the instructor's desire to extend what counted as authority in this class to include both texts and personal experience and revealed her intention to use multiple kinds of authority to make her writing more effective. In contrast, Beth did not encourage Patricia and Carol to rely on their own experience as valid evidence. On the surface it seemed that Beth was asserting two different sets of rules about the writing MJ was requiring: one that applied to Carol and Patricia and another one that applied to her. Given her belief in the value of textual authority, perhaps Beth felt that her peers needed to master a facility with textual evidence before they could earn the right to go outside of the text. It is also possible that Beth felt less qualified to judge the effectiveness of her peers' personal testimony: put in the position of having to judge their writing in an institutional context, she relied on the established standards of the institution. But a third explanation also seems possible: namely, that even Beth's "nontextual" evidence was really "textual"; her references to women's lived experience did, after all, come from *Backlash*, a text. So her claim to be validating personal
experience as evidence in her writing was not quite accurate.

In the end, Carol and Patricia's only response to Beth's draft was to say that because it was incomplete, they couldn't really respond. Patricia closed the discussion by joking, "You really do your own criticism. You don't really need us."

Beth and the Institution

Beth's assumption of authority and her domination of her peer response group can be seen as products of her institutional position as a successful writer (an English major and a creative writer) and responder to writing (a peer tutor). In Kenneth Bruffee's terms, it was Beth's successful acculturation by the academy that gave her the confidence and the power to try to acculturate her peers. Her successful acculturation might also have led to what seems to be an unstated belief in a single standard for judging writing. As a consequence, Beth approached the "differences" in her peers' writing as weaknesses or problems that needed to be corrected and that she felt she was in a position to correct.

Despite MJ's validation of multiple sources of authority, Beth never came into line with MJ's view. The monolithic values that Best asserted regarding the writing
assigned in MJ’s class were closely related to the values she held regarding the nature of literary texts. Throughout the class, Beth seemed to contrast "universal" literature with "issue-oriented" literature that, in Beth’s opinion, appealed only to special interests or groups. (Notice that Beth acknowledged that the use of personal experience makes sense "in a class like this.") For Beth, universal literature had a greater value than issue-oriented literature. In an early class discussion, MJ asked students to talk about books they liked or disliked. When a number of African American students complained about the irrelevance of *The Great Gatsby*, Beth adamantly defended it, arguing that Fitzgerald wasn’t interested in "surface things" like the signs of wealth in the book that students had found off-putting, but in "human emotion." Later in the same discussion, MJ asked students if they had special expectations when they read books by African Americans. Beth responded that blacks tend to write about issues whereas whites don’t. When several African American students said that they expected African American literature to express the "truth" and to teach them something, arguing that white writers can’t write about what it means to be black and that white readers can’t understand black literature in the same way that black readers can, Beth insisted that good writing transcends differences, that it is about "universal human
experience." In an interview, Beth remarked, "I tend to shy away from issue-like things, issue-like books and literature and focus more on what I was talking about the very first day, you know, universal things and human emotion. That's what I try to write, and that's what I enjoy reading."

It should not be surprising that Beth's position was different from the position of most of the other students in the class. Unfortunately, Beth was unable to see that her position was a position, just one among many. Of course, Beth's position is not just one among many: it represents the dominant paradigm in most English departments, at least those in which a large number of faculty were trained under the doctrine of New Criticism. As a result, it is likely that Beth's belief in the superiority of literature that deals with "universal human experience" was one passed on by her professors and one that she was rewarded for adopting. Even in this class context, Beth's "traditionalism"—although challenged—was rewarded: Beth received "A"s on all her papers and received the highest possible evaluation for her peer response.

Although one of the goals of a course such as "African American Voices" is to complicate notions about "universal human experience," Beth was perplexed to find her views called into question by others in the class,
going so far as to complain in private to MJ about her classmates' insistence on discussing literature exclusively in terms of African American experience and their hostility toward her views. Ideally, having one's perspective called into question can result in self-reflection and perhaps a modification or a qualification of that perspective, but Beth showed no sign of budging from her position. Even when MJ warned her against telling people that they were wrong, Beth said only that she knew she needed to learn to be patient. Although MJ was able to take a critical stance toward her teaching, one that allowed her to see a conflict between the obligation to teach academic norms and the desire to challenge those norms, Beth acted as a teacher without this kind of self-consciously critical perspective. When Beth's values were criticized by the class (as they were not in her peer response group), instead of turning a critical lens on herself and her values, she turned it back on those who disagreed with her. Beth was also unable to see the extent to which her values reflected established academic norms, norms that have come under attack for being exclusionary. Beth clung to her values as having some universal import rather than seeing them as the social construction of an established discourse community.
Perhaps Beth's distress over the loss of her authority in the class as a whole contributed to the strength with which she asserted her authority in her peer response group. As we can see in the peer response session described above, Beth seems to have adhered to a New Critical approach in her discussion of literature and imposed that approach on her peers by emphasizing that texts—not one's interpretation of them—should serve as the foundation for writing in this class. In her criticism of her peers' interpretations, she also implied that there was only one "correct" reading of a text, and given Beth's years of training in reading and writing about texts, she was able to imply, fairly confidently, that hers was the correct reading.

Similarly, Beth seemed confident that her approach to writing about texts was the correct approach. And the fact that all three group members had chosen to write about the universality or timelessness of literature—Beth's specialty—probably gave her even more confidence. If Beth's view of literature seems dominated by a New Critical paradigm, her view of writing—with its emphasis on a single thesis, textual support, and some matters of style—seems equally dominated by current-traditional rhetoric. Although "New Criticism" and "Current Traditional Rhetoric" are umbrella terms for a complex of ideas, they represent a number of similar values: a
valorization of texts and a devaluing of personal experience, a belief in a single approach to the reading and writing of texts and a dismissal of other approaches, and a claim to be above the politics of social and cultural differences. Perhaps most important, they once shared enormous power as normalizing forces in the field of English studies. And although on a theoretical level, the tenets of New Criticism and Current Traditional Rhetoric have been thoroughly disputed, their legacy lives on in many literature and composition classrooms as well as in students like Beth. Read in this way, the power that Beth asserted in the peer response group was granted her by virtue of her alliance with a very powerful institution.

This explanation of why Beth was able to position herself as an unassailable authority in the peer response group also explains to some extent why Patricia and Carol were unable or unwilling to resist her power. In the larger classroom setting, Beth’s view was a minority view and one challenged by many of the other students, but in her peer response group, Beth was able to assert her view without the opposition of a half dozen students and without the intervention of the teacher. Neither Patricia nor Carol had the academic experience or success with reading and writing about texts that might have given them the confidence to oppose Beth—for Patricia, English was a
second language, and Carol had received the lowest grade in the class on her first essay. Patricia, who felt insecure about her reading and writing abilities and was uncertain how to do the kind of writing required in "African American Voices," found Beth's corrections of her text particularly helpful. Patricia seemed to want a clear statement of what an acceptable essay should be, and Beth was able to issue that statement. Patricia was also sympathetic to Beth's view of literature. It was Patricia who on the first day of class said that she had enjoyed reading The Great Gatsby, thus provoking the hostility of some of the African American students and the support of Beth. And Patricia's view that these "culture classes" overemphasize people's differences is not unlike Beth's view that good literature is universal: both reflect a traditional humanist appeal to an inherent human sameness. Such an appeal permits one to evade the issue of the hierarchical relations of power that Greg Myers and John Trimbur argue organize all human relations.

In "African American Voices," where neither Beth nor Patricia could claim special insight into the literature based on their experience, an emphasis on universality or commonality gave them access to the texts they were reading. It also gave them a way of deflecting whatever discomfort they might have felt about their racial positions in relation to the class. In this respect,
their adherence to a belief in the possible universality of texts can be seen as a social as well as a personal or institutional factor that affected peer response. Patricia, whose parents owned a grocery in a predominantly black neighborhood in Los Angeles, seemed especially uncomfortable writing or talking about African American experience. Admitting that among the Koreans she knew there was a great deal of prejudice against African Americans, Patricia explained that she had enrolled in "African American Voices" in order to overcome her limited perspective and to gain insight into African American culture. In spite of her desire to understand African American experience on its own terms, however, Patricia seemed unable to confront that experience directly and was made especially uncomfortable by the rage and hostility that some of the literature and some of the students expressed.\textsuperscript{17}

Although Beth never referred to herself as "white," her frustration with the African American students' emphasis on their experience may also have been a product of her anxiety about racial difference and her desire to be free of accusations of prejudice or feelings of collective white guilt. Any discussion of the oppression

\textsuperscript{17} For a recent discussion of student resistance to reading literature of this kind, see Cheryl L. Johnson, "Participatory Rhetoric and the Teacher as Racial/Gendered Subject." \textit{College English} 56 (1994): 409-419.
of African Americans potentially implicated her, and she actively resisted such an implication. For example, by aligning herself with her African American instructor in her criticism of Carol's generalization about the economic oppression of African Americans, Beth lessened the chance that her criticism would be seen as racist. Similarly, Beth's retreat into claims of universality can be seen as an attempt to further avoid dealing with the problem of how to talk about African American experience without implicating herself as a white person. Unfortunately, her claims of universality served to further mark her as a member of the majority culture who had the luxury to choose not to deal with the messy matter of racism in America. Beth and Patricia's difficulty in dealing with racism was perhaps best illustrated during a class discussion that took place, at the initiation of several of the African American students, the day after the Los Angeles riots broke out. MJ opened the discussion by allowing students to express the anger and pain they felt in response to the acquittal of the white police officers who had been videotaped beating Rodney King. She then moved the discussion to a more general consideration of racism in America. When MJ raised the issue of racism against African American women, Beth questioned whether such a thing existed, admitting that although she frequently witnessed racism against African American men,
she did not believe there was racism against African American women. By making racism a male problem, she once again removed herself from racial guilt. Patricia avoided implications of racism by saying nothing during the discussion of the Rodney King verdict and the LA riots. In fact, Patricia told only me that she was from Los Angeles and that her father’s grocery had miraculously remained untouched during the riots while most of the other Korean businesses in the neighborhood were destroyed.

Because Patricia was sympathetic to Beth’s views and seemed comfortable with Beth’s authoritative stance and because Robert was frequently absent from the peer response group, Carol would have been alone if she had chosen to oppose Beth. Although a number of African American students felt powerful enough to oppose Beth in class, they also knew they could rely on their peers for support. In the peer response group, Carol could not count on that support. Although Carol’s writing indicated that she did not share Beth’s approach to texts, Carol voiced her dissent only in the private space of her final draft. In spite of Beth’s attempts to fit Carol’s writing to the established mold of academic writing, Carol managed to resist Beth’s authoritative voice in her revision and to continue writing "differently." This difference emerged in Carol’s choice to support her
generalizations not with more textual references but with 
additional references to Rodney King and to her own 
experience as an African American university student. And 
while in some cases she chose to tone down her assertions 
about the oppression of African Americans, in other cases 
she did not. One of the most interesting ways in which 
Carol resisted Beth's advice was by borrowing and 
extending Patricia's "misreading" of Cullen's "We Wear the 
Mask." Beth had explicitly told Patricia that she was 
wrong to say that it was the oppressors who were wearing a 
mask when, according to Beth's reading, the poet was 
clearly describing how the oppressed must wear a mask if 
they want to fit in with the majority culture. In Carol's 
revised essay about the continuing effects of racism, she 
wrote, "In the poem, the oppressed group of people are 
wearing the mask. However, the poem can be interpreted to 
read as the oppressor wearing the mask. Racism can cover 
itself from being seen as it really is and can dodge 
confrontation, by wearing a mask." In the margin next to 
this sentence, MJ wrote "Good point," and at the end of 
the essay she commented, "This essay is much better than 
the first one. Your tone is more confident. I love your 
use of masks as worn by the oppressors. That is quite 
innovative." In spite of enormous pressure to conform to 
traditional conventions of academic discourse, in her 
revised draft, Carol produced a different kind of
discourse, one that challenged the narrow standards of text-based academic writing by relying on the authority of African American experience and by interpreting a piece of literature in ways that served her larger purposes. But Carol was able to make these challenges only outside of her peer response group, allowing Beth and Patricia to continue believing that the rules for academic writing that Beth asserted were not open to question. In the public arena of her group and her class, the dissensus represented by Carol's writing went unarticulated and unheard.

**Dissensus--A Dream (Deferred)**

As I have portrayed it, this group's peer responding did not allow for the emergence of differences among group members to be dealt with productively. For the most part, dissensus within the group was not articulated and was consequently not acknowledged, understood, or valued. Needless to say, in this peer response group, none of the group members practiced the "methodological believing" that Elbow recommended as a productive response to differing perspectives. And although one might argue that the group's discussion of each member's writing was characterized by the kind of consensus Bruffee advocated, the consensus was forced rather than negotiated, resulting not from group members' shared desire to accommodate their
writing to the standards of the established community they all wished to join but from Beth's imposition of her standards, which represented a narrow and inflexible version of community standards that was not open to discussion or dispute. In contrast with Bruffee's model of collaborative response, this group was not made up of peers who came to share the same paradigms and the same values but, instead, replicated an uneven distribution of power. And the member who had the most power was the one best able to articulate the authoritative and exclusionary rules of the "normal" discourse of the academic community—the most powerful community represented in this classroom—and to use those rules to reject and hence silence the "abnormal" discourse of her group members.

Because of Beth's powerful position in this peer response group and her tenacious adherence to a narrow and unquestionable standard, the "rhetoric of dissensus" that Trimbur proposes also failed to play a part in this group's processes. Beth had no reason to want to understand the hierarchically arranged power relations that determined that her standards would prevail while her group members' standards would be marginalized. Patricia and Carol might have benefitted from this kind of analysis of group members' differing assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the reading of African American literature and the writing of essays based on that
literature, but in this group, they had no power to initiate such an analysis. And although an understanding of the normalizing effect of established rules for academic reading and writing on these students' own texts might have enabled them to critique more generally the problematic workings of established knowledge-making communities, these students' experience in their peer response group did not yield this understanding.

Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur might argue that what happened in this peer response group resulted from the teacher's failure to organize peer responding in a way that would ensure that differences among students would be handled productively. Although there may be some ways in which MJ could have improved her implementation of peer response, the use of collaborative pedagogies is often motivated by a desire to see students assert more control over their learning. Activities like peer response are predicated on the belief that students can learn from each other without the teacher's intervention, and teachers who rely on peer response inevitably give up some of their control over what students learn. Although MJ may have seen improvement in the writing of Beth, Patricia, and Carol and may have concluded that peer response was effective for that reason, she had no way of knowing at what cost this improvement took place, nor could she know the extent to which this peer response group—under Beth's
supervision--operated on assumptions about texts that competed with her own.

The collaborative responding practices that I have described here, characterized as they were by the valorization of traditional norms of academic discourse and an unequal distribution of power among group members, set the tone for the group's subsequent peer response workshops. Beth--and the values she espoused--continued to dominate the group, in spite of the differing values articulated by MJ, by the other students in the class, and by Carol. Although Patricia continued to claim that she benefitted from hearing the perspectives of her peers, Beth continued to avoid engaging her peers' perspectives by bringing little of her writing to the group and by giving little time and little consideration to Carol's and Patricia's remarks. Carol claimed to have learned most from Beth's positive comments on her work. At the end of the quarter, she still pointed to the moment when Beth praised her use of rhetoric as one of the most significant contributions peer responding had made to her writing. Although from a teacher's point of view--and even from a researcher's--Beth, Carol, and Patricia seemed to have something to gain from collaboration, these students' experiences should give us reason to question our assumption that the potential benefits of collaborative
responding can be realized in classrooms characterized by competing norms.
CHAPTER IV

COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE TO READING

IN "THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE"

"as recent literary theory and reading research both suggest, there is really no way to read except in terms of what we have been calling one's history. As long as we acknowledge as teachers how readings are produced in this interested way, as long, that is, as we ask students to openly discuss their own experience and concerns in their responses to texts, then tension, ambivalence, and conflict will characterize both our teaching and their reading and writing." Nicholas Coles and Susan V. Wall

Dan:  "I'm going to shut up now since you've torn apart everything I said."
Bob:  "Well, that's the idea."

As Chapter III demonstrated, the peer response group is a complex site of potentially conflicting assumptions, beliefs, and values about reading and writing. Students in response groups, when faced with different assumptions, do not always respond in ways that advance the thinking or writing of individual group members, as Peter Elbow proposes, or in ways that help constitute the group as a discourse community with shared values and beliefs, as Kenneth Bruffee suggests. In the face of such differing assumptions about texts, the peer response group studied
in Chapter III was unable or unwilling to acknowledge, analyze, and understand those differences, instead allowing the most powerful set of assumptions—those associated with the academic discourse community in general—to prevail.

This chapter focuses on another type of collaborative responding—the small discussion group charged with responding to published texts. By asking students, first, to construct an individual response to a reading prior to class discussion in a journal entry or response paper, teachers encourage students to rely on their own authority in interpreting a text. And by asking students to discuss their responses in small groups, teachers turn over to students the responsibility for making sense of conflicting readings. Many teachers hope that these discussion groups can replace what otherwise might end up as a dialogue between the teacher’s interpretation of a text and those put forward by students, a dialogue in which the teacher’s interpretation is seen as the more authoritative one.

There are a number of similarities between collaborative discussion groups and peer response groups in writing classes. Both require that students take responsibility for their learning, and both provide opportunities for students to learn from each other as well as from the teacher. But there are a number of
significant differences as well. In peer response groups, the focus is on writing and on helping individual writers revise papers that the teacher will ultimately evaluate. Students are usually asked to go beyond articulating a reaction or an interpretation of peer texts to offer specific recommendations for revision, and these recommendations are often tied to criteria that teachers have identified. When doing peer response, students may find it important to agree about how a text should be revised so that they can leave the workshop with a firm idea of what they need to do next to improve their writing. If readers express different perspectives on a peer draft and those differences aren't resolved, students may feel frustrated, confused, or angry.

In small discussion groups, however, the focus is on reading rather than writing, on the comprehension and interpretation of texts rather than on the production of them. The goal of small group discussions is usually not to improve individual group members' performances on a specific task but to enhance the group's learning more

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18 In "Reading and Writing a Text: Correlations between Reading and Writing Patterns," Mariolina Salvatori makes an interesting case for the similarities between reading and writing as acts of construction and interpretation necessitated by the inherent ambiguity of texts. In making distinctions between peer responding and small group discussions of texts, I am focusing not on the differences between reading and writing but on the different goals that most teachers ascribe to those pedagogical activities.
generally. Students in discussion groups may be less likely to base their response to published texts on a set of specific criteria. Such criteria seem unnecessary if students are not being asked to evaluate the effectiveness of a text. When responding to published texts, students may also be more comfortable with the idea that their responses to readings are inevitably personal, and thus may be willing to accept conflicting readings more easily than they would if these conflicting readings were offered in response to a draft they needed to revise by the following week. Many of these differences might be traced to the assumption that published texts are, ironically, more "open" to interpretation than are drafts that students are struggling to get right.

Teachers who rely on small discussion groups in their classes often do so with the express purpose of eliciting the multiple interpretations of published texts that they believe are inevitable. In contrast with whole-class discussions of texts which are often characterized by a dialogue between the teacher’s interpretation and the interpretations of a few assertive students, small group discussions of texts allow many more interpretations to be heard. But as the close observation of one peer response group revealed in Chapter III, the teacher’s purposes for group work are not always fulfilled by students who are working to some extent outside of the teacher’s control.
Although teachers may hope that small group discussions will enable students to acknowledge and value differing interpretations of professionally-authored texts, they cannot ensure that this will be the case.

"The American Experience": Competing Contexts

Like "African American Voices in Literature" (English 367.03), "The American Experience: Intermediate Essay Writing" (English 367.01) was designed to meet the University's requirement for a second-level writing course that focused on diversity in American culture, especially on issues of race, class, and gender differences. The University thus prescribed that the course should advance students' academic reading and writing skills, described as "read[ing] carefully" and "express[ing] ideas effectively," while at the same time investigating the subject of American cultural diversity.

Although the goals of "The American Experience," are prescribed by the University, the enactment of these course goals in the construction of a syllabus and in the choice of pedagogical approaches is left to individual instructors who thus bear a great part of the responsibility for determining the values of the community constituted by a particular classroom. Because of her authority as the instructor, the values that Denise brought to her intermediate writing course might be said
to represent the dominant values of her classroom. Denise admitted that although it was tempting to give her students what she called her "pc agenda," she tried not to impose her political views on them. She did acknowledge that one of her main goals in the course was to help students develop "the skills to critique culture and things that we don't question, like individualism." For Denise, the reading, writing, and discussion that went on in class were intended to serve this end. But a second goal Denise had was to give students what she called "academic skills... like generalization, analysis, definition" that she described as submerged within the assignments she created that asked for cultural critique. For example, the second essay students wrote was one in which they were asked to construct an extended definition of "racism." Like MJ, Denise thus assumed the dual stance toward her teaching that Greg Myers argues is necessary for teachers within institutions who also wish to critique those institutions. She wanted her students to gain academic skills, but she also wanted them to gain the skill of critiquing institutions like the academy.

Although Denise valued (and was institutionally required to value) some of the skills associated with what might be described as traditional academic writing, she also wanted students to learn to use writing "as a way of exploring ideas, as a way of figuring out what they want
to say and what they think." Denise saw her use of response papers—one-page typed responses to assigned reading—as a means toward this end. In this way, reading and writing were intimately related in "The American Experience." Readings in the course included essays from the book Rereading America and a packet of supplemental materials—articles on the LA riots, for example. Here is how Denise described the response paper in her syllabus:

A response paper entails just what the name implies: a thoughtful response to a reading. These responses may be on one essay assigned for the day, on all the essays, or some combination thereof. Topics for response papers are varied; they might include: a question the readings led you to and how you arrived at that question; a comparison or contrast of one essay to another or of the assigned readings to earlier readings or class discussions; an opinion and/or critique of the reading(s); a personal or news event that relates and adds to or calls into question the text(s); and so on. The only requirement for these papers is that they take the essays one step further—into an issue, question, critique, etc.

In an interview, Denise explained her expectations for the response paper assignment: "I don’t want summary. I’m assuming they can read and understand, but I want them to start questioning, and I guess the reading is sort of, in a microcosm, what I want them to do with the whole course with culture." The importance of questioning texts—including the text of culture—was perhaps the most salient feature of the class. In fact, the teacher asked students "why" so often that one student wrote out the
word in block letters and held it up frequently during class discussion, a gesture which the class—and Denise—usually greeted with laughter and which suggests that students in this class felt comfortable expressing their views.

Related to Denise’s valuing of a critical perspective on American culture was her belief in the importance of questioning one’s own assumptions. Denise’s responses to students in class were aimed at getting them to question themselves as well as the texts they were reading and American culture at large. Denise also modeled this kind of questioning in her comments on students’ response papers, where she focused almost exclusively on interrogating the content of students’ responses. Another way in which Denise encouraged students to question their thinking was through her frequent use of small group activities. Denise assigned students to small groups at the beginning of the quarter, and they did most of their work in these groups. For example, student groups met at the beginning of almost every class to generate questions or issues they wanted the whole class to discuss. They also read and discussed each other’s response papers, brainstormed topics for writing assignments, responded to each other’s drafts, and wrote a research paper as a group. Denise explained the connection she saw between
her use of these groups and the course focus on diversity in this way:

I do want to get them out of that individual competitive type of thing that I don't think works in this society but is just a myth... it's also because of the issues of this class... they can learn as much from each other [as] they can from me in terms of opinions about the readings... I see the groups as some sort of social construction... [in] that they are making meaning from these readings... they can all add a different perspective.

Denise's use of collaborative response groups was thus expressly motivated by her desire to create a community in which members would bring different perspectives to group work and would learn from each other.

Denise used information students had given her on a questionnaire to try to create groups made up of members with different (but complementary) writing strengths, different leadership preferences, different majors, and different genders and races when possible. Although groups constituted on the basis of difference rather than similarity might seem ripe for conflict, Denise admitted that she hoped for conflict within the groups but feared that students would avoid it. According to Denise, "One of the benefits [of working in groups] is to be pushing each other's thinking. Well, they can't do that unless they are willing to argue with each other to some extent, and I'm afraid they'll run away from that." The fact that Denise devoted so much class time to group work suggests
that she believed collaboration would benefit students in spite of their potential resistance.

In the class as a whole, students did seem to assume the questioning stance that Denise advocated. Although the class was fairly homogeneous, made up of predominantly white students, half male and half female, who came from the mid-west, a fairly diverse range of political perspectives were presented during class discussions. Although a few conservative students felt that Denise’s liberal views constrained what they could say and write in the class, the majority of students wrote in their course evaluations that the class did expose them to a variety of points of view and helped them think critically about their own perspectives. The fact that student groups set the agenda for class discussion probably contributed to the sense that student views got a fair hearing: when small groups reported to the class on their discussions of readings, many groups regularly presented group members’ conflicting views. Denise facilitated the articulation of multiple views by asking students during class discussions to address their remarks to each other; students were thus charged with the responsibility of critiquing their classmates’ perspectives on issues. Many students—representing both conservative and liberal views—regularly participated in class discussions, during which students built on the views expressed by their peers as
well as openly debated issues such as the availability of equal educational opportunities, the efficacy of Affirmative Action policies, the causes of the LA riots, and the social and biological origins of gender differences.

As Chapter III illustrated, however, collaborative response groups do not necessarily mirror the workings of the larger classroom community. Although Denise intended for these groups to extend the kinds of cultural and personal critique that she initiated and that the general classroom climate seemed to support, there was no guarantee that individual groups would function in this way. Like the one examined in Chapter III, the collaborative response group that I chose for close study in "The American Experience" had difficulty meeting the teacher’s goals. In their discussions of group members' responses to published texts, they did not regularly elicit multiple perspectives, nor did they regularly try to push each other’s thinking by arguing or asking questions. Although group members brought to the group diverse perspectives via individually authored response papers, the group’s discussion of these responses was constrained by their desire to carry out an efficient discussion of the readings and to do so in ways that did not provoke conflict. To illustrate, I’d like to examine two of the group’s discussions, one that focused on their
responses to Mary Crow Dog's autobiographical narrative *Lakota Woman*, and one in response to a set of readings on the African American experience. In both cases, the response papers written by group members represented different perspectives on the assigned reading, but the group's discussion of their responses seemed to ignore or erase those differences.

The group that I chose for close study certainly exhibited the teacher's desired range of perspectives. Betsy, a junior Animal Science major, was a full-time student in her early twenties who had recently married and was commuting to this urban campus from the small farm-town where she had grown up. Bob was in his early forties, married with two children and was returning to finish the degree he had begun twenty years earlier. He was also working full-time while enrolled in the class, and his employer was financially supporting his pursuit of a college degree. Gloria, one of two African Americans in the class (everyone else was white), was, like Bob, also returning to college part-time after ten years in the work force. She was in her late twenties. Although Gloria had originally been a Marketing major, she was now considering a major in either Journalism or English. Tim and Dan were in their early twenties, single, and lived on campus, but that was about all they had in common. Tim was a junior honors student majoring in aeronautical
engineering, whose interests included computer programming and participating in role-playing games. Dan, also in his junior year, was a self-described "punk" who worked as a roadie for rock bands, and, in his spare time, tried to maintain his status in the College of Architecture.

**Collaborative Response to Lakota Woman**

The one-page paper students wrote in response to Mary Crow Dog's *Lakota Woman* was the third of six students were asked to write. Students read the book during the fifth week of the ten-week quarter, and it was the only reading assigned that week. *Lakota Woman* was also the only full-length book students read in the course; most of the course readings consisted of groups of essays or excerpts from books. By the time students wrote response papers for *Lakota Woman*, they had received Denise's comments on two other response papers and thus had some idea of the kind of response Denise expected and valued. Students also knew that on the days response papers were due Denise usually asked them to get into small groups, read each other's papers, and generate a question or issue that they

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19 Individual response papers were due on the day assigned readings were scheduled to be discussed. At that point, Denise responded to them but did not grade them. Students were required to turn in all six response papers at the end of the quarter when Denise graded them as a set. Any response paper could be revised before it was turned in for the final portfolio grade.
wanted to discuss with the whole class. Thus, although response papers were based on a reader's personal reaction to a text, they were public responses that would be read, discussed, and analyzed in the context of the collaborative response group.

**Individual Response to Lakota Woman**

Before examining this group's discussion of their responses to *Lakota Woman*, I would like to look closely at two group members' response papers in order to explore what they can reveal about students' differing assumptions regarding reading and writing about texts. The response papers written by Betsy and Bob are especially interesting because of the degree to which they differ and because Betsy and Bob both played an active role in the group's discussion of *Lakota Woman*; thus, differences in their individual responses were likely to affect the group's collaborative response.²⁰

If, as demonstrated in Chapter III, the classroom can be seen as a site of potentially conflicting assumptions

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²⁰ My decision to focus on the response papers written by Betsy and Bob was also influenced by the constraints inherent in qualitative research, namely, that the data available for analysis are not always in the control of the researcher. More specifically, on the day that the *Lakota Woman* response papers were discussed, Dan was absent and Gloria did not have her response paper written. Tim denied permission for his response to *Lakota Woman* to be photocopied.
about texts, then students' response papers may well bear marks of an effort to make sense of these various assumptions. Betsy's response to *Lakota Woman* seems a good example of a text that reflects a struggle to meet the competing demands of representing one's personal experience as a reader while also taking into account the norms of academic writing. Here is her response paper, reproduced in full:

It's hard for me to picture a church full of nuns and priests that do nothing but make a hard living for minority children. Yes, it was probably like that but it is still hard for me to imagine. Who has the right to the land? Well, in my opinion no one should be able to own nature but if it must be decided then I must say that I believe that the Indian's claimed the land first and there is no reason why it should have been taken from them. And I don't see how the white man thought he could go in and take the land without there being a fight about it. The massacres and single deaths were totally unnecessary and not at all the Indian's fault. I think that the white man should look at how all the Indian tribes got together and forgot all their differences in order to concentrate on what was most important to all of them which was to protect their people, religion, land, and culture and live a peaceful life. They came together so that everyone was taken care of and no one had to take orders from anyone. I also hated the fact that white men sold postcards that pictured dead, frozen Indians, just to make some money. The Indian's had every right to fight for what was theirs and the one statement that really sticks out in my mind was when that author wrote, "The men who had brought us whiskey and the smallpox had come with the cross in one hand and the gun in the other."

Betsy's text contains a number of features that might be read as evidence of a personal response to a text that
has not been successfully brought into line with the norms of writing about reading espoused by the academic discourse community in general or the community of this classroom in particular. These features include a rapid shift from one response statement to the next (which results in a text that lacks focus), a failure to connect these seemingly disparate responses to an overarching generalization, an uncritical acceptance of the author's point of view, excessive references to the fact that her response paper represents her opinion, a tendency to make implicit rather than explicit connections between her experience and the issues raised by the text, and the absence of a conclusion. Although the kind of text Betsy has produced here might suggest a lack of familiarity with or control over the standard essay form (a clear focus; supportive detail; a beginning, middle, and end), remember that Betsy was asked to construct a response to a reading, not an essay. Because Denise did not prescribe a form for the response paper, students were left on their own to determine how to write up their responses. Thus, although the features of Betsy's response may reflect what she

21 In analyzing Betsy's response paper, I have been especially influenced by compositionists such as David Bartholomae, Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, and Mina Shaughnessy who demonstrated the fruitful practice of reading the seeming idiosyncracies in student writing for what they can tell us about students' assumptions regarding how to read and write texts.
doesn’t know about academic writing, her response paper might also reflect an assumption that responses to texts should be natural and spontaneous, a description of one’s reading experience rather than a carefully constructed position statement.

