

AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH:
AFFIRMING SPACES FOR LINGUISTIC IDENTITY WITHIN THE COMPOSITION
CLASSROOM

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, “African American Vernacular English: Affirming Spaces for Linguistic Identity within the Composition Classroom,” presents the findings of an IRB-approved case study on African American female identity within the first-year composition classroom. The goals of my research are to interrogate the privilege awarded to Standard American English, advocate equality among all cultural dialects, and affirm pedagogical spaces for students’ linguistic identities.

My research addresses the links between African American females’ language and identity. The first portion of the case study involves the students’ academic identities. Based on the results of the study, I argue that in order to succeed within academia, African American female students must overcome a silencing of the African American voice as well as their personal insecurities involving language. The second portion of the study involves the students’ societal identities. I argue that incorporating new waves of technology that reflect students’ interests provides students an outlet to explore facets of their identity that fall outside the scope of academic discourse.

Within my research, I demonstrate concrete ways to apply the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s position statement Student’s Right to Their Own Language. I examine the gaps that exist between certain professional organizations’ policy statements and the actual pedagogical practices of the members of these professional organizations. In so doing, I seek to challenge other English professionals to uphold the position statements of our

professional organizations. The foundational argument of this dissertation is that language and identity are tied inextricably together; therefore, any professional policies or pedagogical practices that seek to negate students' cultural languages should be reexamined.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; my husband, Dr. Norman Golar; and all the African American females who strive to have their voices heard and respected within academia.

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I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank my husband, friend, and fellow scholar Dr. Norman “NoGo” Golar. You have always been such a great asset to me and to my scholarship. I appreciate all the drafts that you read and critiqued for me over the last six years of graduate school. The years and the changes that we have encountered are evidenced in your name changing from “NoGo” to “Dr. Golar.” Indeed, I am proud to stand by your side as Dr. Regina Golar. I love you, Hon.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: POLICIES ON LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE AS IDENTITY, AND IDENTITY WITHIN TECHNOLOGY	22
CHAPTER THREE: FROM THE CLASSROOM TO REAL LIFE: A REVIEW OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY VERSUS SOCIETAL IDENTITY.....	53
CHAPTER FOUR: APPLYING STUDENTS’ RIGHT TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE WHILE UPHOLDING THE STANDARDS OF THE CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY.....	79
CHAPTER FIVE: “I RESPECT LANGUAGE RIGHTS, BUT THIS HERE IS SOMETHING ELSE!”: ADDRESSING ‘ERROR’ WITHIN STUDENTS’ ESSAYS WHILE AFFIRMING LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE.....	117
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	134
EPILOGUE.....	146
REFERENCES.....	148
APPENDIX.....	154

Chapter One: Introduction

During the spring semester before I graduated with my master's degree in English, I enrolled in an academic writing seminar. The goal of the course was to revise an academic paper and turn it into a major paper that we would defend before a committee of professors in our field. From a larger perspective, we were to demonstrate our knowledge of our field, and thereby prove ourselves to be specialists in our respective programs of study. The paper that I chose to revise and later defend was *Competing Discourses: African American Students' Assimilation into White Culture through Language and the Effects on the African American Community*. Little did I know that I would be the African American student who would be assimilated into White culture and the effects that semester would have on my life.

Privilege, says one of my African American professors. *They swim in a sea of privilege. All around them they are surrounded by privilege. All they see is privilege. All they know is privilege. And they don't even know that it is, indeed, privilege.* Other students wrote on literary authors and texts. John Milton. Marianne Moore. Norman Mailer. Etc. I chose to write on Reality. I argued against the negative effects of assimilation on African American students into White mainstream culture in order for them to succeed in school. In the midst of White faces, it is needless to say that the days to workshop my paper were the most dreaded days of the semester.

“Aren't we supposed to critique organization? Language? Structure? Content? Why are they arguing with *me*, instead of critiquing my work?! They didn't even give me any feedback.

They just argued with me. And the professor is the leader!” My fiancé knew that workshop days for me would be counseling days for him. “Do you have any idea how powerful this work is?” he asked. “Someday this is gonna be published, Babe. Yeaah. They don’t want to hear it. They don’t want to hear it.”

And so because they didn’t want to hear it, they decided to silence me. My work became the last to be critiqued. Those who cared for me as an individual were kind enough not to speak at all. Those who didn’t care for me couldn’t wait to criticize—I beg your pardon—*critique* my work. Remember, we mustn’t be sensitive. Everyone has to go through the same process. The problem was that the process wasn’t the same for everyone.

Before she would begin with my paper, the professor would sigh loudly and remove her red glasses. “You know, Regina, I just don’t know.”

“What about the thesis? How is the organization?”

“I mean, it’s well written. I just...I just don’t know if I agree with you.”

[Internally] My committee isn’t going to question me on whether you agree with me.

They want to see a solid work. I need to strengthen the writing. Not change my argument.

So I sat in silence. And they talked at me—not to me, but at me.

Peer 1: “Black people aren’t the only ones who have these problems.”

[Does that diminish our struggles?] I knew I needed to educate the world.

Peer 2: “Delete this. Revise that. Say this instead.”

[Revise my voice right out of my work.] I knew I had a lifelong battle ahead of me.

Peer 3: “Here [placing a book in front of me]. I want you to read this book. It’ll help you understand.”

[What did you just say to me?!] Y’all, I knew I needed JE-SUS! And got Him.

After each workshop, I would walk to my fiancé's apartment through blurred eyes. What was I doing wrong? Why was this so hard? The books all sounded the same: *African American students need Standard American English! Just learn how to code-switch! Bidialectalism is the key!* Standard American English within my paper? Check. A proficient code-switcher? Check. Mastery of two dialects? Check. Yet there were serious challenges in this academic discourse that needed to be addressed.

Loud sigh. Remove red glasses. "You know, Regina. I just don't know."

[Internally.] *What a surprise.*

"Wait—I know what it is."

[Internally.] *Finally! Just say that you internalize the "White America" in my paper to be YOU. Just say that you TALK objectivity but PRACTICE subjectivity.*

"Regina, everyone else is writing on literature, on the past. You're the only one who has something to prove. You're the only one who has to put your money where your mouth is."

Prove something. Put my money where my mouth is. And so I had to. And so I did.

This case study was nurtured in silence, matured in anger, and born in controversy. If my voice was to be heard, I knew that I had to have the right words. Objectivity. Research. Data. No one cared about my blurry-eyed walks home. Nor should they—right? I had to prove—no, no—*suggest* that the answers to African American students' problems in academia were not confined to bidialectalism and code-switching. There were other issues concerning language and culture that English professionals needed to address. Everyone has to go through the same process. The problem was that the process wasn't the same for everyone. And so I begin.

This project presents the findings of an IRB-approved case study on African American female identity within the first-year composition classroom. The goals of my research are to interrogate the privilege awarded to Standard American English, advocate equality among all cultural dialects, and affirm pedagogical spaces for students' linguistic identities. Within this dissertation, I demonstrate concrete ways to apply the Conference on College Composition and Communication's position statement Student's Right to Their Own Language. Largely, this dissertation is a response to Geneva Smitherman in "'Students' Right to Their Own Language': A Retrospective," wherein she describes her experiences with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) concerning teaching materials for SRTOL. According to Smitherman, she and other committee members spent almost four years "assembling a publication of practical classroom assignments, activities, lectures, and teaching units that would show and tell how to apply the philosophy of the 'Students' Right' resolution to the day-to-day experience of teaching and learning" ("SRTOL: A Retrospective" 24). However, NCTE "reluctantly decided" against publishing the collection (24). In so deciding, NCTE and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), which originally published SRTOL, both have contributed to SRTOL's status as simply a position statement, rather than as a theory-based pedagogical enactment of language rights.¹

My work takes a step in the same direction as the steps taken by Smitherman and her colleagues. My work includes sample assignments for a practical application of SRTOL.² However, I go one step further to include my candid experiences in enacting SRTOL. I not only share my successes in dealing with SRTOL but also my limitations and what could be termed as

¹ See Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of the political climate surrounding the creation and publication of SRTOL as well as Smitherman's experiences with both NCTE and CCCC.

² See Appendix E for these sample assignments.

my failures. In so doing, I seek to challenge other English professionals to uphold the position statement of our professional organization; assist these English professionals with lesson plans, syllabi, and reading/writing assignments that correspond to SRTOL; and aid them in avoiding the pitfalls that I encountered during this experience.

As indicated in the opening narrative, this case study began in 2007 as a result of my research on language and SRTOL as well as my personal experiences with negated cultural voice. I had a hypothesis that I sought to test. Based on my research, I believed that English professionals had a responsibility to create cultural spaces for students' voices, home languages, and dialects, rather than privileging solely academic discourse and Standard American English (SAE) within course curricula. If English professionals created such an environment, then I believed further that students would have a more positive learning experience that would present itself not only in students' written work for that semester but also in their self-esteem and long-term college career, thereby increasing retention rates among minority and working class students.

Methodological Overview. After culling the data from the research and analyzing the results, I was compelled to change the focus of the case study drastically. Before discussing the new direction of the case study, I will first explain the original study. The case study was originally titled "The Effects of MySpace.com in the Composition Classroom." The purpose of the case study was to assess the ability of MySpace.com to aid African American freshman composition students in negotiating the various identities that they bring with them as they enter the university setting. Previous research (Richardson, Delpit, Bizzell, Horner, Gilyard, Rose, Bartholomae, etc.) suggests that students experience difficulties in academia because the values within students' home communities often conflict with the values of the university. The English

department granted me permission to use specifically African American readings as well as MySpace.com in the composition classroom. I had hoped to research the ability of MySpace.com, due to its emphasis on individuality and multimodality, to aid African American students in reconciling the differing discourses that they encounter as they pursue higher education.

Research activities were the following: (a) post-writing test, (b) pre-survey on technology, (c) post-survey on technology. Regular classroom activities were the following: (a) diagnostic exam (pre-writing test), (b) MySpace.com in the classroom, (c) African American readings, (d) five writing units.³ Participants completed the following: a pre-writing test, which was the diagnostic exam required by the First-year Writing Program; a pre-survey on technology and African American identity; a post-writing test; and a post-survey on technology and African American identity. Additionally, students used MySpace.com throughout the semester (experimental group only). The pre- and post-tests were completed in one class session each (total = two classes), while the pre- and post-surveys were completed in approximately thirty minutes each (total = one hour). The purpose of the tests was to assess any changes in students' writing skills, while the purpose of the surveys was to assess any changes in students' views on technology and African American identity. All research took place in the regularly scheduled classroom. Students were not audio- or videotaped at any time. Approximately 48 students participated in this study based on their self-enrollment in the two composition courses. All students, regardless of race or ethnicity, were welcomed to enroll in either section of the course. In terms of the effects on research, if non-African Americans enrolled in the course and agreed to participate in the study, then I used their data to compare with the African American students'

³ I created all surveys and writing tests; no resources were borrowed from other sources, with the exception of the African American readings that came from *Heritage*.

data.

