

THESIS

“WHO IS ‘YOU’?”: TEACHING AUTHENTIC APPROACHES TO AUDIENCE AND
GENRE IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

“WHO IS ‘YOU’?”: TEACHING AUTHENTIC APPROACHES TO AUDIENCE AND GENRE IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

Ours is a highly digitized society, and accordingly, so are the daily practices of communication in composition classrooms. Students of the digital age bring with them a new and continually evolving language into their college writing, which, while it is indicative of the change in language processes, can be problematic. The impetus for this thesis developed through my experiences teaching first-year composition. Frustrated with the ambiguity of audience in student writing, I would ask students in one-on-one conferences “who is ‘you’?” in order to create the opportunity to discuss specific directives of audience. What I came to realize was how often their rhetorical situation changed due to social media and other forms of instant communication. If and when the digital language that forms through social media interferes with the development of student identity and authorial agency as a result of a lack of comprehension to an identified audience. Digital Natives must be approached as multilingual English language learners because they carry with them similar code-switching tendencies into the classroom, which means that it is imperative that recent trend to incorporate blogs and other methods of digital writing be integrated in the classroom as ways to connect students to the language with which they are most familiar. Through the inclusion of digital media in composition classrooms and a careful articulation of the rhetorical situation, students can begin to gain more agency through their writing. Compositionists will be better equipped to prepare students for their

collegiate careers in the formative years during enrollment in first-year composition by including narrative, literary, linguistic, and rhetorical traditions in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the nature of composition as a general education requirement, the field itself is presented with as wide an array of audiences and learning potential as the potential audiences students address in their daily, digital lives. Literature regarding enrollment, retention, and graduation rates suggest the prominent part to ensuring students succeed is to build connections with the campus in order to better visualize themselves in relation to it and society (Talbert). The core curriculum of first-year composition is unique to other general education requirements. While most campuses offer multiple course options for general education requirements in math and sciences, the English requirement is limited, with scaffolded composition courses in place to reach each student. As a field, composition studies should aim to help students engage not only in academic discourse, but in individual student development. Composition instructors are faced with concerns of how to adequately address student needs and voice in the context of the classroom, specifically in regards to students in a digital age¹. Technology in the classroom is not a novel concept, nor is it the impetus to completely rewrite the ways we teach and students learn. Rather, technology is a tool to refashion and remediate² communication. As part of the constant adjustment to written communication, the divergence of written skills increasingly complicates the transference of knowledge and abilities from writing in daily, non-academic life to academic settings within first-year composition classrooms and beyond. The concern for complete cognizance in the context of writing those first papers in academia falls on the shoulders of

¹Definition developed from Robin Goodfellow's "Literacy, Literacies, and the digital in higher education" (2011), the term "digital" is the "latest descriptive term used in education to express the incorporation into its activities of new information and communications media" and "succeeds 'computer'... 'online', 'networked', 'web-based' and the now ubiquitous 'e-'" (131). Likewise, "digital writing spaces" consist of the spaces through which students create daily compositions that adhere to genre-specific norms.

² Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's "Remediation: Understanding New Media" (2000).

composition instructors who serve as intermediaries in the transition for a traditional³ student from high school graduate to full-fledged college student. It is a delicate time, intellectually, as many students are faced with a slew of new expectations and the realization of limitations through which composition instructors are often responsible to promulgate. The result is a horde of issues to address in order to bring each individual student to his or her fullest potential and to prepare the student for the remainder of his or her academic career and eventually into the work force.

What many conversations in composition studies address is the prominence of technology in the classroom, what to do with it, and the students whose education is impacted by its presence. The discussion of technology in the classroom is not whether or not it should be incorporated, as many areas within composition studies have already argued the importance of technology in the classroom⁴, but rather what the continuous interaction with technology has on student writing and how that interaction manifests itself into the classroom, with the residual “you” intended to serve as an indicator of a broad, faceless audience. Digital Natives⁵ showcase a “discontinuity” to traditional education systems Digital Immigrants hold familiarity to, both as learners and teachers (Prensky 1-2). Exposure to technology changes the neurology of the brain, and for Digital Natives, the entirety of their lives is under the influence of technology, therefore the construction of neural pathways is drastically different than contemporaries in the field, and consequently, the instructors that implement the practices into the classroom with Digital Natives. As a result of the constant exposure to technology, Digital Natives develop a fluid

³ That is, a student who enters higher education immediately upon completion of secondary education. For the purposes of this thesis, I will limit my references to students to only the “traditional” college student as they are most affected in research and pedagogical discussions of digital natives and considerations of digital literacy. Non-traditional students pose entirely different concerns in regards to agentive selves through audience and the affects of social media on writing.

⁴ Jeff Rice’s *The Rhetoric of Cool*, as a primary example (2007).

⁵ As defined by Marc Prensky’s “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants” (2001).

language that demonstrates malleability to new innovations. Within the classroom, there is more disconnect from teachers to Digital Natives than immediately apparent, most notably, according to Prensky, with instances of Digital Immigrants' tendencies to print out emails rather than to read from the computer screen (2). In response to Prensky's urge for Digital Immigrants to "stop their grouching, and as the Nike motto of the Digital Native generation says, 'Just do it!'," multiple pedagogical approaches have developed to strategize ways to teach students of the digital age. While a complete shift for Digital Natives backwards into the language that's familiar to Digital Immigrants is harmful since it hinders the natural evolution of language, a peek into foundational practices of pedagogy is not only beneficial to reignite familiar excitement of learning in the mind of the instructor -- an excitement that carries through to the reach of the students -- but it is necessary in order for all parties in the educational exchange that occurs in composition classrooms to grow and learn. It is illogical to continue to reinvent the wheel, but progressive to consider its original form and continue to build on and make adjustments to the seminal thought. Likewise, successful teaching strategies and approaches in years past can still hold influence with a few contemporary considerations. Digital Natives must be approached as multilingual English language learners because they carry with them similar code-switching tendencies into the classroom. Aside from different understandings of technological terms and abilities to use technology adequately, digital languages and their native speakers carry malformed rhetorical traditions which are not new or novel concepts in it of themselves, but rather the application of rhetoric has taken considerable and unnecessary change. While the multilingual skills and characteristics of Digital Natives can prove to be beneficial to individually create meaning of and through text, the important rhetorical skills students should acquire in first-year composition are not being met at the fullest potential, which negatively

impacts agency⁶ in writing. A complete approach⁷ to classroom instruction in first-year composition is imperative to strengthen the foundational knowledge of rhetoric in order to improve argument in written, oral, and visual communication.