In this brief text, Betsy has responded to at least six different issues raised in the first half of *Lakota Woman*: the nuns’ mistreatment of the Lakota children, the Native American’s right to the land, the cooperation among various tribes involved in the American Indian Movement, the selling of postcards that depict dead Native Americans, the right of Native Americans to fight for what was theirs, and Mary Crow Dog’s statement that the Catholic church participated in the destruction of Native American culture. Although we can see this response as evidence that Betsy did not know how to write a focused paper, it might also suggest that Betsy fully engaged the text and had strong reactions to a number of issues and events. Betsy did worry, however, that this mode of response was not the one valued by the academy. Specifically, she described her responding strategy as "just kind of common sense," and she contrasted her response papers with those of her group members which she said sounded more intelligent than hers. Betsy commented that the response papers her peers wrote made more direct references to the readings than hers did, adding "That
made me an outsider, I guess, because I just stated my opinion, my response."

Betsy explained that she had difficulty writing response papers when she was not immediately struck by something to say about the reading, if she read something that "didn't really click." The importance of a reader's interest in the text--and the difficulty of writing in response to a text that she was not interested in--led Betsy to remark that response papers should not be required to be a page long "because, I mean, like the Declaration of Independence, people could really write about that. But then this lesbian thing [referring to an essay included in the unit on gender], I didn't want to write about it. . . . I wrote just a bunch of bull. . . . I don't think we ought to start pulling stuff out of our head, yanking it out." This statement further reveals Betsy's belief that a response paper should represent one's actual reading experience rather than a critical analysis of a text one may not have been interested in.

Although Betsy described herself as someone who likes to read, she preferred to read about things she was familiar with or could be sympathetic with. For Betsy, who lived on a farm and owned horses, her favorite reading material was "anything to do with . . . animals."
Similarly, she commented that she had looked forward to reading Lakota Woman because "I got a lot of heart when it
comes to the Indians." If Betsy's interest in "the Indians" and thus in *Lakota Woman* provoked an engaged if not focused or coherent response to the text, that interest also might explain why Betsy's response was characterized by complete sympathy with Mary Crow Dog's version of events, culminating in Betsy's conclusion that "The massacres and single deaths were totally unnecessary and not at all the Indian's fault." Betsy's response thus failed to meet the teacher's expectations that students critique the readings rather than merely agree with them, that they push beyond a passive acceptance of the version of reality represented in the text. But for Betsy, it may have seemed illogical or unnecessary to critique a text she was completely engaged by, since to have something to say about a text--to feel something "click"--was clearly a positive experience for her.

In spite of Betsy's overwhelming sympathy with Mary Crow Dog's story, she went to great lengths in her response paper to point out that her interpretation of the book was "only" her opinion. She did so by marking her statements with references to herself as reader such as "It's hard for me to picture," "in my opinion," "I don't see," "I think," "I also hated the fact that," and so on. These references suggest that Betsy believed response to texts was a personal matter and that her response was but one among many. Her use of phrases like "I think" and "in
my opinion," however, may also reveal a tension between accepting the inevitably personal nature of reading and recognizing that her response might not be the "right" response.

Another characteristic of her response paper that suggests Betsy may have been unaware of the need to translate her spontaneous reading experience into a carefully constructed statement that others could understand is her tendency to make unstated connections between her experience and events described in the text. One example of an implicit connection to her personal experience is Betsy's comment on ownership of land, a comment that might be connected to her farming experience, which seemed to have greatly affect Betsy's perspective on issues. Throughout the quarter, Betsy made numerous references to the status of farmers in this country. For example, when students were asked on the first day of class to try to define "American," Betsy mentioned "the breaking up of farms" as part of that definition. This comment, which was ignored by her classmates who seemed to find it irrelevant, can be seen as an attempt by Betsy to bring her "American experience" into conversation with that of her classmates. But because Betsy does not make explicit connections between her experiences and her responses, her remarks often proved perplexing to her audience.
The first and last sentences in Betsy's response to *Lakota Woman* can be read as another implicit attempt to connect her experience to the text she is reading. In an interview, Betsy told me that the reason it was hard for her to imagine nuns and priests mistreating children was because her great-aunt is a nun, a fact conspicuously absent from her response paper. In spite of her positive view of nuns, however, Betsy accepted Mary Crow Dog's version of the story—"Yes, it was probably like that"—a move that may have created conflict for her as a reader. The recognition and exploration of this kind of conflict can be the beginning of the critical approach to texts that Denise valued, but Betsy did not sustain an interrogation of her response or of the text and simply dropped the subject of the role of religion in the oppression of Native Americans. The importance of the subject, however, is suggested by Betsy's positioning of her comment on nuns at the beginning of her response paper and is reinforced by her final sentence: "the one statement that really sticks out in my mind was when the author wrote, 'The men who had brought us whiskey and the smallpox had come with the cross in one hand and the gun in the other,'" a statement that clearly implicates the church in the oppression Crow Dog describes. Given Betsy's admission that she rarely went back to the text to write her papers, her quoting of the text here seems
significant. Unfortunately, Betsy's conception of response as a list of spontaneous reactions allowed her to leave this statement—and her reasons for being struck by this statement—unanalyzed.

If Betsy's response to *Lakota Woman* reflects her personal assumptions regarding response to texts, then her assumptions seem at a distance from the norms of academic reading and writing. Betsy admitted that she had limited training in performing critical readings. She explained that her first experience of analyzing what she read came in a Black Studies course she had taken just prior to enrolling in "The American Experience." According to Betsy, the Black Studies course enabled her to "get out from inside of what I read. I mean, that's really something you don't get in high school." Although such a course might have been expected to make Betsy a more critical reader, Betsy described her approach to reading as "shaped a long time ago, way before college."

In addition, what she found most valuable about the Black studies course was its emphasis on the biography of the author, an emphasis that may have strengthened Betsy's

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22 Denise confided to me informally that she was worried about Betsy because her writing showed so little familiarity with the conventions of academic discourse. In fact, Betsy received a "D" on her second essay that asked students to write an extended definition of racism because Denise saw in Betsy's paper no attempt to define a concept, one of those academic skills Denise embedded in all her writing assignments.
tendency to read in sympathy with the narrative voice of the text.

In analyzing Betsy’s response to *Lakota Woman*, I have been highlighting the degree to which her assumptions about how to construct a response to a text seemed to differ from those associated with the norms of academic reading and writing. Another way to illustrate Betsy’s somewhat distanced position in relation to these norms is to contrast her response paper with the one written by Bob. For Bob’s response to *Lakota Woman*, which, like Betsy’s, reflects his personal experience of reading the book does so in ways that make it seem more in line with academic discourse. Here is the response paper he wrote:

The reading of Lakota Woman has opened my eyes to the harsh treatment of our forefathers (and for that matter still today) the American people have exerted on our native American brothers. Living in the East we have been quite sheltered to the raw truth of the Indian struggle for equality. Even our grade school history books, what I can remember of them, have tempered the injustices which are and have been perpetrated against the Indians. Some of the stories told by Mary Crow Dog brought to mind images of World War II; Hitler’s anti-Jewish Germany and concentration camps, both on American soil (the Japanese) and abroad. Like the unfortunate people who are caught in the middle of warring factions all over the world, the Indians too, have been forced into reservations, institutional schooling, religion, and ways of life and living not suited to their historically free spirits.

When I was a teenager around 1965 our family toured some of the West. I saw the old battered cars bulging with Indians, some of the housing, and the commercialized areas of the
reservations, trading posts and Indian Forts. At the time I didn’t realize I was just seeing a tourist front and not the extreme poverty which was their actual life.

Persecuted apparently by all factions of the American assemblage of nationalities, the Indian seems to reside at the bottom of social order. Their struggle for equal opportunity for life has been a very long and hard road. Change in our culture through time and persistence is inevitable. In the late sixties and early seventies we changed America’s attitudes on Viet Nam. To initiate change there were protest marches, riots, and even deaths (remember Kent State) all around the country, O.S.U. included. But, changes were eventual, and the war was ended. Attitudes will continue to change toward the Indian; then, their war will be over too!

From the opening sentence, Bob’s response paper evidences an ability to translate a personal reading experience into a text that falls within the norms of academic discourse. In the first sentence, Bob evokes his experience as a reader when he remarks that his eyes have been opened by reading Lakota Woman. But this sentence also provides a focus for the rest of the paper, and evidence of a focus might be considered a minimum standard for academic writing. Unlike Betsy’s response, which seemed like a spilling out of her various reactions to the book, Bob limits his response to the idea that he had been sheltered from the suffering Native Americans endured and that reading Lakota Woman has corrected his perspective. Because Bob’s response paper is focused, it seems closer to the academic norm. Perhaps one reason that Bob’s response paper is closer to the "norm" than Betsy’s is
that Bob's personal assumptions about reading are closer than Betsy's are to those espoused by school. For example, Bob's preferred reading material is factual or scientific; he said he liked reading Lakota Woman because "it gave me a lot of information I didn't really have."

His response paper, not surprisingly, described his experience of having been presented with this new information.

Like Betsy, Bob constructs a response to Lakota Woman in which he makes connections between the text and his personal experience, but these connections are explicit and clearly support the main point of his response paper. In the first paragraph, for example, Bob mentions that living in the East is one reason he has been unaware of the suffering of Native Americans. He also attributes his lack of awareness to "our grade school history books" which played down the violence done to Native Americans. This reference to personal experience clearly supports the central idea of his response paper, which academic norms require, while also critiquing an American institution, something that Denise valued. The entire second paragraph of Bob's response is given over to a story of his childhood experience with Native Americans while on a family vacation in the West; he ends the paragraph by asserting that he was not seeing the real conditions in which they lived. Again, Bob used an example from his
experience to explain his point that he had been ignorant of Native American oppression and that the dominant American culture was in some way to blame.

One other characteristic of Bob's response paper that illustrates his ability to construct a personal response to a text within the norms of academic discourse is the way he draws parallels between Native American experience and other kinds of oppression. When Bob writes in the first paragraph, "Some of the stories told by Mary Crow Dog brought to mind images of World War II," Bob's comparison of the experience of Native Americans to that of Nazi-era Jews and Japanese-Americans during the War is an example of his personal perspective on the text. But referring to important historical events also marks Bob as a member of an academic discourse community that values a knowledge of history and an ability to make connections among historical events.

There is at least one other way in which Bob's response to *Lakota Woman* came closer than Betsy's to approximating a norm of academic writing about reading, and that is in its conclusion. Although Bob's hopeful conclusion is somewhat illogical given that he is responding to *Lakota Woman*—a text that describes in painful detail the failure of the American Indian Movement to result in change for Native Americans—and given his own fairly complex reading of the plight of Native
Americans in our culture, Bob’s final paragraph does seem to indicate an awareness of the academic norm of drawing some conclusion from one’s reading. Betsy’s response paper did not seem influenced by this norm. Although Bob’s "hopeful" ending exemplifies the kind of stock conclusion that students are often taught to write in high school and that many college writing teachers object to, it still suggests that Bob is working within the norms of the academic essay in ways that Betsy seems not to have been.

In analyzing Bob’s response paper, I have focused on the ways in which this text seems to meet a complex and somewhat conflicting set of expectations: that it represent an active engagement of a text, that it acknowledge the ways in which a reader’s personal history influences his or her response to a text, that it push beyond a mere response to a text into a question, issue, or critique, and that it meet minimum standards for academic writing. By highlighting the ways in which Bob’s response paper seemed to meet these requirements more fully than did Betsy’s, I am not suggesting that Bob’s is a better or more successful text. I am suggesting that Bob’s approach to texts is likely to seem more "normal" and thus more acceptable than Betsy’s for readers who are members of a community that shares the values outlined above, including the students assigned to Bob and Betsy’s small discussion group in "The American Experience."
Collaborative Response to *Lakota Woman*

Although one of Denise's goals for asking students to write response papers was to have them question texts—and their readings of them—she recognized how difficult it can be to acknowledge one's perspective and to take a critical stance on that perspective. As I have already noted, she saw the collaborative discussion group as a place where students could come to see that all readers have limited perspectives and are all positioned differently in relation to texts and the issues raised by those texts. Because group members would bring different perspectives to the group, they could push each other's thinking. But as we saw in Chapter III, student groups can function in ways that fail to meet the teacher's goals even as they accomplish the task assigned to them, in part because they are operating within a complex mix of competing assumptions, values, and beliefs about texts.

As noted above, the response papers Betsy and Bob wrote after reading *Lakota Woman* reflect attempts to articulate a personal perspective on the text within an academic context, with Bob's paper representing a closer tie to the norms of academic writing. In addition to differences in the ways Betsy and Bob structured their written responses, the content of their responses differed as well. Although Betsy and Bob both responded sympathetically to *Lakota Woman*, Betsy described moments
when she was emotionally affected by the book whereas Bob focused on how the book affected him intellectually. The other members of their group had different perspectives on the book as well. As a history buff, Tim brought his knowledge of history to bear on his interpretation of *Lakota Woman*, but he also responded sensitively to the victimization of Lakota women, making references to a friend who had been sexually assaulted. Although Gloria did not bring to class a response paper on *Lakota Woman*, she had read the book and thus had a perspective, if not a paper, to share. In her response paper, which she turned in at the end of the day, she discussed the parallels between the oppression of Native Americans and the oppression of African Americans. In spite of their varying perspectives, however, this group’s discussion of *Lakota Woman* was not characterized by an articulation and interrogation of those perspectives. Instead, this group opted to construct what might be considered a more narrowly academic response to the text, one that focused on a single issue and did so as simply and efficiently as possible.

The positions held by Betsy, Bob, and their group members in relation to the norms of academic discourse proved especially important when the group responded collaboratively to *Lakota Woman*. Specifically, the group devalued responses to texts that seemed at a distance from
the academic norm. Looking closely at this group’s discussion of their responses to *Lakota Woman* can provide some insight into why this group failed to be the kind of community Denise hoped they would be: one that engaged each other’s perspectives and one that used the conflicts that arose to push each other’s thinking. That these students had varying perspectives on *Lakota Woman* is a given. But a look at the response the group constructed and that Bob reported to the class reveals that the richness and complexity of these varying perspectives seems to have been lost. Here is Bob’s oral report of the group’s discussion of *Lakota Woman*, which represents an elaboration on the notes he took during the discussion:

Bob: OK, we chose the area of brutality in general towards the Indian population, uh, in the life, as younger children and all the way through perhaps. You know they were brutalized by everyone around them, all the different nationalities. And the halfbreeds even had it worse because they were brutalized mentally and physically even by the full bloods that were in their own tribes. As they aged, well, they weren’t too old when they were taken from their families and the Indians were to be educated by the white man’s system and, uh, apparently had a, uh, they were much more family oriented, the uncles and the aunts who would help take care of the children. They were a much tighter group so that was a very strenuous type situation for a young child to be taken away from all that and landed in an institutional type situation which was completely out of their realm, whatever. So they were brutalized from early on all the way through the school system. Uh, and then, uh, as they aged even older, her sister, for example, was sterilized after giving child or having childbirth through a white hospital, so that’s another way, and I guess that wasn’t an isolated
circumstance. So the Indians in general, the white man was trying to limit their reproductive capabilities and get rid of them that way. Um, then, alcohol. The white man kind of introduced the Indians to alcohol and drugs so that was a form of brutality, I guess, um, I don’t want to, uh, it was destroying their lives. What we were wondering is are there any instances or specific items along this path, brutality, that you can think of? You know we’re taking it from very young to older, Indians in general.

In spite of the fact that the group’s response was delivered orally, the response is structured loosely as an essay might be, with an announcement of the subject in the first sentence—"brutality in general toward the Indian population . . . as younger children. . . and all the way through [life]"—and the remainder of the response given over to examples of brutality toward Native Americans, organized more or less chronologically. Such an organization does not highlight (or even make visible) varying perspectives on the issue of brutality in Lakota Woman. Another feature of this collaborative response that belies the fact that it was produced by four readers with differing perspectives is that there is very little acknowledgement that it represents an active interpretation of the text. Although Bob mentions the group in his opening statement—"we chose the area of brutality"—and in two places in the response uses the phrase "I guess" to lessen the authority of his statements, for the most part, statements of this group’s perspective on the text are presented as statements of
fact. This characteristic of their response is logical given the group’s focus on the "facts" of the text; their response simply recites a list of incidents that Mary Crow Dog depicts as examples of brutality. The group did not argue with the text or with each other over whether, for example, forced sterilization really occurred or occurred in the way Crow Dog suggests. Related to the group’s focus on the "facts" of the text is the question with which Bob ends the group response: "What we were wondering is are there any instances or specific items along this path, brutality, that you can think of?" This question asks the class to add more examples to the group’s response; it does not invite the kind of critique of the group’s position that Denise valued.

Although this group’s collaborative response does not reflect the classroom community’s valuing of an engagement with varying perspectives and an ability to critique culture, the question remains whether Bob’s report of the group’s response is an accurate representation of the group’s discussion. Were varying perspectives on Lakota Woman elicited, discussed, and valued? If not, why not, given that this kind of discussion was one of the objectives of small group work? And to the extent that varying perspectives were discussed, what led the group (or Bob) to present a collaborative response that did not reflect multiple perspectives? In answering these
questions, I would like to focus on several factors affecting this group’s discussion, including who assumed leadership of the group, how the subject of discussion was chosen, who contributed to the discussion, and whose contributions were valued.

In trying to understand the values of any group, an important consideration is group leadership, both how the role of leader is constructed by the group and how a particular group leader acts out that role. Leaders, after all, are usually assumed to have more power than other group members, and the values of the group are often closely identified with those of the group leader. In this group, Dan, who was especially gregarious and something of the class clown, usually acted as group leader. However, on the day response papers to *Lakota Woman* were discussed, Dan was absent. As a result, the group spent the first few minutes talking about how to proceed, with Bob ultimately emerging as the leader, which for this discussion involved keeping the group on task, taking notes, and presenting the group’s collaborative response to the class. As leader, Bob was in a position to control the group’s response to some degree, and as someone who had taken his last writing course over twenty years earlier, he was particularly attached to the traditional thesis-support model of constructing a response, as illustrated by the response paper he wrote.
In addition, as the oldest member of the group and one who held a supervisory position at work, he felt fairly comfortable acting as task manager.

One of the important roles Bob played in the first few minutes was to identify the issue the group would discuss: "brutality." Bob's naming of this issue happened in response to Tim's suggestion that their issue be "Why white people are so stupid" and Betsy's comment that she was surprised at how badly the government treated Native Americans. Bob thus generalized from Tim and Betsy's comments (and perhaps from his reading of group members' response papers) to the issue of brutality. Already, then, Bob was drawing on what everyone in the group had to say in common about Lakota Woman, rather than drawing on the ways in which their positions differ. This approach is efficient and makes sense given that they were asked to come up with a single question or issue. Once Bob had named "brutality" as their issue--and no one disagreed--Bob took the responsibility of keeping the group focused on the issue of brutality in Lakota Woman.

As the person taking notes in preparation for reporting the group's discussion, Bob was also in a position to determine how the response would be structured. Near the end of the discussion, when the group had wandered off the topic, Bob brought them back to task by asking them to consider the form the response
should take, commenting: "OK, we need to be focused here. Forms or ideas, we'll need to give explicit examples. I guess what we're doing here is tying it to their life. It [brutality] wasn't just a small segment; it encompassed their whole life." Here Bob suggested that they frame the collaborative response as a chronological summary. By doing so, Bob again revealed his sense that the group's response should be orderly and coherent. This emphasis on chronological order might be related to Bob's desire to construct a collaborative response as simply and efficiently as possible. Even his decision to end with a question was motivated by this desire. Bob said to the group, "We don't have to do anything, just ask them a bunch of questions."

Although Bob's role as group leader allowed him to assert control over the focus and structure of their response, another factor affecting this group's collaborative response was who contributed and whose contributions were valued. For example, Gloria did not have a written response to share, and she further placed herself outside of the group by reading an assignment the teacher had returned to her rather than reading her group members' response papers. But although her participation was minimal, she made several important contributions. She, more than anyone, tried to push the group to come up with a complex and critical response. For example, when
the group wandered off the topic of brutality for a few minutes, Bob brought them back to task by saying, "OK, well, we have to come up with something. Brutality, OK." In response, Gloria warned, "we can’t just say ‘brutality’, we have to put brutality in context. What about brutality?" Gloria also helped draw generalizations from the examples of brutality that group members threw out by saying things like, "So, there’s brutality on all different levels." Although Gloria’s participation in the group was somewhat erratic—at some points she participated actively, at other points not at all—her suggestions were usually responded to. To understand the group’s valuing of Gloria’s contributions to this discussion, it is important to consider Gloria’s rather complicated role in the group. In general, Gloria seemed reluctant to work seriously with this group of students. In an interview, Gloria commented that she had not benefitted from her involvement with this group because, as she put it, "My particular group was very closed-minded, my group was very naive, so they didn’t contribute much in the way of new perspectives." However, in whole class discussions she showed an interest in the issues raised by the class and an ability to respond critically to assigned readings. In addition, the fact that she was considering a career as a professional writer made her especially interested in the class as a means of improving
her writing. Although Gloria seemed interested in the class and seemed capable of making valuable contributions, she frequently arrived late (she commuted from a town 30 miles away and the class met at 8:00 a.m.) or came without having her assignments done. As a result, her group came not to depend on her. For example, no one objected when she read her own work while the rest of the group read each other's response papers, and no one made an effort to involve her in the group's discussion of *Lakota Woman*. Yet, when she did make comments during the discussion, the group seemed to listen and tried to follow up on what she said. Perhaps her comments were valued because they were seen as helping the group produce the kind of response Denise wanted—one that pushed beyond the obvious—and for this reason, the group tolerated what they at times considered Gloria's irresponsibility. It was also easier for them to tolerate her behavior than to object, and not much was at stake if she didn't participate: the process and product of small group discussions were not evaluated in any way by the teacher. In addition, the group may have been especially tolerant of Gloria because she was African American and they were white, making them hesitant.

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23 The group responded somewhat differently to what they perceived to be Gloria's limited participation in group work when they were in the process of collaboratively authoring a research paper for which all of them would receive the same grade. See Chapter V, "The Collaborative Progress Report."
to act in a way that might be considered racist. As Bob admitted in an interview, the fact that he was in a racially mixed group made him more cautious about saying certain things. In Bob's words, "You have to be real careful when you're in a racially mixed group. Some things you might say and not say. I mean, it's sad, but it's true because you might kind of make a comment and think, 'well, how are they gonna take that?'"

Like Gloria, Tim also made few--but valuable--contributions to group discussions. Tim, a quiet student who preferred to work alone, was attentive during group discussion but said very little. In spite of this limited participation, his response was often solicited by the group. For example, Bob turned to Tim when he wanted confirmation of the group's topic, "brutality." And it was principally Bob and Tim who conferred about how they should present the group's response. In the final minutes of group discussion, after Bob had already begun to organize his notes in preparation for his presentation to the class, Tim mentioned that "one thing we really didn't get to is alcohol," an example which, once confirmed by Gloria, Bob promptly added to his list. And importantly, it was the example of alcohol as a form of brutality that triggered a heated class discussion, giving even more power to Tim's infrequent remarks. The fact that the group read each other's writing regularly may have been
one reason why they valued Tim's contributions. Although Tim spoke only occasionally, by most standards he would be considered an excellent writer (he regularly received "A"s from Denise, and I was often impressed by his writing as well). His papers were characterized by an authoritative tone, a polished style, and an ability to construct complex relationships among texts, his personal experience, and his other academic interests such as history and science. Everyone in the group identified Tim as smart, and although they were occasionally put off by his bookishness, they usually listened to him attentively and looked to him for authoritative analyses of readings and issues.

I have highlighted the value placed on Gloria's and Tim's remarks in part for the contrast it provides when we consider the value placed on Betsy's contributions to the group's discussion. Although Betsy participated actively in the discussion by offering her reactions to the book, asking questions, and soliciting the opinion of others, the group seemed to perceive her comments as contributing little to their collaborative response to Lakota Woman. In fact, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that the group's response happened in spite of Betsy, whose comments about the book seemed to differ from those of her group members in such a dramatic way that they were often treated as irrelevant or distracting. Perhaps most
obviously, Betsy rarely connected her comments with the ongoing discussion. For example, after Bob and Tim settled on the issue of brutality, an issue that Betsy had written about in her response paper and had brought up at the beginning of group discussion, she immediately changed the subject by asking Bob, "What did you think when she said that blacks are just like white people?" Later, when the group was trying to come up with examples of brutality in *Lakota Woman*, Betsy again interjected her different and somewhat disruptive perspective:

Gloria: So, there's brutality on all different levels.

Betsy: But she didn't say anything about older white people, did she, the elderly white people?

Gloria: The nuns.

Betsy: Well, that's not elderly. [Pause.] I don't recall her saying something like that. Maybe there wasn't any.

[The group pauses.]

Bob: OK, cause she was an Indian half-breed she was looked down on by all the Indian kids, whatever, when she was little.

In this exchange, Gloria at first responded to Betsy's perplexing remarks by trying to clarify for Betsy what the group had been saying. Ultimately, though, the group simply ignored her and went on. Betsy repeatedly interrupted the group's discussion of brutality to make comments or ask questions that seemed off-the-topic, questions about whom Mary Crow Dog married, about the kind
of diploma given at the boarding school she attended, even about the role of the co-author of *Lakota Woman*. And although the group made a good faith effort to answer her questions and to guide her into the mode of responding they were pursuing, Betsy did not adjust her comments to fit into the group’s ongoing discussion. One reason Betsy may have continued participating in this seemingly disruptive way was that she described her usual role in groups as "the person who sits next to the note taker and yells out ideas." Ironically, Betsy’s disruptive comments may have stemmed from her desire to be a productive group member.

The kind of responses to *Lakota Woman* that Betsy offered her group bear a striking resemblance to the ones she produced in her response paper: spontaneous, reader-centered, seemingly unconnected to a controlling idea or overarching purpose. Betsy’s questions and her focus on the literal interpretation of sentences suggest that she was particularly worried about getting the facts of the text straight, a kind of reading that was not valued by Denise ("I assume they can read and understand") and that is usually assumed in college-level classes. It is no wonder, then, that her group members were impatient with her. However, Betsy’s desire to express her opinion of events in the text and to inquire about others’ opinions can also be seen as an active solicitation of her group
members' perspectives on issues. For example, when she asked Bob "What did you think when she said that blacks are just like white people?" she was asking for his response to one of Crow Dog's central arguments: that everyone--white and black--participated in the oppression of Native Americans. Later in the discussion Betsy again interrupted the group's effort to construct a response to the issue of brutality by asking for the group's response to another significant event in *Lakota Woman*:

Bob: And the Indians weren't accepted in their own territories because if they went to town then they got beat up.

Betsy: I thought it was interesting when all the tribes got together and they all forgot their differences and just worked on what everyone was there for, the land and, and, the whites didn't think they could do that, and the whites can't do it theirselves. Like when they took over that BIA building, they were organized and nobody had to take orders from anybody. They had, like, what, 800 people in that building and yet it wasn't crowded, everybody just--

[The group is silent]

Betsy [to Bob]: What did you think about when they first got to that town, to take over the BIA building, you know, and everybody said they were gonna help them out?

[While Betsy is speaking, Bob jokingly suggests to me that I should be the one to report the group's discussion]

Bob [to Betsy]: I'm listening.

Betsy: You know, when they said all them church people was gonna help them out, and once they got to town, nobody did.
Bob: I read that part.

Betsy: And all of the sudden, they had a change of heart all of the sudden. I mean, why was that? Why'd they back out at first?

In this exchange, Betsy interrupts Bob's example of brutality--the Lakotas were sometimes beaten when they went into town--to ask for Bob's response to Crow Dog's depiction of AIM's occupation of the BIA building. Her comments clearly do not contribute to the group's ongoing discussion, and the group indicates as much first by their silence and then via Bob's tolerant but somewhat condescending remarks, "I'm listening" and "I read that part," suggesting that Betsy's questions do not need to be attended to except in a cursory way. Although Betsy's questions were not particularly relevant to the group's immediate goal of constructing a chronologically ordered list of examples of brutality toward Native Americans, her questions can be seen as the kind that could potentially initiate a discussion involving diverse perspectives in a way that the group's narrow discussion of brutality did not. But clearly, her group members did not see her remarks in this way.

A number of factors seem likely to have led this group to marginalize Betsy's perspective on *Lakota Woman*. Bob's leadership of the group seems important, especially given that he selected the topic of discussion, kept the group focused on that topic, and reported the group's
discussion to the class and thus had power to determine whose contributions would be represented in the group report. In his own writing and in his discussion of texts, Bob showed a concern with abiding by academic norms, so it is not surprising that as group leader, traditional academic values of focus, order, and coherence dominated the group. Betsy's position in the group and in the class also contributed to the continued marginalization of her voice. Unlike Gloria and Bob, who regularly contributed to whole class discussions, Betsy rarely spoke in this context, and when she did, her comments, like her writing and like her group participation, were marked by a perspective that did not seem to fit with that of the rest of the class. In addition to her seemingly quirky perspective, Betsy's writing and speaking were marked by a lack of facility with Standard Edited English; for example, in the portion of group discussion presented above, Betsy uses irregular forms such as "theirselves" and "all them church people." In an intermediate writing class, these kinds of mistakes were likely to have contributed to a perception of Betsy as, in Tim's words, "a hick." Although Denise may have wanted the collaborative response group to be a site where group members brought differing perspectives and where these perspectives were engaged equally, as Greg Myers and John Trimbur argue, groups do not operate this way. All
perspectives are not equal; perspectives that represent the sources of power—in this case the academic discourse community of which "The American Experience" was necessarily a part—will likely prevail.

Although by refusing to engage all group members' perspectives, this group’s discussion of *Lakota Woman* did not meet the teacher’s larger goal for this collaborative activity, the group did accomplish, at least minimally, some of the teacher’s smaller goals. They read each other’s response papers and thus had some exposure to alternate points of view, they spent their group time actively discussing the assigned reading, and they raised an issue that resulted in a lively class discussion. Taking Kenneth Bruffee’s model of collaborative response, this group’s discussion of *Lakota Woman* was in many ways a success. In general, the group seemed to agree to construct their collaborative response according to the norms of an established discourse community, and the consensus reached by this group was not obviously forced as it was in the group examined in Chapter III. However, it is possible to see the consequences of consensus in both cases as the same: the dominant perspective remained dominant and alternate perspectives were marginalized without group members’ gaining insight into why dominant values continued to hold sway. The consensus to abide by narrow academic norms were not discussed or negotiated.
In the case of this group's discussion of *Lakota Woman*, the values at stake were primarily those dealing with the structuring of a response to a text. Bob's values, which represented the dominant values of the group, closely paralleled those norms of academic writing that prescribe a clear focus, supporting evidence and an objective presentation of the "facts." Betsy's values, which led to a more spontaneous, reader-centered, non-linear response were marginalized. In addition to the silencing of alternate views regarding the structuring of response to texts, however, this group's discussion of *Lakota Woman* might also be said to have reinforced another value associated with academic discourse: namely, that differences should be resolved by appealing to established norms rather than by interrogating the power relations that organize those differences hierarchically.