In these two English composition classes, all requirements of the First-year Writing Program within the English department were fulfilled. These classes differed from other composition classes within the department based on the course readings that focused on African American experiences, which allowed African American students to write about and discuss issues pertinent to their home communities. A second difference was the implementation of MySpace.com in one classroom (experimental group only). Although the control group had African American course readings, it did not include MySpace.com; rather, students used Bedford Comment® as their mode of technology within the classroom. At the beginning of the semester, students in both composition classes were required to take a diagnostic exam, as required by the First-year Writing Program.⁴ Also, an outside party administered the survey that assessed students' familiarity with technology as well as their views on their African American identities (home, academic, and social). Throughout the semester, students had five writing units with a formal essay due at the end of each unit. At the end of the semester, the students took a post-test to assess whether or not their writing skills improved. Then, I was supposed to compare the results of the pre-test and post-test from both classes to assess whether the class with MySpace.com significantly improved in their writing skills and in their understandings of how to reconcile conflicting discourse communities. Also at the end of the semester, the students took the same surveys on technology and African American identity to note if any changes occurred in their views since the beginning of the semester. The students were informed that the results of the case study would be included in my dissertation; also, they were informed that results might be presented at various professional conferences to share with the academic community.

⁴ All composition teachers within the English department designed and administered their own diagnostic exam.

Participation in the study lasted one academic semester (August 20, 2008-December 5, 2008). Students received no incentives to participate in the study, other than the opportunity to participate in a class that caters to their cultural experiences as African Americans or to expand their knowledge of African American culture.

Although the methodology of the case study did not change, the focus of the case study absolutely changed. Whereas I originally intended to count T-units to assess any gains in the students' writing, I was stunned by the results of the unit on societal identity. The most compelling data was not T-units and sentence length; instead, the most compelling data was the content of the students' essays as they changed from academic discourse to non-academic discourse. Similarly, after I analyzed the students' writings from the unit on society, I analyzed their writings for the unit on academic identity. Again, content trumped T-units.

The unit on familial identity separated the units on academic and societal identity. However, as a teacher-researcher, I made an ethical decision not to include the students' writings on their family issues. Such information will remain off-the-record. Nevertheless, the reading audience receives glimpses into the students' home lives as they write on their academic and societal identities.

Analysis. My analysis may be described as *context-sensitive text analysis*. In his article by the same title, Thomas N. Huckin explains the renewed interest in contextualized linguistic analysis within composition research:

After more than a decade of relative neglect, the linguistic analysis of written texts should become once again a major component of composition research. This renewed interest will come about, I believe, as a result of the increasing emphasis now being given to the role of contextual factors in composition. Instead of focusing exclusively on the individual writer and his or her plans, strategies, or voice, more and more researchers are drawing attention to the social dimension of writing. They are seeing the writer not as an autonomous agent but as a member of one or more discourse communities, each having its own values,

norms, and ways of knowing and communication. (“Context-Sensitive Text Analysis” 84).

Indeed, the original case study focused on language in isolated forms; hence, my original task to count T-units to gauge gains in writing. But as Huckin notes, the real interest of the case study proved to be the social dimension of writing and students as members of discourse communities. In response to the process movement within composition, rather than the product movement, text analysis includes the sociological and cultural dimensions of writing (Huckin 85).

The four characteristics of context-sensitive text analysis are as follows: It is problem-driven, rather than theory-driven; it accounts for the context of situations as much as possible; it relies on plausible interpretation; it combines multiple forms of analysis (Huckin 89-90). In accordance with context-sensitive text analysis, the problem that drove my research was the linguistic racism that led to the silencing of cultural voice within academia. The students provide the context of the situations that they describe within their expository writing; I, the teacher-researcher, provide further context as I describe the classroom environment for each writing unit. The plausible interpretations of the students’ texts are based on their academic writings and surveys, rather than the teacher-researcher’s sole interpretation of the texts. Finally, the multiple forms of analysis included both qualitative and quantitative methods, though the quantitative methods were not emphasized in the results of the case study.

Huckin also lists the following epistemological assumptions of context-sensitive text analyses, all of which apply to my case study on cultural language and identity:

- Texts exist; texts are the product of an attempt by a writer to communicate meaning to one or more readers.
- Meaning includes not only propositional content but metalinguistic and interpersonal content as well

- Writers try to use language in cognitively efficient ways; there are no two ways of saying exactly the same thing; thus, even minor details of language usage can be significant in interpreting the meaning of a text.
- Writers belong to multiple discourse communities, and the texts they write often reflect their divided loyalties. (86-88)

Limitations of the Study. Several factors limited the study. Foremost, the First-year Writing Program (FWP) underwent a change in directors. One director approved the case study, but then that particular director resigned. When the new director assumed leadership of the FWP, she was not informed of the case study scheduled to be conducted within the writing program.

Such a change in leadership was significant because the two directors had considerably different goals for the program and leadership styles. The first director knew about the case study from its inception and supported research within the composition classroom. This director's leadership style did not lend itself to conformity. She allowed the composition teachers (whether graduate students, part- or full-time instructors, or professors) enough flexibility within their own classrooms and course syllabi to individualize each section of composition to the classroom teacher.

The new FWP director's leadership was more structured. She desired to see more uniformity within the program. First-time graduate students were required to use the same textbook; in fact, everyone (veteran graduate students, part- and full-time instructors, and professors) was encouraged to utilize the default textbook. However, the new director did not mandate that experienced composition teachers utilize the default text.

Regardless of the rank or title of the composition teacher, he or she was required to teach from a program-approved textbook, per the mandate of the new director. The previous FWP director, however, had approved the case study to be conducted without a textbook. I was granted permission to develop a course packet compiled with readings of my choosing from various sources. The course packet was intended to lead the course in a certain direction that focused on African American language and identity.

After speaking with several reputable book publishers while at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and working with book representatives who visited the campus, I soon realized the limited—one might say non-existent—market for composition textbooks that emphasize African American experiences—another gap in the field of composition and rhetoric that must be addressed eventually. Ultimately, I refocused the course and chose *Heritage: African American Readings for Writing* as the course text. Nonetheless, the new director was quite accommodating to the case study, despite the mandate of a textbook for the composition course. She had the privilege to terminate the case study but chose not to do so. For that, I remain especially grateful.

Other limitations presented themselves at the university-level. I found myself at the mercy of a university-wide initiative to increase enrollment. My specialized courses were listed as English 101: The African American Experience. However, students flooded the course not because they were interested in African American experiences but because no other courses were available—at least no other courses that would accommodate their schedules. Hence, the first class contained seven African American students out of twenty-four. The second class contained seven African American students out of twenty-one. Because they were disinterested in the course topic, many of the non-African American students initially did not care to participate in

the case study, which would have seriously hampered the project overall. The project had to be thoroughly explained so that they could understand that they would not be negatively impacted by the in-class research. Even so, many of these students resisted discussions of class readings.

Theory. For the other unit, “Who Am I in Society?”, I utilized Gwendolyn Pough’s criteria for *womanist theology*. Pough explains, “Womanist theology is largely about taking the skills, many of which are rhetorical in nature, that black women have used throughout time to overcome oppression and use them to conquer contemporary situations” (68). Within this writing unit, I analyzed the ways that the African American female composition students overcame societal oppression as they strove to conquer their contemporary situations.

Furthermore, I revisited two conversations within the field of composition and rhetoric: the postmodern concept of subjectivity and the CCCC’s position statement on Students Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL). I rethink the concept of the postmodern subject in relation to MySpace.com. In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, Lester Faigley asserts, “Because the subject is the locus of overlapping and competing discourses, it is a temporary stitching together of a series of often contradictory subject positions” (9). I contend that MySpace.com is conducive to the postmodern subject because it allows these “often contradictory subject positions” to reside unapologetically with one another. With each writing unit, the students changed their MySpace backgrounds, songs, photos, and blogs based on how they perceived themselves concerning that facet of their identity (academic, familial, societal, and individual). The students learned that it was unnecessary to relinquish one subjectivity and its identifying characteristics for the sake of another. Instead, they learned, through MySpace.com, how to emphasize a certain identity based on their rhetorical situation.

Findings. For the unit “Who Am I as a Student?”, I found that academic discourse and African American females’ academic identities present challenges for them that they do not readily recognize. In order for African American female college students to succeed within academia, they must overcome both a silencing of African American voice as well as personal insecurities involving language. But rather than critiquing the dominant power structure for its implicit hegemony, the African American female students internalize these challenges and view themselves as deficient.

For the unit “Who Am I in Society?”, I found that when utilizing academic discourse, African American females attending a predominantly White university articulated their societal identities in terms of the racism, sexism, and degradation that they experienced while on campus. However, when they had access to photos of positive African American leaders as well as songs that voiced their experiences in society, via MySpace.com, these same students discussed their societal identities in overwhelmingly powerful and positive terms. Accordingly, I argue that incorporating new waves of technology that reflect students’ interests, specifically MySpace.com, provides students an outlet to explore facets of their identity beyond the scope of academic discourse.

Clarification of Terminology. Before progressing through this argument, I would like to qualify the terminology that I will use. Depending on one’s point of reference, including but not limited to the field of composition and rhetoric, the field of linguistics, or public discourse in general, the definitions of certain terms slightly change.

African American Vernacular English. I use the label *African American Vernacular English* to refer to the language variety spoken by certain African Americans within the United

States of America.⁵ However, I acknowledge that this same language variety has had many labels throughout the years, including but not limited to, *Ebonics*, *Black English*, *Black English Vernacular*, *African American Language*, *African American English*, and *Spoken Soul*.

Although many people use these labels interchangeably, Geneva Smitherman differentiates among the terms and explains the political backdrop that accompanies these terms:

Since December 1996, when the Oakland resolution on Ebonics was passed, the term “Ebonics” has come to be used loosely to refer to “US Ebonics,” and used interchangeably with “Black/African American (Vernacular) English,” a practice I [Smitherman] also follow. But we should keep in mind that the original conception encompassed more languages than African American Language and was, in fact, a rejection of the term “Black English” and the concomitant subordination of this Africanized language under the categorical heading, “English.” (*Talkin that Talk* 29)

Indeed, these labels have been entrenched in the political controversies surrounding the language itself.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that certain scholars are moving away from the label “African American Vernacular English” to “African American English” due to the stigma increasingly attached to the word “vernacular.” However, I retain the qualifier “vernacular” because I differentiate between the English of African Americans and the vernacular English of African Americans. I do not consider African American Vernacular English to be *the* English of African Americans, as implied in the label “African American English.” Some African Americans, myself included, speak Standard American English in certain settings and African American Vernacular English in other settings. Therefore, I do not posit African American Vernacular English as *the* English of African Americans. Some may argue that the other variety of English spoken by African Americans is included under “Standard American English,” which may be true. However, one may choose to use characteristics of African American Vernacular

⁵ See Appendix A for the characteristics of African American Vernacular English.