This approach to instruction calls for further reconsideration of how each field of study intersects, especially within the humanities. If, as composition instructors, in addition to a foundation in rhetorical pedagogy, we can utilize the tools within narratives of literary studies⁸ and digital storytelling⁹ to teach composition writing, we can help students gain more agency and voice because if they have a voice of their own in their writing — as they do when constructing personal narratives or engaging in discussions on social networking sites — then the audience would be identifiable, giving a more definitive direction to their arguments. While narratives are not the only option to the creation of a tangible audience, it is a method of creation students are familiar with in their daily writing in social media platforms. They create narrative identities of themselves for a wide range of audiences to perceive. Among the adjustments and considerations to teaching students to compose for a variety of genres and a variety of purposes, the issue of audience awareness has raised considerable investigation in its relation to the student/author construct. Narratives¹⁰ in composition classrooms with the added integration of digital writing

⁶ The term “agency” will be defined as individual identities, as built upon by the research of Glynda A. Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz in the essay “Crafting an Agentive Self,” specifically the discussion and definition of agency as a framework through which “individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities as competent actors in the world able to influence the direction and course of their lives. Our conception of identity is inherently multiple and dialogical. We enact the selves we want to become in relation to others - sometimes in concert with them, sometimes in opposition to them, but always in relation to them” (47).

⁷ That is, one that includes all aspects of English language learning -- literary, linguistic, creative, narrative, rhetorical, etc.

⁸ Specifically, the narratological concepts as detailed by Manfred Jahn, which will be elaborated on further in this essay.

⁹ The merging of creative writing on a digital platform elevates creative writing and narratives to the 21st century in the form of digital storytelling.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this essay, I will use the definition and discussion of narrative — specifically the rhetorical approach narrative — as outlined in J. Phelan’s “Teaching Narrative as Rhetoric: The Example of Time’s Arrow.” Phelan specifically defines narrative as “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose or purposes that something happened,” further detailing that “this definition is [his] effort, not to get as close as

spaces can increase the collaborative element to composition studies and in turn reflect the collaborative society in which we find ourselves. Furthermore, the nature of the English language complicates the use of “you” within texts because it is such a sweeping term which encompasses formal or informal, and singular or plural audiences. The quickest path to reaching an audience is through the broad “you” rather than using specific terminology. While undoubtedly most compositionists include grammar and syntax into the instruction or revision processes, I argue that a more formalized inclusion of the practices of the English language should also take shape in composition pedagogy. Although many institutions have separate “homes” for writing programs and English programs, the base of study intersect and overlap on many levels, and should therefore not exist entirely separate. The skills learned and taught are transferrable and serve to positively impact one another. Digital Natives’ identities are complex and highly evolutionary. The danger of not adequately addressing the needs of Digital Natives within the purview of their own digital language leads to misapprehension of identity within the context of the rhetorical situation. Composition instructors should not only incorporate technology in the curriculum, but do so in a way to familiarize students with ways to integrate their digital language in a specific, directed manner.

possible to the Platonic Ideal definition of narrative ... but to direct our attention to tellers, audiences, and purposes as much as to the ‘something that happened.’ In this way ... the rhetorical approach is interested in narrative as an act of telling that has designs on its audience” (219). Furthermore, I will later discuss narrative through theoretical investigations of narratology as outlined by Manfred Jahn’s “Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative” in which the basic narratological concepts are outlined and discussed as literary elements. It is through the fusion of the rhetorical approach to narrative of Phelan and the literary approach of Jahn that I will develop my argument for the place of narrative in the composition classroom to aid in students’ focus of audience and agency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students are trained to write for a grade, with mere consideration of the teacher to be the only audience, and enter classrooms well aware of the pre-established discourse community of academia and attempt to write from a position of privilege¹¹. The act of entrance into the academy for a formal education is an immediate distinction from those who do not embark on the path to a higher education. Rather than an adaptation of the jargon through which their educators and sources who influence their research communicate, it is necessary for students to understand the application of the writing skills they learn in the composition classroom as they continue into their professional, post-collegiate lives. The writing skills students gain in first-year composition courses establish the trends and abilities they have in terms of communication that will be carried through the rest of their lives. A heightened sense of the rhetorical situations — along with an integration of narrative writing structures, tools of literary studies, and English linguistic considerations — can serve to increase the schema students develop as writers in introductory writing courses to bring a set of holistic skills into their future endeavors. As discussed in Patricia Y. Talbert’s “Strategies to Increase Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation Rates,” the student integration model (SIM), first discussed by Vincent Tinto in 1987, theorizes that the social integration of students—such as developing cohesive relationships with students and faculty, maintaining appropriate learning environment, and engaging socially in school activities—increases their institutional commitments, thereby reducing the likelihood of student attrition. Students who have a greater sense of

¹¹ Reference built from Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University.” *Journal of Basic Writing* 5.1 (1986): 4-23. Print. The position of privilege holds with it a characteristic of writing objectively, or what is considered to be “academic,” and while it is necessary to accommodate and promote the development of language, the hinderance students face in their ability to write objectively -- as demonstrated in the academy -- comes from the broad and conversational “you” students use from their digital language.

belonging to the academic environment are comfortable with matriculating through the process and have a higher chance of completing their degree program (23).