**Collaborative Response to Readings on Racism**

Certainly, one impetus behind the creation of courses like "The American Experience" is the recognition that ignorance about issues of cultural difference can perpetrate the kinds of prejudice that continue to threaten American society. For instructors like Denise, the use of collaborative pedagogies in classes designed expressly to explore the nature and consequences of cultural difference can move students--at least
theoretically--toward a better understanding of issues like racism by giving them a chance to engage with a range of views. Although reading *Lakota Woman* gave students exposure to the perspective of a Native American, their discussion of the book did not allow them to challenge each other’s perspectives on the issues Mary Crow Dog raised. Since these students’ responses to *Lakota Woman* represented varying but not conflicting perspectives--everyone in the group was sympathetic with Mary Crow Dog’s story--it might be tempting to overlook the consequences for this group of not discussing their perspectives. But what about when group members do have conflicting perspectives on an issue that relates to them more directly than the oppression of Native Americans, an issue like race relations in America?

In the sixth week of the ten-week quarter, Denise began a unit on "The African American Experience" by asking students to write a response paper after reading Shelby Steele’s "I’m Black, You’re White, Who’s Innocent?" (a chapter from Steele’s controversial book, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*), excerpts from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and an essay called "Setting the Historical Context," which provided background on the Civil Rights Movement. Given the variety in the readings and students’ very different personal histories in
relation to the issue of racism, the response papers written by Bob, Dan, Tim, Betsy, and Gloria represented very diverse perspectives. But again, when these students were asked to engage each other’s perspectives in a small group discussion, they managed to avoid arguing with each other—as Denise feared they would—choosing, instead, to discuss racism in a way that would not be contentious. Although Dan, rather than Bob, led this discussion, the group’s collaborative response to the readings on racism still managed to erase the differences in group members’ perspectives by dealing with racism in only the most narrowly academic way.

**Individual Responses to Readings on Racism**

In order to explain the consequences for this group of avoiding their differing perspectives on racism, I want to look briefly at the content of students’ response papers for evidence of their perspectives. What is especially interesting is the degree to which these texts reveal not just students’ perspectives on the readings but also their opinions on black-white relations in general, and more important, their ideas about how these issues should be discussed. This latter characteristic of their response papers might be attributed to the fact that Shelby Steele’s essay dealt explicitly with the difficulty most Americans have discussing race relations. Still,
given that students had been assigned four readings, it seems significant that in their response papers several of them focused on or alluded to Steele.

Betsy's response to the readings on racism differed from her response to *Lakota Woman* in that it focused on a central issue: Steele's argument that racism continues in this society because of the perpetuation of what he calls black innocence and white guilt. In her response to Steele, Betsy agreed that blacks have been oppressed and that whites should feel guilty about what they did to blacks in the past, but she also argues that although blacks now have the same opportunities as whites, they continue to want more. Betsy wrote, "It seems to me that we owed a lot of sympathy and understanding towards the blacks for what we had done to them and I can see where we have given the black race, as best we knew how, what they wanted and they keep asking for more." Betsy points out that racism comes from the perception by whites that "blacks keep fighting for more 'rights' [and] the whites see them as now having a better chance at getting some jobs and college money than they can." Betsy's response paper thus moved from a description of her response to Steele to an assertion of her views on race relations in America. In her final paragraph, Betsy asserts her view more explicitly: "The fact that the innocence of the black man has brought him power is true in my eyes. I agree
that he deserves the better half of it to, but I think that he may be getting a little greedy." Although Betsy’s response paper contains several overt statements of her views on racism, she makes no reference to her personal experience with these issues, perhaps because as she noted in an interview, she had limited exposure to African Americans: there were only two African Americans in her high school, one of whom was killed in a car accident.

Bob’s views on racism were in many ways similar to Betsy’s, but his response paper reveals his views less explicitly than did Betsy’s. In his paper, Bob does not specifically address the readings, but his introductory paragraph echoes Steele’s acknowledgement that most people find it particularly difficult to talk about race. Bob opens his response paper by writing: "The ideas that the word racist encompass seem to be very hard for people to speak to. For most people their public image of racism is very different from the views they would share between family and close friends." Although Bob does not say specifically what views people would hesitate to share publicly, he does acknowledge that within his family racial prejudice was openly expressed. For example, he explains that his parents refused to rent the inner-city property they owned to African Americans and he admits that they conveyed to their children "the notion that races of color are in general, of low class, of low
intelligence and with no motivation, self-esteem, or desire to better themselves." Although Bob began his response paper by pointing out that "Ones attitude toward race would generally represent those of our parents and family or the people closest to us," he concludes by saying that he has overcome his racist upbringing "through college and business" which according to Bob were "my first encounters with upwardly striving minorities." Bob adds that he is happy he can bring up his children "without these preconcieved notions on racism." Bob's response paper represents a somewhat ambivalent position on racial difference. Although Bob admits that racism is a difficult subject to discuss, he does manage to talk about it by constructing himself as someone who has overcome his family's racist attitudes. But Bob himself has commented that what people say publicly (which might include a response paper that will be read by other students, one of whom is African American) and what people say privately are often two different things. Remember, too, his admission that being in a "racially mixed" group affected what he said. Bob acknowledged that being in this group affected what he wrote as well. As Bob put it in an interview, "[When] we found out everybody would be reading [our response papers], well, it kind of put back in the back of your mind, maybe when you were about to write something, um, well maybe I should put that in a
little bit different way." 24 It is likely, then, that Bob’s written response to the readings on racism was constrained by the fact that his group would be reading it. Although he portrays himself as someone who has completely overcome his racist upbringing, it is possible that this portrayal represents his "public" attitude toward racism rather than the one he would share among "family and close friends." 25

Tim’s response paper is markedly different from both Betsy’s and Bob’s. Although Tim begins with a critique of Steele’s essay, complaining that "Steele makes lots of suggestions and more than a few accusations, but comes up with very little in the way of concrete solutions," he uses his critique of Steele as an opening into a larger critique of the way race and racism have been constructed in America by both African Americans and whites. For

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24 It is interesting to note that in the paper Bob wrote in response to a series of readings on the LA riot, he expressed a much more overtly negative view of minority groups whom he described as wanting something for nothing. One reason Bob may have felt freer to assert this view is that this response paper was due when he was scheduled to go on vacation, so he wrote the paper early and turned it in to Denise without his group members reading it.

25 Another example of Bob’s awareness that certain attitudes should not be expressed publicly occurred during a small group discussion of group member’s plans for their second formal essay, an extended definition of racism. Bob chose to write on Affirmative Action as reverse racism, but he was willing to discuss his topic only when Gloria was out of the room. When she returned, he immediately changed the subject.
example, he remarks that "the entire American population enjoys deluding itself on the issue of race. Whites refuse to admit that they might be repressive to racial minorities, but at the same time those racial minorities feel compelled to cry 'Racism!' at almost any situation which does not go in their favor or which they feel could be construed as offensive." Tim goes on to make what is, for him, a characteristic move: he uses his knowledge of history to relate the subject at hand—racism in American culture—to a larger context. Specifically, he questions what he calls the "myth" of African versus Western or European culture, arguing that both Africa and Europe are heterogeneous continents made up of diverse cultures. In his conclusion, Tim moves back to the immediate issue when he remarks, "What it boils down to is that people aren't willing to accept those that are different than themselves." Tim was especially adept at critiquing texts and culture in the way Denise valued, and his response to the readings on racism was characterized by this kind of academic critique. According to Tim, everyone is to blame for oversimplifying the issue of cultural differences, which he argues is more complicated than simply racial difference. By taking this approach, Tim did not have to give his view on African American experience beyond saying that all people are guilty of not accepting others who are
"different," a statement that makes race just another kind of difference.

Gloria began her response paper with what might be seen as a surprising understatement: "The subject of racism has always been of particular interest to me." Gloria goes on from this personal admission to refer, as Bob did, to Steele's analysis of the discomfort many people feel in talking about racism "in an integrated situation." She comments, "It seems as though people immediately react in a sort of stunned and inhibited manner, not quite knowing what to say or how to say it for fear of either offending someone or even causing the conversation to inflame. Others seem to use the topic to intentionally make certain people feel either guilty or inferior whatever may be their cause." It is interesting that in her comments Gloria does not refer to African Americans or whites specifically, implying that members of both groups are reluctant to talk about race. In contrast with the somewhat objective and analytical tone of her introduction, Gloria goes on to write about her personal experience of being the object of race prejudice. She laments that "Being black has definitely put some walls between some potential great friendships with some people who are white. Barriers that can not be overcome because I couldn't change the color of my skin, have left me wondering why?" Instead of blaming whites for their
racism, Gloria admits that she has the desire "to convert a racist" by being the first black with whom they have a positive relationship, thus taking responsibility herself for eliminating race prejudice. In Gloria's final paragraph she attempts to explain—or explain away—the oppressive behavior of whites when she attributes "the 'White Man's' actions throughout history" to the spirit of Manifest Destiny and the desire to "spread western religion and culture around the world as the will of God expected." Gloria comments that although this movement may have been well intentioned, "the 'ole' mighty dollar may have changed the course of things and added to the division of people among racial and economic lines." By characterizing the differences between racial groups in this way, Gloria avoids criticizing whites for their racism by portraying them as having been blinded by good intentions and led astray by greed (not racism).

Given Gloria's admission that racial prejudice has caused real pain in her life, it might seem strange that she hesitates to blame the perpetrators of this prejudice, emphasizing instead what she can do to curb racism. However, if we consider that she, too, made much of Steele's description of the discomfort people feel discussing racial issues, Gloria's response paper may have been affected by a concern with how her group members would respond to her text—and to her as an African
American woman. In an interview, Gloria admitted feeling keenly aware of her position in the group and in the class: "I always see my role as a black girl in an all-white environment as, you know, [Denise] said I can't feel this responsibility, but I usually end up feeling like I'm representing... the black race or something to someone whose never, never been exposed to black people, and I might be the first black person that they're talking to." Gloria saw her collaborative group as a place where she might feel called upon to play this role. The purpose of the group (or what she imagined to be Denise's purpose for the group) was, in Gloria's words, "So that we can exchange ideas and... kind of be forced to deal with each other at least in thinking. Hopefully, to encourage better thinking, better understanding. Like hopefully [Betsy] will have a better impression of black people because I get the feeling she's never ever dealt with any." It is possible to see Gloria's response paper on racism as intended to educate without alienating her group members.

Unlike the other response papers, all of which opened with some reference (if only implicit) to the Shelby Steele essay, Dan's response paper focused instead on the relationship between the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr. and those of Malcolm X. At the end of the response paper, Dan also tried to position both Ellison and Steele in
relation to King and Malcolm X. Although Dan says that he was taught that King's ideas were the most influential, he admits that he is attracted to the ideas of Malcolm X as well. In his conclusion, Dan evades addressing the conflict among these African American leaders' perspectives (Malcolm X explicitly criticizes Martin Luther King, Jr., for example) by suggesting that all of these ideas have merit. Specifically, he offers this proposal:

I'm not too sure if the time of these black leaders lives would allow but if there is truely strength in numbers and the more unified the group the better, I think that the black movement could have been even stronger if they all sat down and worked together on a solution. Maybe some leaders could persuade others to see their point of view and/or they could create new methods to help create racial equality.

What is interesting about Dan's response paper is the degree to which it reflects his own philosophy about managing discussions about difference in his small group. For Dan, diffusing conflict--keeping the group "unified"--seemed particularly important. Dan's desire to mediate the tension that arises when differing perspectives on difficult issues are brought into conversation with each other is reflected in his suggestion that Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Ralph Ellison sit down together and work on a common solution for the problem of racism in American society. Similarly, in the context of small group discussions, where he often acted as group leader,
Dan was more prone to mediate differences, to work toward a common solution, than he was to argue or highlight the differences among group members' positions. One way that Dan diffused conflict both in the small group and in the class as a whole was to make a joke at the very moment when students were beginning to seriously argue. In addition, when Dan led small group discussions he often kept the conversation going by asking group members the kinds of informational questions that Betsy asked during the *Lakota Woman* discussion, questions that did not provoke the arguing of different viewpoints. In the epigraph to this chapter, Dan reveals his dismay at having his comments questioned or corrected by group members--"I'm going to shut up now since you've torn apart everything I said"--and this kind of comment, even though spoken in a joking tone, may have curbed the very kind of conflict that the teacher saw as leading to productive critical thinking about issues of cultural difference.

If we look again at the other group members' response papers, we can also see hints or suggestions of their attitudes toward discussing contentious issues like racism. Because students knew their response papers would be read by group members, they were conscious that their remarks would be part of a public conversation about race relations in America, and their papers reveal some anxiety over participating in that conversation. It certainly
seems like more than a coincidence that Bob and Gloria both framed their very different response papers by referring to the discomfort people feel when talking about racial issues. For Bob, that discomfort may be traced to his desire not to be considered racist: the only way to ensure that his remarks, which were politically conservative, would not mark him as racist would be not to have to make them. When Gloria refers to the "stunned and inhibited manner" in which most people react to discussions about racism, she may be referring primarily to whites, but Gloria may also be referring to her own discomfort in discussing racism in the context of her small group. Gloria’s sense that she is representing the black race and her consequent desire to maintain positive relations with whites may lead her to resist or refrain from engaging in open conflict with them about racial issues.

Although Betsy’s response paper does not refer explicitly to the difficulty of discussing racism, based on what Betsy has revealed about her attitudes toward race and her limited experience with African Americans, it is easy to imagine that she, too, might feel uncomfortable discussing the issue with her group. On the one hand she acknowledges that blacks have been wronged and that whites are responsible, but she also believes that blacks now have equal opportunities and have no right to ask for
more. As Betsy sees it, if whites have already admitted their guilt in oppressing African Americans, there is no point in continuing to discuss it, in continuing to make whites feel guilty. One way to escape being made to feel guilty is to avoid talking about the issue. Tim’s response paper, like Dan’s, does not reflect overt anxiety about discussing racism, but it does, like Dan’s, exhibit a strategy for managing the discussion of a potentially contentious issue: move the issue out of the context of personal experience and into the context of history.

Given the richness and diversity of this group’s individual responses to reading on racism, and given the latent anxiety group members seemed to feel about discussing the issue publicly, the group’s construction of a collaborative response to these readings seemed likely to require a complicated process of negotiation. But perhaps not surprisingly, this group evaded or bypassed what even they acknowledged was the subject they were supposed to be discussing.

**Constructing a Collaborative Response to Readings on Racism**

As I argued in my analysis of the *Lakota Woman* discussion, the group leader can play an important role in determining the nature and outcome of the group’s collaborative response. On the day the group discussed
the readings on racism, all five group members were present. As usual, Dan assumed leadership of the group and in the first few minutes made a decision that constrained the direction the group could go in. At the start of group discussion, there was some confusion over which readings had been assigned for that day. (Denise had made changes in the syllabus off and on throughout the quarter.) Although everyone in the group had read at least some of the pieces on racism and had written response papers that dealt with that issue, Dan suggested, "Let’s just talk. Let’s not read everybody’s paper. Well, cause [Betsy] didn’t write about the right thing maybe." After Betsy insisted that she had written about the right thing, Dan continued, "You only wrote about half of the right thing and mine never makes any sense." Tim responded by assuring Dan "That’s not true." In spite of these reassurances, Dan convinced the group to launch into their discussion without reading each other’s response papers. There are many possible reasons for Dan’s suggestion—his own admitted laziness, his preference for talk over writing and reading, boredom with the routine (this was the fifth time they had been asked to get into groups and read each other’s response papers). But it

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26 Dan expressed a similar preference for talking rather than reading when the group was asked to respond to each other’s drafts of the second essay they wrote for the class. Dan opened that peer response session by suggesting
is also possible that Dan feared the discomfort the group would feel if they each read what the others had written about racism. Whatever Dan’s reasons were, his decision meant that the members of this group lost an opportunity to engage (and have their own thinking challenged by) the diverse perspectives represented in their peers’ response papers. It also meant that the group’s collaborative response happened exclusively through face-to-face conversation. If students revealed some anxiety about discussing racism in the format of written responses to readings, it is possible that discussing the issue in their small group without relying on written texts as a way into that conversation could prove even more anxiety provoking.

Dan was not the only group member who played a part in determining that the group did not discuss racism in an openly conflictual way. For example, when Dan commented at the beginning of the group’s discussion that he had focused on Malcolm X’s criticism of Martin Luther King’s ideas, Bob’s response was "But see, I’m, that’s not really around my interests." Perhaps not surprisingly, the group did not pursue a discussion of Malcolm X. Gloria did

that the group just talk about their drafts, arguing that reading them would take too long. Given that they had only 45 minutes to respond to four drafts, he may have been justified in being concerned about time. But he also did not have a draft to share with his group, so talking would have benefitted him more than reading.
manage to initiate a discussion of Shelby Steele’s essay by describing the controversy in the black community surrounding Steele, primarily because of his anti-Affirmative Action stance. But instead of responding to the substance of Gloria’s remarks, Dan asked Gloria for the title of the book and then asked her if she’d read the whole book, remarking to the group, "I thought she’d read the whole book and that’s why she’s so knowledgeable."

Dan, who admitted that he hates to read (Lakota Woman was the first full book he had read since he started college), seemed to be impressed by text-based knowledge, a fact that continued to influence the ways in which he solicited and valued his group members’ contributions to collaborative response.

In spite of Dan’s interruption, Gloria brought the group back to a discussion of Steele by focusing on the anecdote he used to illustrate the difficulty whites and blacks have in talking about racism. Here is a portion of what can be seen as a potentially explosive discussion:

Gloria [summarizing Steele]: If you’re black and you’re discussing racism in an integrated room, then you are more likely to want to put the blame on white people for what they’ve done. And if you’re white. . . you want to say, ‘Gosh, I didn’t do it and that happened a long time ago and you can’t,’ you know.

Tim: Yeah, it’s just the way he describes certain parts of it seem really odd.

Gloria: Yeah.
[Pause]

Gloria: So I think that's interesting, the way people react when they talk about it. Like the first paragraph [of Steele's essay].

Bob: Like in this article, in this first paragraph where he discusses, uh, he hadn't even met a person but somebody told him that they were racist, so without even meeting them they had a racist attitude towards him. Without even meeting them.

Gloria: Well, he wanted to... see this racist person and talk to them and that's when he found out racist people can be very sly and tricky because the man was very nice to him and very cordial and that's when he realized that race

Bob: He was a liar

Gloria: It could have been a lie, his friend tried to hide the truth, or racism can be

Tim: Secretive

Gloria: Well, hidden. They could look at you and they could smile at you and you would never know it.

In this discussion, both Bob and Gloria refer to the story Steele tells in which as a child, he meets a friend's uncle who he has been told is racist. But they each use this story to make a very different point about the nature of racism. Bob argued that Steele was wrong in assuming that someone he had never met was a racist. The fact that this person treated him nicely was evidence that the man was, in fact, not a racist. Gloria interpreted the same anecdote quite differently, seeing it as evidence that racism can take many guises including public "niceness." But before Bob and Gloria had the chance to explore their
different positions on this issue, Dan steered the conversation away from Bob's and Gloria's interpretation of Steele and towards a consideration of what each of the authors thought about who was to blame for racism. The question of blame proved a provocative one for the group. As Steele himself argued, continually making whites feel guilty only exacerbates the problem of racism by causing reactions such as the one Bob expressed during this discussion of blame:

But these guys [referring to the readings as a whole] were, they blamed people like crazy. Yeah, from 200 years ago. I mean, it's like how can we be blamed now; that sort of thing happened two hundred years ago. I mean, how can anybody change anything that happened two hundred years ago? So really, it should all be forgot about.

Although Bob's statement represented the kind of personal perspective on the readings that Denise hoped small group discussions would elicit, it also served, ironically, to distract the group from pursuing the issue of responsibility for racism by raising the question of when and where slavery (the "thing that happened two hundred years ago") began. Although Bob mentioned slavery only in passing (alluding to it as "that sort of thing"), the group under Dan's leadership chose to follow up on what was arguably the least consequential part of Bob's statement. At any rate, it was the one part of his remark that was not likely to elicit conflicting points of view.
In fact, the group spent the remainder of their collaborative response time attempting to trace the history of slavery, a subject that, while certainly related to the problem of racism in contemporary American culture, allowed the group once again to avoid discussing their differing perspectives.

The group's discussion of the history of slavery had a number of qualities that might be labeled "academic." The group attempted to recount the "facts" rather than group members' perspectives or opinions about the issue, and they sought textual rather than experiential evidence. In constructing a history of slavery, the group relied on the authority of Tim, who was in Dan's words, "a history buff" who had tested out of his required introductory history course, and on the authority of Gloria, who told the group, "I just took History 151 and that's why I know [about] this." The discussion thus met Tim's preferences for taking issues out of the realm of the personal into the realm of historical fact. And in the informational rather than argumentative discussion the group had, Dan was able to ask the kind of fact-seeking questions he preferred. The discussion was also one which Bob no doubt found preferable, given that the readings on racism were "not around my interests."

Perhaps the most curious feature of this group's discussion of the history of slavery was that it worked to
eliminate the issue of racial difference as a motivating factor of slavery and focused almost exclusively on the economic factors that drove the slave industry. Tim contributed to this shift in focus by bringing into the discussion his knowledge of slavery in Ancient Greece and feudalism in medieval Europe. But Gloria, too, argued for the economic rather than racial basis of slavery: "You know what I think, I think it was all economics. I mean, it wasn't completely economics but it was very much economics because, you know, black people were too poor, just like Mexicans." Later in the discussion, Gloria further diffused the relationship between racial difference and slavery by reporting:

[S]lavery has been going on for years, but it wasn't always a racial thing. I mean, Africans enslaved other Africans, you know. Even in Africa black people had slaves, because there were certain tribes that were bred for that, you know what I mean, like they were slaves and then it became an economic thing where Africans started selling Africans to Europeans.

Ultimately, Dan's quest for information led him to ask how slavery made its way to America, creating an opening for the issue of American race relations to reemerge. But in response to Dan, Tim and Gloria drew parallels between the use of indentured servants, who according to Gloria were lower class whites, and the importing of Africans to be used as slaves. Throughout the discussion, no one attempted to bring the group back to
the readings that were assigned, nor did the group seem concerned that they would be unprepared to present an issue raised by the readings for class discussion. The group was aware, however, that the discussion they had was not the one they were "supposed" to have had. Near the end of the assigned time for group work, Denise circulated around the room checking on each group’s progress. Here is the "progress report" the group gave Denise:

Tim: No, we don’t have a topic yet, if that’s what you were wondering.

Denise: OK guys, try to get to a point where you can bring something back to the class.

Dan: But we totally went off the subject. We explored the history of slavery in the United States, right here.

[a few unclear words]

Dan: Well, it was very interesting. I’ve learned something.

Gloria: Yeah, it’s interesting actually.

[The group jokes about bringing donuts and coffee back to the class in lieu of an issue to discuss.]

Tim: We were arguing history.

Bob: Yeah, but it was off the topic.

Dan: But it was educational.

Betsy: It was related, but it wasn’t what you wanted.

This group’s report to Denise indicated an awareness that their discussion deviated from the one expected of them, in part because they focused neither on the readings nor
on the issue of contemporary African American experience. In choosing to discuss the "related" issue of the history of slavery, the group's collaborative response to the readings on racism, like their collaborative response to *Lakota Woman*, permitted them to evade the issue of their differing perspectives on race relations in America. It might also be said that this discussion, like the *Lakota Woman* discussion, represented an alliance with a kind of academic reading that valued impersonal, objective, historical knowledge over personal experience and personal opinion. Their discussion was also "academic" in its appeal to school-based authority--Tim and Gloria's knowledge of the "facts" of history. And their discussion was academic in the colloquial sense as well: it had no "real life" consequences for the members of this group.

If this group had confronted their differing perspectives on racism as revealed in their individually-authored response papers, it seems likely that potentially painful conflicts might have erupted. Although Denise saw educational value in this kind of conflict, it is understandable that these students wanted to avoid the painful consequences of openly confronting their different perspectives on racism, especially given that they needed to continue working together throughout the quarter. Although from the teacher's perspective, this group missed an important educational opportunity, in one sense there
were no tangible consequences for doing so. The collaborative responses were not evaluated by the teacher—only the individual response papers were. And even though this group had nothing to bring back to the class for discussion, the other groups raised enough questions that this group was never called upon to speak.

In their collaborative responses to published texts, this group did not respond to group members' differences in the productive ways that the prominent models of collaborative response propose. The group was not motivated to practice the "methodological believing," which would have required them to accept as valid Betsy's seemingly irrelevant comments on *Lakota Woman* and to believe that Gloria has personally suffered from race prejudice at the same time they believed Bob's contention that they shouldn't have to talk about something that happened 200 years ago. Of course, Elbow emphasizes that "methodological believing" takes discipline, practice, and commitment and that it works best when group members trust each other and see the subject at hand as open to interpretation. This group did not seem to see the value of collaboratively interrogating their differing perspectives and were not motivated to do the hard work that "methodological believing" requires. It is also important to note that in responding to multiple perspectives Denise advocated something closer to the
other half of Elbow's model, "methodological doubting," which requires group members to question rather than believe each other. But even this conceptualization of collaborative response assumes that multiple views will be heard and deemed worthy of critique, and as the discussions of *Lakota Woman* and the readings on racism revealed, these students were not motivated to question each other's perspectives either.

In both collaborative response situations examined here, the group operated from a basis of implicit consensus that in response to competing assumptions, values, and beliefs, they would act on those that represented the norms of academic discourse. These norms not only dictated the structure of the group's response to *Lakota Woman* and the content of their response to the readings on racism, but also made it possible for them to complete their assigned task and at the same time ignore or erase their differences. Approaching collaborative response in this way allowed the group to work together efficiently and without conflict, goals that seemed especially important to the men who acted as leaders of the group.

If students did not acknowledge their differing perspectives, then it was not possible for them to critique the power relations that organized their perspectives hierarchically, as Myers and Trimbur
advocate, a critique that might have led them to see the marginalization of Betsy's perspective as a product of the group's alliance with academic norms. That this group functioned hierarchically is evidenced in the control that group leaders had over the subject and direction of group discussions. Both Bob and Dan set the agenda for group discussions early, and those group members who challenged that agenda, Betsy in the *Lakota Woman* discussion and Gloria in the racism discussion, had little power to alter the course of the discussion. It seems significant that the dissenting voices in the group came from members of marginalized groups in the culture at large where the voices of women and people of color have often been ignored or erased. This group thus seemed characterized by the same unequal distribution of power that Myers and Trimbur argue characterize all groups in American culture.

If Shelby Steele is right that most Americans feel uncomfortable talking about racial difference, it is easy to understand why these students would be reluctant to discuss how their differing cultural positions might be affecting their perspectives on texts—and their responses to each other's perspectives. After all, doing so is difficult, given the possible social consequences. In articulating their perspectives, group members wanted to avoid saying anything that could be construed as offensive. In questioning each other's perspectives, they
also sought not to offend. The desire to avoid conflict seems natural given that these students needed to work together every class period and were anticipating having to write a research paper together at the end of the term. Unfortunately, avoiding issues of conflict and power relations within groups does not make them go away, as these students were forced to realize in their continuing work together.
CHAPTER V

COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE TO A CULTURAL SCENE IN
"THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE"

In the groups studied in Chapter III and Chapter IV, students were reluctant to engage group members' differing perspectives, opting instead to act according to an unspoken consensus to uphold narrow academic norms that allowed them to ignore differences within the group. In both the peer response group and the small discussion group, students were able to avoid acknowledging or engaging their differing perspectives on texts, in part, because the cost of doing so was minimal. Although in both cases, the groups lost what their teachers might have thought was a valuable opportunity to learn from each other, both groups managed to perform their assigned tasks in a way that met the teachers' minimum standards and allowed the groups to escape potentially painful conflict.

This chapter focuses on a collaborative activity that did not allow students to ignore their differences so easily: that of a collaborative research project for which all members of the group would receive the same grade.
During the process of completing this project, students were forced to confront their differing perspectives on the teacher's objectives for the project, on the subject the group chose to research, on the kind of writing the project required, and on the roles and responsibilities of each group member. In these cases, the text the group was responding to was not always "written" in the conventional sense; their responses to proposed research topics, to the research site itself, to the data they collected, and to their group processes all required interpretation of "texts" that were essentially nondiscursive. In the context of the collaborative research project, then, I identified as collaborative response any moment in which students were asked to give their reading of an idea, a situation, or a physical text that was a part of the project. Because the research project required students to respond to many different kinds of "texts," I had the opportunity to explore how students' responding strategies might change as the material they were working with changed.

In expressing and discussing their views on various aspects of the research project, student groups were inevitably affected by personal, social, and institutional factors. Perhaps the most salient personal factor that influenced students' responses to the project were their personal assumptions about how a group project should be
organized, and specifically, assumptions about what their individual roles in the project should be. Students also brought to the collaborative research project personal assumptions about writing, both their own writing and the kind of writing required by the assignment. Although students working in peer response groups and in small discussion groups were also affected by their personal assumptions about the goals of the group activity as well as their assumptions about the texts that they were focusing on, in those contexts, students' differing personal assumptions were fairly easy to ignore, because students were not required to agree about how a draft should be revised or about the most significant issues raised by a reading. In the context of collaborative writing, however, where decisions had to be made in order to move the project forward, students' differing personal assumptions about the nature of the project and their role in it had to be confronted.

The collaborative writing project also highlighted the social factors that affected group response to a greater extent than did peer responding or small group discussions of published texts. In the response situations described in Chapters III and IV, students were engaged socially for relatively brief periods of time, usually an hour for a peer response session, or twenty minutes for a group discussion. Although these groups met
several times throughout the quarter, each time they met they took up a new text, a new subject, and thus had the opportunity to respond differently as a group. As we saw in Chapter IV, given different texts and a different group configuration as a result of the absence of one group member, the social context proved somewhat different, in terms of who assumed leadership of the group, for example, and who contributed to the group discussion. But in the case of the collaborative research project studied here, students worked together over a longer period of time, and each part of the work depended on the preceding parts. The social context in which students worked was thus ongoing or cumulative rather than isolated or sequential. In other words, what happened in one group meeting was likely to influence how students responded to each other and to the project in subsequent group meetings. In addition, because the group's work translated into the same grade for each member of the group, students were more invested in group processes (and the outcome of those processes) than they seemed to be when involved in collaborative activities that affected them less tangibly. Thus, social factors that affected group processes when students were engaged in peer responding and small group discussions—who assumed leadership, who participated, whose participation was valued—affected collaborative research/writing in an especially pronounced way.
The institutional factors that affected student responses within the context of a collaborative research project seem particularly important, if only because the place of collaborative research within the academy continues to be contested (Ede and Lunsford, Ervin and Fox). Most schools are based on an individualist model of education in which students are expected to learn individually and be evaluated individually, and the system of evaluation is competitive and hierarchical. Although by the time they reach college, most students have been involved in at least one group project, they often express dissatisfaction with such projects, frequently complaining of an uneven distribution of ability or effort within the group. Although the influence of the individualist model of education may be one reason students have negative experiences with group projects, their negative experiences with collaborative work only increase their alliance with an individualist model. When the group project involves collaboratively authoring a text, as it did in the group project that is the focus of this chapter, institutionalized norms of academic writing, norms based on the assumption that such writing will be authored individually, also affect students' response to the process and product of collaborative research/writing. For example, the assumption that a text should be focused, coherent, and univocal is a commonplace in most college
composition classrooms, yet this standard can be especially difficult for students writing collaboratively to achieve, in part because of students' conflicting personal perspectives on what makes writing effective or appropriate, perspectives which must be acknowledged and negotiated within a complex social context.