English but not consider himself or herself as an African American Vernacular English-speaker in general.⁶ I am unwilling to wholly equate an African American's English with the vernacular at this time. Accordingly, I maintain the qualifier "vernacular."

Instead of focusing on labels, this argument seeks to target the negative attitudes behind the labels. Such attitudes do not change with the label itself. As John Baugh explains, "If the vernacular speech of urban or rural slave descendants is devalued, modified nomenclature will not increase its worth in the eyes of those who hold black speech—or African Americans—in low regard" (1).

Dialect. In *American English: Dialects and Variation*, Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes offer four definitions of dialect: "those who speak differently from oneself;⁷ those varieties of English whose features have, for one reason or another, become widely recognized throughout American society; a kind of deficient or 'corrupted' English; a specific, socially disfavored variety of English" (3-7). They further clarify *dialect* from a professional standpoint: "Professional students of language typically use the term DIALECT as a neutral label to refer to any variety of a language that is shared by a group of speakers" (2). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes's definition of dialect as a neutral label that applies to any variety of language is the definition supported throughout this argument.

⁶ See the section titled "Standard versus non-standard" within this chapter for a discussion of the language continuum.

⁷ In this definition, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes do not consider people themselves as dialects. Perhaps a better wording of this definition would be *someone's variety of English that differs from another's variety*. The authors reference the following example as evidence of such a definition: "We went to Boston for a vacation and the people there sure do speak a dialect" (2). In this example, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes refer to the language variety as the dialect; not the people themselves. Therefore, one may reasonably assume that the first definition, "those who speak differently from oneself," may contain typographical or editing errors of some sort.

Language. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes choose to describe, rather than to define, language. They write, “Languages are invariably manifested through their dialects, and to speak a language is to speak some dialect of that language. [. . .] [D]ialect is simply how we refer to any language variety that typifies a group of speakers within a language” (2). For Wolfram and Schilling-Estes and other professional students of language, no inherent value system exists between the terms *language* and *dialect*. The same is true of this argument. The terms may be used interchangeably throughout this argument. Never does the term *language* constitute a hierarchical value system over the term *dialect*, if used.

Standard Versus Non-Standard. The language of academia and other forms of public discourse is referred to as “*Standard American English*” throughout this argument (emphasis added). Conversely, the languages of various cultures that deviate from Standard American English are referred to as *non-standard*. To explain the differences between standard versus non-standard, I draw from Wolfram and Schilling-Estes’ views of a language continuum. Along the continuum, “standard” is placed at one polemical end while “non-standard” is placed at the other polemical end. The continuum is extended so that a speaker (or rather his or her language) is categorized as more standard or more non-standard as he or she progresses along the continuum.

Wolfram and Schilling-Estes explain what they call “Formal Standard English” or “Prescriptive Standard English” as the “written language of established writers,” which we usually find “codified in English grammar texts” (10). The concept of non-standard English would include characteristics of oral and written language that veer further and further away from the written language that we find codified in English grammar texts. It is sometimes difficult to assess non-standard language; in fact, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes note that based on

the audience, a speaker's language may be considered standard by some and non-standard by others (11). Indeed, certain characteristics of language are stigmatized by different people and categorized as non-standard based on personal biases.

For this particular argument, readers should not automatically consider an individual to be a non-standard speaker if his or her speech contains certain characteristics of African American Vernacular English. Speakers may find themselves at any place on the language continuum; perhaps no one ever speaks and writes perfectly codified English at all times. Hence, within this argument, the term "non-standard" does not reflect a value system, but more so a deviation from the prescriptive rules of English grammar to varying degrees. In short, standard English is not synonymous with "good English"; neither is non-standard English synonymous with "bad English." Standard English is prescriptive English, and non-standard English is non-prescriptive English.

Equality. I state the goals of my research to be to interrogate the privilege awarded to Standard American English, advocate equality among all cultural dialects, and affirm pedagogical spaces for students' linguistic identities. However, Nina Chordas problematizes the term "equality" in "Classrooms, Pedagogies, and the Rhetoric of Equality." She argues that terms such as equality are so vague and nebulous as to have practically no effectiveness in actual practice. Although the term equality does not appear consistently throughout this dissertation, the concept of equality is thoroughly threaded throughout. Accordingly, I leave my reading audience with three insights on the concept of equality, taken from Chordas.

First, when dealing with classroom practice, many educators believe that they should treat everyone (or in the case of this argument, everyone's language) equally, or the same. However, educators must concede the racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences

among students. Therefore, each educator must decide whether his or her personal pedagogy will either minimize or openly acknowledge difference (219). Next, Chordas reminds us that “equality does not occur in a vacuum, or without cost, and the term equal should not be thoughtlessly employed. We must first answer the question: Equal to what?” (220). Each educator must deliberate on what linguistic equality will cost the students—and perhaps even the educator himself or herself. Will it cost additional classroom time? More grading? Tensions within the class among the students? Decreased rates on student evaluations, which may lead to administrative censure? Insecurities that the educator is not doing all that he or she can in order to help the students to survive in the “real world”? However educators choose to implement linguistic equality based on their personal pedagogy, they must realize that such choices are not free, and they do not occur within a vacuum. Finally, regardless of conversations about equality, students must still conform to the teacher’s power and authority within the classroom. Students are not equal to the teacher; furthermore, they are unequal to one another (Chordas 222). Concerning language, this truth about “equality” evidences itself in both teachers’ and students’ personal biases about what constitutes standard versus non-standard in both oral and written language.^{8 9} In enacting linguistic equality, each educator should consider Chordas’s complication of the term “equality” and how such a term may be enacted in concrete ways.

Chapter Overview. The dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapters 2 and 3 provide literature reviews that will contextualize the overall argument of this dissertation. Specifically, Chapter 2 is divided into three major sections: language policy, language as identity, and the

⁸ See the section titled “Standard versus non-standard” within this chapter for a discussion of the language continuum.

⁹ I have encountered situations wherein White Southern students will marginalize language variations based on African American Vernacular English, but they will not perceive non-standard language in “y’all” or in an oral sentence such as, “I was, like, I’m sooo going to the party.”

intersections among language, identity, and technology. Under language policy, I review the position statements of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the Linguistic Society of America, U.S. English, English First, and ProEnglish. I examine the gaps that exist between certain professional organizations' policy statements and the actual pedagogical practices of the members of these professional organizations. Next, concerning language and identity, I introduce and support the foundational argument of this dissertation, which is that language and identity are tied inextricably together; therefore, any professional policies or pedagogical practices that seek to negate students' cultural languages should be reexamined. Finally, I bring my work into the twenty-first century as I explore the intersections among language, identity, and technology. Certain scholars contribute to the conversation on technology within the classroom from different perspectives, including but not limited to wealth gaps among students, feminist concerns with technology, and racial identity within online spaces. I end Chapter 2 with the gap in current composition and rhetoric research that my work seeks to fill. I offer my work as a response to Geneva Smitherman's critique of the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication for neglecting to provide concrete ways that English professionals may implement professionally-endorsed position statements on language.

Chapter 3's literature review provides background on the issues pertinent to my case study. First, I rehearse the most commonly endorsed responses to the conflicts between students' academic identities and their cultural identities. These responses include bidialectalism, biculturalism, and code-switching. I elucidate the inherent problems within these three responses. I then engage Patricia Bizzell's assertion that acquisition of an academic world view is "well worth the risks." I argue that the supposed student-sponsored agency of education is

often students' passive assimilation of White middle class culture. The second portion of Chapter 3 contextualizes the technology and identity issues that arose within the case study during the unit on societal identity. I review cultural studies theory and technology pedagogy. I then apply them to the pedagogical uses of online social networks within the composition classroom. Also, I complicate traditional views of Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) by introducing postmodern theory and extending SRTOL to include the language of the Millennials.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of an IRB-approved case study on African American females' language and identity. The first portion of the case study involves students' academic identities. Based on the results of the study, I argue that in order to succeed within academia, African American female students must overcome a silencing of the African American voice as well as their personal insecurities involving language. The second portion of the study involves their societal identities. I argue that incorporating new waves of technology that reflect students' interests provides students an outlet to explore facets of their identity that fall outside the scope of academic discourse. Throughout the chapter, I share and discuss the reading assignments and writing assignments as well as my pedagogical practices.

For Chapter 5, I suggest ways that English professionals may address students' writing errors without negating their cultural voice. First, I draw from the work of Bruce Horner to critique the concept of "error." Next, I revisit Min-zhan Lu's argument on linguistic innocence. Finally, I extend the conversation on error as I review two special cases that I encountered within the classroom. Within this chapter, I concede that certain students' writings fall outside the scope of commonplace errors and address such situations accordingly.

In Chapter 6, I posit the further implications of my research to include the long-term retention of minority and working class students within academia. Therefore, I conclude my argument with a brief review of the existing literature on retention as well as three major Southern universities' approaches to the retention of African American students.

Chapter Two: Policies on Language, Language as Identity, and Identity within Technology

Various languages, such as German, Mande, Mandingo, Wolof, and Choctaw, all influenced early American English (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 114). With such a multifaceted linguistic history, it is understandable that controversies over language still occur within the United States. In his essay “The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Our Times,” Harvey J. Graff shows how the United States traditionally has linked language to literacy, literacy to education, and education to success. In chronicling the origins of literacy and education in America, Graff writes, “Education was associated with respectability and advancement,” and also, “If people were to improve their society and themselves, they must be educated” (Graff 215, 212). Therefore, America’s general standard regarding social advancement and success has always been intertwined with one’s level of education.

During the nineteenth century, teachers emphasized language and speech skills more so than actual reading comprehension. With numerous immigrants, slaves, and poor Whites entering schools, language acquired a special significance.¹⁰ Education held multiple purposes, and schools began to be utilized for “assimilation and sociocultural cohesion” (212). Graff finds, “One significant use of literacy training was to homogenize the speech of the pupils. [. . .] Schools in nineteenth-century North America were promoting a class society, and one of the ways to ease social tensions was through homogenizing language, erasing some of the visible

¹⁰ Graff does note that slaves and the poor were initially excluded from education (212).

signs of diversity” (224). The same trends that were evident in nineteenth-century education still are evident in twentieth and twenty-first century education.