Because the scope of education and reach to students within the purview of composition instructors is so vast, a key component to the instructional goals of first-year composition should be to help students in the development of identity¹² through rigorous academic support. The coursework of first-year composition allows for students to explore and make meaning through writing and reading arguments. In a rhetorically focused program, through the process of understanding the rhetorical makeup of texts and how students interact and consume texts, they can begin to understand their role as creator of arguments. It is important for students to solidly be able to identify their selves in relation to others through writing, which necessitates a thorough understanding of the rhetorical situation. Within the composition classroom, there are innumerable responsibilities for instructors. The College Section of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) addresses the needs of college English teachers as “teachers of composition and literature, of language and pop culture, of methods and mythology; *we are instructors who teach it all -- especially to undergraduates*” (NCTE.org/college, italics mine). Part of the “all” that we teach is the path to fulfillment of individual identity and agency, which is constantly formed through writing. The adaptations to identity take form through social media and the constant attempt to define one’s self in relation to the interconnected, world wide whole.

In a traditional classroom setting, as with any face-to-face interaction, identity is perceived by those with whom the author — or agentive self — is in communication. Digital identities, however, are entirely constructed and through the appropriate rhetorical approach, can be fabricated and tailored to suit the authors’ needs, which establishes his or her own authorial

¹² Specifically, identity in writing which is reflective of social identity, depending on the rhetorical situation in which students find themselves.

identity. Roger Cherry discusses “self-representation in rhetorical theory and in literary critical theory in an effort to provide a useful starting point for future studies of self-portrayal in written discourse” and argues that “like audience representation, self-representation in writing is a subtle and complex multidimensional phenomenon that skilled writers control and manipulate to their rhetorical advantage” (385). Authorial identity is the “sense a writer has of themselves as an author and the textual identity they construct in their writing” (Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox, and Payne 153). This sense of self as author must work in tandem to pre-established understandings of audience. The dialectical relationship between audience and author is inherent, because even if the author does not intend to have an audience -- such as in personal writing -- that choice is still rhetorical, as is the construction of the text, so while students and writers in online spaces demonstrate an awareness of this relationship, the transcendence of the dialectical relationship is confounded in manners of real audience. Danielle DeVoss and Cynthia Selfe aim to “add information to our understanding of these matters, particularly as they relate to college-age women who have designed and published personal home pages” through the exploration of our current understandings of “identity, subjectivity, agency, and literacy” (32, 31). The research presented by DeVoss and Selfe substantiate the creation of identities for an anonymous audience through online writing environments. Through a case study of second-grade writers, Diane Lapp, Andrea Shea, and Thomas Devere Wosley conclude that

audience awareness is an abstract cognitive concept with which even accomplished adult writers struggle from time to time. In this study, the second-grade participants demonstrated that blogging technology can help young authors construct an understanding of what the audience for their written work might require to fully understand the text and to connect to the writer as co-constructors of the intended

message. The immediacy of the feedback made possible through blog posts assisted student authors to become increasingly aware of those who might read their work (42).

The faceless interaction can indeed help students in points of revision when their audience is known as the other end of the exchange of communication. The integration of blogs and online writing environments in the classroom can, in instances as described by Lapp et. al, truly help the writing process. However, the genre of writing for academic purposes in composition classrooms becomes overly complicated due to social media and digital writing that is not easily controlled or accounted for by instructors. Students of the digital age are accustomed to writing for a broad audience that is not easily identifiable, and whose reactions and the consumption of the audience reactions are based purely on interpretation, since the actual interface is between the person and a computer screen. In oral communication, orators can gauge audience reactions based on facial expressions and tones of responses, but because there is no immediate reaction to digital writing that is easily identified or interpreted, writers in online environments communicate with little direction to audience reception. Contrary to popular conception of brain development, the brain constantly replenishes its cells and changes in a much more malleable way than previously thought. The neuroplasticity phenomenon maintains that the brain recognizes itself, dependent on sensory areas and external stimuli. Prensky asserts that “while cultural differences might dictate what people think about, the strategies and processes of thought, which include logical reasoning and a desire to understand situations and events in linear terms of cause and effect, were assumed to be the same for everyone. However this, too, appears to be wrong” (Prensky, “Do They Really Think Differently?”). The languages then that Digital Natives develop is, in fact, a different code of language than what Digital Immigrants are accustomed to because what is in the brain and how it functions continues to change experientially. Students of the past would

have been much more receptive to the teaching strategies of the educators who continue to teach, but Digital Natives exist with an entirely different language, so adjustments must be made. The Digital Immigrant teaching strategies fall on the wayside change because

Digital Natives are used to receiving information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to “serious” work (3).

The change in perception of information signifies a need to adjust teaching approaches. The shift in language and differences between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants is noted in the “‘Did you get my email?’ phone call” from Digital Immigrants to Digital Natives’ misunderstanding of what it means to “dial” a number (2). The inextricable link between thought and language necessitates language instruction to intersect with the thought processes of the learner.

Although some particular genres of digital writing can hinder the formation of identity in relation to the rhetorical situation, digital writing, when incorporated as a middle-ground for Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants, can help student writers navigate their personal roles. Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes explicate ideas of technology, self, and writing in response to the Virginia Tech shootings as produced in new media. The authors examine

editorials and short essays, online and in print, offered interpretations and commentary from an ever-increasing distance, a simultaneous new media response emerged, a dizzying accumulation of blog postings that attempted to make sense of—to account for—the violence and its perpetrator. Such postings seemed to us emblematic of a textual production combining both speed of response and disciplining of affect