A collaborative research/writing project thus represents a particularly rich site for studying the factors that affect students' differing interpretations of the project and for exploring the nature of their collaborative negotiation of those differing interpretations. By studying Bob, Betsy, Gloria, Tim, and Dan as they went through the process of collaboratively researching and writing a paper in "The American Experience," I had the opportunity to consider how this group's collaborative responding practices compared across collaborative response situations. As I have already suggested, although the group was able to avoid their differences in their discussions of published texts, they could not avoid confronting their differing interpretations of the collaborative writing project. In their efforts to resolve their differences, however, they frequently appealed to the authority of established academic norms. This appeal to the authority of established norms was especially apparent at three significant points in this group's process: in choosing
the subject they would collaboratively investigate, in
determining the roles and responsibilities of group
members, and in responding to each other’s differing
writing styles. At each of these points, the appeal to
established norms resulted in the marginalization or
silencing of those perspectives that the group determined
to be at a distance from those norms, just as it did in
the peer response and small group discussions examined in
Chapters III and IV.

The Collaborative Research Project in
"The American Experience": Competing Contexts Revisited

Although the university determined that "The American
Experience" should provide students with opportunities to
read, write, research, and discuss texts that deal with
issues of American cultural diversity, the University did
not prescribe or even recommend that students work on
these tasks collaboratively. As I noted in Chapter IV, it
was Denise who brought to the class a belief in the
benefits of collaboration. Although she had used small
discussion groups and peer response groups in previous
writing classes, this was the first time that Denise had
assigned a collaborative research paper. In spite of
Denise’s concern that conflicts in people’s schedules
could make it difficult for them to work together on the
paper, she felt that the benefit of getting multiple
perspectives on their research subject outweighed the potential disadvantages of having to do the project as a group. The fact that the group paper coupled with the group oral presentation of the paper would account for 40% of each student's grade is also a reflection of the importance Denise placed on the collaborative research project.

When Bob, Betsy, Gloria, Tim, and Dan began their collaborative research project, they did so within these two competing contexts: that of the academic community, which generally does not support collaborative research/writing, and that created by Denise, which emphasized the difficulty of collaborative work but insisted on its value. In addition, these students pursued their collaborative project within the context they had created for themselves as a small group, which as described in Chapter IV, was characterized by rules of operation that made it possible for them to complicate Denise's goals for group activities in her classroom. Although the group had participated in a number of collaborative activities by the time Denise assigned the group research project, they had not established a group context in which they regularly confronted group members' differing perspectives and used their differences to push their own thinking, relying instead on narrow academic norms for reading, writing, and discussion that allowed
them to evade the issue of their differences. When they were forced to confront their differing perspectives in order to fulfill the requirements of the collaborative research project research, conflicts necessarily arose with sometimes painful consequences for individual members of the group and for the group as a whole. In their attempts to resolve these conflicts, the group, again, appealed to narrow academic norms that allowed them to marginalize or erase dissenting voices within the group.

The Assignment: Analyzing a Cultural Scene

Denise assigned the collaborative research paper at the beginning of the sixth week of the ten-week quarter. The paper was to be based on an analysis of a cultural scene. Although at that time students were busy writing their first drafts of their second essays, Denise told them she was assigning the group paper early because of the extra time it would take them to "get the group together." She also said that because of the complexity of the task, she would be assigning the project in stages. Thus, the first assignment sheet focused on how to define a cultural scene and how to gather information about the scene; it also gave advice about choosing topics. (See Appendix D for a complete description of the assignment.) Denise distributed subsequent assignment sheets that dealt
with writing up the research and preparing the group oral report.

On the first assignment sheet, Denise informed students that they would have to turn in a research topic and plan at the end of the following week. Although students would be given an hour in class to work on their research plans on the day those plans were due, Denise advised them to start spending whatever time they had left at the end of a group discussion exploring possible topics. At the bottom of this first assignment sheet in a section headed "Some Helpful Warnings," Denise included additional recommendations for choosing a topic. There she advised students to come to a consensus that is not forced about the subject they would investigate. In Denise’s words:

Be sure that every group member agrees to this topic or it won’t work; in other words, don’t simply decide by majority vote because that will leave someone feeling less committed to the project than others.

Denise also warned not to study a cultural scene that could be potentially dangerous.

Denise’s call for consensus in choosing a subject for the collaborative research paper is particularly interesting given her rationale for using groups so extensively in this class. Denise relied on a collaborative pedagogy because of her desire to challenge students’ individualist assumptions. As she said in an
interview, "I want them to see that they can be different, but at the same time work together." As Denise told the class when she introduced the assignment, "One of the reasons you’re doing this in a group is to get out of that singular perspective." Denise saw it as a benefit that students would have differing perspectives on their topic and, as I noted in Chapter IV, she also saw as valuable the inevitable conflicts that such differing perspectives could create. But from the very beginning of the group project, Denise emphasized that groups would have to find some way to deal with their differences. As we can see in her warning about choosing topics, she expected students to negotiate an agreement regarding the subject they would investigate. Throughout the project, Denise reiterated the need for groups to acknowledge their differing perspectives and yet act as a group in choosing a subject, in researching that subject, in writing up their research, and in managing group processes.

Although Denise wanted and expected the groups to take responsibility for the management of group processes, she also felt that for the group project to succeed, she needed to do more than simply organize the groups, assign the project, and then wait for the final draft to be turned in. Consequently, Denise assigned the project in stages, gave the groups some time in class to work, and scheduled due dates for various parts of the project--the
research plan, a progress report on their research, a rough draft workshop where each group responded to the draft of another group's paper—so that the groups could not put off all of the work until the last minute and so that she could respond to the process as well as the product of their research. The assumptions, values, and beliefs that Denise communicated to students regarding the collaborative research paper included an acknowledgement of the difficulty of the project, especially the difficulty of doing it as a group, but also a belief in the benefits of working with multiple perspectives on a subject, of learning to handle conflicts within a group, and of taking responsibility as a group for completing the project. Although Denise insisted that groups manage themselves, she also provided a number of supports and safeguards that she hoped would help the groups work effectively, including telling students on the day she handed out the assignment, "If you start having a problem you can come to see me, and I’ll help you work it out as much as possible, but ultimately it’s your responsibility."

In spite of the ways in which Denise tried to support students' collaborative work, the group I studied found the difficulties of collaborative research/writing to far exceed the benefits. Perhaps because in previous collaborative activities this group had been able to avoid
dealing with their differences and thus avoid conflict, they were especially disturbed by the conflicts that arose during the process of researching and writing a paper together. In an attempt to resolve these conflicts, the group turned repeatedly to established standards and traditional sources of authority rather than depend on a negotiation among group members. To illustrate, I'd like to examine three occasions during which this group's differences led to conflict that was resolved in ways that upheld established norms and resulted in the marginalization of some perspectives. These occasions include choosing a subject to research, reporting on their group's progress, and writing a draft of the paper.

**Choosing a Research Topic**

The group discussion that is my focus here took place a week after Denise assigned the group project. As she had promised, she gave the groups about 45 minutes to work in class on what she called a research plan. Specifically, Denise asked the groups to answer in writing six questions about their intended research project and to turn in their plan at the end of class so that she could respond to it and return it to them during their next class meeting. These questions included: What is your topic? Why did you choose this topic? How will you go about researching your topic? Who's going to be doing
what? When will you stop doing the observation? When will you stop writing?

Although Denise had suggested that the groups talk about possible topics before the day set aside for writing the research plan, the group I studied did not. As a result, they had a substantial amount of work to do in the 45 minutes allotted: they had to suggest topics, discuss them, choose one, and write out a research plan. Perhaps because of the limits of time, and because only Bob and Betsy suggested topics, the group discussed almost exclusively how they could go about researching the first topic suggested, the one presented by Bob—homeless people or street people.

A closer look at a few moments of this group’s discussion of topics will help illustrate both the ways in which group members’ perspectives on the project differed and their characteristic methods of dealing with those differences. For example, from the beginning, Bob—who worked full-time downtown, had two school-age children whom he had some responsibility for during the summer, and lived on the far west side of the city—was especially concerned that the group’s subject could be easily researched given their diverse work and commuting schedules, and his suggestion that the group research the homeless or street people was expressly motivated by this concern. When other group members resisted his idea, he
attempted to impose his view of the project by trying to convince them that his topic would allow them to pursue their individual interests. Here is the beginning of the group's discussion:

Dan: Any ideas?

Bob: Yeah, I got an idea. . . . With our particular circumstances—I work, she's got to drive [nodding to Betsy], I live a long way out—what about homeless people, street people? It's something that can be researched, in magazines, they’re on campus a lot, get some at the dumpsters, because I was walking down campus to get my books and stuff and people were asking me for change.

Betsy: Yeah, but are they homeless?

Bob: Street people, just define the whole thing.

Betsy: Yeah, but are you gonna go ask them, 'Are you homeless?'

Dan: Ask them what? I mean, I tell you what, there are so many people with cars that just run out of gas, and I've never seen a car just sitting on the side of the road.

Bob: Maybe homeless isn't the, go for the street people, beggars.

Betsy: Poor people?

Dan: What about that? Because I gave a bum two bucks one day, and later that night he bought me a beer in a bar.

Bob: You're pretty kind-hearted.

[Laughter.]

Bob: Can I get a response here?

Dan: Well, let's throw some more things out.

Bob: That's what I'm asking for here.
Dan: At least we've got one if we can't think of anything else.

Bob: Well, I'm downtown, too, so at lunch hour I can walk around; I've already had some experiences with people who were, kind of like, streety people.

[Betsy mumbles something about the people around her hometown who carry signs saying they'll work for food.]

Bob: Which town do you live near?

Betsy: Centerburg.

Bob: Centerburg.

Betsy: There's no homeless. [Laughter]

Dan: Is there anything happening out there that you could do?

Betsy: Well, there's just, I mean, like, there's people living in trailers

Bob: There's destitute people.

Betsy: What?

Bob: Destitute. Is that the right word?

Dan [to Betsy]: Well, if there's anything interesting happening out there, you could write a paper on another topic.

In making a case for his proposed topic, Bob first pointed out that because of the group's circumstances, not just his, they should consider researching a cultural scene that they all had easy access to. But his group members were concerned about more than accessibility. When Betsy questioned Bob's characterization of the homeless, he tried to win her as an ally by expanding the topic from
"the homeless" to "the destitute" so that Betsy could do her research in her hometown while Bob did his research outside of his office building on his lunch hour.

As we can see from Dan's comments, he, too, wanted to view the group project as one that everyone could work on individually, although he seemed motivated not by a concern with his own convenience (he doesn't mention how he could go about researching the subject) but by a concern that everyone in the group be happy with the topic. For example, as the group discussed various permutations of Bob's suggested topic, from the homeless, to street people, to destitute people, to the poor, to three areas of the main street of the city (the suburbs, campus, and downtown), Dan repeatedly tested the topic by trying to figure out how each person's interests could be met. At the same time Dan worried about making everyone happy, he also worried about the final product of their research. At various points during the group's conversation, Dan made comments such as, "Maybe we could do something that could tie all this together, different perspectives," and "I don't think this is all going to hold together somehow," and "I see us all trying to do our separate thing and then trying to mesh it together." Dan's somewhat competing criteria for choosing a research topic are reflected in this opening discussion in his expression of interest in Bob's topic, his appeal for
other ideas for the group project, and his suggestion that Betsy write about something that is interesting (and convenient) to her.

The fact that group members had different criteria for choosing a research subject, combined with the necessity of agreeing on a subject, was one source of conflict within the group. Although Bob and Dan (for somewhat different reasons) wanted to make it possible for Betsy to do her research from her home, she was less concerned about having to commute to a research site than she was about having to do research that she felt uncomfortable pursuing. Betsy was reluctant to accept Bob’s idea that they research "the destitute," for reasons that had nothing to do with whether there were destitute people in her home town. For example, Betsy described herself as shy, so the idea of having to interview strangers was upsetting to her. She also objected to making assumptions about people’s financial status based on appearances alone. She stated her objections later in the discussion, when Bob and Gloria attempted to convince Betsy to research the rural poor:

Gloria: Betsy’s gonna do, do you mind doing the rural poor since you live in a rural area?

Dan: Are there rural poor?

Gloria: I’m sure there has to be.

Bob: Like you said, there’s a dilapidated trailer park nearby.
Betsy: No, just people with junky yards.

Bob: Oh.

Dan [joking]: That's your definition of poor!

Betsy: No, I'm talking about junky yards, they don't have no place to put stuff, they don't go to stores.

Gloria: There you go.

Betsy: But how do I know they're poor?

Gloria: But that's what I'm saying.

Bob: No, they're "economically disadvantaged" [making fun of a phrase Gloria had used a few minutes ago].

Dan: Geez. [Laughter.]

Bob: I was just teasing.

Betsy: But they might just be slobs.

Gloria: OK, well.

Bob: Well, go ask them their approximate income. [He laughs.]

Gloria: Well, we know that poor in this country is based on income, right? If you think they are in a low income level, then they are probably in a lower neighborhood. But they might, [the group talks over her], they might not think, listen, [more talk], wait a minute, [talk], listen, they might not think, listen.

Betsy [in a loud voice]: Why don't you guys talk about this; I'll figure out my own part later.

Gloria: But they might not consider themselves poor, but maybe by the standards of living...

Betsy [emphatically]: I'm not going to talk to them.
Dan [jokingly]: "Yeah, I’m doing my English paper on poor people; how do you feel about that?"

Betsy: Yeah, I’m not gonna walk up to their houses and ask them their income. That’s rude. And I wouldn’t want someone to do that to me.

In this part of the group’s discussion, Gloria sided with Bob in trying to convince Betsy that researching the poor in her town is a good idea. Although Betsy made it clear that she objects to judging people by the appearance of their property and finds it rude to question people about their financial status, the group did not engage her differing view of the subject. Immediately after Betsy’s outright refusal to do the research the group was asking her to do, Bob commented, "I just don’t think she’s as open as the rest of us to talking about the poor," and Gloria agreed, adding, "Yeah, you’re not open." This interpretation of Betsy’s resistance marks her as uncooperative rather than as someone whose differing views on the subject of poverty should be considered. Betsy may have had personal reasons for not wanting to research the rural poor. Although I did not ask these students about their economic status, during this discussion of topics

27 It seems important to note that earlier in the discussion, Betsy had volunteered the only other topic the group considered: 4-H clubs. In response to her suggestion, Bob, who as I have shown was seriously invested in researching a topic convenient to him, made a joke that those groups aren’t around anymore, and Betsy’s topic was dismissed. This is another example of the group’s lack of concern with Betsy’s personal interest in a topic.
Betsy warned her group against stereotyping all small farmers as poor. Dan attempted to resolve the conflict by trying to make it possible for Betsy to pursue the project Bob and Gloria wanted on her own terms, a solution which might have seemed to preserve everyone's individual interests. Specifically, he suggested that she just sit outside the trailer park and take notes on what she sees (which group members imagined might include "barefoot kids," "throw[ing] garbage on the ground," and "the house with ten million kids running around"); and Betsy tentatively agreed.

Although Gloria sided with Bob and tried to impose his topic on Betsy, she did not state her view of the project or of Bob's topic as explicitly as did Bob, Dan, and Betsy. Gloria's first comment during the group discussion was that studying the poor in several different locations was "a good group idea." Later she added that "everybody can get something different out of it." These statements suggest that Gloria's view of the project was much like Dan's: a good group project is one that allows each group member to focus on different things. Although it is somewhat difficult to discern why Gloria sided with Bob in pushing for the homeless or the poor as the cultural group the group should research, she did show an active interest throughout the quarter in the social issues raised by the class. She was also enrolled at the
time in the School of Journalism, so doing research on the homeless might not have seemed as intimidating to her as it did to Betsy.

Gloria may also have gone along with Bob's suggestion out of a desire to make a decision quickly and get the research plan written. Gloria had taken on the responsibility of writing responses to Denise's six questions, so if the group had difficulty making a decision, she was the one who would be stuck trying to write up the research plan at the last minute. Perhaps as a consequence of assuming this responsibility, Gloria's participation in the discussion was characterized by frequent attempts to conceptualize the research project as a whole. Each time the group seemed to be considering a new approach to Bob's proposed topic, she would ask for the group's consensus. For example, only a few minutes into the discussion Gloria asked, "First of all, do we all agree on the economically disadvantaged?" Later in the discussion, she asked the group if they all agreed that they would limit their research to "panhandlers." In asking for the group's consensus, she seemed to recognize Denise's requirement that everyone in the group agree on the topic. And Gloria's desire to reach agreement quickly, so she could get on with the research plan, may have been one reason she pressured Betsy to agree to Bob's topic. Gloria's interest in completing the plan also
prompted her to articulate what each group member’s role in the project would be (we see her assigning Betsy a role in the preceding discussion)—which was one of the questions she had to answer for Denise. In addition, she made several suggestions of titles for the group paper, a move that also indicates that she was interested in finalizing the group’s plans.

Tim said little in the first half of the group’s discussion of possible topics. He made his first direct comment when Dan and Gloria tried to assign him roles: Dan assigned him the role of "typer" because of his sophisticated computer equipment, and Gloria suggested he be the one responsible for analyzing the fieldnotes. Tim resisted these roles, saying, "I’m not writing the whole paper," which might suggest that unlike his group members, he viewed the collaborative research project as a group effort rather than as a division of labor. But he might also have been expressing a concern that being responsible for all the analysis or all the text production would mean he would be stuck with more than his fair share of the work.

What is striking about this group’s discussion of possible topics thus far is the degree to which group members conceived of the collaborative research project as a compilation of individual research projects, with each group member doing research on a separate part or aspect
of the topic, according to his or her different interests. In other words, the group approached the problem of their differing perspectives by trying to conceive of a group project that would allow them to work independently and thus preserve their perspectives intact. This approach to the assignment was one that Denise especially wanted to avoid. As she said in an interview, "[I am] worried about people writing different sections and just all photocopying them together and not even writing transitions or working together at all on the thing, to make it easier for them to do, [which would] take away the benefits of getting multiple perspectives." Given what we have seen of this group's collaborative practices, it is easy to imagine why this individualistic approach to the collaborative research paper would be attractive.

An individualistic approach might have worked in a group that shared interests and work habits and where group members were seen as equals who would make equally valuable contributions to the project. But the members of this group had competing interests and thus competing criteria for judging the appropriateness of a topic. In general, group members responded to proposed topics by

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28 Kenneth Bruffee's consensus model of collaboration seems to rest on the assumption that student groups will be constituted in this way, as a community of knowledgeable peers who share the same paradigm and the same set of values.
thinking about how that topic would satisfy their interests and work expectations rather than by considering what kind of group project the topic would lead to. In responding to a group member’s reluctance to accept the proposed topic, the group usually tried to convince the reluctant person that, indeed, the topic would be a good one for that person, as an individual, to pursue. If that approach failed, the group tried expanding the topic to make it more inclusive and thus more acceptable to resistant group members. During this group discussion, Bob and Gloria spoke the most forcefully for the appropriateness of Bob’s proposed topic, the homeless, and used the tactics I just noted to try to persuade Betsy, who was clearly reluctant to pursue the topic. They also worked to persuade Dan, who took a critical stance toward the subject out of a concern that the final project wouldn’t be coherent and a concern that Betsy was not happy with the topic.

For the first fifteen minutes or so, the group’s discussion of possible topics (principally versions of Bob’s suggestions that they research the homeless) was characterized by a somewhat circular negotiation process: Bob continued to try to sell his topic by expanding it or revising it in response to group members’ objections; Betsy resisted Bob’s topic(s), sometimes actively, sometimes passively ("Why don’t you guys talk about this;
I'll figure out my part later"}; Gloria attempted to get consensus from the group regarding the topic and kept trying to assign individual roles; and at moments when the group seemed to moving toward resolution, Dan would question whether the separate parts of the project would fit together. Clearly, these group members had competing interests that resulted in differing perspectives on what would make a good group project and on the suitability of Bob's proposed topic. But they also seemed unable to address directly the issue of their differing views and instead tried to accommodate each other without giving up anything themselves.

Perhaps out of frustration, perhaps out of a hope of getting some support for his concern with the disunity of the project, Dan turned to me and asked, "What do you think, is this gonna work here?" Dan's question created a dilemma for me as a participant-observer in this small group: How could I respond without interfering with the very group processes I was trying to study? Throughout the study, I had tried to remain more observer than participant in the group. Although the frequent use of group work in the class and the vivacity of the group members led to my feeling a comfortable rapport with these students, up until this time, I had not been asked to fulfill the promise I made to the group when they gave me permission to study them: a promise to give them my
response as a group member whenever they requested it. Now Dan was asking me to respond to the group's plan to research the poor.

I'm not sure how I would have answered Dan's question if I had been a full member of this group. My response would likely have been shaped by my personal interest in the proposed topic, by a concern with the feasibility of the project, and certainly, by a desire to maintain a good working relationship with the group. But I was not an actual member of the group who was being asked to come to an agreement with my peers on a topic for a collaborative research project that would count for 40% of my final grade. So I responded as myself, a composition researcher and writing teacher who wanted to see these students, whom I enjoyed working with and to whom I owed a great deal, succeed.

Carrie: I think that it would be easier if you focused on the same kind of site, like if you each chose one neighborhood or one street.

Dan: I pick High Street.

Carrie: Well, no. I haven't thought about this at all. Or if you all took different social welfare organizations. I mean, ideally, you'd take all the same one, but what you are saying is that "we all live in different places, we have--"

Bob: Well, we're dividing it into different areas.

Carrie: Into different places.

Bob: Different geographical areas.
Carrie: So your cultural scene is alike in that
Bob: So you started analyzing this already.
Carrie: No, I'm just being sure that a...
Dan: A teacher.

Carrie: [Denise] is going to say the same thing. She's gonna say that you're not focused enough, that you're going to end up with--exactly what they said--too many different things.

Bob: She's gonna say, Why? Why? [Laughter]

My suggestion that the group choose a more focused topic and research a single cultural scene rather than multiple ones was no doubt a "teacherly" suggestion. I even invoked Denise's name in support of my suggestion, and Bob and Dan clearly recognized the authority associated with words like "analyze" and "focus." The introduction of what students perceived to be an authoritative perspective on the collaborative research project in general and on Bob's proposed topic in particular seems to have had several effects on the group's continuing negotiation of the topic. First of all, both Dan and Betsy used my comments to bolster their resistance to Bob's topic, but for different reasons. Betsy used my cautions as an opportunity to reiterate her objections to the project, an indication that although she had given in to the group's request that she research the rural poor, she was still reluctant to do so. Now, instead of objecting to the proposed topic on personal
grounds, Betsy appealed to more authoritative criteria by
telling the group the topic was just too "broad." A few
minutes later she offered a more powerful challenge to
Bob's topic by asking, "Does anyone have any better
ideas?"

Dan continued to question whether the research
project as the group had been imagining it would result in
an effective paper, only now he had an ally, one with
institutional authority. Perhaps as a result, Bob and
Gloria stopped responding to Dan's reservations by trying
to convince him that, indeed, the project would work. In
his attempts to come up with versions of Bob's topic that
might work better, Dan began using my suggestion that the
group focus more, which necessarily involved giving up his
efforts to come up with a topic so inclusive that group
members could study different geographical areas or
different but related subjects. For example, Dan said to
Bob:

I just think we're gonna have, [the research
subjects are] similar because they are talking
about poor people, but three different types of
groups, maybe four, maybe five, I don't know.
Maybe we just ought to focus more like on the
street people or the college people or the farm
people.

And neither Bob nor Gloria objected to Dan's proposal to
focus on only one group. In fact, from this point on, the
group's negotiation of their research topic seemed
dominated by an effort to become increasingly focused, an
effort that I supported. When I suggested that they could focus on the main street that ran through campus, Tim, who up until this point had not voiced his view of the topic, enthusiastically agreed. Dan, Tim, Gloria, and Bob negotiated how much of High Street they should research. When Bob continued to want to include a study of downtown as well as campus, Tim responded by first narrowing the topic to "panhandlers, the people on the street," which might indicate that Tim was willing to accommodate Bob's interests. But moments later Tim proposed that the group research only the part of High Street that ran through campus, a move that suggested that choosing a focused topic was more important than considering individual interests. Sensing a moment of consensus, Gloria tried once again to assert a final statement of the group's research topic: "panhandlers on campus."

The group revised the topic twice more during the discussion. Out of a concern that "panhandlers" was too limited a topic, the group agreed to look at all the people on this particular street on campus. As Dan put it, "It's not too broad, it's not too narrow: the people that you see when you are hanging out on High Street." In response, the group began to brainstorm about all the kinds of people they saw every day when they walked down this busy thoroughfare. Although Dan once again raised the issue of the inevitability of their differing
perspectives, this time he seemed to see it as a necessary part of the project and not as a reason to discard the topic. As Dan put it:

Everyone is gonna take a totally different view. I’m not gonna maybe go for the panhandlers where someone else would, and I would focus on ... maybe near the Newport [a campus nightclub] ... right across from the Union. I’d focus on the people you’d see there, and you would focus maybe on the other side. That would be our natural tendency. By next Thursday, which is when our rough draft is due, well next Thursday we’ll all come back and see what we have, or maybe this Tuesday or we call each other up on the phone and talk on some other day.

Perhaps recognizing the wealth of data their multiple perspectives on this scene would yield, Gloria prompted the group to limit their focus again, to the corner of High Street and Fifteenth Avenue. In the few minutes of class remaining, the group hurried to write out their research plan, which included a title offered by Gloria: "Folks on Fifteenth and High."

My reading of this group’s negotiation process suggests that an important factor in their ability to reach a consensus on a topic for their collaborative research paper was their appeal to an established norm for academic writing: focus. When their reasons for proposing or rejecting possible topics were "merely" personal, the group was unable to agree on a topic because doing so would have meant that one group member’s perspective would win out against another’s, and this went
against the group's individualistic conception of the project as allowing each group member to pursue his or her own interests. It also went against Denise's prescription that everyone in the group should genuinely agree on the topic. The group's attempts to enlarge the topic so that each group member could pursue separate interests inevitably failed as well, because as Dan repeatedly pointed out, this approach would make it difficult to produce what their grade on the project depended on: a single coherent text. Although as the excerpts from this discussion illustrated, these students had differing perspectives on the project, the group did not talk openly about their competing and conflicting interests. They did acknowledge their differing perspectives, but they saw them as problems--Betsy wasn't "open" to Bob's topic and Dan was worrying unnecessarily. At this point, they seemed unable to agree on a common goal that was more important than individual interests. They kept trying to find a topic that would allow them to avoid dealing with these competing interests. But to no avail.

The consensus the group ultimately reached was in many ways a productive one. They did end up choosing an appropriate topic, one that from my perspective and from Denise's met the requirements of the assignment and thus the established standards of Denise's classroom. As the group moved toward an agreement to research the different
kinds of people they would see on the corner of Fifteenth and High Streets, there was none of the verbal opposition that characterized the first half of the discussion. Still, it is possible to see the group's consensus, motivated as it was by an appeal to academic standards, as resulting in the marginalization or erasure of dissenting views. For example, Bob had been adamant about how difficult it would be for him to come to campus to do his research, and the group had agreed to a topic that made it impossible for him to do otherwise. More troubling perhaps than the marginalization of Bob's view was the erasure of Betsy's perspective on the topic the group finally chose. Betsy remained silent from the time Dan suggested that the group study High Street until the end of the discussion. As Gloria was writing up the group's research plan, they finally addressed Betsy's silence:

Gloria: Is that OK with everyone? "Folks on Fifteenth and High?"

Dan [to Betsy]: What do you think?

Gloria: Betsy?

Betsy: I don't know what's going on.

Although Betsy had not expressed opposition to the group's decision to research the corner of Fifteenth and High Street, her closing remarks indicate that she did not share the group's enthusiasm about the agreement that they finally arrived at. If Betsy's perspective on the
collaborative project was characterized by a concern that the topic be interesting to her and that it not require her to do research that would make her uncomfortable by having to interview people she didn’t know, for example, Betsy may have had reservations about pursuing the research topic the group had chosen. Although she was a full-time student, being married and a commuter may have led her to be less interested in the campus culture than were Dan, Tim, and Gloria. Even Bob, who disliked the idea of doing research on campus, had expressed an interest in researching the panhandlers that he had had encounters with there. In contrast, Betsy had expressed no interest in the research site the group identified. Her silence may very well have represented a passive dissent, one that went unacknowledged as the group pressed on to complete their plan to research a topic that had met with the approval of the authoritative academic community.

The Group Progress Report

This group’s process of coming to consensus about a topic for collaborative research suggests that the group moved from an individualistic conception of the group project, one that would have allowed them to pursue their differing interests without negotiating, to a conception of the project more in line with Denise’s goal that they bring their differing perspectives together in researching
a single cultural group or scene. In spite of their agreement on the topic, however, this group attempted to pursue their collaborative project as separate individuals working independently. During a required group meeting with Denise at which they were to report on the progress of their research, the group revealed their conception of the collaborative research project as a compilation, an adding together, of their independent research. Their commitment to this conception of the project became especially clear when they resisted Denise's urging that they begin as a group to analyze the whole of their data in order to generalize from them.

The ironic thing about this group's report on their progress was the spirit of solidarity they expressed. Unlike the group's discussion of possible topics, which was pervaded by conflict, during the progress report, the group represented itself as a consensual unit. For example, when Denise asked a question, one group member would respond and the others would build on that response. They also frequently completed each other's sentences, added "yeah" after one of them spoke, and laughed as a group. Not once during the group report did Dan, Bob, Tim, or Betsy disagree with each other.