Based on American history and current trends in education, it is important to remember that when assessing one’s ability to succeed, the American public often places high value on an individual’s language. In the twenty-first century, composition and rhetoric scholars are steeped in discussions about bilingualism, bidialectalism, biculturalism, and code-switching, but we must remember that other individuals still devote themselves to a monolingual view of society and a belief in the speech-homogenizing power of the educational system. While Graff chronicles the history of literacy in America, John Trimbur sees the necessity to review the history of English itself in America. In “Linguistic Memory and the Politics of U.S. English,” Trimbur reveals the language politics behind America’s monolingual preferences. According to Trimbur, America demonstrates a “systematic forgetting” concerning language that perpetuates an ambivalence toward multilingualism. Noting that the Founding Fathers of the United States did not overtly institute a national language, Trimbur argues that they covertly instituted English by using it in the political realm. He revisits the historical moments in which colonialists exerted linguistic dominance over Native Americans and African Americans. He concludes that America’s linguistic ambivalence continues today in the college curriculum as it marginalizes other languages into foreign language departments, treating them as “dead” languages to be spoken, but not written, mastered, or included within the English composition classroom.

Bruce Horner targets the field of composition and rhetoric—which is generally considered to be fairly liberal regarding language politics—in “‘Students’ Rights,’ English Only, and Re-imagining the Politics of Language.” Horner claims that the CCCC position statement

Students' Right to Their Own Language¹¹ is aligned with English Only ideology.¹² He highlights conflicting language ideologies within SRTOL in relation to English Only legislation. According to Horner, SRTOL advocates students' linguistic rights, yet it neglects to include students' rights to languages other than English. SRTOL uses the words "language" and "dialect" interchangeably; however, these words are used in reference to English. The result is students' right to dialects of the English language, which implicitly supports English Only ideology.

Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Horner notes that students should be aware that linguistic capital does not equal or ensure social capital, and certainly not monetary capital. Horner argues that "dominant approaches to language and 'error' have failed to understand language as material social practice" (742). Accordingly, these approaches fail to adequately address the challenges faced by teachers, students, and writers. He advocates for writing to be viewed as a site for students to mediate their language and social identity. Finally, Horner calls for students' active power/agency in examining and analyzing linguistic power structures. The works of Horner, Trimbur, and Graff aid us in understanding the controversies surrounding America's linguistic history—controversies that have inevitably led to differing statements on language policy.

Relationship among English Professionals, Professional Organization(s), and In-class Practices. This review of literature beginning with SRTOL in 1972 connects policies on

¹¹ The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) issued its position statement Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) in 1974. The position statement explains CCCC's professional stance on students' dialects. (See "Language Policy" later in this chapter for a detailed description of SRTOL.)

¹² "English Only" constitutes part of a national movement to make English the official language of the United States. (See "The Debate outside Academia" later in this chapter for a detailed description of the English Only and/or Official English movement.)

language, to language and identity, and finally to identity within technology. However, this review of varying perspectives on policy/language/identity still leaves one question unaddressed: what is the impact of such policies on actual classroom practices? Despite the research of the LSA and the CCCC background statement for SRTOL, many English professionals choose not to include students' cultural dialects and identities within the classroom. Keith Gilyard speculates on the subject in "Holdin it Down":

For example, the CCCC Language Policy Committee recently surveyed CCCC and NCTE members regarding their views on language diversity. Findings reveal that a significant number of teachers are unaware of CCCC policies on language diversity and that verbal commitment to language diversity often does not translate into classroom practice. However, the results also indicate that course work in linguistic diversity does have a significant impact on teachers' understanding and attitudes. (Gilyard 118)

Gilyard does not provide details concerning the "significant impact" that this survey supposedly had on teachers' understanding and attitudes. But despite this lack of details, his words *verbal commitment to language diversity often does not translate into classroom practice* still highlight a considerable concern within English studies.

Stephen Parks's text on SRTOL had considerable import, especially considering that the NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus objected to its publication. Before reading Parks's account of the SRTOL history, I considered it to be a foundational document within composition and rhetoric. Never before has a statement of its magnitude been published within our profession. The lines of SRTOL that are especially powerful relate to the role of classroom teachers: "We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language." Rather than the general public, sometimes teachers themselves oppose professional policy most adamantly. In fact, CCC's members openly mocked the message conveyed from CCCC, such as John R. Hendrickson: "at

last igdorence has took its riteful plas in the world [. . .]. Of corse this aint rote in the dialect of my nurture or any other sombitch I know about unles its some wasp imperialist its ok anyways becaus it aint gonna be nobodies langwich in a few yeers it never shud a been” (300).

When viewing such open disdain for professional policy, as evidenced by Hendrickson, one necessarily questions the contradictions between individual beliefs and professional policy. Many views concerning language politics are expressed in composition and rhetoric literature, but the question regarding individual beliefs vs. professional policy has yet to be adequately addressed by the field at-large. SRTOL exists as a monumental document for its time, yet (as noted by Stephen Parks) CCCC has neglected to implement the position statement in concrete ways. Geneva Smitherman also shares her views on NCTE concerning SRTOL. She and other committee members spent almost four years “assembling a publication of practical classroom assignments, activities, lectures, and teaching units [that would show and tell how to apply the philosophy of the ‘Students’ Right’ resolution to the day-to-day experience of teaching and learning” (“SRTOL: A Retrospective” 24). However, NCTE “reluctantly decided” against publishing the collection (24). Smitherman explains NCTE’s decision as the result of a more conservative cultural climate within the nation, as opposed to the turbulent era wherein SRTOL was conceived. Thus, composition and rhetoric has a nationally-endorsed position statement on language and identity from CCCC, but lacks a nationally-endorsed guide on ways to apply SRTOL in concrete ways. My case study on language, identity, and technology moves in the direction of this need.

Language Policy. Several professional organizations have issued language policies in an effort to educate the general public on the links among language, culture, and intelligence. For example, the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) addresses the links between language and

intelligence. Its “Language Rights” statement details the organization’s stance concerning multiple languages within the United States:

[T]o be bilingual--to speak both English and another language--should be encouraged, not stigmatized. There is no convincing evidence that bilingualism by itself impedes cognitive or educational development. On the contrary, there is evidence that it may actually enhance certain types of intelligence. (Linguistic Society of America)

The organization also asserts, “Furthermore, different languages allow different ways of expressing experiences, thoughts, and aesthetics. America’s art and culture are greatly enriched by the presence of diverse languages among its citizens” (Linguistic Society of America). These and other related statements from professional organizations suggest that multiple languages do not detract from the richness of our nation; rather, various languages contribute to its richness.

Additionally, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) executive committee issued a position statement titled “The National Language Policy,” which declares in its background statement, “All people in a democratic society have the right to education, to employment, to social services, and to equal protection under the law. No one should be denied these or any civil rights because of linguistic differences.” The position statement provides seven reasons why English Only is wrong: it’s unnecessary, unrealistic, educationally unsound, unfair and dangerous, invasive, counterproductive, and unconstitutional.

It is the third reason that I would like to quote and explore at length:

It’s educationally unsound. English Only opposes bilingual and similar programs that help students build on their linguistic skills. When students cannot use their strengths, they experience alienation and failure. Prohibiting or discouraging diversity limits rather than expands learning opportunities. (CCCC)

As evidenced in the CCCC’s National Language Policy, many English Only opponents contest eliminating academic programs that assist multicultural students.

Both the “Language Rights” statement and the National Language Policy have contributed to advances in linguistic equality within the classroom, but neither has received the attention attributed to another CCCC’s document. In 1972, CCCC issued a resolution on language policy, which was later to become known as Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL). The monumental document, which later appeared in a 1974 special issue of *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), summarizes CCCC’s professional stance on students’ dialects:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect has any validity amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (CCCC)

Aware that not all composition and communication professionals would readily accept the resolution, a special committee drafted background information and a substantial bibliography to include with the resolution.

Of the many arguments against SRTOL and the concept of non-standard dialects within the classroom, one readily cited argument involves public opinions and prejudices within the business world against such dialects. In the introduction to the SRTOL background documents, CCCC notes, “[I]t is worth remembering that the past teaching in English classes has been largely responsible for those attitudes,” as it questions whether English professionals will emphasize public opinion or linguistic evidence. Certainly, public attitudes may not change until the educational system changes. And as noted by CCCC, the educational system contributes to

the value system of the general public. English professionals must begin to change the course curricula within individual classrooms in order to affect public opinion in the years to come.

Also in the introduction to the SRTOL background documents, CCCC indirectly raises the question of the true goal of English classrooms in which it includes responsibility for students' self images: "As English teachers, we are responsible for what our teaching does to the self-image and the self-esteem of our students." A central argument of this project—one that will be repeated throughout this work—is that language and identity are tied inextricably together. CCCC supports such an argument: "Since dialect is not separate from culture, but an intrinsic part of it, accepting a new dialect means accepting a new culture; rejecting one's native dialect is to some extent a rejection of one's culture." CCCC notes that English faculty must begin to change curricular practices in order to include students' cultural languages within the classroom while upholding the standards of the curricula, i.e., Standard American English.

In *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students' Right to Their Own Language*, Stephen Parks reviews the events surrounding SRTOL, including events and history that are not often cited in relation to the document. According to Parks's research, the Dartmouth Conference, the relationship between Black English and Black Power, and differing political frameworks for defining the role of the student all contributed to the creation of SRTOL. He also cites the role of activist organizations, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party, and Students for a Democratic Society, and how these organizations "imagined student politics as a microcosm of national politics" (22). Within these turbulent political times, CCCC issued SRTOL.

Parks reconsiders the present value of SRTOL within English studies in light of the past political climate in which it was created. He contrasts CCCC and MLA against the New University Conference:¹³

Institutionally blocked at the MLA and CCCC, it [the NUC] would have to rely upon the actions of NUC members placed on boards, councils, or committees. These members, however, by necessity also had to respond to the needs of the organizations which they also represented. A resolution could not produce results. The development of the SRTOL, then, is not the story of a cadre of individuals pushing through radical reform, but the ability of organizations to usurp progressive politics into the mainstream. It is the story of the difficulty of individuals producing radical change. (155)

Parks notes that the 1974 SRTOL document still exists as CCCC's official statement on language rights (203). However, he also notes a November 1983 meeting to discuss whether CCCC should draft a statement of language rights for the 1980's and 1990's. The Executive Committee members decided against any additional language rights statements, yet accepted the Allen report.¹⁴ Parks assesses this meeting as follows:

Here, the SRTOL becomes a vague statement about respecting students; it does not become an institutional tool against the emergent politics of the New Right. Consequently, given the material available to them, I would argue that the actions of the Executive Committee resulted in an endgame. Neither position can claim victory. That is, the Executive Committee was unable to articulate a way for the SRTOL to both speak to the conservative present and respect its leftist past. There appeared to be no ground for the CCCC to move forward on the SRTOL. *In effect, the SRTOL became history.* (235-36, emphasis added)

Parks's ending words, "In effect, the SRTOL became history," are particularly loaded and open for interpretation. The rhetorical effect of this line leads one to believe that SRTOL became

¹³ Parks describes the goals of the NUC as "rejecting professional models aligned with the liberal welfare state" while advocating activities that fought class, race, and gender oppression (7). Members of the NUC sought ways to "create an image of the student that would allow such activism to enter the university classroom," support leftist political organizations, and try to change the politics of certain organizations, including the CCCC (7).