in order to consider the “conflation of writing with normalizing knowledge” through texts produced during the aftermath of tragedy (146). The pervasiveness of information, the ease with which students gain access to that information, and the expansive perspectives offered through this type of platform contribute to the overall schema and experience of intellectual growth. As writing genres vary, so does the rhetorical place of writing, but too often, the transition into a new consideration of audience is left out. Carol N. Fadda-Conrey focuses on a selection of blog and online journal entries that document the siege of Lebanon in 2006 which establishes an archive of the war through the creation of narratives that “underscore the immediacy of the war experience” through cyber-blog narrations (Abstract). Fadda-Conrey’s investigation of the online testimonials provide the potential for a connection between the writer and the reader across international borders which ultimately transforms the cultural space between first-hand experiences and readers of the narratives. Roberta Rosenberg describes an activity she gave to her class post-9/11 where the students are responsible to write a narrative which tells the story of where they were during the attacks, then read and/or interpret a published essay or short story by a professional in the field about the attacks, connect their own experiences to that of the author’s, and then write a final essay about how reading the published works influences their own experiences. The focus of Rosenberg’s assignment is to help students connect storytelling narratives in a writing class to their examinations of literature in order to develop a complex understanding of the catastrophes of 9/11 which provides deeper context and a way to heal from the trauma. Hull and Katz offer a comparative case study about two authors, a child and a young adult, who utilize “multiple media and modes to articulate pivotal moments in their lives and reflect on life trajectories” (43). The discourse of social power by theorists like Foucault, Bakhtin, and Bourdieu, contemporary research on fostering agency through narratives by Glynda

Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz offer additional resources to help bridge the literacy gap through different resources and tools for learning in order to help children and adults “develop agentive senses of self” (44). Furthermore, Hull and Katz interpret through their case studies¹³ that “narratives of self - stories about who we have been in the past and who we want to become in the future - can play in the construction of agentive identities” (44). To digitize the concepts of agentive selves through storytelling casts relevancy and support to efforts in composition studies to explore the functionality of online writing environments and notions of space which inherently integrates arguments of genre as directives of space.

Facebook audiences consist of high school friends, family members, new friends from college, fellow athletes, musicians, etc., all with varied jargons for each discourse community, so when student users write, they write to either appease a specific discourse community or they write in complete ignorance of any discourse community. Jane Mathison Fife remarks at the use of Facebook as a tool to teach rhetorical analysis due to the direct interaction with audiences. Fife notes that her students discuss the familiarity of Facebook to function as “representations of the self, most features that can be seen as appeals to logos or pathos also have a strong reflection on the writer’s ethos” (558). Further in her discussion of Facebook in a composition classroom, students commented on the ways Facebook users appeal to certain audiences through their own situated ethos. The positive or negative reception of a user’s self created identity in digital writing environments is often formed through blind interactions with audiences, as many users develop what Fife terms as “this is me” versus “like me” profiles, and elaborates that “for some students, these specific ‘this is me’ profiles — even though they may not have evoked positive feelings through shared preferences — impressed them favorably through the honest ethos they

¹³ Hull, Glynda A., and Mira-Lisa Katz. “Crafting an Agentive Self: Case Studies of Digital Storytelling.” *Research in the Teaching of English* 41.1 (2006): 43-81. Print.

created instead of the ethos of schmoozing suggested by the ‘like me’ profiles” (559-60).

Audience and reader reception exists in the digital writing environment, and the judgment of audiences is placed on the author who, likely unaware of the rhetorical strategies he or she employs in the creation of an online identity, isolates the audience and diminishes effective rhetorical communication. This trend transcends the digital sphere into the classroom and onto their papers, and while it complicates their understanding of real audience, it provides a platform for the individual self to come into fruition through writing due to the enhanced sense of self and confidence through potential peer/audience approval. The self-confidence students gain from online writing and often anonymous personalities should be integrated into examinations of audience and the ways in which students self-identify as author and audience in order to develop a more complete communicative identity.

Wendy Swyt’s “Audience as a Cultural Condition: Using Popular Advertisements in College Writing Assignments” details writing assignments she gives to her students to teach them how to address, process, and understand audience. Through these assignments, similar to the assignments I give in Composition I courses to teach rhetorical analysis, Swyt guides students to an identification of audience through advertisements to achieve an introspective ownership of their selves as created audiences. Written directly on the assignment directions, Swyt outlines for students ways to identify the potential audience in various magazines who the ideal consumer is for the advertised product and how, rhetorically, the company appeals to the intended audience. Before students can begin to identify how consumers are being persuaded, the identification of the consumer must take shape. Swyt notes that “students produce facile analyses of advertising that describe advertising’s effect on ‘other people.’ Donna’s paper demonstrates how students claim a certain distance from the deception of advertising ploys” (57). Although

students were able to recognize the tactics used by marketers to sell a product to a specific audience, few recognized themselves as the audience which demonstrates a failure to understand the imperative author-audience dialectical relationship. Without the realization of self as audience, students cannot begin to formulate arguments as author adequately enough to have any rhetorical impact which stymies their agentive self. To best serve student interests and prepare them for writing in domains with actual audiences and authentic argumentative situations, students must not only be aware of this additional adjustment to writing for and within the academy, but be equipped with the tools necessary to create productive relationships through their writing.

The structure of rhetorical pedagogy in composition is based from its ideological tradition. James Berlin argues that

instead of rhetoric acting as the transcendental recorder or arbiter of competing ideological claims, rhetoric is regarded as always already ideological. This position means that any examination of a rhetoric must first consider the ways its very discursive structure can be read so as to favor one version of economic, social, and political arrangements over other versions (717).

To continue the claim of Berlin of rhetoric's discursive structure, consequently, the rhetorical situation is also discursive and malleable to considerations of adaptation due to the onset of digital writing environments. The change of student writing exists largely because of the various platforms students now have at their disposal with which to create texts. The ideology of rhetorical pedagogy and the rhetorical situation within the composition classroom must change to reflect the increased demands of students to write in multiple environments. With so many potential outlets for the reception of their arguments, the authorial voice and narrative agency is

disrupted for students. It is therefore the role of the instructor to adjust the scope of instruction to include a reconsideration of audience, and accordingly, genre and author. In order for the argument to be effectively communicated, all of the components of the rhetorical situation must be sound. To reconsider elements of audience and genre, we must also reconsider how author is constructed as a by-product of the adjustments to audience awareness and genre. Roger Cherry's investigation of ethos and persona raises considerations of the treatment of author that can be assimilated into reconsiderations of the rhetorical situation. Cherry argues that authors create under the context of either ethos or persona¹⁴ and have been largely conflated to the point of disillusionment and a lack of any semblance of understanding, especially by composition student writers.

