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ASSEMBLING THE IDENTITY OF "WRITER" (290 PP.)

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This dissertation examines the ways that teachers of writing conceptualize and

employ the term "writer." The field of Rhetoric and Composition has a long

history of prioritizing the writer in the writing process; a steady stream of

scholarship has called for students to "see themselves as writers," and the central

issues of the field have long been associated with—sometimes even defined by—

various conceptions of what a "writer" ought to *be* or *do*. This project responds to

calls across the discipline for a more comprehensive understanding of both the

writer and its place in scholarly conversations. Through two qualitative studies of

writing teachers—a series of 10 multi-tiered ethnographic interviews and an

interactive focus group—I explore various notions of "writer" and their

pedagogical ramifications. Data were gathered and analyzed using a constructivist

methodology (unstructured interviews and inductive coding) and contextualized

within observed trends in Composition scholarship.

Results reveal widely disparate notions of writer amongst participants, but also

some shared assumptions. The coding process resulted in eight data-based

categories: four broad *types* of writer and four overarching *characteristics* of

writer. These categories, while discrete, interconnect in intriguing ways, and the

observed tension between them suggests that the word "writer" cannot be viewed

in singular terms. The most pronounced disjuncture is between identity and

activity; that is, notions of writer based on the act of writing tend to clash with the mythologized "figure" of the writer. Results further suggest that even as Composition pedagogies evolve in the 21st century, the term "writer" tends to be associated with neo-romantic and anachronistic ideas of writing and literacy. In light of these results, I argue that the identity of writer may be too tenuous and unstable to serve as a pedagogical goal. In a broad sense, this research illuminates the implications of competing discourses, looking at how individual and disciplinary conversations can form implicit definitions that shape the pedagogical approaches of both students and teachers.

ASSEMBLING THE IDENTITY OF "WRITER"

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FOREGROUNDING THE WRITER IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION STUDIES

Where to start? At the end called writing, or the end called The Writer? With the gerund or the noun, with the activity or the one performing it? And where exactly does one stop and the other begin?

-   Margaret Atwood (2003, p. 4)

The field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies has a long history of prioritizing the "writer" in the writing process. Robert Brooke maintains, "Writing teachers […] help students see themselves as writers first and students second" (1987, p. 141). Peter Elbow, who has inspired countless instructors to think of the classroom as a "community of writers," argues that self-identification as "writers" allows students to assume power and agency (1995, p. 74). Perhaps most striking are the countless writing centers who continue to invoke Stephen North's enduring dictum: "producing better writers, not better writing" (1984, p. 438). Even as new media and genres proliferate, many composition pedagogies remain focused on the "writer qua writer" (Yancey, 2004, p. 309). Throughout the discipline's history, the central issues of Rhetoric and Composition (hereafter abbreviated as R & C) have been associated with—sometimes even defined by—various conceptions of what a "writer" ought to be or do. But what do we really mean when we talk about writers? How do particular notions of writer affect/effect our pedagogical practice?

The field has shown interest in developing a more nuanced understanding of the "writers" we purport to teach. Harry Denny (2005) argues that our increasingly reified narratives need to be interrogated:

> What does it mean to claim an identity as a writer? When unpacking the sign 'writer,' what other kinds of markers lurk under its veneer? As tutors and teachers champion a writer identity, what others are sutured to it? When a writer-identity is nurtured, what other forms of identity get eclipsed? (p. 40)

Denny reminds us that we don't teach writers "as purely writers [rather] they come to us as an intricately woven tapestry, rich in the authenticity and texture of identities" (p. 45). Elisabeth Leonard (1997) suggests that the discipline's intense and often public debates over the relative value of "personal" and "academic" discourse (Bizzell, 1982; Bartholomae, 1985, 1990, 1995; North, 1990; Elbow, 1995) are really just disagreements over the nature and purpose of the writer: "In this debate it is not academic discourse that is at stake […] Nor is it whether or not the writer is constructed […] The question, I think, is 'what is a writer?'" (p. 219). Roz Ivanič (1998) also argues for "a revival of interest in the writer" (p. 97). She laments the lack of research exploring "writer identity," eventually posing the same persistent query: "What, one may ask, is the identity of the writer?" (p. xii). Bronwyn Williams (2006) positions the writer in a broader discussion of identity and literacy, arguing that institutional definitions shape the identities of students and teachers alike: "Who, in the eyes of the institution, is a reader or a writer? What are the consequences of these terms in the academy?" (p. 2).

These recurrent questions, however, have inspired little research to answer them. One exception is The National Conversation on Writing (NCOW), a media action project

of the Council of WPAs. NCOW has begun exploring writer identity through a series of interviews with both student and professional writers (made available as video and audio essays on their website). Driven by the question, "What makes people feel they are writers (or not)?" NCOW accumulates "stories" from writers and teachers of writing in order to transform the way society views literacy education. NCOW encourages anyone with a stake in writing instruction to join the "conversation." Bowden and Vandenburg's NCOW video, "Who is a Writer? What Writers Tell Us" (2010), presents a collection of interviews with people who write for a range of purposes and audiences, showcasing the diversity of those who call themselves "writers," as well as what, how, and where writers write. While their work is illuminating, the authors are clearly more concerned with advocacy (showing that "everyone is a writer") than with generating a comprehensive description of what constitutes a writer. Their project is effectively a concerted attempt to show that Johnny *can* write—to "change the sensationalist stories suggesting that writing skills and abilities are declining." NCOW has spearheaded a critical conversation for R & C, but the continued centrality of "writers" in our scholarship and practice demands a closer examination of the term.

The purpose of this dissertation is to extend and enrich the conversation begun by NCOW—to identify and describe ways in which teachers *talk* about writers in order to better understand its role in our classrooms and scholarly discourses. Through two qualitative studies of writing teachers— a series of 10 multi-tiered unstructured interviews (the core study of this dissertation) and an interactive focus group—I examine the writer vis-à-vis the following research questions:

1. How do postsecondary teachers of writing conceptualize the term "writer"?

2. How do they position/discuss the writer in relation to pedagogical practice? My aim, then, is not to describe writers *in situ*, but to illuminate the implications of our disciplinary conversations—to provide an in-depth examination of our ways of discussing writers and writing and to consider the pedagogical consequences of those discussions. In a broader sense, these studies represent an attempt to better understand our values as writing instructors—the shared and divergent ideals that manifest themselves in our discourses.

This introductory chapter establishes context for my research questions by tracing the central role of the writer in R & C's scholarly discourses. I examine ways in which varying conceptions of "writer" have shaped our pedagogical approaches, mirroring the historical trajectory and identity of the discipline itself. As the next section will make evident, notions of writer (especially in R & C) are hindered by a tension between identity and activity. This dissertation broaches this tension directly. However, it is important to note that my own positioning and framing of this study is predicated primarily on the former (identity). Please note as well that while I closely examine a number of movements, both in this and the subsequent chapter (e.g. writing-as-process, the "social turn," postmodernism), my coverage of them should not be construed as exhaustive; rather, I provide a selective genealogy vis-à-vis the central issues of this dissertation.

Writers vs. writing: Process pedagogy

R & C's pedagogical focus on the writer may be traced to the origins of the process movement, where the writerly self was explicitly foregrounded. It is a story that most writing scholars know. After the celebrated "paradigm shift" from product to

process in the 1960s and 1970s, strategies for teaching composition became less focused

on texts and more focused on their means of production, leading teachers and scholars to

characterize writing instruction in terms of "writers" rather than writing. This move must

be understood in terms of its historical context, i.e. 60s upheaval, the marginalization of

writing instruction in English departments, and, most importantly, a predominant

instructional emphasis on formal correctness and narrowly construed "rules." Writing

teachers adamantly rejected these "current-traditional" pedagogies of fixed forms,

seeking to empower students through liberatory instruction.[1] Their new pedagogies

resisted both formalist approaches and, to varying degrees, the exclusionary nature of

academic writing. The goals of process instruction reflected this change, as teachers

looked beyond the text, seeking to fundamentally change "attitudes and practices"

(Tobin, 2001, p. 7).

Process pedagogy shifted the focus of writing instruction away from texts and

towards writers. Focusing on the writer was a way to avoid the current-traditionalists'

emphasis on the final product (the writing). Process teachers based their approach on a

shared notion: that "the growth of students as writers is not the same as the improvement

of texts" (Knoblauch, Brannon, 1984, p. 151). Thus, a "key assumption" of process

pedagogy has perennially been that "students are writers when they come to the

classroom" (Tobin, 2001, p. 7). "Focus more on the writer than the writing" became a

"common process slogan," shifting the focus not only to the process of writing, but to the

person doing the writing (Tobin, 2001, p. 12).

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[1] I use quotation marks because not all historians accept the "current-traditional" characterization of 19th and early 20th century pedagogy. Scholars quibble about how prevalent these pedagogies of correctness actually were/are. However, few would argue that the process movement, especially its more expressive incarnations, formed largely out of opposition to them.

In this sense, the process movement represented a substantial shift in pedagogical values; however, its focus still reflected century-old rhetorics that located agency in the mind of an individual writer. John Genung (1892), for example, characterizes writing as "so individual, so dependent on the particular aptitude and direction of the writer's mind, that each one must be left for the most part to find his way alone, according to the impulse that is in him" (p. 217). The process-minded writing research that flourished in the 70s and 80s, which was heavily influenced by cognitive psychology, tended to look at writing through the lens of a *particular* writer's creative process (e.g. Emig, 1971; Perl, 1979; Flower and Hayes, 1977, 1981,1984; Rose, 1980, 1984, 1985). In their "cognitive-process model" of writing (in many ways the paragon of process research), Flower and Hayes (1981) describe writing as "writer-based prose," placing great emphasis on the capacity of the writer for invention (p. 371). Other process scholars followed suit; while they did not ignore the social aspect of writing, their research and teaching typically focused on the agency of a single writer.

By the 1980s, "process pedagogy" had become so prevalent at the postsecondary level that one was (at least to its proponents) either "on the bus or off it" (Tobin, 2001, p. 4). This is not to say that the process model was ubiquitous or that it was taught in any one consistent way all the time. This was particularly the case at the K-12 level, where process pedagogy was introduced but never fully embraced. This can, at least in part, be attributed to the outcomes-based mindset encouraged by standardized testing and narrow form-focused standards. Moreover, New Criticism remained the dominant model of instruction in many English departments, especially at the high school level. Applebee (1986) notes that the heightened interest in writing instruction did not always change the

amount or nature of student writing in the K-12 classroom. While a comprehensive examination of K-12 pedagogy is outside the scope of this dissertation (I interviewed only postsecondary teachers), it is important to note that many high school English courses continue to pursue writing solely in terms of literary analysis, and these students eventually take college composition courses. Between the looming imperative of testing and the lingering influence of New Criticsm, the zeal of process scholars, as well as their stated intent to help students think and act "as writers," is easy to understand.

Because the process movement had its roots in resistance, its adherents tended to adopt a somewhat defiant "us vs. them" stance. This manifested itself in their treatment of the writer, which was seminal in two key ways. First, it defined the parameters of writing instruction in terms of unflinching student-centeredness; and second, it began a long trend of identifying the writer in terms of its *opposition* to something else. We thus see a proliferation of pedagogical theory that sets "writers" against "writing":

> We produce better writers, not better writing. (North, 1984, p. 438)
>
> The goal is to teach people to be writers, not to produce good texts in the course of a semester. (Brooke, 1988, p. 39)
>
> Students should "learn to become writers, rather than to learn to write papers."
>
> (Yancey, 1992, p. 17)

Such emergent notions of writer were (and still are) contrasted with more immediate concerns like grades or papers. In these passages, writing is conceptualized as a process, even *in lieu of* product, as if texts somehow cease to be important in light of our increased focus on writerly identity. This is almost certainly not the message these scholars meant to convey. Such resolute articulations of process are understandable, given the tendency

of students, the institution, and the culture-at-large to fixate on mechanics, external correctness, and grades. I draw on these examples not to critique the ideas of any of these individual scholars, but to illustrate how forcefully our discourses have separated "writers" and "writing." In practice, these writing teachers probably attended to a host of both process- and product-based concerns, but our scholarly *talk* has at times reduced writing and writers to diametric opposites. What matters, for purposes of this discussion, is the proliferation of these expressions as particular ways of *talking* about the writer.

Our discourses are bigger than any single teacher or theorist. Perhaps the most visible evidence of this is found in writing centers. In "The Idea of a Writing Center," a watershed article in writing center circles, Stephen North proposes a facilitative, student-focused center whose philosophy is fundamentally at odds with its product-based image. "Writers," North says, "and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction" (1984, p. 438). North's words effectively canonized the work of writing tutors. They continue to dictate scholarly conversations, serving as the foundational yardstick against which all other writing center theory is measured. His ideas have not been embraced uncritically (Simpson, 2010; Boquet and Lerner, 2008; Denny, 2005; Bawarshi and Pelkowski, 1999; Petit, 1997; Shamoon and Burns, 1995), and North himself eventually conceded that "Idea" became something of a romanticized "mythology," a "public idealization" that obscured the "lived experience of writing centers" (1994, pp. 9-10). Nonetheless, countless writer center websites continue to proclaim the same explicit goal: "making better writers, not (just) better papers."[2] Lerner and Boquet (2008) suggest that the "wide and uncritical invocation" of these core phrases

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[2] Obviously, the word "just" is crucial here – and it's not always included. The word "just" implies a focus on process, people, *and* their written products, not process *instead* of product, as many of these earlier proclamations were worded.

"have become a kind of verbal shorthand, a special handshake for the initiated, an endpoint rather than an origin" (p. 171). As Marilyn Cooper notes, North's axiom became a veritable "writing center mantra" (1994, p. 100). Writing centers play an important role in this conversation, insofar as they illustrate the *reductive potential of our collective discourses*. North's revisions to his own position have not had the staying power of his original dictum. Examining and re-examining our perceptions of writer can help us better account for nuance and counteract our discipline's acknowledged tendency toward reification (Crowley/Octalog, 1988; Yancey 2004).

While process pedagogy has evolved considerably (and moved into a "post-process" era, depending on who you ask), the separation of writers and writing in our scholarship persists. Kastner (2010), for instance, asserts that the principal "goal" of her assignments is "not for students to perfect their writing or even to produce polished writing, but instead, for these students to see themselves as writers" (p. 30). Indeed, an enduring legacy of the process movement was in foregrounding "the writer's growth as the subject of writing instruction" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 60).

Writer vs. student: Empowerment and agency

The writer is contrasted not just with "writing," but with the identity of "student." Bronwyn Williams (2011) recalls how he came to prioritize the writer under the tutelage of Donald Murray:

> Rather than regard them as students to be filled with the teacher's forms of writing, we were encouraged to regard them as writers first, and to engage them with their struggles to communicate their experiences, and by extension their identities, on the page. ("Whose Knowledge" ¶ 1)

Like Williams, many writing teachers and scholars maintain that identifying as "writers" empowers students, allowing them to write with greater purpose and agency. Peter Elbow is among the most vocal and well-known proponents of this position:

> My larger self wants them to feel themselves as readers and academics, but this goal seems to conflict with my more pressing hunger to help them feel themselves as writers. I can't help wanting my students to have some of that uppitiness of writers towards readers. I want them to be able to say, "I'm not just writing for teachers or readers – I'm writing as much for me – sometimes even *more* for me. I want them to fight back against readers. (1995, p. 76)

Elbow (1973, 1981, 1987, 1995) envisions a classroom where students learn to "feel" like writers, writing first and foremost for themselves—sometimes even at the expense of their audience(s). For Elbow, it is important for writers to *acknowledge*—but not necessarily write to—their audience. Despite the importance of readers, we can't be "tyrannized by what they say" (1973, p. 104-5). He warns against "putting decision-making power in [reader's] hands," because you may effectively "push yourself out of the picture" (1973, p. 105). Elbow stresses that while readers offer invaluable input, ultimately "you are in charge" (1973, p. 106). He insists that students who act as writers write with greater confidence: "I want my first year students to be saying in their writing, 'Listen to me, I have something to tell you,' not 'Is this okay? Will you accept this?' (p. 82). Not all writing teachers agree with Elbow's position—indeed, some have attacked these ideas—but countless teachers have followed his lead, seeking to empower students by urging them to self-identify as writers. This is evidenced by the great popularity of his textbooks, most notably *Being a Writer: A Community of Writers Revisited* (2003).

Like his legions of followers, Elbow emphasizes the capacity of the writer

identity to engender *ownership*, *authority* and *agency.* For him, being a writer hinges on

control—that is, knowing not only how to gain control, but when to "let go" (1981, p.

171) or "invite chaos" (1973, xviii). A writer gains "power" by knowing when to

overpower the forces that push back against his own writing (1973, 1981). In this sense,

"Good writers [like] good athletes don't get really good until they stop worrying and

hang loose and trust that the good stuff will come" (1973, p. 27).[3] Control is something a

writer gains by *choosing* to relinquish control. In this sense, the direction of one's writing

is very much in the hands of the writer, giving Elbow's writer an unmistakable autonomy.

In encouraging students to behave as writers, Elbow encourages them "to write as though

they are a central speaker at the center of the universe" (1995, p. 80). This authority is

critical to Elbow's notion of the writer; he maintains that without it, our writing has no

"heart" (1994).

Elbow (1995) holds that school settings lead students to write in fear of

evaluation, transforming "writing" into "being tested." He argues that "the odd writing

behaviors of students make perfect sense once we see that they are behaving as test-takers

rather than writers" (p. 382). A host of R & C scholars continue to make this distinction.

Goncalves (2005) laments that "our educational institutions position first-year students

(passive recipients of knowledge) as non-writers" (p. 103). Since so few students "see

themselves as 'writers' at all" (p. 103), she begins her classes with an assignment "meant

to invite students into the identity of 'writer'" (p. 30). Similarly, Ivanič (1998)

distinguishes between "students" who write for "assessment" and "writers" who write for

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[3] Elbow's widely embraced practice of "freewriting" serves as the definitive example here; by *selectively* embracing indeterminacy and resisting disabling constraints, a writer effectively controls his/her lack of control.

"publication" (p. 296). She highlights the difference between positioning oneself as a "knowledge-maker" (writer) or a learner-apprentice (student) who simply displays competence.

Such school-based constraints have inspired many advocates of portfolio assessment to encourage students to "see themselves as writers" (Bishop, 1990; Cooper and Brown, 1992; Yancey, 1992; Huot, 2002). These scholars typically stress the importance of extending writing beyond the limits of the classroom context. Huot (2002) observes that "in many classrooms, the role of student consumes that of writer" (p. 67). He argues that the unavoidable "disjuncture between competing roles" (student and writer) can create something of a double bind, in which the "authority necessary to write well" inevitably conflicts with the "deference necessary to be a good student" (p. 67). Authority is again the operative word here; teachers call for students to adopt a "writer" identity to push them out of the limited "student" role and avoid the rote recitation of simply "doing school." Encouraging students to see themselves as writers can help them think outside the context of grades and the classroom.

Some empirical studies support these approaches. In a longitudinal four-year study of over 400 Harvard University students, Sommers and Saltz (2004) find that students see greater value in college writing when they "refashion themselves as writers" (p. 128) with "real intellectual tasks" (p. 140). According to students' own reports, their learning is inhibited when they fail to grow out of the "novice" student role or see no purpose for writing beyond the classroom. The authors thus assert that "the story of freshman year is not one of dramatic changes on paper; it is the story of changes within the writers themselves" (p. 144).

Several anecdotal classroom studies (Kastner, 2010; Street, 2005; Whitney, 2008; Bishop, 1999; Ivanic, 1994), mostly by teachers of their own students, also extol the virtues of reframing "students" as "writers." Like Elbow, many instructors (Kastner, 2010; Whitney, 2008; Street, 2005; Bishop, 1999) stress the benefits of community membership. Kastner (2010) asserts, "Considering students as part of a writing community from the outset, seriously and consciously treating students as writers, will have positive results" (p. 26). Like her antecedents, she links this practice to "ownership," maintaining that teachers should interact not with writing, but "a writer's writing" (p. 30). Street (2005) also stresses the socially affirming value of the writer identity, urging students to "acquire the ways of being a writer" as a means of entering "a distinctive community of practitioners" (p. 639). This kind of self-exploration is not limited to process pedagogies; it has also been advocated for cultural studies classrooms. Goncalves (2005), for example, encourages her students to assume "the social identity of 'writer,'" noting that this subject position "holds a valued position in educational discourse," unlike the "unsatisfying subject position" of student (p. 30).

Robert Brooke takes things a step further and insists that learning to write *necessitates* a change in identity. He maintains that "writing teachers want to produce writers, not students," urging instructors to organize their entire pedagogy around "the possibility of the writer's identity" (1987, p.151). Encouraging students to see themselves as writers, he maintains, shifts the focus away from the teacher's authority and towards "their authority in their worlds" (1991, p. 1). A critical point for Brooke is that students *must* assume think and act *as a writer* in order to write; adoption of this "role" is "more important than developing any set of procedural competencies" (1991, p. 5). Learning, in

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this sense, *only* occurs via a struggle with self-definition: "When people embrace the roles a situation offers and make them part of their ongoing behaviors, they have learned something. When, in contrast, they reject or merely comply with the presented roles, then they have not learned but have merely passed through the class" (1991, p. 25-26). In this sense, learning to write "depends on" an understanding of the "self as writer" (1991, p. 83). A number of scholars (Smith, 1994; Bishop, 1999; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; Kastner, 2010) agree that learning to write is fundamentally about finding and assuming a new identity. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) remind us that we must reconcile this assumption with our own observations that "some learners can work their way into that identity and others cannot" (p. 183).

Shifting our focus from "students" to "writers" is also an oft-suggested solution to the so-called "literacy crises" at all levels of education. Maxwell (2002) insists that "professors need to help students start seeing themselves as writers" for there to be any hope of improving the "mediocre to poor" student writing at colleges and universities:

> Here is the source of the problem: Too many students on the nation's campuses […] see themselves as mere students. But in the academy, they are more than mere students. Everyone is, or should be, a writer […] Students need to […] start seeing themselves as writers, not as harassed victims playing a game of handing in "word salads" to meet a deadline or to satisfy an assignment for a mere grade.

Maxwell writes for a general university audience; this excerpt comes not from a disciplinary journal, but an article published in a school newspaper. Interestingly, this suggests that the language of the student-writer binary is being employed outside of R & C to interact with the broader educational community.

Within our own scholarly circles, Yagelski (2000) argues that the ongoing debates about literacy and education reform stem from a "conflicted idea of the writer"—that is, a deeply entrenched disparity between "writer" and "student writer" (p. 33). Unlike students, writers enjoy "exalted status" in western culture, which leads students to disclaim rather than assume the identity (p. 34). Yagelski notes that professional writers are often lauded as cultural icons, while student writers are perceived as "collections of particular and often discreet writing skills" (p. 35). This latter conceptualization not only posits a decontextualized writer, but also perpetuates the widely disparaged (at least within Writing Studies) "autonomous" (Street, 1984) model of literacy. Overly narrow conceptions of "student writer" reflect an instrumental conception of reading and writing, what the New London Group (1996) term "mere literacy," a central point of contention in debates about literacy education and school-based assessment. Like the other scholars mentioned, Yagelski (2000) is primarily concerned with building confidence—with "possibility and empowerment" (p. 64). Indeed, it is largely for reasons of empowerment that NCOW continues to produce media asserting that "everyone is a writer" (2010).

As anyone involved with the National Writing Project (NWP) will tell you, reframing the self as a writer has long been associated with positive "transformation" and self-efficacy (Whitney, 2008). NWP, like NCOW, is dedicated to propagating this inclusive notion of writer. An organizing principle of NWP's immensely popular workshops for writing teachers ("Summer Institutes," which operate in all 50 states) is that teachers and students should work together *as writers*. NWP stresses the importance of not just students, but teachers of writing seeing themselves as writers, conceptualizing the writing teacher as a *writer* teaching writing. Passionate testimonials on the NWP

website affirm the value of taking on the writer identity ("Writing Project Voices"). In addition, a host of links and resources are devoted to describing what it means to be a writer ("Being a Writer"). Like writing centers, the countless Writing Project sites have played a significant role in defining the content and trajectory of our pedagogical conversations. Due in no small part to NWP's wide-ranging influence, writing instructors tend to discuss teaching in terms of "writers" rather than "students."

In light of this literature, a tension emerges—a tension between identity and activity. Does "writer" describe what one *is* or what one *does*? This distinction is critical, and the literature rarely fleshes it out with adequate detail. Distinguishing "writers" from "writing" or "students" reveals what R & C as a discipline has sought to reject (form-focused instruction, limiting school-based roles), but what does the term "writer" move us *towards*? When we talk of students becoming writers, do we have a particular kind of person in mind? Or is a writer anyone who writes anything? Does the mere act of inscribing words on a page or screen make one a writer? Ultimately, any conception of "writer" walks this hazy line between identity and activity. This distinction is addressed more extensively in subsequent chapters.

An increasingly tenuous writer?

New technologies continue to "change the writing process in substantial ways" (Bruce, 2002, p. 8). As Takayoshi and Selfe (2007) note, it has become a "common place that digital composing environments are challenging writing, writing instruction, and basic understandings of the different components of the rhetorical situation (writers, readers, texts) to change" (p. 1). New media scholars like Domingo, Jewitt, and Kress (2014) are examining the "changing function of writing in online contexts" to better

understand contemporary literacies. Scholarship in R &C continues to push for a more "multimodal" notion of composition beyond just alphabetic text, and teachers have begun to incorporate such texts into their classrooms (Selfe and Takayoshi, 2007; Comstock and Hocks, 2006; Hull and Nelson, 2005; Wysocki, 2004).

Have new writing technologies changed the nature of the "writer" so often invoked in R &C scholarship? Kathleen Yancey speaks to these issues in her "Chair's Address" at the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). She claims that for all our *talk* of multimodal composition and "post-process" approaches, the preponderance of our instruction remains grounded in 20th century approaches and a narrow, decontextualized "writer:"

> Regardless of the changes that are advocated as we attempt to create a post-process compositional curriculum, most (not all but most) attempt this without questioning or altering the late 20th century basis of composition. To put the point directly, composition in this school context, and in direct contrast to the world context, remains chiefly focused on the writer qua writer, sequestered from the means of production. Our model of teaching composing, as generous, varied, and flexible as it is […] (still) embodies the narrow and the singular in its emphasis on a primary and single human relationship: the writer in relation to the teacher. (p. 309)

Yancey argues that the new media writer is categorically different from our traditional conceptions of writer: "technology changes literacy: that's the kind of transformation we are seeing now with regard to writers" (p. 318).

It could be argued, of course, that technology *always* changes the nature of literacy. I maintain that this discussion still matters, if only because of the widespread *perception* that these recent changes are something heretofore unseen and paradigmatic for the discipline. To its credit, the field has embraced these changes, expanding our notion of "composition" and what it means to write. However, our discourses still tend to frame writing instruction in terms of "writers." Yancey's comments suggest that at least some in the field perceive such pedagogies to be dated and/or problematic.

Taking into account the proliferation of digital nonacademic writing, Kastner (2010) urges us to meet students where they are: "Our students *are* writers, and they are [already] conditioned to perform in a world that communicates through writing" (p. 25). Indeed, writing is central to meaning-making in contemporary communicative contexts. A proportionately high number of students (especially so-called "millennials") are writing all the time, perhaps more than any previous generation of composition students. For Kastner (2010), this is further reason to treat them not as students, but as "writers."

In spite of Yancey's expressed concerns, a number of new media scholars continue to invoke the same aphorisms: "composition teachers are well aware that we need to help students learn to see themselves as writers" (Keller et. al., 2007, p. 72). This passage is particularly striking, since it suggests ("teachers are well aware") that helping students to see themselves as writers is something of a disciplinary truism—as if this is simply what we do. But what kinds of writers are we asking our students to be? While the effect of new technologies on writing pedagogy is not the primary focus of this dissertation, changing conceptions of literacy and composition are difficult to ignore.

How have our notions of writing changed—and how do these changes affect our writer-centric pedagogies?

Research and theory continue to evolve in R & C, but our focus on "writers" remains a constant. Though such conversations are a product of twentieth century pedagogies, the notion that "we may empower our students as writers" remains widely held (Bizzaro, 2009). Despite this steady stream of scholarship, however, specific constructions of the "writer" identity remain relatively unexplored.

Rationale/Contribution to the field

The words we use to talk about what we do are critically important. In a seminal Chair's Address at CCCC, David Bartholomae (1989) points to the importance of reflecting on our own foundations, calling for a richer understanding of the "terms we use to constitute our subject, the terms we take for granted and the degree to which we take them for granted" (p. 45). Some terms, he says, become paradigmatic; for all practical purposes, they *are* our "legacy." However, these terms are also "our problem, our burden, since they resist reflection and change" (p. 45). Yancey (2004) cites this very passage from Bartholomae in her own "Chair's Address," reiterating the importance of examining the terms that populate our scholarly discussions.

I want to suggest that "writer" is just such a term, not necessarily in the sense that it has been "taken for granted," but in that it is a formative part of our "legacy" as teachers and scholars, a fundamental term we use to "constitute our subject." In answering Bartholomae's call, this dissertation examines the ways in which current notions of "writer" fit into our pedagogical practice as part of a rich and sometimes contentious history. The "writer" that is our "legacy" is not the single idea of any one theorist but a product of our collective *discourses*. I share Bartholomae's concern with

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the potential effect that these discourses can have on otherwise complex ideas, watering them down, making them appear more reified than they actually are. It is perhaps for this reason that Browyn Williams wonders, "Has the overt display of the writer's identity become, in fact, a move that can limit discussion rather than engage it?" (2006, p. 8).

This dissertation makes a contribution to the field both by examining teacher's use of the word "writer" and positioning the term in current pedagogical conversations. Through this project, I hope to help teachers and scholars better understand the ramifications of our own (often implicit) assumptions. R & C's disputes over its own disciplinary identity have long been entangled with questions of the writer. What are the implications of our conceptions of "writer"? How do these conceptions affect teachers' practice in the classroom? Does enculturation into a particular discourse community necessitate the adoption of a particular subject position (in this case, "writer")? Can we engage effectively in academic writing without identifying *as* "academic writers"? My qualitative studies (both the interviews and focus group) examine with specificity the kinds of writers we are asking our students to be. This, I hope, will advance and enhance our teaching, strengthening and revitalizing both our theoretical bases and practical approaches.

Chapter Synthesis

The aforementioned oppositional constructions of writer (writer-writing; writer-student) persist, and remain a foundational part of late 20th century Composition scholarship. Broadly speaking, conceptions of writer within R & C are increasingly disparate, reflecting competing disciplinary narratives. The discipline has touched on these issues, but explicit descriptions of a "writer" surface only intermittently, and not

always with adequate depth or breadth. To what extent do our "writer qua writer" pedagogies (Yancey, 2004) persist? What kinds of writers are we *currently* talking about? What does it really mean to *be* a writer? In the most elemental sense, "writers are people who write" (Bishop, 1990, p. 1). Beyond that, however, the literature suggests a great deal of interpretive dissonance, which this study seeks to disentangle.

I am particularly interested in the circular reasoning at work here. In shifting our pedagogical focus from writing to writers, we hope that our students will attain (to varying degrees) agency and authority—but why do these things matter if not to produce better texts? An increasing number of scholars (e.g. Elbow, Yagelski, Gradin) have sought to make "writers" and "writing" less dichotomous, but there remains an appreciable tension between them, especially in certain circles (e.g. writing centers). Are students *becoming* writers in our classrooms, as some scholars suggest? What are the pedagogical and philosophical ramifications of such expectations? It bears mentioning that those who encourage the writer role may not explicitly teach students to *be* writers— that is, I'm not sure teachers always vocalize this objective in class (though some certainly do). Rather, to be a writer may be more or less akin to thinking about writing in a particular way. It is precisely these particularities that I explore in this project.

Organization/Preview

This dissertation is organized into 7 chapters. This chapter has introduced the studies that comprise this dissertation and established the centrality of the writer in R & C's scholarly discourses. Chapter II provides a conceptual overview of the term, especially since the onset of the process movement, exploring the role of "expressivism" and postmodern and social theory in (re)defining the writer. In addition, Chapter II will

briefly examine the issue of a writer's presence in his/her writing, looking at related terms like *ethos* and voice. Finally, it reviews some common nonacademic/popular constructions of writer.

Chapter III details the broad methodologies and specific data collection methods informing the core inquiry of this dissertation—10 multi-tiered qualitative interviews with postsecondary teachers of writing. Procedures for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis are explained, as well as the conceptual bases and rationale for the research design. The study assumes an unequivocally constructivist approach, but still seeks to maintain transparency and empirical rigor. This chapter concludes by presenting the overarching categories of "writer" derived from the interview transcript analysis. Chapter III provides an explicit account of my research process, allowing future researchers to replicate, extend, or challenge this study.

Chapters IV and V discuss the results of the interviews, examining in great detail each of the categories that emerged from the inductive coding process. Chapter IV presents holistic results for the study, including frequency and coding counts for all categories. This chapter then describes the four broad *types of writer* derived from the data analysis: *Capital "W" Writer, Lowercase "w" writer, Expressive Writer,* and *Academic Writer*. Chapter V looks at the four most prevalent *characteristics of writer*: *Writers have Power, Writers take Risks, Writers are Readers*, and *Writers are Discourse-Specific*. Through both chapters, I use graphics and detailed excerpts from participants to illustrate the kinds of statements that typify and comprise each category. These categories, while discrete, interconnect in a number of intriguing ways. Some categories

are characterized by distinct sub-components ("dimensions"), which are represented graphically and discussed extensively.

Participant responses reflect a tension between various conceptualizations of writer. Results suggest that the term is associated with an array of self-refuting ideas and that related pedagogical issues are far from settled.

Chapter VI describes a second study—a four-person focus group—that was incorporated to supplement the interviews and further contextualize the resulting data. Including a focus group enabled me to observe various notions of writer within the context of an actual discussion. Chapter VI describes the details of the focus group, including the methods (participant selection, data collection and analysis), results, and conclusions. The focus group was treated as an outgrowth of the interview study, employing similar research questions and methods of data analysis. Unlike the previous two chapters, where categories are dimensionalized and discussed at great length, I focus primarily on the tension *between* observed categories and the extent to which self-identification as a writer is perceived to enable or constrain writing.

Chapter VII concludes the dissertation. In it, I summarize and synthesize the results, drawing pedagogical implications and connections to R & C literature. I note limitations, salient insights, and contributions to the field, suggesting areas for future research. Interestingly, participants found the dimensions of the capital "W" Writer to be the most inescapable. In light of the fragmented and somewhat anachronistic results, I argue that the term "writer" may ultimately be too fraught to serve as a pedagogical goal.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION:

A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF THE WRITER

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two provides a conceptual overview of the writer, focusing primarily on central concerns since the onset of the process movement. As in the previous chapter, my coverage of the various topics should not be construed as exhaustive; this is a selective overview predicated on the specific issue of the writer. Conceptualizations of writer in R & C are born of a complex milieu of sociocultural, institutional, and disciplinary forces, reflected in the work of countless scholars and teachers. This chapter is less about the nuances of their individual positions than it is about recurrent themes and shared ideals.

My discussion is broken into three parts. Part I explores some common popular/nonacademic constructions of writer, especially those that manifest themselves in our pedagogies and in the results of this study. Part II looks at conceptualizations of writer since the onset of the process movement, focusing on the role of expressivism and postmodern and social theory in (re)defining what it means to be a writer. As part of this discussion, I look at the longstanding disciplinary divide between "personal" and "academic" writers, the effects of the "social turn" on conceptions of writer, and the disciplinary backlash against postmodern notions of writer. Finally, Part III examines related terms used to talk about writers (*ethos* and voice) and the relationship of a

physical writer to the text, briefly touching on how new media technologies affect the writer. This last section, though somewhat more abstract, relates to the results of these studies (see Chapters 4-6), where participant notions of the writer-text relationship appear to inform (to varying degrees) their conception of a writer.

PART I: *Popular/non-academic constructions of writer*

While the nonacademic literature on the writer is far too expansive to be covered adequately in this dissertation, some popular cultural tropes are worth discussing, if only because 1) they are so pervasive, sometimes leaking into academic circles, and 2) they appear with surprising frequency in the data set. These manifestations of the writer reflect broader cultural beliefs about literacy and individuality. As Yagelski (2000) reminds us, this is particularly the case with romantic notions of writer, which "continue to drive popular conceptions of the Writer today and profoundly shape current discussions in the public arena" (p.34). In subsequent chapters, this study will show that even teachers who actively resist these notions of writer often find them impossible to avoid.

It bears mentioning that non-academic representations of writer tend to align the term with creative writing. I maintain that these constructions are still highly relevant to writing teachers. One reason is that many composition instructors (e.g. Bishop, Yancey) identify strongly as creative writers. More important, though, is that teachers—even those who encourage students to act as writers—are not the only ones constructing the writer. Brooke (1991) claims that individuals forge a distinct identity from "competing social definitions of self that surround them" (p. 4). In this sense, non-academic culture contributes (often explicitly) to "competing social definitions" of the "writer" identity, out of which students may forge a writerly self.

Popular constructions of writer: Affirming the innately gifted writer

Like our own scholarship, many nonacademic books about writing explicitly push their readers to embrace the identity of "writer." However, their well-worn rhetoric of self-affirmation and can-do positivity is noticeably more over-the-top. Karen Peterson (2008) offers to help her readers "discover your true writer's identity," no matter how little they manage to write: "So what if you haven't even written a word? I am here to tell you that if you *want* to write, then you are, by definition, a writer" (p. 14). Jane Staw (2003) looks to build her readers' self-esteem by having them list characteristics they wish they had as writers, then destroying the list and its "myths." This, too, ends with affirmation: "Now […] repeat to yourself, 'I am a writer. I may write slowly, with a great deal of difficulty. I may not know where to begin, and I may not create striking metaphors. But I am a writer'" (p. 112-13).

Popular culture also advances the notion that being a "writer" is something inborn, a preexistent part of one's disposition and character. Peterson (2008) claims that most writers she has worked with "sensed, on some level, that writing was a part of their being" (p. 16). Jenna Glatzer (2003) is even more direct: "Like Monks who take a vow of silence or those daring souls who want to climb Mount Everest, writers are not made — they are *called*" (p. 8). Anne Lamott, author of the bestselling *Bird by Bird*, does little to dispel this notion: "God made some of us fast in this area of working with words" (1994, p. xviii). For both writers and teachers of writing, it can be extraordinarily difficult to reconcile this view of the intrinsically "gifted" writer with research findings that suggest "producing writing is a learnable skill like any other" (Boice, 1985, p. 477).

Popular constructions of writer: The writer as tortured artist

Depictions of writing and writers in films, books, and even some academic literature often promote the idea that writing is exclusively a product of anguish and suffering. The near-apocryphal lore surrounding artistic creation serves to mythologize this construction of a writer: that of the tortured artist. Famous authors contribute to this mythology, telling tales of how they wrestle with their muses and demons in an agonizing quest to create. For example, George Orwell (1946) laments: "Every book is a failure, […] a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand" (last ¶). Norman Mailer is widely quoted as saying (just before his death), "every one of my books has killed me a little more" (Gilbert, 2009). Lauren Slater (1998), author of the *Prozac Diaries*, actually worried that antidepressants were flattening the angst she needed as a writer: "It's been almost a year now since I've composed a short story or poem. I who always thought of myself as a writer, all tortured and intense. But [now] I can just manage this journal. So maybe I'm not a writer anymore" (p. 91). Kurt Vonnegut (1976) notes how rarely people are willing to "endure the life of a writer," likening it to "making wallpaper by hand for the Sistine Chapel."

The writer is often framed as a person uniquely prone to self-loathing and mental anguish. Lamott (1994) quips, "My writer friends, and they are legion, do not go around beaming with quiet feelings of contentment. Most of them go around with haunted, abused, surprised looks on their faces, like lab dogs on whom very personal deodorant sprays have been tested" (p. xxx). Palumbo (2000) is similarly bleak, and even more explicit: "Writer's block. Procrastination. Loneliness. Doubt. Fear of failure. Fear of

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rejection.   Just plain…fear. What does it mean if you struggle with these feelings on a daily basis?   It means you're a writer" (p. 2). Authors of writing advice books, even as they urge readers to adopt a "writer" identity, repeatedly point to the tendency of writers to disparage not just their work, but themselves. "Writers," notes Nelson, "tend to think of themselves in a number of ways, all bad" (1993, p. 1). Some even represent the writer as a uniquely neurotic personality type, as if the very impulse to create were indicative of some underlying psychological condition. Glatzer (2003) wryly asserts, "If I weren't so defective in the first place, I'd probably never be a writer" (p. 84).

These potentially disabling associations sometimes extend into academic spheres. Indeed, the notion of the writer as tortured artist stems primarily from nonacademic creative writers —fiction, songwriters, and the like —but academia has also contributed to these constructions. Such pervasive myths and clichés are part and parcel of how the "writer" is constructed, sometimes even by our own discipline. In one of the videos produced the National Conversation on Writing, an interviewee pithily states "I am a writer because I'm a masochist" (Bowden and Vandenberg, 2010). And English Professor Robert Holkeboer (1986) won a scholarly achievement award for his book, *Creative Agony: Why Writers Suffer*, in which he aligns writing with a host of grim miseries.

These are but a few of countless examples. Whether the emotional difficulties of writers are the cause or effect of psychological problems is rather beside the point. What matters, for purposes of this discussion, is that these tribulations are so frequently associated with the term "writer." The construction of a writer as tortured artist perpetuates the notion that one must suffer for his/her art; that anxiety, self-doubt, and

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isolation are somehow inescapable; that writers, by definition, are beset by pain and struggle. Many people thus come to believe that writing thrives under harsh conditions, even that the struggle is necessary for creation.

Popular constructions of writer: The writer who writes spontaneously

The aforementioned myth —that writing is inherently painful and arduous —is directly tied to notions of the writing process as unavoidably random and compulsive, such that writing can only take place when the "muse" is present. In this sense, a writer is a passive recipient of inspiration. Lamott reflects on a sudden blast of inspiration: "It was like catching amoebic dysentery. I was just sitting there minding my business, and then the next minute I rushed to my desk with an urgency I had not believed possible" (1994, p. 180). Julia Cameron (1998), author of the bestselling *The Artist's Way*, insists that these moments of clarity always manage to find her: "Even when I don't think I want it, even when I think I have nothing to say, it seduces me like the first really balmy day of spring" (p. 27). A writer's writing, in this sense, is wholly unpredictable.

Among the most famous examples of writing as an uncontrollable outburst is the story of Jack Kerouac composing *On the Road* in a single continuous marathon writing session. The remaining artifact—a 120 foot scroll consisting of twelve-foot long rolls of paper scotched taped together with single-spaced text and no paragraphs—would seem to reflect the hyperactive muse of writer *compelled* to write. Indeed, Kerouac tended to associate his productivity to momentary blasts of inspiration, encouraging others to embrace "wild" writing "with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement" (*Genius* 2009). This characterization of writing, along with the dubious lore behind the scroll's creation, contributes to the notion of writing as a

compulsion, as an unavoidable impulse. Not only does this devalue writing as "craft,"

but it reinforces the idea that the writer alone is not enough; that something larger than

life must be present for eloquent writing to occur.

Such a notion of writing (and in a rhetorical sense, invention) may be traced all

the way back to Plato.[4] We see explicit articulations of Platonic invention in the

Phaedrus, particularly when Socrates is speaking to Phaedrus about the eloquence of his

speeches (italics mine): "I am well aware that I have thought up none of them from

within my resources, because I am conscious of my own ignorance; the only alternative,

then, I think, is that *I have been filled up through my ears, like a vessel, from someone

else's streams*" (235d1). In this sense, invention is something random and revelatory, a

spontaneous product of some undefined outside source; ideas simply emerge in one's

head independent of a writer's own "resources." Insights, for Plato, are often born of

madness and divine inspiration. One's ability to invent is subject to inspiration from the

"muses." Throughout the *Phaedrus*, Socrates remarks that he feels unusually inspired,

that "something more than human has happened" to him (238c5). Socrates sometimes

invokes the muses at the beginning of a speech, but after that, invention is out of his

hands. His ideas are not even his own, as he has "become possessed by Nymphs" and is

practically "uttering in dithyrambs" (238d1). When he finally breaks from these lengthy

speeches, it is as if awakening from a trance. Socrates seems to have been animated by

the mythic surroundings of his discourse, and is "inventing" a song that he has no control

over.

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[4] Rhetorical scholars (e.g. Lefevre and Crowley) have long associated romantic notions of writing and writers with a lingering Platonic influence; few would argue that his idealistic conceptions of invention have dominated Western notions of creativity.

In Plato's world, spontaneous and even uncontrollable inspiration is something of a "happening"—invention simply occurs, independent of a writer's volition. In this sense, invention is not only solitary and individual, but also largely outside a writer's control. It is something that happens *to* a writer. This can lead would-be writers to accept diminished rhetorical agency, as evidenced by those who align creativity with "waiting for the muse." Despite research by psychologist Robert Boice (1997) showing such "binge writing" to be profoundly ineffective, many writers (even some in academia) continue to romanticize it. Indeed, a number of famous authors attribute their greatest works to something outside themselves.

The lingering romantic mythology of the writer

These popular tropes suggest a neo-romantic notion of a writer that might seem trite and dated in our contemporary era. However, their influence is far-reaching, especially outside the academy. Many academic conceptions of "writer," especially within R & C, explicitly seek to undo the persistent influence of such "myths." This, however, suggests just how pervasive these ideas remain. These narratives also intensify the aforementioned rift between identity and activity; taken as a whole, these conceptions construct a writer as more of a *figure*—a particular kind of person with special abilities and propensities. Culturally speaking, this figure looms large, making it difficult to conceptualize any kind of writer without broaching these ideas. The innately gifted, spontaneously compelled figure of the writer thus clashes with the aforementioned discourses of affirmation that urge *everyone* to identify as a writer.

PART II: *Recent academic conceptions of writer*

This section explores some of the most influential academic notions of writer since the process movement. It begins by examining the "writer" espoused by expressive teachers and scholars. It then examines the effect of postmodern theory on the writer, the disciplinary divide between "personal" and "academic" writers, the effects of the "social turn" on the writer, and the disciplinary (within R & C) backlash against postmodern notions of writer. In many cases, these movements and their proponents draw on the romantic stereotypes of the previous section, both supporting and condemning such conceptions of writer.

Expressivism and the writer

The influence of the aforementioned popular notions of writer in R & C as a discipline is perhaps no more evident than through expressive pedagogies. Historically, writing instructors have been "as much or more interested in *who* they want their students to be as in *what* they want their students to write" (Faigley, 1989, p. 396). Expressivism—a popular form of process pedagogy grounded in humanistic (and, for some, neo-romantic) ideals – has been especially formative in this regard.[5] While there are many components to (and variations on) expressivist pedagogy (e.g. using writing as a mode of learning, a renewed interest in rhetorical invention), what matters most to this discussion is their focus on *self-expression.[6]* The origins of expressivism are somewhat amorphous and difficult to pinpoint. Its philosophical underpinnings can be traced to Susan Langer (1942, 1953), whose theory of "expressiveness" in language had become

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[5] Expressivist and process pedagogies are often lumped together and discussed interchangeably. For purposes of this dissertation, "expressivism" refers to but one part of a broader writing-as-process movement. Indeed, not all "process" teachers can rightly be termed "expressive"—but expressivists can fairly be characterized by (among other things) their resolute focus on process.

[6] Expressivism is also referred to as "expressionism" (Berlin, 1988; Yancey, 1994; Howard, 1999) or simply "expressive" rhetoric or pedagogy (Burnham, 2001).

ubiquitous in college textbooks and readers in the 1960s.[7] R & C's earliest proponents of an explicitly "expressive" approach were James Britton and James Kinneavy.

Burnham (1993; 2001), Harris (1990), and Berlin (1987) locate its roots in a confluence of related movements, including 19th century Romanticism, early 20th century progressive education, expressionistic art, and psychoanalytic theory.[8] In a broader sense, expressive pedagogy may be an upshot of a global "epistemological shift" towards the individual in the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the increasingly humanistic focus of personal "themes" in American composition courses (Connors, 1987). The group of core expressivist practitioners—Elbow, MaCrorie, Coles, Murray, Kelly, and Stewart—was instrumental in framing writing instruction with respect to "writers" rather than writing/students and in foregrounding identity in the classroom.

Expressivism anchors its pedagogy by "assigning highest value to the writer and her imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development" (Burnham, 2001, p. 19). Encouraging students to act as writers was (as discussed in Chapter 1) regarded as a way to increase agency, leading students to take ownership of their writing. Writing, in this sense, belongs to the student, and is more than just a tool; it is an extension of an individual. Such writing was termed "expressive," Britton's descriptor for writing that is "closest to the self" (1982, p. 106). Indeed, most expressive-oriented teachers favor personal writing in the classroom and continue to stress the value of individual experience in intellectual work. Indeed, one of the enduring aspects of expressive

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[7] Langer argued that all human activity has an expressive component. Artistic (or, in this case, writerly) expression is not merely "symptomatic;" it is not a biological reflex, like a baby crying. Rather, humans express feeling through "symbols" rather than "symptoms." In this sense, we express not actual feelings, but ideas of feeling. This distinction, which was recognized by Britton & Kinneavy, is not always evident in the pedagogy of expressive teachers.