¹⁴ According to Parks, "The Allen report argued that a more moderate vision of the SRTOL should be endorsed and that the project of creating the necessary documents should be accorded to the NCTE" (233).

“history” in the sense of *a thing of the past*--not “history” in the sense of *monumental significance*, as many composition and rhetoric specialists would believe.

Parks seemingly presents a credible account of the events surrounding SRTOL; however, Keith Gilyard questions Parks’s research methods in “Holdin It Down: Students’ Right and the Struggle over Language Diversity.” Gilyard notes that Parks’s research is entirely archival, derived from letters and minutes taken at meetings. Gilyard especially critiques Parks for his silencing of African American scholars:

The main point to make here, however, is that Parks silences African American scholars; [. . .] But although Parks is wary of misappropriating the experiences of African American students, he uses scholars like [Geneva] Smitherman as objects, speculates about their motivation, and constructs a history *about* them while ignoring the chance to incorporate them as speaking subjects in his study. (122)

Here, Gilyard emphasizes the importance of interviewing when scholars are recounting relatively recent events in history, especially when the participants in the historical event are still living and able not only to speak for themselves but also to provide additional insights into these historical events.

Last, but certainly not least, Gilyard anticipates that Parks’s less than precise reports on African American scholars may have cost him alliances with these individuals. He reveals the extent of certain scholars’ dissatisfaction with Parks’s text: “In fact, the NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus sent a letter to the executive director of NCTE (the organization that published Parks’s book) objecting to the publication of *Class Politics*” (122). According to Gilyard, participants available to report on SRTOL included Marianna Davis, Jim Hill, Vivian Davis, Ernece Kelly, and of course, Geneva Smitherman (122).

Indeed, Smitherman exists perhaps as the most notable scholar continually connected to SRTOL since its inception in 1972. Based on her extensive experience in fighting for students’

linguistic rights, Smitherman has suggested her own language policy. In *Talkin that Talk*, she proposes the National Language Policy for African Americans and the nation. First, the policy must be multilingual in order to prepare youth for world leadership and to protect the interests of the African American community. Of the multiple languages, African American youth should be encouraged to learn African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the Language of Wider Communication (i.e., Standard American English), and a third world language, possibly Spanish. Smitherman's proposed policy calls for official recognition of AAVE and suggests that it be utilized as a co-equal language of instruction in schools that have large numbers of AAVE speakers. Last, but certainly not least, the policy would reinforce the need for the LWC (i.e., Standard American English).

Contrasting Views on Students' Right to Their Own Language and Other Inclusive Language Policies. Over the years, SRTOL has received not only considerable support but also considerable opposition. Heated debates occurred thirty years ago due to the CCCC's resolution and continue today. In 1972, CCC published counterstatements from English professionals regarding SRTOL, though it was not yet titled as such. A draft of "The Student's Right to His Own Language" was circulated by mail to the CCC's membership before the Executive Committee revised and adopted it.¹⁵ Geneva Smitherman served on the committee that created SRTOL, and in "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language Rights," she reflects on the turbulent times:

The fall-out was tremendous. Stringent, vociferous objections were put forth. There were calls for the resolution to be rescinded and the background document recalled. Some blasted CCCC for abdicating its responsibility and pandering to 'wide-eyed' liberals in the field. Others accused CCCC of a 'sinister plot' to doom speakers of 'divergent' dialects to failure in higher education by telling

¹⁵ See Stephen Parks's *Class Politics* for a detailed account of the changes in each draft of SRTOL.

them that their stigmatized language was acceptable. A few simply said that the CCCC had done lost they cotton-pickin minds. (362)

An example of the fallout is evidenced in William H. Pixton's 1972 counterstatement wherein he calls the resolution "unsound" and offers cogent arguments against it. He begins by asserting that CCCC's affirmation of students' dialects is unnecessary because, in essence, the student has the right to his own language whether the Executive Committee affirms it or not. Pixton then addresses English teachers who privilege students' native dialects because they are "insuring that their students will have severe difficulties when they encounter the world of real affairs, a world which demands intelligible English from the individual, not the 'dialect of his nurture'" (299). Here Pixton argues that English professionals have a responsibility to equip students with the only language that will be accepted in the non-academic world—and, in truth, the only accepted language in many places within the academic world. Though argued over thirty years ago, this counterstatement to SRTOL still is considered by many people to be a valid objection to cultural dialects within the English classroom. Pixton then targets CCCC's stance that the privilege awarded to Standard American English's works to suppress other cultural dialects: "Standard English is used by the majority of persons in the English-speaking world, not so they may dominate, but so they may communicate. And those who expect to live in this world would do well to learn its language" (299). With so many existing dialects within America, not to mention other English-speaking countries, Standard American English's overarching goal is to unify—not oppress—individuals from diverse backgrounds.

However, not all of Pixton's arguments are sound, and at times, he utilizes illogical and hyperbolic statements to emphasize his point. He compares learning Standard American English to learning a foreign language:

The Committee implies, also, that a student's identity and style will be destroyed if he is required to know standard English. This idea is untrue. A student who learns a foreign language does not lose his identity and style, and it is clear that his knowing how to use standard English, which is much closer to his personal being than a foreign language is, will in no way destroy his identity and style. (299)

In this faulty analogy, Pixton fails to acknowledge that when learning a foreign language, students' native languages are neither denounced nor devalued. American students are not told that English is inadequate and therefore they need to learn Spanish or French. Instead, foreign languages are treated as enhancements to students' linguistic repertoire.

Not only did these debates occur thirty years ago; they still occur. Opponents of students' home dialects within the classroom currently argue that standard English prepares students to compete within the dominant discourse, whereas the use of dialects decreases students' chances of job offers and economic advancement. In "The Case for the Standard Language," David E. Eskey summarizes the underlying arguments of home dialects within the classroom. As he reviews the two major arguments in the debate concerning standard English, Eskey states:

One, the bidialectalist (or biloquialist) position, is that every nonstandard speaker should be given a chance to learn the standard dialect without having to give up his own kind of English. Since standard English is the language of those in power, the nonstandard speaker, so the argument runs, must learn it if he wants to get ahead in our society; he should not, however, be expected to give up the dialect of his family and friends. (771)

Bidialectalism, or code-switching, is endorsed as a medium between opponents on either side of SRTOL. From this perspective, students access the benefits of both standard English as well as their home dialects. Students are equipped to succeed in the business world, yet they are not removed from their home cultures. Next, Eskey reviews the counter position to this argument, which is that "nonstandard speakers should not be expected to become bidialectal, partly because

the whole idea is based on what is essentially a racist premise—that minorities must learn to do things our way in order to succeed in American society” (771). In other words, bidialectalism is problematic because it still posits SAE’s supremacy among various dialects. As Eskey clarifies his personal position, he endorses the position that supporters of SRTOL oppose: “I would argue that standard English is rather the language of the educated English-speaking peoples, ‘educated’ in the simplest sense of the word” (772). His argument resembles the position that standard English is the language of wider communication. However, within his argument, Eskey does acknowledge that “the standard [he has] in mind is essentially a written standard” (770). As the author closes his argument, he admonishes educators to continue teaching standard English: “But the schools must also continue to teach our students to read and write the standard language, not as the language of the rich and powerful but as the language of educated speakers everywhere” (774).

Other opponents of home dialects within the classroom, such as Maxine Hairston, concur with Eskey as they argue that teachers disadvantage students if they fail to teach standard English. Hairston, a former chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) asserts that the writing classroom has become fraught with politics. Composition teachers should emphasize the goal of writing classes: “writing itself, and how one uses it to learn and think and communicate” (697). In “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” Maxine Hairston argues:

[I]f one endorses these intellectual positions [Deconstruction, post-structuralism, and Marxism]—and sympathizes with the politics behind them---it’s easy to go to the next step and equate conventional writing instruction with conventional literary studies. Then one can say that because standard English is the dialect of the dominant class, writing instruction that tries to help students master that dialect merely reinforces the status quo and serves the interest of the dominant class. An instructor who wants to teach students to write clearly becomes part of a capitalistic plot to control the workforce. What nonsense! It seems to me that

one could argue with more force that the instructor who fails to help students master the standard dialect conspires against the working class. (184)

The argument follows that if educators fail to teach standard English, then they fail the students themselves and hinder their economic and societal advancement.

The Debate outside Academia. The debate on language politics extends beyond composition and rhetoric; language legislation groups within the general public also oppose inclusive language politics. Several national organizations, U.S. English; English First; and ProEnglish, all are committed to making English America's official language. However, the initial debate within these circles seems to concern the name/label attached to the movement. All three organizations (U.S. English, English First, ProEnglish) use the phrase "Official English" on their respective websites. U.S. English goes as far as to specifically request that its proposed legislation not be termed "English Only," but rather "Official English:" "Please ensure that all references to U.S. English legislation and legislative efforts accurately reflect efforts to pass official English, not 'English-Only.' Our opponents have a first Amendment right to use this phrase, but it is not an appropriately neutral term to use in news coverage." Perhaps proponents of the Official English/English Only movement care to disassociate the movement from the negative publicity that has become associated with English Only legislation in recent years.

Nevertheless, the two terms are somewhat conflated within both the general public and academic circles. For example, Wikipedia.com (a non-academic site that members of the general public commonly reference) uses the two terms interchangeably:

English-only movement, *also known as Official English movement*, refers to a political movement for the use only of the English language in official government operations through the establishing of English as the only official language in the United States. There have been various unrelated incarnations of the movement throughout American history. (emphasis added)

Similarly, the National Education Association (NEA) in *Official English/English Only: More Than Meets the Eye* differentiates the two terms with only a slash. The NEA then addresses the goals, limitations, and setbacks of the Official English/English Only movement jointly throughout the text.^{16 17}

Although labels are important, the larger, more pertinent debate occurring within language legislation groups concerns the role of the English language in the United States. U.S. English describes itself as the “nation’s oldest, largest citizens’ action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States.” U.S. English provides a list titled “Misconceptions About Official English” that includes questions such as the following:

- “Can other languages be used in our day-to-day private lives?”
- “Can other languages be used by government officials in emergency situations or in the investigations of crimes?”
- “Can other languages be taught and promoted in our society?”

The website answers, “Of course!”; “Absolutely!”; and “We encourage it!” to these questions in respective order (U.S. English). U.S. English also provides the following statement:

English is the key to opportunity in this country. It empowers immigrants and makes us truly united as a people. Common sense says that the government should teach people English rather than provide services in multiple languages. What would happen if our government had to provide services in all 322 languages spoken in the U.S.? Without a common language, how long would we remain the “United” States?

The website specifies which services should be administered only in English: “all public documents, records, legislation and regulations, as well as hearings, official ceremonies and

¹⁶ In following the trends of general society and academic circles, this paper respects the title “Official English” but uses the phrases “English Only” and “Official English” neutrally and interchangeably.