Although linguistic literature does not ignore the indefinite use of "you" in the English language, its complexities are enhanced and further isolate audience in student writing which has undergone tremendous evolutions through the influence of digital writing environments. What I argue is a consequence of the seemingly convenient plurality of *you* because, as discussed by Eric Hyman as a term that "does not distinguish number (especially), gender, or formality," the "*indefinite you*"¹⁵ hinders the writers' ability to adequately address audience semantically through text, which is detrimental for beginning writers in composition to conceptualize a real audience to write to and to recognize through analysis of text (165). As discussed previously, the comments I write on students' papers and conversations we have as a large group or in one-on-one discussions lead to an investigation and clarification of "who is 'you'?" in their writing.

¹⁴ The etymological outline and definitions Cherry provides hold extreme value to my research because of the rhetorical emphasis and the impact the terms have on ways students write. The distinction between the two terms, according to Cherry, results from the treatment of ethos by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* as the rhetors' need to "portray themselves in their speeches as having a good moral character," whereas persona, through its Roman origins, "has been employed in literary critical theory to refer to an intentional 'mask' a writer adopts in the written text" (392-3).

¹⁵ Eric Hyman builds his definition of the term "indefinite" through Grelling's terminology which argues for *indefinite* to serve as an "autological term" to describe itself. Furthermore, Hyman broadens *indefinite* to encompass its semantic, "ordinary" and without boundaries (165).

Through careful examination of semantics, an accurate declaration of the intended *you* in composition narratives can strengthen the argument by a clear identification of the intended audience, which consequently enhances the components of the rhetorical situation and individual agency for composition students. However, the linguistic discussion of the English language is oftentimes left out of composition pedagogy, which focuses more on the strength and ability of student writers through intellectual awareness rather than the importance of distinguishing semantic structures. A nonlinear approach to composition pedagogy to include, as intimated by Bawarshi of the reconceptualization of genre through “functional and applied linguistics (Bhatia; Halliday; Kress; Swales), communication studies (Campbell; Jamieson; Yates), education (Christie; Dias; Medway), and most recently, rhetoric and composition studies (Bazerman; Berkenkotter; Coe; Devitt; Freedman; Miller; and Russell)” calls for the inclusion of all literary and linguistic fields to apply the traits that overlap in writing in order to better equip students for their roles as author in a highly communicative society (335). The indefinite audience — Hyman’s *indefinite you* — convolutes the argument. The “indefinite grammatical person,” as argued by Hyman, “sometimes denot[es] the speaker, sometimes denot[es] generically or indefinitely nearly everybody or anybody, and sometimes even denot[es] the person(s) addressed, and very often denot[es] some overlap of two or more grammatical persons” (165). The multiplicity of potential audiences, while simplified because of the lack of terminology, adversely affects reception of an argument which isolates the prospective and intended audience.

ARGUMENT

Facebook and Twitter¹⁶ impact the way students write and view writing. Their understanding of writing in the digital sphere and the language therein is then transferred into the classroom without any real distinction between writing genres and audiences. Now, more than ever, students are exposed to the creation and consumption of text. On the first day of class each semester, I ask students to raise their hands if they write every day. A couple of shy hands will inch up in the air, but the majority of students do not classify their daily activities to include writing. Most students do not believe they write or read every day because they disregard text message exchanges, Facebook statuses, or Tweets as forms of writing, which indicates that while they do have a baseline understanding that writing in their social lives carry a shift in textual expectations to academic lives, their skills of basic writing and communication that they do, in fact, use every day do not always transfer with the change in writing spaces. At any given moment in a student's daily writing life, they inadvertently enter into an innumerable amount of discourse communities, all with social norms, expectations, and rules for the discourse. Consequently, the audience varies tremendously between writing experiences and often become convoluted, even within a specific digital writing platform. The unidentified audience many students write to comes from the multitude of writing platforms and expanded potential audiences. During the short period of time that elapses between different methods of online writing, the audiences shift greatly because of the multiple potential audiences that exist within each individual online writing platform. Facebook has the option to join and create "Groups" or "Like" different "Pages" that represent specific interests, all of which are extensions of the user's

¹⁶ According to the Pew Research Center, as of December 2012 67% of online adults — ages 18-65+ — use Facebook and 16% of online adults use Twitter. The next most popular social networking sites were Pinterest (15%), Instagram (13%), and Tumblr (6%). Due to the staggering difference between 18-29 year old users — the ages of traditional first-year composition students — and the next age bracket, 30-49, I have opted to use Facebook and Twitter as primary references to social networking use.

identity, and do not necessarily overlap in terms of discourse communities — not to mention the hundreds of “Friends” that make up the regular audience on the user’s “News Feed” who range from childhood acquaintances, close friends, family members, coworkers, classmates, and many times, complete strangers who happen to share similar interests. Within these individual “Groups” or “Pages,” users can then contribute to the discussion, each with its own jargon and range of audiences. Twitter also comes with its own set of different discourse communities, each distinguished with “hashtags” to which users cater their Tweets. “Trends,” determined through Twitter’s database and evaluation of those the user is “Following,” categorize “hashtags” to solicit interest about what other like-minded individuals write. To further complicate matters, users can connect their Facebook and Twitter accounts so what one chooses to Tweet is then showcased on Facebook, amplifying the potential audience.