Although the group may have been trying especially hard to give Denise the impression that all was well, another reason the group was able to express such
agreement on the status of their research was that each group member present had fulfilled his or her individual responsibility to spend some time observing the research site. In that respect, Dan, Bob, Tim, and Betsy saw each other as equal contributors. The group had also begun imagining how their different perspectives on the research site could work together and thus felt fairly confident that they could complete the research project successfully. As Dan reported it, "This is the best part, because Tuesday we came in [to class] and we had no idea what everybody was doing. We were confused, and I didn't think it was going to fall together, and because someone up there likes us, it just fell together." It is interesting that Dan described the group's success at this point as the result of good fortune and not as a result of their having successfully negotiated an agreement about how to complete the project. What made it possible for the group's research to "fall together" was an idea--attributed to Bob and Dan--for organizing the paper that would allow them to incorporate easily the very different kinds of research they had gathered: they would describe how the cultural scene changed over the course of a day or a week. As they conceived of it, this approach meant that they could simply splice together their various observations of the scene, depending on what time of day the observation had taken place.
It is not surprising that the idea of merely sequencing their individual parts would appeal so strongly to this group since their observations of the corner of Fifteenth and High differed markedly. Dan focused on people (mostly young women) who were walking down the street and on a busy pizza restaurant frequented by sorority and fraternity members; Bob focused on the hot rods cruising High Street, and he interviewed a man who asked him for money, claiming his car had run out of gas; Tim studied the clientele in four different restaurants on this corner, and Betsy drew elaborate maps of people's walking patterns. 29 Writing a chronological narrative of the happenings on Fifteenth and High Streets, an approach similar to Bob's and Dan's handling of the discussions of Lakota Woman and the readings on racism, would allow the group to include everyone's research without having to discuss their various interpretations of the scene and determine the relationships among them. In Dan's words:

During the day, pretty much this is what our main thing is going to be, there's a lot of delivery trucks and people are hurrying off to class. And then, about mid-day to mid-afternoon, it's a slow change; people start hanging out there more after class and whatnot, and there's still people going to class and going to the oval [the lawn in the center of campus]. And then at night is where, there's just a total difference. People are coming home

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29 I have left out Gloria, because at this point the group did not know what research she had done. She ended up focusing on the arts events that took place in the area.
from their last class, but like the [Flying] Tomato was jumping with activity. And there's just people on the streets and. . . .

As the group saw it, all they needed to be ready to write their paper was to do some additional research during times no one had yet observed, like weekends.

Although Denise was pleased that the group was moving forward in their research and seemed enthusiastic about their project, she was concerned that they had not yet begun to analyze their data or draw generalizations from it, two academic skills submerged within the assignment, to use Denise's characterization. Analysis and generalization are skills that would require the group to compare and contrast their differing perspectives on their research and to come to agreement about what their observations as a whole meant. When Denise suggested that they move from merely describing their cultural scene to analyzing it, the group resisted:

Denise: I still have a question for you guys about the paper, which is, it sounds like what you are writing here, the sections that you just handed each other, are descriptions so far. You still really need to decide what you are going to do. The description is good, I mean, that's one big chunk of this paper, but you still need to talk about the other part of how you analyze, and how are you going to talk about it and why these certain groups come there, why they change.

Dan: Ah, there's the word--"Why?"

Denise: All those big words need to come in at some point, and you need to make that move beyond description.
Dan: Once again, that little partner over there with the tape recorder [referring to me].

Tim: Ah, no.

Dan: Why do we always have to do the "whys"? Why do you constantly say "why"?

Denise: Because this is college, and part of what you do is answer the question "why."

Betsy: But it's going to be our opinion, right?

Denise: Well, yes.

Bob: [We've] spent years learning that "why."

Denise: It's got to make sense in terms of what you've seen and what you've described.

Betsy: We can do that.

Tim: Yeah.

Dan: I hate that part, though.

Denise: But that might be something you want to sit down and talk about on Sunday. Perhaps you can all try to get as much of your description going as you can--you said you were meeting on Sunday--and everyone can do descriptions of what can we make of that.

Tim: Yeah, that's something we'll have to figure out once we get all the descriptions together and get it organized a little bit--well, this fits here and this fits here and where can we, what can we generate once we have all this together.

Dan initially resisted Denise's suggestions because of the difficulty of doing the "whys", as he called it, which may have been one reason he tried to pass the job of analysis
off to me. Both Betsy and Tim expressed optimism that the group could do what Denise was asking, perhaps because they wanted to assure her—and themselves—that the group could complete the project successfully, something they had been confident about at the beginning of their meeting with Denise. But other comments they made suggest that they imagined the move toward analysis of their data would not necessarily require them to give up their individualistic approach to the research project. Note Betsy’s request for assurance that the analysis could be based on their "opinion," a request that may have been motivated by a wish to preserve her individual opinion. Even Tim, the group member who had the most experience and facility with academic writing, imagined that they would be able to do group analysis of the data after they had compiled and organized their individually-produced parts of the paper.

When Denise insisted that the group consider how they would analyze and come to conclusions about their data, they were forced to recognize that doing so would require that they take into account their differing perspectives, an activity which this group wanted to avoid:

30 Remember that during the group’s discussion of their topic, Gloria had tried to assign Tim the job of analyzing the group’s fieldnotes. Tim, too, was seen as someone who could bring special academic skills to the collaborative project.
Betsy: Do we all have to agree on the opinion or can we all have a different opinion?

Denise: You can have your different opinions if you want, if it doesn't, you want to try to reach a consensus if you can. If you can't reach a consensus then you want to talk about maybe "[Bob] and [Tim] thought this means but [Betsy] and [Dan] thought it meant this." If you come up . . .

Dan: Can we put a little asterisk saying that these opinions don't necessarily reflect the whole group?

[Laughter]

Tim: We can do this.

Denise: Yes, yes, but if you end up splitting like that, what do you think it is about the people involved that makes them hold those different opinions--you want to analyze yourselves a little bit. . . .

Dan: Well, I thought it was pretty neat just the fact that we all went to the same place and we all looked at different things.

It is not surprising that Betsy, whose perspective had frequently differed from her group members' and had been consistently marginalized by the group, was concerned with having to reach consensus on an interpretation of the data. But Dan, too, worried about having to make statements in the paper that purportedly reflected everyone's thinking, especially since, as Dan told Denise, everyone in the group approached their research so differently. Although the group may have resisted Denise's push toward analysis primarily because of the work involved. Analyzing data in order to determine its
significance is certainly more difficult than simply describing it. But this group may have anticipated that analysis would be especially difficult for them, since it would require confronting and resolving their differences in perspective.

At this point, the group did not have any specific reason to expect that collaborative analysis would result in painful conflict. Unlike the essays on racism which led group members to respond in ways that they found difficult to discuss with the others in their group, the research site that they chose did not elicit emotionally charged responses: Bob observed hotrods, Dan observed young women, Tim observed restaurants, Betsy observed walking patterns. Still, each group member's observations reflected of his or her individual perception of the corner of Fifteenth and High Street, and the group seemed to resist having to challenge those perceptions.

There was one difference in perception that the group could not avoid dealing with: the perception of Dan, Bob, Betsy, and Tim that Gloria was not doing her fair share of the project, which conflicted with Gloria's perception that she was participating to the best of her ability. As the group reported to Denise on the progress of their research, they mentioned several times that they did not know what, if anything, Gloria had done on the project. As Dan explained it, he and the other three group members
present had each spent some time individually observing Fifteenth and High, and he had observed with each of them at least once. The group had no evidence that Gloria had observed the research site. The fact that Gloria failed to attend this required group meeting with Denise increased the group's suspicion that Gloria was abdicating her responsibility.

Because the group seemed to conceive of the collaborative research project as a compilation of individually-authored parts, they expected each member of the group to act independently but to contribute equally to the project. This individualistic conception of the project led the group to see Gloria's failure to contribute as her problem, rather than the group's problem. They thus appealed to Denise to use her authority to confront Gloria and, if necessary, to penalize her by lowering her grade on the project. When Denise reiterated that everyone in the group would receive the same grade and insisted that it was the group's responsibility to negotiate with Gloria about her role in the project, the group strongly objected:

Denise: At some point you all are going to need to talk about... if you don't feel like she is pulling her weight, you're going to need to talk about this.

Dan: Well, we don't know what she's pulling right now because we
Denise: Because you don’t know what she’s doing.

Bob: Well, she’s old enough to be responsible for herself and her actions.

Betsy: Yeah, she was here when we said we were going to be here.

Dan: Remember, I specifically drew the map [to Denise’s office], and she was there.

Denise: I think you want to decide how you want to deal with issues of responsibility in the group.

Dan: We want to shoot her.

Denise: You’re writing one paper as a whole; [Gloria] is getting whatever grade you’re getting. OK? If that feels unfair to you, if she hasn’t been pulling her weight, then it’s up to you to do something about it. If you are fine with the fact that she’ll get whatever you get. . . .

Betsy: She’s going to get the same grade that we do?

Denise: Everyone’s going to get a grade on the paper; you’re writing one paper, one grade.

Bob: Well, that’s pretty unfair, because it’s obvious this one person is not contributing.

Betsy: Yeah.

Denise: That’s why it’s up to the group to try to pull this all together.

Dan: Well, aren’t you supposed to do the hammer of justice thing?

Although these four members of the group shared a perception that Gloria’s participation had been inadequate, they also shared a reluctance to confront her or discuss with her what she perceived her role in the
project to be. As Bob saw it, each group member should work independently and be evaluated independently, and as Dan expressed it, conflicts within the group should be resolved by an external authority--by Denise, acting as "the hammer of justice." In one sense, this group can not be blamed for imposing individualistic expectations on collaboration. It seems that little in their educational experience had prepared them for the kind of collaboration Denise expected in which group members would share responsibility for making decisions, for maintaining productive group relations, and for turning out a product that represented a synthesis of multiple points of view. They were accustomed to being accountable only to the teacher and did not wish to become "interdependent" in the way Kenneth Bruffee recommends.

At the end of their progress report, the group reluctantly agreed to talk to Gloria about their concerns. Denise assured them that she would act as a mediator if necessary, after the group had done everything they could to resolve the conflict themselves. Ironically, the conflict was resolved--if that is the right word--by happenstance. The group progress meeting took place on a Thursday. The group met on Sunday, with all group members present, and by that time Gloria had done some of her research. The issue of her limited participation in the group project was not brought up, although Gloria did
apologize for missing the meeting. On Monday night, each
group member, including Gloria, brought his or her part of
the draft to Tim's room so that he could enter the parts
on his computer and print out a rough draft of the whole
paper which was due in class on the following morning.\footnote{Pan complained to me that Gloria had not yet turned
in her contribution when he left Tim's dorm room that
night, but she must have given something to Tim in the
early morning because her work does appear in the group's
first draft.} The group never confronted Gloria, acting instead as
though her missing deadlines and meetings was not a
problem. By not confronting her, they avoided conflict
and were thus able to maintain a satisfactory if less than
optimal working relationship.

What the group didn't know is that another student, a
friend of Gloria's who was also the only other African
American in the class, had overheard them complaining to
Denise and reported their complaints to Gloria, who felt
less reticent than they did about staging a confrontation.
On Tuesday, the day the group's rough draft was due,
Gloria burst into class demanding to know why the group
had been criticizing her behind her back. Although Gloria
admitted that she had not done her research as early as
the others had, and she apologized for missing the
progress report meeting, she argued that she had since
made up for these problems and accused them of being too

\footnote{Pan complained to me that Gloria had not yet turned
in her contribution when he left Tim's dorm room that
night, but she must have given something to Tim in the
early morning because her work does appear in the group's
first draft.}
quick to make negative comments about her. The group seemed stunned by her outburst, but Dan tried to bring them back to an even keel by assuring Gloria that although at the time of the progress meeting they hadn’t known what was going on with her, everything was fine now. It seems likely that this was exactly the kind of confrontation the group wanted to avoid, one in which group members’ differing perspectives resulted in painful conflict that might interfere with their ability to complete the collaborative project. However, instead of using this opportunity to discuss their differing perceptions of group members’ roles and responsibilities and to make decisions about how to handle future conflicts, the group turned their attention to the task Denise had assigned them to do—responding to another group’s draft—leaving Gloria to comment, "You couldn’t wait to cut me down, [you were] quick to cut my throat."

Although it seemed important to Dan to act as though there were no longer a conflict, the conflict was far from resolved. Immediately after class, Dan went to Denise to talk about the group’s problems and to ask if they could break up the group. In this, he was acting independently (not a surprise); he did not consult his group members prior to presenting his proposal to Denise. In response to his request, Denise restated her commitment to the collaborative project and gave him suggestions for how he
might act as a group mediator should conflicts continue to erupt. Dan’s meeting with Denise highlighted the degree to which this group was motivated to avoid conflict. Even Dan, the group member who had expressed the least reservation about doing a collaborative research project, responded to conflict within the group by appealing to an established authority and by proposing to go it alone.

Armed with Denise’s ideas for dealing with the group’s conflicts, Dan accepted the responsibility to act as a mediator and to try to keep the group functioning. As Denise pointed out, with only a week to go until the final draft of the research paper was due, he really had little choice but to do everything he could to make the group project work.

Confronting Differences in (Collaborative) Writing

One conflict that Dan couldn’t mediate was the one that arose as a result of what group members described as their differing writing styles. The group had imagined that writing their collaborative research paper would be a matter of adding together and organizing their individually-authored parts, but when they attempted to do so they were struck—and perplexed—by the differences in their writing. As Dan explained it, although the group had regularly read each other’s response papers, they hadn’t really read them: "I don’t think we really
commented on how the writing was or anything. . . . And I
guess this [collaborative paper] is the first time we
really read each other's work, 'cause we never read
anybody's drafts or anything. Wow, we're in a different,
whew!" Although during the process of completing the
collaborative research project, students did have the
opportunity to read and respond to each other's writing,
given the pressure of time and their own commuting
schedules, they had few opportunities to respond
collaboratively to their paper. As a result, there was
little face-to-face negotiation of their differing views
on how the paper ought to be written, and little
negotiation of how to deal with their differing writing
styles. Ultimately, the responsibility for transforming
their individually-authored texts into a single coherent
final paper was left in the hands of a few, primarily Tim
and Dan. The end result was a text that adequately met
the established standards of academic writing—Denise gave
the group a "B" for their final paper—but did so by
marginalizing or erasing some group members' writing.

Although Denise had given the groups the option of
sitting in front of a computer and composing their paper

32 Although the group had participated in a peer
responding workshop during which group members were to
respond to drafts of each other's second essay, at Dan's
urging the group chose to read their drafts aloud and talk
about them rather than read them.
together, this group let Denise know that because of their
various circumstances they would not be able to write the
paper in this way. She suggested that they write
different parts and then work as a group to put them
together, and they agreed. Unfortunately, only Tim and
Dan, who both lived on campus, were actually available to
construct the group’s first complete draft. They did so
on Tim’s computer, in his dorm room, the night before the
draft was due for peer response. In one sense, Tim and
Dan were good group delegates. Tim was an excellent
writer and had volunteered the use of his computer; Dan
was the group leader and mediator, and he had spent some
time doing research with everyone in the group but Gloria,
so he was familiar with the others’ work and could help
make sense of their individual drafts. But during the
process of putting together the first group draft, Tim and
Dan were faced with the realization that their
collaborative research paper could not be a mere stringing
together of individually-authored sections, not if it was
to meet the familiar norms of academic writing that
dictated that texts be focused, coherent, and have a
consistent style.

For this preliminary draft, Tim and Dan typed in
everyone’s contributions in their original form—with the
exception of Betsy's part. Although in their progress meeting with Denise, the group had expressed enthusiasm about the very different approaches each had taken on the research scene—including Betsy's approach—for Tim and Dan this valuing of different perspectives seemed to work better in theory than it did in practice. In the group progress meeting, Dan had described Betsy's mapping out of walking patterns as "crazy" but reflective of her unique research perspective. However, when Tim and Dan were faced with how to incorporate into the group's draft Betsy's three-color map and two paragraph description of where people walked, Tim was so frustrated that he just left it out. Tim also decided, after Dan had left for the night, to cut in half Dan's part, which presented some history of the street corner and described some of the architecture of the area, two of Dan's research interests. In planning the collaborative research project, it had seemed important to preserve each group member's individual perceptions of the research scene. As Bob described it, "Everyone, kind of on their own without too much discussion, kind of naturally picked a little bit different area, within their background interests. . . .

33 Although I was not present at the all-night drafting session that took place in Tim's dorm room, I was able to reconstruct the process I am reporting here based on information from interviews with group members and by examining the group's draft in various stages.
It was kind of helpful [that people looked at different things] because we didn’t have to end up [with] people being assigned different aspects that would have been against a preference." But when putting together these individual approaches, or more specifically, when Tim attempted to put them together, the goal of preserving individual perceptions seemed to conflict with the goal of constructing a coherent paper.

Tim and Dan talked about the difficulty of putting together the draft by focusing on differences in group members’ writing styles. On the day the group’s draft was due in class for peer response--by another group--Dan asked me if I would respond to it as well, commenting, "If you could help out, we’d very much appreciate it. This is the roughest rough draft that I’ve ever seen." After I had read quickly through the draft, Dan asked, "Do you notice the drastic changes in writing styles? . . . I thought you could see [it] drastically." The word "drastic" suggests that he feared these differences in writing styles might have serious consequences for the group. In an interview the next day, Dan reiterated his concern about the incompatibility of group members’ preferred styles:

When I first read everybody’s different [parts], I just thought it was really different. I still think it’s different, maybe it’s just cause I know it’s their part or whatnot. It’s just that the style of writing--[Gloria’s] is kind of
artsy-fartsy type; it has thoughts but it flows; [Betsy's] was more like she was talking, and talking in a story-type; [Bob's] was one-on-one, him versus the bum talking; and then [Tim's], it seemed pretty well done; and then mine, it used to be about that big [measuring out about a page with his hands], and now it's about that big [measuring out a few inches with his fingers].

Note that although Dan seemed troubled by the differences he describes, he does not talk about any one group member's writing style disparagingly. Even his comment that Gloria's style is "artsy-fartsy" is followed by a recognition that it expressed ideas and "flows." Perhaps Dan was hesitant to criticize his group members' writing, because his, too, had been cut by Tim. Dan's reaction to the differences in his group members' writing parallels his reaction to the group's discussion of topics. He wanted to choose a topic that reflected everyone's interests equally but that would also result in a successful group project. Similarly, he seemed to appreciate each group member's writing style, but he also wanted to produce a good final paper.

In contrast with Dan's pluralistic approach, Tim's view of his group members' writing was much more hierarchical. Tim was a confident writer, one who had done well in writing classes in the past and who also did a lot of writing on his own. Tim told me that in his first-year composition class, his teacher had suggested that he "lower [his] writing level to that of the other
students," and he had resented the suggestion. Given his perception of himself as a writer, it is not surprising that Tim felt freer than did Dan to criticize his peers:

I don't really care for [writing as a group]. Especially with our group. Ours is probably the most diverse group, diverse writing styles. Trying to get the paper to look like it's cohesive will be really hard. [Bob] is basically a storyteller. That's OK if you're writing fiction, but we're writing an analytical paper. His style isn't any good for that. [Gloria's] style is wordy. I'm wordy, but [Gloria] makes me look like Ernest Hemingway. [Betsy], for want of a better term, is a hick. She's a nice person, but she doesn't write real well.

Here Tim revealed his alliance with established academic norms, particularly the ones that dictated that texts should be cohesive and that they should be written in a style appropriate to a given genre. In the case of an analytic paper, a narrative style was unacceptable, and so was a "wordy" style. Betsy's style, which did not always conform to rules of Standard Edited English, was the most unacceptable of all. Although Tim did not mention Dan's writing, he must have found something wrong with it to justify cutting it so severely in the first draft.

In addition to complaining about the inadequacy of his group members' writing, Tim found their approaches to the research inadequate as well. In particular, he complained that Gloria and Betsy had picked "off the wall" things to observe and that no one in the group had done as much research as he had. As he described it, "The day we
agreed we would have our research done, I was the only one with my research done. I’d been out there for seven hours. [Dan] had been out there for maybe an hour. [Betsy] had been in the library for a little while. [Bob] was still out of town." Thus, in addition to seeing himself as the best writer in the group, Tim saw himself as the only group member who was doing what he was supposed to. In Tim’s words, "I don’t like group work when the work is subjective, based on your opinion, because you have to rely on other people. You have to worry about your own competence and other people’s competence, too. I don’t want to sound arrogant, but I’m usually the one that pulls the group along behind me."

Tim’s predisposition against collaborative writing, coupled with his view that his group members were not as capable as he, likely affected Tim’s decision to respond to the differences in group members’ writing by seeking to eliminate them in the group’s draft. Because he had primary responsibility for the draft and because he was constructing it the night before it was due, he did not negotiate with the others about how to resolve the differences in their writing—he simply made executive decisions, decisions which he justified in terms of academic norms for writing analytic papers.

Although Dan was able to joke about having his part cut in half, Betsy was deeply upset at having her
contribution to the first draft erased. At the beginning of class the day the draft was due, Tim told Betsy that he and Dan had not typed in her part because they couldn't read it. In private, he told me that what she had given him barely qualified as field notes. For the rest of the class period during which the groups were to offer a response to another group's draft, Betsy did not participate in what was supposed to be a collaborative activity. Instead of moving her desk into the familiar group circle, she kept it facing the front of the room, and throughout the class, she sat with her face buried in the papers on her desk. After class, she asked me if I would help her write her section, since she didn't know what the group wanted her to do. Once again, members of this group responded to the conflict that arose over their differing perspectives by appealing to the external authority of academic norms: Tim had appealed to the norms of academic writing, and Betsy appealed to me.\footnote{As it turned out, Betsy was able to write a new part for the group paper without my help. Based on their reading of the draft, the group decided that they needed some general description of the variety of people they had observed, and they assigned Betsy to write that description. She was thus the only member of the group who was prevented from following her initial research interests, a fact that conflicted with Bob's version of the story.} The group did have an opportunity to offer their response to the draft that Tim (and Dan) constructed, but they had
little time to do so, since the final draft was due the following week. Dan instructed each person in the group to make written comments on the draft, and to add material in places where their research related to what was already written. Dan recognized that although the group had done their research independently, there was some overlap: they had, after all, researched the same cultural scene. Unfortunately, the group did not meet to revise the draft together, but responded to the draft individually, and turned over their responses to Tim and Dan who were again responsible for putting together the group’s final draft. Bob volunteered to join them for part of this last drafting session. The most substantive written response to the group’s draft came from the students whom Donna assigned to respond to the rough draft in class; I also responded carefully in writing to the group’s draft. Tim did a close reading of the draft that he and Dan had put together, writing questions in the margins about organization and purpose as well as making editing suggestions. Betsy and Dan provided written responses to the first few pages of the draft, but they seem not to have made it the whole way through. The evidence
available to me suggests that neither Bob nor Gloria responded to the draft.\textsuperscript{35}

The group's efforts to revise the final draft of their paper were frustrated by the additional responsibility of preparing for the oral presentation of their research, which was due on the same day as the final draft, the last day of class. Because everyone was required to participate in the oral presentation, it made sense that group members worried more about what they would say in front of the class than they did about revising the final draft. The group was also somewhat burdened by their idea to use slides of Fifteenth and High as part of their presentation, which meant that someone had to shoot the slides, get them developed, and then put them in a logical order in preparation for the oral presentation. At this point, there was so much work to do that it seemed more efficient for the group to complete tasks individually rather than collaboratively. For example, Bob had a good 35mm camera, so he took slides, and Dan had a friend who worked in an all-night photo shop, so he got the slides developed.

\textsuperscript{35} Dan agreed to save for me all of the written material from the group project, including fieldnotes and early drafts. Although it is possible that Bob and Gloria's comments on the draft were lost, there were several copies of the draft that had no comments on them. It seems likely that these belonged to Bob and Gloria.
As Bob wrote in his personal evaluation of the group project, "This final paper finally took shape in the wee hours of the eleventh hour." Given the real time crunch they were in--Tim and Dan were still typing at 6:00 a.m. and the paper was due at 10:00 a.m.--it is not surprising that Tim chose the most expedient route and simply used his discretion in revising the paper. In addition to making large changes in organization, he edited and then added the new material that Betsy and Dan had provided, including a number of photographs and cartoons that Dan had found in the University's archives. Tim made substantive changes in Gloria's and Bob's parts as well. For example, in the final draft, Tim cut the stories Bob had written for the first draft about interviewing two men who had tried begging money from him, stories that Tim had found inappropriate in an analytical paper. He also made stylistic changes in Gloria's text to make it less "wordy."\footnote{In Tim's individual evaluation of the project, addressed to Denise, he made it even more clear that he found Gloria's writing inappropriate. As he told Denise, "Her writing style is wordy, even compared to my own, and evasive; rather than try to get the facts down, she's generally more worried about how to make her writing seem more flowery and impressive. This is partly why her sections (trust me, you'll know her sections when you read them) have the higher bullshit to information ratio than anyone else's writing."} Perhaps the most significant contribution that Tim and Dan made to the final draft was writing a conclusion...
for the paper. In the conclusion, Tim and Dan attempted
to generalize from their data and draw connections between
their research project and the issues raised by "The
American Experience," a requirement of the assignment.
Because the conclusion also purports to represent the
group’s experience of the collaborative project, it is
interesting to compare it with the evaluation of the group
project that each member of the group wrote individually.
Here is the conclusion Tim and Dan constructed for Denise
as reader:

With such a wide variety of people that can be
found, it is quite easy to see why Fifteenth and
High can be considered a "melting pot." At any
given time in the day, or any day in the year,
one can see someone of just about any race,
nationality, religion, or sexual preference.
There are no boundaries as far as this corner
is concerned. It is in this place that all
walks of life seem to live in harmony, or at
least tolerate each other. Possibly the best
element of the diversity in this area is the
group charged with creating this paper. The
chosen method of observation for the group was
to sit near the corner and take notes on
whatever caught their eye. This resulted in
wildly different observations which were
difficult to correlate, as each group member
focused on a different aspect of the cultural
scene. Some focused on the bands in the area,
others looked more at the local restaurants, and
still others picked various individuals or
groups from the crowds to observe. In
assembling this paper, a wide range of interests
and writing styles had to be accommodated, and a
lot of compromise was necessary. In the end,
however, things worked out, primarily because
the people involved wanted them to work and were
willing to compromise. The group members came
to realize just how diverse their class was, and
thus on a larger scale, realized how truly
diverse the world is.
Remember that this tribute to diversity was written by only two members of the group, one of whom had privately expressed a less generous view of the group's differences.

Although it is true that completing the project required compromise, it is also true that some group members had to compromise more than others. Betsy, for example, seemed to do more than her share of compromising. She compromised on the topic, she compromised on the research she had to do, and her writing was compromised by Tim's editing. In contrast, Tim compromised little. He had suggested researching the campus stretch of High Street, he chose to research the restaurants in the area, all of his material was included in the final draft, and only he edited his writing. Group members may have had equal responsibility for the group project, but they did not have equal status in the group. Power over the final outcome of the collaborative project—the part that counted most—was concentrated in the hands of a few who had neither the time nor the inclination to make sure that all group members' perspectives were reflected equally.

Over the course of the research process, the group moved from an individualistic approach that allowed for autonomy to a hierarchical approach in which a few group members assumed authority over the others.

Although in the conclusion to their research paper, Tim and Dan portrayed the group as a "melting pot" of
diversity that existed together in harmony—or at least tolerated each other—as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, the group's collaborative process was characterized by disharmony and dissensus. In order to complete the project, the group tried to ignore their differences, but ignoring them is not the same as tolerating them, and it is certainly not the same as acknowledging them and valuing them. Group members' individual responses to the collaborative project, those they wrote for Denise and those they voiced in interviews with me, emphasized not the ways in which their educational experience had been enriched by having the opportunity to confront the differing perspectives of others, but their frustration at being forced to act collaboratively with others who they did not see as equals or who they felt did not treat them fairly:

Bob: I felt cooperation as a whole was lacking throughout the paper's initial development. . . . Everyone did contribute to the paper's content. But some seemed to put forth a bit more effort.

Tim: I don't care for group projects, especially unstructured projects like this final paper. It's a pain to get the group in one place for any length of time, and getting them to agree on anything is worse.

Dan: I've become the group leader, somehow, and did a majority of the work. I've been constantly busy doing this project and working with everyone in the group. Besides organizing the whole project, I spent a lot of money, time, and effort to make this whole thing work, and still I think it could be better. . . . All of
the creative ideas were mine, and I feel the work was not evenly distributed.

Gloria: After reading the final copy, I found that my part was edited without my permission. I am upset with the [oral] presentation and how they totally left me out. ... I'm pissed, and I hope their work doesn't reflect my abilities.

Only Betsy not openly criticize her group members in her individual evaluation. But she didn't praise them either. As Betsy put it, "I think everyone in our group did their share. But since everyone did such different things, it's hard to say who did more and who did less. ... I feel that I did my share, and I hope the rest of my group feels the same."

Although Betsy's response to the collaborative project is not as critical as those written by her group members, all the responses reflect the individualist assumptions that seemed to drive the group: that ideas can be owned individually, that only individual work is a fair representation of a person's abilities, and that people's differences make it difficult if not impossible for them to work together productively. These students saw each other not as a group who could draw on each other's resources in order to produce a final product more rich and complex than any one of them could complete alone, but as an aggregate of individuals, forced to struggle against each other's competing needs, ideas, egos, writing styles, and work habits in order to produce a final product that
none of them felt reflected what each was capable of. Throughout the project, members of the group contested for both independence and for power, not so much power over others, but power over the group project, which meant power over themselves and their work.

A number of personal, social, and institutional factors combined to make these students' experience of the collaborative research/writing process particularly difficult. Although I have described the group in general as individualistic, several of the students were especially so. For example, Bob acknowledged that learning to get along with others who are different from you is important, since wherever you work, "you're gonna have one [person] on each side of you," but he also admitted that "I'd just as soon go to Canada, Winnipeg, way up in the boonies, but how are you gonna make any money. . . . Yeah, I'm a loner, but obviously, I don't live in aloner town." Betsy, too, expressed a personal predisposition against working in groups, but for different reasons. As Betsy put it, "I'm a shy person; I don't like meeting people. . . . I just get the feeling people aren't going to like me and stuff like that, so I don't say much to them, and they don't say nothing to me, and I'm comfortable with that." When assigned to this group, however, Betsy liked them, because "they were all easy going." If Betsy was going to have to work with a
group, she wanted to like them, and she wanted them to like her. Her need to be liked by the group must have made it especially difficult for her to have her work rejected by them. In addition, Betsy expressed an extreme resentment of being treated as though she were stupid, which she felt Gloria was guilty of, and which the group's response to her writing might have suggested.

Gloria's resistance to collaborative work was both personal and social. According to Gloria, "Too many people think they know it all, and they are not really willing to listen. Everybody is too busy ... thinking they are right." What made group work difficult for Gloria was that "too many people's egos are involved." Hers included. Gloria was especially worried about getting credit for her ideas. As she put it, "I'd rather have the opportunity for my own work to be my own, because usually I don't get credit in a group situation. Even though I have a strong personality, I don't get credit for my own work." In this group situation, Gloria's fear was well-founded, as the group's progress report to Denise revealed.

Gloria explained her preference for individual work and her anxiety over participating in group work as stemming from her creative personality. But she also related it to her racial difference: "I don't like to cry 'racism' or any of that stuff, but I'm telling you, being
black in an all-white environment does create certain . . . problems." Gloria described one consequence of being black in an all-white group: "I feel like whatever I do, and it's not my imagination, whatever I do, whatever I might do wrong is focused on, they really are, because I'm different." Although racial difference was not an overt issue in the collaborative research project, it was a covert issue that pervaded the history of this group's work together. As I noted in Chapter IV, every member of this group expressed some anxiety over dealing with the issue of racial difference, a fact that must have affected the group's working relationship. The spirit of solidarity that I saw Bob, Betsy, Dan, and Tim express during the progress meeting with Denise I did not see reenacted when Gloria was present. Even during the one group meeting that everyone in the group described in positive terms—they met for pizza and beer at the corner of Fifteenth and High the Sunday night before their first draft was due—Betsy claimed that Gloria had been yelling at her to write her newly assigned part of the paper by the next day. The anger that Betsy felt toward Gloria that night—and throughout the project—likely interrupted any group solidarity the others might have felt.