¹⁷ A review of the NEA’s stance on language issues are forthcoming within this argument, per Mary Hatwood Futrell, president of the NEA.

public meetings” (U.S. English). U.S. English does not call for English Only in a literal sense; rather, they call for English in the official business of the United States. Accordingly, we see the recurring argument that English (read, Standard American English) is crucial in the business world, so by extension, students should master it in order to function and/or succeed.

The most recent move to make English the official language of the United States takes the form of H.R. 997, or the English Language Unity Act, which was introduced in 2007:

To declare English as the official language of the United States, to establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization, and to avoid misconstructions of the English language texts of the laws of the United States, pursuant to Congress’s powers to provide for the general welfare of the United States and to establish a uniform rule of naturalization under article I, section 8, of the Constitution. (U.S. English)

To borrow a phrase taken from the U.S. English website, *so what’s the fuss all about?*

The *fuss* is that despite these positive views of Official English and/or English Only in the United States, I argue that their disadvantages outweigh their advantages. Official English and/or English Only legislation simply provides evidence of larger societal biases against languages and dialects outside of Standardized American English, especially when one considers the links between language and identity. Mary Hatwood Futrell, president of the NEA during the time of its publication on the English Only/Official English movement, puts forth a comparable argument:

[T]he movement to declare English the official language of the United States—by state legislation/ballot initiative or federal constitutional amendment—is not simply about legislating the official status of English. That movement is also about restricting languages other than English and terminating needed bilingual services for limited English proficient communities. *A close analysis reveals this movement to be little more than the revival of the racial and ethnic intolerance of the last century.* (NEA 5)

In many instances, language becomes a “straw man” for other covert prejudices and injustices.

A case in point is English First, which describes itself as a “national, non-profit grassroots

lobbying organization founded in 1986.” The organization lists its goals as “making English America’s official language, giving every child the chance to learn English, and eliminating costly and ineffective multilingual policies.” English First appears to be another national organization concerned about unifying American citizens through a common language.

However, upon closer inspection, one begins to question English First’s true agenda. Under its “Projects,” English First includes “Keep Rush [Limbaugh] on the Air.” Its reasoning for such a project is “Don’t let the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] take our freedom of speech.” As the organization expounds on language rights, it lists the following people and/or publications as “Foes of the First Amendment” and quotes them at length:¹⁸

- All minority-owned stations and minority-owned talk and news format stations were significantly less likely to air “The Rush Limbaugh Show,” as were female-owned stations. -- *Off the Dial (2007)*
- Spanish-language programming better serves our community. . . . The current stakeholders who are media conglomerates do not represent or produce programming to address the needs of the growing majority of Californians and Latinos across the nation. We urge the FCC to examine closely the actual demographics of our State and of our nation, and investigate whether or not the current situation provides equal access to linguistic or cultural minorities. After all, aren’t these airwaves meant to serve the public?-- *Ms. Delia Saldivar, Radio Bilingue, Inc., testimony to the Federal Communications Commission (2004)*
- The Commission has previously noted the concerns of some that programming, particularly network programming, often is not culturally diverse enough to respond to

¹⁸ The other “Foes of the First Amendment” can be found on English First’s website.

the needs and interests of certain segments of a broadcaster's community. -- *David Honig, Minority Media and Telecommunications Council*

According to English First, supposed foes of the First Amendment support diversity, including the interests of cultural minorities and women. As English First and its supporters rally to prevent the FCC from taking "our" freedom of speech, they espouse a narrow view of "our" that does not include minorities and women. English First directs its supporters concerning appropriate action under its section "What You Need to Do Right Away": "Unless the FCC and the U.S. Congress hear from the American public, your local broadcast of the 'Rush Limbaugh Show' may be replaced by *Spanish-language programs on how the families of illegal aliens are still eligible for food stamps*" (emphasis added). With English First, one perceives how individuals and organizations utilize language as a straw man for other covert prejudices and issues.

Last, but not least, ProEnglish differentiates itself from U.S. English and English First. Described as the "nation's leading English language advocates," ProEnglish distinguishes itself in its commitment to working through the courts on all levels of government. The website emphasizes that Official English does not translate as English Only. Its reasoning behind Official English includes "reinforc[ing] America's historic message to new immigrants - that we expect them to learn English as the first step in their assimilation—and that we are committed to ensuring that all Americans share in the economic, social and political benefits of having a common language." Similar to English First's ambiguous "our," ProEnglish's "we" does not specify who within America expects immigrants to learn English. And even within the group of people who support immigrants learning English, individuals differ on the actual ways to require

immigrants to learn English as well as the immediacy of this mandate (before citizenship? within x number of years? within one generation? etc.).

Despite these organizations' stated goals, we cannot view language and develop language policy independent from the individuals speaking the languages. Language and cultural identity are tied together inextricably. Notably, all organizations using an ambiguous "our" or "we" assumed an American ethos based on a historic American culture rooted in nothing other than language.

Language as Identity. Keith Gilyard, Lisa Delpit, Elaine Richardson, and Geneva Smitherman emphasize students and the cultural backgrounds that they bring with them into academia. For example, students encounter challenges when they attempt to reconcile their home culture with academic discourse. The debate among these scholars is whether the responsibility should fall upon students to employ bidialectalism, or whether English faculty should be accountable for incorporating students' home dialects into the classroom.

Keith Gilyard analyzes identity in his autobiography *Voices of the Self*, relating his experiences with bidialectalism. Gilyard advocates bidialectalism as a means of empowerment and academic advancement for African Americans. Gilyard favors bidialectalism, yet acknowledges the issues of identity that he experienced as he was torn between his home culture and academic discourse. When reconciling his two identities became overwhelming, Gilyard went through an identity crisis.¹⁹ However, his overall argument emphasizes academic achievement for minority students, and bidialectalism was how he himself succeeded.

Also, in "African American Contributions to Composition Studies," Gilyard reviews the history of African American critical pedagogy and culture, specifically noting African American

¹⁹ In *Voices of the Self*, Gilyard manipulated two identities: "Keith" was his street identity whereas "Raymond" was his academic identity.

Vernacular English (AAVE). Gilyard argues that the three most powerful influences on African American culture are the African American jeremiad, the African American church, and slave narratives. Drawing on the works of historical figures such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, and Carter G. Woodson, Gilyard suggests that the controversy between conservative and liberal ideologies concerning African American language is not a new occurrence.

Lisa Delpit echoes Gilyard's argument as she acknowledges issues of identity through her daughter's perspective in "No Kinda Sense." Delpit's daughter attended a predominantly White school, but unlike Gilyard, the girl was unable to successfully create two identities (see footnote 19). Accordingly, she suffered from low self-esteem. Delpit explains that when she enrolled her daughter in a more culturally diverse institution, the girl flourished, but also acquired African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Delpit argues that her daughter acquired an additional dialect so easily because she felt accepted by her new community. Delpit's solution reflects Geneva Smitherman's reasoning behind her suggested National Language Policy: she urges educators to embrace students' cultural dialects, thereby embracing the students' identities. In return, students will be willing to acquire SAE.

Similar to Gilyard and Delpit, Elaine Richardson weaves personal narrative into her argument on issues of language and identity in *African American Literacies*. She advocates AAVE in the classroom as she notes African Americans' forced assimilation into White culture through language. Richardson examines the social, cultural, and educational factors that compel students to relinquish their language, culture, and perspectives. She expands the definition of "language" to include speech acts, nonverbal behavior, and cultural production. Richardson further argues that when African American students exchange their language for SAE, they also

exchange their ways of knowing and being in the world. Such an exchange creates a loss of identity and divides members of the African American community.

In “Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of *Nommo*, and the Dynamics of Resistance and Identity through Language,” George Yancey cites historical examples of slavery to posit the existence of linguistic racism. Whites required African slaves to relinquish their native language and speak English when they brought the Africans to America. He argues that African American students’ present dilemma, which requires them to relinquish AAVE while in the classroom, mirrors the situation that past African slaves faced. Like their ancestors, present day African American students lose their pride, identity, and sense of home when educators force them to relinquish their home language.

John Russell Rickford and Russell John Rickford also support cultural language in *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. They find it unnecessary to abandon “Spoken Soul” (their title for AAVE) in order to master SAE. Rickford and Rickford suggest several ways to reclaim Spoken Soul: develop a new awareness about the origins, structure, politics, and larger significance of Spoken Soul; be conscious of our love-hate relationship with Spoken Soul; strike phrases such as “bad English,” “broken English,” and “lazy English” from our vocabulary; and never shun or jeer another African American because of the way he or she speaks (Rickford and Rickford 229).

In “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?,” Patricia Bizzell notes that the three challenges faced by basic writers (those students least prepared for university-level work) are different dialects, different discourse conventions, and different ways of thinking. Bizzell introduces the concept of *language communities*, as she argues that initiating basic writers into an academic language community will help to alleviate their difficulties in academia.

Understanding that her solution contains political overtones, Bizzell acknowledges the challenges that basic writers will face; importantly, these students will find that their cultural worldview differs dramatically from an academic worldview. Her answer is *biculturalism*, or acquiring two cultures and adapting to each culture as the rhetorical situation deems necessary. Although Bizzell attempts to address the challenges faced by basic writers, she neglects to fully explore the implications behind bidialectalism and biculturalism.

Unlike Bizzell, Victor Villanueva and Richard Rodriguez thoroughly address the implications behind bidialectalism and biculturalism within the Hispanic community, though from two almost opposing perspectives. In *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez attributes his academic success to what he terms “public English.” He disagrees with bilingual education and argues that what bilingualists fail to understand is that there are two concepts of individualism: private individuality and public individuality. According to Rodriguez, in order for one to acquire a public individualism, he or she must necessarily diminish his or her private individualism. He even goes as far as to argue that a contradiction exists within the term “minority student” because from his perspective, when he became a “student,” he was no longer a “minority.” Accordingly, he believes that biculturalism cannot exist; if they are to succeed in acquiring a most-desired public individualism, minorities are called on to diminish their private individualism.

In *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Villanueva also disagrees with biculturalism in relation to language and identity, though for different reasons. According to Villanueva, biculturalism itself is a “tension.” Whereas Rodriguez willingly relinquishes some of his cultural ties, Villanueva denies that such a feat is even possible. He believes that one can never relinquish his or her home culture or the new culture (mainstream society). In referencing

the melting pot metaphor of America, which in recent years has evolved into the salad bowl metaphor, Villanueva calls Rodriguez a chili pepper that hasn't quite melted.²⁰ From the views of two Hispanic American scholars, compositionists can uncover two distinct views on the issue of language and identity as well as the tension that surrounds these views.