[8] The connections to Romanticism in particular have been traced extensively, both by expressivism's detractors (Berlin, 1987, 1988; Faigley, 1986) and defenders (Fishman-McCarthy, 1992; Burnham, 2001; Gradin, 1995; Veeder; O' Brien, 2000).

pedagogies is the notion that writers should be invested in their writing—that student writers, in particular, should write primarily on topics of interest to them. Donald Murray (1991) goes so far as to insist that "all writing is autography." This is a commonality among expressive teachers—for all their subtle differences, most align a writer with personal writing. Expressivists thus tend to focus primarily on a writer's autonomy and what a single person can do with language. Elbow's popular metaphor-laden books (1973, 1981) are in many ways the epitome of this approach, encouraging specific kinds of writerly habits, serving as a kind of "self-management" for writers (1973, vi). Like many expressivists (Murray, Stewart), he posits an inclusive notion of "writer" predicated on the assumption that "everyone in the world wants to write" (xi).

Expressivists may also be characterized by their unequivocally process-based notion of writing and writers. Most expressivists share the assumption that a writer makes meaning *through* the process of writing (e.g. Murray, 1972, Elbow, 1973). Being a writer, in this sense, means using writing as a vehicle for thought and self-exploration. Britton (1982) termed this "writing to learn." When a writer writes to learn, s/he uses writing as a mode of learning; s/he writes *in order* to learn what s/he has to say. Writing becomes a matter of "shaping at the point of utterance"—that is, finding and developing ideas by writing about them (Britton, 1982). In the seminal "Teach Writing as a Process, Not Product," Murray conceptualizes just such a writer, "an individual who uses language to discover meaning in experience and communicate it" (1972, p. 8). Through writing, he says, "writers discover more than they know they knew" (Murray, 1986, p .159). In this sense, "meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with" (Elbow, 1981, p. 15).

This epistemic view of rhetoric is central to expressive conceptions of the writer, manifesting itself in writing-to-learn activities like freewriting (Elbow, 1973, 1981).[9] Consistent with Elbow's view of audience, "freewritings help you by providing no feedback at all" (1981, p. 4). The notion that a writer sometimes must sometimes disregard his/her audience is shared by many of Elbow's expressive-minded peers. Murray notes that writers often "suppress [their] conscious awareness of audience to hear what the text demands" (Berkenhotter and Murray, 1983, p. 171). Corder (1991) similarly states that writers sometimes must "go the hell on without an audience" (p. 326).

Audience can be an inhibiting construct for expressivists hoping to expand their pedagogies beyond the purview of what is typically considered "academic." Williams (2011) speaks to this: "We weren't only teaching students to become better academic writers; we were teaching people to become better writers." This distinction ("writer" vs. "academic writer") is common amongst expressivists. Much expressivist scholarship condemns academic writing as "dull" (Elbow) and "lifeless" (Murray), accusing it of detaching a writer from real experience. Perhaps the best example of this is Ken Macrorie's notion of "Engfish," a sort of sterile institutional language through which "neither the writer nor the person written about come alive" (1970, p. 13). Macrorie decries Engfish (and most academic writing) for concealing rather than revealing the self.

This points to a fundamental concern of the expressivist writer; for him/her, writing is typically undertaken in order to construct or discover a self, to "write one's self." For some expressivists (Stewart, Murray, Kelly), this is necessarily a "true" and

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[9] Berlin contends that expressivist rhetorics are not epistemic because expressive language is only thought to shape private, and not social, meaning. This position, however, seems to understate the social cognizance of most expressivists, and ignores the centrality of "writing to learn" to most expressive pedagogies. Contrarily, Burnham (2001) praises the early expressivists for their "epistemic" theory of language, for using "writing as a means for both making meaning and creating identity" (p. 108).

"authentic" self. Lou Kelly (1973) proclaims that (italics mine) "the content of composition is the *writer* – as he reveals his *self*, thoughtfully and feelingly, in his *own* language, with his *own* voice" (p. 645). This single statement is highly representative of both the expressivist writer and the associated issues of self that stem from it. Indeed, for expressivists, writing expresses—or in some cases "reveals"—the/a self. This passage also illustrates the expressivist's concern with student *ownership*, and their consequent concerns with *voice* (Stewart, Elbow).

A number of expressive teachers are vocal proponents of exploring what it means to be a writer. Donald Murray and Wendy Bishop, in particular, held that reports from professional writers about their own craft are crucial to writing pedagogy. Murray collected fifty years worth of quotations from writers on writing, eventually publishing their testimony in *Shoptalk: Learning to Write with Writers* (1990), a resource meant to make the writing process more transparent by sharing the habits and beliefs of professional writers. Bishop likewise stressed the importance of integrating "writer's insights" with R & C scholarship "to further clarify what it means to be a writer and have a writing process" (1990, p. 19). Bizzaro (2009) and Burnham (2001) continue to call for more reflections from writers on their own writing.

Ultimately, the expressive movement was defined as much by its detractors as its practitioners, few of whom were self-proclaimed "expressivists." Elbow contends that many of the more scathing critiques were "polemically distorted," insisting that "the term is mostly used as a stick to beat me over the head with" (1991, p. 84). Other expressive teachers were similarly unwilling to own the label. Bishop, for example, refers to herself as a "self-identified-something-like-an-expressivist" (1999, p. 11). Williams (2011),

however, concedes that expressive pedagogies were often watered down by their followers: "That's the problem with disciples. They lose nuance as they gain fervor."

Elbow held that the pejorative views of his methods were not shared by most teachers of writing:

It's probably fair to say that by the late 80s, I was seen as a prime exemplar of a theory and philosophy of writing judged to be suspect or even wrong-headed by most of the dominant scholars […] And yet, interestingly enough, many classroom teachers did not share this distrust of so-called 'expressivism,' and I could usually count on a sympathetic audience of teachers when I gave a talk or a paper. This split between scholars and teachers bears pondering" (2000, p. xvi).

Whether an actual rift exists between "scholars" and "teachers" is arguable; what is less arguable is that opposing camps have actively promoted—and continue to harbor—quite different notions of the self and what it means to be a writer. These camps continue to reemerge in scholarly circles. McGaha's (2014) recent article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "In Defense of Expressionist Crap," was followed by a host of contentious comments about writing and writers, many of which seem to reflect precisely the kind of "rift" Elbow noted at the turn of the century.

It bears mentioning that not everyone believes that expressivism was ever a dominant pedagogical practice. Harris (1990) questions the very existence of an "expressive" genre, arguing that the term has been ill-defined and overused, and "does not accurately describe a category of discourse" (ix). Zebrowski (1999) likens the "expressivist menace" to the Communist Red Scare, claiming that it was widely disparaged but rarely practiced: "In contrast to the increasingly shrill condemnations of a

thing called expressivism, […] expressivism was never a major, persuasive movement in college composition" (p. 106). Burnham (2001), however, contends that expressivism constitutes "a complete rhetoric" that deserves a more prestigious place in R & C's history (p. 154). Ultimately, expressivism is an important piece of this conversation because of its ongoing presence in the discipline. In its incarnation, it revolutionized writing pedagogy, and many of its core practices have become routine classroom activities. Expressivist texts (especially Macrorie's and Elbow's) were frequently used as textbooks and remain popular to this day. Its influence is unmistakable, and some scholars perceive it to be "expanding its region of command" (Fulkerson, 2005, p. 655). Howard (1999) even suggests that it may be "the prevailing model of writing within our culture" (p. 47).

Postmodernism and the writer as subject

Over the years, notions of writer have been re-imagined in light of postmodern theory.[10] Traditional notions of writer (especially expressive and romantic conceptions) have been relentlessly challenged, both by post-structural critiques of the subject (e.g. Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes) and broader criticisms of identity itself (e.g. Foucault, Butler), leading to "disagreements over the subjectivities that teachers of writing want students to occupy" (Faigley, 1992, p. 17).[11] Increasingly, the self—and, consequently, the writer—has been viewed as contingent and partial, and "meaning" was seen as

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[10] Postmodernism eludes succinct definition. In a literal/temporal sense, it refers to the era following modernism, characterized by cultural "transformations" which have "altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts" (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxiii). For the postmodernist, meaning is always contingent and unstable, represented and legitimated through competing versions of reality. Postmodern thinkers tend to embrace chaos and indeterminacy and resist systems, grand narratives, and totalizing schemes. Foucault, in particular, rejected both unified explanations and the *need* for them: "We aren't, nor do we have to put ourselves under, the sign of a unitary necessity" (1991, p. 78). Lyotard's (1979) well-worn definition, "incredulity toward metanarratives," remains fairly apt (p. xxiv).

[11] While post-structuralism and postmodernism operate on shared assumptions and are often used interchangeably, I use "post-structural" to refer specifically to *language*, and "postmodern" to denote broader epistemological beliefs about reality. In this sense, most post-structural theory is also postmodern.

something indeterminate and outside a writer's control. A central tenet of postmodern thinking is the notion that "all classifications are oppressive" (Barthes, 1977). This extended to the identity of writer; indeed, the very idea of "being a writer" was cast into doubt by a proliferation of anti-foundationalist and social constructionist thinking that made identity no more than a slippery construct.

Postmodern conceptions of writer typically hinge on the oft-discussed "question of the subject." Foucault (1969) offers a clear explanation of the issue:

> The subject […] should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating rules from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse. (p. 137-8)

The focus thus shifted away from how writers write to how they are "written" by sociocultural context. This represented a break from philosophies that conceptualize the subject as a unified, ahistorical agent in the creation of meaning (e.g. Descartes, Husserl, and Sarte). The concept of the subject is formative for most of Western culture, and has, since the incursion of postmodern ideas, become central to discussions of the writer.

No discussion of the effects of postmodernism on the writer would be adequate without a brief précis of three vastly influential French post-structuralists: Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. This selective overview focuses specifically on the roles they played in (re)defining the writer identity.[12] Their critical analyses focused less on the writer than on the *discourses* of which that writer is a part.

Since Barthes (1967) famously proclaimed the author's "death" in the late 60s, the relationship between a writer and his/her writing has appeared tenuous. Barthes takes issue with the modern tradition of associating writing with the "life," "tastes," and "passions" of the person producing it, arguing that "the author is never more than the instance writing" (p. 145). The "author" is superseded by the modern "scriptor," who writes by selective appropriation and patchwork rather than by self-expression. This effectively problematizes the idea of textual *ownership*, challenging an ideal venerated not only by nonacademic culture, but much of the scholarship in R & C.

Barthes (1973) distinguishes between "authors" and "writers" on the basis of transitivity (1973), directly addressing the previously identified tension between identity and activity. For the author, writing is an intransitive activity—s/he merely endeavors *to write*. The author uses language for its own sake; his/her words function solely to "inaugurate an ambiguity," answering no questions, concluding no goals (p. 161). In this sense, the author performs a "function" related to an overarching identity (p. 158). A writer, on the other hand, is purely instrumental, "a transitive man" for whom "language is merely a means" and "no more than a simple vehicle" (p. 160). It is the author—a

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[12] These figures were famously complex and self-contradictory, making my interpretation of their perspectives necessarily reductive. They would be the first to reject any attempts to neatly summarize their philosophies, but we can safely say they sought to challenge and destabilize accepted truisms about identity and the writer. All three have been enormously influential in a host of academic spheres, particularly literature and continental philosophy.

figure that Barthes no longer finds viable—whose concerns are ontological; indeed, "an author is a man who wants to *be* an author" (p. 160). Ultimately, his "true responsibility" is to prop up the "failed commitment" of literature and perpetuate the "myth of fine writing" (p.160). However, the intransitive sense of the verb allows the author a certain open-enededness and "freedom" that the writer does not have. Barthes' "writer," on the other hand, merely engages in an "activity" (p. 158)—one that "supports" but does not "constitute" a *praxis* (p. 161). This, Sontag (1982) says, "divides writers into those who write *something* and the real writers, those who do not write something, but, rather, *write*" (p.xix).[13]

In later essays, Barthes reconceptualizes the "author" as the "Writer" (with capital "W"), representing not an actual person, but a literary figure who is constructed to appear as if transcending the norm. In "The Writer on Holiday," Barthes (1972) examines the lore behind the "singularity of the Writer," one for whom it is "quite natural" to "write all the time and in all situations" (p. 30). This seemingly involuntary "logorrhea," he says, has come to be "regarded as the very essence of the Writer" (p. 30). A writer, then, is framed as a "superman," an "intrinsically different being" who is valorized on the basis of this "artificial singularity" (p. 30). For Barthes, these lofty definitions are social and cultural *constructions*. His skepticism ultimately leads him to define the writer as more reactive than proactive, a relatively passive figure, "not the possessor of a function or the servant of an art," but rather "the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses" (1977, p. 397).

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[13] Enos (1990) provides a lucid description of Barthes' transitivity. She explains that we don't generally say "I was authoring something." One writes a *thing*. One *is* an author.

Though Barthes' most influential essay was initially composed as a provocative artistic manifesto and not necessarily as a scholarly piece, his ideas have shaped subsequent conceptions of the writer, especially in English departments, where the direction of writing instruction is determined in large part by literature scholars.[14] He is relevant to this project because so much of his work explores writing and writers. Sontag (1982) suggests that Barthes' writings reflected his own struggles with the identity; she considers his writer-centric essays "his great apologia for the vocation of the writer" (p. xvi).

Like Barthes, Derrida argues that the "subject of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author" (1967, p. 285). Identities like writer are, for Derrida, provisional and relational constructs subject to the play of differences that creates meaning in language. Derrida is most relevant for his critique of intentionality and "the metaphysics of presence," the long-standing belief that a writer is present in a text and his/her intentions can be identified by readers. The manifestation of the writer on the page, to Derrida, is merely a "trace" which "always means that the writer is not present" (1967, p. 396). Thus, "the writer's thought does not control his language from without; the writer is himself a kind of new idiom, constructing itself" (1967, p. 11). By arguing that there is always an irreducible non-presence (and self-consciously problematizing his own voice on the page), Derrida further disputes the presence of a writer in his/her writing. Like Barthes, his ideas have had greater currency outside of R & C (particularly in Semiotics, Literature, and Philosophy), but his far-reaching influence is indisputable.

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[14] Logie (2013) insists that Barthes' seminal 1967 essay has long been mischaracterized as a politically-minded literary work and wrongly situated within critical literary traditions. He argues that the piece was rather a "site-specific, richly networked artistic provocation," as much a product of the antifoundationalist leanings of *Aspen* (the counter-cultural American "magazine" in which it first appeared) as Barthes' own interests. Nonetheless, the essay (which was subsequently published as a journal article in 1968) continues to inform scholarly conceptions of the writer.

More importantly, he played a central role in redefining what constitutes (and does not constitute) a writer.

Foucault (1969) follows Barthes and Derrida in proclaiming the "death" of the modern "author," but contends that neither of them went far enough to fully break from the authorial tradition. Like his post-structural peers, Foucault holds that writing destroys rather than preserves authorial presence and that an author does not preexist his/her text, taking particular care to show that the "author" of any text is socially and culturally constrained. Foucault problematizes our taken-for-granted notion of author, noting that the concept is not timeless, has not always existed, and is peculiar to recent history. For Foucault, the "mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence," (p. 117) making writing a "voluntary obliteration of the self" (p. 116). "It would be false," Foucault asserts, "to seek the author in relation to the actual writer" (p. 129). Foucault introduces the concept of the "author function," which does not designate a real individual, but is a textual projection that is neither spontaneous nor an attribute of the person writing. Readers, he claims, tend to ask the same wrongheaded questions in a misguided attempt to get at the "real author" (p. 138). Foucault rejects these queries, asking instead, "What matter who's speaking?" (p. 138).

Ultimately, the "author" is, for Foucault, but one instantiation of the "subject," and far from a source of infinite meaning.[15] The Foucauldian subject is "subjected" through iterative social processes that constrain and define his parameters for being. He is subject to and of these processes, a product of history and power (1975). This process of

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[15]Foucault's later writings were dominated by issues of the "subject" and "subjectivity." Identity became Foucault's primary focus late in his life, when he became increasingly interested in "care of oneself" and "how the self constitutes itself as a subject" (1984, 1988). Though such themes were less explicitly evident in his early writings, Foucault insisted that "subjectivity" was always his focal concern.

"subjectivation," an unavoidable result of embedded structures of power, suggests that the subject is historical, emergent, and never "free" in the sense that the modern subject was thought to be (1975). In this sense, a writer is written; the identity limits, constrains, and subjugates, preventing its adherents from moving outside its prescribed boundaries. The deterministic implications of this epistemology have troubled many R & C scholars, leading many to wonder what kind of agency a writer can hope to have in the face of such delimiting structure.

Foucault, as if informed by these questions, eventually imbued (or appeared to, at least) writers with at least a modicum of agency. His "technologies of the self" hint at self-maintenance and even self-formation (italics are mine):

> Technologies of the self […] permit individuals to *effect by their own means* or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to *transform themselves* in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (1984, p. 18)

This agency is especially evident in his later writings (1977, 1984, 1976), some of which (e.g. "Self-Writing", "Technologies of the Self") directly explore the effects of writing on the writer, as well as the ways by which a writer can "cultivate a self" through writing.[16] Foucault argues that everything we write fundamentally changes us, making the writer a subject who is neither fixed nor final. In this sense, writers do not "find" or "know" (in the Delphic sense) themselves, but shape an ever-changing writerly identity *through* the act of writing: "Writing transforms the thing seen or heard 'into tissue and blood.' It

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[16] Late in his life, Foucault developed an interest in *askesis*, an ancient Greek practice of self-discipline and spiritual training, translated by Foucault as "the training of oneself by oneself" (1977, 1984).

becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself" (1977, p. 213).[17] Writing, then, is a perpetual "becoming," such that "the writer constitutes his own identity through this recollection of things said" (1977, p. 213).

Even with this degree of agency, Foucault's subject is fundamentally unstable, and Foucault himself is generally associated with *dissolution*, not cultivation, of identity. Though these late writings appear to give the subject more autonomy, he continued to insist, "I do indeed believe that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere" (1984, p. 50). Like Foucault, these postmodern icons were full of seemingly self-refuting contradictions. All three, for example, reject the idea that a writer is primarily self-expressive. Foucault (1969) speaks to this, arguing (ironically, just as expressivism was beginning to flourish) that "the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of 'expression;' it only refers to itself" (p. 116). This suggests that a writer does not transmit a unique self to the page, but rather "the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original" (Barthes, 1967, p. 146). Claims like these can make a writer seem peripheral to his/her own writing. However, both Barthes and Foucault—somewhat paradoxically—wrote markedly more autobiographical and confessional material later in their careers. Ultimately, these inconsistencies are less important than their enduring legacy— most people remember these theorists for their resistance to identity and self-expression, for disrupting time-honored traditions and long-held notions of writing and writers. If anything, the recurrence of such inconsistencies reminds us of the irreducible complexity of the term

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[17] This passage also points to *embodiment* of the writer in writing, another Foucauldian theme; indeed, for Foucault, "the role of writing is to constitute […] a 'body'" (1977, p. 213).

writer, as well as the defiant propensity of postmodernists to assume incongruous positions.

Conceptions of "writer" were shaken considerably by mid-twentieth century attacks on authorship and the unified subject. In the 1980s and 1990s, compositionists influenced by postmodernism (Bartholomae, 1985, 1990, 1995; Faigley, 1986, 1989, 1992; Berlin, 1987, 1988,1992) began to question the notion of a consciously autonomous self, charging writing teachers (primarily "expressive") with positing an arhetorical, solipsistic, philosophically naïve writer. Faigley (1989) claimed that the whole of the process movement became watered down and "domesticated," due in large part to the pervasive influence of "expressive realism" and its focus on an individual writer's psyche. Like Faigley, many compositionists had come to view a writer as "an effect rather than the cause of discourse" (p. 9).

Faigley has been one of R & C's most vocal proponents of a postmodern writer. In his book-length analysis of composition studies vis-à-vis postmodernism (1992), he argues that "the question of the subject" has become the overarching issue for writing teachers (p. 225). Faigley (1992) maintains that "what a person does, thinks, says, and writes cannot be interpreted unambiguously" (p. 9) because identity itself is "heterogeneous and constantly in flux" (p. 227). "Writer," then, is a "subject position" that is negotiated rather than essential. Faigley insists that writers are too often equated with "an identifiable, 'true' self" (1989, 1992, p. 405). He cautions against judging each student on the basis of the "real" self s/he is "becoming," rather than on a socio-rhetorical

self that is "discursively produced and discursively bonded" (p. 411).[18] This, he claims, reduces being a writer to a "simple test of integrity," and erroneously assumes that a rational consciousness can somehow be laid out on a page (p. 409).

The 'social turn'

Part and parcel of postmodernism, the so-called "social turn" (e.g. see Trimbur, 1994) further problematized the relationship between writing and writers. In the 80s and 90s, scholars (Bizzell, 1982; Bartholomae, 1985, 1990; Brodkey, 1987; Lefevre, 1987; Berlin, 1992; Bawarshi, 2003) began to bemoan the tendency of process researchers to privilege the writer as primary agent of writing. Inspired by social language theorists like Vygotsky and Bakhtin, writing researchers began to explore cognition as embedded in social action, rather than as a precondition for it. The cognitive approach, which tended to focus on an individual's mental processes and decision making, fell out of favor as theory and research challenged "the myth of the solitary writer" (Lunsford and Ede, 1990, p. 73) as an "originating consciousness" (Crowley, 1990, p. 16). Lefevre (1987) reconceptualized invention as unequivocally social, pushing its purview beyond the province of an individual writer. Genre theorists like Bawarshi (2003) sought to reconcile writer-based conceptions of invention with social genre theory, looking at "not only what writers do when they write, but what happens to writers that makes them do what they do" (p. 50). Bawarshi argues that while writers "participate" in a dialectic between the social and individual, "they are not its sole agents" (2003, p. 50). In this sense, process-based methodologies provide only a "partial view of the writer"—a writer who is

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[18] In a study that sought to determine what constitutes "good" writing, Faigley (1989) contrasted a report on a 1929 English test with *What Makes Writing Good* , a 1985 collection of teacher-nominated "best" student essays. He concluded that teachers of both eras value "authentic" student writing, and that "shared assumptions about subjectivities – the selves we want our students to be – still shape judgments of writing quality" (p. 114). The instructors who graded the essays appeared partial to a so-called "honest" writer, one who produces writing that is "true" to the individual self.

necessarily "positioned" within discursive sites of action (p. 54). As a whole, genre studies (Miller, 1984; Freedman, 1993; Freedman and Medway, 1994; Clark, 2002; Pare, 2002; Bawarshi, 2003; Bazerman, Bonini, and Figueiredo, 2009) led to richer descriptions of the systems in which a writer is situated, locating both writers and writing within complex strata of interpersonal and intertextual relations.

The social turn marked a change in the content of our conversations—a shift from words like "cognitive process" and "writers" to words like "socially constructed subjects" and "discourse communities." The discipline redirected its focus (to varying degrees) from "inner-directed" to "outer-directed" writing (Bizzell,1982). Perhaps because of its ubiquity at the time, Flower and Hayes' cognitive process model was sharply criticized, not only for framing writing as problem-solving, but for situating these problems within a writer: "Flower and Hayes show us what happens in the writer's mind but not what happens to the writer as his motives are located within our language" (Bartholomae, 1985, "Inventing" p. 142). Bizzell (1982) derides the cognitive model as overly prescriptive and conspicuously ignorant of social context and dialectical relationships. It ably explains, she says, "how" a writer writes, but cannot explain "*why* the writer makes certain choices in certain situations" (p. 73). Bartholomae (1985) insists that academic writing is not "writer-based prose;" rather, the academic writer locates an "I" on the page that is distant from and different from himself. He maintains that if writing is indeed solving a problem, the problem is not located in the "writer," but "in the way subjects are located in a field of discourse" (1985, p. 141). Both Bartholomae and Bizzell argue that "bad" writers are not necessarily deficient in a cognitive sense, but rather are out-of-step with a particular discourse community.

The criticisms levied against the cognitivists and Flower and Hayes in particular were the impetus for a broader disciplinary shift away from the "private economy of the writer as self-possesed agent" (Bawarshi, 2003 p. 60).[19] R & C began to conceptualize a writer who writes from the outside in, rather than from the inside out. Expressivists were relentlessly criticized for favoring the individual writer over social reality (Berlin, 1987, 1988; Faigley, 1989; Harris, 1990). This started a chain reaction (of sorts), during which expressive teachers were widely (and somewhat unfairly) disparaged for conceptualizing the writer as a "self-contained sphere of agency" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 61). Harris (1990) argues that "writing-for-self does not exist in any real sense [because] all discourse is intended for an audience other than the self who is doing the writing" (1990, p. 68-69). These condemnations, while not groundless, tended to understate the social awareness of the expressivist writer. William Coles (1978), to cite but one example, states (italics mine): "What the writer does in his paper, as he is well aware, he has done by and for himself; the triumph of its having been writing belongs to him. *But* […] *this triumph does not belong to him alone* […] *He could not have done it without the rest of us*" (p. 270). This quotation is fairly representative; expressivists no doubt prioritized an individual writer, but most at least *acknowledged* the social component.

Nonetheless, much contemporary research continues to "assume the writer as its starting point" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 60).

Personal vs. academic writer

Expressivists were most commonly denounced for their focus on autobiographical writing, i.e. "writing about the writer" (Faigley,1992, p. 120). This led to intense and

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[19] Flower (1994) eventually incorporated a social element into her cognitive framework, drifting closer to the epistemological position(s) of her critics.

often public disagreements over the nature and role of "academic" and "personal" writing, with divergent notions of writer thrust into the foreground (Bartholomae, 1985, 1995; Elbow, 1995; North, 1990). A series of published (and widely publicized) debates between Bartholomae and Elbow mirrored a growing divide in the discipline, between not just contrary notions of the composition classroom, but contrary notions of writer. To Elbow (1995), the "role of writer" categorically conflicts with the "role of academic," leading him to prioritize the former in the classroom. He argues that the personal component is essential to being an effective writer, and that "autobiography is often the best mode of analysis" (p. 80). Elbow, characteristically concerned with agency and ownership, stresses students' right to voice *their* perspectives, in the context of not only academic exchange, but also their own lifeworlds. Elbow maintains that writing should *belong* to a writer: "Unless we can set things up so that our first year students are often telling us about things that they know better than we do, we are sabotaging the essential dynamic of writers." (p. 81). While he acknowledges the potential limitations of this approach, he rejects the claim that self-centered writing is one of the "characteristic sins of first-year students" (p. 80).

Bartholomae (1995), unlike Elbow, is hesitant to grant the writer his/her own presence. He argues that Elbow is just trying to preserve the independent, self-expressive "author," and that R & C's emphasis on personal writing stems from a problematic belief in the "figure of the writer as an individual psychology" (p. 68). Teachers, he contends, misguidedly align the writer with "the trope of the real" (p. 67). Similar to Faigley (1992), Bartholomae laments "the celebration of point-of-view as individual artifact" (1995, p. 69) that has anchored the discipline across "almost two hundred years of

sentimental realism" (1995, p. 67). He views the composition course as "part of the general critique of traditional humanism" (1995, p. 70); this means questioning the sovereignty of the classic "subject," which, in the context of this discussion, means the sovereignty of a writer. Like Bartholomae, many opponents of expressive pedagogy held *epistemological* qualms about the approach—what they seemed to oppose, specifically, were notions of writer predicated on identity rather than activity.

A similar (and somewhat less genial) debate occurred between Bartholomae and Stephen North (1990) in a special issue of *PRE/TEXT* (edited by Elbow), with competing notions of the writer discussed in direct relation to expressivism.[20] Bartholomae views North's writer as a product of "expressive discourse"—a "mode" whose "fundamental purpose" is to posit and perpetuate an autonomous "writer as free agent" whose self-expressive writing is "a-historical" and "self-authorizing" (p. 123). North (1990) admits to prioritizing "facticity" and "truthfulness," but insists that terms like 'expressive' or 'personal' aren't particularly "useful," creating needless complications for writers who just need to find a "suitable rhetorical posture" (p. 106). Bartholomae is careful to distinguish between "a person, someone who writes, and the figure of the writer, a figure positioned within a discourse, a discourse […] the writer never completely invents or controls" (p. 122). North counters that Bartholomae's focus on "discipline-bound voices" draws overly narrow boundaries around what counts as academic discourse and who counts as a writer.

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[20] In a review of North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Bartholomae (1990) critiqued the overly strong presence of North himself in the book, arguing that North's otherwise insightful history was tainted by "expressivist" inclinations. The debate morphed into a more abstract (and occasionally mean-spirited) discussion of "personal" writing, with several explicit and implicit references to the writer embedded within it.

Scholars continue to negotiate the tension between the personal and academic writer (Corder, 1991; Summerfield, 1994; Sirc, 1997, 2003; Leonard, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Bailiff, 1997; Bishop, 1999; Fulkerson, 2005; Yagelski, 2000; Kastner, 2010). The relatively recent proliferation of "literacy narratives" and consequent focus individual literate histories and has marked what some (Williams, 2011; Bizzaro, 2009) believe to be a renewed interest in personal writing in the discipline. Some scholars, however, worry that overemphasis on personal writing and self-disclosure reduces the singularity of one's suffering to "a rhetorical commonplace" (Bailiff, 1997). Leonard (1997) sees merit in both Elbow and Bartholomae's ideas, but wonders (with respect to Bartholomae) how working with the words of *others* will enable one "to feel fully like a writer, to feel creative and imaginative" (p. 220). Bartholomae, however, continues to maintain that "it is wrong to teach late-adolescents that writing is an expression of individual thoughts and feelings" (Bartholomae, 1990, p. 128).

Bartholomae's position was influential but divisive. His text-based conception of the writer, predicated on a desire to "separate the author from the individual"(1990, p. 123), has been denounced by feminist (Fleckenstein, 1998) and process-minded (Ritchie, 1989) scholars. Fleckenstein (1998) takes particular issue with Bartholomae's "(dis)missal of the writer *outside* the text" (p. 109). Nonetheless, his voice was critical in defining what constitutes an academic writer— and in situating that writer within what he believed to be "the real work of the academy" (p. 63).

Elbow (1981; 2000; 2007) has long contended that binary thinking about "personal" and "academic" writers is counterproductive. Indeed, the supposed conflict between writing about, on one hand, personal experience, and, on the other hand, culture,

power, and identity (e.g. in a cultural studies classroom), can make different conceptions of writer seem unnecessarily dichotomous and reductive. Indeed, few *current* teachers of writing discount the important of academic genres or completely reject the notion of a socially constructed reality. The primary way that these debates continue to shape composition theory and practice is in regards to *how much* power is granted to a writer.

Backlash: The postmodern impasse

The proliferation of social and postmodern theory has frustrated some scholars, many of whom argue that the de-centered, socially constituted "subject" is an overly inhibiting position for would-be writers to assume. What, in light of all this destabilizing and constraining theory, can an individual writer hope to *do*? If we are unavoidably "subjected," what kind of real action can be taken? Trying to account for individual agency in the face of indeterminacy and social forces can lead to what Lester Faigley (1992) termed the "postmodern impasse:" that is, how do we teach a writer to write when s/he has no grounding outside of contingent discourses? Postmodernism deconstructs and blurs distinctions, replacing certainty with uncertainty. It liberates us from constraining traditions, but makes a writer tenuous and incidental.

Some scholars maintain that postmodernism effectively stripped writers of their agency. For Elbow (1995), a writer needs more power:

> Writers usually want some 'ownership,' some control over what a text means. Almost all writers are frustrated when readers completely misread what they have written. It doesn't usually help if the readers say, 'But the latest theory says that we get to construct our own meaning.' […] I get to decide what I *intended* with my words; you get to decide what you *heard*. (p. 75)

Elbow worries that writers are on the losing end of a conflict with readers over "who gets to control the text" (p. 75). Other scholars agree that readers have been given an overabundance of authority at the expense of writers (Enos, 1990; Corder, 1991; Baumlin, Jensen and Massey,1999; Williams, 2011). Corder (1989) suggests that reader-centric "theorists" have pushed too far in reducing the personal agency of the writer: "Were [theorists] to think of themselves as writers, I believe that they could not think (or bear) the judgment that their own theories bring against writers, the judgment that the writer is not the writer [and] that the writer is not in the text" (pp. 307-8). Elbow has conceded that his notion of writer is somewhat "romantic" (1995, p. 82). He nonetheless clings to his position on the basis that students can benefit from it: "I stand by – nervously [but] are you going to make me give up all the features of the role of writer that seem helpful and supportive?" (p. 83).

Some compositionists view postmodern theory as "paralyzing" in its deconstruction of "all principled positions" (Faigley, 1992, p. 20). For many of these teachers, the problem of agency is an ethical dilemma, calling for a reassertion of values (Yagelski, 2000; Schmertz, 1999; Baumlin, Jensen, Massey, 1999; Freisinger, 1994). Why deconstruct if the end result disempowers the very subject of our practice? Yagelski (2000) sees "despair" resulting from our sometimes immobilizing social theories. He claims our overemphasis on the sociocultural has "obscured the writer," replacing the individual with social "categories" (p. 63):

> At some point, teachers must confront those piles of essays submitted to them by individual students, each of whom is to be understood and (not incidentally) assessed as an individual. In such a context, the idea that the writer disappears in

discourse seems only slightly less silly than using a Scantron machine to grade all

those essays. (p. 75)

Yagelski thus argues that the postmodern conception of the writer is "disconcerting and

even limiting" (p. 63).

Due to these perceived constraints, some scholars insist on maintaining some

semblance of writerly agency in the classroom. Tobin (2001) suggests that a

"philosophically naïve" writer can still be "pedagogically powerful:"

While positivist notions of agency, authorship, voice, and self may be

philosophically naïve, they can still be pedagogically powerful. In other words, it

may be enormously useful for a student writer (or any writer for that matter) to

believe at certain moments and stages of the process that she actually has agency,

authority, an authentic voice, and a unified self. (p. 15)

Schmertz (1999) agrees that "agency cannot proceed without some notion of essence" (p.

87). Williams (2006, 2011), Bizzaro (2009), and Freisinger (1994) also support a

conscious return to a more centralized writer for pedagogical purposes.

Ivanič (1998), like Tobin, contends that "the 'real self' is a psychological reality

to […] student writers" (218). She argues that identity is socially *constructed,* but not

socially determined, such that "people ARE (her CAPS) agents in the construction of

their own identities" (p. 19). Ivanič characterizes writing as a purposeful *act* of identity.

Her research (1994, 1998, 2010) is most concerned with a writer's capacity for self-

representation; how students "use written language to construct the identity of the writer"

(p. 345). For Ivanič, to write is to align one's self with a socio-culturally shaped

subjectivity. An essential issue, then, becomes "how individuals react to the alternatives

available to them" (p. 22). She contends that the term 'identity' is "misleadingly static," conceptualizing a more proactive writer engaged in a "continuous process of identification" (1998, p. 2). Ivanič is one of a number of scholars (Yagelski, 2000, Burnham, 2001) whose work both embraces and pushes back against postmodern and social theory, representing a writer as an active agent in the construction of his/her own writerly self—one who is subject to but not entirely subjected by sociocultural forces.

Some postmodernist thinkers have themselves noted the limited room they left for agency. Foucault acknowledges that his writings can have an "anesthetic effect" (1991, p. 83). Indeed, part of his aim is that we come to understand "the difficulty of doing anything" (p. 84). However, even he (in his later writings) developed an interest in individual agency: **"**Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others in the technologies of individual domination [and] how an individual acts upon himself" (1988, p. 12). Even Bartholomae, a staunch critic of the autonomous and independent author, acknowledges that "many students will not feel the pleasure or power of authorship unless we make that role available" (1995, p. 69). However, he has reservations about teaching students such a "lie" even if it is a "pleasant and, as they say, empowering one for certain writers" (p. 70).

Due to growing concerns with agency, a number of scholars have sought to reconcile expressive values with postmodern and social critiques, including Veeder (1997), O' Brien (2000), Fishman and McCarthy (1992), Gradin (1995), Bishop (1999), Yagelski (2000), Burnham (2001), and Bizzaro (2009). Most synthesize various epistemologies and approaches to acknowledge a social, unstable world and still allow

the writer room for agentive action. Both Gradin (1995) and Yagelski (2000) explicitly articulate a hybrid "social expressivist" discourse, attempting to shift emphasis back to the writer, but not an autonomous or asocial writer. Adler-Kassner (1998) argues for a "new, more inclusive notion of ownership" that accounts for sociocultural context. Bailiff (1997) rejects the hybrid pedagogies of most "revisionary expressivists" (her term), claiming that they ultimately "cannot deliver on the liberatory promises made" (p. 77). She acknowledges the ways they improve on expressivist claims, but insists that their notions of writer tend to invoke the very values they seek to disrupt.

How to conceptualize the writer in the wake of postmodernism and the "social turn" remains a critical issue, particularly because the modern notion of the stable, unified subject still holds sway in R & C, rearing its head even in ostensibly "postmodern" pedagogies (e.g. Goncalves, 2005). This has saddled composition scholars interested in "writers" (a great number of us) with the eternally difficult task of reconciling structure and agency.

PART III: Ethos, *voice, and the writer*

The wealth and range of constructs that pertain to the writer extend well beyond the purview of the previous sections. The word writer can evoke a number of associated concepts from (to name but a few) rhetorical theory, philosophy, literary criticism, psychology, and sociology. This chapter focuses mainly on scholarship that explicitly addresses notions of writer, and not necessarily these related concepts, terms, and issues. However, such distinctions are difficult to maintain, as the writer is often discussed vis-à-vis other constructs ("author" or "artist") or text-based manifestations (*ethos*, voice, tone,

persona, presence, subject/ivity, stance).[21] To further complicate matters, the term is entangled with broader issues of identity and authenticity, as well as the aforementioned questions of agency, intentionality, and authorship. These related issues are rich areas of scholarship in their own right, and my coverage should not be construed as exhaustive. This section focuses primarily on rhetorical *ethos* and the metaphor of voice. The terms are examined selectively, only insofar as they represent particular ways of talking about a writer.

Conflicted notions of "writer" are steeped in longstanding conflicts about the self in language. Issues of voice and *ethos* tend to revolve around what Ivanič (1998) termed the "discoursal self;" that is, "the portrayal of self which writers construct through their deployment of discoursal resources in their own written texts" (p. 327).[22] What is the relationship between the actual person outside a text and this "discoursal self" inscribed on a page? What, for purposes of this discussion, is a writer's relationship to his/her writing? These questions are central to the scholarship on *ethos* and voice, and the tension between opposing perspectives plays out in both our scholarship and the writing classroom. In this sense, it is difficult to discuss what it means to be a writer without a brief discussion of these terms.

In a study of mature students, Ivanič (1998) finds that student writers often feel alienated from the "discoursal self" on the page, which runs contrary to what she sees as

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[21] Little agreement exists about the distinctions between these interrelated but not identical terms. They are often grouped together and/or used interchangeably, complicating an already divisive issue (Cherry, 1988; Ivanic, 1998; Bowden, 2003; Elbow, 1994, 2007). To further confuse matters, they are frequently used as synonyms for "style," which has its own specific rhetorical history. Teasing out these distinctions is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[22] Ivanic (1998) identifies four aspects of writer identity. Three of these – the discoursal self, autobiographical self, self as author –are "socially constructing and socially constructed," shaping the fourth, the more abstract "possibilities for selfhood" (pp. 23-4). Burgess and Ivanic (2010) expand this framework to account for development of writer identity across "timescales" (Lemke, 2000), refocusing their attention on identity construction as a process.

the "point of writing:" to write "something that matters to the writer" (p. 346). She argues that "language […] has deeply personal consequences, going right to the heart of our being" (p. 345). Murray (1980) takes this a step further: "Writing means self-exposure. No matter how objective the tone or how detached the subject, the writer is exposed by words on the page" (p. 24). This widely-held position is denounced by Sarah Allen (2010), who argues that the perceived connection between a perspective (as written on the page) and an actual person leads students to internalize criticisms of their viewpoints as criticisms of themselves. She contends that "conceptions of the writer" remain too "bound up" in what she terms "opinion-as-identity" (p. 366). Both voice and *ethos* tend to hinge on these conflicting notions of the discoursal self, reflecting contrasting notions of writer that continue to permeate R & C scholarship.

Ethos—which can loosely be termed *"character"* or *"credibility of the speaker"*—often informs scholarly discussions of identity and writers.[23]Aristotle, the first to treat *ethos* as part of a larger system of organized rhetorical strategies, describes *ethos* as perhaps the most important of the three *pisteis*, or rhetorical "proofs" (1.2). Aristotelian *ethos* is made manifest *through* a speech, and "not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a particular kind of person" (1.2). He repeatedly stresses that a rhetor must "construct a view of himself" in order to "seem" credible and trustworthy (2.1.3). This is where scholars diverge; in this "seeming" to construct one's own *ethos,* many see a troubling potential for self-fashioning, pandering, or outright deception. These long-

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[23]*Ethos* (spelled *êthos* – an older word) is alternately conceptualized as "custom" or "habit" (Sattler, 1947; Corts, 1968; Yoos, 1979; Baumlin, 1994) or "habitual gathering place" (Jarrat & Reynolds, 1994; Reynolds, 1993; Halloran, 1982). There is no cut-and-dried rendering of *ethos,* due to issues of translation, competing interpretations, and contradictions within the *Rhetoric*. Baumlin (1994) expresses regret that we can approach ethos only "within a set of paradoxes and downright contradictions" (xxvi).

standing concerns with artifice—which date at least back to Plato—are especially

pronounced when it comes to writing and writers, as evidenced by the abundance of

Rhet/Com scholarship (expressivist in particular) calling for "honest" student writing and

authenticity of voice. Some scholars (e.g. Yoos, 1979; Gabin, 1991; Garver, 1994;

Kennedy, 2007) argue that preexistent moral character is (or *should* be) part of *ethos,* but

the discursively constructed version remains more widely accepted. Aristotle's

unequivocally constructed notion of *ethos* places all the emphasis on the discoursal self.

This complicates conceptions of writer, raising questions of whether writing represents

"real" character in a person or simply the *appearance* of character.

This is essentially the same core issue underlying the ongoing debates about a

writer's presence: is the character on the page constructed? If so, to what extent is it

constructed? This aspect of *ethos* has been so contested that Baumlin (1994) accounts for

its thorniness right in his definition: "the *problematic* relation between human character

and discourse" (xvii, italics mine). In this sense, *ethos* informs one of the perennial

questions about writers: what is the place of a writer in his/her writing? In a telling

passage in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates is about to give a speech for Lysias, but before

doing so, he covers his head with a sheet. As Socrates is talking, he is feels something is

wrong; he is overcome and disturbed by something transcendent, and suddenly removes

the sheet. He explains to Lysias that he has not only "offended" the god Love, but has

concealed his "true self" by separating *him* from his words. This curious move can be

read as a commentary on the identification of the speaker with/in his own speech. One of

the many reasons that Plato decries writing in the *Phaedrus* is that it cannot represent the

self accurately: "it makes a difference who the speaker is and where he comes from; you

don't just consider whether things are as he says or not" (275c). For Plato, "written words" are no more than "a reminder to the man who knows the subjects to which the things written relate" (275d). Due in no small part to Plato's enduring influence (and modernist notions of essentialism), some continue to see *ethos* as intrinsic—more Platonic and less Aristotelian. Rhetorical scholars (e.g. Johnson, 1984) frequently divide R & C in two opposing epistemological camps on this basis.

An increasing number of contemporary theorists, however, view *ethos* as more akin to the discoursal self, characterizing a writer as emergent through writing/rhetoric and discernible as an appreciable manifestation in the text. Drawing heavily on Barthes and Foucault, Enos (1990) argues that the "writer can live on in the text" despite the author's proclaimed "death" (p. 344). She maintains that rhetoric—specifically, *ethos*— allows us to distinguish between the author, who is external to the text, and the writer, a manifestation of activity *in* the text. She argues, on the basis of that writer-author distinction, that *ethos* actually sustains the textual life of the writer. The real demise, in this sense, is the object of literary criticism. For Enos, "*Ethos* is what brings the writer to life" (p. 342).

More unequivocally performative positions have been espoused by Charlard (2003) and Allen (2010). Drawing heavily from Lyotard (1979), Charland (2003) has argued that a rhetor or writer can have "*ethos* without identity," such that the only relevant factor in a rhetorical exchange is an emergent *ethos* created in and through a discursive performance. Seeking to connect Aristotelian "prudence" to the incommensurability of postmodern thought, Charland focuses on means rather than ends, on "character-in-action" (p. 265). His *ethos* stems from the "irreducibility of the

contingent moment," on rhetorical action in the face of a radically plural series of ever-changing contexts (p. 269). Similarly, Allen (2010) suggests a writerly "subject" who is constantly in flux, never more than a "historical moment, an event in the movement of time" (p. 374).

Poststructuralist challenges to self-presence in writing call into question the possibility of an inscribed *ethos*. Holiday (2009) dubs this the "postmodern ethical dilemma," i.e. "how do we change what invents us?" (p. 396). As with the broader questions of writer identity, scholars of *ethos* have attempted to reclaim individual agency (Reynolds, 1993; Baumlin, 1994; Schmertz, 1999; Holiday, 2009). Holiday (2009) seeks to actively "dislocate the equation of *ethos* and intrinsic character" (p. 403). She speaks from the standpoint of a cultural studies classroom, advocating a writer who challenges normative discourses in the name of political agency. Appropriating feminist theory and using the less common translation of *ethos* ("gathering place" or "haunt") as a starting point, some (Schmertz, 1999; Reynolds, 1993; Jarrat and Reynolds, 1994) see a classroom where writers articulate their *ethos* in terms of "positioning"—that is, they identify themselves, provisionally, at certain points in their own writerly self-evolution. Schmertz (1999) argues that student writers (women in particular) need a "place" from which to speak. This, she says, allows for a degree of "self-making" (i.e. agency) *and* accounts for *ethos* as unstable, emergent, and plural. Reynolds (1993) maintains that a conception of *ethos* as "place" or "location" opens "more spaces in which to study writers' subject positions or identity formations," especially with respect to "how writers establish authority" (p. 326).

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Some scholars (Elbow, 1994; Yoos, 1979; Freisinger, 1994; Corder, 1978, 1989) prefer to use *ethos* to maintain a connection between discourse and a real self. Elbow (1994) contends that for *ethos* to be persuasive, it must evoke an actual writer. He acknowledges that audiences are persuaded by a "constructed" voice, but only insofar as it appears to represent an *actual* voice. Garver (1994) similarly argues that "reasoning [only] persuades because *we think* it is a sign of character" (p. 147). Both Corder (1989) and Elbow (1994), even as they acknowledge the constructed nature of *ethos*, persistently align it with some semblance of an actual self.

Corder (1978) pushes the boundaries of the writer identity with his theory of "generative *ethos*," arguing that ethos is emergent and cumulative.[24] For Corder, a "speaker becomes through speech," but "the speaker's identity is always saved to emerge as an *ethos* to the other" (p. 133). In this sense, each manifestation of *ethos* builds upon the last; *ethos* accrues, mutates, and continues to a/effect subsequent rhetorical exchanges. We manifest a self through our words, but "our words never leave us" (p. 127). Such an *ethos* is "always in the process of making itself and liberating hearers to make themselves […] There is always more coming" (p. 114). This, he says, makes generative *ethos* "commodious"—that is, "spacious, roomy, and accommodating" (p. 128). *Ethos*, especially "generative *ethos*," allows us to explain why "flaws in writing are flaws […] and why [they] work against the writer" (p. 131). Corder (1989) ultimately argues that a writer *tries* to be in his/her writing ("I want *ethos* to be real and in the text so that I can be real to others"), but that the paradoxical and fraught nature of *ethos*

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[24] Corder posits 5 categories of ethos, but cites the generative form as the most important, giving it virtually all of his attention.

makes it difficult to achieve (p. 301). A writer, he says, writes "as much to hide as to reveal" (p. 300).

Other scholars (Halloran, 1982, Johnson, 1984; Schmertz, 1999; Goncalves, 2005; Holiday, 2009; Tombro, 2011) use *ethos* as a theoretical frame for conceptualizing a more ethical, politically aware writer. Classical *ethos* concerns itself with ethical habits, such that we are the roles we habitually assume (Aristotle, Book II, *Nichomachean*).[25] Halloran (1982) sees great value in this, arguing that we have a moral obligation to teach student writers more than just writing; we can model and push them towards "just actions." Similarly, Nan Johnson (1984) suggest focusing writing instruction on the classical rhetorical education, and *ethos* in particular, in order to help teachers reinforce "the ethical responsibility of the writer" (p. 114).