Alice E. Harwick and danah boyd’s digitally produced article “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience” investigates how “social media technologies collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it difficult for people to use the same techniques online that they do to handle multiplicity in face-to-face conversation” (1). The authors discuss imagined audiences in online social contexts, claiming a complication in our metaphorical views of space and place which directly impacts the kairotic situation of writing in a rhetorical sphere through their studies of Twitter users as responses to Tweets regarding their imagined audience. The aesthetic distance represented in social media communication constructs a wall of imagined perception, amplified by the hundreds of millions of users worldwide. Although an imagined wall exists between author and audience, there is an implied and impenetrable relationship and trust that develops as a result of the anonymity digital writing spaces create. To consider the amount of users on Twitter along with sheer number of

daily tweets, the window for actual audience feedback narrows due to the barrage of information and instantaneous communication. While quick feedback has been made more possible through digital writing, accurate and poignant audience reception becomes less likely and consequential simply because the trending “hashtags” on Twitter constantly change. As a result, students who use social networking sites like Twitter have grown accustomed to writing for a vast audience with very little to no real understanding of the long-term implications of the author-audience dialectical relationship.

The distortion of audience as a result of online social media becomes a habitual method of reference when students attempt to create an argument in writing. There is little to no distinction between writing for an online, imagined audience and writing for a real audience through composition arguments. Even through the use of blogs or online discussion board forums, students change the way they write to fit the method of writing to conform to their understanding of that particular genre. When students engage in discussions through the university’s online communication platform, their language tends to be much more informal and representative of how they write in their own digital worlds rather than the accepted language to the genre of writing for the classroom. However, for many students, once the program through which they write is in the form of a word processor, their ability to form rational and critical thoughts changes dramatically as they adjust and attempt to write more academically than they do even in curriculum-based online writing assignments. Rosa Eberly builds on the pre-existing discourses about audience in the composition classroom¹⁷ as the groundwork for her suggestion

¹⁷ Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford argue in “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy” that the current understanding of how to address audience in a composition classroom needs to be reevaluated because each side of this discussion has “failed adequately to recognize 1) the fluid, dynamic character of rhetorical situations; and 2) the integrated, interdependent nature of reading and writing,” ultimately proposing that audience — grouped “under the rubrics of *audience addressed* and *audience invoked*” — needs to be considered as a much richer concept (156). Ede and Lunsford cite the graphic depiction by Mitchell and Taylor as proponents for the audience addressed rubric of the process that begins with writer and leads

of a new vocabulary of “plural publics and public spheres,” noting that “not everyone would assent that such a vocabulary is new. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux . . . use *public* rather persistently in their educational theories as an adjective” (166). Eberly argues that contemporary composition studies must consider classrooms “not as *communities* but as *protopublic spaces*,” in that this realization will help students to think of themselves as “actors in different and overlapping publics” which can “help them realize the particular and situated nature of rhetoric and the need for effective writing to respond to particular needs of particular publics at particular times” (166-7). The composition classroom serves as practice to the application of communicative and rhetorical skills to be better equipped for the demands of a digital, fast-paced twenty-first century. While the teacher-as-audience method of writing is the most realistic and actual form of writing reception, the classroom is a place for the student to see the teacher as multiple types of audiences, with the type of transformity to accommodate potential audiences for students to gain the skills to be transferred into future communication. These classrooms should encourage students to critically engage in communication with potential audiences as a means to activism. I truly believe in the importance of being aware of what exists in the larger cultural psyche, critically evaluating the information through a rhetorical lens, and drawing conclusions and implications of that information in order to become not only more informed, but have the tools ready to dismantle any oppressions and inequalities that students come across in their lives. Ann George asserts that “critical pedagogy . . . envisions a society not simply pledged to but successfully enacting the principles of equality, of liberty and justice for all” (92). The

to writing process, written product, audience, responding process, response, and feedback to the writer, and make the claim that this model puts too much emphasis on the audience and not enough emphasis on the writer. Contrastingly, Ede and Lunsford discuss Long and Ong’s respective articles (as examples of audience invoked rubrics) about and their abstract existence within writing, and how it differs from a speaker’s audience which is real and in front of the speaker/author as the argument is constructed, ultimately leading Ede and Lunsford to note on the oversimplification of the range of diversity within oral and written communication.

central focus on producing dialogues that can actively help students engage in democratic ideals and processes is by and large the most appealing aspect to critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire's critique of the "banking" concept of education and advocated practice for a more dialogic "problem-posing" education that allows students to develop a "critical consciousness -- the ability to define, to analyze, to problematize the economic, political, and cultural forces that shape but . . . do not completely determine their lives" (93). The Socratic method of problem-solving and learning through asking questions and guiding students to the correct answer somewhat fits into this mold. The lasting affects of critical pedagogy is that it provides a platform for individual empowerment -- an invaluable resource for students. George builds her discussion of critical pedagogy from bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, which "insists that teachers can emancipate students only by themselves actively pursuing 'self-actualization,' a well-being springing from the union of mind, body, and soul" (109).

Anthropologically, humans have an innate need to communicate and narrate experiences in order to fulfill and reinforce semblances of community that aid in the establishment of individual identity. Narrative experiences in literary studies take shape in the form of novels — formerly regarded as a mere feminine pastime. When incorporated into composition studies as tributaries to critical and feminist pedagogies, the novel and narrative forms therein offer strategies to enhance, and in many cases, create an authentic agentive self for composition students. A feminist perspective on the form of the novel indicates its narrative structure and multiple processes that "suggest its direct connection to life experiences: its narrative form, its flexibility, its popularity, and its concern with the individual" and through narratives, allow interpretations and the ability to relate to and among audiences of lived experiences through the "daily storytelling by which people often make sense of their experience" (Frye 434). Student as

author does not function in an isolated state, but rather performs to further fulfill individual and intellectual growth. Therefore, for students to fail to recognize the entirety of audience, the isolation is transferred onto the multiple audiences to whom they write which reduces the strength of situated ethos in those circumstances where the shift in audience is so vast and an unintentional, subconscious move. The need to communicate and be understood through the position of the author encourages a sympathetic relationship to form, characterized by the genre of novels, narratives, and the epistolary style. Susan Lanser maintains that “the rhetorical complexity of the letter reminds us that narrative meaning is also a function of narrative circumstance” and that a “feminist narratology might acknowledge the existence of multiple texts, each constructed by a (potential) rhetorical circumstance. To the extent that such questions determine the very *meaning* of narrative, they are questions for narratology” (686). Within the field of composition studies, narratology — through Lanser’s proposed feminist perspective — lends itself to disengendered inclusiveness of innumerable authorial perspectives and the correlating audiences.