Finally, no discussion of African American Vernacular English would be complete without incorporating the research of linguist William Labov. In "Are Black and White Vernaculars Diverging?" Labov addresses the links between language and identity from a linguistic perspective. He incorporates the factors of geographical space, socioeconomic status, and race into his research as he suggests, "[T]here is continued divergence of black and white vernaculars" (5). Many individuals considered the media to be a unifying medium that would converge the languages of African Americans and Whites. However, Labov bases his findings on "studies of sound change in progress sponsored by NSF [National Science Foundation] through the 1970s" (5). The three social groups that Labov's research examines include Whites, the rising African American middle class, and urban minorities. Within the urban minority community, Labov found "evidence of new grammatical features, reinterpretations of features of other dialects, and continued divergence of the tense, mood, and aspect system" (6). He reports on habitual *be*, the stressed *been* that has been labeled "remote present perfect," *be done*, and developments in the third singular *-s*.

Interestingly, Labov's research reveals, "The more contact blacks have with whites, the more they move away from the black vernacular side, and the more contact whites have with blacks, the more we [Labov and his researchers] observe borrowing of forms" (10). Depending

²⁰ The melting pot metaphor implies a homogenous mixture wherein all cultures in the United States become immersed within each other. The salad bowl metaphor implies a heterogeneous mixture wherein all cultures in the United States are still discernable from one another but reside together peacefully.

on the amount of contact that each racial group had with the other, the one racial group began to reflect the language patterns of the other. Accordingly, urban minorities, who have little-to-no contact with the African American middle class or Whites, create their own language patterns.

Perhaps Labov's most significant research finding that relates to my project on language and identity can be found in his statement on language and education:

There is no doubt that the divergence that we have witnessed on the linguistic front is symptomatic of a split between the black and white portions of our society. It may also be a further cause of divergence in widening the distance between the English of the classroom and the vernacular that the child brings to the classroom. But like many of my colleagues, *I see that the primary cause of educational failure is not language differences, but institutional racism.* (10, emphasis added)

Research confirms the linguistic rift that is spreading between African Americans and Whites, though the rift seems to be influenced more by geography and socioeconomic status rather than race. However, research also indicates that institutional racism in the educational system—not linguistic differences—is the true problem in the classroom. Labov concedes that he and his research team had yet to create concrete contributions to the academic curriculum that would make worthwhile changes in the educational system. In recent years, several scholars have drawn from Labov's research findings to address that need, and my work continues in that tradition.

Language and Technology. Many individuals have been concerned about language and identity within the composition classroom for quite some time. However, as composition specialists incorporate technology within their individual pedagogies, these concerns have now developed to include language and identity in online spaces. Undoubtedly, technology constitutes an increasing component of the composition classroom. Whether through blogs, wikis, online social networks, or online peer critique software, composition instructors utilize

technology in the classroom for various reasons, including as an effort to engage students. However, composition instructors should not implement technology within the composition classroom without considering the social, theoretical, cultural, and pedagogical implications of such a practice. Charles Moran, Cynthia Selfe, Stuart Selber, and Adam Banks have addressed problems that arise when composition instructors utilize technology within the classroom. I assert that rather than avoiding technology within the classroom altogether in an effort to evade these problems, teachers should integrate technology into the classroom while equipping themselves with scholarly research that discusses these issues, and they should be aware of the theoretical underpinnings of their pedagogical practices.

Charles Moran and Cynthia Selfe address the problems of incorporating technology in the classroom in “Teaching English across the Technology/Wealth Gap.” The authors assert that teachers who strive to incorporate technology in the classroom must be aware of three realities: technology widens the gap between wealthier students and poorer students, other teaching resources must be cut from budgets in order to provide technology, and commercial and political goals do not correlate to the educational goals of technology. Moran and Selfe emphasize teachers’ critical awareness of the economical, political, and social factors at play in technology. They argue that educators should not always insist on cutting-edge technology; instead, educators should utilize less expensive resources and emphasize writing.

Stuart Selber admonishes composition and rhetoric specialists to move from “literacy” to “multiliteracies” in his work *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* in his efforts to address the challenges of technology within the classroom. Specifically, he examines functional literacy, critical literacy, and rhetorical literacy. With functional literacy, computers are tools, and students are trained as users of technology; the goal is effective employment. With critical

literacy, computers are cultural artifacts, and students are trained as questioners of technology; the goal is informed critique. With rhetorical literacy, computers are hypertextual media, and students are trained as producers of technology; the goal is reflective praxis.

Selber contributes much to the conversation on technological literacy; however, in one area, he simply rehearses old arguments on discourse. According to Selber, “privilege accrues” as individuals become proficient in the discourse conventions of a given community. So in order for students to become full members of a community, they must learn the language of the community. Selber argues a valid point. However, as cited earlier, Bruce Horner borrows from the work of Pierre Bourdieu to remind us that linguistic capital does not equate social capital—and certainly not economic capital. So although Selber correctly assesses the need for students to become proficient in the use, critique, and production of technological literacy, he should reassess the goal of multiliteracies when privilege does not necessarily follow.

Cynthia Selfe also challenges composition and rhetoric specialists to move beyond old concepts of literacy in *Technology in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*. As a point of departure, Selfe argues that *literacy alone is no longer our business. Literacy and technology are—or so they must become*. Building on this foundation, she reviews the Technology Literacy Challenge and its impact on education. She notes the roles of government, education, business, parents, and ideology during this major technological leap. The government served as the momentum behind the Technological Literacy Challenge by training teachers, providing computers and Internet access within classrooms, and encouraging curricular changes that would involve online learning. The realm of education was the official venue of these new changes in technology. American businesses applied pressure to the Technology Literacy Challenge by stimulating consumers’ appetites for new technology and

supporting the new, technologically-proficient students. Parents had the responsibility to sanction the new views on technology and education; they bought home computers for their children as soon as possible and began to revise the master narrative of education to include technology as a crucial component of success. Finally, ideology provided the set of beliefs that would fuel the new emphasis on technology within our country (technology plus science equals progress; technology plus capitalism plus democracy equals progress; technology plus education equals progress). Selfe ends by suggesting ways that educators can engage critically with technology, such as understanding the politics [economics] behind literacy education, refusing to comply with the traditional split between the arts and the sciences, and having a technological understanding of the world (i.e., technology does not equate better education or a better life).

To confront the problems of technology, Christine Tulley and Kristine Blair incorporate feminist pedagogy into the computer classroom in “Ewriting Spaces as Safe, Gender-fair Havens: Aligning Political and Pedagogical Possibilities.” According to the authors, men have dominated technology and marginalized women; no safe spaces existed for women and girls to interact. Accordingly, Tulley and Blair outline five suggestions for creating safe spaces for women and girls in the computer classroom: redefine computer literacy, provide various ways for students to enter the technological writing environment, collaborate to establish ground rules, establish a buddy system, and provide technology mentors (57). Although the authors briefly acknowledge race, age, and ethnicity, their primary focus is gender, specifically women and girls.

In *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology*, Adam Banks also contributes to changing our field’s understanding of technology. He notes four types of access that are crucial to success in technology. Material access is owning or having access to technology when needed. Functional

access includes effectively using technology. Experiential access means utilizing technology as a part of one's life. Critical access is the ability to critique or resist technology when necessary. Banks further complicates our understanding of technology as he connects technology to racial issues; he argues that America has a "user-friendly racism." In other words, a language of access circulates within our society, but only surface changes occur while the fundamental principles of racism remain. He also discusses the importance of a "Black digital ethos," or the attitudes, knowledge, and understandings that African Americans should bring with them as they engage with technology.

Samantha Blackmon emphasizes culture in the computer classroom in "(Cyber)Conspiracy Theories?: African-American Students in the Computerized Writing Environment." Blackmon explores the idea of "cyber humans," or individuals who relinquish race, class, gender, and sexual orientation so they can identify with other individuals in cyberspace. Blackmon argues that African Americans resist technology and the Internet due to the misrepresentations and stereotypes of their race online. Similar to Moran and Selfe, Blackmon emphasizes the technology/wealth gap and admonishes teachers to examine cultural factors, issues of access, and issues of representation online.

While Selber, Selfe, and Banks have helped to reshape our understandings of writing technologies, other scholars have helped to complicate and obscure our existing ideas. In "Computers, Innovation, and Resistance," Fred Kemp complicates our traditional modes of teaching composition. As he discusses Texas Tech's use of ICON (Interactive Composition Online), he argues that the English graduate students and instructors experienced a "psychology of loss," a mostly unstated, unexamined attitude that fueled the resistance surrounding ICON. Composition specialists have built writing programs on the mentorship model wherein novices

(students) learn from the expert (writing instructor). However, ICON split the role of the teacher into classroom instructor and document instructor. Although the undergraduate students benefitted from ICON, the graduate students and instructors resisted the new system because they themselves benefitted from the expert/apprentice model during their education and expected their students to do the same. Kemp further complicates the traditional model of composition in large writing programs by arguing (1) knowing how to write well and teaching others how to write are not the same thing and (2) knowing how to read and interpret literature does not equate knowing how to teach writing. For these reasons, he argues that removing the masses of graduate students from teaching writing benefitted his program.

Other issues that were once clear-cut are now becoming obscured with new research, as evidenced by Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher, and Nichole Brown's findings in "The Cultural Ecology of Race." These authors examined the challenges that instructors face when incorporating conversations on race within the computerized environment. Importantly, they reexamine the oft-cited assertion that women are intimidated by technology. In the case of Brown and her female family members (three generations of African Americans), these women embraced technology as a means to improve their socio-economic conditions. Thus, the authors suggest the belief that women are intimidated by technology may apply to white, middle-class women—not women in general. Selfe, Hawisher, and Brown call for a move toward induction, rather than deduction, when dealing with students' views on race and technology.

In *Teens, Technology, and Literacy; Or, Why Bad Grammar Isn't Always Bad*, Linda Braun devotes the chapter "Libraries and Classrooms as Virtual Communities" to social networks, including MySpace.com. Braun expands the meaning of "community" to include social networks that introduce students to new people and ideas. The author argues that

educators should explore such communities in efforts to connect with students. Braun attributes MySpace's success to its connection to real life. Braun differentiates between digital natives versus digital immigrants, and she argues that educators must find new ways to teach digital natives and engage them in the curriculum. Accordingly, she advocates implementing social networks into the classroom.

Chapter Three: From the Classroom to Real Life: A Review of Academic Identity versus Societal Identity

In this chapter, I present the background literature that is needed to contextualize the two units of the case study that I present in Chapter 4. First, the literature review for the research on academic identity includes discussions of biculturalism, bidialectalism, and codeswitching. Second, the literature review for the research on societal identity includes discussions of the pedagogical uses of MySpace.com, cultural studies pedagogy, and technology pedagogy. I then apply post-modern theory to MySpace.com as I reappropriate the CCC position statement SRTOL to include not only cultural language but also technology idioms.