As Elbow (1994a) asserts, "The ancient and venerable debate about *ethos* and virtue leads to, and in a sense even contains, the modern debate about the relationship between voice and identity" (xvii). Like *ethos*, the metaphor of voice remains an elusive term. What or who does voice represent? Is it a fixed attribute that a writer "finds"? Can writers actively choose what voice they assume? Is voice a starting place? A component of style? Why is it important? Voice, despite being widely invoked in writing classrooms and scholarship, is complicated by such questions, leaving little agreement as to how voice should be used or conceptualized. Elbow, one of its biggest proponents, laments that "the term has been used in such a loose and celebratory way as to mean almost

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[25] The notion of a profoundly ethical rhetor (i.e. "the good man speaking well") became especially pronounced with the Roman rhetoricians, most notably Quintilian (thought they rarely used the word *ethos*). His popularity amongst 17th and 18th century British rhetoricians (e.g. Blair, Campbell) helped sustain these ideas and move them into the realm of R & C and the writing classroom.

anything" (1994b, p. 2). Watts (2001) likewise refers to voice as a "catchall term," one that "means too many things and thus means virtually nothing" (p. 185). Yancey (1994) claims that our disparate conceptions of voice tend to reflect competing notions of writer:

> Sometimes we use voice […] to talk about the writer composing text […]
> Sometimes we use voice to talk specifically about what and how a writer knows,
> and the capacity of a writer through 'voice' to reveal (and yet be distracted by) the
> epistemology of a specific culture. Sometimes we use voice to talk in neo-
> Romantic terms about the writer discovering an authentic self and then deploying
> it in text. (p. vii)

In this sense, voice is inextricably tied to the writer identity, often serving as the impetus for debates over the writer's presence in the text—pointing, once again, to issues of the discoursal self.

Watts (2001) notes that "conceptual slippage" makes voice a thorny and unwieldly concept (p. 179). Indeed, a comparatively large portion of the scholarship on voices is devoted to pinning down (or, at least, attempting to pin down) the term (see Elbow, 1994a, 2007; Yancey, 1994). Poet and critic Jonathan Holden, who is cited by some voice scholars, provides an implicit definition of voice in his description of poetry:

> Infusing feeling into language so that, without the aid of external devices such as
> the author's actual voice in performance, language on a silent page can attain the
> power and immediacy of a singing voice in the ear of the reader. (1980, p. 135
> cited in Elbow, 1994a)

This quote ably captures how most scholars and teachers appear to conceptualize voice. Critical is the manifestation of a tangible thing in writing—a self, a singing voice, suggesting an indelible connection between a writer, reader, and the discoursal self. For scholars in R & C, then, voice seems to suggest a distinct tone or timbre that signals a writer's presence on a written page, allowing us to "hear" the person(s) behind the discourse.[26]

Expressivists, as Elbow (2007) notes, are especially fond of "voice" in writing—so much so that the term "voice" has, for many in Composition Studies, come to mean simply "expressive notions of voice." For many expressive teachers, being a writer is first and foremost a matter of "finding a voice." A number of early expressivists push student writers to discover not just *a* voice, but *your* voice, making voice a means of self-expression. According to Elbow (1994a), this was a fairly common pedagogical strategy, one not limited to expressive teachers: "the phrase 'finding one's own voice' became common and remains so – not just among self-obsessed sophomores, not just among naïve members of the general public, but across a wide spectrum of critics, scholars, creative and imaginative writers, and teachers of writing" (xviii). The notion of finding one's "own" voice spoke directly to expressivist concerns with ownership and agency. Huspeck (1997) views voice as a "phenomenological effect of marginalization," a reaction and resistance to oppression, which might partly account for its allure to 1960s compositionists. Indeed, voice has long been associated with empowerment, a focal point of the process movement and expressivists in particular.

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[26] I realize that this sentence uses metaphors to describe a metaphor. Such is the difficulty of defining voice; it seems to refer endlessly to other amorphous concepts.

Voice advocates tend to endow the writer with certain innate qualities. Elbow

describes the "power" of voice early in his first book: "In your natural way of producing

words, there is a sound, a texture, a rhythm – a voice – which is the main source of power

in your writing" (1973, p. 193). Murray also insists that we must learn to use "our own

voice," in order "to write in a way that is natural for us" (1984, p. 97).Teachers who

utilize voice tend to posit this "natural" connection between the writing and the writer,

enabling the writer to transfer aspects of his identity to the page. Some teachers

(followers of the early expressivists, in particular) explicitly advocate for an "authentic"

voice. Stewart, author of *The Authentic Voice,* explains, "Your authentic voice is that

which sets you apart from every living human being […] it is not a copy of someone

else's way of speaking or perceiving the world. It is your way" (1973, p. 3). In this

sense, voice is what "differentiates one writer from another" (p. 2). Macrorie (1970)

maintains that voice reveals "truth," and, like Elbow, stresses the power it affords a

writer: "Finding the right voice will help you write better than you ever thought yourself

capable of writing" (p. 149). Similarly, Murray (1984) asserts, "Voice separates writing

that is not read from writing that is read" (p. 144). Elbow urges his readers to "look for

real voice and realize it is there in everyone waiting to be used" (1981, p. 312).[27] The

notion of "authentic voice" presumes a preexistent and unique writerly self that students

can "find" or "discover." More than that, it presupposes a link between this preexistent

self and the discoursal self. This belief has grounded more than a few expressive

pedagogies, some of which are predicated almost entirely on discovering an "authentic

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[27] Elbow has revised his positions since his earlier publications, but he continues to maintain, "sincere writing is good writing" (2007, p. 168).

voice" as a writer.[28] Macrorie and Elbow, perhaps anticipating future critiques, acknowledge the possibility for multiple voices. Nonetheless, authentic voice pedagogies have proliferated well beyond the ranks of their forebears. Their abundance suggests a continuing belief in a real self behind the voice in the writing.

The "power" of voice is directly attached to the (im)personal ways in which it is adopted. Like more expressive teachers, Bartholomae (1985) is interested in how students use voice to write "their way into a position of privilege," but conceptualizes different means to this end (p. 157). In the extensively cited "Inventing the University," Bartholomae (1985) contends that the power of voice comes not from self-exploration, but from conscious appropriation.[29] He argues that as academic writers-to-be, students must "learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (p. 134). To accomplish this, student writers must learn to knowingly adopt "a variety of voices and interpretive schemes" (p. 135). In this sense, a writer writes in a voice that is not the writer's "own." Disputes over voice continue to mirror the aforementioned disputes over the roles of personal and academic writers.

The power of voice is sometimes assigned mysterious and inscrutable qualities by its proponents. For Elbow (1981), being a writer involves a degree of "magic" or "juice," "which some excellent writers can call on at will" (p. 10). Juice, he says, is akin "magic potion, mother's milk, and electricity," a singular sense we get when we "feel the pulse" of a writer's presence of the page (p. 286). The word "magic" appears 20 times in *Writing with Power* (Elbow, 1981) alone. Freisinger (1994), a self-proclaimed "authentic voice"

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[28] Most scholars of voice (Bowden, 1995, 2003; Elbow, 2007; Yancey, 1994) align authentic voice pedagogies with expressivist teaching.
[29] The title is meant to be ironic, because academic discourse cannot be "invented" – only appropriated.

adherent, similarly maintains that "authentic voice" focuses on the "natural, innate, magical" and resists "empirical verification or rational explanation" (1994, p. 193-4). Hashimoto (1997) levies one of the more scathing attacks on these ethereal notions of voice, decrying voice pedagogies for their "evangelical" and mystical claims, likening them to self-help seminars and biblical prophecies promising salvation. He questions the relevancy of voice as a concept, arguing that "not all writing requires a commitment to the self" (p. 78). Elbow later insisted that the writer he envisioned was not only mysterious and irrational like the one Hashimoto derides, but one who "pushes just as hard for analysis, conscious control, care, explicitness, and rationality" (1998, xxvi).

The concept of voice has proven divisive in R & C, especially since postmodern and social theory have problematized the extent to which any writer can claim to have his/her "own" language or voice. For many postmodern theorists, writing eliminates or erases voice. Since the death of the author was proclaimed, some theorists maintain that voice in writing does not exist at all. Barthes (1967) proclaims that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (p. 142). Johnson (1981), a scholar of Derrida, argues that the "natural" things a text supposedly represents have "always already escaped, have never existed" and that meaning is only knowable through "the disappearance of natural presence" (p. 48). Foucault (1966) similarly argues that a writer writes "in order to be faceless," not to find his voice, but to avoid it, to create a text that "rejects its identity" (p.17).[30] Even Elbow admits, "people sometimes find it useful to

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[30] Somewhat paradoxically, Foucault also maintains that, "To write is thus to 'show oneself,' to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence" (1997). Such seeming contradictions are characteristic for Foucault, and reconciling these positions is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is most important to this discussion is his *influence*, and he is more often remembered as one who rejected the textual presence of a writer.

produce a voiceless, faceless text—to give a sense that these words were never uttered but just rather just exist with ineluctable authority from everywhere and nowhere" (1994a, p. xvii).

As the theoretical orientation of the discipline has grown more social, scholars are more likely talk of voice(s) in the plural than the singular. Bakhtin's social theories of language have been particularly influential in this regard. Indeed, the unifying idea behind well-known Bakhtinian (1981) concepts like "ventriloquation," "heteroglossia," and "doublevoicedness" is that a writer is a conduit for language that is never entirely his/her "own." For Bakhtin (1981; 1986), everything a writer writes has "dialogic overtones." All "utterances" are simultaneously reactive and proactive, spoken or written in response to previous utterances and in anticipation of utterances that may follow. Each utterance is part of a greater whole, a larger ongoing dialogue. No one—including an authentically voiced writer—speaks as the Biblical Adam and "disturbs the eternal silence of the universe" (1986, p. 93). In this sense, one's voice is always "populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (1981, p. 294). Despite these constraints, Bakhtin does account for individual agency, claiming that voices can be "freely developed, applied to new material, new conditions […] new contexts" (1981, p. 345). He is careful to note that communicative genres are "flexible, plastic, and free" and, when mastered, can be used "creatively" (1986, p. 79). Ultimately, a writer's voice is not "discovered" internally, but "born of the struggle with other's words and thoughts" (1986, p. 89). Thus, we do actively "voice" our words, but they are only partially our own—they are always "half someone else's (1981, p. 293). Bakhtin's theories suggest the inherent plurality of any "discoursal self." In this sense, a writer's voice is a composite of

sociocultural voices and the fluid self of a writer; "voice" is always "voices"—there is no voice in isolation.

Foucault posits a strikingly similar (albeit less influential) theory in his later writings (1997). Drawing on Seneca's music analogies, he argues that a writer's voice is born of countless other voices, but that the separate parts are not distinguishable from one another; they "blend harmoniously" to constitute a self and a voice. One's voice—and, in a larger sense, one's identity—is wholly unoriginal and derived from the ideas of others, but through the "practice of the disparate," we take these heterogeneous elements and synthesize them into a more unified whole (p. 12). Foucault, like Bakhtin, does allow for individual agency; it is "the writer" who finds "unification" in this heterogeneity (p. 13).

Some scholars locate voice with readers rather than writers. In a survey of 70 editorial board members for 6 journals (applied linguistics and R & C), Tardy and Matsuda (2009) report that blind reviewers of anonymous manuscripts build impressions of an author's identity, constructing voice as an "effect" felt in the reader (p. 34). Reviewers are able identify characteristics of the authors—and sometimes the authors themselves—with uncanny accuracy, based only on the "rhetorical stamp" they hear in the text. Burgess and Ivanic (2010) also argue that a "perceived writer" is always constructed by readers. As Williams (2006) writes, "We can talk all we want about multiple selves, but that doesn't stop people from engaging in particular readings of our identities" (p. 8). Baumlin, Jensen, and Massey (1991) take a similar position, refuting Derrida's attack on writer's presence by locating Derrida himself in his texts: "Even while he wears a series of masks, do we not hear Derrida's own distinctive voice intoned in the reading?" (p. 190). The implications of audience-based conceptions of voice are

critical to those who foreground voice in the classroom, since readers may read a different voice than a writer writes.

In spite of these complicating theories, many scholars continue to argue for the connection of voice to an individual writer. Freisinger (1994) calls for writing teachers to "reexamine and revive the lessons of authentic voice pedagogy" vis-à-vis postmodernism (p. 187). Elbow has written extensively on this over the years, producing countless articles that attempt to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable positions. He and Freisinger share the same ultimate goal: to preserve a theory of writerly agency. Elbow (2007) has tactfully observed that the concept of voice does not necessitate a belief in an autonomous self, or even in a stable or coherent identity. He suggests "embracing contraries," arguing that we needn't choose between romantic and postmodern positions, and can stand on *both* sides of an identity issue, depending on the context of a particular situation. He encourages us to use multiple metaphors and lenses to conceptualize voice and the writer. Through his notion of "resonant voice" (1994a; 2007), we see Elbow trying to appease his detractors, positing a sort of stabilized-for-now student writer, who isn't so stable that s/he will offend those who have moved past the modern subject. Elbow claims that many voice enthusiasts have "mistakenly celebrated" the "sincere" voice, preferring to use "resonant" to describe voices that powerfully reflect the identity of the writer (1994a). The real question, he says, is not "how sincere are you?" but rather, "how much of yourself did you manage to get *behind* the words?" (1994a, xxxvi). In this sense, the "resonant voice" of a writer is "not a picture of the self, but it has the self's resources behind or underneath it" (1994a, xxxvi).

Elbow's notion of a voice, like his notion of writer, has always remained anchored, however provisionally, to a real self. Indeed, most expressivists, though they may speak in terms of multiple "voices," typically prioritize a "one-to-one correspondence between an individual and his or her voice" (Yancey, 1994, xi). To this day, the self-sustaining writer that drives what Bowden (2003) terms "voicist" pedagogies remains a central point of contention. Bowden (2003) notes that even staunch critics of voice (as she claims to be) we can't get away from the concept: "the term invariably emerges, often sheepishly from one of my students and, more frequently than I'd like to admit, from me as I stumble over my own inability to describe what I mean" (p. 285). As a whole, disputes over voice—like disputes over *ethos*—continue to insist upon themselves, reflecting R & C's continued grappling with questions of the writer.

Multimodality, new media literacies, and the writer

In our multimodal world—where contexts and exigencies for writing mutate and evolve at ever-increasing speed—issues of the discoursal self are even more pronounced, making the nature and function of the "writer" is even more difficult to pin down. Digital contexts offer endless "possibilities for selfhood," (Ivanic, 1998) expanding exponentially the ways in which one might "be" a "writer." Identity and authorship, already slippery notions, are becoming even more difficult to pin down or even discuss in a quantifiable way. The instability, multiplicity, and transience of identity are more perceptible in the digital realm, where writers move seamlessly but often *visibly* between various subject positions. In electronic writing, the plurality of selves a writer occupies is more explicitly the product of conscious rhetorical choices. When a person manipulates an avatar or profile picture, we can actually *see* him/her negotiate different subjectivities

in a tangible way. In this sense, the online writer is not only more dynamic, but more transparently *constructed.*

This has clear implications for student agency, a recurring issue throughout this chapter. Indeed, R & C scholars have begun to recognize that "with computer technologies, writers have more control over the page than they've ever enjoyed" (Takayoshi and Selfe, 2007, p. 2). While a comprehensive discussion of new media scholarship is outside the scope of this dissertation, it bears mentioning that new digital contexts enable a writer to exercise more control over the "self" in his/her writing. To what extent do the increasingly complicated issues of the online discoursal self play out in a contemporary writing classroom? Have the "writer qua writer" (Yancey, 2004) pedagogies mentioned in Chapter 1 been updated with the new media writer in mind?

Chapter Summary

This chapter has traced various representations of the term "writer" in both academic and nonacademic spheres, exploring the influence of expressivism, social and postmodern theory, *ethos* and voice, and popular culture. Concepts emerge from the textual utterances of our scholarly conversations, including key/contested terms, recurrent constructions, and particular ways of discussing our subject. The appreciable tension between these concepts and terms continues to complicate the work of R & C teachers. This tension is perhaps most pronounced with respect to the identity-activity distinction. Does the mere act of writing something make one a writer? How does the abstract "figure" of the writer (or author) play into our disciplinary current conversations? To what extent do the aforementioned romantic notions of writer persist? The rift between personal and academic writing seems to reflect a perceived disconnect between a writer

who is *constructed* in discourse and a writer who is *expressed* as an extension of the self—hence the importance of the discoursal self. Current issues of the writer seem to revolve not around *whether* a writer is constructed, but *to what extent* that writer is constructed.

In a broader sense, it appears as if the field is still working through the difficult task of reconciling social and postmodern theory with expressive values. The focus on *agency* is unmistakable. Critical questions of writing and identity continue to revolve around this core issue, which is frequently tied to issues of *authority, ownership,* and *authenticity*. These issues inform the research and interview questions for my own studies. The specific methods and conceptual grounding for the core study will be detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter describes the overarching methodologies and specific data collection methods informing the core inquiry of this dissertation. After discussing the conceptual grounding and rationale for the research design, I provide (in separate sections) overviews of participants, data collection (interviews), and data analysis.

Rationale/Theoretical Orientation

This was a qualitative study with a constructivist approach**.** Data were gathered via 10 ethnographic interviews and contextualized within observed trends (see Chapter 2 Lit Review) in Composition scholarship. Given the highly heterogeneous notions of "writer" and associated terms, my project was open-ended and descriptive. As typically recommended by qualitative scholars (Smagorinsky, 2008; Geisler, 2004; Johanek, 2000; Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo, 2012) methods were selected on the basis of my research questions—broad queries for which fluid and holistic means of inquiry are most appropriate:

- How do postsecondary teachers of writing conceptualize the term "writer"?

- How do they position/discuss the writer in relation to pedagogical practice?

Because these questions focus on *perception*, I sought a method of inquiry that encouraged metacognitive reflection, allowing teachers to describe their *own* perspectives and beliefs.

Interviews were employed because they offer the most flexible and productive means of investigating teachers' epistemological assumptions, providing insight into what participants think and why. The interviews enabled me to explore how teachers of writing *talk* about the identity of writer, as well as how they situate themselves, their teaching, and their students in these conversations. As Jones (1985) states, "in order to understand other persons' constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them" (p. 46). Interviews are particularly useful for assessing participant "perceptions, meanings, and definitions," (Punch, 2009, p.144). They allow a researcher to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences" and to better understand the "lived world" outside of scholarly discussions (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). Interviews are a preferred method when respondents include high-status people (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003) or those with extensive knowledge or expertise (Fontana and Frey, 1994; Charmaz, 2006). Interviews are also recommended when a researcher seeks "in-depth" information (Creswell, 2009; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003).

While interviews have some acknowledged limitations (see below), their use allowed the most direct access to teacher *perceptions* of writing, identity, and the writer. Moreover, the field of R & C has shown growing interest in interview accounts. Blakeslee, Cole and Conefrey (1996) call for writing researchers to "combine our *in situ* examinations with thoughtful considerations of the perspectives possessed by our

subjects" (p. 150). Nelms (1992) calls for more oral testimony on the grounds that it counteracts the reductive "heroes and villains" narratives that resulted from the discipline's overemphasis on documentary evidence. In a broad sense, the increasing ubiquity of the interview has made it a familiar and easy-to-navigate exchange for participants (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003).

As indicated, there are some limitations to interviews as a method of data procurement. As many scholars (Mishler, 1986; Chin, 1994; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003) have pointed out, they are inherently messy undertakings. Attempts to standardize the interview process have been met with particular skepticism from Mishler (1986), who argues that traditional formal interviews tend to exclude the contextual factors that define everyday communication. He urges researchers to mind the problematic "gap between research interviewing and naturally occurring conversation" (p. 6). The use of interviews as a method depends on an assumption that participant perspectives are not only meaningful, but knowable. However, "interviews are as fraught with the perils of intrusiveness and artificiality as any other research methods" (Chin, 1994, 269). Responses are frequently indeterminate and subject to multiple interpretations. Moreover, researchers cannot assume a one-to-one correspondence between responses and beliefs. As Fielding (1996) notes, we should be wary of the widely-held assumption that language is an accurate indicator of thought and action. What people actually believe and do is not always consistent with what they *say* they believe and do.

Representational issues can be especially pronounced for researchers in our discipline, in that we are "writers writing about writers writing" (Sullivan, 1996, p. 104). In an interview, where voices invariably get entangled in multiple representational layers,

our analyses can only be "our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they are up to," (Geertz, 2003, p. 9). And participants' constructions may not even be their own. Interviewees, as Deborah Brandt suggests, may "try to render their responses with the perceived desires of the questioner" (2001, p. 12). Additionally, Gubrium and Holstein (2003) have observed the tendency of some interview participants to articulate the talking points of a broader community, rather than their individual beliefs. This was not necessarily a problem for my study, however, since it aims to shed light on shared perceptions of the R & C community, not just a single "subject" telling his or her unique story. The "writer" has a lineage, a history, and I am interested in how participants draw on that lineage, as well as how they align themselves with or against particular schools of thought.

Virtually every aspect of the interview process has been critiqued on representational grounds; even transcription remains an "unsettled and complex issue" (Leander and Prior, 2003, p. 202). Such ingrained limitations must be acknowledged for discriminating readers to weigh against my claims. Some radically postmodern views reduce qualitative interviewing to a "communicative game" where "all descriptions refer [only] to other descriptions" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p. 9). While this study is not informed by such an inhibiting notion of reality, I do ascribe to the belief that participant representation is always "more rhetorical than reportorial" (p. 14). I have nonetheless striven to produce reliable, valid research—irrespective of my limited grounds on which to generalize or claim certainty.

With these limitations in mind, I assume a constructivist approach to both interviewing and data analysis. Like Chin (1994) and Mishler (1986), I conceptualize the

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interview as a meaning-making collaboration, constituted by the epistemologies of both

the researcher and participant. Interviews, in this sense, are never detached and impartial:

> It is not neutral tool, for the interviewer creates the reality of the interview
>
> situation. In *this* situation answers are given. Thus, the interview produces
>
> situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes. This method
>
> is influenced by personal characteristics of the interviewer, including race, class,
>
> ethnicity, and gender. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 353)

This means that a researcher does not simply find and convey meaning that already exists

in the data, but *creates* meaning through interaction with his/her participants and his/her

interpretation of the findings. Indeed, since the "crisis of representation" (Denzin and

Lincoln, 1994) of the early 1990s, few researchers view the interview as anything other

than a wholly interactive process. Long gone are the days when a "subject" served as a

mere "vessel of answers" (Gubrium & Holstein 2003). With this in mind, my interviews

were treated as unequivocally social events; in this sense, I do not "report" on an external

reality, but co-construct reality with my participants. In a broader sense, this means

viewing language itself as a form of social action, in the sense that it does not represent

but rather constitutes the world.

 Throughout the research process and especially in this chapter, I have made a

concerted effort to heed our discipline's calls for greater rigor and transparency (Haswell,

2005; Smagorinsky, 2008). This study was designed with Richard Haswell's (2005)

criteria for "RAD" research in mind—that is, research that is **R**eplicable, **A**ggregable,

and **D**ata-supported. This means "replicable" in the sense that the study is clear and

methodical enough to be replicated by another scholar; "aggregable" in that it is "exactly

enough circumscribed to be extended" and makes an "enduring" contribution to the existing body of research in its area (p. 201); and "data-supported" such that all claims are verifiably grounded in the data itself. As Smargorinksy (2008) has lamented, scholarly discussions of methods rarely provide adequate detail, making Haswell's "replicability" a tall order. Haswell himself notes the difficulty of replicating the kinds of ethnographic work that writing scholars typically undertake. In an extensive review writing research, Juzwick et. al (2006) find that a comparatively small portion of the articles they examine meet Haswell's RAD criteria. However, if R & C as a field wishes to move beyond a "private epideictic," then RAD research must play a more prominent role (Haswell, 2005). This study, in striving for the levels of transparency and systematicity that RAD demands, is a hopeful step towards filling an identified methodological "gap" in our discipline's scholarship (Smagorinsky, 2008; Haswell, 2005).

Doing RAD research requires transparency, about not just the methods selected and applied, but also one's own subjective positioning. This means preemptively identifying one's biases and proclivities, as well as the ideological underpinnings that frame one's inquiry. I am coming to this study with a great deal of disciplinary context. R & C's narratives are rooted in well-defined pedagogical and scholarly traditions; as my expressed intent is to situate the conversations of these teachers *within* those narratives, I cannot claim a tabula rasa. My own positioning as a teacher and scholar of writing undoubtedly influenced the framing and trajectory of the study. As Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo (2012) remind us, our research questions and the methods we employ are unavoidably products of our own subjective interests, inclinations, and

proclivities. In the words of Richard Young, "There are no problems floating around in the world, out there waiting to be discovered; there are only problems for someone […] We do not find problems, we create them" (1981, p. 60). Indeed, this study is born of my own experiences as a classroom teacher and a lifelong interest in ontological questions of identity.

Data-based concepts and themes form the basis of my analysis, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 51). While the impetus for this study lay in R & C scholarship, my open-ended research questions elicited data that both exceeded and contradicted my expectations. I maintained a self-reflexive approach throughout the process, enabling me both to critically reflect on my own role and to consider emerging trends and patterns vis-à-vis my research questions, letting them shape and hone my overarching focus.

Because I intend for this study to qualify as RAD research, this chapter provides a high level of detail about data procurement and analysis, especially coding procedures and priorities. The inclusion of these details should not be construed as an attempt to make the study "objective." In the field of R & C, any systematic series of methods that purports to "know" anything is often reduced to "positivism."[31] Since the field's turn towards the postmodern and social, the very idea of "knowing" anything, even provisionally, seems to irk a great number of us. This relates to issues like reliability and validity, which are discussed in this chapter, but seldom in R & C. However, as Hillocks (2005) and Miles and Huberman (1994) contend, even qualitative researchers "count;" we all do *some* things systematically, and our turn to the subjective, the polyvocal, and

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[31] The positivist epistemology is important for R & C insofar as it represents something we have defined ourselves *against*. There is no indication that any faction of the discipline embraces positivist approaches; the actual target is probably naïve realism or the very idea of certainty.

the interpretive should not prevent us from doing data-supported research that richens the scholarship of our community.

Participants

Interview participants (see Figure 3.1) were recruited via listserv probes, word-of-mouth, and my own focused online searches. Most participants were contacted by e-mail, using an IRB-approved recruitment script (see Appendix A). In the interest of reciprocity, participants were compensated with a $10 gift card for their participation in the study. This modest gesture served less to entice potential participants than to indicate my appreciation of their time and involvement. They were pursued primarily on the basis of their diverse backgrounds and Composition-related experience. The goal was not to uncover the assumptions of any particular group of teachers, but to gain a multiplicity of insights in the writer identity. These participants provide a varied cross-section of the field, offering a wide range of perspectives. Pseudonyms are used to conceal the identity of the participants. The total sample consists of 10 postsecondary writing teachers (six females and four males) from a diverse array of sociocultural and institutional backgrounds.[32] The "years of experience" refer only to postsecondary writing instruction; many participants have worked in other domains, including journalism, library science, theater, and secondary teaching.

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[32] The greater number of female participants more accurately reflects the field of R & C, where women have long been represented in greater numbers than men (Enos, 1996; Bailiff, Davis, and Mountford, 2008).

Figure 3.1 — Participant Background Information

Participant	Institution	Title	Education	Years of Experience	Background
Tom	2-year Community College	Assistant Professor	M.A.	7	Classroom teaching, Adult basic education, ESL
Shelby	Private Research University	Associate Professor; Writing Program Coordinator	Ph.D.	15	WPA, Classroom teaching, Writing centers, ESL
Monica	Public Research University	Associate Provost for Academic Engagement; Writing Center Director	Ph.D.	20	Writing Centers, WPA, WAC
Matt	Private 4-year liberal arts college	Adjunct instructor	M.A.	13	Journalism, classroom teaching
Lisa	Private 4-year liberal arts college	Lecturer	M.A.	3	Classroom teaching (college and high-school), ESL, National Writing Project
Kelsey	2-year Community College & Public research university	Doctoral student & instructor	M.A.T.	10	Classroom teaching, Basic writing, Writing center tutoring
Julie	Public research university	Doctoral Student & instructor	M.A.	3	Classroom teaching, WPA, Test preparation
Greta	Private Liberal Arts College	Dean of Library services; adjunct instructor	Ph.D.	4	Library science, WAC, Classroom teaching
Jason	2-year Community College	Assistant Professor	Ph.D.	10	Classroom teaching, Basic writing, Writing centers, Literacy programs
Brent	Public Technical College	Associate Professor; Writing Center Director	Ph.D.	13	Writing centers, WAC, Classroom teaching

Participants include fully tenured professors, non-tenure track lecturers, graduate students, administrators, and two Deans. They teach at a range of both public and private schools, including research universities, small liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. These schools are located all over the country, in both rural and urban areas. All but one of the participants have extensive classroom experience.[33] Several are involved with writing program administration, writing across the curriculum initiatives, and/or writing centers. Four participants have published in the field, and two are widely recognized scholars.

Because so many Composition courses are taught by graduate students and adjuncts, I have made a particular effort to include them in my participant sample. Contingent faculty have been receiving a great deal of attention from the field, as evidenced by the host of sessions at this year's MLA and CCCC conventions devoted to adjunct labor. It was said of MLA that "you couldn't turn around without hearing about contingent faculty issues in one form or another" (Boldt, 2013). Similar topics proliferated on the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (e.g. Osborn's "The Lonely Adjunct," June 2012) and WPA listserv (e.g. "Comp Teachers on Food Stamps," Dec. 2012). The upshot of these discussions was the "Adjunct Project," a new online forum conceived by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about adjunct pay and working conditions.

By incorporating these underemployed (and generally unpublished) voices, I hope not only to give contingent faculty a voice on this issue, but also to move beyond the "received wisdom" (Connors, 1992) of our scholarship. Nelms (1992) emphasizes the capacity of interviews to draw attention to marginalized people and groups, those whose

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[33] One participant, in her words, "rarely taught comp in the required comp course sense." She was selected on the basis of her varied and extensive experience with writing programs and her prominent presence in the field.

ideas, while relevant, may not even exist in textual form. I want to avoid characterizing the "writer" only in accordance with what our foremost scholars have said. An overarching goal of this study is to broaden perspectives on identity by giving *more* teachers a voice in our pedagogical discourses. I therefore include teachers whose voices, without oral interviews, might well go unheard. I want to get a richer sense of the breadth of definitions, the extent of terminological disparities—this means exploring not only within, but outside the increasingly reified narratives that we pass from one generation of scholars to the next. In this sense, the interviews offer the fringes of our own profession a voice, a chance for them to situate themselves in a discourse that normally *situates* them. Our stories are told from only a handful of perspectives, and the dictates that inform classroom practice extend far beyond the pages of our journals, textbooks, and written documentation.

Procedures/Data Collection

Interviews consisted of two parts: a live interview (phone or face-to-face) and a more structured e-mail "interview" to which participants provided written responses. This two-tiered process allowed participants to respond to my questions in different contexts. By integrating "talk" and "text" in my interviews, I was able to examine ways in which they "shape and occasion" one another (Leander and Prior, 2003). The written and spoken dialogues directly informed each other, providing, on the whole, a richer body of data. I arranged and conducted all the interviews myself.

In a general sense, the interviews were "ethnographic" (Spradley, 1979) and predominantly "unstructured" (Fontana and Frey, 1994), broad-based conversations that prioritized context and nuance. As I sought depth rather than breadth, my approach was

informed by Charmaz's (2006) notion of "intensive interviewing," which allows for "in-depth exploration of a particular topic" through participants' interpretations of their experience (25).[34] Interviews, in this sense, are "open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet restricted" (Charmaz, p. 28). This style of interviewing is widely advocated when dealing with complex or contested issues or concepts, which my research questions seek to examine (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Duffy, 2007; Fontana and Frey, 1994; Mishler, 1986).

Interview questions (e-mail and live) were conceived as open-ended vehicles for reflection (see Appendices B & C). These were broad queries that could be focused during the conversation to "invite detailed discussion of topic" and "encourage unanticipated statements and stories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Flexibility and variation were more important to me than standardization. I encouraged participants to embrace tangents and diversions and to reflect at length. I posed both direct questions (e.g. "what does a writer do?") and indirect contextualizing queries (e.g. "What should be the main focus of the composition classroom"). There were no pre-established categories for responding; participants could communicate any information they felt was relevant. Open-ended, non-standardized questions enable a researcher to explore complex issues without imposing a priori categorization that might limit the field of inquiry. This generally leads to a richer and more comprehensive data set (Punch, 2009).

Because I wanted to avoid reifying the "received wisdom" (Connors, 1992) of R & C scholarship, I often asked participants to reflect on past experiences by asking "think

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[34] Charmaz's "intensive" interview is more or less akin to Spradley's "ethnographic" interview (1979) and Fontana and Frey's "unstructured" interview (1994).

back" questions (e.g. "think back to a time when…").[35] This strategy can establish a more personal context for a response, and is especially helpful when a researcher wants responses beyond the mere reiteration of community beliefs and values (Krueger and Casey, 2009). This technique also builds reliability by encouraging participants' to think outside of the context of the "immediate interviewing experience" (Krueger and Casey, 2009, p. 54).

The more exploratory e-mail questions (see Appendix B) were sent first, asking participants for background information and calling on them to reflect on some basic terminology and their own sense of the term "writer." The e-mail questions were the same for each participant. These simple queries enabled the participants to consider the overarching issues, reflecting on their own positions and perspectives *before* discussing them in a live setting. Spontaneity and immediacy were less important to me than depth and rich context. This sort of inquiry does not necessitate capturing a person's first impulse or knee-jerk response; on the contrary, I wanted to see deep, thoughtful engagement with the questions. Participants were thus encouraged to take their time, embrace diversions and tangents, and to answer the questions as thoroughly as possible. The responses to the e-mail interviews helped to frame the live interviews.

The live interviews (8 phone and 2 face-to-face) took place only after the e-mail questions had been answered.[36] The length of the interviews ranged from 26 to 93 minutes, depending on conversational depth, tangents, and a participant's willingness to continue. These were relaxed and informal affairs, very much akin to a "friendly conversation," as recommended by Spradley (1979). As a teacher of writing, I found it

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[35] This strategy was used primarily in the live interviews.
[36] The two face-to-face interviews were conducted in a quiet room in a university campus building.

relatively easy to maintain this casual rapport; participants, as fellow teachers, did not

distrust my intentions, and treated me not just a researcher, but as a peer. Indeed, there

were times in each interview where the scripted questions (see Appendix C) seemed to

recede and discussions took on a shape of their own. In this sense, all live interviews

were unstructured, which, most scholars agree, are the least obtrusive and most "data

dense" method of inquiry (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Nelms

(1992) maintains that the unstructured interview actually increases reliability, as the

open-endedness and need to adapt to informants prevents interviewers from making

sweeping generalizations.

Ethnographic interviews generally proceed according to a researcher's growing

understanding of how participants make sense of their experiences (Spradley, 1979; Chin,

1994). I therefore assumed a hands-off approach, such that participants did most of the

talking, and their responses dictated the direction of the conversation. Corbin and Strauss

(2008) warn that rigid adherence to questions can "hinder discovery" (p. 152). With this

in mind, wording of questions and follow-up questions depended on how the interview

unfolded. As the study progressed, the live interview questions were revised in

accordance with participant responses. Few of the live interviews follow the script as it

appears; questions were asked in varying order, depending on the context of the

conversation. Occasionally, I added a more precise follow-up query to further explore a

particular point or to clarify uncertainty. Generally, though, my role was more reactive

than proactive.

The live interviews were audio-recorded in their entirety and transcribed for analysis. My transcriptions accounted for every meaningful utterance made by both the participant and interviewer. I followed the transcription key in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 — Transcription Key

,	Denotes short but noticeable pause by a speaker
..	Denotes lengthier pause by the speaker
…	Denotes lengthiest pause by the speaker
italics	Indicate emphasis by the speaker
/word(s)/	Unclear/uncertain translation
⌐	Latch or overlap (original speaker)
∟	Latch or overlap (second speaker/inserted at point of crosstalk)
<words>	Explanatory notes

In cases where a word or phrase was indecipherable (this rarely happened), the segment in question was placed between two slash marks with a question mark. I noted short pauses (comma) and long pauses (ellipses), but omitted all linguistic "filler" ("umm," "you know," etc.) that was deemed superfluous to the point the speaker was making. I indicated speaker emphasis (by either myself or the participant) with italics. I also identified latches, overlaps, and crosstalk, but these proved rather peripheral to my analysis (Tannen, 1989; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). I wanted my transcriptions to reflect real conversation, but my research questions did not necessitate a great deal of prosodic detail.

Transcripts were analyzed primarily on the basis on semantics, lexical choices and recurrent themes. At times, the transcribed phonological attributes helped clarify or strengthen these themes, but they were not my main focus. Because most interviews (eight of ten) were conducted via telephone, visual data like gestures, backchannels, and non-verbal-cues were not recorded. An unavoidable limitation of any transcript is that it

offers only a "partial representation" of actual talk (Leander and Prior, 2003, p. 209). In order to mitigate this slippage between talk and text, each transcript was reviewed and double-checked for accuracy with the corresponding recording. Explanatory notes (see above Figure 3.2) also helped fill this gap.

Broadly speaking, I use interviews to "explore, not to interrogate" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 27). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, interviews are employed under a constructivist paradigm. This means they are as much about data "making" as data "collection" (Baker, 2004). As Charmaz asserts, an interview is always a "construction —or reconstruction—of a reality" (2006, p. 27).

Analytic Approach to the Transcript Data

My primary objects of study were the interview transcripts, which totaled 154 single-spaced pages and over 71, 000 words.[37] I used inductive coding to analyze the transcript data. Loosely informed by the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 2008), I treated the transcripts as verbal data, labeling segments of text, locating a range of codes, and moving data into categories that reflected emerging themes. Grounded theory is an inductive analytical approach involving the use of systematic coding and processes to *arrive at*, rather than prove theory. I use grounded theory as more of a heuristic than an algorithm, closer to what Charmaz (2000) termed "constructivist" grounded theory:

> By adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach, the researcher can move
>
> grounded theory methods further into the realm of interpretation social science ...
>
> [with] emphasis on meaning, without assuming the existence of a unidimensional

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[37] This aggregate word count (done in Microsoft Word) includes the interview questions and some extraneous crosstalk, neither of which were coded during the analysis. Peripheral verbal exchanges were included in the transcripts to account for conversational context, but the *analyzed* text is closer to 60, 000 words.

external reality. A constructivist grounded theory recognizes the interactive nature

of both data collection and analysis, resolves recent criticisms of the method, and

reconciles positivist assumptions and postmodernist critiques. (pp. 521-22)

The more emergent, context-driven epistemology behind constructivist grounded theory

allowed me to ground observations in the data while simultaneously acknowledging my

interpretative role as a researcher. My approach to the data followed grounded theory in

the sense that it was systematic, avoiding presuppositions and unsubstantiated claims;

however, I make no claims that these precautions allowed "the" meaning of data to

emerge.

I took care to avoid preemptively narrowing my analytical gaze, but this study

was unavoidably a product of my own proclivities and interests. I did not strive to

maintain the sort of tabula rasa that Glaser insists is necessary for "pure grounded theory"

(2002, p. 44).[38] Charmaz (2000) rejects these earlier incarnations of grounded theory

(namely Glaser's), in particular the belief that data "speaks" to a researcher: "Like

wondrous gifts waiting to be opened, early grounded theory tests imply that categories

and concepts inhere within the data, awaiting the researcher's discovery" (p. 522). Unlike

more objective notions of grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory allows a

researcher's experiential or disciplinary knowledge to play a role in the analysis,

provided it is utilized in a data-sensitive way (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis was truly a

process of "constant comparison" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) between inductive and

deductive—an ongoing comparison of data with data, data with codes, and codes with

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[38] To Glaser (2002), the very idea of "constructivist grounded theory" is a "misnomer" (p. 1). He insists (rather obstinately) that by coding and accounting for researcher bias, we can "make the data objective," and that constructivist data, if it exists at all, is "irrelevant to grounded theory methodology" (p. 32). Such data, he says, may play a role in "in-depth interviews," but the resultant analysis would not be grounded theory, since constructivist findings are "diluted" by "researcher interpretation" (p. 42).

one another, gradually moving towards more concrete descriptions and analytic

interpretations.

Data analysis began with "open coding" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz,

2006), becoming progressively more focused as the study developed. As recommended

by Charmaz (2006), the transcripts went through two overarching but not entirely discrete

"phases": an "initial phase," an open-ended micro-level reading in which transcripts were

coded twice, line-by-line, in their entirety, and a second more "selective phase," in which

recurring and salient codes were used to sort the data and develop broader theoretical

categories. I do not draw sharp distinctions between the various stages of coding (open,

axial, selective), as these analyses generally "go hand in hand," informing one another

throughout the analytic process (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 198).[39]

To avoid an unwieldly number of potentially irrelevant categories, the coding

scheme was derived from responses to the writer-specific interview questions (i.e. six live

questions and one e-question—see Appendix), and then applied to the rest of the data set.

This methodological move follows the advice of Grant-Davie (1992), who encourages

researchers to "set the limits of the data" during preliminary coding in order to determine

"which parts of the material to include as significant data for further interpretation and

which to discard as irrelevant" (p. 274). Miles and Huberman (1994) also stress the

importance of "data reduction" to eliminate nonessential information. The more

indirect/contextualizing queries produced a large amount of peripheral data, much of

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[39] Grounded theory researchers have long disagreed on the number of "phases" involved with coding, as well as what to call them (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Corbin and Strauss, 1998, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). For purposes of this study, the names attached to discrete phases are less important than employing and describing methods that are systematic and clear. More recently, such distinctions between phases have been regarded as "artificial" by Corbin and Strauss (2008).

which did not directly address the identity of "writer." I thus culled a set of codes from the more focused questions—questions that elicited responses about the writer identity.

To arrive at these codes, I analyzed the answers to the focused questions repeatedly until the data reached "theoretical saturation," the point at which the categories were well-developed enough that contradictions and variations ceased to emerge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 263). The resulting categories were used as a coding scheme for examining the rest of the data set, i.e. the responses to the indirect questions. Many participants proffered information (usually in response to the indirect questions) that far exceeded the scope of the study. These digressions, an inevitable outcome of unstructured interviews, were coded only insofar as they are relevant to the research questions. This selective approach allowed me to consider the information a particular question sought when coding participant responses. Some segments do not fit neatly within my identified codes, at least using the full transcript—but my categories aptly describe every piece of verbal data under the "writer-specific" questions.

The *thought unit* served as my unit of analysis. The question of how to divide texts into codeable units has long plagued researchers (Krippendorff, 1995). Establishing unit boundaries can be quite problematic; even determining what constitutes a sentence or paragraph can be slippery with conversational speech. In order to avoid arbitrary cutoff points, participant utterances were coded by *thought unit,* defined as a "complete idea" (Taylor and Donald, 2004, p. 458) or a "single thought" (Weldon, Jehn, and Pradham, 1991, p. 559).[40] In this sense, segments of text were separated not by sentence or paragraph, but by idea, and labeled vis-à-vis the respondents' apparent train of thought.

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[40] Within the field of Writing Studies, Grant-Davie (1992) codes using a similar unit that he calls an "episodic unit," which lasts "as long as the subject continues to make the same kind of comment" (p. 276). However, "thought unit" is a more frequently used (and, I would argue, more appropriately named) term for this type of coding.

The starting and ending point for coding a given segment of text was based on its *thought unit*, which could be as small as a single word or as long as a paragraph. The goal was simply to assign single codes to "homogenous stretches or episodes" (Bakeman and Gottman, 1997, p. 68). When a new idea was introduced—even mid sentence—a new code was assigned.[41] This analytical unit was functional rather than syntactic. Syntactic units are more predictable and easier to quantify, but are limited and problematic as descriptors, since subjects may generate varying numbers of "units" to make the same point (Grant-Davie, 1992, p. 276). While the thought unit sacrifices a degree of consistency, it allows responses to more accurately reflect topical shifts by the respondent.

As the coding scheme became more refined, relationships were examined and re-examined and, consequently, codes were revised to reflect a growing understanding of the data. This was a continuing process of "negotiation," as recommended by Grant-Davie (1992): "Researchers must negotiate with the data, searching their memories for alternative schemas that might account for the data, revising schemas they had brought to the analysis, or forming new schemas to account for the [emerging] evidence" (p. 273). In this sense, I was constantly reflecting on both codes and the assumptions informing them. Most codes were renamed several times to more accurately reflect the phenomena they described. Similar codes were merged into broader categories to ensure that each code was separate and distinct. In addition, categories were "dimensionalized" (Strauss, 1987; Corbin and Strauss, 2008) to reflect emerging subcategories. Dimensions are defined by Corbin and Strauss as "variations within properties that give specificity and

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[41] Units were coded using various highlight colors in Microsoft Word. Each code corresponded to a particular color. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present the color-coded categories that emerged from this process.

range to concepts" (2008, p. 159). Dimensionalizing involved fracturing a coded concept into an array of appreciable subcomponents. A concerted effort was also made to identify exceptions to emerging rules. Corbin and Strauss (2008) encourage researchers to look for the "negative case," one that "does not fit the pattern" (p. 84). These serve to enhance the developing "theory," more accurately accounting for the heterogeneity of participant assumptions. Through this iterative process, finer distinctions of concepts were exposed and accounted for, further developing the conceptual categories.

A number of qualitative scholars have identified limitations to coding and data interpretation, insisting that any act of coding is subject to a researchers "assumptions and presuppositions" (Mishler, 1986, p. 4). An increasing number of researchers (Mishler, 1986; Grant-Davie, 1992; Chin, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2004; Charmaz, 2006) reject the notion of "raw" data altogether, viewing analysis as an unavoidably interpretive act. Even as I have made efforts to make my analysis rigorous and systematic, I must acknowledge the subjective nature of the coding process. As Grant-Davie argues, "researchers don't just collect data, they create this material by selecting and defining it" (p. 274). Indeed, the selection of a particular analytical frame or unit of analysis is itself a subjective act. While I do not necessarily agree with Chin's (1994) contention that "analyzing interview data is more akin to the interpretation required in analyzing a literary text," I concede that my analysis is informed, at least in part, by my methodological choices (p. 252). In this way, my coding process was, as previously described, a "negotiation" between observed trends and my own prior knowledge (Grant-Davie, 1992). Such a "negotiated" approach is still tenable with RAD research (Haswell, 2005), as none of its components necessitate claims of objectivity. I

am ultimately more concerned with the "values" assigned to various terms and positions than in uncovering the "truth" of the matter. However, these more subjective concerns should not preclude one from doing RAD research.

The inevitable influence of biases and proclivities was a major reason to include (as I do) an "intercoder" in the process of data analysis. As with any codes, there was a degree of slippage and an inescapable interpretive element. Sometimes, a thought unit was subject to multiple codes or uncertain boundaries. Testing my codes against those of another researcher proved invaluable in these instances. To increase reliability, codes were "cross-checked" through what Creswell (2009) calls "intercoder agreement."[42] As Creswell explains, this means "not that [multiple coders] code the same passage of text, but whether another coder would code it with the same or similar code" (p.191). My intercoder, a capable and motivated 4th-year undergraduate honors student, was recruited on the basis of her availability and background. She had previously participated in transcription and coding during a semester-long Independent Study. As an English student, she was used to close readings and thinking analytically, but was a relative outsider to the discipline of R & C. Not having been steeped in our disciplinary discourses, she could approach the transcripts with fresh eyes. She did the requisite CITI Training modules and was trained to identify and code segments of transcript data. Additional training (all of which was done by me) consisted of a discussion of underlying terms and principles, a brief reading of excerpts from methods-based scholarship, and several extended examples and practice runs. Following the training, the intercoder was given the full transcript set and the coding scheme derived from the writer-specific

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[42] It bears mentioning that "reliability," in this case, does not carry the same connotation that it does in quantitative research. For some, the term invokes a complex and contested history, posing problems that lie well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

interview questions. The intercoder and I compared codes for 7 of 10 transcripts (70%) in the sample.

To assess the reliability of my coding scheme, I calculated both percentage of agreement and Cohen's Kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960).[43] Creswell (2009) and Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that coders agree on the code posited for a given passage of text at least 80% of the time. The intercoder and I compared codes for segments of text across 70% of the transcript set (7 of 10) with an 89% level of agreement. I calculated Cohen's Kappa to be .84, considered "very good" agreement.[44] While many researchers in Writing Studies prefer the conceptually straightforward percentage of agreement, Cohen's Kappa is generally viewed as a slightly more robust measure of reliability, since it uses correlation to account for the probability that coding agreements occurred by chance (Cohen, 1960; Hayes and Hatch, 1999). It nonetheless carries some limitations; Cohen's Kappa is considered by some to be an overly conservative measure and/or arbitrary in determining chance agreement (Brennan and Prediger, 1981). Moreover, it is typically used to assess categorical data with very sharp boundaries (e.g. "yes" or "no")—sharper than the categories in my study, which, while discrete, were not isolable from each other in such a clear-cut way. In spite of these limitations, the .84 Kappa value at least suggests that the relatively high percentage of intercoder agreement may not be overstated.