It is interesting that both Betsy and Gloria were marginalized by the rest of the group, but on different grounds. To some extent this marginalization was
circumstantial. Both of them commuted from a distance, and both had other obligations in addition to school—Gloria worked at a large department store downtown, and, as Betsy put it, "I got my husband to cook for at 5:00; I can’t be running up here every night at 7:00." But neither Betsy’s nor Gloria’s contributions to the group project were valued as much as those made by Bob, Dan, and Tim. Although none of the men in the group made openly disparaging remarks about women, and none blamed what they saw to be Gloria’s and Betsy’s inadequacies on the fact that they were women, in separate contexts, all three made remarks that suggested they favored old-fashioned gender distinctions. For example, Bob referred to his wife as "my old lady," Dan made jokes about having focused on the blonds in cut-off shorts during one of his evenings of observing Fifteenth and High, and Tim argued in his response paper on gender issues that chivalry should not be dead. In addition, the men seemed to share an alliance that did not include the women in the group. Dan and Bob spent several evenings together drinking beer and observing the research site, and all the writing and revising of the paper went on in Tim’s dorm room. Gloria
and Betsy were likely to have felt unwelcome at these gatherings.37

In addition to factors of racial and gender differences, differences in age also had an effect on this group. Whenever the group talked about their differences, they always included the fact that Bob was older. Although being a returning student in his forties did make Bob an outsider to some extent, it also gave him a sense of authority over the others, especially in terms of managing the work of the group.38 Bob subscribed to an individualist work ethic, which emphasized taking personal responsibility for one's work (Bob had owned his own business at one time.) And for him, the same rules applied to school: "If you gotta do it, you've gotta overlook the little things, there's no excuses. . . . That's the way it is. You go to work on Monday or you don't go to work on Monday and you're fired." From Bob's point of view, the students in his group were not mature enough to handle this kind of responsibility. As Bob put it, "I'm gonna call them "kids" because they are. They

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37 During the one beer and pizza meeting Betsy did attend, she brought her husband. Unfortunately, they drank too much, stayed too late, and her husband ended up being late for work the next day, something Betsy felt responsible for.

38 Gloria, too, was older than her group members, but her age did not seem to enhance the group's view of her as an authority.
haven't experienced some of these things, and they think that there's an excuse for everything, and some of them will have a rude awakening." Like Tim, Bob felt that he was the only one who ever had his work done on time. (Ironically, Tim complained of Bob's lax work.) Because he saw himself as more mature and more responsible than his group members, Bob felt justified in acting as a task master, though he admitted he wasn't as "forceful" as he would have been in a real work situation. It seems that at work, Bob was accustomed to acting as a top-down manager, a management strategy that seems inappropriate to the kind of collaborative work Denise envisioned, where group members were supposed to be equals. Bob's efforts to manage the group were also frustrated because the group, especially Tim, did not see Bob as the authority he imagined himself to be.

Clearly, then, this group's collaboration was constrained by personal factors such as group members' differing personalities (Betsy's shyness, Bob's self-identification as a loner) as well as by social factors like differences in race, gender, age, and experience. But perhaps the most powerful constraint on their collaborative work came from institutional forces, especially group members' individualistic assumptions about education, which were manifested in a profound anxiety over being evaluated academically as a group.
This anxiety was perhaps greatest for Tim, who valued academic success highly and who was reluctant to risk that success on "other people's competence." In reflecting on the ultimate goals of "The American Experience," Tim made a remark that helps explain his resistance to collaboration as Denise defined it:

I'm not one for group work, especially with group members from diverse backgrounds. I know that's probably one of the points of the class, but I still don't like it. You're asking people to make comments on something based on their cultural background while at the same time, calling into question their cultural background. It's a hard position to put anybody in.

Tim's cultural background had imbued in him the values of academia. In doing the collaborative project, he was being asked to use his cultural background--white, male, middle-class, allied with academic standards--to fulfill the assignment, while at the same time calling his perspective into question by engaging his group members' differing perspectives and values, including differing values regarding standards for academic writing. As Tim remarked, "It's a hard position to put anybody in." Tim's position as a successful student who knew how to follow the rules was a powerful one. Working with students who did not share his position was supposed to lead him to critique his position, but doing so would have meant giving up his claim to power and success, something he was unwilling to do. And who can blame him? He was, after
all, working in an academic context where the same norms he was supposed to critique would be used to evaluate him, and that evaluation had consequences both for his future and for his immediate identity as a good student.

Denise, too, recognized a conflict between her ideal of collaboration, in which group members' differing perspectives would be valued equally, and the reality of having to grade the product of that collaboration according to established academic standards. As she was grading the collaborative papers, she phoned me to talk about the ambivalence she felt giving Tim a "B" for 30 percent of his grade. Tim was one of the best writers in the class; had he not been weighted down by a complicated and conflictual collaborative process, his research project would have likely turned out better—in terms of academic norms—than the one submitted by the group. In her final comment on this group's paper, Denise wrote, "You should be proud of yourselves. For such a diverse group, this came together well." But in a context where an "A" is valued more highly than a successful collaborative effort, Denise's comment probably provided little consolation, especially for Tim.

Collaborative response groups in composition classrooms work within competing contexts characterized by competing values: that of the university, that of the class itself, and that created by a specific group of
students working together. But for Bob, Betsy, Dan, Gloria, and Tim, there was conflict, but no real competition. The grade on the transcript always wins.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

"By clearly encouraging students to foreground their differences rather than sublimate them for a consensual greater good, we can help them learn firsthand how domination and resistance work. The challenge is how to tolerate our multiple differences while still struggling communally to produce literate and responsible discourse. That is just the challenging enterprise members of a reflective university are confronting every day." --John Clifford, "Toward an Ethical Community of Writers"

"I don't like to think about what we talked about most of the time [in the class]. I got more important things to worry about like bills and job and school." --Dan

I began this dissertation by invoking what I suggested was a familiar scene in composition classrooms: students sitting in a circle engaged in some collaborative task. In the succeeding pages, I presented my view of what happened inside those circles, a view not usually available to the teachers who typically spend the time allotted for group work by circulating around the room, stopping to observe each group for only a few minutes. What I saw happening in the groups I observed complicates many teachers' and theorists' assumptions about what should happen. As I noted in Chapter I, proponents of
collaborative pedagogies like Peter Elbow, Kenneth Bruffee, and John Trimbur see collaboration among students as the answer to what is wrong with traditional American education. This study, however, suggests that collaboration may not be the panacea everyone wishes it to be and that it may even work to reinforce traditional educational values.

Because the models of collaboration offered by Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur were not based on systematic studies of students engaged in collaborative activities, they failed to account for the numerous constraints that can work against the ideals of collaboration these theorists presented. All three of the dominant models of collaboration represent classrooms—and students—as materials that can be acted on and transformed through a teacher’s practices. In contrast, my experience in "African American Voices" and "The American Experience" revealed the degree to which classrooms—and the collaborative response groups that inhabited them—were characterized by multiple set of values, beliefs, and assumptions that competed with those the teachers asserted.

Recently, a number of theorists have begun to complicate in similar ways the characterization of classrooms, communities, and cultures as constituted by a single set of assumptions, beliefs, and values. Theorists
like David Bleich ("Reading"), Joseph Harris ("Idea"), and Mary Louise Pratt ("Arts," "Interpretive") have mounted an extensive critique of discourse community theories that represent communities as monolithic and marked by clear boundaries. Bleich, Harris, and Pratt all contend that communities and the individuals who inhabit them are never singular or separate. As Harris describes it, "the borders of most discourses are hazily marked and often travelled, and . . . the communities they define are thus often indistinct and overlapping" ("Idea" 17). Because individual writers are inevitably members of multiple communities, they can find themselves committed at once to several different and potentially conflicting sets of beliefs, values, and discourse practices.

It is interesting that Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur all see collaboration as a means of overcoming established but problematic aspects of traditional American education, but they do not see the degree to which those traditional values may compete with the values they espouse, nor do they represent classrooms--or collaborative response groups--as a place where these values are contested. For example, Elbow argues that collaborative responding can serve to loosen the constraints imposed by narrow academic standards; if students are taught to practice "methodological believing" they can provide support for differing individual approaches to reading and writing.
But this ideal vision of the way collaboration can work ignores the power that institutional norms can assert when writing and reading are done and evaluated within institutional settings like university classrooms. Elbow's model itself represents competing values. The very individualism he wishes to preserve can work against his goal of teaching students to practice adopting the perspectives of their peers; if students believe they have a right to their personal positions, they may be reluctant to consider the efficacy of other positions. Another set of competing values inherent in Elbow's model is that between believing and doubting. Elbow admits that systematic doubting or critical thinking is more widely taught and valued in traditional education than is believing, and he is wise to argue for the merits of a less competitive, less conflictual, and more open-minded approach to different perspectives, but my study suggests that instead of complementing each other, the urge to doubt and the urge to believe compete instead.

Kenneth Bruffee's advocacy of collaboration is motivated by a desire to help students overcome their limiting personal approaches and gain facility with the established language practices of the academic community. Learning collaboratively, Bruffee argues, can help students get beyond the excessive individualism that manifests itself in competition and hierarchies that can
be harmful to students by fostering a spirit of collectivity and cooperation that will enable all students to learn more effectively. But Bruffee's desire to see students treat each other as equals who depend on one another must compete with institutional practices such as the grading of individuals, which serve to distinguish among students by ability and achievement and often determine which students will be admitted into selective academic programs, graduate and professional schools, and even employment. The values that characterize the academic community which Bruffee wishes to initiate students into compete with his goal of transforming students' relations to one another from hierarchical to egalitarian.

For John Trimbur, collaboration is the means by which students can investigate the tendency of consensus to erase or marginalize dissensus. Students who engage in this form of collaboration could come to recognize the negative consequences of the marginalization of dissent and could begin to imagine ways to transform this status quo practice. Although this goal is a laudable one, when pursued in the institutional context of a university classroom, it must compete with the institution's goal of maintaining established standards. Trimbur seems to underestimate the degree of alliance students may feel with established standards after years of having been
rewarded for abiding by them, and the class that Trimbur would teach is only one of many which students will be trying to succeed in. Trimbur's model of collaboration does not deal with the issue of dissent within the classroom. One of the primary objections voiced against the kind of critical pedagogy Trimbur is advising is that it does not allow space for disagreement with the values of that pedagogy. Certainly, if all groups are characterized by a struggle over values as Trimbur suggests, classrooms must be as well.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the specific classrooms I studied were characterized by exactly this kind of struggle over values. In addition to the values associated with the university community and the values students brought with them to the class, MJ and Denise also asserted somewhat conflicting values. Specifically, both hoped that having students work collaboratively would enable them to meet the dual goals of valuing differences among people while engaging in the kind of critical reading and writing associated with academic discourse.

In theorizing classroom-based collaboration, it is thus important to consider that classrooms are characterized by multiple and competing sets of values and that, as John Trimbur has pointed out, these values do not exist in equal relations to one another. Mary Louise Pratt has emphasized the inevitable power relations that
exist among the competing values that are inevitably a part of any community. In her influential essay, "Arts of the Contact Zone," Pratt uses the term "contact zone" to describe the meeting, meshing, and clashing of cultural values that characterize most communities. Although it is possible to imagine cultures that might be in equal relation to each other, in most cases they are not. Pratt uses the typical classroom as an example of a community where the different cultures represented are not equal and where the values of the more powerful members—teachers—are presented as the norm:

Teacher-pupil language . . . tends to be described almost entirely from the point of view of the teacher and teaching, not from the point of view of pupils and pupiling (the word doesn't even exist, though the thing certainly does). If a classroom is analyzed as a social world unified and homogenized with respect to the teacher, whatever students do other than what the teacher specifies is invisible or anomalous to the analysis. (452)

As Pratt sees it, the fact that our nation and our classrooms are sites of competing cultural discourses requires that we conceive of our classrooms not as a "homogeneous community" or as a "horizontal alliance" but as a "contact zone" where more powerful discourses seek to marginalize, erase, or co-opt less powerful discourses. Because the established discourses of the university have such power, they inevitably constrain the efforts of teachers who seek to challenge those discourses and the
values they represent and who see student collaboration as mounting that kind of challenge. Ironically, the classroom-based collaboration I studied, rather than serving to challenge and transform traditional academic values, served instead to highlight the many forces working to maintain the status quo.

As with any research based on ethnographic methods, the scope of this study precludes generalizations about the efficacy of collaborative pedagogies in all college-level writing classes. It does yield conclusions, however, about what happened in the groups I observed closely and systematically over the entire course of their group membership. In the preceding chapters, I offered detailed portraits of two collaborative response groups in three different responding situations: responding to individually-authored texts, responding to assigned reading, and responding to a collaborative research project. The stories I chose to tell in those chapters, stories that to me seemed representative of the ways in which these groups functioned throughout their existence, were primarily stories of the group’s failure to respond to differing perspectives in the ways their teachers intended and theorists recommend.

That the bulk of this dissertation focuses on the seeming failure of these groups perhaps reveals the limits of my interpretive lens. As a researcher who is also a
teacher, I couldn't help but feel that these students lost an important learning opportunity when they failed to engage each other's perspectives equally and fully. Because Carol's preference for experiential over textual evidence was not permitted a fair hearing, for example, Patricia and Beth lost the opportunity to interrogate their assumptions that texts, interpreted "objectively," were the only valid source of authority. And what learning might have resulted if Bob and Gloria and all of the members of their group had been able to have a sustained conversation about their differing perspectives on Shelby Steele's essay? Would Bob have come away with a better understanding of Gloria's experience as an African American woman? Would Gloria have understood better the difficulty of overcoming a family history of racism? Would Betsy, Dan, and Tim have had the opportunity to expand or complicate their thinking about racism by having to articulate their views in the context of their group members' views?

Ultimately, I can't answer these questions, because the students I observed did not practice the "methodological believing" that Peter Elbow recommends; they did not try to believe everything anyone wanted to say. Instead, the workings of these student groups resulted in the marginalization and erasure of some group members' perspectives, for they did not develop Trimbur's
"rhetoric of dissensus," a language for talking about how and why marginalization takes place. From where I was sitting, these students seemed to suffer more than the loss of an educational opportunity as a result. Sometimes this suffering was overtly communicated to me: the frustration Carol and Patricia felt when Beth acted as though she didn’t need their response to her writing; Gloria’s complaint that her group members weren’t open and didn’t listen; Betsy’s sense that her contributions were shut down by Gloria. But it is likely that the suffering went on silently as well, perhaps manifesting itself in a decision to sit on the periphery of the group, to say nothing in a group discussion and thus remain a voice unheard by the others.

Although the failure of these groups to value multiple perspectives is significant in terms of the immediate negative consequences for the specific students in the groups, especially the students whose perspectives were marginalized, this failure seems to have long-range consequences as well. Because these students had no means of interrogating their group processes, they most likely left the class with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction regarding their collaborative experiences but with an equally vague understanding of them. As a result, many of these students may resist future opportunities for collaboration or may endure collaboration as a necessary
evil that operates in status-quo ways that they feel powerless to change. For the most marginalized students in these groups, who were also members of marginalized groups in this culture--women, racial minorities, working class students--the acceptance of their marginalization means the perpetuation of the uneven distribution of power that characterizes our culture. But it is not my intention to place blame, to argue that if only teachers had done things differently, if only certain students hadn't behaved in the way they did, collaboration might have been more productive. Instead, it seems crucial that we examine closely the constraints acting on collaboration in the classroom in order to understand better what prevented the students I studied from functioning as the kind of equitable community that most of us hope for. Identifying these constraints can help both teachers and students see what they are working against when they are asked to work together to recognize and value differences among people.

Constraints on Collaboration:

Individualism, Hierarchy, and the Status Quo

Individualism

As numerous composition theorists interested in collaboration have argued, American education is based on individualist assumptions, and these assumptions get
passed on to students through both the content and the process of traditional education. Students learn early that independence is valued over dependence, that originality is prized, and that academic success is determined primarily through an evaluation of individual work. Although educational theorists like Paulo Freire, Edwin Mason, and Robert Slavin have argued that learning is enhanced when pursued in the context of social relationships, American educators have been slow to agree. As a result, students come into their college classrooms assuming that academic learning—and the writing and reading required as a part of learning—are necessarily individual, personal acts. In spite of the value that theorists like Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur place on collaboration, when we ask students to share their writing or reading with other students, to respond to texts or even write them as a group, they are often skeptical about the value to them, as individuals, of doing this kind of work. This skepticism, which I am arguing is a product of individualistic notions of reading, writing, and learning, was one of the most obvious constraints I saw working on

39 See especially the Introduction to Kenneth Bruffee’s Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge and Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s discussion of collaborative pedagogy in Singular Texts/Plural Authors, pages 118-121.
the students in the collaborative response groups I studied.

Although teachers and theorists may believe that students have something to offer each other in terms of new or challenging perspectives, the students I studied did not seem to see each other this way. In general, these students seemed determined to see their perspectives on texts as personal. As students described it, their responses were affected by their experiences outside of the immediate classroom context, by long-held interests. It is this kind of personal approach to texts that Elbow hoped collaborative reading and writing would foster, but, in fact, the students in my study insisted that group work affected them little and that for the most part their perspectives remained unchanged by their experiences in the class.

Beth's perspective on literary texts was, she claimed, a matter of personal preference. She enjoyed reading texts that she believed appealed to universal human emotion rather than to the interests of special groups. Similarly, Carol preferred texts that spoke directly to her experience as an African American woman. As I argued in Chapter III, Beth, Carol, and Patricia interpreted the poems and the assignment differently, in part, because of differences in their personal histories that put them in different positions in relation to the
texts they were reading and writing. All three women sought positions of authority from which to read and write. For Beth, that meant seeing the African American literature she read as appealing to universal emotions rather than race issues; for Carol, that meant seeing the literature as a reflection of African American experience; and for Patricia, that meant seeing the literature as both universal and about minority experience. These students did not seem to see that understanding the differences in their positions and thus their perspectives could expand their thinking, as Elbow suggests, or enable them to better understand how American culture works, as Myers and Trimbur propose.

Students in "The American Experience" made similar claims about the personal nature of their responses to the texts they were asked to read. Betsy liked reading Lakota Woman because she had a sympathetic interest in the plight of Native Americans; Bob read Lakota Woman for the information it gave him about a period of history he was unfamiliar with. The readings on racism, like the African American literature assigned in MJ’s class, elicited responses that reflected students differing positions in relation to the texts. Gloria’s and Bob’s responses to Shelby Steele’s essay reflect their differing personal experience with the issue of racism. Gloria’s draws on her experience of being the victim of racism; Bob’s
response reflects his experience of having racist parents. This emphasis on the personal nature of their responses seemed to make it difficult for these students to value or take seriously their group members' responses. Although they would probably agree that everyone is unique and thus has a different reading of a text, they had difficulty seeing what they could learn from each other's differing readings. After all, they were being graded on their individually-authored response papers, and they were not asked to revise their papers in light of their peers' responses. In this respect, students' individualistic values were supported by the institutional practice of evaluating only individual work and competed with the values of "interdependence," to use Bruffee's term, associated with collaboration.

This tendency of students to describe about their perspectives on texts as representative of their personal preferences continued when students talked about their reading of a non-discursive text such as the corner of High Street and Fifteenth Avenue. Bob, Dan, and Gloria all described their research focus as a product of their personal interests outside of the class. Bob focused on cruising, because he had fond memories of having cruised High Street when he was a teenager. Dan lived on Fifteenth Avenue and frequented the bars and nightclubs that he chose to study. Gloria used her interest in the
performing arts to choose her research focus. Although these students were told explicitly to draw on their multiple perspectives of a single cultural scene, they preferred to collect their research independently and write five separate parts of the paper, which they continued to think of as "my part" throughout the process of constructing the final draft. The consequences of such an individualistic approach were most obvious for Betsy, who did not understand how to do her research but seemed to be prevented by the ethos of independence in the group from engaging her group members' research perspectives in order to learn from them.

I have been suggesting that students' highly individualistic notions of reading and writing kept them from engaging their peers' perspectives on texts, but Dan had a more specific reason for resisting the influence of his peers: he was afraid he would "copy" their ideas, something he believed was not an acceptable academic practice. This belief may be related to Dan's experience in architecture classes where the originality of designs was prized. In these classes, students regularly critiqued their classmates' work, but they did not help each other make their designs better, in part because of the highly competitive atmosphere in the architecture program. This is an example of the ways in which classroom experiences advance and reinforce
individualistic notions about education. Dan’s assumption that one’s academic work should be original and not influenced by others is one that many students bring with them, no doubt a product of their experiences in competitive, non-collaborative classrooms. Thus, these students’ unwillingness to allow their perspectives on texts to be influenced by their peers seems to be related to the fact that they were being asked to do so in a school setting. In most schools, teachers see students’ reading and writing—and evaluate them—as evidence of an individual student’s learning. Students often are not permitted, let alone encouraged, to learn from each other. They are not taught to see their peers as valuable resources. Teachers like MJ and Denise who wish to change their students’ perceptions of the value of their peers’ perspectives must work against years of prohibitions against relying on others.

Students’ view of their reading and writing as reflections of their individual learning, and their reluctance to value their peers’ perspectives were attitudes students brought with them to "African American Voices" and "The American Experience." But in subtle ways, competition and individualistic assumptions about reading, writing, and learning were reinforced in these classes as well. In spite of the value MJ and Denise placed on collaborative response, the product of students’
individual responses to texts—their essays and response papers—was what counted most. It should not be surprising then that students valued their peers’ perspectives on texts only to the degree that those perspectives contributed to their individual work.

In the case of the peer response workshop in "African American Voices," students’ perspectives on the readings and on their peers’ writing were overtly intended to affect each other’s individually-authored texts. As a consequence Beth, Carol, and Patricia valued only those responses they believed contributed to their individual work. Beth tried to change Carol’s and Patricia’s views on reading and writing about literature, because she saw herself as someone who knew more than they did and saw her peers as people who could benefit from her expertise. Because Patricia was willing to see Beth as having more authority than she did, Patricia accepted what Beth had to teach her, namely, the importance of grounding her writing in "objective" interpretations of literature rather than her "opinion." In contrast, Carol, who was not particularly impressed by Beth’s appeals to great literature, seems to have resented Beth’s overt assertion of authority. It appeared that Beth did not think she had much to learn from Carol or Patricia, so she did not give her peers the chance to respond to her writing. Beth also limited the influence Carol and Patricia could have
on each other by dominating the group's discussion during peer response workshops to such an extent that Carol and Patricia participated hardly at all.

Unlike the peer response workshops that took place in "African American Voices," the small group discussions in "The American Experience" did not have the goal of affecting individual students' work in such a concrete way. The small group discussions were meant to lead to whole class discussions; students were not expected to use their peers' remarks to make their own work better. Perhaps this is one reason why in this collaborative response situation students didn't actively solicit the perspectives of group members and didn't engage them when they were expressed. There were no tangible consequences for individual group members of ignoring Betsy's perspective on Lakota Woman or for failing to read or discuss group members' responses to the essays on racism. Dan described the group discussions as "busy work" that helped the 8:00 a.m. class go by quickly.

If Beth was able to influence Patricia because of Patricia's willingness to see her as an authority, members of "The American Experience" group may not have been able to influence each other because they did not see each other as readers and writers who had something to offer them. Gloria claimed that her perspectives on texts were not affected by her group because she saw her group
members as "closed-minded." Bob saw himself as having more life experience than the "kids" in his group, while Tim saw himself as a more successful reader and writer. Betsy said she enjoyed hearing other's opinions but claimed not to have been influenced by them. Like Patricia, Betsy felt she was not as good a reader and writer as her peers, but unlike Patricia, Betsy was so worried about seeming "stupid" that she was often too preoccupied with whether and how to assert her opinions to even hear what her peers were saying.

In contrast with peer response workshops and small group discussions, the collaborative research paper did require students to consider their peers' responses to the assignment, to the research site, to the collaborative process itself, and to the writing they were trying to produce as a group. However, Betsy, Bob, Dan, Gloria, and Tim were unprepared to shift from a focus on personal interests to group interests, from individual responsibility to group responsibility, from a single point of view to multiple perspectives. Although Denise may have presumed that this group could learn how to make productive use of their multiple and conflicting perspectives through their small group discussions of assigned readings, she may have overestimated the degree to which relatively unstructured, unmonitored, and unevaluated collaborative responding could work to
unsettle students' ingrained individualistic assumptions about reading, writing, and learning. In other words, she may have underestimated the degree to which the values she espoused competed with other values—those students brought with them and those of the university. As I argued in Chapter V, this group's approach to collaborative research was strikingly individualistic. They sought to preserve their right to research different subjects and to write up their research individually in whatever way they preferred. They also expressed a desire to be evaluated individually. Their anxiety over being evaluated as a group seemed to exacerbate their reluctance to value their peers' contributions. Tim admitted that he resisted group work because of his lack of confidence in his group members. And Gloria's final evaluation of the group's work revealed her fear that the collaborative paper did not accurately reflect her individual work.

The individualist assumptions that these students harbored are exactly the ones that proponents of collaborative pedagogies like Kenneth Bruffee wish for students to interrogate. But wishing does not make it so. In the limits of a ten-week course, and in classrooms where individualism is subtly reinforced, the constraint on collaboration imposed by individualist assumptions proved too powerful to overcome.
Hierarchical Organization of Difference

In addition to the constraint created by the students' predisposition against collaborative activities, the collaborative response groups I observed seemed to be constrained by forces working within the groups themselves. One reason, if not the central reason, for Kenneth Bruffee's commitment to collaborative pedagogies is his belief that knowledge is socially constructed by communities of like-minded peers who, through a process of consensus-building, come to agree about what will count for them as knowledge. Bruffee sees education as the process of acculturating students into this knowledge-making process, and he recommends using teacher-guided collaboration to help students gain experience working with others to apply the rules of knowledge-making that operate in established communities. Other proponents of collaborative pedagogies, especially those with a special interest in business and professional writing, have also argued for the efficacy of collaboration, especially collaborative writing, on the grounds that it will help prepare students for the "real world" of work outside the academy (Doheny-Farina, Faigley and Miller, Forman and Katsky, Locker).

A number of compositionists have questioned whether writing teachers should want their student groups to imitate the real world practices of established knowledge-
making communities, when those practices are characterized by unequal relations of power that result in the marginalization of some group members (Clifford "Responses," Myers, Trimbur "Consensus," Trimbur and Braun). As I noted in my discussion of the Dissensus Model of collaboration, Greg Myers and John Trimbur recommend that teachers organize collaborative groups differently, in Trimbur’s words, "non-hierarchically so that all discursive roles are available to all the participants in a group." According to Trimbur, "Students’ experiences of non-domination in the collaborative classroom can offer them a critical measure to understand the distortions of communication and the plays of power in normal discourse" (Consensus 615). Unfortunately, Trimbur does not offer specific advice about how to organize students "non-hierarchically" or how to ensure that their classroom experience is one of "non-domination." It is easy to see why Trimbur and other teachers of writing would hope that student groups in the classroom could function differently from those communities that we want them to be able to critique, just as it is easy to see why Bruffee and Denise would hope that collaboration could lead students to deconstruct the "myth of individualism" as Denise called it. But if these students could not escape the constraints of individualistic assumptions, they also could not escape
the patterns of domination that Myers and Trimbur argue characterize groups outside the classroom.

An unequal distribution of power in these groups manifested itself in the kinds of hierarchical leadership patterns that Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford found to be the most common form of collaboration in the professional organizations they studied (Singular). As Ede and Lunsford point out, in hierarchical collaboration "goals are most often designated by someone outside of and hierarchically superior to the immediate collaborative group or by a senior member or leader of the group. Because productivity and efficiency are of the essence in this mode of collaboration, the realities of multiple voices and shifting authority are seen as difficulties to be overcome" (133). It is interesting that Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur do not include in their discussions of collaboration a consideration of how group leadership is established. All three of their models seem based on the assumption that group members are equal and share equal responsibility for running the group. They fail to consider how the ideal of egalitarian relations among students might be complicated by the influence of pervasive hierarchical models of group relations.

In the collaborative response groups I studied, this hierarchical leadership pattern was evidenced in the tendency of a few group members to dominate the group by
talking more than the others, by directing group
activities in such a way that not all group members
participated, and by ignoring or interrupting group
members when they did participate. It is important to
note that these students were able to dominate their
particular groups because the majority of students
cомplied. In neither group did anyone openly challenge the
dominating group members, although a few students
occasionally complained about them in private. Student
compliance with hierarchical leadership is not surprising
since American culture itself—as these students learned
in their English 367 classes—seems characterized by
hierarchies, from the United States government, to the
military, to corporations, to schools. When students were
asked to work together in groups, it most likely seemed
natural to them to organize themselves hierarchically.

Beth and Dan frequently dominated their groups to
such an extent that they prevented group members from
articulating their perspectives. As the *Lakota Woman*
discussion revealed, Bob, too, was capable of dominating,
of shutting out members of his group. Although the
tendency of these students to dominate might be explained
as simply a result of their strong personalities—Beth,
Dan, and Bob were comfortable asserting themselves and
taking charge in a way their group members were not—this
explanation seems too simple, for it does not explain why
some group members complied with this form of leadership and why those group members who objected were unable to resist the pattern of domination they saw working. A fuller explanation of the hierarchical leadership pattern in these groups would have to take into consideration why group leaders were able to assert authority in these particular situations. What characteristics did they share that gave them power over their group members?

Power in Beth’s group seemed to be distributed unequally on the grounds of perceived differences in academic ability. Beth was one of only two seniors in this sophomore-level class, and she was the only English major. She wrote well, consistently receiving "A"s on her essays, she had extensive experience critiquing her peers’ writing (in creative writing workshops and in the University’s peer tutoring program where she tutored basic writing students), and she demonstrated a facility with the (academic) interpretation of literature that many of the other students in the class did not share. As I argued in Chapter III, Beth’s academic ability gave her the confidence to lead her group members in a dominating way. It also made it difficult for Carol and Patricia to challenge her. Carol may have disliked Beth’s dominating manner, but she did not try to argue with her.