The onslaught of instantaneous communication and individualized culture creates a need for writing environments through which writers can contextualize life experiences, particularly through self-advocacy and understanding in times of unrest. The authority writers develop through digital writing environments can indeed serve as an agentive element. Lénárt-Cheng and Walker evaluate lifestory-sharing websites as contributions to a participatory democracy through the narrative structures’ forms of lifestory-based activism. These sites serve as platforms for individuals to share their life events as narratives in order to spark activism in regards to the general field of interest and issues through which the individuals who write digital lifestories live. Similar to the traditional novel or epistolary form of narrative writing, lifestory-sharing

websites serve to further the expansive communicative environment in which individuals participate. The epistolary novel is palimpsest for social media. Within the context of the classroom and as a digitally integrative tool for critical pedagogy, the narrative structures of lifestory-sharing websites and coordinated assignments can serve to establish exigency in student writing with practical applications and opportunities for students to develop their agentive self and situated ethos. The collaborative nature of digital writing in narrative form replicates and prepares students for interaction with the various potential audiences in post-collegiate occupations. The foundation for writing to realistic international and inter-ideological audiences¹⁸ is well established through online writing.

Narratives encourage self-awareness and introspection in writing. Recognition of the self in relation to the world — as means of the determination of the not-self — coordinate junctions for individual agency and the formation of identity. On a deeper, more intellectual level, writing has in it the ability to formulate identification and consciousness of the self. G. W. F. Hegel teaches us that “self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*” (105). Through rhetorical cognizance and Hegelian expansion of dialectical relationships between author and audience — producer and consumer — there is, perhaps, a significant opportunity for critical awareness and self-certainty through which composition can instigate. Furthermore, the existence of self-consciousness remains “in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, *it exists only in being acknowledged*” (111, italics mine). As much as students appear to have surface recognition of their selves in relation to society — as evident in the difficulty in

¹⁸ There is, of course, a faction of potential audiences that students may encounter in face-to-face interaction that they may not address or know how to address due to issues of access to technology and ability to navigate online writing forums. We can only hope to prepare students for enough communication opportunities and interactions as possible to foster critical thinking abilities which would allow them to adequately function with those in dissimilar learning and living situations.

relinquishing personal pronoun usage in argumentative compositions — it is difficult to concede they have neared their potential selves through writing because of the lack of acknowledgement to the other component in the Hegelian dialectic. It may be an idealistic hope born out of relative inexperience, but I maintain that through flexibility and integration of the factionalized strands as discussed earlier in the context of Bawarshi's assertion of genre and invention in composition on the part of the composition instructor, we can begin to build critical thinkers at such a tremendously formative stage of development that will undoubtedly pay dividends for our cultural community.

Virtual writing spaces allow for a "Thirdspace identity construction" which "provides students with an opportunity to explore their assumptions about what constitutes identity and to articulate the heterogeneity that characterizes their postmodern subjectivities" (Lauer 53). Lauer continues the ongoing discourse about ways to have students explore the self through their writing by discussing the existing tactics, such as the personal essay, and how a more multi-textual approach is now necessary in the age of complicated techno-identities. Lauer's use of existing definitions of space: "'Firstspace . . . as self-evident . . . 'Secondspace' describes the privileging of mental and philosophical construction of space . . . 'Thirdspace' is an ever-open space that allows contradictory and seemingly incompatible ideas to coexist and be creatively restructured in new ways to produce new meaning" (56-7). The evolution of self-identity in composition already exists through social media and the continued development of digital technologies and writing spaces, so it is necessary to accommodate and adjust approaches to teaching students how to attain their identities. The narrative structure of online writing environments is conducive to the development of voice because of the anonymity it allows, but with anonymity, a disillusionment of audience emerges, especially in novice writers.

Narratives allow for students to create a sense of agency through their ability to harness their own rhetorical voice which establishes situated ethos in writing. The use of the personal pronoun “I,” when used as an indicator of expertise in the narrative structure of student compositions — rather than as hedged language to state personal beliefs or opinions — enhances the agentive self in writing. In these situations, students see themselves as the dominant voice of the argument — a first step to the attainment of a true agentive self. However, the tendency for many students in terms of writing with the personal pronoun “I” is to mimic a journalistic or purely narrative structure of writing to which they are accustomed in digital environments, both as consumers and creators of text. These instances carry with them implications of assumed relation to the audience, as if they view their writing as directed at a particular individual or discourse community. As with the disassociation to audience, the uncertainty of the author’s role within that audience-author interaction muddles the argumentative strength of the student’s writing. Additionally, the reflective agent of narratives aids in the development of critical thinking skills. Prensky maintains that

In our twitch-speed world, there is less and less time and opportunity for reflection, and this development concerns many people. One of the most interesting challenges and opportunities in teaching Digital Natives is to figure out and invent ways to include reflection and critical thinking in the learning (either built into the instruction or through a process of instructor-led debriefing) but still do it in the Digital Native language.

Narratives through a rhetorical approach can help to establish the reflective capabilities of student writing in online environments.