In the case of disagreements, which generally occurred when a single thought unit could be coded in multiple ways, the intercoder and I discussed the rationale behind our contradictory labels, determined which code made more sense, and then applied it. In this

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[43] Though we compared codes across the transcript set, these measures were calculated with respect to the writer-specific questions – those sections of data where every piece of text was coded.
[44] Kappa was calculated by plugging data into the matrix on this website: http://graphpad.com/quickcalcs/kappa1.cfm

sense, she helped me not only "check" codes, but also refine and improve them. With her assistance, the coding scheme was both tested for reliability and subtly fine-tuned. Both Morse et. al. (2002) and Geisler (2004) recommend using an intercoder in this capacity— that is, in both a formative and summative way.

Incorporating an intercoder helps reduce the inherent biases and limitations of single-researcher interpretation, producing more reliable and more "replicable" results (Miles and Huberman, 1994). According to Haswell (2005), reliability is inextricably tied to replicablity and aggregablity, both core components of RAD research. However, some scholars contend that "reliability" is a more restrictive term than agreement, and that "agreement" between two researchers cannot safely be termed "reliable" until their agreed-upon findings are tested against a standard protocol. In this sense, "reliability could be low even when interobserver agreement is high" (Bakeman and Gottman , 1997). However, others (Creswell, 2009; Saldana, 2009; Gibbs, 2007) view "agreement" as a critical step towards greater reliability. Agreement is nonetheless only a "step towards" reliability; Hayes and Hatch (1999), even as they call for the widespread use of chance agreement correlation, maintain that these more rigorous measures still should not be construed as providing a "precise estimate of reliability" (p. 364).

To ensure even greater reliability, then, I followed the procedures outline by Gibbs (2007), who calls not only for constant cross-checking of codes, but also habitually writing reflective "memos" to sort and develop emerging ideas, double- and triple-checking transcript accuracy, and avoiding "drift" in code definitions. In this sense, coding was not a one-time dissection of the data, but an ongoing process of coding,

testing, reflecting, contextualizing, and re-coding—a "cyclical act" (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). All categories leak; I utilize these procedures to ensure that they leak as little as possible.

As a result of this process, my codes coalesced into eight general categories. Of these, four were broad types of writer (see Figure 3.3), and four were the most frequently articulated characteristics of writer (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.3
Types of Writer

Capital "W" Writer
- Professional/paid for publication
- Uniquely insightful, exceptional
- Creative/artistic
- Romantic
  - Innate
  - Spontaneous
  - Solitary/Individual

Lowercase "w" writer
- Inclusive, i.e. everyone is a writer
- Writer as "communicator"
- Utilitarian
- Practical/Functional

Expressive Writer
- Self-expressive
- Honest & sincere
- "Personal connection"
- Reflective & Self-exploratory

Academic Writer
- A "whole new language"
- Rhetorically aware
- Conventions and standards
- Mechanically correct
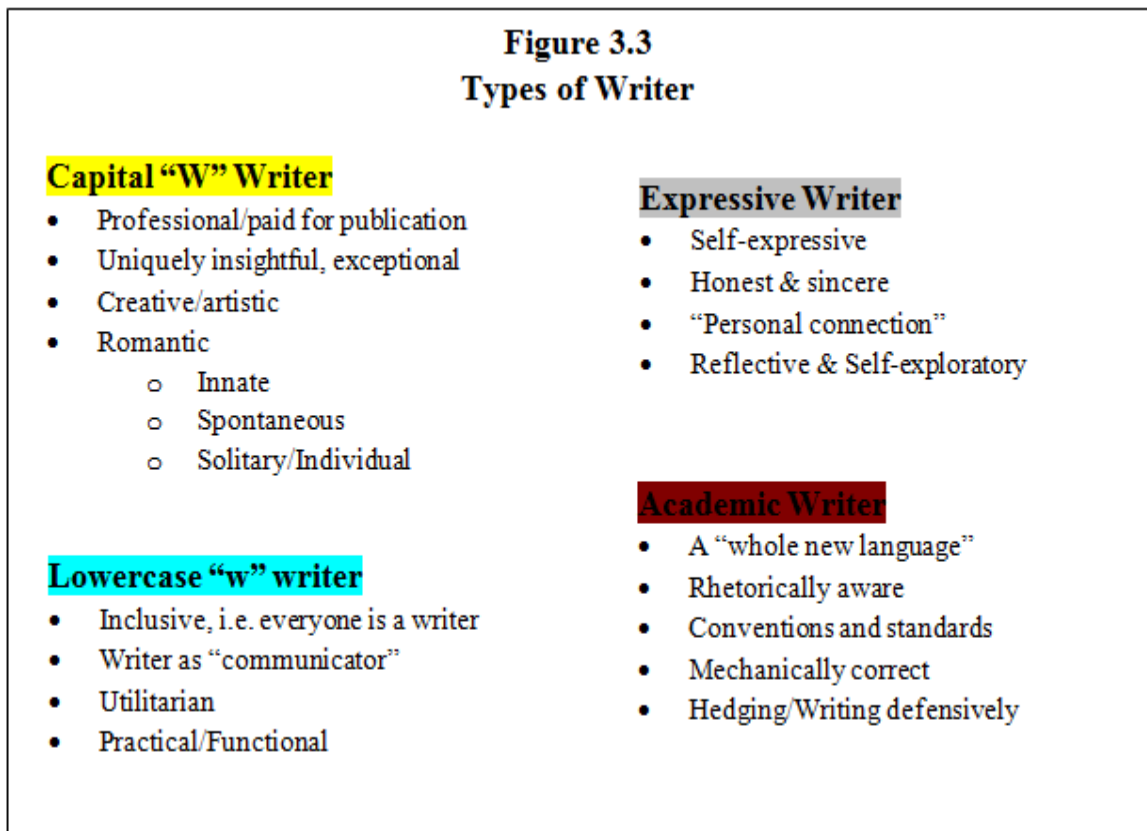- Hedging/Writing defensively

Figure 3.4
Overarching Characteristics of Writer

Writers take risks
- Taking chances/breaking rules
- Self-exposure
- Fear
    - "Perils" of audience
    - "Dangers" of a new discourse
- The "very idea of being a writer"

Writers are Discourse-Specific
- A writer is situated in a particular discipline or field

Writers are Readers
- Writing-Reading-Thinking are inextricable from and/or constitute one another

Writers have Power
- Self-efficacy
- Rewards
- Validation
- Agency

Categories, as Corbin and Strauss (2008) state, enable a researcher to "reduce and combine" data by grouping lower-level concepts based on shared properties to form "higher-level concepts" (p. 159). Both the "types" and "characteristics" of writer are data-based categories, in this sense. Many dimensions started as separate codes before being clustered under particular categories. The characteristics were often directly associated with one of the types of writer, all of which were both encouraged and resisted to varying degrees by participants.

My analysis is further influenced by feminist notions of participant representation. Patricia Sullivan (1996) raises a vital question: "What gives [the researcher] the right to speak for another, to tell another's story?" (p. 104). A host of scholars have called for participants to play a more active role in qualitative research (Powell and Takayoshi,

2003; Gubirum and Holstein, 2003; Cushman, 1996; Mortensen and Kirsch, 1996; Sullivan, 1996), reflecting a growing concern with "the constructive role played by active subjects in authoring their experiences" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p. 32). Perl (1999) reminds us that participants "can make imaginative leaps along with the researchers" (p. 95). The interview has thus been widely reconceptualized as an occasion for "activating" interview participants who are encouraged to "*construct* versions of reality" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p. 32). With this in mind, Blakeslee, Cole and Conefrey (1996) urge researchers to make the voices of our subjects "audible" and not preemptively impose "our voices and interpretive schemes" (p. 141). Corbin and Strauss (2008) further suggest that using participants' own labels and interpretive frameworks can lead to more member-sensitive findings and conclusions. I thus privilege the voices of the participants in the final document, letting *their* narratives shape and describe my overarching categories. This meant not only quoting liberally from participants, but utilizing "in vivo" codes (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006) derived from the participants' own words in order to more accurately convey the specific lexical choices of writing teachers. As a consequence of this approach, participants could "construct roles for themselves and us in the same way we construct roles for them" (Powell and Takayoshi, 2003, p. 398). Ultimately, I sought to understand the writer via teacher's *own* accounts of their beliefs and experiences. Their collective musings say more about the term than one researcher ever could.[45]

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[45] Another common practice for feminist researchers interested in enhancing participant voices is to have participants read and respond to results as a member-check. This was not done for two reasons: 1) lack of interest from participants I contacted, and 2) time constraints, which precluded me from getting feedback from the entire participant sample. Insofar as I am claiming to adhere to feminist notions of representation, this may be considered a limitation.

Chapter Summary

      This chapter has presented the methodological bases and precise data collection methods employed in this dissertation. Using a constructivist framework, I conducted and transcribed two-part interviews with 10 different participants, transcribed all interviews, and then used inductive coding to derive data-based categories from the transcripts. During my inductive scrutiny of the data, there was a great deal of what Donald Schön (1984) calls "problem reframing," as my theoretical bases were constantly modified in response to emerging patterns and regularities. Both data collection and analysis were honed through "addition and revision," such that I would "accommodate or reconstruct" my understanding of the writer based on new or emergent knowledge (Grant-Davie, 1992, p. 273). In a holistic sense, the project depended on an ongoing dialogical relationship between analysis and reflection, such that codes emerging at one level would be weighed against emerging intertextual themes across the sample. This interplay not only increased validity (Gibbs, 2007), but kept me productively engaged throughout the research process. In the chapters that follow, I present the results of the interview transcript analysis, expanding on the dimensionalized categories of writer introduced at the end of this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: TYPES OF WRITER

Chapter overview and organization

This chapter and the next present the results of the interview transcript analysis,

examining in depth the categories introduced at the end of the last chapter. While Chapter

V considers the four central *characteristics* of a writer, Chapter IV focuses on four *types*

of writer that emerged as dominant categories:

1) Capital "W" Writer
2) Lowercase "w" writer
3) Expressive Writer
4) Academic Writer

My discussion of these observed categories is informed by the research questions driving

the study:

1. How do postsecondary teachers of writing conceptualize the term "writer"?

2. How do they position/discuss the writer in relation to pedagogical practice?

I draw on a number of representative[46] examples to illustrate the kinds of statements that

typify and comprise each type, looking at the ways that the dimensionalized sub-

components coalesce to constitute the broader category. In addition, I note where smaller

groups of participants sometimes diverge from these norms in intriguing ways. I also

discuss participants' attitudes and stances *toward* these constructions, including how they

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[46] A statement is considered "representative" if it 1) accurately reflects the sentiments of at least 8 of the 10
participants, and 2) encapsulates in a particularly lucid way the core assumptions associated with a particular category.

position themselves and their students in relation to the writer(s) they conceptualize. This is meant to provide a richer context for participant utterances, suggesting the ways that the writer is situated in their conversations.

Because this chapter is complicated by the multitude of dimensions in each category, I have provided an outline delineating the sections and subsections:

CHAPTER IV: TYPES OF WRITER
1. **Chapter overview**
2. **Broad categories and overarching trends**
3. **Writing teachers as writers**
4. **Types of Writer: Capital "W" Writer and Lowercase "w" writer**
   A. Dimensions of Capital "W:" Professional/Paid for Publication
   B. Dimensions of Capital "W:" Creative/Artistic
   C. Dimensions of Capital "W" Writer: Romantic
      1) innate
      2) spontaneous
      3) solitary
   D. Dimensions of Capital "W:" Uniquely Insightful
   E. The "culturally loaded" writer
   F. "No one is just a writer anymore:" From writers to communicators
5. **Types of Writer: Expressive writer**
   A. Dimensions of Expressive writer: "Personal connection"
   B. Dimensions of Expressive writer: Reflective/self-exploratory
   C. Dimensions of Expressive writer: Honest/Sincere
   D. The writer in the writing
   E. Reservations about the expressive writer
6. **Types of Writer: Academic Writer**
   A. Dimensions of Academic writer: "A whole new language"
   B. Dimensions of Academic writer: Rhetorical awareness
   C. Dimensions of Academic writer: Hedging/defensive
   D. Dimensions of Academic writer: Adheres to rules and conventions
   E. Resisting the Academic writer: "Pulling out" the self?
7. **Conclusions**

Chapter IV begins with a review of the eight categories of writer (four types and four characteristics) introduced in the last chapter, accompanied by tables which organize the findings into specific coding counts. This is followed by a brief discussion of how the participating teachers' conceive of themselves as writers. I then describe and contextualize each of the four writer "types," exploring their various dimensions and drawing extensively on relevant quotations. Because they are so often discussed concurrently, the first two types (Capital "W" and Lowercase "w") are examined in the same section. The remaining types ("Expressive" and "Academic") are subsequently discussed in separate sections. Dimensions of each type are described in marked subsections. Throughout the next two chapters, I look not just at the eight identified categories ("types" and "characteristics"), but also at the ways in which participants intimate relationships *between* them. These categories, while different from one another, interconnect in intriguing ways, and often manifest themselves as binaries in participant discussions. In this sense, participants explicitly discuss not just what/who a writer *is*, but what/who a writer is *not*.

As a whole, Chapter IV offers a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of teachers' language, teasing out the details of their complex beliefs and assumptions about the writer. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I quote liberally from the participants, stressing *their* words in my analysis. Indeed, their specific lexical choices and collocations are important to situating the writer within the *discourse* of writing teachers. Italics refer to phonetic emphasis by the participant unless otherwise indicated. All direct quotations are attributed to pseudonyms (for a complete list of participants and background information, see Figure 3.1 in previous chapter). I use abbreviations to

indicate whether quoted passages are derived from live interviews (I) or e-mail interviews (E).

Broad categories and overarching trends

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the coding process resulted in eight overarching categories—four broad types of writer, and four predominant characteristics of writer. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 (see next page) show the specific enumerated results of the data analysis.

Categories of Writer: Frequency and Coding Counts

Table 4.1: Types of Writer

Category	Frequency (number of instances coded)	Word Count (total number of words in all thought units coded)	Average Unit Length (words per unit)
Capital "W"	370	10599	28.65
Lowercase "w"	231	5105	22.10
Academic	186	4842	26.03
Expressive	305	8594	28.18

Figure 4.2: Characteristics of Writer

Category	Frequency (number of instances coded)	Word Count (total number of words in all thought units coded)	Average Unit Length (words per unit)
Writers have Power	356	9807	27.55
Writers take Risks	329	9322	28.33
Writers are Discourse-Specific	118	3086	26.15
Writers are Readers	89	1877	21.09

The salience of a category was determined not only by the number of coded instances, but by word count (total number of words that participants used to talk about each category) and unit length. While frequency (recurrence of units) was important, it only revealed *how often* a topic was broached by participants. Because my unit of analysis, the thought unit (see Chapter III), did not impose a fixed syntactic length, some coded

segments were much longer than others. Indeed, some participants spoke more extensively about particular topics and ideas, and the frequency counts might overstate or understate the importance of a code, depending on the unit length.[47] The word counts and average unit length offer additional depth, suggesting *how extensively* each category was discussed. The word counts are included to mitigate the limitations of frequency counts. Assessing unit length allowed me to more accurately assess the semantic priorities of participants. The larger the average thought unit (see column 3), the longer participants tended to dwell on that particular category. For example, the category of "academic writer" was coded fewer times (186) than the lowercase "w" writer (231), but the total word count was nearly the same, revealing a relatively high average unit length. Indeed, this category stemmed from some of the longest coded thought units in the study, some of which covered an entire paragraph. So, in assessing the relative saliency of the codes, I noted not only how frequently they occurred, but the number of words used to talk about them.

There were, of course, differences between participants as well; some tended to dwell on particular topics at the expense of others. Not all participants *explicitly* invoke the language defining a category (for instance, only two refer directly to a "Capital W Writer"), but many make strikingly similar lexical choices. Throughout my discussion, I try to indicate noteworthy ways that participants' conversations converge and diverge.

While all the participants readily acknowledge (and often promote) the social component of being a writer, the *individual* "writer" dominated the interview

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[47] For example, 15 one-word units may be less meaningful than 5 multi-sentence units.

discussions.[48] These teachers, even the more expressive-oriented ones, seem fully aware of social and postmodern theory; they nonetheless tend to focus on a single writer, however socially constrained that writer might be. Participant responses do not, in most cases, appear to reflect a "naïve realism," but rather a conscious choice to frame their pedagogy vis-à-vis the students they teach.

The varied representations contained within each these categories reflect the myriad of ways that participants discuss the writer, suggesting, in a broader sense, the multifaceted intricacies of the term. Participants change their answers frequently, assuming multiple—sometimes even seemingly contradictory—positions. This, I believe, is less attributable to participant inconsistency than the difficulty of conceptualizing a writer in any single way. Indeed, it was through sorting and categorizing so many conceptions of writer that I came to appreciate just how thorny and contentious writerly identity is. In many cases, variation in these themes proved as intriguing as the themes themselves. Such variation suggests that the question of the writer is far from settled.

Writing teachers as writers

In order to provide greater context for the four types of writer that emerged as categories, I will first discuss (in a more general sense) the ways that participants talk about themselves as writers (or not). This section is not meant to correspond with any particular category; rather, it provides a broad overview of how teachers applied to the term "writer" to themselves. As the study progressed, it became increasingly evident that participants' understanding of writers was derived in large part from their own writing experiences. Their notions of "writer" (and the extent to which they embraced these

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[48] This may be attributed to my interview questions, which queried students about "a writer" and "the identity of writer," which could have led participants to think in singular rather than plural terms. I acknowledge this as a potential limitation.

notions) were often discussed in terms of their own writing. Participants readily shared the details of their writing successes and failures, and some talked extensively about the trajectory of their literate lives. Of the 10 teachers interviewed, four explicitly identify themselves as writers (See Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1
Do participating teachers identify themselves as writers?
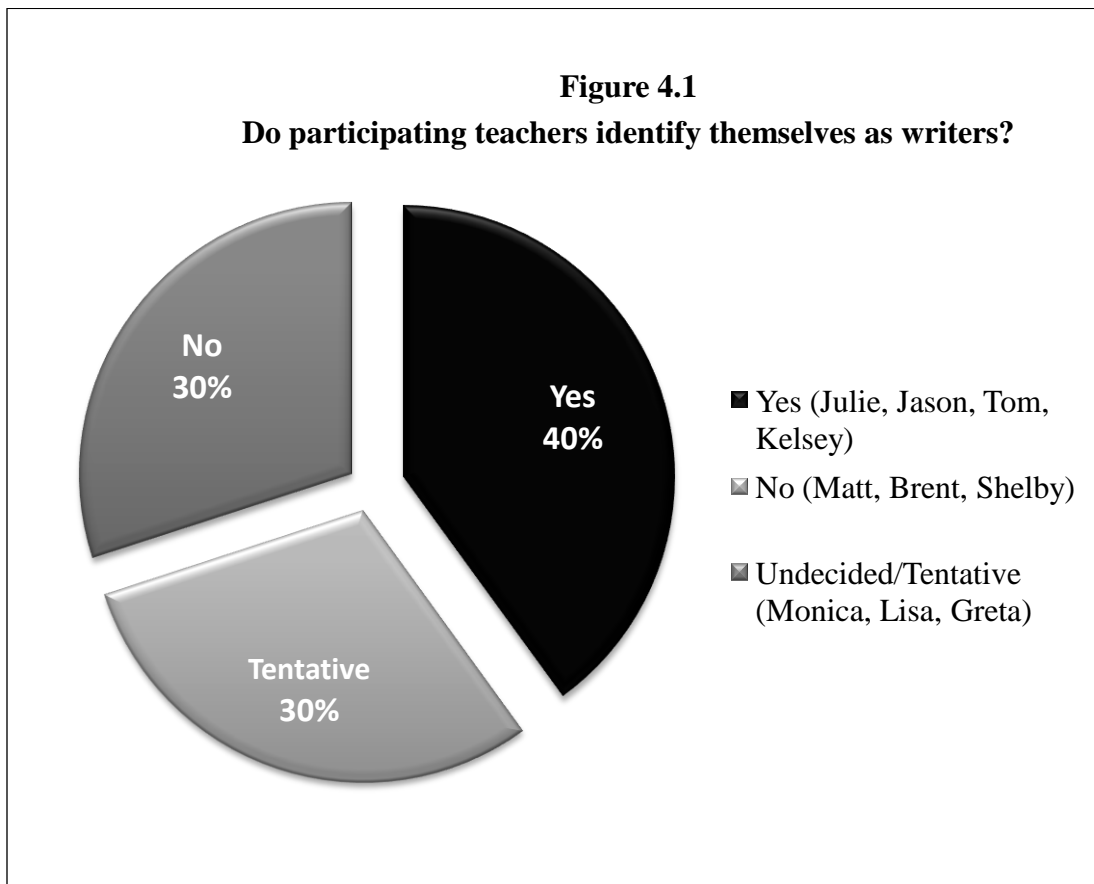
Jason and Julie are most unequivocal about embracing the term; Julie even claims to have "framed my life in terms of being a writer" (E). Tom argues that identifying as writers is good for teachers, as it marks us as "people who value intellectual work, who value ideas and language [and] gives us a defining set of characteristics that we share" (I). Jason states, "I think it's important as a writing teacher that I am writing. I wouldn't presume to teach acting, either, if I were not actively pursuing it as an art" (E). Such statements are

reminiscent of Wendy Bishop, who proclaims, "I can no more imagine being a writer teacher who does not write than I can imagine being one who does not read" (1999, p. 14). Throughout her career, Bishop argued passionately that writing teachers "still need a place to write from, a writer's identity" (p. 22).The National Writing Project, as well as a number of process writing teachers (Elbow, Murray, Bishop, Bizzaro, Williams) have long sought to create a classroom where "writing teachers will associate as writers with other writers" (Bizzaro, 2009, p. 260).

However, in contrast to this tenet of process pedagogy, the majority of participants appear reluctant to "own" the term writer (Shelby, I). They willingly self-identify as "teachers" (five), but approach being a "writer" with hesitancy or outright rejection. Brent speaks to this:

> I've always been troubled by the notion of claiming an identity as a writer. I don't think of myself as a writer. I think of myself as a learner, a researcher, a teacher, a writing center director. I identify in these ways with no hesitation, but I rarely think of myself as a writer. (E)

Brent's choice of words ("troubled") is intriguing here, reflecting the perceived risks (see Chapter 5) one takes in outwardly "claiming an identity as a writer." The seeming trepidation in this passage reflected the responses of numerous participants. Three seemed to have particular difficulty with the term, grappling with it conspicuously during the interviews. This exchange with Greta reflects the noncommittal wavering that appeared whenever these participants were asked to consider the writer in relation to their sense of themselves:

> **P:** So, going back to the e-mail…you said you did think of yourself as a writer, is that correct?

G: \<long pause\> Yeah…

P: \<laughing\> There's a little reticence there…are you sure?

G: Well…if people said to me, what do you do, I don't think the first thing I would say would be 'writer.' But, I do think of writing as a skill that I have that is very valuable to me…it's just…there no easy answer to that.

Like Greta, the more hesitant participants, even as they constructed particular types of writers, were reluctant to characterize *themselves* in any of these specific ways. Bishop (1999) has maintained that the "fear" of expressivist figures (see Chapter 2) stems from a fear of "authorizing ourselves as writers-who-teach-subject: writing" (p. 13). While "fear" may be too strong a word for these results, six of the ten participants (some of whom push their students towards the role of writer) were unwilling to embrace the term. In the subsequent sections, I suggest that this reticence may reflect perceived constraints that accompany not only "writer," but any overt proclamation of identity.

Participant responses suggest that teachers' self-conceptions inform their assumptions about literacy and their pedagogical approaches. Brent muses, "I have a feeling that if we had more people who didn't so much think of themselves as writers, then the freshmen comp curriculum would look very different" (I). Teachers' conceptions of themselves as writers (or not) thus constitute a large portion of the discussion throughout the next two chapters. Their disparate perspectives suggest that the teacher-as-writer issue is one with which the field has not yet come to terms.

Types of writer: Capital "W" Writer and lowercase "w" writer

*I feel like we need to distinguish between 'Writer' with a capital 'W' and writer with a lowercase 'w.' Not everybody wants to be a writer with a big 'W.' Just like not everyone wants to be an "Artiste" with a capital A…and with that inflection.*

— Kelsey, I

Because the first two types of writer —Capital "W" Writer and lowercase "w" writer—are so often discussed in conjunction with one another, they are examined

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concurrently in this section. The tension between these two categories—which seems to reflect the previously noted tension between identity and activity—was evident across the data set. Participants talk about both types, often defining a writer *against* one or the other. After introducing these two types and distinguishing between them, I explore specific dimensions of the Capital "W" Writer in greater detail.

The category most commonly constructed by participants can be termed *Capital "W" Writer.* This type of writer implicates the identity of a person; in this sense, it is less about the activity of writing than the "idea of being a writer" (Tom, I). The Capital "W" Writer is concerned with broader questions of self—not just "what do you *do*?" but "who *are* you?" The constitutive dimensions of this category are detailed in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 – Categories of writer: Capital "W" Writer
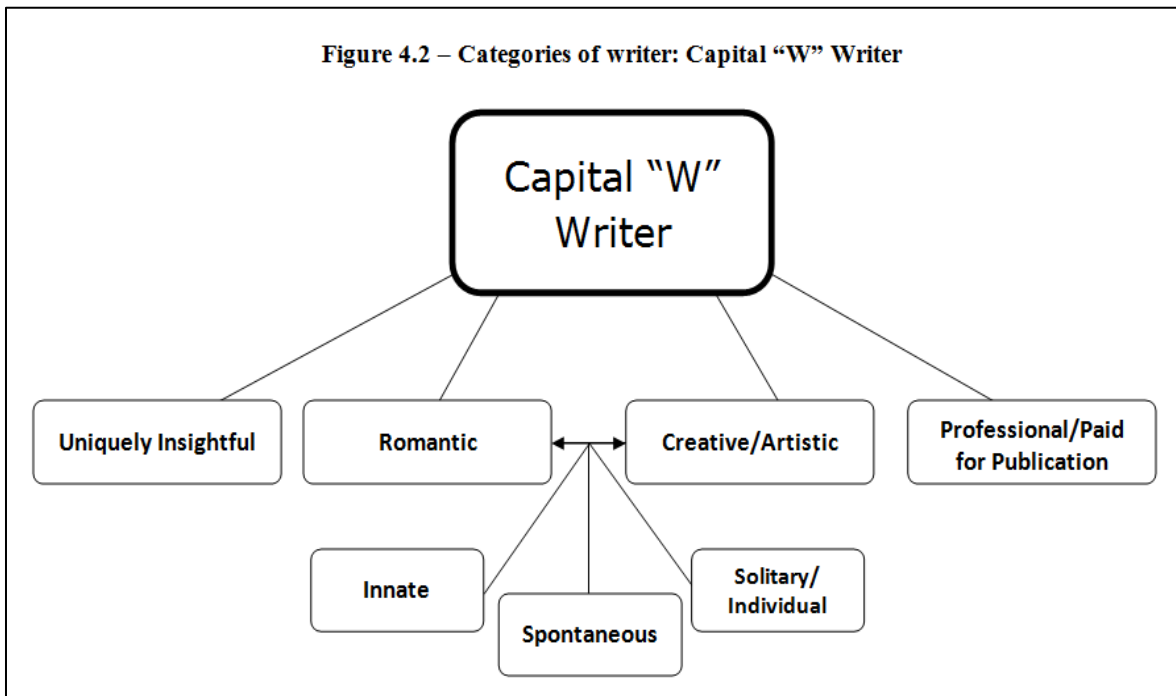
Each of these dimensions is discussed in a subsequent section. A writer, in the Capital "W" sense, is not merely one who writes, but one for whom writing is particularly important and essential to his/her identity. This category also encompasses singularly

romantic notions of the writer-as-artist. The Capital "W" Writer, while not always

advocated or supported by these teachers (indeed, many actively work against its

dimensions), dominated the interview conversations, and was invoked (sometimes

explicitly) to varying degrees by every participant. It was a talking point in every

interview, shaping the trajectory of participant discussions. As the most frequently coded

category in the data set, the capital "W" Writer served as a reference point for

participants, a kind of yardstick against which other categories of writer were constructed

or measured.

The capital "W" Writer is nearly always invoked in conjunction with another

category: the *Lowercase "w" writer.* A Lowercase "w" writer is utilitarian and

functional, referring less to the identity of a person than to the *activity* of writing. Such a

writer is discussed more in terms of what one *does* than one what one *is* (i.e. capital W).

This category is more inclusive, such that "anyone who writes anything is a writer"

(Monica, I). Unlike the capital "W" Writer, writing is not a formative part of the

lowercase "w" writer's identity. S/he is merely one who writes. These two categories

appear to differentiate between the *idea* of the writer and the *act* of writing; in this sense,

most anyone can "write," but a Capital "W" Writer's identity *depends on* writing. While

only two participants use these terms, all distinguish (sometimes implicitly) between

these two types of writer.

Most of the participants explicitly invoke the concepts underlying the lowercase

"w" writer in their interviews, and many of them (six) appear to employ it in the

classroom. Participants frequently point to the "functional advantages" (Greta) of using

the lowercase "w" writer as a pedagogical tool. Julie speaks to this:

People who write *are* writers in some way, shape, or form. It doesn't have to be the focus of your life. I always try to make the point that they [students] are [writers], whether they see themselves that way or not […] We all write, and so we're all writers. I think there's real value in understanding it that way. (I)

The notion that "we're all writers" is central to the lowercase "w," harking back to the rhetoric of the process movement. Participants stress the need for students to understand that "writing is utilitarian" (Tom, I). Monica holds that a writer is most productively viewed not as "high minded and artistic," but as "one who writes to get things done:" "I don't mean 'writer' in a purely pragmatic way…but then again, why not? This is where we are. This is what we're doing. Unless we see ourselves as teaching only one kind of writer, and I don't think that's productive" (I). Tom argues that a more "concrete" notion of writer legitimates the work of writing teachers:

If that's how we view the identity of writer, as more practical, then it also justifies our existence to people who don't really care about the lofty stuff. It's more realistic. It brings us down to earth, makes us accessible […] Identifying writing as production, as physical work you can see, with real benefits, I think that's important.

Like Tom and Monica, participants seem to advocate the lowercase "w" writer as a way to be "practical" and get away from the looming "idea of the writer" (Tom, I). As Kelsey's quotation opening the section states, not everyone can be—or wants to be—a Capital "W" Writer. But everyone is a Lowercase "w" writer, since the lowercase "w" writer is "any producer of written communication" (Lisa, I).

A number of participants argue that more inclusive notions of writer (i.e. lowercase "w") run contrary to widely-held perceptions of what a writer does. Brent, for example, contends that a writer is generally viewed as a professional for whom writing is central:

> I think we have an idea in our mind who a writer is, and who a writer isn't. We might say that anyone who puts words on a page is a writer, but there's also this other aspect of it, the broader idea of a writer, which gets tied to a profession. I guess you could say I write to make a living, but I don't consider that, my first professional function […] And I think people who really identify as writers […] would think of themselves as *that*. That's what they do. They write. Writing is their thing. (I)

A writer, in this sense, is not just one who writes "to make a living," but one who views writing as his/her "first professional function." Capital "W" writers predicate their very identity on writing; it is, as Brent states, "their thing." Participants who self-identify as writers tend to support this inextricable connection. Julie claims, "I have no idea where I begin/end as a person or where I begin a as writer; those are very much the same thing for me" (Julie, E). Greta similarly observes that people "have the tools" to assume the "writer" identity if they need to, but most do not see themselves as "primarily writers:" "Like, who are you? I'm a writer. No. Not like that" (I). Julie's earlier passage on page nine is also telling: note her insistence that being a writer "doesn't have to be the focus of your life," which distances her notion of the writer from the Capital "W." As Shelby states, "Teachers and students do write. Whether our identity is wrapped up in that is another story" (I).

Like Brent, Shelby rejects the idea that "everyone is a writer," implicitly arguing that a "writer" is one for whom writing "is" more central to his/her identity:

I think this goes back to Natalie Goldberg, and being around the National Writing Project. It was like, look to the person to your left, and look to your right, and everyone say, 'I'm a writer.' […] I don't know. I just see it as a part of my job.

[…] I like to write. I feel comfortable with it. It's still not my identity. (I)

Shelby does not see herself as a writer, despite (or, perhaps because of?) having been steeped in the discourses of the lowercase "w." Statements like hers reinforce the notion that the identity of writer is less about writing than the more abstract sense of *being* a writer.

Dimensions of Capital "W" Writer: Professional/Paid for Publication

Participants consistently align the "professional" or "real" writer (Capital "W") with the tangible success of publication, payment, or performance. Shelby, for instance, says that writer identity is difficult to discuss in the classroom because "it's so tied up with producing and publishing" (I). Julie similarly speaks of the "widespread assumption" that "writers are just people who publish" (I). This is particularly pronounced when they talk about themselves as writers. Participants appear unwilling to "own" (Shelby, E) the word writer without some kind of sanctioned validation. Julie, for instance, predicates her "future as a writer" on her "first book publication [or] first award for writing" (E). Jason calls himself (italics mine) "a writer and a playwright *because* I've had a few plays produced" (I). He recalls that "before I could call myself a writer, I had to have success at it" (I). He likens this to his "growth as an actor:"

The turning point was probably accepting paychecks for the work I did. If I *didn't*

consider myself an actor, then how would I dare presume to ask someone to give

me a hundred bucks for doing this show? […] It was kind of the same process as

my becoming a writer. I really needed to have some success in it first. (I)

Like Jason, the participants who call themselves writers all recall successful experiences

with writing. In this sense, a writer does more than just "write;" s/he writes effectively

and/or successfully. This is a critical part of being a Capital "W" Writer; s/he is a

professional, such that *others* see the value of his/her writing, and may even pay him/her

for it.

Writing teachers seem acutely aware of this perception of writer, having long

sought to extend student work beyond the classroom and into nonacademic contexts (e.g.

newspaper editorials). The potential for a wider audience and publication, some scholars

argue, allows students to see themselves as "writers" rather than students working for a

grade (Kastner, 2010; Goncalves, 2005; Huot, 2002; Elbow, 1995; Cooper and Brown,

1992). With the proliferation of new technologies for writing, more would-be writers

have the opportunity to be sanctioned by publication. Indeed, much has been written

about the democratizing potential of the internet. The National Writing Project, for

example, encourages teachers to use the internet to help students expand their readership:

"The Internet keeps offering more possibilities for publishing student work […] An essay

that once appeared in a classroom anthology can now be directed toward an Internet

audience of literally the whole world" (NWP, 2010).

Do digital media make the identity of a published writer accessible to more

people? Curiously, this was not addressed by most of the participants. Brent, who seemed

most acutely aware of the effects of new media on the writer, remarked that, "the line between published writers and everyone else is less pronounced now" (I). Monica expressed concern that we "aren't really keeping up with all the new opportunities for publication on the internet" (I). However, for the majority of participants, publication was associated primarily with print media. This may suggest that some notions of writer remain grounded in 20th century literacies.

Interestingly, even participants who posit a lowercase "w" notion writer are hesitant to embrace the identity without the sanctioned affirmation of publishing. For example, even as she claims that "we're all writers," Monica maintains, "I'm a writer, now, because I do write, and I have published. I get affirmed that way. If you strip all of that away, I probably am more hesitant to identify myself as a writer" (I). Lisa, though she encourages her students to see themselves as lowercase "w" writers ("they're writers if they write anything"), expresses qualms about applying the same label to herself without a more extensive record of publication:

> I've rarely been paid or rewarded for writing […] I was compensated for a couple of freelance articles, and I've won a couple of little things [But] when you say you're a writer, and then you don't get published …well, I don't know how much that helps your sense of identity. Or your confidence. (I)

Being a writer, as Lisa suggests, is widely associated with publication, so much so that a self-proclaimed "writer" with few or no publications might appear to others as something of a failure. In this sense, one only assumes the identity of a writer if s/he has had some tangible success with writing. Matt encourages his students to "be writers when they need to," but adamantly insists (despite his 30 years of journalism experience) that he is not

himself a writer: "I deny that term when people ask me. I'm working on a novel this month, though, so…we'll see if I finally get something in print" (I). Interestingly, Matt does not call himself a writer for writing the novel, but the potential for publication seems to invite the possibility of being a writer. The painstaking revision and editing work that Matt did for years make him (in his words) no more than an "enabler of writers" (I). Indeed, tangible success appears to be critical to embracing the identity.

This might help explain why so few students tend to see themselves as writers. Indeed, most participants report that their students construe the writer very narrowly, such that "writers get published, and writers are *good* writers" (I). Monica makes a telling point: "As teachers and professors we've probably had at least some success writing. But some of my students, I don't think they've ever had that" (I). This comment reflects the degree to which being a writer is dependent on audience and positive affirmation (see subsequent section on "Power" in Chapter 5 for more). The data suggest that one doesn't typically proclaim himself/herself as a writer without approval from someone *else*; in this sense, being a capital "W" Writer hinges on the validation of publication.

Dimensions of Capital "W" Writer: Creative/Artistic

In addition to being a published/paid professional, the Capital "W" Writer is associated predominantly with "creative" writing. Participants tend to equate the writer with novels, poetry, and memoirs, suggesting that a writer is (by implicit definition) creative and imaginative:

> For me, when I think about *being* a writer, I can't help but think in terms of creative writers, who produce work as art. (Tom, I)

> I think that those of us in the writing field, in Composition, we still, whether we want to or not, subscribe to this overall idea that certain people are writers. Like,

John Grisham, he's a writer. He's famous, that's what he does… but us, we do this other stuff. (Shelby, I)

I think…creative writers, at least today, are much more at ease with that term. That's what most people think a writer is […] And so I think they are more likely to call themselves 'writers.' (Greta, I)

Writers, for me, first were novelists. So, somebody like Mitch Albom […] I used to read his articles in the Free Press, and then his books. He's a writer. (Jason, I)

Consistently, participants responded to my questions by shifting the conversation to creative prose. In all these excerpts, the writer is associated with what one is—with identity rather than activity. These comments are less about how writing occurs than the kinds of people who might be considered "writers." In addition, participants who identify as writers tended to conceptualize the writer on these terms: "My first thought, if someone says 'writer,' would jump right to creative writing […] I think the more burning passion that writers have, that comes from being a creative writer" (Julie, I). Even Matt, with over 25 years of journalism experience, talked primarily about writers as people who create "art," not news. The Capital "W" looms large here. These creative writer narratives even seem to drive some participants away from the identity. Brent recalls: "I remember taking creative writing classes in college, and I enjoyed them…but the other people in the class were so serious about these courses, you know? And it's just like, I'm not *these* people" (I).

In some cases, the alignment of the writer with creative writing feeds into a broader construct of the writer as artistic genius. There has been a myriad of research on this issue (e.g. Crowley, 1990; Fishman and McCarthy, 1992; Veeder, 1997; Boice, 1997; O'Brien, 2000; Leahy, 2005), reflecting its prominence within the discourses of R & C scholars. Tom asserts:

We stereotypically have this idea of the writer as […] the rogue artist who doesn't

give a shit about anything else in the world […] I don't know if that bigger notion

of the artist writer is useful for teachers, but I think that's how most people

probably see it. (I)

Again, we see that these stereotypes are predicated on "the idea of the writer" (identity),

and not necessarily the actual act of writing. Tom is quick to note that such artistic

notions of writer are not pedagogically "useful;" nonetheless, he believes that "most

people" adhere to these stereotypes. Participants tend to downplay this kind of writer—

but the stereotypes are "hard to get away from" (Brent, I). Monica laments that the writer

is still associated with "blood sweat and tears, you know, all that tortured artist kind of

stuff" (I). Lisa was particularly vocal in her disdain for the "artist" writer: "Some people

are just insecure. Like, 'oh, look, I'm the creative type. I'm an artist.' They need that

kind of thing. It's hard not to think that when someone tells me they're a writer" (I).

Indeed, several participants condemn the lore surrounding the writer-as-artist for

propping up "overblown" (Matt, I) notions of the writer. This writer is even more of a

"figure," further distancing the "idea of the writer" (Tom, I) from the "writer on the

ground" (Monica, I).

Dimensions of Capital "W" Writer: Romantic (innate/spontaneous/solitary)

These lofty themes relate to a number of romantic stereotypes used to characterize

the capital "W" writer. One of the most apparent dimensions of the capital "W" writer is

that being a writer is something inborn and preexistent. While participants agreed that

writing is teachable, most reserve a place for intrinsic ability, and some place a great deal

of emphasis on it. Julie maintains, "There is this elemental aspect, where you either have

it or you don't […] I can teach you how to play football, but not everyone's going to the pros. There's something about each individual that pushes them that extra step or not" (I). The idea of the "naturally gifted" writer is hardly new, appearing in rhetorics since at least Roman times. Contemporary scholars are likely to view the "gifted" writer more as a product of social forces than essential biology (the classic nurture-nature debate), and indeed, most participants reject (at least outwardly) the notion that being a writer is innate. But even as they argue against the idea of the innately capable writer, their own anecdotes sometimes suggest an implicit belief in intrinsic ability:

> The best writer in my class right now is actually a scientist. He's pre-med. This kid is incredibly gifted…very very bright. He just decides, 'I think I'll write about this and that,' and off he goes […] He's just really good. His phrasing is excellent, his sentences are excellent. And he knows how to reach out to his readers. It's pretty amazing. I have a feeling that this kid is one of those who would be excellent at whatever he does, at least academically. He's one of those…one of those lucky people who just has that natural talent. (Lisa, I)

Lisa clearly believes that it is "natural talent" that enables this student to write so well. Her word choice—"one of those," "incredibly gifted," "excellent," "amazing"—frames this student as an exceptional, almost larger-than-life individual. This effectively separates the Capital "W" from the Lowercase "w" for many participants: "Sure, we all write, and in that sense we're all writers…but most successful writers […] have that certain something, a little extra that goes beyond what we teach" (Kelsey, I). Passages like these suggest that anyone can be a lowercase "w" writer—but a writer in the Capital "W" sense has the "natural talent" to exceed expectations and transcend norms.

Greta shares several similar anecdotes about her son, who, she claims, was "born a writer:"

> **G:** If you're going to be a writing teacher, then you should believe that there's something there for you to work with, some kind of natural ability to start with. We're all language users. We're all speakers. So that's the core. And what a writing teacher does is kind of develop that into someone who might actually say, 'yes, I'm a writer.' But there's always something that precedes us as teachers. I mean, my son was born a writer. He's really amazing, in terms of how he can put words together and make them sound really good […]
> **P:** Interesting. You do believe for some people it's more innate? i.e. your son?
> **G:** <laughs> You can't deny it, yeah. He's been homeschooled, but he writes better than I do […] Some things, I don't see how I could have possibly taught him. They didn't come from me.

In this exchange, Greta expresses her belief in something "natural" that "precedes us as teachers" (I). Like Lisa, she uses superlatives ("amazing") to describe the "natural" ability of a "born" writer. Tom also associates the writer with inherent abilities and inclinations, maintaining s/he "is probably born with a certain writer-ness" (I). He recalls that both his parents were elementary educators that placed a high value on literacy. He nonetheless insists that his identification as a "writer" stemmed not from their influence, but from a "natural connection" with writing:

> This was an environment where writing was valued […] Writing was certainly encouraged [but] I never felt pressure from them to be interested in it. It was more of a natural connection. I think at least part of it is just…this is who I was born as. (I)

Tom's is the most overt claim for a natural-born writer. Nonetheless, this assumption seemed to be held by many participants—even by those who argued against it.

The intrinsically capable writer is frequently cast as one who was not only born with natural ability, but also a "natural desire to write" (Greta, I). Shelby states, "I think

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writers would express it as just something they *have* to do. Because it's in their soul and they love it, they have to do it […] they're writers because they *have* to be writers" (Shelby, I). In this sense, being a writer is like a calling, an ingrained predilection that stems from within ("the soul" is mentioned three times in this regard). Tom claims that a writer taps into a "natural kind of rhythm, much like nature would have a rhythm" (I). Writing for such a writer is practically automatic; as Jason asserts, "It's like they can't contain themselves, so they have to write" (I). Lisa similarly maintains that "a writer *needs* to write somehow […] Some people, they can't *not* do it" (I). This suggests that a writer is not only innately capable, but compulsively driven.

Indeed, the romantic notion that being a writer is intrinsic is typically accompanied by the idea that writers write through random spontaneity, almost as if by accident. Some participants call for regular, habitual writing—but again, their own reflections on writing tend to belie this advice. To cite but one example, Monica repeatedly insists that writing "is not something that we are born knowing how to do" (I). She laments that "people on our campuses still think […] you're born a writer or you're not, that it's an isolated set of skills…or a gift" (I). However, she is quick to note that she is not a "naturally fluent writer:"

> It's really about fluency. I compare myself to my friend Steve. We have a kind of running joke. There's a very good book about writers called *The Midnight Disease*. And Steve has the midnight disease. If he's not sleeping, he can just sit and write for hours. And me, it's not like that. I don't just sit down and go, I don't have that fluency […] Some people, they just let it flow.

This passage suggests that writers are *compelled* to write, that writing occurs almost involuntarily, whether a writer wants it to or not. Like Monica, Lisa recalls writers who cannot help but write, where "writing pours out of them in an uncontrollable but oddly articulate way" (I). Tom also speaks of this phenomenon, describing invention as a "sudden crystallization" that anchors the inscrutable writing process of "talented" writers: "Maybe it's not something that we can put a quantitative value on or figure out with statistics […] but, sometimes a piece of writing just kind of emerges and crystallizes and forms exactly what we're trying to express" (I). As Kelsey maintains, "There's just this sense that writers just do it spontaneously, almost by accident. And, I think that gets tied to what our students think of, when they think of a writer" (I). In this sense, a writer is seemingly someone for whom words emanate spontaneously and out of necessity.

Another romantic dimension of the capital "W" Writer is the idea that being a writer is solitary business. Again, participants offer somewhat self-refuting assertions; even as Julie and Jason urge their students to think of writing as "a social practice," even as Julie and Kelsey talk of building a "community of writers" in their classrooms, they describe writing itself as a fairly solitary activity. This was a recurrent theme in the data set:

> Even in the academy, the message is that writers do it alone, that they go off and do it by themselves. (Monica, I)

> You can't really avoid the private component in writing. It's a stereotype, and we work against it…but, really, a lot of writing does happen when you're by yourself. (Tom, I)

> For many years, my writing has been very isolating to me, and it's why I quit my dissertation. Writing was me by myself at my computer, and I needed something more. (Jason, I)[49]

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[49] Please note that Jason did eventually finish his dissertation, but only after years of "avoiding it" (I).

Tom and Jason provide particularly intriguing examples here. As Tom says, many teachers in R & C actively "work against" the "stereotype" of the lone author. But Jason's dissertation experience frames writing as not only private and solitary, but lonely and "isolating." Tom similarly insists that while the writer identity may connect us to a "community of writers," it can also isolate us, in that being a writer may "set us apart from a community that we were trying to join, simply because we've given ourselves that label" (I).

Isolation was an appreciable theme in the data set; for many participants, the "social turn" did little to change how writers actually write:

> I don't know, you get into grad school and everyone talks about how writing is social […] about how it connects us to other writers and other writing, how no one writes in isolation. But you know what feels less isolating? Talking to other human beings. In person. Our words may be dialogic or whatever, but that doesn't make you feel any less alone when you're sitting at your computer in your office. (Greta, I)

Greta's perspective was not atypical; while no one suggested that writers must isolate themselves in order to write, they did suggest that writing and being a writer could be "isolating." It is perhaps for this reason that Tom maintains, "I want to be a writer, but not in a way that removes me from other people" (I).

Virtually all the participants call upon romantic notions of the solitary, innate, spontaneously inspired writer, even as they fight against such "myths." Participants seem fully aware that these are stereotypes, but each still plays a huge role in how they conceptualize a writer.

Dimensions of Capital "W" Writer: Uniquely insightful

The aforementioned romantic narratives elevate "writers" into a more transcendent category, framing them as individuals who exceed the norm, who are exceptional in some way. Following this, participants frequently use words like "gifted" (9 instances), "brilliant" (8 instances), and "natural" (14 instances) to describe a writer. In this way, the romantic dimensions of the Capital "W" Writer support and sustain the idea that a writer is singularly capable and/or *uniquely insightful*. Many participants suggest that a writer has a special ability to make meaning, a distinctive writerly way of viewing the world. "Writers," Lisa insists, "notice things about the world around them that maybe others don't" (I). This, Tom states, is the writer's "role;" to see and notice things, serving as a kind of "lens" (I) through which others can learn more about people and places. Tom (I) gives the writer a heightened role in both the academy and the culture at large:

> A writer is someone who articulates something deeper in language, through
> words. I don't know if everyone can do it…a writer really frames how we interact
> with the world […] A writer serves this really unique and important purpose,
> serving as a representation for ideas and philosophies that turn into action,
> whether it's political or otherwise. (I)

This statement implies not only that a writer has ingrained ability—but that a writer somehow *is,* fundamentally, a unique kind of person. Along these same lines, Julie calls it the "mission" of the writer to "find stories" and act as a "reporter for life" (I). Not everyone can *be* this person, let alone write like him—being a writer means being esteemed, appreciated, and generally impressive—even extraordinary. Writers are that

good. There's something special about being such a person. As Kelsey states, "A writer is truly an individual" (I).