In contrast, Bob and Dan were not the strongest students in their group academically. Although they
participated actively in the class, they were not avid readers or writers and received "B"s and "C"s on their essays. In contrast, both Tim and Gloria claimed to enjoy reading and writing and received consistently higher grades than their group members. Dan's and Bob's leadership of this group--Dan led most of the time, Bob filled in when Dan was absent--seems attributable to a belief that they had something the group needed beyond academic ability.\footnote{As I remarked in Chapter V, Tim's academic ability might have put him in a position to lead, but he preferred to be a behind-the-scenes kind of leader. He was also not particularly interested in sharing his academic expertise until his grade depended on it, as it did for the collaborative research paper. In that situation he did lead the group in ways they were not aware of--from his computer keyboard.}

As I noted in Chapters IV and V, Bob took a task-management approach to group leadership. His overriding goal was to complete tasks efficiently, and this goal led him to keep a tight rein on group processes, as he did in the \textit{Lakota Woman} discussion, to marginalize dissenting voices, as he did in the group's discussion of research topics, and to be critical of group members who did not fulfill what he saw as their assigned task. Bob identified his leadership style as a product of his management experience, and he felt comfortable imposing this form of leadership because of his perception that he was more responsible and better at getting things done.
than were his group members. Because the group cared about completing tasks, they complied with Bob's leadership even when it resulted in the marginalization of some perspectives. In spite of Trimbur's contention that collaboration among students can provide an opportunity for students to critique the hierarchical structure of most groups, this group recreated this structure, perhaps because it was the one they were most familiar with.

If the ability to manage tasks efficiently is a quality associated with traditional leadership, so too is aggressiveness or charisma, the ability to command a group's attention and take charge of it. Dan's gregariousness seems the characteristic that most qualified him to be group leader. He admitted that he loved to talk, and he easily initiated the small group discussions that were the most common activity this group engaged in. He also enjoyed talking in whole class discussions, so he was the one who usually reported to the class the question or issue the small group had talked about. No one else in his group, except perhaps Gloria, enjoyed playing this public role. Although Dan was aware of his talkativeness, he was not aware of the ways in which his talk could shut out group members: he frequently interrupted and talked over people, and he always had a joke or comment to make about anything that anyone else said, which inevitably brought the group's
attention back to him. Dan was a comedian who loved to perform, and that meant he needed an audience. His group members were often willing to be his audience because he was entertaining. He also kept the group discussion going with his jokes and comments so that no one else had to. They could just sit back and enjoy. As Betsy described Dan, "[he] puts in his two words, his humor . . . . He can break the ice; I like that."

In both groups, leadership seemed to be constructed not as a role that the group needed someone to play in order to accomplish various tasks but as a quality that some students had and others didn't—another hierarchical organization of difference. Students who asserted themselves as leaders seemed to do so on the grounds that they were more qualified than their peers, that they knew more or worked more efficiently, or could more successfully keep the group going. There was not a sharing of leadership in these groups, beyond the occasional sharing between Dan and Bob. Once Beth and Dan assumed leadership, they seemed never to question their right to these positions. Rather than emerging from the group and shifting over the course of a group's work, leadership was imposed on the group by a few group members.

Significantly, these dominating leadership patterns were perceived differently by different people in the
groups. The degree to which group members were willing to accept hierarchical leadership seems related to their acceptance of a hierarchical organization of difference within the group. Because Patricia saw Beth as having more reading and writing ability than she did, she seemed to feel Beth deserved to dominate the group. In contrast, because Carol did not share Beth's and Patricia's belief that Beth's ability to read and write about literature entitled her to more power within the group, she privately resented Beth's tendency to dominate. Students in Dan's group also had somewhat different responses to Dan's tendency to dominate. Gloria was the only member of her group who admitted resenting Dan's leadership. Gloria may have resented Dan because she, too, vied for a position as leader of the group. She described herself as having a strong personality, and during several collaborative response sessions, she seemed to make an effort to lead. For example, she initiated the discussion of the Shelby Steele essay and presented herself as an authority on Steele's ideas. Similarly, during the group's discussion of research topics, she volunteered to write the group's report, a position that often gave a person power to control the group's discussion, as Bob did during the discussion of Lakota Woman. However, Gloria's attempts to lead the group were not acknowledged by her group members.
Betsy, however, did identify Gloria, not Dan or Bob, as the person who most often shut her down.

Gender seems to have played a role in this group's perception of leadership. As Meg Morgan noted in her study of student collaborative writing groups, a woman is often not identified as the leader of the group, even when she performs those tasks associated with leaders. Gloria's attempts to lead the group were frustrated by Dan and Bob, who talked over Gloria, interrupted her, or made light of her remarks. Their treatment of Gloria may reflect their view of themselves as the rightful leaders of the group, but it may also reflect an implicit belief that Gloria did not deserve to be group leader. Although Betsy did not openly interrupt Gloria's attempts at leading the group, she perceived Gloria's behavior negatively, even when it resembled the behavior of Bob and Dan, whom she did not perceive negatively. In Betsy's words, "a lot of what I try [to do in the group] is interrupted by [Gloria]." Betsy, too, seemed to see Dan and Bob as more appropriate leaders than Gloria. Although Betsy may have been expected to ally herself with Gloria as two women marginalized by the men in the group, Betsy felt a stronger alliance with Dan, who often looked out for Betsy's interests. For example, it was Dan who kept asking Betsy if she was happy as the group struggled to come up with a research topic, who helped her find the
Archives and the Journalism Library during the process of doing their research, and who tried to plan a group meeting at her house so she would not have to do so much commuting. Betsy seemed to appreciate Dan's efforts to help her; she liked him and felt that he liked her. She thus had no reason to quarrel with Dan's leadership of the group. And, in fact, Dan was the only member of the group who did not complain about Betsy's naivety or lack of academic ability. Students in this group seemed to have differing ideas about what constitutes effective leadership. Betsy wanted a group leader who was affable, so she appreciated Dan's leadership efforts; Gloria wanted a leader who would share leadership responsibilities and who would value her work in the group, so she often felt Dan controlled the group too much. Although gender seemed to affect perceptions of leadership to some extent, the differences in Betsy's and Gloria's perceptions of Dan, for example, suggest that gender is only one of many complex factors that determine how leadership gets established in groups.

Racial difference also played a somewhat complicated role in determining who led the group and how leadership was perceived in "The American Experience". In fact, in commenting about not getting credit for her work in groups, Gloria mentioned race as a factor but did not mention gender. Although she insisted that she tried not
to blame racism for everything, she was keenly aware of
the degree to which her race made her different, and
different in a way that magnified her mistakes. As I
illustrated in Chapter IV, the students in Gloria’s group
expressed in their response papers and their interviews
some anxiety over being in a racially mixed group. It is
impossible to say whether Gloria’s race and gender
affected her group members’ unwillingness to see her as a
leader, since none of them admitted as much, but it is
clear that they did not treat her attempts to lead as
seriously as they treated Bob’s and Dan’s. The fact that
Gloria may have interpreted their treatment of her as
resulting from her racial difference and the fact that
Bob, Betsy, and Tim had all complained in their response
papers that minorities were too quick to cry "racism,"
makes it seem likely that racial difference did affect the
way members of this group perceived each other.

The influence of race and gender differences in the
collaborative response group in MJ’s class was perhaps
more complicated than in Denise’s. Gender differences
exerted less of an influence since three of the four group
members were women and the only male group member was
rarely present for group workshops. There were also more
women than men in the class, and the teacher was a woman.
Racial difference, however, did seem to play a covert role
in the group. First of all, the group was the most
racially diverse in the class and was dominated by one of only two white students enrolled in "African American Voices." The group member who felt herself to have the least authority was Patricia, the only Asian-American student in the class. By virtue of her race, Carol was a member of the majority in this class, but she, too, had little authority in the group.

Although it would be easy to say that Beth's position as a member of the dominant racial group in America enabled her to dominate Carol and Patricia, none of the group members expressed this view. Carol and Patricia acknowledged that their membership in their respective racial groups affected their individual responses to texts and their experiences in the class as a whole, but neither one referred to racial difference as a factor in her experience in the group. If Carol and Patricia were both conscious of the effect of their race on their experience in the class, it seems unusual that they would suddenly ignore race as a factor during peer response workshops. They may, however, have found it inappropriate or awkward to talk with each other or with me about how race could affect group dynamics. If they discussed it privately with MJ, I was not privy to that information. As I noted in Chapter III, Beth never described her race as an influence on her responses to texts, her writing, her small group work, or her classroom experience. However,
given that students spent the quarter reading and writing about the oppression of blacks by whites, it is hard to believe that Beth was not at all conscious of how racial difference might affect how she perceived and was perceived by group members. Although certainly these other differences mattered, ignoring the issue of racial difference seems problematic, especially given that one purpose of "African American Voices" was to investigate the subject of racial difference.

It is not so hard to believe, however, that students would find it impossible or improper to articulate their perceptions of the effect of racial difference on their group interactions, especially Beth's domination of the group. If Beth and Carol had different languages for talking about the racial issues that arose in the texts they read, they most certainly did not share a language for talking about racial differences as they might have affected the small group. Instead of seeing their differences in terms of race, these students described their differences in terms of personality or academic ability.

With the exception of Gloria and Carol, the only two African Americans in my study, these students seemed to be unaware of the degree to which American culture may have predisposed them to treat their perspectives hierarchically in terms of differences in gender, race,
and social class (in the case of Betsy), but also in terms of personality, academic ability, and leadership qualities. It seemed that, for these students, cultural difference was something to read about but not something relevant to their small group experience, even in Denise's class, where the teacher had assigned students to groups and organized collaborative activities with the express purpose of bringing together people with differing abilities and differing perspectives. Students in Denise's group may have recognized that the bringing together of different perspectives was one of the goals of the class and of working in groups, but the goal of valuing differing perspectives equally competed with the students' sense of how groups ought to work. The leaders of these groups and the students who assented to their leadership seemed to see it as natural or inevitable that some students would have more power than others, even if that meant that they also had power to marginalize some group members. Students who wished to challenge this assumed norm, notably Carol and Gloria, had no means of doing so, because it was their perspectives that were effectively marginalized by the relations of power the rest of the group seemed to accept as normal.
Maintaining the Status Quo

When I first described the context in which students performed the various collaborative activities that I observed during the course of my study, I highlighted the potentially conflicting sets of assumptions, beliefs, and values at work: those that students brought with them, those of the collaborative response group itself, those of MJ's and Denise's particular classes, and those of the academic community at large. Thus far, I have emphasized the constraints imposed by students' individualistic assumptions and by the hierarchical values that characterized their group processes. Yet another constraint I would like to consider is a product of the classroom context in which these students collaborated.

In both classes that I studied, the teachers wanted students to learn to recognize and value their differing perspectives on texts while also learning to write acceptable academic prose, and teachers tried to expand the notion of "acceptable" writing to include the multiple approaches to texts that they believed resulted from people's differing cultural positions and experiences. Although these two goals represent the kind of dual stance toward one's teaching that Greg Myers advocates, as goals, they seem somewhat incompatible. As I have tried to demonstrate, students found it difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish both the goal of valuing their
peers' differing perspectives and the goal of completing assigned tasks in an academically successful way. Forced to choose between the two, students consistently acted to abide by established academic norms, even when that meant marginalizing or erasing some group members' perspectives.

Teachers themselves were constrained by these competing goals, and as a result, they sometimes reinforced students' alliance with established standards, thus reinforcing students' reluctance to challenge those standards by entertaining multiple perspectives. For example, MJ communicated approval of Beth's writing by giving her high grades, even though MJ told me privately that she did not agree with Beth's "universal" approach and tried to complicate Beth's interpretations of texts during whole-class discussions. MJ also rewarded Beth's peer responding, even though her comments imposed narrow academic standards on her peers' writing. Similarly, Denise felt compelled to give Tim a high class participation grade to make up for the "B" she gave him on the collaborative research paper so that he would receive the "A" in the class that she felt he deserved based on his individual work. Denise also felt conflict over giving Betsy a "D" on her definition of racism essay, which Denise felt showed a lack of familiarity with academic discourse. But she did give her a "D".
Because students were held to an established standard by their teachers, we should not be surprised that they tried to succeed in their classes by relying on the norms by which they would be evaluated. In these classes, teachers evaluated the tangible product of collaborative work rather than the unobservable process. Thus, students attended to the product more than the process of collaboration. In doing so they seemed driven by three principles: complete the task efficiently, avoid conflict, and abide by established standards.

**Success means completing the task efficiently.** These groups’ determination to complete tasks efficiently often meant that not all group members participated fully and equally in collaborative activities. Although it might be tempting to see their drive for efficiency as an unwillingness to invest themselves in collaborative activities, it is important to take into consideration the real constraints imposed on these groups by the classroom setting. First, students had to perform collaborative tasks in a limited amount of time—–they were given only 20 minutes to read and discuss five response papers, an hour to write responses to peers’ drafts and then discuss them or to generate a research topic and write a research plan. In most of the collaborative response sessions I observed, students did spend the entire time carrying out the assigned task, but because of the limits of time, they
usually focused exclusively on the part of the task that would be evaluated. For example, Beth spent more than half of the allotted time for peer responding out in the hall writing comments on Carol’s and Patricia’s drafts. The group then spent the remainder of their time listening to Beth explain her comments. Even if Carol and Patricia had wanted to discuss their responses to the drafts, there would not have been time. Similarly, Bob kept the group’s discussion of *Lakota Woman* focused on the issue of brutality, which ensured that he would have something to report to the class. In their discussion of potential research topics, the group also focused almost exclusively on the first research topic proposed. The need to settle on a topic and write up a research plan—quickly—led them to see Dan’s and Betsy’s reservations as problems to be overcome—or ignored. In both groups, students did not seem to have time to complete the task successfully while also engaging multiple perspectives, so they chose what seemed the most pressing and consequential of the two.

**Success means avoiding conflict.** When multiple perspectives were presented in the context of responding to group members’ individually-authored texts, discussing assigned reading, or working on a collaborative research paper, the goal of avoiding conflict also took precedence over the goal of discussing differing perspectives on an issue or text. The desire to avoid conflict is probably a
natural one, especially for students who are the products of traditional education. In teacher-centered classrooms, there are few opportunities for intellectual conflict to erupt among students who interact primarily with the teacher rather than with each other. Conflicts between teachers and students are usually seen as a matter of the right answer (usually the teacher’s) versus the wrong answer (usually the student’s). In this configuration, conflict is resolved by the person in authority, and there is little point in engaging in an extensive discussion of their differing views. In fact, if a student were to question a teacher’s perspective, it would most likely be construed as rudeness or lack of respect. When students do disagree with each other in a traditional classroom, the conflict is usually resolved by appealing to the teacher who is expected to settle the dispute, again, by identifying which perspective is correct and which incorrect.

Most students have little experience resolving conflict among themselves, and they seem reluctant to suffer the possible social consequences of trying to do so. This may be one reason Carol did not openly disagree with Beth. It may also have been why the group in Denise’s class avoided confronting Gloria about what they saw as her inadequate participation in the collaborative research project, appealing instead to Denise to do the
teacherly thing and settle the dispute for them. When Gloria angrily confronted her group members, Dan tried to erase the conflict rather than deal directly with it. But fearing that the conflict wouldn’t go away and that it would make it uncomfortable for group members to continue working together, Dan appealed to Denise—as authority—to remove the conflict by breaking up the group.

On the surface, it might seem that if these groups wanted to avoid social conflict, they would have gone out of their way to make sure that all group members contributed and that all contributions were valued equally. But such a process would be time consuming and unpredictable, two characteristics that made it unlikely that these groups would choose this route when they had a limited amount of time to complete a task. They were also unlikely to undertake a time-consuming unpredictable process when there were no external rewards for doing so. Because students in peer response workshops could write responses to each other’s individually-authored texts without engaging differing perspectives and risking the eruption of conflict, that is the route they chose. Similarly, students were able to avoid conflicts in small group discussions of readings because coming up with a question for class discussion did not require them to elicit multiple perspectives. Of the different collaborative responding situations I observed, the one
during which students had to agree about a research topic came the closest to an active engagement of differing perspectives; it was also the only one during which there was open conflict. In this collaborative response situation, Denise had required that all group members assent to the topic, which required hearing each group member's perspective. The conflicts that arose as a result of this process made everyone in the group uncomfortable as well as concerned that the group would not be able to complete the assigned task—the research plan—in the allotted time. Ultimately, they resolved their conflict not through the process of discussing their differing perspectives but by appealing to the established standards that I, as a recognized authority, articulated.

Success means abiding by established norms. For most of these students, completing tasks successfully meant determining which group member had the "right" or "best" perspective, and it was the traditional norms of academic reading and writing that furnished the criteria which they used to judge such perspectives. These groups valued those perspectives most closely allied with traditional norms of academic discourse and marginalized or erased those perspectives that seemed not to fit those norms. In "African American Voices," Beth's perspective on reading and writing about literary texts no doubt had weight because it represented the academic norm, and Beth
was able to assert her perspective authoritatively because of her confidence in the efficacy of that norm. In Beth’s group, Carol’s and Patricia’s less "normal" perspectives on texts were erased by Beth’s more normal and thus more powerful one.

A similar process seemed to be at work in "The American Experience." The group valued Bob’s focused, chronologically-ordered response to Lakota Woman and marginalized Betsy’s less "normal" one. "Focus," an important trope in academic writing, also served as the criteria by which this group chose their research topic, resulting in the marginalization of Betsy’s and Bob’s more personal criteria. In writing their collaborative research paper, the group’s concern for coherence among the parts—another academic trope—led them to erase Betsy’s original contribution. Tim’s concern for the academic appropriateness of the group’s paper motivated him to eliminate and make changes in his group members’ writing, changes that Dan did not understand, that made Betsy feel like a failure, and that made Gloria angry. Appealing to established standards at the expense of some group members’ perspectives resulted in the successful completion of the assigned task: the group did produce an academically acceptable research paper—focused, coherent, and consistent. But none of the students in the group thought of the paper as successful, perhaps because the
process of producing the paper was so painful and because many of them felt that their contributions had been erased.

The fact that, when faced with multiple perspectives in the context of collaborative response, students consistently valued the perspective that most closely resembled familiar academic norms should not be surprising given that they expected to be evaluated according to these criteria. And, indeed, they were. MJ and Denise may have wished for their classrooms to be places where students could challenge academic norms like the valorization of textual over experiential evidence or the necessity of writing from a single uninterested perspective. And they may have believed that the use of collaborative pedagogies would help make possible that challenge. But their goal of critiquing established standards competed with their use of those standards to evaluate their students' work.

Although I have been stressing the constraints on collaboration that I saw working in the classes I studied, I am not proposing that teachers simply give up on collaborative pedagogies. My study was too focused to lead to such a generalization. My own experiences collaborating with my peers have convinced me that collaboration is messy, unpredictable, and--rewarding. I have found that engaging others' perspectives does expand
my thinking and that my learning is enhanced by my social involvement with others who are learning with me. But my productive collaborative experiences have not taken place in the classroom. The discrepancy between my experience and that of the students I studied leads me to want to know more about the particular constraints acting on classroom-based collaboration. Are these constraints at work in most classrooms? Are there strategies that teachers and students can use to loosen these constraints? Can students learn from collaboration even when it fails? Can teachers justify requiring collaboration among students knowing that it might fail?

Implications for Research

Our understanding of the constraints acting on classroom collaboration would certainly be enriched by designing studies that allow for comparison across student groups within the same classroom and across classrooms. My study inevitably focuses on the failure of collaborative response groups, because that was all I was able to see. Had I been able to study more than one student group in the same classroom, I might have learned that the constraints I identified acted more powerfully on one group than another or that another group was able to work against these constraints more productively. Throughout my study, Denise frequently lamented that I had
chosen to study what was, in her opinion, the most dysfunctional group in the class and pointed out that several other collaborative groups were working quite well together. Of course, as the teacher she had a limited view of these groups, one that might have been enriched or complicated by a researcher’s view of a seemingly successful group.

Although it would be difficult to get an insider’s view of more than one group working at the same time, the ability to compare more than one group in the same class might justify giving up the benefits of being able to study only one group closely. Researchers might also wish to study classroom collaboration in pairs. Having multiple perspectives on the collaborative practices they observe could enrich researchers’ interpretations of their data, just as the teachers and theorists hope that students’ views will be enriched by engaging the perspectives of their peers. Had another researcher observed the groups focused on in this study, she or he would likely have interpreted the data differently, perhaps offering interesting challenges to my emphasis on the failure of these groups. Actually doing collaborative research on collaboration might also give researchers added insight into the student groups they observe trying to do the same.
For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus on groups that exhibited a high level of diversity in terms of race and gender but also in terms of perspectives on texts as revealed in class discussions and in students' writing. As a number of researchers have suggested, groups that are more homogeneous tend to function better than do clearly heterogeneous groups. (Belanger, Qualley and Chiseri-Strater). That students in my study had difficulty valuing each other's perspectives may be related to their perceptions of each other as quite different from themselves. Future studies of classroom collaboration intended to foster the acceptance of multiple points of view, especially as they reflect cultural differences, might focus on the effect of students' perceptions of each other and include homogeneous as well as heterogeneous groups.

Although a number of researchers have done studies of classroom-based collaboration, few have studied the complex site represented by a writing course that also seeks to teach students about cultural diversity. Most of the debate about these courses has focused on reading lists and writing assignments and on the degree to which changes in curriculum will yield changes in students' reading, writing, and thinking; few have actually studied the effect a course on cultural diversity has on students' relations with each other, and few have considered the
effect of student resistance to such courses, as I have begun to do here. Given the difficulty the student I studied had recognizing the value of their differing perspectives, it seems imperative that researchers continue to study what these courses can actually accomplish. My study represents only the beginning of the work needed before the full impact of such courses can be known.

Proponents of collaborative pedagogies often suggest that collaboration will benefit any student in any class pursuing any task. But much more needs to be known about the variables that affect classroom-based collaboration across a broad range of classroom situations. It is easy to hypothesize that students in a required first-year writing course might have different experiences with collaboration than advanced students in a business writing or creative writing course, where students are assumed to share similar goals. And we might expect different collaborative tasks—peer responding, collaborative response to literature, and collaborative writing, for example—to be constrained by different factors, which this study, given its limited scope, can only suggest. As Peter Elbow noted, it is easier for groups to engage multiple perspectives when group members trust each other and when the collaborative task clearly invites different interpretations. When the issue is one which people
already have well-established positions on, issues like racism, for example, it can be much more difficult for the groups to really listen to what others have to say on the subject. More work thus needs to be done on the relationship between particular collaborative activities and the outcome of those activities. Future studies of collaboration might also consider how teachers with different philosophies about reading, writing, and learning, might affect students' collaboration differently. One limit of current theories of collaboration is that they do not take into account how these different contexts for collaboration might complicate students' collaborative experiences. An accumulation of microanalyses such as those I have attempted here, in combination with broader studies of teachers' and students' experiences with classroom collaboration, could provide the field of composition with something close to the full picture that Shirley Brice Heath argues is needed in ethnographic studies of education, a picture characterized by both depth and breadth of perspective, one that highlights the importance of context and yet allows for comparison across contexts.

Implications for Theory-Building

This study highlights the degree to which prominent theories of collaboration (such as the ones outlined in
Chapter I) fail to take into consideration the constraints I saw working against collaboration in the classroom. The theories offered by Peter Elbow, Kenneth Bruffee, and John Trimbur rely on several assumptions that are called into question by my research: the assumption that students will be motivated to participate in collaborative activities, the assumption that students within groups see themselves as equals, and the assumption that teachers can organize collaborative groups to function in ways that support their goals. That the theories of Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur have been so attractive to teachers seems related to the fact that the assumptions underlying these theories are ones many teachers share. As teachers, we want to believe that students will be engaged by the classroom activities we assign. We also want to see students as having equal status, because our teaching and evaluation of them are based on notions of equality among students. If we do worry about power relations in our classrooms, we think about them in terms of teacher power versus student powerlessness, rarely in terms of the power relations working among students themselves. This view of the classroom reveals the tendency for teachers to focus on their own roles and to see students primarily in relation to them as teachers. As Denise pointed out in a recent
follow-up discussion of this research, a teacher's view that he or she is responsible for students' experiences in the classroom is in some ways a necessary delusion. Teachers need to believe that their pedagogical decisions can affect at least some students in the ways they want them to or what is the point of making careful and considered choices? However, my study highlights the many factors outside of a teacher's control that constrain the work students are able to do.

It seems crucial, then, that theorists recognize their tendency to imagine the teacher as someone who can control students' experiences in the classroom and begin interrogating the assumptions, the wishful thinking, that lead them to portray collaborative classroom practices in such glowing terms. One way to do this would be to ground theories of classroom collaboration in actual students' experiences. In the theoretical discussions by Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur that I cited in my Introduction, there are no student voices represented. For example, in a chapter from *Collaborative Learning* entitled, "Writing and Collaboration," Bruffee represents the potential of collaborative response to improve students' writing by constructing a hypothetical conversation between students, one that looks nothing like those I had occasion to
observe during the course of my study. 41 No wonder teachers are disappointed when their students fail to talk to each other in the focused, informed, and insightful ways Bruffee imagines they might! Similarly, Trimbur ends his influential essay on consensus and dissensus in collaboration by describing a classroom discussion of the hierarchy inherent in distinctions between "literature" and books by popular writers like Stephen King. But there is no discussion of how this kind of hierarchical thinking might affect students' responses to their peers' writing, as it did in the groups I studied.

By proposing collaboration as a means by which students can expand their thinking (Elbow), participate in the process of knowledge-making (Bruffee), and learn to critique the inequities of communities that operate in the world outside of the classroom (Trimbur), theorists have failed to consider the ways in which the kinds of constraints I've identified work against these laudable goals for collaboration. If theorists are going to continue to argue for the efficacy of classroom-based collaboration, they will need to revise their conceptions of collaboration as a cure for all that is ill in American education and see it, instead, as a practice constrained by the very forces they wish that classroom collaboration

41 See Kenneth Bruffee, Collaborative Learning, pages 59–60.
could overcome: the belief in individualism and autonomy, the tendency to organize differences hierarchically, and the valorization of the status quo. Instead of seeing classrooms as a space where the negative effects of these forces can be escaped, theorists of collaboration need to see classrooms and the teachers and students who inhabit them as products of these forces.

Many teachers try collaborative pedagogies and then abandon them when they don’t "work" in the ways theorists like Elbow, Bruffee, and Trimbur promise. The real question theorists of collaboration need to answer is not "How will this practice ensure that students will learn what I want them to learn?" but "Why should collaborative practices be instituted given the unpredictable outcome of these practices?" Perhaps one value of classroom-based collaboration is that it gives students the opportunity not to escape the constraints I’ve identified, but to see them at work in a concrete way. Students may have as much to learn from the inevitable frustration, conflict, and disappointment that result from their efforts to engage the perspectives of others as they do from the moments when their thinking is expanded, when they see their peers as different but equal, and when they achieve academic success without marginalizing others. But is it ethical for teachers to require students to undergo such frustration, conflict, and disappointment, especially when
only the product of collaboration is evaluated, when the experience itself is not taken into consideration? Although the students I studied might say "no," another possible answer to the question would be, only is teachers begin to think of classroom-based collaboration not as simply a pedagogical activity to be added to a writing class for its practical benefits but rather as a complex process through which students and teachers can learn about the social nature of reading and writing and also about themselves.

Implications for Pedagogy

In *Singular Text/Plural Authors*, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford conclude by admitting that although they had hoped their research would enable them to give specific advice about how best to institute collaboration in the writing classroom, their study yielded, instead, an awareness of the many forms collaboration can take and a recognition that what might work in one context might not work in another. I, too, hesitate to offer general pedagogical advice based on a focused study of classroom collaboration in a very specific and thus limited context. One large implication I might draw from this study, however, is that teachers need to think seriously about their reasons for wanting to use collaborative activities in their writing classes. Because activities like peer
response workshops have become such a customary practice, teachers may no longer give them careful consideration. Given the constraints I saw working against students' productive collaboration, it seems essential that teachers be aware of what they and their students might be up against. Before implementing collaborative pedagogies, teachers might ask themselves a number of questions: What are my goals for collaboration in my classroom? Does collaboration support my philosophy of reading, writing, and learning? What do I myself know about collaborative reading and writing? Am I willing to take the time to plan, monitor, and if necessary intervene in students' collaborative activities? What are the likely benefits to students of classroom collaboration? How will I respond to student resistance? The point of asking questions such as these is not to lead to a complete acceptance or rejection of collaborative pedagogies but to remind oneself that classroom collaboration is a complicated activity and not without risks. Teachers need to think seriously about the constraints that might work against collaboration in their specific contexts before they commit themselves and their students to take on collaborative tasks.

For teachers who wish to foster productive student collaboration, Ede and Lunsford do offer general guidelines: allow time for groups to cohere and leaders to
emerge; create tasks which require students to work together; allow time for group norms to develop and for students to negotiate authority and responsibility; encourage creative conflict and protect minority views; make room for peer and self-evaluation of collaborative work; ask students to evaluate both their own and the group's performance (Singolar 123-24). In spite of the usefulness of these, which are based on empirical studies of collaboration, Ede and Lunsford acknowledge that their study raised as many questions as it answered, especially about how collaboration might affect students' values, beliefs, and assumptions, about the effect of race, class, and gender differences on collaboration, and about the way power works in collaborative groups (125). My study sought to answer some of these questions, albeit about a small number of students. Because students' attitudes, race and gender differences, and the use of power operated outside of the teachers' control in the groups I studied, I hesitate to imply that changes in pedagogy alone could have lessened the negative effect of these forces. Perhaps the most significant pedagogical implication of my study is that teachers and students need to be more aware of the constraints acting on classroom-based collaboration. Organizing collaboration so that this kind of awareness will be possible is a necessary first step.
**Constructing a Collaborative Classroom**

Several of the guidelines offered by Ede and Lunsford emphasize the amount of time required for students to establish productive collaborative practices. When students are faced with complex and competing goals for collaborative activities, as the students I studied were, the time needed to establish group norms, to negotiate issues of responsibility, and to learn to handle conflict productively seems even greater. Both groups in my study found it difficult to complete collaborative tasks in the time allowed, and the pressure they felt to work efficiently was one reason they were not able to value multiple and conflicting perspectives in the way their teachers hoped they would. In addition to the time constraints imposed on particular collaborative activities, the group in "African American Voices" worked within the additional constraint of having very little time to develop group norms: they met together for a total of only five or six hours during the quarter. Teachers who teach in institutions that use the quarter rather than the semester system complain frequently of having too little time to accomplish their goals, and this seemed especially true of the kind of goals MJ and Denise had for collaborative activities. Teachers who are seriously committed to fostering productive collaboration, especially within a limited course schedule, may need to
build into their courses many and various opportunities for collaboration.

Denise did seem to compensate for the time constraints of the quarter system by asking students to work together frequently, but as I have already noted, the group activities she assigned—primarily group discussions of assigned readings and students' responses papers—did not require students to engage their multiple perspectives. My study suggests, then, that given students' predisposition against collaborative work (an attitude reinforced by negative collaborative experiences) students need not just time to work together but time spent learning to work together. Neither MJ nor Denise spent class time discussing group processes (beyond Denise's warning that group members had to genuinely agree on the research topic), and group activities were not designed to teach students how to work together effectively.