In an attempt to help students differentiate the audience to which they are accustomed to writing, during one-on-one conferences in the writing process of essays I ask students “who is

‘you’?” While some students respond with as much explanation as indicating “you” as “the audience,” most students are often unsure of how to respond with specific directives of audience. Even if a student can actually indicate who, specifically, their intended audience is, their use of “you,” and consequently that identified audience, changes from paragraph to paragraph which carries the trend of writing to a vast audience within one body of text as they do within social networks. The result of the audience shift is an isolation of audience, that while in the context of the classroom is not a true problem since the nature of writing for the classroom must be to fulfill requirements of the instructor as “real” audience, but the skills students acquire in foundational writing courses should be formed in preparation for communication in other courses where writing has gained prominence — due in large part to the work of the National Writing Project — as well as the skills necessary to communicate with an increasingly small world. As much as I would like to believe in a de-centered classroom, the teacher, by virtue of the structure of academia, is already an isolated audience member with a specific agenda in the extrapolation of student arguments to evaluate, determine, and assign a grade, so the use of “you” does not hinder the isolation factor of audience reception. It does, however, impact the student’s perception of their self in relation to the world at large and their role within it. The tendency is to write to appease any potential audience member, but the cognitive skills to be able to identify and write to and for a specific audience based on a specific genre of writing is lost, which ultimately complicates the strength in student voice and the power their writing can have. The use of “you” is meant to satisfy any potential reader, but what ultimately occurs is an alienation of readers through that false assumption. The issue is not merely a lack of understanding audience in compositions, but rather the implications that particular lack of understanding carries: by not writing with identification of specific audience, the ownership of the argument and of the text

itself belongs to a multitude of potential audiences and genres rather than a focused narrative argument representative of the student's ideas. Many pedagogical approaches that shaped the educators and theorists of today were created in times where writing was done through focused assignments for the classroom or in the workforce, and in more recent developments, through blogs and other online forums. While there are certainly a considerable amount of contemporary pedagogies and theories that address the impact the digital age has on students, there are areas of the discussion which are in need of expansion.

Where I believe there should be more intersection and incorporation of literary and philosophical theories is in the emphasis and prominence of the rhetorical situation in order to create an ideological framework as a foundation for rhetorical analysis and considerations of audience, author, and genre¹⁹ which assists in the creation of agency for students. How a student identifies his or her self within digital writing platforms correlates to how audience is viewed and understood, as well as the ways with which the author is tasked to interact. A strengthened sense of individual self and ethos for student writers within the classroom allow them to situate themselves in relation to a specific, purported audience, which works in tandem to a holistic comprehension of genre. The reality of an audience is oftentimes misconstrued in a composition classroom, likely due to misunderstandings of genre and the rhetorical connectedness of genre and audience. Anis Bawarshi²⁰ argues for “dramatic reconceptualizations of genre and its role in the production and interpretation of texts and culture . . . in order to investigate the role that genre plays in the constitution not only of texts but of their contexts, including the identities of

¹⁹ Audience, author, and genre are one of many varied forms of interpreting the rhetorical situation. A popular ordering which I teach to my Composition I students is reader, writer, and text, as Joe Marshall Hardin's Composition textbook *Choices* details. For the purpose of this essay, I chose to substitute “audience” for “reader” because although in a Composition class the literal receiver of the information would be reading the written text, the term “audience” allows for a more broad conceptualization and heightens the possibilities for argument interpretation; “writer” for “author” because I am directly addressing issues of textual communication; and “genre” for “text” because of the importance of genre theory to my argument as defined by Anis Bawarshi.

²⁰ Bawarshi, Anis. “The Genre Function.” *College English* 62.3 (2000): 335-60. Print.

those who write them and those who are represented within them” (335). Bawarshi contends for a more prominent consideration of genre theory as a “method of inquiry” to synthesize factionalized strands of English Studies, to include applied linguistics, rhetoric and composition, creative writing, literature, and cultural studies (336). The author-function, as detailed by Foucault’s “What Is an Author?” is exemplified as an alternative juxtaposed with Bawarshi’s investigation of genre theory as clarifying discourses’ modes of existence, defining what Bawarshi calls a “genre function” to constitute “all discourses’ and all writers’ modes of existence, circulation, and functioning within a society” (338).

The most tasking consideration is how to adequately address these issues within the classroom. It is one thing to point them out to students, integrate it into the discussion, or ask them rhetorical questions in hopes that they can intrinsically motivate themselves to recognize the rhetorical situation and their place within it, but Digital Natives require more focused attention in a language they understand. Fife’s use of Facebook as a means to teach rhetorical analysis is one perspective that can, indeed, help students to recognize the rhetorical appeals and the construction of the rhetorical situation in a digital platform.

CONCLUSION

For students to gain an awareness of audience increases their rhetorical schema and develops their agency as creators of text and arguments. Students are acclimated with writing for a broad and oftentimes faceless audience, and there is very little transition evident in composition papers to demonstrate their awareness of audience which creates a cognitive dissonance that a reconsideration within composition pedagogy can address. Even the understanding of themselves as audience and consumers of text is rhetorically and culturally constructed, rather than intrinsically constructed with a view of their selves as both author and audience.

Admittedly, most students identify grammar and syntax as their weakest areas in writing and point to those facets as harbingers to their fear of writing. The difficulty in how to approach semantics to students enrolled in a general education composition course does not go unnoticed. However, since the function of our language is such an integral part in communication because while it is not the official language of the United States, English is arguably the most widely-spoken language of the nation, and we would do students a disservice to not include even the most basic integration of linguistics into composition curriculum. If the function of the language did not have such an influential role in the rhetorical and critical aspects of composition, it could be conceded that the trends of grammarian composition are outdated. The interminable influence of digital writing spaces and the complications of the rhetorical situation in every possible method of communication necessitates a revisit to ways of linguistic integration. Although the semantics of the English language exist and it is our job as speakers and teachers of English to accommodate for the difficulties in the application of the language, the inclusion of the semantic discussion and function of the indefinite *you* into composition pedagogy is necessary in order to

localize the intended audience. If an exact audience is identified, followed by consistent usage of the indefinite *you*, students demonstrate a more complete and focused awareness of audience, which encourages the conceptualization of genre in texts. With a clearer approach to audience and genre, student as author can truly gain a sense agency in composition. The tenets of creative writing, literary studies, and narratology have distinctive genres and accompanying audiences. A combination of narratives and the theories therein, linguistics, and rhetoric serve to enhance the ability of students who are exposed to more genres and outlets for their writing which has evolved from the established precedent for composition pedagogy.

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