These excerpts reflect the insistent hold that the Capital "W" has on teachers. Some teachers, even as they urge their students to see themselves as writers "simply because they write" (Lisa, I), refuse the identity themselves. There seems to be a disparity between what these teachers purport to teach and they way they conceptualize a "writer" in relation to themselves or in the abstract. An almost palpable tension between the Capital "W" and lowercase "w" was evident, to varying degrees, across the interviews. Again, the difference between these two types seems to be *what a writer does* (lowercase "w") versus *who a writer is* (Capital "W"). Lisa, for example, claims (CAPS are hers): "I find it hard to convince them that they can BE better writers, but I can help them know that they can learn to write more effectively for varied purposes" (E).

The "culturally loaded" writer

Some participants argue that the bigness of the capital "W" is too constraining for writer identity to be pedagogically useful. Brent was the most vocal proponent of this position, returning to this talking point numerous times over the course of his interview. In his e-interview, Brent wrote, "the term writer is so culturally loaded that it becomes completely unusable" (E). Intrigued, I asked him to elaborate on this in his live interview:

> I think the word 'writer' is such a culturally-loaded term. It's just overwhelming. I
> don't know if it does our students any benefit, to try to tell them that 'you are a
> writer,' because they're subject to the same kind of cultural influences that we
> are, and probably have the same suspicions about what it means to be a writer

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[…] It means something to say that about yourself. [And] the people who identify

as writers, they have to work with that" (I).

Brent argues that being a practical lowercase "w" writer is untenable in the face such

deeply entrenched cultural associations. Certainly, one could be reductive and define a

writer simply as one who writes—but, as Brent points out, the term *already* "means

something" to most people. In this sense, a capital "W" Writer must "work with" all the

aforementioned traits that people tend to associate with writers.

The notion that the word writer is "culturally loaded" is well-supported by the

data set. Other participants make strikingly similar comments:

> We live in the same society as everyone else, and we're subject to those same
> ideas and clichés, about, what a writer is. (Shelby, I)

> There's a lot in a name, in what we call ourselves. Maybe more than students
> want. It's just, something, bigger…bigger than most of them […] You don't just
> get to be a writer. You have to *be* all those things associated with it. (Lisa, I)

> I do think that students may not identify as writers for a lot of reasons that are
> continually reconstructed in the culture…these clichés are just so, old and tired,
> and so hard to get away from. So the writer becomes this monolithic thing.
> (Monica, I)

All of these passages reinforce the idea that the word writer is "culturally loaded." As

Lisa states, "there's a lot in a name." The data suggest that teachers fully understand

what Shelby terms "clichés," to the point where any construction of writer acknowledges

them in some capacity. In this way, the capital "W" serves as the impetus for other

conceptions of writer.

In light of such unavoidable (and potentially disabling) cultural connotations,

some participating teachers seek to replace the capital "W" Writer with the lowercase

"w" writer in the classroom (italics mine):

People have these puffed up definitions of what it means to be a writer. It's just so big to some students. But I try to say, that it's like a kind of *hidden identity that we all carry*. If we're readers, if we're learners, we're also writers […] *So we're all writers, really*. (Monica, I)

It's easy to see the writer as something unattainable and artistic, but let's not ponder the big questions too much. Let's *get down to some of the brass tacks*. I don't want to completely explode the myth of the writer as a high form of art… but that's *not a good starting point*, and that it's probably a very long process to get there. (Matt, I)

In these passages, Monica invokes the lowercase "w" spirit of inclusiveness ("we're all writers"), trying to make the identity accessible and less "puffed up." Matt is unabashedly practical, looking not to "explode" the myth of the "artistic" writer altogether, but to start in a simpler place ("not a good starting point"), with something more basic ("the brass tacks"). Indeed, in his e-interview, the first thing he does is reject "lofty 'writer' definitions", contrasting them with "down-to-earth effort" (E). These statements suggest that some participants employ the lowercase "w" writer to offset the looming influence of the capital "W" Writer.

Despite the continuing calls for students to embrace the lowercase "w," however, a number of participants remain unconvinced that students should think of themselves as writers at all. Shelby, who is clearly familiar with the scholarship that promotes students-as-writers, contends, "Identity certainly matters, but I don't know that we have to identify as something in order to be able to do it" (I). Tom makes a remarkably similar assertion: "I don't know that people have to think of themselves as writers to be effective" (I). Brent, unsurprisingly, views the writer as reductive and unnecessary:

I've gotten to a point in my teaching career where I really don't feel the need to say that anymore, to go into a class and make a point out of that […] In a writing center, when you're seeing everybody come through the door, all these different

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people using the written word in different ways, and all these countless different

kinds of assignments… it becomes kind of silly, I think, to just call everyone a

'writer.' (I)

Interestingly, Brent's choice of words ("I've gotten to a point in my teaching career")

suggests that he has *outgrown* the lowercase "w" writer. To an experienced teacher who

has seen a plethora of different people and assignments, the writer identity seems almost

"silly." Late in her interview, Lisa laments, "Most [students], career-wise, are not going

to be writers. Most of them even hobby-wise are not going to be writers" (I). Both she

and Brent (E, I) make the same suggestion: that as teachers, we frame our instruction not

in terms of "writers," but "communicators."

"No one is just a writer anymore:" From writers to communicators

As digital genres continue to proliferate, distinguishing between the lowercase

and capital "W" writers becomes increasingly tenuous. Julie insists that the lowercase

"w" is even more relevant in our contemporary culture: "If you're a student, you *do*

write. You write when you text, you write on blogs or Facebook, you write e-mail […]

Your research paper is just another way to communicate" (Julie, I). Texting and social

networking have become common, which, according to some participants, means that

"more students are writers because of their online experience" (Kelsey, I). Indeed, in a

lowercase "w" sense, the notion that "everyone is a writer" is perhaps more accurate than

ever. And, as mentioned, the internet makes the seeming loftiness of the capital "W"

accessible to a greater number of people. The endless possibilities for self-publishing

enable more writers to reach more people more easily using more modes of

communication. This provides, in Matt's words, "more chances to be a real writer" (I).

Interestingly, when Julie encourages her students with the lowercase "w" writer, "they [students] tend to think that stuff doesn't count" (I). Some participants agree with this notion; Matt is careful to note that being a writer is "not just texting and not just e-mailing" (I), while Lisa argues that "spending too much time online can detract from their [students] real writing" (I). Jason observes that writers of "blogs" or "online poetry" are "practically the only people who ever see themselves as writers" (I). On the whole, results suggest that some teachers believe that the internet democratizes the writer, leading to an expansion of the lowercase "w" type; however, participants report that *most students* (and some teachers, it would seem) continue to equate the writer with the capital "W" Writer.

Brent contends that our growing techno-digital culture makes the writer a delimiting and anachronistic notion (italics mine):

Part of the problem, I think, is [...] our literacy needs are changing so fast, that when we sort of stick to these older...ways of thinking about teaching writing, or thinking about what writing is, we don't think about the fact that, in the twenty-first century, communicating is not just written. It's very visual. It depends on sound, music...all sorts of things coming together. And we have media that allows us to bring these things together [...] *No one is just a writer anymore*. (I)

Brent's comments echo new media scholars in R & C, who have long pointed to the capacity of "multimodal" communication to change writing in a fundamental way. As Selfe and Takayoshi (2007) note, it has become a "common place" that digital composing environments are "challenging" long-held notions of writing and writers. In light of the explosion of new media, "writer" may be, as Brent notes, a somewhat limited

descriptor—especially when considering how many different modes typically converge when we communicate. "Writer" has traditionally referred to print-linguistic text, but in contemporary communication, text is but one part of a larger whole. Monica's comments further suggest that our "writer qua writer" (Yancey, 2004) pedagogies have overstayed their welcome: "We cannot, in the 21st century, be in business to create the same old writer. We just can't do that. This is the culture; this is the economy; this is how the world goes around" (I).

Statements like these make the participants' tendency to focus on print media all the more perplexing. Certainly, most are aware of these changes in technology and literacy, but their conversations rarely address (at least not directly) the effect of these changes on the writer. This observation bears further scrutiny (and perhaps further research), and is dealt with more extensively in the conclusion.
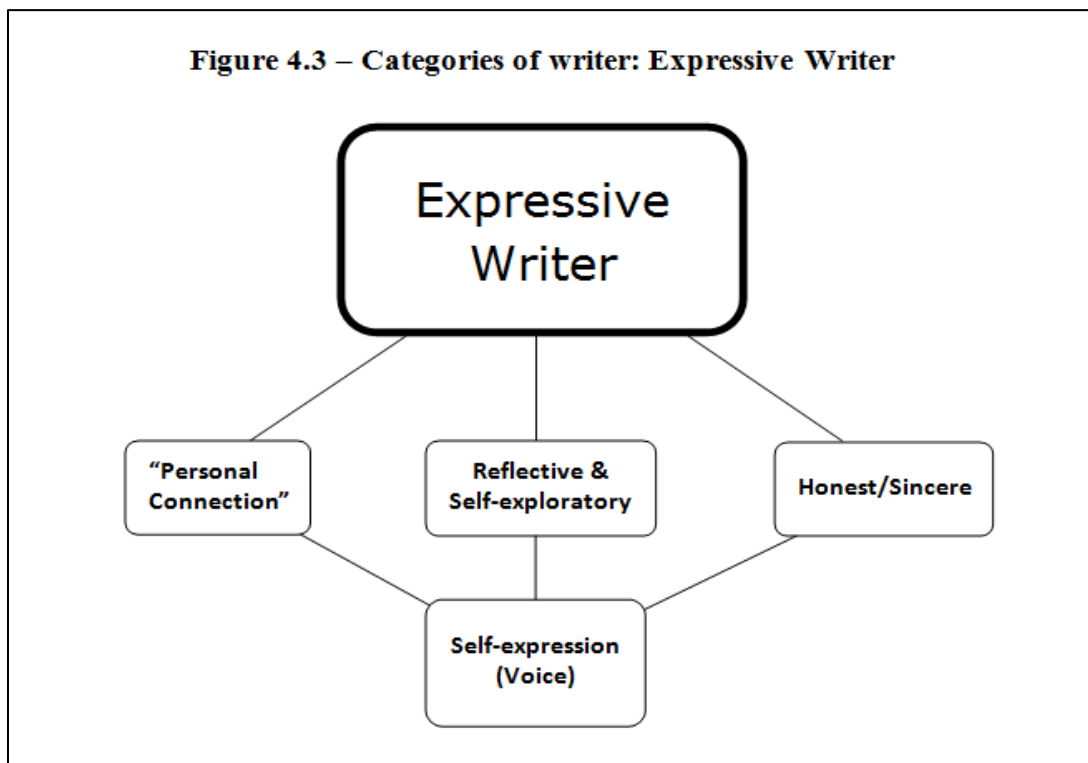
In his e-interview, Brent wonders "whether or not the idea of being a writer is even productive in the 21st century. *Maybe we're all just communicators* and a writer really is that person who toils away in solitude writing a novel" (E, italics mine). Can we modify our notions of writer to more accurately capture how *current* writers write? Or is the word is so burdened with cultural associations that it has ceased to be useful? In this sense, perhaps the term "writer" is itself dated, unavoidably tied to romantic mythos and anachronistic notions of literacy.

Types of writer: Expressive writer

I was shocked to be challenged by someone in a conference discussion, where he just could not believe I was so naïve…like I didn't understand social constructivism or something. Of course I do. But I don't think it's an either/or here […] There are some core understandings about student writers that got kind of thrown out just because they were associated with something like expressivism.

- Monica, I

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The *expressive writer*—another type of writer frequently discussed by participants—is a writer who uses writing to express some aspect of the/a self. S/he typically views writing as "an extension of myself on the page" (Julie, I). Though only a few participants use the term, all talk about this type of writer, and many explicitly or implicitly argue that a writer is primarily expressive. Like the capital "W" Writer, an expressive writer may view writing as relating to some aspect of who s/he *is*; however, segments coded as "expressive writer" focused specifically on self-expression and self-exploration in writing, rather than the broader conception of identity to which the capital "W" typically refers. In many cases, a capital "W" Writer is conceptualized as expressive, but the latter was coded frequently enough to warrant its own category. It appears to refer to a separate type of writer, and not just a dimension of the capital "W." Figure 4.3 details the dimensions constituting this category.

Figure 4.3 – Categories of writer: Expressive Writer

Expressive Writer

- "Personal Connection"
- Reflective & Self-exploratory
- Honest/Sincere
- Self-expression (Voice)

Self-expression is the unifying theme to this writer type. A handful of participants (three) identify (somewhat apologetically) as expressive-oriented teachers, arguing for the inclusion of the expressive writer in the classroom. This, they claim, provides more opportunities for "engagement" (Monica, I) and "meaning-making" (Kelsey, I). Julie aims to "show my students that expressive writing can and should be rigorous; it's not the hippy dippy experience that it's often made out to be" (E). The expressive writer conceptualized by participants, while not asocial, tends to focus on an individual person.

The expressive writer also connects to prior discussions of voice and *ethos* (see Chapter 2). The majority of participants posit a one-to-one correspondence between a person and his/her discoursal self; in other words, the constructed voice or *ethos* on the written page is part and parcel of the person writing. In this sense, a writer is said to be unavoidably "in" his/her writing, to varying degrees. This issue is discussed more extensively in a subsequent subsection.

Dimensions of Expressive Writer: "Personal Connection"

In a general sense, the most appreciable component of the expressive writer is that s/he maintains a "personal connection" (Monica, Matt) to his/her writing. Virtually all the participants emphasize the importance of this connection in the writing classroom:

> A traditional paper becomes 'meaningful' because the student was able to somehow find a way into the paper, some kind of personal connection. (Monica, I)

> I want the writing to mean something to them. […] Let's move away from writing for a quote unquote 'objective' for a bit. Let's write for ourselves. That involves writing about things that matter to you, and hopefully some element of self-discovery in the process. (Julie, I)

> [It's] definitely a challenge when the assignment doesn't hold any personal connection for the beginning college composition student. (Matt, E)

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Throughout the interviews, participants stressed the importance of a writer being personally invested in a writing task. Teachers assert that writing improves when students write about "the things that matter to them" (Lisa, I). The resulting personal connection leads to "writing that is meaningful to the writer" (Julie, E). The personal component of the writer is prioritized by everyone but Brent and Shelby. A few teachers even stress the importance of providing students with "opportunities to write in privacy" so they can "more easily tap into personal experiences" without the anxiety of audience (Julie, I). Interestingly, this speaks directly to longstanding expressivist concerns (e.g. Elbow, Chapter II) about the inhibiting effects of audience on would-be writers.

Some teachers predicate their entire epistemology and pedagogical approach on the personal connection. Jason, though he does not explicitly use the term, posits a remarkably expressive writer, and spoke passionately of the "need" for writers to be wholly invested in anything they write:

> What does it matter to talk about all this stuff if we don't start with how it affects us? What does it do to our hearts? [...] I always start my classes by asking that, and that's where I start when I'm thinking about a piece of writing, or writing about a piece of writing [...] As a writer, what do *you* want to do? What would make this paper worthwhile to *you*? What issues are you passionate about? What do you care about? I haven't taught an English class in 9 years that didn't ask these questions. (I)

The zealous and sincere tone of this passage is reminiscent of some expressivist scholarship, foregrounding the individual experience of the writer. Indeed, for most expressive teachers, "a writer has to get it right with the self before getting it right with

his or her ultimate audience" (Freisinger, 1994, p. 188). An expressive writer writes about things that are "worthwhile" to him/her, about issues in which s/he has a personal stake. Writing, in this sense, is more than a school-based task; it is an exploration one's own interests and passions. Without this personal connection, Jason says, there is no "ownership" or "agency" and "student writing is drained of passion and meaning" (E).

Dimensions of Expressive Writer: Reflective and self-exploratory

In light of this persistent focus on the self, it comes as no surprise that participants also view an expressive writer as one who uses writing as a vehicle for reflection and self-exploration:

> I see a writer as someone […] trying to work through some of the abstract thinking and philosophies that make us who we are. (Tom, I)

> I am very focused on them [students] exploring their own identities and using the writing to do that […] I get most excited when I read comments in their reviews about how they learned a lot about themselves. (Julie, I)

> Writing is something that helps us with seeing our lives overall. (Greta, I)

> A writer uses writing to understand herself, and to represent that self to the world. (Lisa, I)

The emphasis here is on writers learning about themselves *through* writing, on "writing as a means of personal exploration" (Jason, E). The expressive writer uses writing to make meaning, to examine, construct, and represent a/the self. This is effectively an identity-based manifestation of the time-honored expressive practice of "writing to learn" (Britton). Two participants (Julie and Jason) even mention the film *Dead Poets Society*, which glorifies teaching based on "honest" self-expression.

The majority of participating teachers associate being a writer with some degree of personal reflection, and several discuss the formative role writing has played in

constructing *their* identities. Julie reflects on how writing enabled her to make sense of her life:

> When I started writing, it was a way for me to figure out who I was in a lot of ways that weren't just about a writer. So, who I was as a woman, who I was in terms of my relationships…writing seemed to be the way that I figured this all out […] Throughout my life, even before I would say I was a writer, I always went to writing when everything fell apart. So, you know, you break up with your boyfriend, you write about it. It was always what I did. (I)

Interestingly, Julie's pedagogy seems to stem directly from the ideas espoused in her reflection; she encourages her students to view writing not just as a way to make meaning, but as a "potentially liberating" means of better understanding oneself (E). This is more or less consistent with her self-proclaimed "expressive" ideals. Again, as well, we see how writing teachers' own experiences shape their understanding of a writer. Participants were most articulate and passionate when they engaged in these autobiographical musings, suggesting the profound influence these experiences continue to have on their epistemologies and pedagogical approaches. Julie asserts, "When I think about writing, I think about something that helped me become who I am today" (Julie, I).

Dimensions of Expressive writer: Honest and sincere

Part of being an expressive writer is expressing a "real part of oneself" (Monica, I). Many participants place particular emphasis on the "real lives" of writers, stressing the importance of writing from "honest" human experience. Lisa insists that "audiences react positively when a writer is honest and real" (I).Tom argues that "writing is always an attempt at a true representation of who we are," and that writing becomes "complete"

only when a person is able to convey an "authentic moment of representation as a writer" (I). Kelsey notes that "a paper can look very clean and very organized, but still feel like, meh. And that's usually because they [the writer] didn't really put themselves into it in an authentic way" (I).

The emphasis on honesty extends to the classroom. Participants stress the importance of student writers using "genuine language, language that is their own, and not borrowed language (Greta, I). Julie maintains, "The language they use, it should be theirs. You can tell if they really mean it" (I). The notion that sincere writing is good writing continues to prevail with some of these teachers. Many of them quote seminal expressive scholars and teachers. Two (Jason and Tom) cite honesty as the most important characteristic a writer can have. Even Matt, despite being somewhat dismissive of the personal component in writing in his interview, maintains that "A writer approaches the task at hand with intellectual honesty and sincere effort" (E). For many of these teachers, an honest and "real" connection is what makes writing effective.

Participants insist that honest writing is something that readers expect. Kelsey asserts, "Being honest matters, even if it's just what your audience perceives. That whole idea of fakeness is just so much a part of us, as social beings" (I). Matt further insists that a reader "looks for some sort of emotional buy-in from the writer, so that you can have a greater sense of trust for what you're reading" (I). This also speaks to the importance of *ethos* in the writer-reader relationship. The appearance of character is critically important because, as Kelsey states, it's "what your audience perceives." Statements like these frame honesty as a rhetorical issue. This would have to be the case, since teachers cannot really tell whether student writing is honest or not.

Jason was especially attracted to "honest writing," so much so that it became the focus of much of his live interview: "I don't think good writing happens without some level of honest exchange […] I think there's a huge difference in the quality of students' writing when it's the truth" (I). Jason's dedication to honesty is even more apparent in his own writing: "In a perfect world, I would want to be in my writing, telling the total truth, all the time" (I). Jason found writing his dissertation particularly difficult, largely because revisions made him feel "disingenuous" (I). He recalls: "There's sections of my dissertation that, when somebody gave me a revision, it was like, 'now I have to frickin' lie to you! […] When I'm writing, I really want it to be me." (I). Jason consistently holds that, "real learning, real teaching, comes from an authentic place" (E). The emphasis on honesty in these passages is striking; Jason is so focused on that which is "real" and "authentic" that revisions feel like a "lie" to him. Ivanic (2008) cites many similar conversations with her participants; she write**s** about an ABE teacher who lamented, "What I don't like about writing is that people don't know I'm Irish" (p. 70). Such statements reflect the perceived importance of a writer getting his/her *real* self into the writing.

The writer in the writing

Informing all the aforementioned constituent dimensions is the basis of the expressive writer, self-expression. For these teachers, "expression" means that writing represents, comprises, or reveals/exposes some aspect of the self. Participants thus maintain (to varying degrees) that a writer is *in* his/her writing:

> I would say we are always in our writing, to the extent that we have our own values and epistemologies and experiences that influence what it is that we're

even saying to begin with. […] There's always some element of identity in

writing. Your values are always there. (Julie, I).

This statement is highly representative of the segments coded "expressive," and

fundamental to the expressive writer. There is always an element of the writer in anything

s/he writes. The extent to which a writer is perceived to be in his/her writing differs

between the participants, but all of them make this connection. Lisa simply asserts that "a

writer always tries to express some aspect of herself when writing" (I). Jason, with his

unflinching focus on honesty, characterizes writing as "a way to bare the soul" (E). Tom

takes a "representational" view of the writer, arguing, "Writers function as symbols of

ideas and ideals […] the way we communicate sends messages about the types of people

we are" (Tom, E). Even Shelby, who adamantly rejects expressive pedagogies and

conceptualizes (along with Brett) perhaps the most contingent writer of all the

participants, agrees that the writer is always present on the page: "We cannot completely

divorce ourselves from our writing […] Even if you have multiple personalities, they're

all still yours. Even when take on a role in writing, that's still *you* taking on that role." (I).

Indeed, participants insist that even if a writer isn't writing autobiographically,

s/he is still present in the writing in some capacity. Kelsey maintains that even when we

act rhetorically, even as we may try to "hide our voice" or intentions, we are unavoidably

part and parcel of anything that we write:

We edit ourselves from head to toe. We restrain and constrain the looks we give,

the way we move our bodies, it's all very calculated […] You can never just be

yourself. [But] there is always a part of *us* in that writing. Because the *reasons*

you do that, the reasons you edit yourself, adhere to those constraints or break

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through them or whatever…those reasons reflect something about what you think

and what you value. (I)

Rhetorically constructed identity is wholly contextual, which participants readily

acknowledge—and yet they all make some variation on this claim: that some part of your

autobiographical self (Ivanic, 1998) always finds its way to the page. In this sense, "even

if you're writing an argument and you're supposed to keep first-person out of it, it's still

your argument" (Brent, I). From this standpoint, there is no pure "discoursal self"

(Ivanic, 1998). The capital "W" Writer may be little more than a "figure," a sociocultural

construction, but the expressive writer is always, on some level, sutured to a real person.

Julie neatly summarizes the crux of these assertions: "I don't believe it [writing] can be

separated from who you are" (E).

Tom maintains, "There's a sense that, no matter how we communicate, we have

this essential person trying to shine through" (I). His language, like that of many of the

participants, suggests an essentialist belief in a core self. Julie notes, (italics mine) "In

Composition I, I'm less concerned about students *being* something. It's more about

exploring yourself to kind of figure out *parts of you that already are*" (Julie, I). This

passage reflects not only the emphasis on self-exploration, but also self-discovery. A

writer, in this sense, does not construct a self through writing, but locates and expresses

preexistent "parts of you that already are." Kelsey is even more explicit: "I think that

there's something essential, about who you are […] that probably comes out to varying

degrees you're trying to write" (Kelsey, I). Viewed in this way, the expressive writer

"represents" the self, rather than constructing and constituting it.

Some participants explicitly invoke the issue of writer's presence during their discussions. Tom, for example, not only claims we are in our writing, but explicitly rejects hardline postmodernist perspectives:

> I think writers are consciously present in their writing. […] I certainly subscribe to the belief that culture influences us, but I would never go so far as to say a writer is just kind of this, figure. Kind of like, Foucault or someone would say.
>
> […] I don't think we can totally get rid of the writer as an individual. (Tom, I)

By referring directly to Foucault in this excerpt, Tom demonstrates at least some familiarity with the writer-related issues introduced in Chapter II. Others participants refer to Derrida (Monica) and "expressvisism" (Julie, Brent, Greta, Monica) in the context of their interviews. This suggests not only that writing teachers remain aware of these conversations, but that they are continuing to position the writer within them.

The issue of a writer's presence in his/her writing runs through the interviews, raising the aforementioned issues (see Chapter 2) surrounding voice and *ethos*.[50] Again, participants' epistemological stances seem to inform their pedagogical approaches. A number of participants maintain that the more a writer gets himself/herself into the writing, the better that writing is. Monica speaks to this: "One of the goals we have for developing writers is that they will develop a distinctive voice, meaning that what they say, they mean, and it is close to their thinking and reflective of their thinking" (E). In this sense, Monica appears to use the term "voice" precisely because it seems to reflect an actual person behind the words. Julie also speaks to its importance: "Voice reminds me that a human has written it. Somebody's having a conversation with me […] I should be able to pick up your paper and know that there's a person behind it, even though that

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[50] While the participants use "voice" frequently, *ethos* is almost never used explicitly.

person isn't standing in front of me" (I). For most participants, voice is inseparable from expressive teaching and, consequently, the expressive writer. Not all participants embrace the idea of voice—some (most notably Brent, Greta, and Shelby) explicitly question its usefulness. Brent muses, "I could say that voice is simply an expression of one's emotions, opinions, or points of view, so audience doesn't matter, but what's the point of developing a voice that no one listens to?" (E). Greta states: "Our courses are supposed to be all about the student finding their own special voice as a writer. I find that pretty touchy-feely, and I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to do with that in Comp I" (I). Nonetheless, even she notes that, "it's not really possible to detach yourself from anything you write" (I).

Reservations about the Expressive Writer

While all participants spoke extensively of the expressive writer, a handful showed some aversion to this writer type and the teachers who promote it. Shelby sought to distance herself from expressive pedagogies very early in our live interview:

> When I first saw your e-mail, and I saw identity, I wondered if I was the right
> person for this study. Because I don't buy into or say, a lot of the stuff that I hear
> from other instructors. Like, locating one's identity and speaking from there…my
> classroom isn't one of those where you find yourself. Not to say that stuff isn't
> important, but *writing for me isn't about expressing yourself*. (I)

Interestingly, Shelby's first thought upon seeing my recruitment script was to associate "writer" and "identity" with expressivism. This may be reflective of how pervasive these pedagogies are.[51] Brent takes specific issue with expressivism as well, arguing that the

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[51] This may have also been a clue that my questions were inadvertently leading participants toward identity-based notions of writer. This limitation is discussed further in the conclusion.

Expressive Writer is a product of a teaching approach that tends to be more self-serving than its proponents typically claim: "I often see writing teachers who rely on an expressive pedagogy support their approach by claiming it's student-centered to have people write about themselves, but I wonder if these teachers employ this pedagogy because it speaks to *them*" (E). Brent worries that teachers who conceptualize the classroom writer as expressive are imposing their epistemologies on students, "forcing students to adopt the same ideas, the same sensibilities and philosophical underpinnings that *you* have" (I). This again suggests an indelible connection between teachers' pedagogies and their own writing processes.

Kelsey accuses expressive teachers of sending mixed messages about what it means to be a writer:

> On one hand, there's this idea that you're free to be, and free to express your personal identity. And things like freewriting, where it's like, just write! Right? Just be yourself. I see a lot of that […] But then we introduce this idea of discourse communities, and conventions and genre constraints and audience, all these unstable concepts and representations. How can we talk about this stuff, how we're fully aware that all these things constrain us, institutionally, socially, and then turn around and promote a pedagogy where everybody's just kind of…doing their own special distinctive thing? (Kelsey, I)

Kelsey's comments suggest a tension between the expressive and rhetorically aware academic writer. Both these notions of writer recur with great frequency across the data set. They may well be reconcilable, but Kelsey's comments suggest just how confusing these two categories can be when juxtaposed.

Brent and Shelby maintain that teaching students to act as expressive writers is "limiting" (Brent, I) and a "misguided way to frame a class" (Shelby, I). Their specific concerns reflect how contentious an issue expressive writing remains for the discipline. One would be hard-pressed to deny that most writing has an expressive component, but is that (or should it be) the primary function of writing for our students? What are the ramifications of conceptualizing such a writer in the classroom?

Types of Writer: Academic Writer

Maybe they blogged, or they turned in a few short stories. The few students who see themselves as writers, it's in that way. I don't know if I've ever had a student who identified as an academic writer.

- Jason, I

The fourth type of writer constructed by participants was the *Academic Writer*. While this type was least frequently coded, it included nearly as many words as the expressive writer, due to a higher number of words-per-unit (26.03). The academic writer is most often invoked as a sort of catchall to describe any writing that takes place in the academy. The dimensions comprising the academic writer are detailed in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.4 – Types of writer: Academic Writer
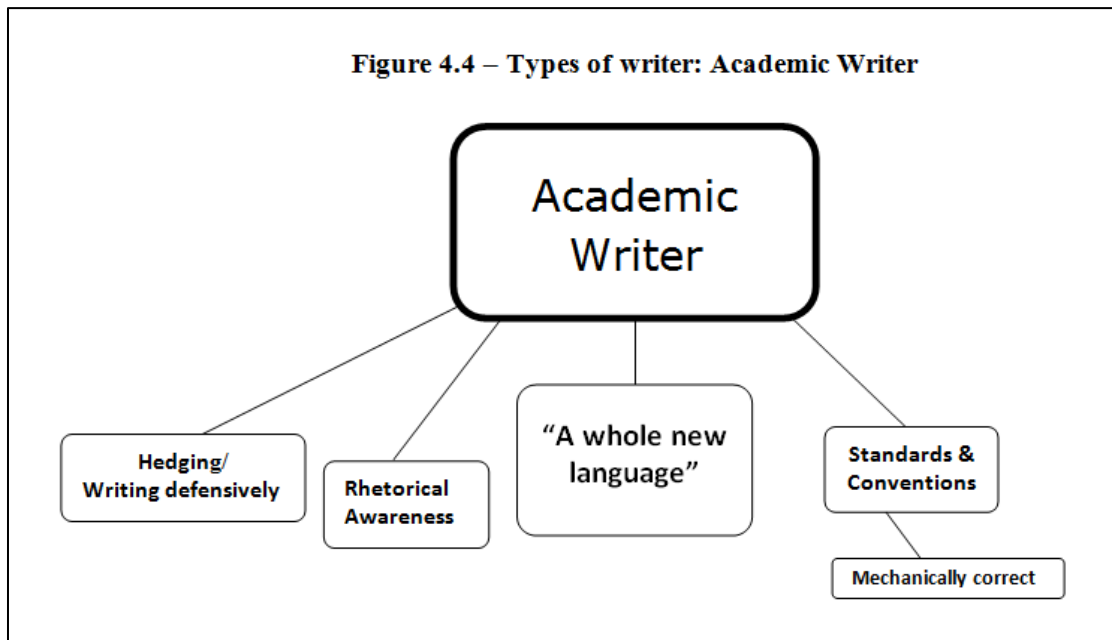
Most participants describe composition courses as "the place where we teach them [students] to become academic writers" (Greta, I). Being an academic writer is about "getting into that college frame of mind" (Tom, I), and "preparing for what you will face as you go through your academic career" (Lisa, I). This type appears to be based on academic preparation, though the precise nature of that preparation is not always clear. While this category is referenced explicitly by all participants, it is described in a somewhat indirect manner, and was commonly set in opposition to the "personal" component of the expressive writer. At times, interview discussions mirror the now decades-old scholarly disputes pitting "personal" and "academic" writers against one another, suggesting that these dichotomies continue to inform our scholarly conversations.

Dimensions of Academic writer: "A whole new language"

Central to being an academic writer is membership in the broader academic "discourse community" (a phrase used by three of the participants). As an indelible part of this community, an academic writer writes in accordance with specific conventions and expectations. The principles of sound academic writing are considered "unique values" (Matt, I), requiring a writer to adopt a highly esoteric vernacular. Indeed, the academic writer is often framed in terms of its difference from all other types of writers, especially the personal or expressive writer. Greta calls it "a mastery of a new dialect" (E). Both Jason and Kelsey liken entering the academic discourse community to learning "a whole new language" (Kelsey, I). Jason claims, "People are learning a different discourse, something that doesn't maybe fit with the way they've thought in the past […] and this is really alien to them" (I). Part of becoming an academic writer is mastering the

"game" (Kelsey, I) or "code" (Lisa, I) of academic writing, wherein one must learn to play by the "rules" of a new community (Jason, I). Kelsey speaks to this: "There are particular ways of writing, and if you don't match that, then you don't gain access to the community. You can't be part of it if you don't learn to play the game" (I).These distinct ways of speaking and writing seem to constitute what the academic writer means to these teachers.

Dimensions of Academic writer: Rhetorical Awareness

A necessary aspect of being an academic writer is rhetorical awareness. The importance of a writer thinking rhetorically is stressed to varying degrees by all the participants. Most emphasize purpose, audience, and context, and some (Brent, Shelby) place particular emphasis on them. Participants point to the "habits of mind" (Monica, I) that enable an academic writer to communicate fluidly across multiple contexts — "to navigate, mediate, and influence the world through language" (Brent, I). Simply put, this means that "good writers work to write differently depending on the situation" (Shelby, E).

Rhetorical awareness is said to call for playing the "role" of many different kinds of writers:

> I think we are learning these different roles, kind of like an actor learns different roles. And we can play them at different times, when they're called for. I'd like to think that all writers can learn these skills, so they can effectively act as different people, depending on the situation they're in. (Shelby, I)

> Because of the development of their writing selves, students from first year to dissertators are moving in and out, forming new identities and shedding others all the time. (Monica, E)

> Sometimes you have to create that identity because it's an expectation that your audience has […] I think one of the useful things about being a writer is that you

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can consciously negotiate that area, and in every sense of the word we have intention. (Tom, I)

In these passages, the academic writer is conceptualized as an ever-changing complex of multiple identities. Most participants stress the importance of the academic writer learning to *consciously* negotiate these various selves. This is directly related to the rhetorical savvy that accompanies the academic writer—an ability to adapt, to not only revise, but constantly reinvent the self for different purposes and audiences. An academic writer "adapts to multiple readers" (Matt, I) and can "write in a way that professors, this year, next year, years from now, will find acceptable" (Greta, I). An effective academic writer is capable of "shape-shifting" in accordance with the rhetorical situation.

It follows that the academic writer is conceptualized not in terms of a particular voice, but in terms of "multiple voices" (Brent). In this sense, voice is fluid, dependent on situational context and the nature of a particular writing task. Shelby speaks to this:

It's not about finding any one single voice […] I would probably, instead of talking about a student writer's individual voice, talk more about taking on the voice of authority. Or showing them how to construct a voice that has authority […] Even that has lots of different parts and dimensions, though […] I think it goes back to taking on a role, rather than doing your own personal thing, like 'This is Shelby's voice.' No, it's the voice of authority that makes the argument. (I)

Conceptualizing voice in terms of "voices" means that the self on the page is always multiple. While a few participants seem more concerned with a writer's "actual self," the plurality of voices conceptualized by most of them suggests a fluid and variegated

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understanding of the writer identity. Their responses suggest that being a writer, especially an academic writer, is never any one single thing.

A few participants (Brent, Shelby, and Greta) even suggest that the writer can be (or is) a rhetorical construction. Shelby argues that "we can identify *ourselves* as writers *to others*, even if we don't identify as writers" (I). Similarly, Greta tells her students that "writer is an identity they can put on" (I). In this sense, being a writer is more of a rhetorical move; one can outwardly *act* as a writer, projecting oneself as a writer without identifying as such. Being a writer is what we present to others. This allows a person to model the identity without embracing or "owning" it, suggesting an unequivocally *constructed* notion of writer.

Dimensions of Academic writer: Hedging/defensive

Participants describe an academic writer as one who writes defensively—almost to a fault:

> As an academic writer, especially, you need to situate yourself in a way that makes you less vulnerable to attacks [...] I could believe something really emphatically, but I'll still hedge. Because, there's some really aggressive people. You say something, really authoritatively or emphatically, and they'll attack you. Academic writers always have to worry about that. (Kelsey, I)

The defensive aspect of hedging is particularly evident in this quotation. An academic writer treads lightly to avoid potential "attacks." This dimension was often discussed in conjunction with rhetorical awareness; indeed, part of being rhetorically savvy is understanding how and when to hedge in light of one's audience. Tom speaks to this: "You have to have a sort of defensive mindset. Everything has to be softened and

contextualized" (I). Monica asserts that "a defensive approach is something we all need

to learn" (I). A couple participants seem uncomfortable with this deferential approach,

arguing that such "tiptoeing" is antithetical to being a writer. Jason insists, "So much of

being a writer is knowing that you have something important to say, something that other

people care about. Knowing that what you say matters. I really feel that the academic

writer works against that" (I). Jason's statement harks back to the anti-academic stance of

early expressivists; indeed, several participants view academic writing as sterile and/or

overly constraining, decrying the overemphasis on rules and formal conventions.

Dimensions of Academic writer: Adheres to rules, standards, and conventions

The academic writer was most often associated with rules and formalities.

Participant word choice reflects this; certain words appear repeatedly in relation to the

academic writer, most notably "convention(s)" (29 times) and "standard(s)" (22 times).

A surprising number of participants align the academic writer with these concerns:

> Students are required to master at least some of the conventions of writing so as to
> engage in contemporary discussion with necessary grammatical and structural
> tools. (Tom, I)

> I think I mentioned that I'm working on writing across the curriculum […] And
> one thing I'm hearing a lot of, is that our students are not observing the academic
> conventions. (Greta, I)

> I work with other English instructors in the writing centers, and I attend
> department meetings, at least when they invite lowly adjuncts, and, they really are
> still interested in some pretty conventional, standard formats of writing […] Even
> though it seems unpopular to discuss in the field at large, this includes issues of
> syntax/punctuation […] And I know my students will land in other classrooms
> where, these conventions…that *is* the expectation […] Grammar and mechanics
> are things that people value, even if we don't. (Kelsey, I)

This focus on "conventions" would seem to contradict the aforementioned observation

that an academic writer is "rhetorical." This disparity seems to reflect a tension between

participant perceptions and the perceptions of others. For these teachers, the academic writer is rhetorical, but they agree that many (even most) others associate such a writer with rules and conventions. Moreover, these surface-level concerns can themselves be rhetorical. In the last example, Kelsey frames "mechanics" as a rhetorical issue, based on what a writer's audience values. "That stuff matters," she says, because "so many people still think of the academic writer, as that mechanically correct writer" (I). Matt and Tom both support this claim, noting that mechanical issues can be "distracting," (Tom, I) and detract from a writer's *ethos*.

I was somewhat surprised to see so much focus on stylistic issues and external polish, since the scholarship of the discipline has long relegated these to the level of "lower-order concerns" (Purdue OWL, 2013). In fact, the process movement formed largely out of opposition to the so-called "current-traditional" emphasis on sentence-level mechanics. As the study progressed, I began to probe deeper into questions of mechanical correctness. Greta attributes the lingering focus on mechanics to the makeup of English departments, most of which are still dominated by Literature scholars:

> I'm the only one in my department with any professional training at all. They're
> teaching like 90% of the comp courses, but they're Lit professors. […] They have
> no training, so they teach what they know, which is grammar and mechanics.
> They want student writing to be correct, because, otherwise, how will you be able
> to respond to the literature? I don't even know if they *have* a philosophy of
> teaching Comp. (I)

Sadly, Greta's situation is familiar to most Composition scholars; Lit-dominated writing

programs have led to much grumbling over the years.[52] Jason laments that "so many

programs still focus on the exact correctness of things like citation, formatting, and

documentation" (I). He contends, "Those things are about teaching students to be

academics and scholars. But there's so much more to writing than that" (I). It is largely

due to the pervasive focus on conventions that Jason resists the academic writer, insisting

that it "requires the enforcing of arbitrary rules I don't myself have any belief in" (E).

Interestingly, both the emphasis on mechanics and resistance to it were more pronounced

amongst the participating community college teachers. This participant sample is not

large enough to make much of this observation, but future research might explore the

differences in assumptions between community college and university contexts in terms

of what constitutes "academic writing" and "academic writers."

Resisting the academic writer: "Pulling out" the self

Ivanic (1998) has found that assuming the identity of an academic writer can lead

students to feel detached and disengaged. Some participants describe a similar

disconnect, deriding academic writing as restrictive and impersonal. They worry that the

academic writer is too constraining and resist the emphasis on academic writing in

writing courses:

> I don't privilege academic writing as the only way to make or disseminate
> knowledge…I think it is a bit overrated in the academy…it does not always do a
> good job, accomplish what was intended. (Monica, E)

> Is the academic essay the be all and end all, and you're not thinking or writing
> unless you use it? No. (Jason, I)

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[52] Certainly, not all Literature professors hold such a view of writing, but this study (and lots of anecdotal evidence) suggests that many still do.

> We talk about making students better writers, but I'm not sure that turning them into *academic* writers is the best way to do that. Most students don't plan to be writers, let along that type of writer. (Greta, I)

The charge most often levied against academic writing is that it distances a writer from his/her writing; that it can "rob students of the personal connection that makes writing meaningful" (Monica, I). Several participants denounce the "self-distancing" (Julie) necessary to be an academic writer. A rhetorically capable academic writer is viewed as one who may consciously "remove" (Greta, I) or "pull out" (Kelsey, I) the self in order to meet the expectations of context and audience. For Matt, being an academic writer necessarily entails "a formal level of removal and pulling out the emotion" (I). Greta insists that "as you move toward very academic writing, you leave less of yourself on the page consciously" (I). Lisa claims that the academic writer "leaves almost no room for individual experience" (I). In a broad sense, these participants appear to accuse the academic writer of marginalizing the expressive writer. This recurring binary (expressive-academic) further supports the idea of "a whole new language," suggesting that the academic writer is distinguished primarily by its dissimilarity from all other types of writers. Seen in this way, academic writing functions as a discourse of exclusion, distancing its practitioners from all other discourses, other communities, and other people.

Removing subjectivity has long been associated with academic writing. Peter Elbow wrote extensively about the difference between the "doubting game" and the "believing game" (1973, 1981). The "doubting game," which Elbow saw as the foundation of academic writing, addressed the problem of self-interest by "weeding out the self" (1973, p. 171). While no participants make any claims of "objectivity" or posit a

value-neutral writer, many seem to perceive the academic writer to be the antithesis of the self. A number of them seem discomforted by this. Indeed, Monica (I) laments that the academic writer is still based on "prescriptive" notions that stem from received wisdom rather than "individual lived experience" (I).

The academic writer, while valued in the academy, is viewed by some as hegemonic and detached from "the real world" (Lisa, I). Some teachers stress the importance of critically examining the conception, rather than simply assimilating an institutionally sanctioned subject position. This critical awareness is viewed as particularly important for students who come to the classroom with a less conventional home language (i.e. not SAE). Both Kelsey and Jason make extended points about this, arguing that the expectation to become an academic writer infringes on student ownership and perpetuates discourses of power.[53] Jason argues that the academic writer is a product of a privileged discourse that excludes many of his students: "Students get told that the language they used in the home, for maybe their whole lives, is wrong […] and this idea that students should learn to be academic writers […] presupposes that all these perfectly legitimate ways of speaking are *inferior*" (I). Kelsey similarly notes that because of academic "conventions," students tend to "use negative descriptions to characterize their writing and speaking, thinking they don't speak or write in a *proper*, *right*, or *standard* way, and […] they need to learn to speak and write differently do well in school"(E). Jason, like many participants, looks for ways to reconcile the expressive and academic writer: "I feel like it's my job to merge those identities together, not to help people adopt *the* identity of an academic writer" (I).

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[53] As community college teachers, Jason and Kelsey may have been exposed to a wider range of languages and abilities than other participants, making this issue especially poignant for them.

The perceived hegemony of the academic writer leads several participants to resist it altogether. Monica asserts, "I probably have resisted certain constraining features of academic writing all my life" (I). This statement presupposes that academic writing is constraining, a word that shows up six times in reference to the academic writer. Jason's reservations about the academic writer are particularly pronounced, leading him to reject its usefulness almost completely. As a "self-identified writer," Jason had difficulty being an academic writer, and continues to doubt its value (italics mine):

> Coming into academia was disappointing to me at first, even as an undergraduate English major. Because I saw writing as a way to answer the most important questions in my life, and I lost some of that in doing academic essays and studying as an English major. It didn't seem like it was concerned with that. The types of questions that were getting asked were just not the questions that I was interested in. (I)

Jason insists that for most students, "learning how to do it [academic writing] quickly becomes a process of figuring out how to transcend it" (I). Said Jason, "I'm not sure it's even relevant to most of my students" (I). Again, this resistance seems to stem from a belief that the academic writer stifles the expressive writer. As Tom notes, "it can't just be about you, and that feels really insincere, even if it's for the greater good" (I). The anti-academic (and, at times, anti-intellectual) undercurrent evident in this reflects expressivist discourse, where school-based writing is seen as an "imposition" (Jason) that students need to push back on. Monica argues that unless we offer some resistance, "we end up reinforcing this idea that there is this one monolithic thing called academic writing done by these people called academic writers" (I).

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Ultimately, though, the specific nature of the academic writer remains somewhat elusive, even as these teachers reference it persistently. As Monica muses (future researchers take note), "it would be an interesting study to just ask professors to define it" (I).

Chapter Conclusions

As this chapter has detailed, my data revealed four main types of writer conceptualized by teachers. These categories, while discrete, interconnect in intriguing ways. The distinction between capital and lowercase "w" writers recalls Barthes' (1972) distinction between the "author" (and, in later essays, the "Writer"), who writes intransitively and almost compulsively to sustain an identity, and the "writer," who merely engages in writing as an "activity." For participants in this study, conceptions of writer seem to hinge on the former concept, reflecting, perhaps, the extent to which the lofty "singularity of the writer" still holds sway, even in a discipline that seeks to undo its influence. The continued conflict between identity and activity may be exacerbated by the persistence of the capital "W" Writer in these conversations.

The observed tension between the expressive and academic writers seems to reflect the ongoing disciplinary conflict over the relative value of "personal" and "academic" writing. A recent conversation on the WPA listserv (Sep. 21-24, 2013) suggests that this issue remains divided. Most teachers and scholars do not view the two as dichotomous (many express a desire to move from "either-or" to "both-and"), but the words "personal" and "academic" still dominate the conversation, framed implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) as discrete forms of writing used by very different types of writers. One comment stood out:

Are our attitudes toward personal writing for our students based on our own

earlier experiences as writers in classes where we have been frustrated by

demands that we write academically, rather than personally, and felt disrespected

as whole humans who find ourselves needing to lop off significant parts of our

selves to comply with those demands? (Marcia Ribble, Sep. 24, 2013).

This comment is strikingly similar to concerns voiced by participants in this study, some

of whom felt compromised and imposed upon by academic writing. Certainly, the

identities of expressive and academic writers can and do overlap, but these continued

distinctions suggest that some teachers have not yet reconciled the two in their

classrooms.

The four types of writers represented in this chapter constitute half of the

categories derived from the transcript analysis. The remaining four, each of which points

to a predominant *characteristic of writer*, will be explored in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITER

Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 presents the second half of the interview transcript analysis. To review, the coding process resulted in eight overarching categories: four "types" of writer, which were examined last chapter, and four dominant "characteristics" of writer, which will be the focus of this chapter:

1) Writers have Power
2) Writers take Risks
3) Writers are Readers
4) Writers are Discourse-Specific

As in Chapter IV, my discussion of these observed categories is informed by the research questions driving the study:

1. How do postsecondary teachers of writing conceptualize the term "writer"?

2. How do they position/discuss the writer in relation to pedagogical practice?

Readers who wish to revisit the holistic results and coding counts for all categories are encouraged to return to tables 4.1 and 4.2 (see Chapter 4).

As in the previous chapter, I provide an outline delineating the specific sections and subsections covered in the chapter. My discussion will follow this sequence, as detailed below.

CHAPTER V: CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITER

- I. **Chapter overview**
- II. **What is the most important characteristic a writer should have?**
- III. **Characteristics of writer: Writers have power**
  - **From validation to self-efficacy**
  - **From self-efficacy to agency**
  - **The rewards of being a writer**
- IV. **Don't fear the repercussions: Writers take Risks**
  - **Fear: The "perils" of audience and "dangers" of a new discourse**
  - **"The very idea of being a writer"**
  - **The risk of self-exposure**
  - **Taking changes/breaking rules**
- V. **Characteristics of writer: Writers are readers**
- VI. **Characteristics of writer: Writers are discourse-specific**
- VII. **Conclusions**

After briefly examining the "most important" characteristic a writer is said to have, I break down each of the four coded categories in a separate section. Of the four characteristics described in this chapter, the first two (*Writers have Power* and *Writers take Risks*) were marked by much greater frequency, word count, unit length, and dimensional complexity. For this reason, they are discussed far more extensively than the latter two, neither of which was multifaceted enough to warrant dimensionalizing into subcategories. As in the previous chapter, all direct quotations are attributed to pseudonyms, and italics denote emphasis by the participant unless otherwise indicated. I use abbreviations to indicate whether quoted passages are derived from live (I) or e-mail interviews (E). The chapter follows a similar trajectory to Chapter 4, exploring each

"characteristic" of writer in detail by contextualizing dimensions through participant quotations, emphasizing shared ways of talking about the writer.