MJ and Denise may have underestimated the degree to which the student groups I studied would resist collaboration, or they may have assumed that students would naturally figure out how to do it by doing it. Had these teachers required that students evaluate themselves and their groups throughout the collaborative process, they would have at least had a mechanism for following the progress of the groups. MJ had no way of knowing that
Carol and Patricia were being silenced by Beth during peer response, so she could not advise the group—and other groups like them—on how they might make space for more voices to be heard. Denise and MJ also failed to build into their collaborative pedagogies any way for students to evaluate those pedagogies. Until the group process report in Denise's class, which she instituted at my recommendation, Denise had not had more than a glimpse of how these groups spent the bulk of class time. And because Gloria was absent for the group meeting, her perspective was erased, with serious consequences for the group. The only other opportunity students in Denise's class had to evaluate the collaborative process was on the last day of class, too late for them to do anything about perceived inequities and interpersonal conflicts. Dan's sense that group discussions were "busy work" seems related to the fact that there was no accountability to the group members or to the teacher for what went on during those discussions. If students had been required to report on their work together, through journals or weekly memos, they might have seen it as a more important part of the class, and the teachers would have had some insight into the ways groups were functioning.

Students, too, need this kind of insight into their group processes. Meg Morgan suggests that students write journal entries in which they describe the role they play
in the group and describe the way they imagine their group members see them. She also recommends that they write about the roles that other group members play, about the conflicts that arise, and about the behaviors they could adopt that would help resolve the conflict productively. This kind of writing would require that students become self-reflective about the collaborative process and take responsibility for solving problems in the group. Since students in the groups I studied did not seem aware of how their behavior was affecting others, asking them to write about it seems like a logical step. The more difficult challenge would be to find some way for students to share their perceptions with each other that would lead to a productive renegotiation of roles and responsibilities rather than hurt feelings and increased resistance to group work. Perhaps teachers and students could discuss as a class the many possible roles people can play in groups. Students could then work as a group to analyze a particular collaborative activity in terms of the role each group member played. By working as a class to come up with a language for talking about differences within groups in a nonhierarchical way, students would then have a means of talking about each other and go beyond personality differences and fixed identities.

It is interesting to imagine, for example, how different the group progress report in "The American
Experience" might have been if students had been asked to report not just on the progress of their research but also on their progress as a group of individuals who were learning to work together. If these students had been asked to write, collaboratively, a description of the roles they had thus far played in the group project, perhaps they would have gained some insight into their perceptions of each other. Of course, such an activity would have taken longer to complete than the group report that Dan dashed off moments before the group met with Denise, a report that did not count at all as a part of the grade on the collaborative project. But the challenge of reenvisioning the group progress report is exactly the kind of challenge I am referring to when I suggest that teachers and students need to value the process as well as the product of collaboration.

In order for students to take seriously the kind of self-reflective writing that I am recommending, teachers would need not only to require it but count it as part of a student's grade. In this way, teachers would communicate to students that they value the process as well as the product of collaboration, making it worth their while to take the process seriously. Another way in which teachers could signal the value of working at collaboration would be by allowing students to participate in their own evaluation of both the process and product of
collaboration. For example, Denise might have been able to respond to the appeals by Bob, Betsy, Tim, and Dan to be graded individually by assigning one grade to the final research paper but separate participation grades that would take into account self-reports of participation as well as group members' reports of each student's contribution. Teachers and students could work together to come up with criteria for evaluating group work that students could then apply to themselves and to each other. In this kind of criteria-building session, students would have the opportunity to share their expectations and their frustrations with collaboration, to raise questions about the role of leadership, the negotiation of conflict, the problem of power relations within the group, the need to entertain multiple points of view, as well as practical matters such as the importance of regular participation in the group (e.g. attendance) and of having work done on time. Like Ede and Lunsford, I wish to resist making specific recommendations without having had the opportunity to study the effect of organizing classroom collaboration in these ways. My study does suggest, however, that collaboration proved especially difficult because students did not have a language to talk about their differences in perspective—regarding the collaborative group itself as well as the texts the group was investigating. If teachers really do want to see
collaborative groups learn to value multiple perspectives, they need to work with students to develop such a language and give them opportunities—and rewards—for using it.

The Problem of Difference within Groups

The special context in which I studied the collaborative practices of students—writing classes that focused on issue of cultural diversity—was an especially interesting site for considering the effect of race, class, and gender on students' collaborative processes. The effect of these differences may have been especially apparent because I chose to focus on the groups that were the most diverse in these respects. Other studies of classroom collaboration have suggested that student groups work best when students perceive themselves to have a common interest (Belanger, Qualley and Chiseri-Strater). Mary M. Lay recommends that student groups "delay any task completion until they have discovered with whom they are working." The benefit for students, as Lay sees it, is that "Discovering what they have in common, what characteristics and values they might share, allows them to appreciate and even tolerate the differences that inevitably emerge during the collaborative process" (97-98). The real issue is not whether teachers organize students in homogeneous or heterogeneous groups but that teachers help students to value both what they have in
common and what differences they bring to the group. Both of the groups I studied began with the perception that their group members were markedly different—in race and gender but also in age, work experience, academic ability, outside interests, family background, and so on. Much of their collaborative work—peer response, discussions of readings, researching a cultural scene—was shaped by students’ differing personal histories, so that the differences between them became even more pronounced. Had students had the opportunity to focus on what they had in common—their lives as students, their desire to do well in the class, for example—their differences might not have seemed so drastic, although they would still have been present: a recognition of commonality does not and should not mean an erasure of difference. My study suggests that teachers need to help students see group relations in this way.

I’m not sure if the recognition of commonalities and sharing a common goal could have altered the unequal power relations that characterized both groups I studied. For example, it is hard to imagine how an articulation of shared goals and values could have effected any change in the hierarchical leadership patterns I observed. Rather than emerging as leaders, Beth and Dan imposed themselves as leaders. Belanger suggests that, left on their own, students may tend to organize collaboration hierarchically
because it is the model of group work most familiar to them. Teachers who would have students practice what Ede and Lunsford call a "dialogic" mode of collaboration, one where leadership is shared, where group members play shifting roles, and where multiple perspectives are valued, may need to plan collaborative work in such a way that students are required to occupy multiple "discursive roles," in John Trimbur’s words (Consensus 615). By rotating leadership and other roles in peer response workshops, small group discussions, or collaborative research activities and by writing about their experiences in these multiple roles, students may come to see group processes as less fixed and may be able to imagine the possibility of countering hierarchical leadership by sharing leadership. Even if students are unable to exact change in their group processes, by assuming different roles and reflecting on their experiences they may come to understand their own compliance with or resistance to dominating leaders.

Although the unequal distribution of power within these groups manifested itself most obviously in hierarchical leadership patterns, it also led to the valuing of some perspectives and the marginalization of others. This way of viewing differences among members of the group complicates Ede and Lunsford’s recommendation that teachers "encourage creative conflict and protect
minority views." For example, it is hard to imagine what anyone might have done to ensure that Patricia’s and Betsy’s views would be protected, especially when everyone in the group seemed to agree that their views could be safely ignored. But students might have benefitted from having to write about the ways in which their own or others’ perspectives seemed to be marginalized, speculating on the reasons for that marginalization and suggesting what they might do to make themselves heard.

When conflicts arise within a context of unequal power relations, it is difficult to see it as the "creative conflict" that Ede and Lunsford admit is most common in dialogic collaboration where collaborators respect and value each other as equals. What kind of conflict is productive within groups who operate like the ones that I studied? If Carol and Beth had openly disagreed about Patricia’s interpretation of Countee Cullen’s poem, would that have been creative conflict? When Betsy resisted Bob’s suggested topic and Gloria accused her of not being "open" to studying the poor, was that creative conflict? Because the students I studied seemed to experience conflict within the group as a painful reminder of their differences, differences that could not be resolved and that would interfere with their ability to complete collaborative tasks, I cannot point to a specific incidence of conflict as more productive than
another and recommend that such conflict be encouraged. Instead, I can recommend that students be taught to analyze the conflicts that erupt in the group, especially in terms of the power relations enacted in the group at the moment of conflict. Given that students tend to avoid conflict, they may also need to be taught when and how to engage in conflict, when to openly disagree, for example, and how to express disagreement. Toward this end, teachers can discuss with the class the role of conflict within groups and between groups, raising the question of what kind of conflict is productive, when, why, and for whom. In "The American Experience," this kind of discussion would have been especially appropriate in the context of discussing the readings on racism by Shelby Steele, Malcolm X, and Ralph Ellison since these men had very different ideas about the role of conflict in improving the plight of African Americans. In a class intended to focus on cultural diversity, the issue of conflict, within the class and in the larger culture, seems an especially important one to raise.

**Articulating Competing Goals**

The fact that students found it difficult to fulfill their teachers' competing goals for collaboration does not mean that teachers need to give up those goals. It may mean, however, that teachers should rethink their
definitions of successful collaboration, which for the most part have been limited to the creation of an academically acceptable product. Because students also seem to act in accordance with narrow definitions of academic success, definitions that make multiple perspectives seem irrelevant or an obstacle to success, teachers have to find ways to make it clear to students that they are defining success differently. I have already suggested that teachers organize collaborative activities in ways that will enable them to teach—and reward—the process as well as the product of collaboration. But teachers might also do well to reconceptualize the product of collaboration to emphasize not focus, organization, coherence, and consistency, but the articulation of multiple points of view.

In the context of peer response to individually-authored texts, for example, students might be asked to write responses to their peers' texts that include an explanation of the criteria they are using to judge their peers' work. When students turn in their revised drafts, teachers could require them to submit not just their peers' responses but also an explanation of why they chose to accept or reject their peers' recommendations. This approach to peer response would signal to students that articulating their perspectives on texts is important and
that taking into consideration their peers' perspectives is important as well.

Teachers might also redefine the response paper to allow for the inclusion of multiple perspectives on assigned readings. In "Reading the Right Thing," Joseph Harris describes his practice of using a sequenced set of responses. Students begin by articulating their individual perspectives on texts, which are then discussed by the class. Students write subsequent response papers in which they are asked to put their perspectives on a text in conversation with several of the perspectives articulated by their classmates, noting the ways in which their reading of a text may have been complicated or altered by this kind of whole-class collaboration. A similar process could be adopted in small group discussions. The goal of these discussions could be to explore the differences in group members' responses to an assigned reading and to analyze the reasons for those differences. Group members could then write revised responses, based on this conversation, or they could share responsibility for writing reports of the group's discussion--outside of class, where they would have the time to carefully consider the significance of the discussion.

Collaborative writing assignments, too, need to be revised to better facilitate the inclusion of multiple
voices. If part of the point of doing collaborative research is to expose the limits of any one point of view and to learn from engaging with the perspectives of others, the final product of collaborative research should reflect that process. Students might work together to construct a narrative of their research project—how they came to know what they know about their subject—by considering the ways in which each group member was (or was not) affected by conducting research collaboratively. Of course, the shape of these narratives would be much less predictable than the focused, organized, well-supported research paper that most teachers value, and teachers and students would have to work together to determine criteria for evaluating this new kind of text.

It is my teacher’s perspective, again, that has led me to do what I, as a researcher, resist—offering these suggestions for reconceptualizing collaborative assignments in the writing classroom. But the ultimate benefit of my research will not be the new knowledge I’ve made possible by representing the failed collaborative efforts of the students I observed, but the consequences of that knowledge for teachers and students engaged in classroom collaboration. It was my fascination with the complexity of collaboration in my own classroom that motivated my research. My experience studying students collaborating in other classrooms must inevitably lead me
back to my own, where newly cognizant of the constraints that act on classroom collaboration and aware that many operate out of my control, I still hope to make it possible for students to work against these constraints and to see the value in doing so.

To allow the constraints that act against classroom collaboration—individualistic assumptions about learning, the hierarchical organization of differences, and the maintenance of the status quo—to remain unchallenged means that those students whose perspectives are inevitably marginalized by the normal workings of communities, including classroom communities, will have no recourse but to sit in silence and to blame themselves for that silence. As Betsy put it, "I just get the feeling people aren’t going to like me and stuff like that so I don’t say much to them and they don’t say nothing to me, and I’m comfortable with that." If, as writing teachers, we hope to make it possible for students to enter the ongoing conversations constituted by published texts, by student writing, by classroom and small group discussions, by the discourse of the academy and of American culture, then those forces that prevent students like Betsy from speaking and from being heard must be combatted.

A Final Challenge
The quotations that I've chosen as epigraphs to this chapter represent a tension that pervaded all of the collaborative responding situations described in the preceding chapters. As a researcher, theorist and teacher, John Clifford views the collaborative response group within the classroom as a site of differing and potentially conflicting perspectives that need to be acknowledged and understood. From Clifford's perspective, collaboration offers students an opportunity to learn a valuable lesson about the way all knowledge-making communities work: some perspectives are privileged and others are marginalized, because domination and resistance, to use Clifford's terms, are "facts" of group life. The promise of collaboration is that it can help students understand how an uneven distribution of power within groups can affect the outcome of group processes. Collaboration also promises to give students an opportunity to rise to the challenge presented by this understanding, namely, "to tolerate our multiple differences while still struggling communally to produce literate and responsible discourse."

But Dan's statement represents another perspective on the issue of tolerating differences while struggling to read and write acceptably. For Dan and students like him, the real business of "school" is not discussing differing perspectives on issues like racism or even on writing.
School is a matter of obligations to be met, like paying bills and holding down a job, and as with these other obligations, students strive to meet the requirements of school as efficiently and painlessly as possible. Collaborating with classmates, especially when difficult or painful, is not considered a legitimate part of what school is all about.

It is tempting to discount Dan's perspective by labeling it unenlightened or resistant and to carry on with our theoretically-informed commitment to fostering the acceptance of difference through collaborative activities. But if we are truly committed to collaboration, that commitment must be expanded to include our relationships with students. Such a commitment necessitates that we be willing to engage Dan's perspectives, and others like it, and to work against our tendency to marginalize or erase student voices in out research, our theory, and most important, in our classrooms. In writing this dissertation, I tried to give voice to student perspectives on classroom-based collaboration. The real challenge, now, is to hear those voices in the classes I teach.
APPENDIX A

COURSE SYLLABI

Syllabus
"African American Voices in Literature: Intermediate Essay Writing"

COURSE DESCRIPTION: English 367 is an intermediate level expository writing course which focuses on topics in American culture. This particular section, English 367.03, focuses on African-American voices in American culture through the reading of African-American literature. Therefore, we use fiction, poetry, essays and films by and/or about African-Americans as our major literary texts in this course. Even though we will spend much of our class time discussing literature, this is first and foremost a writing course. The major objective of this course is to improve your writing skills. We will achieve this goal by using the critical thinking and analytical skills that one must engage in when analyzing literature and by drafting and revising.

WRITTEN REQUIREMENTS: You will be required to write four critical essays--three 3-5 pages and one 6-8 pages. The longer essay will require that you do an in-depth analysis of a particular topic which emerges from our readings. You will be required to write at least two drafts, possibly three, of each essay. In addition, there will be several in-class writing assignments.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS: Each student is expected to participate in small group assignments and peer response sessions. Students will also participate in collaborative oral presentations on the films we view.

POLICIES:
1. Late papers will not be accepted.

2. All papers must be done on the Macintosh computer. Buy two 3 1/2 inch diskettes for this class.

3. You are expected to attend class. If you are absent when the class is scheduled to do peer response, your
essay grade will be lowered one half grade. If you do not have a draft for peer response, your essay grade will be lowered one half grade.

4. Bring three copies of each draft for peer response.

5. You must have at least one conference with me.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION:
Essay 1 15%
Essay 2 20%
Essay 3 20%
Essay 4 25%
Oral presentation 10%
Peer Response 10%

DAILY SYLLABUS

Week One
March 31 Introduction to Course
April 2 Mac Orientation; In-Class assignment; Douglass (handout)

Week Two
7 Brent, Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl
9 Wilson, Our Nig

Week Three
14 DUE: Draft of Essay #1; Peer Response
16 DUE: Essay #1; Chestnutt, "The Wife of His Youth," "The Goophered Grapevine"; Dunbar, "The Party," "We Wear The Mask"; (Handout)

Week Four
21 Toomer, "Karintha," "Esther"; Cullen, "Heritage," "Yet Do I Marvel"; McKay, "If We Must Die," "The White House"
23 Hughes, "Harlem," "Dream Variation," "Theme For English B," "I, Too, Sing America," "Tales of Semple"

Week Five
28 Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God
30 DUE: Draft of Essay #2; Peer Response

Week Six
May
5 DUE: Essay #2; Walker, "For My People"; Wright, (handout); Ellison, Prologue and Ch. 1
7 Petry, The Street
Week Seven
12 Brooks, "We Real Cool," "The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock"; Childress, excerpts; Baldwin, "A Letter from the South"
14 King, "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"; Malcolm X (handout); Baraka, "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note"

Week Eight
19 DUE: Draft of Essay #3; Peer Response; Angelou, excerpts; Walker, "Everyday Use"
21 DUE: Essay #3; film

Week Nine
26 film
28 Groups meet; in-class conferences

Week Ten
June
2 Group Oral Reports on film
4 DUE: Draft of Essay #4; peer response; course evaluations
9 DUE: Essay #4
Syllabus
"The American Experience: Intermediate Essay Writing"

Course Description

English 367 is an intermediate composition course that extends and refines skills in expository writing, critical reading, and critical thinking by having students analyze, discuss, and write about major topics pertaining to social diversity in the United States. The course requires that students draft and revise essays that demand a sophisticated application of expository skills. The selected readings on the "American Experience" stimulate the students' own writing and facilitate an awareness of the interplay among purpose, audience, content, structure, and style. Research writing and documentation is also introduced.

Required Texts

1) Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle. Rereading America: Cultural Contexts of Critical Thinking and Writing (available at SBX)
2) Crow Dog, Lakota Woman (available at SBX)
3) Course packet (available at SBX)
4) a current handbook (recommended)

Course Policies

Attendance: Since we meet only twice a week and most of our assignments are interactive, attendance for this course is crucial. You are allowed two absences without penalty. (These two absences cannot be used on peer response or oral report days.) After two absences, each additional unexcused absence will affect your final grade: minus one half grade for each unexcused absence after the second.

Late Papers: All assignments are due when listed on the syllabus. Assignments will not be accepted late, except in extraordinary circumstances and when arrangements have been made in advance.

Plagiarism: Using someone else's words or ideas as your own is a serious offense in the University. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Committee on Academic Misconduct for review.
Paper Format: You may write early drafts by hand; however, all final drafts and response papers must be typed.

Assignments

There are a variety of assignments in this class, some of which will receive a letter grade, others which will only be graded complete or incomplete.

Response Papers: A response paper entails just what the name implies: a thoughtful response to a reading. These responses may be on one essay assigned for the day, on all the essays, or some combination thereof. Topics for response papers are varied; they might include: a question the readings led you to and how you arrived at that question; a comparison or contrast of one essay to another or of the assigned readings to earlier readings or class discussions; an opinion and/or critique of the reading(s); a personal or news event that relates and adds to or calls into question the text(s); and so on. The only requirement for these papers is that they take the essays one step further--into an issue, question, critique, etc.

Try not to exceed one single-spaced typed page per response. The essays will be used to generate class discussion and will be collected on the day they are assigned for comments. I will not grade the responses until week 9 of the quarter. In week 9 a portfolio of the response papers will be due. For this portfolio, you must include all six essays to receive full credit, but select 3 out of the 6 that you decide are your best work. These 3 will be receive a collective grade. You may revise the responses before they are graded, but it is not required. (i.e., Do it only if you think it will help your grade.) Although only 3 responses will be graded, the portfolio must be complete; the grade for the portfolio will be reduced a full letter grade for each missing response paper.

Formal Assignments: Final drafts of the 3 formal assignments should be turned in with all drafts and peer responses. The final assignment requires a group to produce a single document (collaboration), but each group member must also individually pass in an analysis of the other group members' work to receive full credit for the paper.

Homeworks: (a dorky term, I know, but it was the best I could come up with) Various in-class and out-of-class
short writings will be assigned throughout the quarter. These will not be graded and are meant only to stimulate your thinking or class discussion; however, I will collect a portion of them on random class sessions. Full credit will be received if all assignments collected are complete.

**Oral Report:** These will occur during finals week and will report on the results of the group project. You will not be graded for style but for content and clarity.

**Class Participation:** I expect you to talk and talk a lot in this class, so a significant portion of the grade will be for participation. Included in participation is your attendance at peer responding session and other group work. Because your attendance is necessary to the students in your group, your participation grade will be seriously affected by absences or lack of participation in group work. The participation grade will also include pop-quizzes should they become necessary.

### Grade Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio of Response Papers</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper #1 (folklore)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper #2 (racism)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper #3 (cultural scene)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeworks and oral report</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tbody>
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### The Writing Center

The Writing Center offers free tutoring services to all members of the university community. It is not a remedial service, but used by students of all levels. You can see them on anything from coming up with a topic to deciding where to use a comma, and anything in between. To make use of the Center, call 292-5607 to make an appointment, or visit their walk-in hours on M-F, 11-1. The Writing Center is located in 147 University Hall (the building with the clock tower on the oval).

### Daily Syllabus

**WARNING NOTE:** Although we will try to stick to the schedule outlined here, all assignments and readings are subject to change, with sufficient notice, of course, so that we can ensure some flexibility.

**UNIT 1: WHAT IS AN AMERICAN?**
Week 1: Rights and Individualism

T  Defining Americans; Intro to Course; Form Groups

R  Intro to Paper #1; "The Declaration of Independence" (Jefferson, RRA); "What is An American?" (Crevecoeur, RRA) "Cowboy" (Kramer, RRA); Response Paper #1 due

Week 2: Economics and the Work Ethic

T  "The Paradox of Individualism" (Bellah, et. al., photocopy); "The Gospel of Wealth" (Carnegie, RRA); "Stephen Cruz" (Terkel, RRA); Response Paper #1 due

R  In-class folkloric analysis; "Class Poem" (RRA 95-99); "The Original Meaning of the Work Ethic" (photocopy)

Week 3: Social Class and Individualism

T  Group work on data collection; "Class in America: Myths and Realities" (RRA 72-84); "Literacy and Social Class" from The Violence of Literacy (Stuckey, packet); Response Paper #2 due

Unit 2: The American Cultural Mosaic or Melting Pot?

R  Draft of Paper #1 Due; "Formation of In-Groups" (RRA, 292); Examining out Assumptions about Other Groups

Week 4: The Immigrant Experience

T  Film, Matewan

R  Final Draft of Paper #1 due; Intro to Paper #2; Interviews on ethnic background

Week 5: Native Americans

T  Lakota Woman (1st half, up to Chap. 10): Response Paper #3 due.

R  Lakota Woman (2nd half); Peer Response Practice

Week 6: African Americans

T  Intro to Paper #3; "Historical Context on Civil Rights" (Rico and Mano, packet); from The Invisible Man (Ellison, packet); from The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Malcolm X, packet); "I'm Black, You're
White, Who's Innocent?" (RRA, 347); Response Paper #4 due

R Draft of Paper #2 due for peer response; "The Psychology of Racism (photocopy)

Week 7: Racism and Institutions

T Film, Boyz in the Hood; discussion

R Final Draft of Paper #2 Due; Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data; group time for paper #3

Week 8

T Collection of Articles on the LA Riot (packet); Response Paper #5 Due; Reading a cultural scene; group time for paper #3

Unit 3: Reading a Cultural Scene: The American Family

R "The Paradox of Perfection" (Skolnick, RRA); "Working for What?" (RRA 410); "Black Family Life" (White, RRA)

Week 9 Gender Roles and Sexual Orientation

T "Some Individual Costs of Gender Role Conformity" (Chafetz, RRA); "Images of Relationships" (Gilligan, RRA); "Woman as Other" (de Beauvoir, packet); "A View from Other Cultures: Must Men Fear Women's Work" (Leeuwen, packet) Response Paper #6 due

R "What Price Independence? Social Reactions to Lesbians, Spinsters, Widows, and Nuns" (Weitz, RRA); "No Man is an Island" (Johnson, packet); "Green Light" (Davis, packet); Portfolio of Response Papers Due.

Week 10

T Drafts of Collaborative Project due for Peer Response

R "The Gay Family" (Goldstein, RRA); "Friends as Family" (Lindsey, RRA); "Change the Family: Change the World" (Okin, packet)

Finals Week

Presentation of oral reports and final Draft of collaborative paper due during scheduled finals time
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

African American Voices in Literature

1. Would you describe yourself as someone who likes to read? If so, what do you enjoy about it? What kinds of things do you particularly enjoy reading? If not, what don’t you like about reading?

2. How do you feel about the reading you’ve been asked to do for this class? Is the reading you’re doing for this class different from the reading you’ve done in other classes? How so?

3. What experience have you had with doing peer response before this class? Describe for me your best experience with peer response. Describe for me your worst experience with peer response.

4. How do you feel about doing peer response in this class?

5. Describe for me what you do when you respond to one of your classmate’s drafts. What do you think is your role as responder? Do you give a different kind of response depending on the writer or depending on the particular text you’re responding to? [specific examples]

6. How did you feel about the responses you got from your peers on your writing? In what ways did your peers’ responses influence you as you revised your essay?

7. What do you see as the similarities and differences in responding to published texts like those assigned in this class and to your peers’ drafts?
The American Experience

1. Would you describe yourself as someone who likes to read?

2. What kinds of things do you enjoy reading?

3. How do you feel about the kind of things you’ve been asked to read in this class?

4. Would you say that your reading of the kinds of material assigned in this class has changed at all as a result of the class? In other words, are you currently reading this material in the same way that you did at the beginning of the class? (For example, did you read the articles about the LA riot in the same way as you would have before you took the class?)

5. Have class discussions affected the way you read and respond to the texts assigned in class? If so, how?

6. Has the teacher affected the way you read and respond to these texts? If so, how?

7. Has your group affected the way you read and respond to these texts? If so, how?

8. Have the writing assignments--the response papers and/or the longer essays you’ve had to write--affected the way you read and respond to these texts?

9. Which reading(s) have you enjoyed the most and why?

10. Which reading(s) have you enjoyed the least and why?

11. Have you taken other classes where you were asked to read and respond to other students’ writing? Describe. Did you enjoy this activity? Why or why not? Did you benefit from this activity? Why or why not?

12. How do you feel about being asked to work in a group in this class? What do you see as the role of these groups? What do you see as your role as a group member?

13. How do you feel about being asked to read and respond to your group members’ writing? How do you feel about their reading of your writing?

14. How do you feel about being asked to write as a group?
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APPENDIX D

THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Paper #3: Collaboratively Analysing a Cultural Scene

This is the paper you will be writing together as a group that I have discussed briefly in class. What this means basically is that your group will be producing one document at the end of this assignment, thus you will need to divide up or manage the research work as well as the writing itself. We will be discussing this assignment in stages; right now I want you to begin thinking of a topic and how to go about researching that topic.

What Is a Cultural Scene?

Basically, almost anything that works together as a whole, or would be recognizable to others as a group or event. The key here is how other people, non-members, would see this group. The scene portion of the description refers to a place, event, time period.

Groups: An example of a cultural group could be the gay/lesbian caucus on campus. The scene would then be OSU. Analyzing this "scene" or portion of culture would involve, then, asking questions about how this group sees itself and its purpose, how they see themselves relating to the rest of the university or to each other, and how the other portions of the university view the group. In other words, analyzing involves examining the group or event you choose from varying perspectives of the other groups involved in the scene as well as from the group's own perspective.

Events: An example of a cultural event might be a demonstration on campus, visits by evangelists (like Jed and Sister Cindy), or even something that has happened to most everyone, such as being yelled at, or yelling, sexual statements from a car or at a distance to a member of the opposite (or same) sex. Again, you would want to look at the event from the perspective of those participating as well as from the perspective of those who are in the
audience, and/or those who only read about the event. If you chose an event such as "hey-baby-you-want-a-ride" phenomena, you’d want to get many people’s reporting of this event.

Locations: An example of a cultural scene that would center around a location might be a gay bar, or one of the campus’s bars. Again, you would want to analyze this scene from many different perspectives: why people frequent a certain bar, how people interact, how men or women are treated, why the entertainment fits the clientele, etc., as well as the reputation of the bar in the campus or city context.

How do we get information from which to analyze a "scene"?

The difficult part of this analysis is determining how to learn more about these different perspectives. This will involve a lot of creativity and division of tasks. In all cases, you want to try to become a member of the group as much as possible--attend meetings of the gay/lesbian caucus, go to the demonstration, etc.--and talk to many of the members (i.e. an interview) to obtain an "insider’s perspective." Achieving an outsider’s perspective can also be done through interviews, listening to people’s reactions when you bring it up in conversation, asking people how they react when they see an article on, or a flier put out by the group, etc.

Overall, you want to consider the layers of context you need to examine and find ways of achieving that perspective. In the case of the gay/lesbian caucus, these layers of context would include 1) the group itself, 2) the position of the group within the university context, 3) the position of the group within a larger American social context. An examination of #1, for example, would include how the group related to each other, how they try to achieve that purpose, how they feel they are perceived by others, etc.

Choosing a Topic:

The only requirement in choosing a topic is that somehow your scene will get at the issues we are discussing in class: socioeconomic class, ethnicity, power relationships, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In other words, have an idea about how this scene--whether it be a group, event, or location--will lead to more information about how these themes play themselves out in society.
Due Dates:

Your group must decide on a topic by the end of class Thursday, August 6th and pass in a brief description of the topic at that time. As well as a topic, you will need to include in this description a plan of how you will investigate this scene and who will be responsible for what. I'll be giving you time in class this Thursday and next Thursday to discuss this, but you might also want to meet outside of class.

Some Helpful Warnings:

Be sure every group members agree to this topic or it won't work; in other words, don't simply decide by majority vote because that will leave someone feeling less committed to the project than others.

Also, be sure to pick a scene that is possible to study and not dangerous. For example, choosing a white supremacist group would be difficult and risky because becoming a member of the group in any way would probably be impossible (not to mention bad for one's health).

Analyzing a Cultural Scene: The Paper

Length: 12-15 (the length is primarily due to the amount of space it will take to describe your scene and observations; do not let the length intimidate you)

Due Date: Wednesday, September 2nd, 10:00-11:45

There is not a set format or organization for this paper, but remember that your main purpose in the paper is to describe the scene and analyze it for themes relating to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, Americanisms, etc.—anything that we have covered in class. To this end, I will be expecting to see some discussion of the following in the papers:

a) an extensive description of what you saw (you might decide to also use photographs in an appendix, or drawings and sketches, or copies of some group's/place's literature that you will be analyzing as well as a written description)
b) an explanation of how you went about observing the scene

c) an analysis of the themes you designate in what you observer, and how this analysis may or may not be consensual (i.e., with all group members agreeing to similar analyses)

d) some consideration of how your own perceptions/position may have influenced your choice of method, observation, selection of details and analysis—in other words, don’t leave yourselves and your attitudes out of the paper, or fail to consider how the difference and similarities in your group members may have influenced the project.

There obviously are many ways to organize a discussion of all these aspects. Your group may decide to break the paper into sections using sub-headings (e.g. introduction, methods, data/descriptions, results, or something like that). Or you might decide to discuss all aspects in some other organization (one that uses the description to support the analysis, or one that describes all that you saw and then reflects on it in analysis, etc.) The only rule of thumb is to be sure to include all aspects and not let the analysis and/or description subsume the other.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Bizzell, Patricia. "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College"


Hull, Glynda and Mike Rose. "'This Wooden Shack Place': The Logic of an Unconventional Reading." *College Composition and Communication* 41 (1990): 287-298.


Stewart, Donald C. "Collaborative Learning and Composition: Boon or Bane?" Rhetoric Review 7 (1988): 58-83.