What is the most important characteristic a writer should have?

Figure 5.1 provides a graphic representation of participant responses to the interview question: *what is the most important characteristic a writer should have?* Responses (10) are grouped under three clear themes. The exact wording of each participant's response appears adjacent to its respective "slice" of the pie chart.

Figure 5.1
What is the most important characteristic a writer should have?

Greta: "Rhetorical Savvy"
Brent: "Rhetorical Awareness"
Lisa: "Fluency with Words"

Rhetorical Savvy 30%

Persistence 50%

Honesty 20%

Jason: "Honesty"
Tom: "Authenticity"

Julie: "Resilience"
Shelby: "Discipline"
Matt: "Perseverance"
Kelsey: "Persistence"
Monica: "Determination"
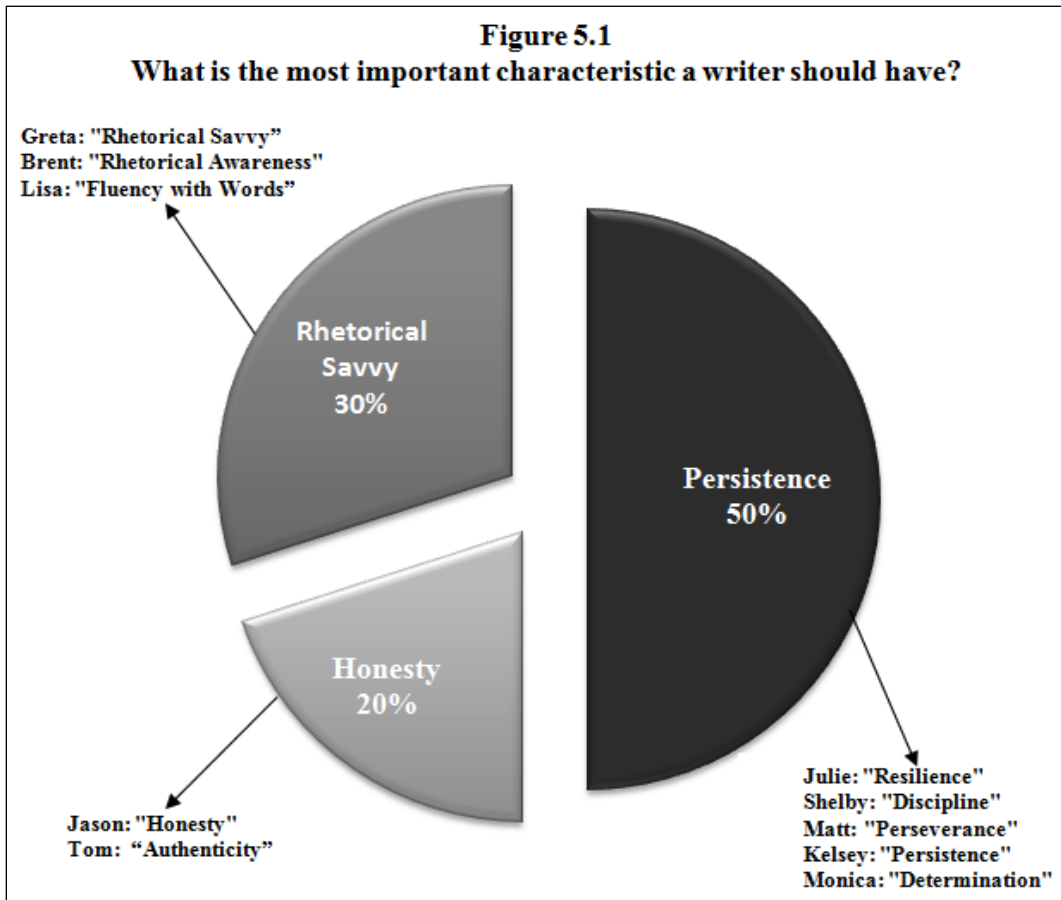
Interestingly, half the participants cite "persistence" (or some variation thereof) as the most important trait a writer can possess. This is consistent with the tendency of participants to equate writing with risks and potential pitfalls. Shelby, for example,

asserts that a writer needs "discipline," which means "showing up and getting it [writing] done, even when it's difficult" (I). As this chapter illustrates, a writer needs a certain amount of persistence to tackle the "risks" typically equated with writing. Three participants point to rhetorical capabilities, traits most often associated with the academic writer, and discussed at length in Chapter 4. The remaining two participants prioritize "honesty" in a writer, a component of the expressive writer, also examined in last chapter.

Characteristics of Writer: Writers have Power

> *A writer can not only communicate in writing, but has a sense of power.*
> - Greta, E

> *I think a lot of this nurturing is about confidence. And I don't mean that in a cheerleading kind of way. You know, like, 'You can do it! You can write a paper!' I mean it as helping to demonstrate to students the power of writing and being a writer, so they see themselves as people who can do this kind of work.*
> - Monica, I

According to the participants, the most prominent characteristic of a writer is that *writers have power*—meaning, in the simplest terms, that they can "achieve goals through the written word" (Brent, E). Matt asserts, "Writers have […] a kind of power. So much can be accomplished simply by writing" (I). This power is most often described as "linguistic" (Tom, I) and/or "rhetorical" (Greta, E). Power seems to relate especially to *ethos* and perception; participants note that there is a "level of esteem" (Lisa, I) in being a writer, a kind of "prestige" and "cultural capital" (Brent, I) that typically accompanies the identity. This was a markedly recurrent category, with the second-highest frequency and word count in the data set. The data suggest that the dimensions constituting this category exist in a causal relationship, such that one leads to another, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2
Characteristics of Writer: Writers Have Power
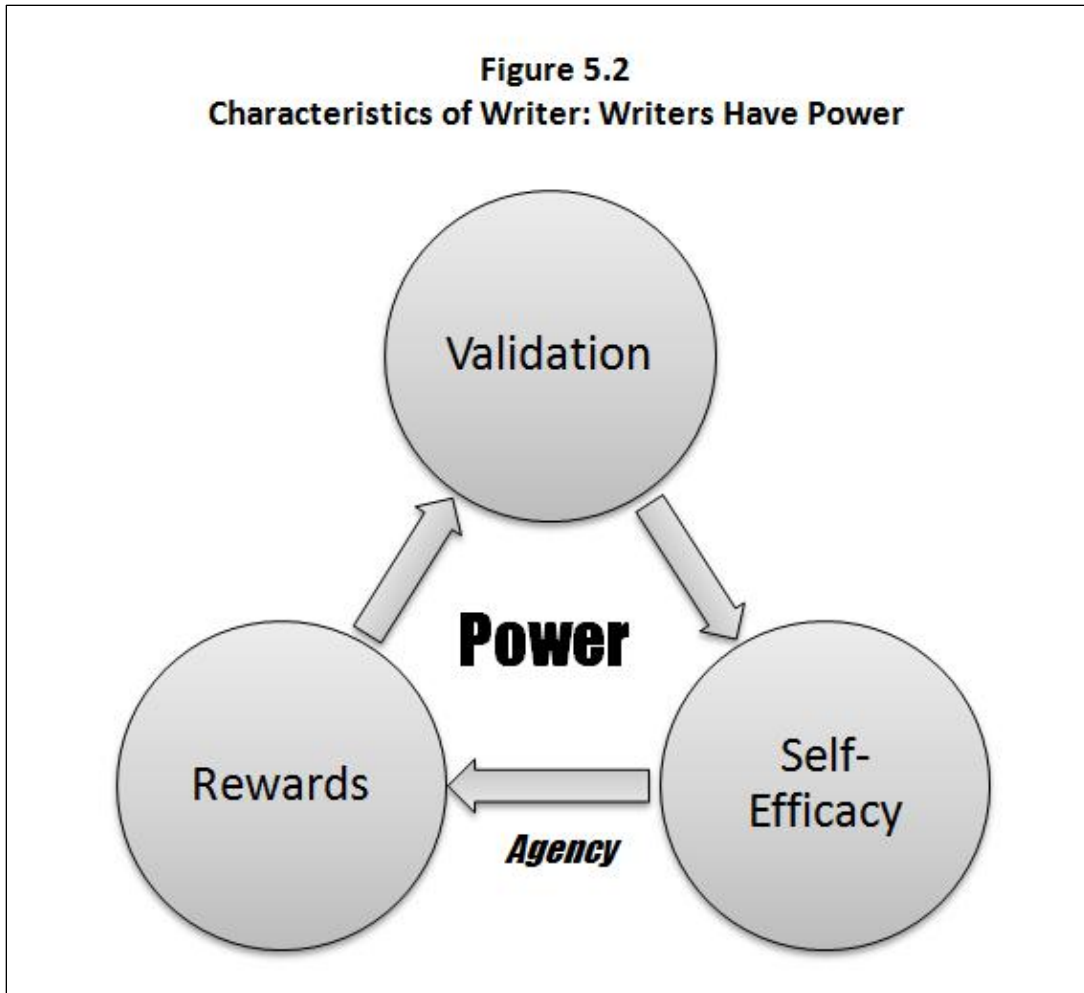
Participant responses suggest that a writer has power, and that would-be writers obtain it through a tripartite process that starts and ends with *validation*. Essentially, a writer is one who is *validated* by others or the act of writing, which increases his/her confidence in his/her ability to complete a written task. This *self-efficacy* leads to greater agency and *rewards*, which once again reinforces the writer through validation (such that rewards validate the person as a writer). The components of this process are, for all practical purposes, the dimensions of this category, and each reflects continuing themes in R & C scholarship (see Chapter 2).

From validation to self-efficacy

A critical part of being a writer is being *told* that you are a writer. This validation usually comes from an authority figure (e.g. teachers, parents), another venerated writer, or as a reward (e.g. financial, emotional, physical/publication) for writing itself. It is deemed far less "presumptuous" (Matt, I) to call oneself a writer if someone *else* labels you a writer first. The power gained from validation gives a writer both self-assurance and self-awareness. Greta points to the importance of the latter: "Without knowing that we have that power, we can't use it" (I). Thus, as a writer, a person knows not just what s/he can do, but that s/he can do it at all.

Validation and reinforcement appear to have played pivotal roles in participants' literate lives, emboldening them to identify as writers. Several participants recall formative experiences that inspired them to see themselves as writers:

> I just always had a lot of insecurities growing up, but the one thing that I consistently seemed to do well, or that people told me I did well, was write. And so I would cling to that […] I always knew teachers liked my writing […] but I would pinpoint English 202, where I had so much encouragement and support, as the place where I finally said, 'I'm a writer.' Because they would tell I was. (Julie, I)

> As young as ten years old, maybe, I thought of myself as a writer, mostly because adults thought I was a writer. I used to write stories and plays, and one of them got put on in my class when I was in fourth grade. So was affirmed by adults. (Monica, I)

> Whether I call myself a writer or not…enough people told me I was good at it that I started to believe them. (Greta, I)

> I have kids, and if you tell a little kid that they're an artist or something, they start to say 'I'm an artist.' And then, all of a sudden, they're drawing more […] I felt that way in 10th grade […] when I started getting a lot of positive feedback on my writing. My teacher told me, 'You're a great writer.' So I started thinking, 'Maybe I am. Maybe I'm a writer.' (Kelsey, I)

In each of these examples, affirmation plays a central role. Clearly, these events represent positive turning points for the participants. For Julie (and a couple others), being considered a writer was particularly empowering, enabling her to transcend personal "insecurities" (Julie, I). This gave her "something to focus on" and helped her carve out a "place in the world" (I).

Once one is validated as a writer, s/he is said to write with greater "authority" (Lisa, I; Tom, I) and "power" (four participants). Correspondingly, several participants explicitly associate being a writer with "confidence:"

> A writer is someone who has a basic level of confidence that they can communicate in writing. (Greta, E)

> I think you need confidence to write really well. Without it, people just play it safe, and the writing isn't as good. (Kelsey, I)

> I think of being a writer as believing you have something to say and having the confidence to say it in a way that other people will take you seriously and listen. (Jason, E)

All of these passages speak to the importance of a writer's self-efficacy—essentially, a belief in one's own competence; a confidence in one's ability to effectively complete a task.[54] For purposes of this study, self-efficacy means that a writer believes s/he both has something to say and the power to say it. As Jason notes, part of being a writer is recognizing the "power of your own perspective:" "There's a permission that comes with calling yourself a writer […] People need to believe that they're allowed to do it, allowed to say something and be taken seriously" (I). Kelsey also aligns the identity of writer with

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[54] There exists a great deal of research on writing and self-efficacy in Psychology and Education (e.g. Bandura), but comparatively little in Writing Studies. Some (e.g. Judge et. al., 2002) have argued that self-efficacy and self-esteem generally measure the same factor.

"permission to try things," asserting: "I think you feel like a writer when you feel like you have something to say […] There's real power in that" (Kelsey, I). Monica similarly argues that a large part of being a writer is "just knowing your opinion matters" (I). Like many participants, she sees self-efficacy as "critical" for her students, as it gives the "authority" to "defend" (Monica, I) their writing. Kelsey encourages her students not only to write with confidence, but to "fight me a bit--to justify why certain things were included or excluded from a piece" (E). Such statements again reflect trends in R & C scholarship, where students are thought to gain power and authority by acting *as writers*. Inextricably tied to self-efficacy are not only issues of "authority," but "ownership." Jason, for instance, insists, "If you're a writer, then this is *your* paper. How do *you* want to convince us?" (I).

Interestingly, participants who do not identify as writers also associate the identity with "confidence." Shelby, a resolute non-writer, asserts, "I publish, and write about how I teach and learn, but I don't identify with those things […] I think that probably has a lot to do with confidence. It takes a lot to be a writer" (I). Matt takes a particularly intriguing position. He does not identify as a writer, but nonetheless insists that the identity is empowering for students. He realized this inconsistency in the midst of our interview:

> **P:** Do you feel like, for them…self-identifying as writers matters? Does it help? Or make any difference, in terms of writing effectively?
> **M:** <chuckling> Yeah, actually. I actually do...and isn't *that* funny? Because I've just been saying that I don't think of myself as a writer, and I'm *absolutely* trying to make them feel like they are…and feel confident about their 5-page essays. So, I absolutely do. Isn't that interesting?
> **P:** It is.
> **M:** I've been driving it out of myself, and here I'm trying to pound it into them. But, there's good reason, because they need to get comfortable with themselves as producers of written communication […] in order to come out the other end and feel like, 'yes I can be a writer when I need to.'

Matt goes on to acknowledge the "power a person can feel" (I) simply from being a writer. And though he plays it safe, refusing the identity himself, he still acknowledges (italics mine), "It would be a real *elevating* moment for me if I felt like I deserved to think of myself and call myself a writer" (I). Matt is a curious case, since he rejects the writer identity so forcefully, yet speaks of his students "as writers" so passionately. One wonders why Matt does not embrace an identity that he himself believes to be so enabling.

Results suggest that there may also be negative ramifications to the validation process. A number of teachers contend that affirmation can be more "problematic" than helpful:

> Sometimes, students have received *tons* of reinforcement for things that maybe they shouldn't have. So, now they think they're writers, but […] it's reinforcing bad habits. Once a student believes that he or she is this amazing writer, it's really difficult to give constructive criticism. Because, they think they already know […] I definitely had students who *thought* they were really good. But it was hard for me, as a teacher, to offer anything, because they won't make changes to their writing. They don't believe anybody else. Usually, they have parents at home going, 'oh my gosh, this is so good!' So it's difficult for me to help them, since they're not always open to growing and learning. (Lisa, I)

As Lisa's reflection illustrates, the flip side to all this affirmation is that a self-identified writer (who is accustomed to praise) may write with more ownership and authority, but that authority can lead him/her resist audience, assessment, and constructive criticism. In this sense, the identity is "problematic" precisely *because* it is so empowering, and

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getting affirmed as a writer may do more harm than good. Other participants also speak to this issue. Kelsey states, "Sometimes I think that 'writer' identity is the problem, because once someone sees themself as a *good* writer, it can be next to impossible to teach them anything new" (I). Self-assured students who believe they are "writers" may be reluctant to acknowledge flaws or missteps in their writing. As Monica observes, "Some people never question themselves. They just go" (I). While this probably makes for a more productive writer, such bravado might also make a person more resistant to teaching. After all, if you never doubt yourself, you're more likely to be dumbfounded, defiant, and maybe a little upset when someone else does (or appears to).

From self-efficacy to agency

The upshot of self-efficacy is "agency," wherein an empowered writer "acts on the world through writing" (Julie, I). Participants point to the range of ways that a writer uses his/her power; s/he writes to "change minds" (Shelby, I), "create meaning" (Kelsey, I), "develop understanding," (Lisa, I) "move people," (Jason, I) and even "to effect change in the world" (Tom, I). S/he "recognizes writing as a skill and an art" (Julie, E), and writes both "as a way to persuade [and] as means of personal exploration" (Jason, I). Also related to power is the ability to take on the "voice of authority" (Shelby, I) and respond rhetorically to different situations, as discussed in Chapter 4. Agency differs from ownership and authority in that it seems to refer to the rhetorical actions within a writer's control and the power to *effect* ownership and/or authority.

Greta describes being a writer as "almost like a superpower" (I). To illustrate this, she requires her composition students to read Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*:

I wanted them to understand that writing is very powerful. And when they

become writers, they are actually harnessing that power. Gorgias writes about,

something like 14 ways that writers have power […] That's the power of words.

[…] Writing is not a neutral activity. It's something a writer controls. (I)

This excerpt from Greta is highly representative; as teachers of writing, the participants

see power as something writers have — and their students need. For this reason, students

are frequently encouraged to "think and act as writers" (Monica, I), not only to "harness"

what Greta calls the "power of words," but also so they might "see themselves as people

capable of writing well" (Lisa, I).

The rewards of being a writer

So, as writers are validated as writers, they gain self-efficacy (which is tied to

confidence, authority, and ownership) and use that power to write effectively. The next

discernible stage—and the last appreciable dimension of writers having power—is that

writers receive rewards for writing. While only a couple participants explicitly use the

word "reward," many talk about power in terms of "what writing can get you" (Jason, I).

For some participants, rewards are professional and tangible, and come through money or

publication: "Once you see something of yours, out there, in print, then it's real. And that

reinforces you as a writer" (Monica, I). Most often, though, rewards are emotional, taking

the form of praise or acclaim about one's writing. Jason looks back fondly on his

dissertation, mostly because of the reactions it received:

Not long after I put my dissertation up on our university's database, Parker

Palmer sent me a letter […] It was in the mail the next day, encouraging me to

continue my work, and how valuable he thought it was, and giving me his address

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[…] It was really him! Suddenly it was all worth it. It was like this sign that I'm

communicating to the world, that all this might actually matter. Holy shit! (I)

Like Jason, the teachers in this study appear heavily invested in outcomes and the

opinions of others. Brent was rewarded when the grants he wrote helped his lesbian and

gay community band finance their performances, making him feel "proud and fulfilled"

(E). In this sense, a writer is rewarded for writing—financially, professionally, and/or

emotionally—and those rewards serve to further validate the writer and perpetuate the

empowerment cycle depicted in Figure 5.2. Through this iterative process, the power

associated with a writer hinges on validation.

The responses of these participants repeatedly point to empowerment, validation,

ownership, and agency, reflecting ongoing trends in R & C scholarship. The importance

of validation is reflected in R & C's own discourses of affirmation, where students are

often encouraged to "see themselves as writers" in the name of empowerment. The

practice of affirmation is particularly central to the National Writing Project, where

students and teachers are encouraged to outwardly identify as writers. Some research

(though mostly anecdotal) supports this practice of reframing the self as writer (Kastner,

2010; Sommers and Saltz, 2004; Whitney, 2008; Yagelski, 2000; Elbow, 1995). While

power is probably most directly associated with Peter Elbow, it has long been an explicit

goal of most writing teachers, from process scholars (e.g. Tobin, 2001) to advocates of

portfolio instruction (e.g. Huot, 2002) to new media scholars (e.g. Wyscoki, 2004; Keller

et. al., 2007).

Ultimately, the main issue regarding power, participants agree, is that not enough

students have it. Without it, one simply does not take the "risks" necessary to be a writer.

Don't fear the repercussions: Writers take risks

> **K:** *You really put your words under the microscope if you call yourself a writer. Like on Facebook…because my friends see me as this, writer person, because of what I do, I have to be extra careful not to make mistakes. Because my integrity is on the line.*
> **P:** *It isn't for them?*
> **K:** *Well, they aren't writers.*
>
> - Exchange with Kelsey, Live Interview

The second overarching characteristic evident in the data is that *writers take risks*. This means not only that a writer takes risks, but that being a writer is itself a risky endeavor, fraught with "chance" and potentially negative consequences. This was one of the most salient and surprising categories in the data set, with the second-highest average unit length (28.33). Figure 5.3 illustrates the dimensions constituting this category.

Figure 5.3 – Characteristics of Writer: Writers take Risks
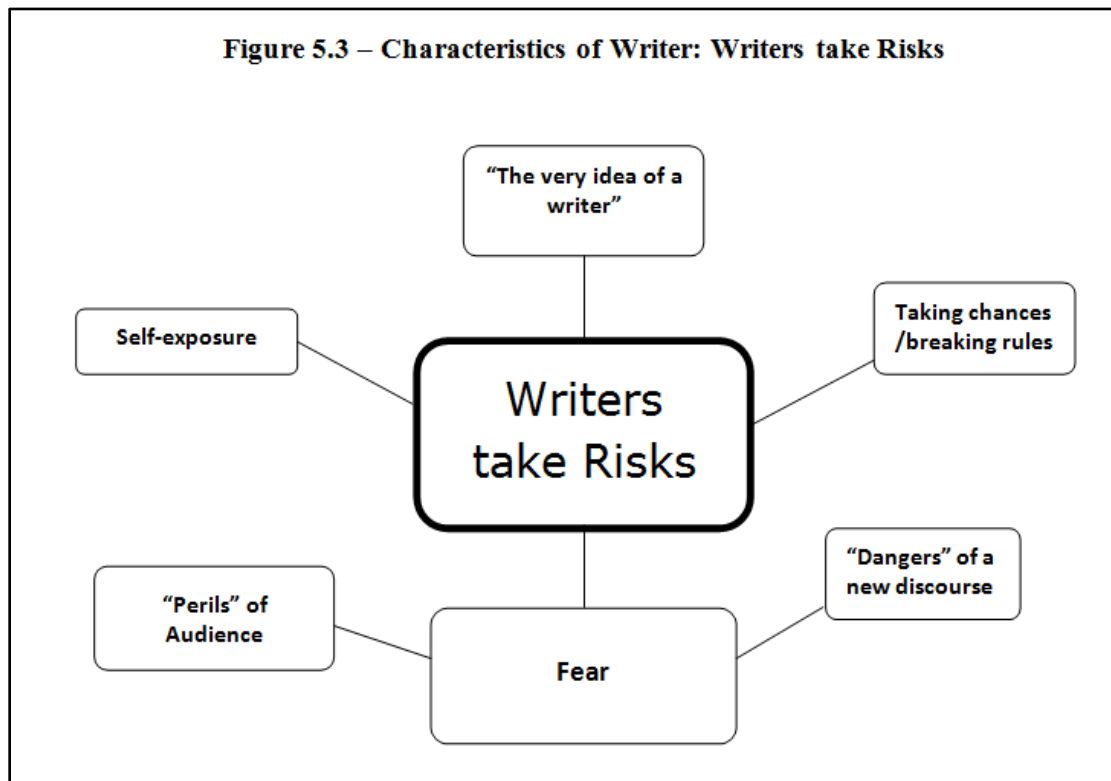
All the participants equate being a writer with some degree of risk, and a number of them talk about risk explicitly and extensively. Central to this characteristic of writer is the

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idea that writing is a "precarious" (Monica, I) activity—especially for a self-identified writer. Figure 5.4 provides a list of words and analogies used by participants to describe either the writer or the act of writing. Several of these are employed by multiple participants.

Figure 5.4
Words and Phrases Used to Describe Writers Writing

Words used to describe writers writing	Analogies used to describe writers writing
"Risk(y)"	"navigating a mine field"
"fear"	"skating on thin ice"
"Intimidating/ed"	"putting yourself out there"
"Precarious"	"tiptoeing"
"Scary"	"stakes are high(er)"/"raise(s) the stakes"
"Inhibit(ing)"	"tread(ing) lightly"
"Treacherous"	"setting yourself up"
"daunting"	
"anxiety"	
"traumatized"	
"courage"	
"audacity"	

These words and phrases can be loosely associated with "risk," a term that appears (in various forms) 28 times in the data set. As the table illustrates, participants also draw on a host of related words and phrases that also suggest risk.

Fear: The "perils" of audience and "dangers" of a new discourse

A seeming constant in the above list is "fear," a word used repeatedly (11 times) to talk about writers writing. Writers are commonly associated with risk, seemingly because participants see so much for them to be afraid of. Participants argue that a writer must have the "courage" to overcome "fear" (Jason, I). Fear, in this case, seems to stem

from an acute awareness of what Julie calls "the consequences of writing" (I). "Sometimes," Tom says, "this writing thing can be almost frightening" (I). This feeds into a larger "tortured artist" narrative (and may relate to the romantic dimensions of the Capital "W" discussed in Chapter IV). Indeed, many participants bemoan the "pains of writing" (Lisa, I). Greta even quips that writing more or less akin to "opening a vein" (I), which suggests both pain and a spontaneous personal outpouring. I chuckled at this when she said it, leading her to expand on her statement: "Actually, it's more like trying to push out a baby. It's just such effort, in terms of actually doing it. The process can be agonizing" (Greta, I).

Popular/nonacademic authors tend to perpetuate the idea that writing can be a downright perilous undertaking. The underlying narrative with respect to popular constructions of writer is *pathos*; specifically, *fear*. To be a writer is to feel fear, or, in the words of Dennis Palumbo, "page fright" (2000, p. 125). Ralph Keyes, whose book, *The Courage to Write,* is predicated almost entirely on transcending fear, warns that "just thinking about being a writer can be scary" (1995, p. 19). Scores of famous writers sustain these ideas, constructing a "writer" who is, by definition, anxious. James Baldwin laments that writing, especially at its onset, is nearly always accompanied by "a certain fear and trembling" (cited in Murray, 1990, p. 72). Margaret Atwood claims that "most writers" grapple with a "preliminary period of anxiety," and that "blank pages inspire me with *terror*" (cited in Oates, 1983, p. 89). John Updike similarly laments the "*terror* of launching yourself into the blank paper" (cited in Murray, 1990, p. 77). For Fran Lebowitz, merely "getting to the desk" can lead her to "react psychologically the way other people react when the plane loses an engine" (cited in Winokur, 1986, p. 101).

Even as some try to debunk this powerful idea as myth, the larger discourse perpetuates

the idea of the distressed, angst-ridden writer.

The teachers in this study connect writing to fear, but this dimension of the risk-

taking writer manifests itself in more nuanced ways than just general pain and struggle. A

common concern is *audience*. Participants argue (rhetorically) that a writer writes with

readers in mind, but many see audience as a stifling and overwhelming thing:

> [Writing], it's about being concerned with what people think, it's audience
> awareness…but that can petrify you as a writer […] Audience can make us edit
> ourselves to death. (Kelsey, I)

> A writer is aware of audience, but that's kind of limiting and even scary. (Greta, I)

> I think it's actually easier to write *without* my readers in mind […] Otherwise, I'm
> always thinking about what they'll think, what they'll say…that's why we need
> things like freewriting. (Monica, I)

These passages suggest the powerfully inhibiting force audience can be for a writer. The

idea of audience seems to make some writers quite anxious. Participants agree that a

writer should "know your audience" (Brent, I); fear enters the picture when what you

"know" about your audience is that they're "picky" (Lisa, I) or "difficult to please" (Julie,

I). Monica's statement above is particularly reflective of expressive teaching; indeed,

many proponents (most notably Elbow) argue that a writer must sometimes ignore his/her

audience in order to write. In this sense, we see not only the element of risk, but the

continuing tension between the expressive and academic writer.

Interestingly, the association of writers with risk appears most pronounced in

school-based settings. Participants attribute the greatest amount of fear—and consequent

sense of risk—to *academic* writing, citing its potential to induce fear of evaluation. The

teachers in this study repeatedly note the importance of showing "pedagogical empathy"

towards student writers (Monica, I). Several accuse teachers of traumatizing students by overemphasizing mechanical issues. Jason asserts, "By the time students get to my classroom, they are *traumatized* by years of red ink all over their papers […] Paper comments are just like this list of ink with *anger* and *judgment* behind it" (I, italics mine). The fear of "judgment" is a recurrent theme. Monica similarly notes that student writers are hyper-aware of their own shortcomings, "always looking over their shoulder, waiting for someone to tell them they're doing it wrong" (I). Interestingly, this ever-looming component of "fear" is consistent with the notion that one must write defensively to be an academic writer. Kelsey maintains that most writers—academic writers in particular— exercise "a particular caution" due to "fear of judgment or embarrassment" (E). This statement points to what Julie calls the "perils" of writing to an academic audience, something that "every grad student understands all too well" (I).

Participants share/recount several anecdotes about how teacher feedback can "paralyze" a student writer. Julie notes that students who have had "bad experiences" and disparaging feedback tend to "approach writing with dread" (I). Jason offers a definitive example:

My first year of teaching, I had a student who so looked up to me. You know, she sat in the front row, and just eagerly absorbed everything. I ended up giving her a 'C' on her first paper […] and then, for three weeks she came to class and put her hood up and sat in the back row. Because, probably, I was this person that she looked up to, and I had told her, effectively, that she was…lacking […] It's easy to forget how much that ink on the paper can mean. A professor's approval becomes this incredibly powerful, scary thing. (I)

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Jason's story aptly illustrates how feedback can disappoint and disengage a willing

writer. His once-enthusiastic student completely shuts down after receiving the "C."This

speaks not only to the anxiety that writing can inspire, but also to the ways in which a

would-be writer may internalize criticisms. These stories are troubling, as they seem to

suggest that being a bad writer is perceived as akin to being a bad person.

The fear factor and resultant sense of risk may increase for writers accustomed to

using marginalized discourses. A number of participants explicitly speak to this:

> Social factors tell them that they don't know how to write, that they can't write or
>
> speak properly. So they've already told themselves they're not writers. And so,
>
> in a writing class […] there's always this chance of exposing those nonstandard
>
> discourses […] They don't want to have their ideas rejected because they haven't
>
> written them the quote-unquote 'right way.' (Kelsey, I)

Kelsey's comments point to the unique risks facing those with "nonstandard," non-native,

or atypical literate histories. For them, writing becomes even more anxiety-inducing. The

aforementioned apprehension and sense of risk may be exacerbated by the feeling that

their own way of speaking is somehow "wrong." In this sense, *any* user of these

discourses takes on a higher level of risk when s/he communicates—especially in writing.

These, as Jason asserts, are "the dangers of learning a new discourse" (I). Again, we see

the element of risk reflected in Jason's word choice ("dangers").

"The very idea of being a writer"

The identity of writer is itself associated with risk, which emerged as another

dimension of the risk-taking writer. The data seem to reflect a shared belief amongst

participants that identifying as a writer "raises the stakes," increasing the level of risk for

those who "own the term" (Shelby, I). Lisa identifies this issue explicitly (italics mine):

"It's kind of *bold*, to proclaim yourself as a writer in your freshmen writing class. That really *ups the ante* in terms of expectations, from your teacher and from other students" (Lisa, I). Her language reflects the increased risks one takes on when s/he identifies as a writer. A self-professed writer "raises expectations" (Matt, I), and thus has more to lose. Matt refuses the "writer" identity on this basis:

> I think maybe it's even a little forced modesty, where I'm trying to see if maybe someday I end up living up to, some of the people my age I admire, who have written so good things over the years. There's a guy in Michigan, who has written so many great things...just great stuff […] *I wouldn't pretend to be able to write what he does.* (I, italics mine)

Matt's "forced modesty" keeps him at a lower level than the published writers he "admires" and is humbled by. "Writer," for him, appears to be a heightened category that he avoids, lest he overstate his own writing abilities. In this way, it's easier to excel—the "expectations" are lower, and he doesn't have to match the "great" writing of his more esteemed peers. Referring to himself as a writer would increase expectations, and Matt would risk not "living up to" them. In this sense, being a writer is more risky than not being one.

Shelby argues that claiming oneself as a writer adds potentially burdensome weight to a person's writing tasks:

> It feels like a risk. Because if you *are* a writer, and you don't write or you're not successful, then you fail […] As opposed to just saying, 'I might write today and I

might not.' I don't think there's the same risk as claiming I *am* something. (I, italics mine)

Shelby essentially claims that a writer has more at stake—that a failure to write effectively ("you don't write or you're not successful") is more significant to a self-identified writer. Her choice of words suggests that not writing is a risk of being ("you are;" "I am") rather than doing, reflecting the ongoing tension between identity and activity. In this sense, one who *is* a writer bears greater consequences for the act of writing.

I was intrigued by this (in fact, it was Shelby's use of the word "risk" that inspired this category), so I asked Shelby to clarify her position. Our exchange (I) further describes the increased risks that a self-professed writer endures:

> **S:** It's just too big.
> **P:** Can you say more about that?
> **S:** Like, I've run half-marathons, but I won't say I'm a runner. Because it's really hard for me. And I've seen the times that the really good runners get, and…that's not me.
> **P:** Sure, I get that…I played in a band for about ten years and I would never call myself a musician.
> **S:** See, but I would call you a musician…
> **P:** Yeah, other people seem to find it easy.
> **S:** That's what I mean. There's no risk for them. It's all on you.

With her analogy to running, Shelby implies that the word "writer," like the word "runner" or "musician," assumes a certain level of proficiency. Like Matt, she suggests that being a writer means being a *good* writer; calling oneself a writer is thus akin to claiming, "I write well." Given this assumption, it makes sense that so many students and teachers approach the term with hesitation. Indeed, a few participants worry that they, as writers, will fail to produce coherent writing worthy of the title: "I think we all fear that.

Especially for us, because this is what we do. What if it isn't good? What if I'm actually kind of a bad writer?" (Monica, I)

For a self-identified writer, a bad paper may represent more than just a failure to perform a writing task; it may seem like a failure of *identity*, a failure to be who s/he purports to be. Risks of this ilk call to mind the capital "W" Writer, one who has tied writing to his/her sense of self in a substantive way. Indeed, the reticence of some students and teachers to embrace the term may be rooted in a desire to avoid association with the capital "W" (italics mine):

> I do think you gain a certain cultural capital by saying you're a writer […] But, we can just as easily look at the other side of that, so when you hear somebody say, 'I'm a writer,' you just kind of roll your eyes. (Brent, I)

> It's easier to identify the students who never see themselves as writers […] They have a lot of anxiety [about] *the very idea of being a writer.* (Tom, I)

As Brent's comments ("you just kind of roll your eyes") suggest, there are those who perceive the "very idea of a writer" (Tom, I) to be self-serving and silly. Indeed, the word "writer" seems, for many, to evoke the capital "W" Writer—that is, the more abstract and lofty *idea* of the writer. In this sense, the "culturally loaded" (Brent, I) aspects of the writer have to do with identity rather than activity. The "anxiety" Tom perceives in his students may be less of an aversion to writing than an aversion to the kinds people they believe writers to be. Self-identified writers are in the unenviable position of living up to the lofty expectations that accompany the "writer" identity. As Brent states, "there's a certain audacity in proclaiming that. You have to live up to that, to that role, to what people think that is" (I).

These excerpts—somewhat unsurprisingly—suggest that notions of writer predicated on identity are more constraining than those simply based on the act of

writing. What is less clear is why these teachers were so apt to construe the writer in this identity-based way. Certainly, my own framing for the study may have led them in this direction (this limitation is explained further in Chapter 7). However, I would also argue that these responses suggest that more abstract identity-based notions of writer are inextricably tied to the term—so much so that even teachers of writing (who most assuredly know better) have difficulty avoiding their influence.

The aforementioned self-efficacy and power associated with writers appear to be metered by a marked cautiousness. If you call yourself a writer, you must support that conception of yourself. Your writing must continue to reinforce that you *are* indeed the kind of person you've identified yourself to be. With every act of writing, you are, in a way, "testing" that conception of yourself. In this sense, a writer writes not just to complete written tasks effectively or eloquently, but also to constantly uphold and sustain his/her identity as a writer. As Lisa says, "there's a lot in a name, in what we call ourselves" (I). In this sense, participants take on risks not only by writing—but by assuming the identity of writer. This observation holds implications for the classroom. Teachers who encourage students to see themselves as writers will need to consider that the term "writer," especially as it tends to evoke ideas about one's identity, can constrain as well as empower.

The risk of self-exposure

One of the biggest risks that writing poses for these participants is self-exposure. A large part of the risk factor associated with being a writer seems to stem from the expressive belief that a writer is "in" his/her writing (see Chapter 4 for an extensive discussion of this). In this sense, writing exposes or *reveals* the self. Tom asserts,

"Putting my whole self into the writing is intimidating, but I still don't think I can remove my whole self from it" (I). A number of participants appear profoundly uncomfortable with "putting myself out there" (Greta, I). The data suggest that there are repercussions to the expressive writer posited by the participants. It makes sense that we naturally identify with our writing, but the prospect of exposing oneself on the page is, for many, "a daunting prospect" (Lisa, I). Interestingly, those participants who identify as writers are precisely those who seem most apprehensive about self-exposure and the potential for disapproving criticism. Jason talks about the difficulty of actually presenting his writing to an audience:

> I mean, it is just a paper, right? My dissertation is just one document that I'll write in my life. It isn't me. But…sitting in the theater to watch one of my own plays, seeing an audience respond to it from moment to moment, is even more terrifying than acting to me […] It's such a struggle for me to get my work on stage, let an audience respond the way they want to…and then walk away and write another play […] I think about my career as a writer, and I've kept myself to pretty minimal audiences. And I don't always think that's an accident. Because my spiritual growth would need to get to a point where I can really put myself out there to as many people as want to see my work as possible, and let them say whatever they want, and…that's just terrifying. […] As far as I'm concerned, it's *me* in those plays. (I).

Jason's concern with "judgment" (I), which surfaces several times over his interview, becomes clearer in this passage. Because Jason does not separate himself from his writing ("it's me in those plays"), he approaches writing with great trepidation. This

connects directly to the aforementioned fear of audience and evaluation, suggesting that many participants believe that they are exposed by writing.

The risk, in these instances, is that any criticism of the writing may become a criticism of the writer. In some cases, the self-exposure associated with being a writer leads participants to internalize bad writing experiences and question their own sense of identity. Participant anecdotes reflect the potential for writing to lower one's self-esteem. In response to one of my "think back" questions, Monica recalled her graduate school experiences:

> I did not enjoy writing my comprehensive exams. I guess maybe that's true for everyone. I felt very blocked, though. They were really, not of a very high quality. And that, well…that reflects on me. I kind of took it personally, and…it really bothered me at the time. I think I've been more hesitant to call myself a writer since then. (I)

The tone during this reflection was unmistakably grim; Monica spoke as if she were recalling the death of a family member. That she continues to reflect with such despondency about her exams—a writing experience from the 1990s—shows how formative these experiences can be. As the italicized segments indicate, Monica internalized her subpar (to her) performance. Perhaps even more significantly, this experience provoked a troubling question: *am I really a writer?* Again, we see difficulties for those who construe the term in an identity-based way.

Kelsey talks about a professor's reaction to a seminar paper with similar disappointment:

It's not that I didn't do well on the paper. I did OK. But it wasn't that enthusiastic, stellar, 'you really nailed this,' kind of reaction, where they talk about how interesting and even publishable the work is. It was just kind of tepid…like, 'yeah, I guess I see your point.' And it really deflated me. It made me doubt my feelings about myself as a writer. (I)

Kelsey is "deflated" not because she received disparaging feedback, but simply because the feedback wasn't effusive enough. Again, we see the assumption that writers are, by definition, good writers—writers whose writing is worthy of praise. Like Monica, Kelsey begins to "doubt" her identity as a writer.

Julie was particularly distraught about the feedback she had received over the years, drawing on a number of experiences that filled her with self-doubt. As a self-identified writer, she struggled mightily to reconcile negative feedback with her own ego:

Sometimes I still get bad feedback […] Even now, in a Ph.D. program, every time I give something to Prof. X, I feel *like I can't write at all*, like I might as well just quit right now. He makes me feel like a *terrible writer*. (I, italics mine)

Julie was particularly invested in her writerly self, and became visibly distressed during her reflection (this was a face-to-face interview). As we talked, it became clear that Julie regarded the grade as more than just an assessment of her performance on a single paper. After a couple of responses like this, I took to playing devil's advocate (tactfully) with my participants (taking care not to trivialize their distress). Julie's response (I) was the most definitive:

P: But, given how much this affects you, why not…pull back a little? Couldn't you kind of, step back, and…just sort of say, 'OK, it's just a paper. It's not about me?'

J: But it *is* about me. It is kind of personal, isn't it? I'm a writer, I think…but then I get attacked for not writing well. How else can I take it?

Julie had internalized these criticisms as if they were levied against *her*—not just her writing. She was more or less unequivocal about this, to the point where she didn't really see another way to interpret the professor's comments.

As Jason asserts, "tying your identity to anything makes you pretty vulnerable to criticism" (I). For a self-proclaimed writer, the aforementioned risks may be attached to a person, not just the writing. Brent states, "It takes a thick skin to really be a writer. You have to be willing to take a lot of heat" (I). Consistent with such statements, a few participants (Brent, Kelsey, Lisa) find students who see themselves as writers to be the most difficult to assess as a teacher. This may be attributed to the vulnerability associated with self-exposure (and may also point to the unintended consequences of positive affirmation, as previously discussed). Again, these observations have noteworthy pedagogical implications; if being a writer is "risky," fraught with potential consequences for the self, then it follows that some "writers" will be more difficult to teach than non-writers.

In light of this common belief—that writers are "in" their writing and exposed on the page—revision gets conceptualized vis-à-vis the *writer* as much as the writing. Julie ties the "emotions" of revision with the "logistics of being a writer:"

It's a very *emotional* process […] You generally have more rejections than you have acceptances for publication. When it [being a writer] is that embedded in your identity, changes are very difficult to deal with. Having to revise is difficult. Because to me, when I revise my writing, though it's what I do as a writer, it's almost like I have to revise myself. (I, italics mine)

Julie was one of several participants to express distaste for revision(s), but the content and specificity of her lament was intriguing. Revision, in this sense, is akin to revising one's self. Along the same lines, Monica links revisions with "self-loathing" (I). And Tom talks about "the things you cut from your papers, and put in a file that you never touch," calling them "your little orphan babies" (I). All of these suggest an indelible connection between the writer and the writing that makes revision harder. Tom refers to these struggles as "the real hazards of being a writer;" that is, "trying to figure out how much of yourself to put in the writing, how much is safe to include" (I).

These passages point to some rarely discussed consequences of conceptualizing writing as self-expression. Interestingly, three of the four self-identified writers in this study report feeling wounded or upset by teacher feedback. It is perhaps for this reason that Shelby suggests (italics mine), "I think maybe as teachers, some of us are too *cautious* to call ourselves writers" (I).These are intelligent, well-educated writing teachers, and many of them took things personally. What might happen to first-year students who have a thinner skin?

This perceived connection between revision and the writerly self has significant ramifications for writing teachers. As a teacher of writing, hearing these participants reflect on these negative experiences was both intriguing and troubling. Did they need to feel this bad about themselves? Allen (2010) speaks to the difficulties of working with such students—those who tie themselves to their writing. She argues that notions of a romantic, autonomous writer, far from being harmless abstractions, are actually quite problematic for teachers because "conceptions of the writer, especially, are bound up in […] opinion-as-identity" (p. 366). In this sense, it is not just one's ideas, but one's

identity that is at stake in an essay or classroom discussion. Allen attributes this problem (opinion-as-identity) to lingering Romanticism and "its hero, the Romantic subject" (p. 366). Romanticism, she says, allows us "to see ourselves as agents in this world;" however, it also engenders "the belief that my perspective is who I am and that any challenge to that perspective […] is a threat to my very existence" (p. 367). Though she does not use the same words to describe it, the tension between activity and identity is present throughout Allen's discussion. Like Allen, I am inclined to suggest that writing (or any other discourse) should not "affirm or negate identities;" it seems more pedagogically sensible to conceptualize a writer in terms of activity; that is, one who is "constituted by practices" (p. 367).

Taking chances/breaking rules

The final dimension of the risk-taking writer is that s/he takes chances, goes against the grain—even breaks the rules—in order to write effectively. Participants frequently describe a writer who deviates from expectations:

> A good writer has the courage to try new things. […] When somebody does something legitimately interesting, and kind of breaks from form for a moment, I just find it so refreshing and engaging […] It engages me as a reader. I think you have to take those risks to be a writer. (Kelsey, I)

> I had some kids who were brilliant poets. They didn't follow the pattern, and they were really really good. (Lisa, I)

> The best writers push boundaries and break all kinds of rules, but so many teachers see writing as this formulaic thing […] I really think writers should take chances. (Jason, I)

In all these examples, a writer is one who defies convention. Writers take risks when they "push boundaries," "break from form," "break all kinds of rules," and refuse to "follow

the pattern." Correspondingly, Greta maintains that students most often fail as writers because they aren't "trying new things" or "pushing the envelope" (I).

Again, this is no more evident than in participants' reflections on their own writing experiences. Jason reflects on successfully taking chances with his dissertation:

> With my dissertation, I took huge risks. I put myself and my soul out there, and went outside bounds of what would traditionally be accepted as a dissertation, and I had to believe I was a real writer to do that […] I was nervous, but it actually went over really well. My dissertation was described as interesting and valuable for the field, and my outside reader called it 'hilarious.' (I)

"Real writers," in this sense, challenge conventions, take risks, stay "true to themselves"—and get away with it. There is sense, in this passage, that being a writer is both intensely personal ("myself and my soul"/exposure) and risky. It also, per the discussion in Chapter 4, implicitly suggests that the "rules" of academic writing constrain these inclinations that "real writers" have.

Kelsey also reflects on a personal writing experience where she succeeded by "breaking the mold":

> I can think of papers where I've gotten so fed up with trying to cram myself into the box of what I think is wanted […] I remember, for an essay on 'All Quiet on the Western Front,' I did this, really creative intro […] And it felt risky, really risky, when I did it […] But I was doing it my way, and *damn the repercussions* **[…]** And she loved it […] After that, I realized I should try more things with writing than I thought. (I, italics mine)

The lesson Kelsey appears to learn here is that a writer can get away with something "risky;" not only that s/he can "try" things and still be effective, but perhaps even that a writer is effective *because* s/he tries these things. The risk factor is acknowledged, but a writer proceeds in spite of "repercussions." Her story constructs the writer as one for whom being "creative" is more important than delimiting structure ("box"). Her wording is telling; she is cramming *herself* ("myself") into a box, which suggests that it is not just the writing, but *her* that is being constrained. Kelsey and Jason make the case that a writer can and should push boundaries — to the point where taking chances seems consonant with the writer identity. For these participants, caution is the academic writer's reaction to risk, while reframing boundaries and taking chances is a "real writer's" (Jason, I) reaction.

Writers, in this sense, possess the ability to create their own context, to treat generic expectations and formats not as templates, but as malleable genres that can be 'tweaked' and adapted to particular tasks. Teachers insinuate that writers who take these chances are generally better received. Lisa speaks to this:

> If you're fluent enough, you can 'reinvent' the form, to some degree, but you can only do it if you try things. Sometimes they won't work, but when they do, that's the kind of writing that a teacher remembers. (I)

Lisa's assertions suggest that risk-taking can be read as more than just rhetorical savvy; it can be reinvention. Writers are observant and skilled enough to make their *own* rules.

It thus makes sense that risky writing would require a great deal of persistence, and, indeed, participants cite persistence as the most important characteristic a writer should possess (see Figure 5.1). This reflection from Julie aptly illustrates the concept:

He [a professor in her Ph.D. program] is the one person who just rips me apart. He's like, 'you're right-branching too much,' and 'your sentences too front-loaded!' So I worry about that…but *I don't stop taking classes with him, and I don't stop writing.*" (I, italics mine)

In this sense, a writer takes risks—simply by writing, s/he risks negative feedback, self-doubt, being misinterpreted or misunderstood. But writers persevere; even in the face of these potential pitfalls, they "don't stop writing." As Kelsey states, writers "have the persistence and courage to take the next step" (I). Being a writer necessitates a willingness to write in spite of consequences.

This leaves us with a looming question: how do writers know *when* to take risks, to defy conventions, to take chances? This is a particularly difficult issue for student writers, because, as Monica notes, "Students are maybe in an even more daunting position than us. As teachers and professors, we've probably had at least some success writing. I don't think many students have had that" (I).

Characteristics of Writer: Writers Are Readers

> *Writers read.*
>
> > - Lisa, E

On the whole, participants agree that writers are readers. While this was a less appreciable theme than the two previous characteristics, it was still coded frequently enough to constitute a broader category. Virtually all the participants connected to writing to reading in their interviews:

> A good writer is always a good reader […] You need to understand readers, so as a reader yourself, know how they should be spoken to. (Matt, I)

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> Reading and writing were never separate for me. I read to make sense of life, and I wrote to make sense of what I had read and the parts of life that still weren't clear. (Julie, I)

> I don't think we can divorce being a writer from being a reader. If you don't read good writing, how can you be expected to produce it? (Tom, I)

> Any decent writer is probably already a strong reader. (Lisa, I)

> I think it's important for students to identify with writing *and* reading […] As a writer, you speak, but you also listen to others. (Jason, I)

By stressing the "close relationship" (Monica, I) between reading and writing, participants maintain that being a reader is part and parcel of being a writer. Lisa placed particular emphasis on reading, arguing that "good readers become good thinkers who become good writers." (I). She shares a story about one of her favorite students, a "brilliant writer;" tellingly, the first thing Lisa notes about him is that "he's a reader, and he's a close reader" (I).

The ability to "work with texts" (Kelsey, I) is cited by a number of participants as a key component of being a writer. Monica maintains that an inability to read and assimilate information is one the biggest obstacles for writing students:

> We complain that student writers don't know to cite sources, or they don't know how to work with multiple pieces of text, and understand how to appropriate things that they read. We're not spending enough time helping them *read.* Helping them work through a text. I think those things, however basic they may sound to some people, are vitally important. (I)

In this sense, the writer is based on both production *and* consumption of knowledge. Monica insists that a writer "needs" reading to write effectively (I). Participants agree that the best writers "understand the interplay between reading and writing" (Lisa, I).

The reading-writing connection was often tied to formative experiences with literacy. Invariably, participants who wrote at a young age were also avid readers. For example, Shelby attributes her notions of writing to her "upbringing," especially during early childhood: "In my home, writing was revered and important and practiced, and of course that extends to reading as well. When I grew up, my parents, always had a book in their hand" (I). Tom recalls that "reading was actually what made me want to be a writer" (I). Many participants share strikingly similar anecdotes; for them, reading was what led them to writing in the first place. Julie muses, "Maybe I eventually did learn how to write because I did all of that reading" (I).

Participants further claim that a writer's identity is "based on the people that they read" (Greta, I). A writer is said to be a product of his/her influences, which come "primarily from reading" (Tom, I). Jason speaks to this: "For me, becoming a writer was so much about *reading* other writers. I wanted to create something *that good* [...] In a way, they made me the writer I am today" (I). Julie makes a similar connection: "When I did eventually identify myself as a writer, it was in the same area in which I had always been a reader. I always read creative nonfiction, and when I started writing, it was in that same area" (I). In a sense, then, participants suggest that writers are what they read.

This is particularly relevant to academic writing, since an academic writer must situate his/her writing with other writers that he has read. So much of one's discoursal self is connected to this framing; what writers do we align ourselves with? With this question in mind, Greta astutely ties reading to writing through Kenneth Burke's (1969) notion of "identification:"

Information literacy is also part of building identity […] By using sources well, a writer can sort of put on the cloak of somebody who does have *ethos* by citing that person. If you cite three respected people in the discipline, then you're going to get some respect yourself. I tend to be a Burke kind of a person, the whole identification thing. So, the people we choose to cite, especially the ones we agree with or cite as authorities, then those are the ones we identify with. Those are the people who we are claiming some…Burke used to call it consanguinity, with them. So, in that sense, we have something in common, we want to take on some of their characteristics. By using sources and citing authorities, a writer is claiming, 'this is the group I belong to. This is the tradition that I'm aligning myself with.' (I).

As Greta explains, a writer can build his/her *ethos* through citation; in this sense, what one reads is critically important to how s/he is perceived on the page. *Ethos* in academic writing hinges on the discoursal self created through this selective process of identification. Indeed, one uses reading to become a more credible writer. Interestingly, Greta uses this very strategy to make her point, standing on the shoulders of a venerated rhetorician by referencing Burkean consanguinity. Reading, then, may be viewed as a means of writerly empowerment.

Characteristics of Writer: Discourse-Specific

You can be a writer in your composition class, but what will you do a different writing situation? Because there are all these rules and conventions that change between disciplines. So, what do you write, and how do you write — in that specific discipline?

Participants tend to view writing as a situated practice undertaken in accordance with the conventions of "a certain discourse community" (Kelsey, E). Their responses repeatedly point to the idea that a "writer" identity is contextualized in a particular discipline or genre:

> This whole idea of becoming an effective writer who can write with authority, that differs between disciplines. (Greta, I)
>
> Writing makes a disciplinary argument. What's valuable and what's not? You have to consider the type of knowledge tied to the writing, and the discipline plays a role there. (Monica, I)
>
> Being a writer, that's different, depending on your worldview, and that worldview changes depending on your field of study […] Maybe I can make you a better writer, but that has to mean something outside of my classroom, in other fields or out on the job. (Jason, I)
>
> I think if you want to play the game, you've got to do it their way and write in your genre […] The constraints change, and the extent to which they can be manipulated. (Kelsey, I)
>
> Who is a writer, really, unless we know the context she's writing in? It depends on a bunch of rhetorical stuff like audience, and also what constitutes 'good writing' in a given context. And that context can be professional, disciplinary, or whatever. (Shelby, I)

All these quotations suggest a writer who is discourse-specific and context-dependent. Though this category was marked by lower frequency than the others, it still accounted for over 3000 words, giving it a much higher average unit length (26.5) than the previous characteristic (*Writers are Readers*). Indeed, while this topic did not dominate the discussions like the writer "types" discussed in Chapter 4, participants engaged extensively with it when it was broached.

Some participants explicitly advocate working towards a more discipline-specific notion of writers and writing. Not surprisingly, participants with interdisciplinary

experience (Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing in the Professions, Technical Writing, Learning Communities, Writing Centers) were most likely to stress disciplinary conventions. They often drew on pedagogical anecdotes to illustrate the discourse-specific nature of being a writer. Julie, who had studied science writing as a researcher, speaks from her experience: "I think a cross-disciplinary approach is what we should be doing […] Writing across the disciplines does inform your identity. I don't know that I want to be a scientist unless I start reading in the sciences and writing in scientific forms" (I). Jason argues that we should tailor disciplinary lessons to students own interests: "My tech writing class targeted students' specific career goals. I had them go out and get documents from the jobs that they eventually wanted so they could learn how to write the way they would *in that job*." (I, italics mine). Monica also stressed the need for students to "practice disciplinary writing as they move through their major" (I). She states, "If that's where they're going to put their energy and their passion, they need to know what that work looks like and sounds like, how it's created" (Monica, I). Julie similarly encourages her composition students to "write the paper in your major. If you're a Biology major, your audience really should be a group of Biologists" (I). These comments suggest that disciplinary writing is not just practical and sensible; it is a way to meet students where they are, a way to address *their* goals and interests. In this sense, focusing on a discourse-specific writer may encourage more student-centered teaching.

A couple of participants found it difficult to separate writers from content. The idea that students leave composition classes as "writers" is, Brent maintains, "misleading." He elaborated extensively on this point:

But what can they really do in an actual writing situation? What are they writers of? At my school, that professional context is important, and they do specific things in their fields. Writer doesn't adequately describe what they need […] It all goes back to content. A writer, whatever that is, needs to help students master content, to become authorities on content […] In that way, I feel like it would help with their identity, as both writers and as members of whatever community they're writing about. When they get to psychology class, they're psychologists writing about psychology, and so they are both becoming writers and becoming psychologists. But I'm not sure what a writer is without the disciplinary part. And I'm not sure where that leaves Comp courses, because we're supposed to be teaching all this transferrable stuff, but we can't do *everything*. Really, no one wants to say this, I think, because it makes us less relevant, but you really need to write in these specific situations to learn it. (I, italics mine)

The implications of such statements for R & C are intriguing. These results suggest it isn't enough for students to identify simply *as writers*, because any writer identity is contingent on disciplinary and/or professional context. This is not a new issue; many post-secondary schools have already incorporated a plethora of discipline-specific writing courses. In European countries and Canada, where there is no comparable tradition of general Composition courses, writing is typically taught within particular disciplines. And some of the more esoteric fields (e.g. legal writing) have their own burgeoning scholarly traditions. But for American composition teachers, where the problem of "transfer" continues to receive extensive scholarly attention, this issue is critically important. Because, ultimately, as Jason states, "What we teach has to be useful in other

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contexts" (I). It's not just about teaching argument" says Julie, "because the arguments that would counter yours are going to vary based on that discipline […] Understanding those things is what writing is about" (I).

Matt was the lone outlier to this category, insisting that "good writing habits cross disciplinary boundaries" (I). He aligned the identity of writer with general day-to-day practices that, for him, were "important in any context" (I). However, other participants agree that a writer is always product of a particular discourse community. This means that "being a writer in biology or history isn't necessarily the same as learning to write for English courses" (Tom, I). For some, the "writer" of the Composition classroom appears somewhat elusive and tenuous. Brent states, "Maybe the term 'writer' needs to be attached to a specific classroom or disciplinary context to mean anything at all" (I). And Kelsey wonders, "I'm not sure what Comp students are expected to be. I mean, what kind of writers are we teaching?" (I). Their concerns relate to longstanding issues of disciplinarity within R & C: what *is* our content as teachers as scholars? Participant responses suggest that this question remain unanswered, but that related issues are on the mind of many writing teachers.

Chapter Conclusions

The eight multidimensional categories of writer discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 organize findings from this study around its core research questions, assembling the identity of writer through shared and competing narratives. Like the writer types examined last chapter, these four characteristics of writer both complement and challenge one another. For examples, being a writer is viewed as both empowering and risky. This seeming contradiction makes sense in light of the dimensions of these categories; the

power associated with a writer may allow him/her to meet the "risks" of writing head-on. This speaks to the importance of the affirmation and self-efficacy stressed by the participants. If, in fact, being a writer is such a "risky" endeavor, then one truly needs the "power" that comes from validation and support. Perhaps it is because of the risks that a writer needs things like "courage", "confidence," and "rhetorical savvy."

Chapters 4 and 5 also point to some overlooked consequences of conceptualizing the writer in terms of identity rather than activity. Calling oneself a writer may imply a commitment to writing with which many students (and teachers) are uncomfortable. That commitment may well lead to greater motivation, but also might lead "writers" to view the requisite difficulties of writing as a veritable crisis of identity. In other words, the identity of writer is empowering, but also can lead to self-contradiction, frustration, an unwillingness to take criticism, or a tendency to internalize assessment too deeply.

In Chapter 6, I introduce another study, a focus group consisting of four writing teachers. The focus group study is an outgrowth of these interviews—it is framed and implemented in accordance with the same research questions and uses the coding scheme derived from *this* study to analyze participant responses. The focus group offers the advantage of interaction—these teachers discuss the writer not just with me, but with *one another*, allowing me to examine multiple perspectives within the context of an actual discussion.

CHAPTER VI

'THE RIGHT KINDS OF WRITERS:' A FOCUS GROUP STUDY

Introduction

Chin (1994) asserts that "the dynamics of any interview situation change radically whenever more than one person is being interviewed" (p. 258). I therefore supplemented the central inquiry of this dissertation (the 10 interviews) with another qualitative study, a multi-participant focus group, enabling me to study multiple perspectives in the context of an actual discussion. Many qualitative scholars (Charmaz, 2006; Silverman, 2004; Punch, 2009) recommend revisiting a topic with more focused queries as analysis proceeds. Incorporating this focus group provided me with a robust data set in which to revisit my findings, allowing me to make somewhat more contextualized claims. This chapter will describe the details of the focus group study, including the methods, results, and conclusions.

The focus group was treated as an outgrowth of the interview study, employing similar questions and methods of data analysis. There was one fundamental difference: the categories derived from the interview transcript analysis were used to analyze the focus group transcripts. In this sense, I did not approach the focus group transcripts as a blank slate, but looked at them vis-à-vis these previously determined categories. To review, the coding process (see Chapter 3) resulted in 8 core categories, delineated below:

Types of Writer:	*Characteristics of Writer:*
Capital "W" Writer	Writers Have Power
Lowercase "w" writer	Writers Take Risks
Expressive Writer	Writers are Readers
Academic Writer	Writers are Discourse-Specific

These categories served as the starting point for my focus group data analysis.

The overarching research questions were the same as those informing the interview study:

- How do postsecondary teachers of writing conceptualize the "term" writer?

- How do they position/discuss the writer in relation to pedagogical practice?

In this study, I placed particular emphasis on the pedagogical positioning of the writer, looking to gain a better understanding of how the term functions in classrooms and in pedagogical conversations. I also focused on an additional question that had emerged consistently throughout my research and data analysis:

- Does a person need to self-identify as a writer to write effectively?

To examine this issue, I devoted more time to a person's self-conception and its effect on his/her writing practices. How important is self-identification as a "writer" to the act of writing? And, in a broader sense, can a person effectively engage in literate practices (in this case, writing) *without* embracing the concomitant subject position ("writer") aligned with that community's discourse?

Like the interviews, the focus group was open-ended and descriptive, but with the added element of interactivity. Because this dissertation is largely concerned with the *discourses* surrounding writers and writing, it was important to examine viewpoints in the context of other viewpoints. The focus group provided this context, allowing me to expand my data-supported exploration of "writer(s)" beyond the interviewer-interviewee

relationship. As in the previous study, I strove to adhere to Haswell's (2005) and Smagorinsky's (2008) standards for rigor and transparency. However, this study, because of its narrowed focus, has limitations. The focus group was not used to uncover new issues or provide corrective insights from the interview study; rather, it was a means of "focusing" on previously identified issues that had already emerged with greater depth. While the interview data reflects assumptions about writers from *individual* teachers of writing, the focus group reveals a slightly more social perspective, capturing a range of intermingling positions and more accurately replicating our disciplinary conversations. For a broader discussion of methodological assumptions and conceptual grounding, please see Chapter 3.

Methods

This section describes the specific methods employed in the focus group study, providing (in separate subsections) overviews of participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. As with the interviews, the project was primarily descriptive, but utilized a more "focused" approach by beginning with the categories established during the interview transcript analyses.

For purposes of this study, a focus group can be broadly defined as a group of similar people brought together to discuss a "focused" topic in the context of a directed, moderated, and interactive group discussion. Though they have thrived in the for-profit sector since the 1950s, focus groups were not employed widely by academics until the 1980s (Fern, 2001). They are particularly apt for my research questions for a number of reasons. Focus groups, like interviews, are useful for examining participant perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Krueger and Casey, 2009; Berg, 2004, Fern, 2001). They

are most appropriate when researchers are "addressing a particular topic of interest" (Berg, 2004, p. 100) and want to gain a "range of opinions simultaneously" (Fern, 2001, p. 17). And, as Popham (1993) notes, focus groups are especially effective when addressing an "education problem or topic" (p. 33).

When executed properly, focus groups are a highly "dynamic" means of gathering data (Berg, 2004). Their primary advantage is the element of interaction. Through focus groups, participants not only interact with the interviewer, but with one another, allowing their reflections to most closely resemble the discourses I hope to probe and describe. Such discussions can produce data and insights that would be less accessible outside of a group setting. Wilkinson (2005) praises the "synergistic effect" of focus group interaction for allowing participants to react and build on responses of other participants, leading to more complex and elaborate conversations & assertions (p. 180). This "chaining or cascading effect" creates more fluid conversations wherein "talk links to or tumbles out of the topics and expressions preceding it" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 182). In this sense, meaning in a focus group is not simply "co-constructed" (as with interviews), but collectively constructed by *all* members of the group. Because of this constant interaction, focus groups tend to produce more "unexpected insights" than single-participant interviews (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 182). The use of focus groups, then, encouraged participants to discuss the "writer" in a more conversational setting, allowing me to observe their utterances as part of a larger discourse.

Krueger and Casey (2009) provide a checklist to help researchers determine when to use focus groups (pp. 20-21). This study meets their criteria, especially in that it seeks to "uncover factors that influence opinions" (p. 20). Moreover, my study seeks "a range

of ideas or feelings people have about something", as well as an understanding of "differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people" (p. 21). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Krueger and Casey recommend the use of focus groups when the specific "language" of participants is important. And our language—how we *talk* about what we do—is fundamental to my project.

Methods: Participants

I attribute the rich interactions and discussions of this group, at least in part, to its manageable size. Researchers typically suggest 5-8 people as the ideal number for focus groups, but recommend smaller groups for complex topics requiring more depth and insight (Krueger and Casey, 2009; Berg, 2004). Because the core issues and terms in this study are so contested and complicated, I limited my focus group to 4 people. I sought a group that was big enough to account for diversity of opinion, but small enough to allow everyone a chance to talk. Participants were speaking on an area of expertise and not an unfamiliar topic. These teachers, who were discussing their *own* practices of teaching and writing, had a great deal to say, and operating with fewer participants helped ensure that no one's perspective was left out. In addition, I wanted to leave room for extended asides and reflections, and such tangents are more practicable with fewer participants. Perhaps most importantly, large groups—as many experienced focus group researchers note (e.g. Fern, 2001, Berg, 2004) — can be extremely difficult to moderate. In limiting the amount of people who participate, it was easier to facilitate and steer the discussion.

Thus, the focus group consisted of four participants of varied backgrounds (see Figure 6.3). As with the interviews, pseudonyms are used to conceal participants' identities.

Figure 6.3 — Participant Background Information/Focus Group

Participant	Institution	Title	Education	Years of Experience	Pedagogical Background
Dan	4-year research university	Assistant Prof. (non-tenure-track)	Ph.D.	22	Classroom teaching, esp. technical and professional writing
Gilda	4-year research university	Doctoral student and instructor	M.A.	8	Writing centers, classroom teaching
Cal	4-year research university	Doctoral student and instructor	M.A.	4	Classroom teaching, tutoring, creative writing
Laura	4-year teaching university	Assistant Prof. and doctoral student	M.A.	12	Classroom teaching, ESL, Basic Writing

Participants were recruited by e-mail, using an IRB-approved recruitment script (see Appendix A), and were compensated with a $10 gift card for their participation in the study. They were selected on the basis of their availability and range of experience. Compared to the interview participants, this group was more similar in terms of expertise and rank. This helped me to avoid a pronounced "power differential" during our discussion, allowing me "to create an environment where all participants feel comfortable saying what they think or feel" (Krueger and Casey, 2009, p. 22).

All participants were experienced classroom instructors, having taught all levels of composition (including developmental classes), creative writing, technical writing, and business/professional writing. Only one of the participants was tenured, but two had published in the field, and all four considered themselves scholars as well as teachers. I included three doctoral students in the interest of bringing new voices into our scholarly conversations (see Chapter 3 for my rationale behind this). As with the interviews, I

welcomed writing administrators[55] and tutors (graduate level only) into the conversation as "information-rich" respondents (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Not only are their perspectives are invaluable to these conversations, but their inclusion seemed to engender fruitful and varied interaction between focus group participants.

Methods: Procedures/Data collection

Focus groups have the advantage of being a highly flexible research method, and can be tailored to the needs of a particular study (Fern 2001, Berg, 2004). Krueger and Casey (2009) insist that "the study and situation should dictate" how a group is to be assembled, administered, and analyzed (p. 22). Likewise, Fern (2001) suggests that focus group researchers avoid "methodological prescriptions" and instead depend on the "research task" when designing a project: "Each researcher can adjust the methodological factors of his or her group research to fit the unique characteristics of the research task" (p. 3). My focus group followed suit, and was conceived and structured with my research questions and specific focus in mind.

The group was conducted in a comfortable, non-threatening environment, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2009). The participants, who were not widely dispersed geographically (I acknowledge this as a limitation), were involved in choosing the specific location: a small meeting room at a local university campus. The focus group, which lasted one hour and 50 minutes, was video-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The use of video allowed for a more thorough analysis of the whole rhetorical exchange and, perhaps more importantly, enabled me to distinguish between different participants

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[55] By administrators, I mean WPAs, writing center directors, etc. – people who may not be teaching in the classroom, but who nonetheless influence pedagogical theory and the discipline's notion of writer(s).

during zealous discussions. I could actually *see* who was talking, which helped me make sense of crosstalk and overlaps and accurately transcribe our discussion.

Like interviews, focus groups can be structured to varying degrees. My group was fairly unstructured, allowing free, open conversation about simple prompts. Less structured approaches are recommended when participants are personally committed to or involved with the topic (Morgan, 2001). Indeed, a group of writing teachers focused on writers and writing had no difficulty sustaining a discussion. In fact, because of their intimate connection with the topic, I occasionally experienced what Morgan (2001) terms a "magic moment;" that is, "the group goes right where you want it to, without any help from you" (p. 148). I acted as moderator, keeping the discussion on topic and moving forward. Krueger and Kasey (2009) warn that the interviewer shouldn't be "in a position of power or influence" in a focus group (p. 6). I therefore took particular care to present myself as a fellow teacher and writing scholar. My explicitly stated goal was to explore beliefs and assumptions—not to judge or evaluate them. Of course, as moderator and researcher, I *did* have a kind of authority that the participants did not. I thus strove to remain cognizant of my own positioning at all times, keeping in mind the words of Thomas Newkirk, who reminds us, "those who turn other people's lives into texts hold real power" (1996, p. 14).

The focus group questions (see Appendix D), as with the interviews, were broad-based vehicles for reflection, meant to spur participants towards further conversation. There were no "right" or "wrong" responses and no pre-established categories for responding; participants were free to share any information they felt was relevant. Open-ended, non-standardized questions (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) allow a

researcher to explore complex issues without limiting the field of inquiry, and generally produce richer and more detailed data (Punch, 2009). My questions became progressively more "focused" as the group's discussions took shape. I honored the participants' conversational trajectory, allowing for even more diversions and tangents than in the interviews, encouraging them to "speak freely and completely" (Berg, 2004, p. 100). In some cases, I utilized methods that went beyond conventional interview questions. For example, I had participants write lists in response to questions (e.g., "what does a writer do?"). I also asked them to respond to specific notions of writer(s) from within the discipline by showing/reading a quotation and asking them to discuss. Throughout our discussion, I encouraged participants to draw on their own classroom experience through the use of "think back" questions (*think back to a time when…*). Krueger and Casey (2009) cite this as one of the most effective means of stimulating data-rich talk.

There are some limitations to focus groups as a method. Perhaps the greatest limitation, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, is the narrow framing of the study itself. While it offers the advantages outlined above, it does not—due to my selective framing and coding process—increase the validity of or "test" the findings from the interview study. And as with the interviews, the presence of my own subjectivity must be acknowledged; an unavoidable difficulty with focus groups (and most forms of qualitative research) is that the results are influenced by the researcher's presence or his/her reading of the group's discussion, raising potential questions of validity. I nonetheless made every effort to allow participant responses to dictate the direction of the conversation. As noted in Chapter 3, I take a constructivist view of research, such that my participants and I make meaning *through* discourse; in this sense, I view participant

representation as "more rhetorical than reportorial" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003, p. 14).[56] With these limitations in mind, it must be noted that results from this focus group may not generalize to those outside it (Berg, 2004; Fern, 2001).

Another limitation is that interaction—the "hallmark" of focus group research—is itself quite difficult to analyze (Wilkinson, 2005). Some even see the interaction of a focus group as a detriment. Indeed, the presence of other participants unavoidably affects both opinions and people's willingness to voice them (Berg, 2004; Krueger and Casey, 2009). Personal viewpoints may be more extreme or less verbalized in a group. As a concept gains supporters within a focus group, doubts and deviations from it are less likely to be expressed. This can lead to "groupthink" (Janis, 1972), a well-known phenomenon where group members' desire for harmony and consensus leads them may downplay their own opinions and perspectives. Groupthink is less likely in a smaller group, though, because the majority consists of only a few people. Some (Morgan, 2001; Berg, 2004) also believe that focus group data is typically less rich than interview data. The use of focus groups is sometimes said to sacrifice a degree of depth for breadth, in that a single person will not be able to talk continuously to the extent s/he could in an interview. This point is debatable, however, as many psychologists claim that focus groups actually probe deeper levels of belief than interviews (Berg, 2004). Such concerns are less problematic for me, as this dissertation does not rely on focus groups as the sole method of data procurement. By examining the focus group data through the lens of the interview results, I avoided conceptualizing writers only with respect to this single group. Ultimately, the focus group data served as a contextualizing measure, enabling me to further explore issues of the writer identified in the interviews.

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[56] For more on my epistemological grounding as a researcher, please see Chapter 3.

Methods: Data Analysis

Both Morgan (2001) and Wilkinson (2005) note the relative dearth of focus group literature on data analysis. What little there is tends to compare and contrast focus groups with interviews. I nonetheless attempt to outline my analytic procedures with adequate depth and detail.

Some scholars (Berg, 2004; Krueger and Casey 2009) caution against viewing focus group data as directly analogous to interview data. With this in mind, data from the focus group was collected and analyzed separately as a different study. I include more extended exchanges *between* participants (as opposed to single-participant quotations) in my discussion in order to honor the group dynamic that produced the transcript. As a whole, the focus group transcript was more "data-dense" (Corbin and Morse, 2003) than the interviews. Results from both studies were viewed collectively in order to explore interconnected patterns of meaning; this chapter, however, looks specifically at the most salient focus group results.

Transcripts were coded using the categories derived from the interview transcripts. This meant that the "open coding" phase (see Chapter 3) was absent, since codes had already been established. The predetermined categories did limit the scope of inquiry (see limitations), but they also provided me with a systematic and "focused" means of approaching these extremely rich transcripts. Berg (2004) states that while focus groups sacrifice a degree of "data precision," they still can be analyzed systematically (p. 106). Transcripts were once again coded by "thought unit," wherein segments of text —which varied in length from a few words to entire paragraph — were labeled with respect to the respondents' apparent train of thought. The goal, as with the interviews, was simply to assign single codes to "homogenous stretches or episodes"

(Bakeman and Gottman, 1997, p. 68).[57] Whenever a new idea was introduced—even mid-sentence—a new code was assigned. A notable difference from the interview transcript analysis is that some pieces of transcript text were not coded. Because predetermined categories were used to examine the data, it was inevitable that I would end up with what I am calling *outlier text*; that is, a small portion of the transcript text which did not fit into the eight predetermined categories (see Figure 6.2). This is an acknowledged limitation. However, the existing codes were still applied to over 90% of the transcript text. Perhaps more importantly, the focus group study was conceived with *conceptual depth* in mind. It was less exploratory and exhaustive than the interview study; it functioned more as a means of closely examining these eight categories in a different, more interactive setting.

In this sense, my approach was more "thematic" and less "tabular" than in the interview analysis. Wilkinson (2005) contrasts these two approaches to focus group analysis; "thematic" is more open-ended and interpretive, seeking to reveal the "lived experience" that surrounds the issues being discussed, while "tabular" coding is more rigidly structured, leaving less room for researcher interpretation. A thematic analysis aims to be "contextual," pushing towards toward deeper analysis and greater understanding of situational "particularities" (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 183). In this sense, the focus group data was quite useful, adding depth to the existing categories. Such an approach is unavoidably constructivist, in that it encourages a researcher to "consider talk as constituting the social world on a moment-to-moment basis" (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 187).

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[57] A more extensive discussion about the thought unit (and units of analyses in general) is provided in Chapter 3.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the focus group transcript analysis. Unlike the previous chapters, where each category was described at length through quotations and analysis, I focus primarily on the observed tension *between* categories, particularly the Capital "W" and lowercase "w." Moreover, I explore the extent to which self-identification as a writer is perceived to enable or constrain writing, especially in the classroom. The section begins with a holistic look at the coding counts for each of the eight categories, then provides a discussion of the most salient and noteworthy trends within these results. The discussion accounts for most of the section, covering the following topics: 1) Capital "W" and lowercase "w;" 2) Writing teachers as writers; 3) students as writers; and 4) an extended look at the question: must students identify as writers in order to write more effectively?

Holistic Results

As noted in the previous section, the focus group data was analyzed vis-à-vis the categories derived from the interview study. The results of this analysis are depicted in Table 6.1 (see next page).

Figure 6.4: Focus Group Coding Counts

Types of Writer

Category	Frequency (number of instances coded)	Word Count (total number of words in all thought units coded)	Average Unit Length (words per unit)
Capital "W"	78	1871	23.99
Lowercase "w"	65	1256	19.32
Academic	45	837	18.60
Expressive	42	956	22.76

Characteristics of Writer

Category	Frequency (number of instances coded)	Word Count (total number of words in all thought units coded)	Average Unit Length (words per unit)
Writers have Power	53	994	18.75
Writers take Risks	48	925	19.27
Writers are Discourse-Specific	41	803	19.56
Writers are Readers	29	560	19.31

Outlier text (uncoded): 811 words

As with the interview results (see Chapter 4), categories have been tabulated by number of coded instances, word count (total number of words that participants used to talk about each category) and unit length. The unit lengths were generally shorter than in the interviews; this may be attributed to the interactive nature of focus group discussion, where continuous exposition from a single participant was less frequent. As noted earlier

in the chapter, there were 811 words of "outlier text" that did not fit the existing codes. Nonetheless, the categories still account for over 90% of the total transcript text. In many ways, these results mirror those from the interview study, with the Capital "W" Writer once again showing the highest frequency, average unit length, and overall word count. The characteristics of risk and power were once again stressed by participants, marked by high frequency and word counts.

The comparatively high word counts for Capital "W" Writer and lowercase "w" writer reflect the extent to which these types dominated the conversation. One participant (like two of the interviewees) made the Capital "W"-lowercase "w" distinction early in our discussion. That participants in both studies felt compelled to make this distinction points to the unavoidable disjuncture between identity and activity.[58] From that point on, it served as a lens through which other topics were examined, a sort of conversational "frame" that shaped the trajectory of the discussion. Even as the discussion shifted to other types or characteristics of writer(s), participants continued to contrast the "figure" of a writer (Cal) with the more "functional" (Dan) lowercase "w" writer, grappling with the implications of these differences throughout the interchange.

There were some slight but notable diversions from the previous study. The discourse-specific characteristic of writer(s) was more pronounced in the focus group, where it was coded nearly as frequently as the expressive and academic writer types, and was closer to the characteristics of risk and power in terms of frequency and word count.[59] This is an intriguing deviation from the results of the interview study, where the discourse-specific writer accounted for a far smaller proportion of the coded units.

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[58] The way that the identity-activity distinction troubled participants may also have been attributable to my framing and questions. This limitation is discussed at greater length in the conclusion.
[59] Word counts for power and risk were more than three times those for discourse-specific in the former study.

Exactly what caused such a disparity is difficult to say. One influential factor was probably the presence of Dan, whose background in professional and technical writing shifted the focus group's conversations in a discourse-specific direction.

A more subtle difference in the focus group results was that the academic and expressive writer types were coded with very similar frequency and word counts; this contrasts somewhat with the interview study, where the expressive writer was markedly more recurrent than the academic in the data set. I attribute this difference, at least in part, to the interactivity of the group, where these two types were more frequently weighed against one another explicitly. As one participant would discuss an expressive-oriented writer, another would invariably contrast those expressive elements with the academic writer. Of course, it might simply be that the participant sample for the interviews included a disproportionate number of expressive-minded teachers.

With four voices instead of one, the discussions generally took on a more complex character; the convergence and divergence of these categories in a conversational context often proved as intriguing as the categories themselves. Participants' answers and positions often shifted, sometimes abruptly. This occurred in the interviews as well, but in the focus group, it was more overt; participants explicitly asked to change their answers in the midst of a discussion. This may reflect the irreducibility of the "writer" identity; in the group discussion, participants had even greater difficulty conceptualizing a "writer" in singular terms.

On the whole, the focus group conversations suggest what many writing scholars already believe: that the various identities of writer are deeply contextual, so much so that the term appears somewhat diluted. Indeed, the focus group highlighted the extent to

which these observed characteristics and types suggest an identity that is not only

multiple, but self-refuting.

Results: Capital "W" and Lowercase "w" writer

A large portion of the focus group discussion was spent teasing out differences

between the capital "W" writer and lowercase "w" writer. Cal made this distinction

explicit:

> I think there's probably something to be said for the distinction between the
>
> capital 'W' writer and a lowercase 'w' writer. Everybody's a lowercase 'w'
>
> writer, but […] the capital 'W' writer, to me, is more the romantic idea of the lone
>
> genius.

As in the interviews, the lowercase "w" writer is characterized by inclusion

("everybody"). The Capital "W" Writer is once again considered a "prototype of writer"

(Laura)—a broader sense of identity that extends far beyond the mere act of writing. As

Gilda notes, "[Students] seem to think that they have to embody some abstract set of

characteristics in order to *be* a writer." Participants consistently contrast this "larger

figure" (Cal) of a writer with the more inclusive and practical lowercase "w." This

distinction was also made by interview participants, but the discussion-based nature of

the forum seemed to keep these teachers particularly focused on it. They reference both

writer types throughout our discussion, exploring the disparity between them with greater

intricacy.

Interestingly, virtually the same dimensions of the Capital "W" writer evident in

the interviews manifest themselves in the focus group; the Capital "W" writer is once

again heavily romanticized, associated with innate ability, solitude, spontaneity, and

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inimitably "shrewd" (Laura) insight. Being a Capital "W" writer is said to involve "a lot of sitting alone and being quiet by yourself" (Cal). Participants also repeatedly point to the "common perception that [writing] happens randomly" (Gilda), citing hyperbolic examples of "a writer awakened in the middle of the night by a sudden urge to sit and to begin writing" (Laura), with "thoughts suddenly popping into a brilliant mind" (Cal). Moreover, they associate the Capital "W" Writer with idea that "writing is something that someone's born being good at" (Gilda)—that "being a writer is somehow ingrained biologically" (Dan).

The group suggests that the discipline of R & C perpetuates these ideas. Cal speaks to this:

> I've used *Writing about Writing* in the past. It's interesting, because the book has all these contributing academics, but in the section about the writing process, where they have narratives from established writers talking about what it's like to be a writer…I'm pretty sure they were all fiction writers […] So it's like, 'take it from these experts,' who are fiction writers. Don't take it from John Paul Gee or someone in the discipline […] They talked about the identity of writer like it was all big W.

Cal raises an interesting point; certainly, we in R & C tend to talk about our pedagogy in a more inclusive, lowercase "w" kind of way, but the "writers on writing" pieces that populate our readers tend to come from fiction writers (e.g. Sherman Alexie, Stephen King, Joan Didion). This would seem to run contrary to our own discourses, sending the message that "real" writers are first and foremost creative writers. Laura argues that these associations stem from our discipline's ties to literary studies: "When we think about a

'writer,' we always come back to some literature-based kind of writer […] It's always a 'writer' in that sense of a fiction writer." Viewed in this way, the lowercase "w" may serve as more than just a pedagogical frame; it may represent a way for R & C scholars and teachers to define themselves against these traditions.

These results also hark back to the interview results in that the Capital "W" writer is "someone we see as more of a professional" (Dan). Cal ably articulates the group's stance: "It would be naïve to say there's not a difference between writers who get paid primarily for writing, and writers who write to function in their everyday lives." As in the interviews, a Capital "W" Writer's professionalism is associated primarily with "writing creatively" (Dan). The group spent a fair amount of time fleshing this out, explicitly contemplating whether different people who write professionally would be viewed as Capital "W" Writers. They came to define "professional" in relatively narrow terms, referring to "popular novelists" (Gilda) or "fiction writers" (Laura) or even "someone who writes poetry" (Cal). Engineers and lawyers, on the other hand, are viewed as lowercase "w" writers, since "their identity is generally not wrapped up in the writing part of their job" (Laura). Interestingly, technical writers (in Dan's words, "people who make their living writing instruction manuals") were not regarded as Capital "W" Writers by the group, even though writing might be the central focus of their job:

> Laura: But they write all the time, right?
> Gilda: Yeah.
> Dan: They do, and we might call them writers, but we, especially in this program, we tend to define writing pretty openly.
> Cal: It's too utilitarian, the writing they do. I mean sure, they're writers, sure, but I don't think this is the Capital "W," at least not how we've been discussing it. You have to have that sort of romantic component.
> Gilda: Right. If you ask students to name some writers, no one is going to name any technical writers.
> Dan: Unless they're in the technical writing program…

Laura: They see the practicality of technical forms of writing, as opposed to that, romantic notion of writing…which is that inspired moment that mere mortals aren't even capable of achieving.

Cal: I think the word, it's too big for that. Unless we've taught them to think otherwise, they're probably going to name novelists or poets.

Gilda: Maybe journalists.

Dan: Yeah…and journalists often go on to write full-length books.

Again, this reinforces the previous observation that a Capital "W" Writer is based on identity rather than activity. Indeed, a technical writer writes nearly all the time (activity), but s/he is not consistent with the more abstract figure of a writer. In this sense, the *identity* of writer is truly about perception—even if a technical writer views writing as central to his/her identity, s/he would not a be a "writer" in the sense that most people interpret the word. Dan's last statement seems particularly revealing here; this exchange suggests that the Capital "W" Writer, for this focus group, is more closely aligned with authors and authorship than the act of writing. Being a writer, in this sense, suggests something bigger—something "too big" (as Cal says) for technical writing. Cal's remark—that technical writing is "too utilitarian"—also points to a broader, more "romantic" identity. As this discussion shows, the group tended to align the Capital "W" Writer with "popular conceptions" (Laura) of writers. In this sense, being a writer may be more about how one is *perceived* than what one actually does. This might explain the heavy emphasis placed on affirmation and reinforcement (especially by interview participants).

Ultimately, this group, though they find the Capital "W" "antiquated" (Cal) and "anachronistic" (Dan), unanimously agree that "the Capital 'W' Writer is the writer that everybody thinks of when you say 'I am a writer'" (Gilda). They argue that Capital "W"

narratives are "difficult to avoid" (Laura), and tend to "limit the scope of what 'writing' or a 'writer' might be" (Dan).

Results: Writing teachers as writers

The constraints of the Capital "W" Writer were evidenced by participants' reticence to identify as writers. They were careful to note that "writer" was "part" of their identity, but "not the whole thing" (Cal); they appear tentative to identify as "just a writer" (Gilda). Laura explains: "I buy into all those stereotypes, even as I know better […] That's my inclination *not* to identify as writer. Because when I think of that word, I think Capital W." Cal recalls that he "spent more time in the writerly mode" when he was engaged in creative writing workshops. He has since "moved away from that," lamenting that he had "bought into the Capital 'W' thing." Nowadays, he is "hesitant" to use writer to describe himself, "even though it's [writing] something I do all the time."

Only Dan self-identified as a writer; however, he felt uneasy about this answer as the discussion progressed:

> D: I would identify myself as a writer. Because I reflect considerably on writing. I write considerably as well. And I write in a number of forms. And in each context, I think about that writing, whether it's e-mail […] or a grocery list, or even if I'm putting together a manuscript for publication consideration. You mentioned student, and considering yourself more a student than a writer, but…I'm a student and a writer. I'm still learning certain kinds of writing, how to refine that, but I'm a writer.
> G: I would agree with that. But…writing is not the forefront of my identity.
> L: I think I feel the same way. If asked, I would probably say 'teacher' first. And then I would be more inclined to say maybe, 'student of writing,' as opposed to 'writer.' Because I spend so much time assessing and studying writing. Moreso than actually writing.
> C: I think a part of me kind of switched. And going from writer to student, I was…less well-versed in Writing Studies […] And I'm learning now, learning a lot. It seems kind of bold to call myself a writer, in light of all the stuff we're talking about in class.

D: So I'm feeling uncomfortable about my characterization now. Because you guys seem to be saying that writer implies 'expert,' in practice, like that Capital 'W.' If you identify yourself as a writer, then you're identifying yourself as an expert writer.

L: Mine is more, the Capital 'W" thing. I think we really do buy into those stereotypes.

C: Yeah, exactly. I don't mean to, but —

G: If you call yourself a writer, people immediately make all these assumptions, and not all of them are good. My brother got accepted to the DePaul MFA program for theater. And he hears things like, 'Oh, you're an actor? Where do you wait tables?' A writer gets those reactions, I think.

L: Go and get a real job.

G: Yeah, so it's not as valued.

C: That's one loss you're going to have to be willing to accept when you take on these kinds of identities.

L: Absolutely.

L: 'Oh, what have you written?'

C: Yes, exactly.

L: I mean, that's a reason not to identify as a writer, right there.

C: People just think capital "W."

D: See, I was thinking small "w".

This exchange again points to an idea typically aligned with the Capital "W:" that being a writer means being a *good* writer. Interestingly, it also shows the hold that the Capital "W" has, even on teachers who, by their own admission, "know better." The recurrence of discussions like these suggests that participants feel compelled to define themselves as something beyond "just a writer," (Laura) lest the Capital "W" subsume other aspects of their identities. Note that Gilda states that writing is "not the forefront of my identity," reinforcing the idea that a Capital "W" Writer's identity is anchored by writing.

Dan's waffling between answers was characteristic of these conversations; focus group participants consistently pushed the boundaries of what being a writer might mean (or not). In this way, all of them were hesitant to identify themselves as anything unequivocally. While this sort of tiptoeing might be expected when academics interact

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(indeed, the hedging associated with the academic writer was present throughout the discussion), exchanges like these also reflect ways in which *any* notion of "writer" is weighed down by sociocultural baggage and romantic stereotypes. In this way, the identity of writer is closely connected to audience. What do others think if/when you call yourself a writer? How will those perceptions affect your *ethos* when you go to write? Given the lofty connotation the word "writer" has, it's not surprising that Cal would feel audacious ("bold") assigning the term to himself. In light of these seemingly inescapable associations, one has to wonder if conceptualizing a Lowercase "w" writer—one who simply writes—is even possible.

Results: Students as writers

Participants note that their students seldom identify as writers. Gilda states, "They all identified themselves doing different things [...] but none of them saw themselves as writers." Participants attribute this reticence to students' "restrictive" (Cal) definitions of writers and writing. Laura notes, "They have very traditional notions about writing, and what it means to be a writer. They don't consider themselves, in that way, even if they write electronically all the time."

Indeed, students (so participants report) saw little connection between new media literacies (in which many are proficient) and "writing." Most students, participants say, do not associate the writing activity they engage in with any kind of writer. This "irony" (Laura) is cited repeatedly during the discussion—that "virtually no students embrace that term [writer]" (Cal), even as "more students are communicating through writing than ever before" (Laura). As Gilda points out, "[Students] that do texting and Facebook on a regular basis […] don't usually consider that a form of writing. Not until *we* mention

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there's writing going on there" (Gilda). As these excerpts illustrate, participants claim that students' definition of writer(s) is invariably tied to "their definition of writing" (Dan). Dan astutely notes that "if they recognized those things [Facebook, texting, and e-mail] as writing, then they could say, 'yes, I do a ton of writing'—and maybe that allows them to identify as writers." However, no one in the group recalled any student construing writing in such a way; in the "rare instance" (Laura) when a student identified as a writer, it was usually only "if they'd done some creative writing" (Gilda). This may reflect students' tendency to align "writer" with the Capital "W" Writer. However, neither "competence" (Dan) nor "prior success" (Cal) were enough to inspire students to take on the *identity* of writer. Cal maintains, "I think even if you ask the ones who said they were 'good writers,' a lot of them would say, 'no, I'm not a writer.'"

Students' reticence to see themselves as writers came as little surprise. But is this something we need to change? Do students who self-identify as writers write more effectively?

Results: Must students identify as writers in order to write more effectively?

The focus group was well aware of the disciplinary discourses encouraging students to assume a writer identity; they spent a great deal of time debating whether students *ought to* identify as writers, as well as ways in which the identity might hinder or enable writing. Their positions shifted frequently throughout the discussion, as illustrated by the following interchange.

> Dan: If you identify yourself as a writer, you're going to think about your writing more, I think. And just…do what it takes to be a better writer. If I don't identify myself as a writer from the start, then I'm not really going to put much effort into the task.
> Phil: So, would you say you…can't write effectively without assuming that role?
> Dan: Yes.

Laura: Mm hmm.

Cal: Hmm…well, I think you can write, to get work done, in a work situation, without identifying a writer.

Dan: OK, wait…I want to change my answer.

<laughter>

Dan: Because the texter doesn't generally identify himself or herself as a writer, yet may be incredibly proficient within that texting discourse. So, based on that definition…oh, I don't know. I think…I think I say 'no.' You don't have to identify yourself as a writer to write —

Laura: Yeah, I can qualify that with all sorts of things. I was thinking of academic writing. If I could put something about academic writing in there, then it becomes a stronger statement for me. But I think you're right, when we're talking about texts and other electronic forms of communication, it's not necessary for them to think of themselves as writers. So yeah, I want to change my answer a little bit, too, I guess.

Cal: Identifying yourself as a writer probably makes it *more likely* that you'll write effectively in more situations.

Gilda: Right. I still think it matters, whether they identify or not.

Laura: Yes.

Initially, Dan and Laura answer this question affirmatively, but their positions change as the discussion progresses. These shifts do not appear to suggest inconsistency; rather, their perspectives seemed to evolve as they listened to their peer's assertions. This question required the participants to reconcile some seemingly incongruous beliefs, which led to a great deal of hedging and qualifying of their statements. The discussions surrounding this question were, above all else, cautious.

When Cal stated, "Identifying yourself as a writer probably makes it *more likely* that you'll write effectively in more situations," participants agreed, and began to hone their positions. Both Laura and Dan insist that identifying as a writer is a "critical step" (Laura) for a beginning college writer, but both conceptualize this "step" in terms of lowercase "w" writers. As evidenced by Dan's early assertions in the previous exchange, the identity of writer is often associated with self-efficacy, reflection, and investment in

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the writing task. These advantages were said to be more pronounced if students were

pushed towards the lowercase "w" writer. Dan speaks to this:

> When we talk about 'writer,' I guess I'm thinking about that broader kind of
>
> scope. But I recognize that a lot of our students don't necessarily get that, and
>
> have a more narrow definition. I think part of our job is to open that door and
>
> broaden it.

In this sense, the lowercase "w" invites students into a more accessible identity, opening

doors instead of closing them, as the Capital "W" was thought to sometimes do.

Identifying as a writer is an "opportunity to empower" a student, as long as the definition

is expanded beyond the Capital "W" stereotypes.

Laura explicitly advocates a move away from Capital "W" Writers and towards

lowercase "w" writers:

> I see that as wholly beneficial to the student, to identify as the lowercase 'w'
>
> writer. I think coming in, because so much of what they're going to be doing in
>
> the academic setting centers on writing, that it would be very helpful to them to
>
> see that it's not this elite or specialized skill or talent that is only reserved for
>
> certain people. I feel like if we were able to have them all see themselves as
>
> lowercase 'w' writers, they could start *without* that mental barrier.

Indeed, identifying as a writer is viewed as a "powerful place to start," (Cal) but only if

students can think beyond the clichés and myths associated with the Capital "W." For

Laura (and countless other writing teachers, no doubt), these myths constitute a "mental

barrier" that the lowercase "w" can help them overcome. Gilda worries that this

distinction is lost on students, and argues we should "make the differences explicit."

"Otherwise," she states, "students tend to identify themselves as only one type of writer."

Due in no small part to rich exchanges like one above, the discussion gained a

degree of nuance as it evolved. Increasingly, participants focused less on whether

students should identify as writers (or not) and more on the advantages and disadvantages

of seeing oneself as a particular *kind* of writer. The lowercase "w" writer seems to be the

only writer these teachers feel comfortable explicitly advocating in the classroom. The

Expressive and Capital "W" Writers (which this group views as very closely aligned) are

linked with too many "problematic associations" (Dan), while the academic writer is

"generally resisted altogether" by students (Cal).

As the conversation proceeded, participants became increasingly concerned about

the kinds of writer(s) students might conceptualize. While they acknowledged that

writing is, on some level, expressive, the group seemed particularly leery of advocating

an expressive writer in the classroom. They cite the personal narrative as an assignment

that teaches (sometimes inadvertently) students the "the wrong lessons about writing"

(Gilda):

> C: I'm just not comfortable with reading those personal narratives, for a number
> of reasons […] Let's be honest about this. I'm your audience, and here are some
> things I won't be comfortable reading. There are some things that are better off
> put in a journal or talked about with a psychiatrist or something. I just can't
> handle those things, as a teacher. I mean, how am I supposed to grade something
> like that?
> L: Right.
> G: Oh yeah.
> C: How am I supposed to evaluate something that has such serious meaning for
> you?
> L: Exactly…that exercise has always struck me as a very strange one to begin
> with. And it's not the narrative part of it that bothers me. I think that a narrative
> way of introducing, especially beginning students, to writing, it's a good way for

them to get their feet wet. But the personal part of it always struck me as kind of strange.
C: I mean, we tell them to be writers, and then we start with this assignment. *Of course* they're going to interpret it as this personal outpouring —
D: This is why I avoid these kinds of assignments in my classes.

This group views the expressive writer as a particularly problematic subject position for a student to assume. They cite its tendency to "mislead" (Cal) students, leading them to conceptualize a writer in a "narrow" (Gilda) or "overly personal" (Dan) way. Moreover, this exchange reveals another theme that harks back to the interview data. Evaluation of writing—especially expressive writing—is often interpreted as an evaluation of the writer ("how am I supposed to evaluate…"). As teachers of writing, are we grading essays, or are we grading students? Like those in the interview study, these participants point to issues of self-exposure that may plague an expressive writer. For example, Dan states, "If I perceive that I'm exposing myself in my writing, I may limit what I say or how I say something […] I might use more hedging language, perhaps…but I might just go silent." Laura similarly asserts we have a protective "self-editor" that keeps us from revealing too much, especially if we believe that "it's really us we're putting out there."

Participant responses indicate that the Expressive Writer is typically aligned with the Capital "W" writer, making self-exposure even more difficult to avoid. The more romantic view of writing typically associated with the Capital "W" evokes a writer who is "laid bare" (Cal) on the page. Gilda states this explicitly: "When we talk about helping them to be writers, most of them are probably thinking about that Capital "W," expressing their deepest thoughts and laying their hearts and souls on the page." As Laura points out, "No matter what we write, even a journal or diary that no one else ever sees,

putting our thoughts on the page is very much an act of exposing ourselves." This can be problematic, however, because "students don't always want to do that" (Laura).

Some participants insist that the lowercase "w" can help some students overcome a fear of self-exposure. Dan argues:

It doesn't have to be *you* on that page. If you're aware of the rhetorical situation, it's all constructed. It's more about the written task and the audience. I'm not saying that you aren't in there somewhere, but with the kind of writing I teach, it's not always a soul‑baring exercise.

To prove this point, Dan asked the other participants if "any one of us has done a piece of writing that we felt was contrary to who we are?" All the participants answered in the affirmative. In this sense, one of the advantages of the lowercase "w" is that it "doesn't dwell on things like self-expression" (Gilda). The lowercase "w" does not appear to necessitate the commitment to writing and self that the expressive or Capital "W" Writer does; this may, Dan suggests, make some would-be writers more comfortable putting words on a page.

Ultimately, participants insist that teachers must reinforce the right kind of writing to make the "right kinds of writers" (Cal). Cal shared an anecdote (italics mine) that really drove this point home:

One of my students put together this really interestingly braided, fragmented thing with lots of poetry and cool stuff in it, and it was way way outside…anything else anybody had done. And she got a really high grade on that, partly for going out on a limb. It was really well done […] I strongly encouraged it, probably with lots of exclamation points and stuff like that…but, from then on, she just stuck with that.

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She never changed. When it came time to put together a formal research essay, even though we had conferenced about it, and I told her to tone it down a little bit, she turned in this really avant-garde sort of thing, and it just didn't transfer. So yeah, it was actually dangerous, in her case, to find this voice and stick with the same expressive approach. And I feel like I'm partly responsible for that […] *If we want to encourage the right kinds of writers, we have to be careful about what we praise...or criticize.*

This account speaks to the way that teachers tend to reward risk (as discussed in Chapter V); the student received a high grade, largely for "going out on a limb." In this instance, though, Cal had inadvertently taught his student to be a *particular kind* of writer, and she was unable to adapt her writing to less expressive genres. That students construe feedback too narrowly is probably not surprising to most teachers; however, Cal's story suggests that students' identities as writers (or not) are also hanging in the balance. Teacher feedback matters, affecting and effecting the kinds of writers our students decide to be.

Despite the potential problems in getting students to identify as "the right kinds of writers," participants nonetheless argue that assuming the identity of a writer *can* be empowering; indeed, "power" is the most frequently coded characteristic of writer. As in the interviews, self-efficacy and positive reinforcement are viewed as major benefits. Dan maintains:

Students who seem to identify themselves as writers take on a certain level of confidence with their writing [...] At the same time, those students who define themselves not as a writer are more timid or hesitant […] They expect a lot more

assistance, or they don't put forth much effort because they've been told they are not very good writers. You can see the difference in the writing, I think.

Dan's statement is consistent with the interview responses and much R & C literature, where students are urged to see themselves as writers in the name of "confidence." This dimension of the category of "power" is once again tied to better performance as a writer. Dan implies that the more confident writer will put in more effort. Perhaps more interestingly, the idea that he can "see the difference" suggests that he perceives the self-identified writer to be more effective. The last part of this passage ("they've been told they are not very good writers") speaks directly to the power of affirmation discussed at length in Chapter 5, pointing once again to the importance of reinforcing one's sense of self as a writer. Statements like Dan's suggest that teachers might well help students by affirming them as writers.

The other participants agree, to varying degrees. Cal explicitly states that "positive feedback will result in a confidence boost." He argues that thinking of oneself as a writer affords someone "a certain currency that you didn't have before," and insists that people assume the identity for a host of reasons beyond self-expression:

> C: I was asked in a creative writing workshop I was in…the professor asks, 'why do you guys want to write stories?' He asked at the beginning of every semester. So it's like, why should I be a writer? And everyone had these romantic big "W" answers. You know, like expressing themselves and stuff like that […] And the answer I gave the first time around was just, well…'you know, to get girls!'
> D: \<laughing> The real reason we write.
> C: Because…well, I was half kidding. Maybe a quarter kidding.
> \<laughter>
> P: It's part of the reason I picked up guitar.
> C: Sure, yeah. The kind of girl that I liked would be the kind of girl who would like a writer. So I thought I would become a writer.
> D: It's a screening process!
> \<laughter>
> L: It's a noble pursuit.

G: So people think.

C: I mean, there are other more honorable reasons, but that can really be a big determining factor.

In this sense, the identity is often viewed as "noble" and praiseworthy, particularly in the Capital "W" sense. This may lead people to feel empowered by associating themselves with it. Laura goes so far to say, "I feel like, if they can see themselves that way, their writing will become better."

Participants are careful to note that writerly identity is unstable, attributing its less-than-static character to "changes in accordance with different situations and audiences" (Dan). This, of course, suggests the rhetorical awareness of the academic writer. Due to inevitable shifts in audience and context, participants suggest that students might need to identify as *multiple types of writers* to write effectively. Laura likens this to code switching: "If students were able to identify themselves as different types of writers, it's kind of like code switching. Because when they're in certain contexts or situations they're expected to write one way, and in other situations they're not." Gilda also speaks to this:

I think I've been presupposing that someone must just identify as a writer, and not anything else. Like, I'm sitting down. I'm writing. So I'm *just* a writer right now. But our students can identify in all these different ways. It's not like there's just one kind of writer. Even here, now, all of us are different kinds of writers…that is, if we even see ourselves as writers at this point.

Dan also speaks to the need for students to identify "not just as writers." Cal talks about the writer identity "in a cyborg sort of way, where you can collect and reassemble yourself […] Maybe 'writer' is like a useful role to take on, as opposed to this identity

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you have to totally embody." Statements like these are a way for teachers to push back against the all-consuming bigness of the Capital "W." Like many of the interview participants, these teachers understand the *commitment* that the term writer seems to imply. In terms of actually writing effectively, it might well be more productive to think of "writer" as a fluid "role" rather than an "identity." Huot (2002) and Brooke (1991) have suggested as much.

In the end, participants end up hedging their answers. Cal muses, "I think it would help if they did think of themselves as writers…*more* of the time."

Chapter Conclusions

On the whole, the trends in this study closely match the preceding study. The categories derived from interview transcript account for over 90% of the verbal transcript data. Despite some divergences noted earlier in the chapter, the coding counts were relatively similar. More importantly, the focus group provided much richer discussions about the Capital "W," reinforcing its status as the category most often associated with the term "writer." These participants had difficulty discussing *any* notion of writer without including (or openly excluding) the Capital "W" in the conversation.

With respect to the new research question (does a person who self-identifies as a writer write more effectively?), participants tread lightly. The benefits and constraints of the writer seem to depend greatly on the type(s) and/or characteristic(s) being conceptualized. Participants seem aware of the somewhat self-refuting nature of their responses; most see value in the writer identity (or role), but they hesitate to fully endorse it as a pedagogical goal. In a concerted attempt to sum up the discussion, Dan

encapsulates the group's viewpoint quite succinctly: "I think we're saying one doesn't *have to* identify as a writer in order to write. But it certainly helps."

In the subsequent and final chapter of this dissertation, I will summarize and synthesize findings from both studies, cite a number of limitations, suggest directions for future research, and offer some closing comments about the writer.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Writing—the setting down of words—is an ordinary enough activity [...]; there's nothing very mysterious about it. Anyone literate can take implement in hand and make marks on a flat surface. Being a writer, however, seems to be socially acknowledged role, one that carries some sort of weight or impressive significance—we hear a capital "W" on Writer [...] Happy the writer who begins simply with the activity itself—the defacement of blank pieces of paper—without having first encountered the socially acknowledged role.

- **Margaret Atwood,** 2003, p. 3-4

Chapter overview

This final chapter discusses noteworthy implications of my findings with respect to my research questions. It is divided into three sections. The first section summarizes and synthesizes the results of both the interview and focus group studies and their ramifications for the writing classroom. Section two identifies and examines the limitations of this dissertation, suggesting possibilities for future research. In the third and final section, I argue (in light of the results) that the identity of writer may be too tenuous and unstable to continue to serve as a pedagogical goal. I end the chapter by offering some closing comments about the study as a whole.

Section 1: Summary and synthesis of results

How do postsecondary writing teachers conceptualize the identity of "writer"?

Viewed together, these two studies offer some important insights for R & C and Writing Studies. First, despite the prominence of the term "writer" in our disciplinary conversations, almost no prior research has described "writer" identity with this degree of depth. Further, these two qualitative studies situate the discourses of *current* writing teachers (including some whose voices are less prominent, i.e. adjuncts and graduate students) within themes that have long dominated R & C scholarship. Participant responses reinforce the centrality of "writer" identity to our pedagogical theory and practice. Moreover, these studies depict in great detail the ways in which writer identity plays out in the classroom, as well as how various conceptions of writer may affect one's inclination to write. Though the impetus for this research lies in postsecondary Composition Studies, the implications of these broad categories extend across disciplines and grade levels.[60]

To review, the central study in this dissertation (ten qualitative interviews) revealed eight categories of writer constructed in participant discourse. These include four *types of writer* and four *characteristics of writer*. Many of these categories reflect ongoing themes in R & C scholarship, suggesting that our scholarly discourses are relatively indicative of how contemporary writing teachers talk about writing and writers. However, the tension between many of these categories points to unresolved discrepancies about what "writer" means. The difficulty of reconciling these disparate

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[60] It bears mentioning once again, however, that the focus of this dissertation was not K-12 pedagogy; consequently, the results, while relevant, may not have a one-to-one correspondence to these classroom settings. Some of the key differences between postsecondary and K-12 pedagogies are discussed briefly in Ch. 1.

conceptions (Capital "W" and Lowercase "w," Expressive and Academic, Power and Risk) is evident in participant conversations across both studies.

The most salient theme in both studies was the near-constant presence of the *Capital "W" Writer* in participant discussion. While most sought to distance themselves and their students from this category, some participants still perpetuate the mythology associated with it. The frequency with which the Capital "W" Writer appears in the data set (despite many participants' resistance toward it) was somewhat surprising, since (for many) this might point to a somewhat dated notion of writing and writing instruction. Many participants seemed fully aware of postmodern and social theory, but still found it necessary to explicitly invoke these romantic narratives—if only to decry them explicitly. And even as teachers pushed away from romantic traditions, many posit (in certain circumstances) an isolated, innately gifted, compulsively driven writer. There is a sense, especially amongst focus group participants, that *being* a writer means, above all else, being a Capital "W" Writer. Perhaps its defining characteristics—that is, notions of writer based on identity—constitute an inescapable connotation; is it possible for *anyone* to approach the term "writer" without considering the lofty "figure" of the Capital "W"? Was the Capital "W" Writer seemed an *unavoidable* part of these conversations? If these participant responses are any indication, the dimensions of the Capital "W" (especially the romantic ones) may be so entrenched and insistent that they *must* be addressed, if only to debunk them.[61] Even if a self-proclaimed "writer" rejects dimensions of the Capital "W," others may construct him/her vis-à-vis these associations.

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[61] Another possibility is that my questions led them in this direction. This is discussed further in the limitations section of this chapter.

The more functional *Lowercase "w" writer* was particularly reflective of R & C scholarship, and was invariably discussed in conjunction with other types of writers (most often the Capital "W"). By reducing writing to its simplest terms (a writer is anyone who writes), the lowercase "w" writer offers an inclusive alternative to the somewhat intimidating Capital "W." Focusing on the lowercase "w" writer enables teachers to push back on the aforementioned romantic narratives and focus on the *activity* of writing. It also gets connected to empowerment, a way that one can gain the "cultural capital" of the Capital "W" Writer without all of the baggage. However, keeping these two types separate seemed more difficult in practice than in theory; most participants defined a lowercase "W" writer first and foremost as *not* a Capital "W" Writer. Even amongst educators, the Capital "W" Writer still holds sway in most contexts when it comes to discussing "real writers." Case in point: looking at the guest speakers at recent conferences and conventions (most notably NCTE), one will note that the event has become a celebration of professional, not just student, writers (book signings, keynotes from writers of adult and children's literature, etc.).

A number of scholars (e.g. Yagelski, 2000; Fulkerson, 2005; Crowley and Hawhee, 2009; Allen, 2010) have even noted a revival of interest in the romantic writer, especially in pedagogical circles. Muckelbauer (2003) believes that we are seeing an "institutional emergence of romantic subjectivity" (p. 62). The continued presence of the Capital "W" narratives in the results of these studies may reflect the continuing influence of neo-romantic epistemologies on teachers. In this sense, the observed tension between activity and identity may be unavoidable. Yagelski (2000) argues that this tension stems

from culturally entrenched differences in beliefs about what it means to be literate. He argues:

> Although our culture still espouses a Romantic notion of the inspired Writer as a kind of iconic American individual, it also structures its literacy instruction — and indeed its formal education system in general—around a limited conception of the student as a collection of individual abilities and potential. (p. 34)

If Yagelski is right, problems of the writer may be part of a broader epistemological disconnect, one that becomes especially pronounced in the writing classroom. The Capital "W" Writer, as it is predicated on identity, is basically a rhetorical construct, detached from the day-to-day *activity* of writing. This study suggests that it continues to frame both popular *and* academic discussions of the term, shaping our conceptions of literacy and literacy instruction, clashing inexorably with the lowercase "w" writer that many try to replace it with. As if to illustrate this point, Tobin (2001) recalls, "I had never thought of my students as *real writers*" (p. 3).

The tension between the *Academic* and *Expressive Writers* was also striking, reflecting longstanding debates in R & C over the relative value of personal and academic writing. While participants speak extensively about both types of writers, most were partial to one or the other. The expressive Writer was denounced for misleading people to believe that all writing is predicated on personal expression, while the Academic Writer was denounced for suppressing the self in writing. Resistance to the Academic Writer was especially evident, harking back to the anti-intellectual stance of some early expressivists. For several interview participants, "being a writer" is, as Elbow once described, somehow antithetical to "being an academic" (1995). This debate, at least

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from a scholarship standpoint, is nearly 20 years old; the content of our conversations has changed dramatically since then. However, conversations similar to those in this study (as I noted in CH. 4) continue to appear on our professional listservs. That this perceived rift between "writers" and "academics" still exists in any capacity is intriguing and merits further exploration. Perhaps it represents a formative split in the field that was never fully resolved.

A number of participants lament the ways that the academic writer suppresses or removes the self from the writing. However, it might be argued that one of the most liberating aspects of writing is that your "autobiographical self" doesn't have to follow you into the text. Writing enables a writer to construct an *ethos* in accordance with audience and situation. Thinking rhetorically, preexistent characteristics that we consider fundamental to our identity only matter in a written text insofar as they relate to things like genre, purpose, audience, and context. In this sense, the person you believe yourself to be doesn't always have to match the Self inscribed on the page. Fishman et. al. (2005) speak to this, "By presenting myself […] as a character, I can distance myself from the very personal editor-audiences, who can be so debilitating that they cause either writer's block or stage fright" (Fishman et. al, 2005, 237).Writing need not be viewed as masking our "real" self; it can also be an opportunity to construct an entirely different self. A relevant question emerges: do some writers identify so strongly with an aspect of their identity that they have difficulty communicating without it?

The most salient characteristic of a writer is undoubtedly that *Writers have Power*. This power refers not just to what one can do as a writer, but also to the "level of esteem" (Lisa, I) and "increased confidence" (Monica, I) thought to accompany the

identity. In playful support of this notion, Corder (1989) writes, "I must confess that I sometimes think of myself as a writer. It's a comforting thing to do on a cold night when wine isn't sufficient" (p. 308). The teachers in this study reaffirm the longstanding belief that thinking and acting *as a writer* leads to agency. The high value placed on validation and self-efficacy support the common notion in R & C scholarship that reinforcement as a writer increases one's confidence and, consequently, his/her writing effectiveness. In many cases, this belief in writer empowerment seems to have originated in the literate experiences of the participants', many of whom felt more comfortable embracing the identity after being *told* they were writers. Their stories may explain, at least in part, why so many teachers base their pedagogies around discourses of empowerment; their own experiences with validation may support such an approach.

The empowerment associated with the previous characteristic must be understood alongside the next most prominent characteristic: *Writers take Risks*. Participants not only maintain that a writer takes risks, but that "being a writer" is itself risky. In this sense, the identity of writer is part of the risk, "raising the stakes" for those who take it on. A self-identified writer "risks" not living up to that conception of himself/herself every time s/he endeavors to write. In this way, being a writer may lead not just to self-efficacy, but also self-loathing. The association of a writer with risk occasionally appears in R & C scholarship, most notably in expressive-minded pieces. Elbow (1995) touches on the idea of risk, arguing (italics mine), "*Writing is a struggle and a risk.* […] None of us who has a full awareness of all the *trouble we can get into by writing* would ever write by choice unless we also had a correspondingly full sense of pride, self-absorption, even arrogance"(p . 81). Interestingly, his comment points to both the risks and the power

associated with being a writer. Elbow (1998) also claims to "hate following rules" (p. xvi). Indeed, the notion of risk is invariably tied to the perceived constraints of rules. Indeed, Mike Rose's (1980, 1984, 1985) work with "writer's block" further suggests the stifling effect "rigid rules" can have on a would-be writer.[62] The teachers in this study point to the "risks" a writer takes in breaking the rules—but most insist that "a writer needs to take those risks" (Kelsey, I).

Ultimately, writers *write*. This is the principle defining characteristic of a writer. But where and when do writers write? Who and what do writers write about? And, perhaps most importantly, how—and how easily—do writers write? This study reveals a multitude of competing and even self-refuting answers to these questions, suggesting that the writer, while it may be provisionally distilled to a group of categories, is ultimately fluid, multiple, and almost irreducibly intricate. Nonetheless, these eight categories and their constituent dimensions represent a wide range of the multifaceted ways that writing teachers and scholars discuss the writer, providing a launching point for future studies. Moreover, the categories converge and diverge with R & C scholarship in intriguing ways, offering valuable insights into the ever-changing character of our scholarly and pedagogical discourses.

How do teachers position/discuss the writer in relation to pedagogical practice?

This study points to rarely discussed pedagogical consequences of our shift in focus from "writers" to "writing." It was observed (most notably in Chapter V) that participants who identify as writers were more inclined to internalize critical comments and/or interpret an inability to write as a personal failing. Indeed, one of the main risks

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[62] Please note: I do not mean to imply that Rose is an expressivist, only that his research furthers the widely-held notion that rules do more harm than good.

associated with the term "writer" was the "very idea of being a writer" (Tom, I). This is particularly pronounced with the expressive writer, since s/he tends to believe that some aspect of his/her actual self is exposed on the page. When we conceptualize the classroom in terms of "writers," we may be construed as evaluating the students themselves, rather than their written work. In this sense, any criticism of writing is a criticism of the writer, and revision is akin to revising the *self*. As long as writing teachers are interested in working with writers and not just writing, then we may be perceived as evaluating *people* as well as papers. As Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999) remind us, "the shift from a product- to a process-based pedagogy becomes an invitation to interfere with not just the body of the text but also the body of the writer" (p. 45).

Again, we see the importance of the ongoing conflict between identity and activity. Is it worse to *write* a terrible paper, or to *be*, as Julie imagined herself to be after negative feedback (see Chapter V), a "terrible writer"? Certainly, scads of anecdotal evidence and even a few empirical studies support the notion that students are empowered by identifying as writers, but given the degree to which so many of our pedagogies rest on this assumption, it deserves greater scrutiny. While I do not doubt that pedagogies of self-discovery work for some, this study suggests that the "writer" identity can constrain as well as empower. Ultimately, process pedagogies that shift the focus from writing to writers are really just conceptualizing a different "product." There is still a product — the student. Pure process would mean privileging the *act of writing* over both papers and writers.

It is therefore critical that teachers of writing reflect on the observed tension between identity and activity when discussing the term writer. Certainly, many teachers

and scholars in the field have already rejected stable notions of self for an unequivocally contextual and situated notion of identity, but these studies suggest that the disconnect between modern and postmodern epistemologies is particularly pronounced with respect to the term "writer."

The takeaway is not necessarily to dissuade students from self-identifying as writers, but to critically examine our own assumptions. As Hillocks (1995) reminds us, teachers' beliefs and assumptions "have a powerful effect on what and how we teach" (p. 29). As noted in earlier chapters, participant responses suggest that teachers teach in accordance with their notion of what constitutes a writer. In this sense, how teachers construct the writer invariably influences how they conceptualize and approach their students.

Lack of new media attention

One surprise of the dissertation results was the lack of focus by participants on new media literacies, one of the most discussed topics in R & C and Literacy Studies since the turn of the century. This is due in part to the framing of the dissertation; these issues were not the focus of my inquiry, and questions were not framed with "new literacies" in mind.[63] As a researcher, this was simply a matter of drawing boundaries; the effect of new media on literacy and the writer could be an entirely separate dissertation.

Nonetheless, I expected far more engagement with matters of technology and digital literacy. Nothing precluded interview participants from broaching these issues, and some (especially Brent and Shelby) certainly did. Many interviewees note the increased relevance of the lowercase "w" writer in contemporary culture, since more

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[63] Since this lack of new media attention is so disconnected from *current* scholarly discourses about writing pedagogy, it may be considered something of a limitation.

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people are writing than ever before. The focus group participants spent a considerable amount of time discussing digital media (e-mail, texting, social networks) and the extent to which writing in these contexts makes one a "writer" (or not). Overall, though, participant notions of writer were anchored by more traditional notions of text and print. Over a decade ago, Jay Bolter (2001) presciently stated that print media "seems destined to move to the margins of our culture" (p. 2). He maintained that "this shift from the print to the computer does not mean the end of literacy itself, but the literacy of print, for electronic technology offers us a new kind of book and a new way to write" (p. 2). If this study is any indication, this "new way to write" has not (yet) produced a new kind of writer.

The lack of attention paid to new writing technologies was particularly surprising in light of their recent prominence in the discourses of multiple disciplines. The results of this study stand in stark contrast to the burgeoning body of scholarship on new media literacy, multimodal pedagogies, and "digital humanities." That said, other scholars have also noted teachers' tendency to cling to print media. Selfe and Takayoshi (2007) state that with respect to new media pedagogy, practice has not always kept up with theory:

> Although composition theories have evolved to acknowledge and study these new *multimodal* texts (texts that exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound), the formal assignments that many English composition teachers give to students remain alphabetic and primarily produced via some form of print media. (p. 1)

Cushman (2011) further notes that postsecondary English departments have been slow to embrace new media because they are low on the "hierarchy of signs," which privileges

the letter and text over other modes of communication. Kist (2005) makes a similar observation in his study of in high school English classrooms, noting that "even in these new literacies classrooms, print was still privileged as a form of representation" (p. 131). These results suggest that even as scholarship on new media proliferates, teachers may still be clinging to print media in their classrooms.

Ultimately, the word "writer," in the strictest sense, does refer specifically to print-linguistic text. Indeed, the responses of many of these participants suggest that the term may something of an anachronism, weighed down by the romantic subject/author and dated notions of literacy. Perhaps if I asked participants to define "composition," "communication," "literacy," or even "writing," the results might have been different. But "writer" seems unavoidably affiliated with a *person*, with identity. This affiliation may have kept the term from evolving as fast as the aforementioned ones. An alternate explanation is that the term "writer" has simply outlived its usefulness in these multimodal contexts. New media scholars like Kress (2003) have long maintained that "communicational change" is "challenging the dominance of writing" (p. 2). Brent speaks directly to this in Chapter 4 ("no one is just a writer anymore"), suggesting we re-conceptualize the delimiting ("culturally-loaded") "writer" simply as a "communicator."

Upon first glance, the eight categories posited in Chapters 4 and 5 might appear dated, obvious, or even naïve. I do not believe this to be the case. In many ways, they transcend old media/new media paradigms. While teachers tended to associate writer(s) with print media, these categories do not preclude writing via new media. One could, for example, conceptualize an expressive writer in a traditional *or* online context. Even the most cursory look at a Facebook News Feed will probably reveal writing that seems to

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stem from an expressive epistemology. Perhaps the New Literacies movement calls not for new categories of writer, but for a re-conceptualization of the categories that we already have.

Having talked to these participants personally, I don't think a heightened awareness of 21st century literacies would have altered their answers. New writing technologies have undoubtedly sparked paradigmatic changes across multiple disciplines, but perhaps these changes are less evident with respect to the specific *term* "writer" (even though they clearly matter in a "Composition" course). Writing is more aligned with multiple modes in our current culture—but perhaps the "writer" has not evolved beyond its words-on-a-page connotation.

With all that said—further research might *explicitly* explore the effect of technology on our notions of writer. Without a doubt, our understanding of the results of this study would be bolstered by it.

Does a person who self-identifies as a writer write more easily and/or effectively?

A central question remains: does assuming the identity of a writer engender agency? Participant responses suggest that self-identification as writer *both helps and hinders one's writing.* On one hand, the notion that writers have power one of the most prevalent categories to emerge from the data set. Much of this power is associated with the confidence that comes from being validated as—and acting as—a writer. Conversely, some participants, as noted in Chapters IV and V, appear inhibited by "the very idea of being a writer" (Tom, I). In this sense, it is the identity (and not the activity) of a writer that teachers found most constraining. The discourses constructing the identity of 'writer' can coalesce into a constraining set of quasi-rules that weighs down writing activities by

constantly provoking the question: "does this thing conform to my identity?" Making a concerted effort at identity—that is, the very act of *trying to be* —can be extremely delimiting. Identity has a way of attaching itself to us whether we like it or not, but when we actively seek out a *particular* subject position, we may overlook strategies or perspectives that challenge our conception of it. The question, "what should I do?" becomes "what would a *writer* do?" Once you *are* something or someone, the parameters for action change. Thomas Mann famously quipped that "A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people" (quoted in Hjortshoj). In contrast to our discourses of empowerment, some constructions of writer may be as burdensome as they are enabling.

Results indicate that teachers harbor several conflicting notions of writer—and not all of them are empowering. This study suggests that the self-efficacy that comes from positioning oneself *as a writer* may be accompanied by the aforementioned baggage (in the Capital "W" sense) associated with "writer" identity. In encouraging our "students" to identify as "writers," we may be exchanging one thorny subject position (student) for another (writer). Unless we, as teachers, work to unpack Capital "W" myths and truisms, our students may associate any number of them with the "writer" we so avidly endorse. Please note that this is not meant to be an admonition of teachers who encourage the "writer" identity; no effective teacher would willingly push students to embrace self-defeating ideals. However, our pedagogical approaches can sometimes have unintended consequences. Ultimately, it may be that the term "writer" is so weighed down by mythology and unproductive cultural associations that it has ceased to be relevant or pedagogically useful. As teachers, we need to avoid reification at all costs, to

help our students understand discourses not as natural ways of *being* but as contested

ideological "contact zones" (Pratt, 1991), where culturally-sanctioned practices clash

inexorably; where what matters is one's rhetorical situatedness and not the specific

subject position s/he assumes.

Section 2: Limitations and Future Research

Limitations (with some suggestions for improved/complementary approaches)

This dissertation has a number of limitations that must be noted, at both the

conceptual and interpretive level. One such limitation, as I note in Chapter 4, is the

framing of the study itself, which preemptively aligns "writer" with identity. As a

teacher-scholar speaking from within the discipline, I am unavoidably a product of R &

C's disciplinary narratives. Since the dissertation was initially framed vis-à-vis these

narratives, it presupposes writer-as-identity as a starting point. The impetus for this study

was the prominence of the writer in R & C scholarship, as outlined in Chapter 1. In

addition to the extensive scholarship calling for teachers to view their pedagogy in terms

of "writers," there were calls to more closely examine the "identity of writer" (e.g.

Denny, 2005) or "writer identity" (e.g. Ivanic, 1998). Even those scholars who did not

mention identity explicitly tended to pose the question, "*who* is a writer?", which

suggests a person rather than an activity (Williams, 2006; NCOW, 2010; italics mine).

Because my interview questions were developed from and situated in those R &

narratives, I was able to examine issues directly relevant to the discipline—but this

framing also limited the scope of inquiry. Indeed, some of my questions, while open-

ended, presume an association of writer with identity. My core interview queries, "What

does it mean to *be* a writer?" (see Appendix C, live interview script) and "What does it

mean to assume the *identity* of writer?" (see Appendix B, e-mail interview script) suggests being rather than doing, and may have influenced some participants to conceptualize a writer in those terms. The content of the interview discussions, especially, tended towards identity-based abstractions. I have argued that these identity-based notions of writer may be unavoidably associated with the term, such that one cannot discuss the writer without broaching them. However, the tendency of participants to focus on identity may also, at least in part, have stemmed from my own positioning and framing. This limitation must be acknowledged and weighed against my claims.

The framing of the study also may have unwittingly intensified the tension between identity and activity. This tension (as I note throughout the dissertation) is evident in both the scholarship and participant responses (i.e. the observed disconnect between lowercase "w" and Capital "W" writers), reflecting what I believe to be a critical issue for writing teachers. As I mention in the results chapters (4 and 5), the extent to which participants seemed burdened with the more identity-based notions of writer was striking. This, I think, reflects the scope and durability of romantic idealism; however, it may also reflect the nature and trajectory of my identity-based questions. I tried to keep the binaries (e.g. writer-writing, writer-student) of the discipline out of my questions, but some questions may have inadvertently pushed participants, perhaps not towards particular answers, but towards particular theories or strands of thought. Consider Shelby's initial response (see p. 154) to my recruitment e-mail, which was to immediately associate the study with expressivism. This was certainly not my intent, and her reaction probably reflects the extent that words like "writer" and "identity" are, for many teachers, inextricably tied to expressive ideals. My study, as it links "identity" and

"writer," was subject to these presuppositions, which may have skewed the results, leading participants to focus on expressive and/or romantic notions of writer disproportionately. In this sense, the data are somewhat troubled by (mis) leading questions.

The focus group, as mentioned is Chapter 6, is also construed somewhat narrowly, which can be considered a limitation in the broad sense. Due to my selective coding process, which utilized predetermined categories, the focus group data can only reinforce or interrogate existing themes. Certainly, the data analysis could have been more empirically rigorous. My choice to code in this was based on growing constraints of timing, logistics and scope—especially scope. There are countless ways in which to view the term writer, and it took an immense amount of time and effort to distill the unwieldy list of potential "codes" from the interview transcripts into concrete categories. All research must set boundaries, and the selective coding process for the focus group data was my way of doing so. In a practical sense, the narrowed focus was in many ways necessary for completion of this project. Ultimately, I only discarded the "outlier text," and my categories accounted for over 90% of the transcript text. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that this was the result of a *directed* search; it's conceivable, even likely, that other categories would have emerged had I approached the transcripts with a fresh set of eyes.[64] Narrowing my analytical gaze enabled me to focus on emerging issues and avoid an overly fragmented data set, but it also makes it difficult to pronounce this data as either "affirming" or "corrective," since it neither builds validity nor uncovers new themes. Certainly, it would have been useful to "check" existing categories by

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[64] I will note, however, that a "fresh" set of eyes would have meant another person doing the coding. At the point at which I analyzed the focus group transcript, I was heavily immersed in the codes and themes from the interview data set, which would have influenced my reading of the focus group.

approaching the transcripts as a blank slate. That the data so closely aligned with the previous study may have been due, at least in part, to my selective interpretation of the focus group conversation. Ultimately, what the focus group offers is a less exploratory and more "focused" discussion with the added element of interactivity, providing additional depth and context for the themes that emerged in Chapters 4 and 5.

As a whole, the results of this dissertation are, I believe, relevant, and useful, but they should not be construed as generalizable or exhaustive. The sample size (14 teachers—10 interviewees and 4 focus group participants) was relatively small. In this sense, the dissertation offers depth rather than breadth. My research process was not only subjective but selective. Given the complex, multifaceted nature of the term "writer," its scope is narrow. This dissertation looks at a particular aspect of the writer (identity) in great detail, and it provides further evidence that the activity-identity tension is an unavoidable part of discussing the term. However, it does comparatively less to describe various writing *activities* in similar detail. The results elucidate the writer, but mostly from the standpoint of identity and its disconnection from activity. A truly open-ended exploration of the term would necessitate an even broader theoretical lens and fewer, simpler questions. Framing this study through the narratives of the discipline proved valuable for gaining insight into established issues. However, such a framing also closes doors to *other* narratives.

Future research

Both writing research and instruction too often treat the writer as a point of departure, rather than as an exceedingly complex construct whose divergent epistemological trajectories are worthy of direct examination. We need, as Bawarshi

(2003) reminds us, more research that explores not only the "production of the text and its consequences," but also "the production of the writer and its consequences" (p. 12). It may well be that the term "writer" is so "culturally loaded" that *any* inquiry will be weighed down by the various associations and triggers that dominate this study. That would be a salient insight, but more studies (with different/broader lenses and frames) are needed to confirm my findings and hypotheses. Future research might assume an even more open-ended approach. I encourage researchers to examine the writer with no predetermined lens to determine if data-supported categories similar to my eight still emerge as salient.

To be more specific, an obvious offshoot of this dissertation might look more specifically (perhaps through direct observation) at how teachers' conceptions of and definitions of writers affect their practice. This would be a logical step from my two studies, which infer practice from discourse. In addition, a more direct inquiry into the effects of technology and new media on the writer would be useful.

This dissertation also highlights the need for an inquiry into *student* assumptions about writer identity. My project provides a detailed look at how R & C conceptualizes a "writer," especially with respect to pedagogy. However, student voices remain conspicuously absent from most of these conversations. Throughout both studies, participants share *their* ideas of what students believe, but the students' attitudes towards the "writer" role(s) that we construct for them remain relatively unexplored. There are few firsthand accounts of student perceptions, save for a handful of studies (Brooke, 1987; Ivanic, 1998; Sommers and Saltz, 2004; Kastner, 2010). This dissertation, then, provides but one piece of a larger puzzle. Further research is needed to explore *student*

conceptions of "writer" identity. To what extent are they burdened by the same cultural associations? One might explore how student conceptions of "writer" affect/effect their writing processes, and, more importantly, how they agree or clash with our own. Until we talk to the very people our pedagogy is built around, this research remains incomplete.

The eight categories posited in Chapters IV and V could also be the targets of future inquiries. Nearly all of these categories are complex enough to sustain a separate study. In particular, the issue of self-exposure, a dimension of *Writers Take Risks* (see Chapter V), demands further exploration. One of the more interesting results of this research centers on the discoursal self. Participants from both studies agreed that writers are always in their writing; where they diverge is in *how much* of oneself ought to be conveyed. New writing technologies, as mentioned, have made notions of writer more transparently discoursal and dynamic. Should locating one's *actual* self on the page still serve as a pedagogical goal? Responses from these teachers suggest that this question remains divisive.

Finally, this project also has potential implications for the study of the amorphous phenomenon commonly described as "writer's block." "Something goes terribly wrong," Hjortshoj declares, "when good writers try to be good writers (2001, p. 52). Indeed, the very name for this phenomenon seems to imply that the issue is localized entirely within a "writer." Given our discipline's relentless focus on the "writer" in the writing process, the role of identity in blocked writers is something that necessitates further exploration. How does one's conception of "writer" affect/effect his/her inclination to write? Future research might expand the discussion begun in Chapter VI, exploring ways in which various notions of "writer" impede or enable writing.

Section 3: Finding agency outside of writer-centric pedagogies

In a broad sense, this project led me to recognize the limits of stable notions of identity. Most participants struggled to reconcile identity-based notions of writer with actual act of writing. This tension, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, suggests a deeper problem of epistemology. The term "writer" seemed to encourage participants to conceptualize identity in singular, autonomous terms. Perhaps the word is so "culturally loaded" (Brent, I) that we may want to entertain slightly different approach.

Doing>Being

The word "writer," insofar as it presumes to define, belies its own complexity. Before we push our students towards *any* notion of writer, we may want to assume "instability of identity as a starting point" (Kopelson 19). I worry about placing too much emphasis on *particular* "selves we help our students to develop" (Brooke, 1991, p. 155). We might conceptualize our practice as teaching students to enact agency in various rhetorical situations, rather than teaching them to *be* anything in particular. One way to free students from the constraints of their own epistemological baggage is to conceptualize their world in verbs rather than nouns. Instead of encouraging a student to assert, "I am a writer," perhaps we simply encourage him/her to *write*. Verbs are active, emphasizing the fluid, adaptable nature of writing. Nouns are (or have the appearance of being) rigid and fixed. Encouraging our students to *be* writers carries the implicit assumption of a real and stable "writer" identity. Indeed, some participants speak to this. Lisa states (CAPS hers), "I find it hard to convince them [students] that they can BE better writers, but I can help them know that they can learn to write more effectively for varied purposes" (Lisa, E). By avoiding the seemingly stable term "writer" and focusing

on the act of writing, we may avoid the identity-activity tension that plagued so many participants.

Writing teachers may even need to question the notion that a person can *be* a writer in any kind of static, reducible way. There is some support for such an approach in R & C. Drawing on the Judith Butler's notion of performativity, Karen Kopelson (2003) seeks to "*dis*organize" the "identity-based pedagogies still dominating composition classrooms" (p. 19). She advocates "a doing that disclaims being as singular, unified, and static" (p. 24). While her "performative pedagogy" does not explicitly address the issue of "writer" identity, it encourages us to look beyond reductive binaries, encouraging "innumerable—and in*numberable*—possibilities for identity, rather than one bounded identity or the other" (p. 20). For Kopelson and likeminded queer theorists, the very idea of "coming out *as*" someone or something serves only to perpetuate society's monolithic constructions. In this sense, to be a writer is to concretize one's beliefs and assumptions about who/what a writer fundamentally *is*—in other words, to reinforce a category. When we teach our students to *be* writers, we may reify (perhaps unwittingly) a predetermined (possibly unproductive) "writer" identity. We must, perhaps now more than ever, expand beyond delimiting definitions of writer and push the boundaries of ingrained cultural narratives.

When we encourage our students to see themselves as writers, what are we really asking of them? Is the "writer" identity "something that emerges like a butterfly from a chrysalis" (Faigley, 1989, p. 411)? Butler herself cautions against working from "foundationalist" approaches to identity, those which claim "an identity must *first* be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated" (1990, p. 181). With this mind, it

behooves us to question the still-common notion that one must *first* adopt the role of a "writer" in order to write.

From a more postmodern standpoint, a writing student would not choose his/her identity from a list of preexisting "selves," but rather would actively construct his/her unique discoursal self *through* the act of writing. Indeed, what students *do* may be more relevant that who they think they are. Thinking rhetorically, such an approach recalls Aristotle's notion of habituation, through which a person becomes the embodiment of the roles s/he assumes. This makes *ethos* enacted and emergent, such that "we become just by doing just actions" (2.1.4). In this sense, we are what we *do*. I suspect some teachers already adopt an approach not unlike this, but I want to push our *conversations* in this explicit direction and away from the unexamined "writer"—and, in a broader sense, away from any "identity-disclosing pedagogies" (Bailiff, 1997). As student-centered pedagogues, we want to focus on the "doer behind the deed," but, in doing so, we must not forget that the doer is "variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler, 1992, p. 195). Indeed, a subject position can be a "point of departure" instead of a "place to set up metaphysical home" (Bailiff, 1997, p. 88). In this sense, one need not *be* a writer in order to write.

Broadly speaking, the results of this study suggest that the writer may be too tenuous, contested, and unstable to continue to serve as a pedagogical goal. As soon as we endeavor to say what a writer "is," we seem to deny the dynamic nature of our own epistemologies and possibilities for selfhood. Perhaps we would be better served by Bartholomae's (1990) still apt characterization of revision: "a way of working on the Problem of Writing rather than a way of fixing an individual or fixing an individual

essay" (p. 130). Instead of starting with pre-established criteria for what constitutes a "writer" and then acting upon them, we might embrace an indeterminate notion of "writing" that acknowledges the particularity of each rhetorical event. This allows a teacher of writing to account for difference at the level of each individual student, encouraging a student to act not *as* a particular self in any given situation, but in accordance with contextual constraints. Ultimately, it may be that we have routes *through* selfhood, not to selfhood, and those routes are circuitous at best. Any given point on this trajectory is unstable, transient, and contingent. In this sense, students are not "writers" (or anything else); rather, they navigate a fluid, ever-changing complex of roles that that defies categorization.

Such a pedagogical approach is not meant to be contingent in an absolute sense, such that the student is powerless to do anything but adapt to external circumstance. Rather, I would argue that student writers exist in mutually constitutive relationship with context (which itself is not a monolithic thing). It shapes them, but they also shape it. Students are both reactive and proactive; they adjust and adapt to particular contexts, but also *act upon* these contexts. In this sense, an indeterminate approach to identity does not have to inhibit agency and invention. R & C's concern has perennially been with empowering students, but this study illustrates ways in which the writer both empowers *and* impedes. As such, it may behoove writing instructors to treat writing as a process of constant negotiation—rather than a process of constant identification.

Resistance

Foucault (1982) once argued that people should seek "not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" ("Subject and Power"). Participants in both studies display varying degrees of resistance to the "writer" identity, especially the Capital "W." For

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many of them, refusing *to be* appears as a sort of coping mechanism. A number of

interview participants make strikingly similar statements:

> "I got my 'A' in high school chemistry […] So I could perform effectively, but
> that didn't make me a chemist. And I think that's kind of how a lot of my English
> students think about themselves. […] It's like, 'I can do this, but this isn't me.'"
> (Lisa, I)

> I hate math, and I don't want to become a mathematician, but I can I become
> proficient at it? Sure. And writing is like that. I think there *are* strategies that help
> people write better. But, is it our job to help everybody feel like a writer? I don't
> know about that. I sure don't want anyone helping me feel like a Mathematician.
> (Kelsey, I)

This resistance seems to be grounded in a concern about the commitment that taking on

an identity seems to necessitate. Simply put, nouns ("I *am* a chemist, mathematician, or

writer") imply far more commitment than verbs ("I write"). Participants in both studies

often refuse to apply the "writer" identity to themselves—even as they may write

frequently and effectively.

Allow me to cite another example from a former student's blog post (with

permission).[65] She writes:

> If someone doesn't like to write, I wouldn't call them a writer. Just because you
>
> do something, that doesn't mean that's what you are. I was a waitress for a while
>
> at a really crappy chicken restaurant, but even while I was working there, I would
>
> not have said, 'I'm a waitress.' That's not what I wanted to be.

This student refuses to assume the identity that her current occupation thrusts upon her.

That doesn't mean she was rude to customers or spilled on drinks on people. She claims

to have done her job very well. However, she is careful to distinguish between what she

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[65] I ask all my students to reflect on and write about the question, "Are you a writer?"

does and who she *is*. Sometimes, we need to remove ourselves from our actions in order to do them at all. All of us engage in jobs and tasks we don't like, and often, the only way to complete them is to separate the work from ourselves. Seeing oneself as a "writer" may help a number of students to write better, but for others, the only way to write at all is to remind themselves, "this is *not* who I am."

Closing Comments

In the end, do we need to proclaim ourselves *as* anything in order to write effectively? This dissertation does not offer a definitive answer. What it does is provide insight into the "terms we use to constitute our subject" (Bartholomae, 1989, p. 45). The exceedingly complex constructions of "writer" that emerge from these studies reflect the fragmented nature of even our most paradigmatic terms and ideals, underscoring the need for constant critical reflection. I thus urge writing teachers to reflect upon—and perhaps modify—the content and trajectory of our disciplinary conversations; to not only push the boundaries of traditional categories of identity, but to question the very existence of those categories; to critically examine assumptions and continually reframe the pedagogical culture of our discipline.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

WANTED: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
Dissertation, Philip J. Sloan, Kent State University
psloan@kent.edu

Who can participate? Any postsecondary teacher who has taught or is teaching Composition I or II

Compensation: All participants receive a $10 gift card for their time

My name is Phil Sloan. I am conducting research on writing and identity for my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of the project is to identify and describe the ways that teachers *talk* about writers, writing, and identity in order to explore the beliefs and assumptions that inform our pedagogical practice. I am particularly interested in examining how we conceptualize the identity of "writer."

You will be asked to respond to interview questions (both face-to-face and e-mail). These questions encourage you to reflect on your experiences as a writing teacher and probe your own perspectives on what it means to write and assume the identity of "writer." Participation will take approximately 1.5 - 2 hours. **Participation is strictly voluntary.**

While complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed, your identity and responses will be kept anonymous and confidential to the best of my ability. **Any quotations in the final written document will be attributed to pseudonyms; no participant or school with which he/she is associated will be referred to by name.** Only two researchers (an inter-coder and myself) will have access to the data. I will store the data myself when the project is complete.

Many will reap the benefits of your involvement. The valuable data procured in this study will be beneficial to students and teachers alike. The results may be presented at a professional conference or submitted for publication to a peer-reviewed academic journal. I am happy to provide a copy of the final paper and/or any future presentation/publication information.

Again, participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to answer any questions. Please contact me with any queries about the project or the specific questions. I hope you will decide to participate.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Phil Sloan
Ph.D. Candidate, Literacy, Rhetoric, and Social Practice
Kent State University
psloan@kent.edu
216-712-7735

E-mail Interview Questions

Please write answers to the following questions on this page and save as a new document. Send your replies to psloan@kent.edu**.**

Take your time in replying to the questions. Think and reflect upon your experiences as a teacher of writing; there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Try to give detailed responses, using specific examples whenever possible. Write as much as you want; feel free to embrace tangents and diversions in order to make a larger point.

1) Describe your background as a writing instructor. Include years of experience/tenure in the field, courses taught, education/training, and any related experience (administration, curricular design, tutoring, etc)
2) What kind of students do you teach? What (if any) role does identity (personal or academic, student or instructor) play in your writing classroom?
3) How do the following affect your pedagogy:
   - Institutional setting/expectations
   - the types of students you teach
4) What does it mean to assume the identity of "writer"? What does a writer do? What doesn't a writer do?
5) Discuss any (as many as you would like) of the following in relation to the writing classroom and the student writer (there may be some overlap):
   a. *Imitation/emulation*
   b. *Ownership*
   c. *Authority*
   d. *Agency*
   e. *Authenticity*
6) Is it important for student writers to have a distinctive "voice"?
7) Reflect on the following passage: *Writing is something inseparable from your total personality and behavior.*

Working Interview Script — Live Interviews

Pointed/Direct:

1) **What does it mean to be a writer?**
   - What is/are the most important characteristic(s) a writer should have?
2) Where would you say your notions of "writer" and writing come from?
   - Think back to…
3) Do your students typically see themselves as writers? Does it matter if they do or not?
   - Think back/experience…
   - Narrower: Does a person need to self-identify as a writer to write effectively?
   - Broader: How does one's self-conception affect his/her process of writing?
4) Do you think of yourself as a writer?
   - Is it important for teachers of writing to think of themselves as writers?
   - Think back/experience…
5) What does one gain or lose by identifying as a writer?
6) What factors affect the role/identity of "writer"? (content? medium? genre?)

Context/Indirect (varied by participant):

7) What/who is (or should be) the main focus of the Composition course?
8) To what extent are we *in* our writing?
   - Follow up on voice where relevant.
9) Writing (and the writing classroom in particular) has been framed in much of our scholarship as a process of "becoming" — do you agree? Discuss.
10) What (if any) is the role of identity in the assimilation of academic discourse?
11) Is the metaphor of "voice" useful in helping us understand the writer?

→**Follow up on responses and e-mail reflections**

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Questions and Prompts

1. What does a writer do? List as many things as you can.
2. Do your students typically self-identify as writers? Does it matter if they do or not?
   - Think back to…
3. What – especially for our students – what does one lose or gain with that role, by self-identifying as a writer?
   - Think back to…
4. What factors affect our ideas of a "writer"?
5. Respond (on screen): *Students must identify as writers in order to write.*
6. Respond (on screen): *Putting ourselves on the line in a relatively non-negotiable way is one of the things that makes writing difficult.*
7. Is it important for writers (especially students) to develop a "voice" when they write?
8. Discussion in relation to the classroom (list displayed on screen): *Ownership, authority, enculturation, Imitation/emulation, agency, ethos, authenticity.* Just pick any that jump out at you, one or maybe two, and talk a little bit about them. Anything that you think merits discussion in relation, to these terms…
9. Do you self-identify as a writer?

→**Follow up on responses in context**

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