The Underlying Politics of Biculturalism, Bidialectalism and Code-Switching and African American Females' Academic Identities: Research on Academic Identity. African American students' use of Standard American English (SAE) within the composition classroom is just one of many ways that students assimilate, or are assimilated into, White middle class culture in order to succeed²¹. Many graduating high school students and beginning college students who originate from African American working class backgrounds find that they must exchange their home languages for Standard American English and/or academic discourse in order for their voices to be heard and/or respected within academia. Consequently, the conversation on Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) is an ongoing debate that

²¹ I would like to acknowledge that the negation of home dialect within academia is not a phenomenon unique to the African American experience. Rather, students from various linguistic and economic backgrounds encounter such discrimination, including, but not limited to, Hispanics, immigrants, and working class White Americans. However, African Americans are the target group for this particular argument.

many scholars have joined, including David E. Eskey, George Yancy, Geneva Smitherman, Gail Beem Sorace, Elaine Richardson, Lisa Delpit, James Paul Gee, and Alice Ashton Filmer. As these scholars examine the ways that African Americans employ Standard American English and are assimilated into White middle class culture, several scholars argue that Standard American English is not necessarily superior to other dialects; rather, Standard American English is what Geneva Smitherman refers to as the *language of wider communication* (LWC). However, as African American students employ Standard American English to communicate with various cultures, they tend to be cut off from their home communities, if those communities do not value Standard American English. Assimilation through language forms a dichotomy between African Americans who consciously (or unconsciously) absorb White culture and those who refuse and/or fail to assimilate into White culture. As I examine the assimilation of African Americans into White middle class culture through language, I should note that I do not altogether oppose the teaching of Standard American English within the classroom. Rather, I argue that African American students' dialect should be not only respected but also affirmed by the English professoriate. To support this argument, I draw from the results of a case study on academic identity. Research suggests that in order for African American female college students to succeed within academia, they must overcome both a silencing of African American voice as well as personal insecurities involving language. As these students strive to maintain connections to their home communities, English professionals must both acknowledge and question the implicit hegemony within academic world views and academic language communities.

The Guiltiness of Linguistic Innocence. Before one can understand fully the controversy concerning what Smitherman terms the “language war,” (qtd. in Yancy 279) one

must understand that the debate is historically rooted in the enslavement of African Americans. In his essay “Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of *Nommo*, and the Dynamics of Resistance and Identity Through Language,” George Yancy states, “This was the situation that Blacks of African descent faced; they were forced to learn the language of the colonizer, forced to split, to multiply in so many different cultural, psychological, linguistic, and spiritual directions against their will” (275). The present dilemma in which African American students are admonished to relinquish use of their home languages and use Standard American English while in the classroom mirrors the situation that past African Americans faced. Slavery was not only an economic advantage for Whites; slavery “was designed to instill in Africans a sense of inferiority and ontological servitude, to deracinate any sense of African pride, cultural identity, and home” (283). As Africans were forced to suppress their mother tongue in exchange for American English, they also lost their pride, identity, and sense of home. The same scenario is re-contextualized and replayed in American classrooms today.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) exists as a source of pride and identity for African American students; consequently, exchanging their language for Standard American English erases students’ connection to their homes. In “Building Bridges to the ‘Language of Wider Communication,’” Gail Beem Sorace notes, “Language instruction is often tantamount to a direct assault on children’s language. Because language is intertwined with culture and one’s psychic being, language instruction often becomes an assault on the child and the culture to which he belongs” (75). As high school and college students strive for educational success, they are admonished to suppress their home languages. Many individuals argue that students do not “exchange” their home languages; they simply accumulate an additional language. Sorace

reviews the *Standards for the English Language Arts* project, which states, “Students must become cognizant of how ‘language conventions vary from one context to another. They need to make use of a range of language conventions as they create texts for different audiences and different purposes’” (qtd. in Sorace 75). The problem with this concept is that only minority students are required to “create texts for different audiences,” meaning that high school and college students who hail from the dominant cultural group are not required to create texts for other cultural audiences. Standard American English may be the *language of wider communication*, but its dominant privilege within academic discourse disadvantages students from working class African American backgrounds as it supersedes the students’ home language that they learn from and connect to their parents: “Woman is the child’s first teacher, who protects it even in her womb and begins to socialize it” (Richardson 75). Geneva Smitherman goes even further to connect cultural language directly to children’s mothers: “when you lambast the home language that kids bring to school, you ain’t just dissin’ dem, you talkin’ ‘bout they mommas!” (qtd. in Richardson 75).

Yancy further examines the hierarchical value of Standard American English over AAVE as he asserts, “Moreover, to engage in this discourse is to *perform* linguistically before an audience of gatekeepers [. . .]” (276). For teachers across America, the use of Standard American English indicates a proper education, and for employers across America, the expression of Standard American English indicates an individual who is worthy of hire (276). I agree with Yancy’s assertion, and I contend that the debate concerning minority students’ assimilation into White culture through language is so controversial because such assimilation equates a new form of racism: “In short, Euro/Anglo linguistic hegemony (*the hegemonic tongue*) is a form of colonialism and linguistic racism” (292). Many individuals do not view the

use of Standard American English as racism, but when White mainstream culture privileges individuals who speak SAE and disparages individuals who do not, the result is linguistic racism.²²

The recurring solutions to language-based assimilation are code-switching and bidialectalism, and by extension, biculturalism. In “African-American Vernacular English: Ethics, Ideology, and Pedagogy in the Conflict Between Identity and Power,” Alice Ashton Filmer states, “My own research (Filmer, 2001) confirms what Baugh and others have found: that African-American students who speak standard English report being (or having been) criticized by their vernacular-speaking peers for ‘sounding White’” (265). Standard American English is not valued within many African American communities; consequently, students who conform their language to “the way White people talk” are ridiculed within their home culture (261). To avoid such criticism, Filmer advocates “bidialectism” or “code-switching.” “From my point of view, it’s not about giving up AAVE, but about being able to switch back and forth as the context warrants. It’s about code-switching, or being bidialectical” (261). From Filmer’s point of view, bidialectism is a reasonable solution to the issues that many African American students face; simply use AAVE at home and SAE within academia.

Lisa Delpit also advocates code-switching and argues that African American students need Standard American English in order to succeed within academia and the job market. In “No Kinda Sense,” Delpit recommends pedagogies based on African American students’ interests so that they successfully acquire Standard American English as a language form. Concerning her eleven year old daughter’s use of AAVE, Delpit states, “[W]hen my child’s language reflects

²² In “Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language, the Power of *Nommo*, and the Dynamics of Resistance and Identity through Language,” George Yancey argues, “In short, Euro/Anglo linguistic hegemony (*the* hegemonic tongue) is a form of colonialism and linguistic racism” (292, original emphasis).

that of some of her peers, I feel the eyes of ‘the other’ negatively assessing her intelligence, her competence, her potential, and yes, even her moral fiber” (38). Although Delpit does not wholly oppose the use of AAVE, she does acknowledge the hardships that African American students face when they do not speak the language of the dominant discourse. She argues that the students themselves do not lack intelligence, but the members of mainstream society will view them in such a manner: “[T]he children whose language is considered defective are themselves viewed as defective. Spoken language has been shown to be one of the key means that teachers, like the corporate world, use to assess the intellect of individuals” (41). In order for students to succeed academically and within the job market, Delpit asserts that they must assimilate into White middle class culture through language.

Similarly, Patricia Bizzell advocates biculturalism. In “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College,” she explores the challenges that many basic writers, or those students “least well prepared for college” encounter (15). Bizzell finds that these students often differ from mainstream students in their dialects, discourse conventions, and ways of thinking. Although Bizzell well-establishes that she is referring to basic writers throughout her argument, many of her ideas are largely applicable to other non-mainstream students who fall outside the scope of basic writing.²³ Bizzell advises educators to assist basic writers in understanding the concept of *language communities*. By initiating basic writers into an academic language community, English professionals will assist students in acquiring a different world view. Similar to other scholars, Bizzell endorses the concept of biculturalism, wherein non-mainstream students may maintain their original world view while acquiring a new academic world view. She

²³ The results of the case study on African American female identity reveal that the research participants also differed in their dialects, discourse conventions, and ways of thinking—though they were not categorized as basic writers. *See section “It Will Pay Off Eventually:” African American Language and Identity in this chapter.*

hypothesizes that although these writers may lose certain aspects of their lives (religious and/or social views) after acquiring an academic world view, they may nevertheless find “its acquisition well worth the risks” (21).

I take Bizzell’s conclusion as my point of departure: through biculturalism, students may find acquisition of an academic world view “well worth the risks.” As scholars advocate biculturalism, they often place the responsibility, or the *agency*, upon the non-mainstream students. In other cases, students taking charge of their own education is a worthwhile endeavor. However, in the case of biculturalism, student-centered agency comes with certain sacrifices. English professionals usher non-mainstream students into an academic world view without ever expanding the boundaries of traditional course curricula that center on mainstream dialects, discourse conventions, and ways of thinking. Non-mainstream students take on an additional culture; mainstream professors and students maintain the status quo. English professionals must acknowledge the hegemonic forces behind mainstream dialects, discourse conventions, and ways of thinking. In many cases, “mainstream” is simply a term that disguises White middle class culture; albeit, no inherent defects exist within White middle class culture—or any culture, depending on your world view. Yet, we cannot continue to require minority students to stretch themselves beyond their cultural world views without ever considering that mainstream culture may indeed benefit from other cultural perspectives.

In short, student-sponsored “agency” is really assimilation. An African American student may have the agency to acquire an additional world view, thereby changing his or her dialect and discourse conventions. However, if the African American student cannot succeed without assimilating into White middle class culture, then his or her agency is not really agency at all. The student-sponsored agency reveals itself to be hegemony-sponsored assimilation. In reality,

the students do not *assimilate* into White middle class culture; they are *assimilated into* White middle class culture—if they desire to succeed.

In *Let's Flip the Script: An African American Discourse on Language, Literature, and Learning*, Keith Gilyard divides the major camps of dialect and educational issues somewhat differently; nevertheless, he does not support bidialectalism as a solution to the challenges of language-based assimilation. Concerning Atlantic Creoles, the *eradicationists* endorse eliminating language differences because they supposedly represent language deficiencies. Unlike eradicationists, bidialectalists concede that Atlantic Creoles do not hinder students' acquisition of Standard American English. Gilyard notes, however, that bidialectalists support an "accommodationist strategy: they don't want to make much of a fuss" (71). Therefore, Gilyard aligns himself with the pluralist camp; they address the political structures underlying language varieties. Gilyard and other pluralists seek to "shake up school and society so language variation doesn't play out so negatively in classrooms" (70). Rather than allowing dominant power structures to continue—as is the case with the bidialectalists and the eradicationists—Gilyard seeks to address linguistic hierarchies, thereby creating more positive educational experiences for non-mainstream students.

In short, the issue is not whether acquiring another world view is *well worth the risks*; the issue is to *spread the risks more evenly* among various cultural and linguistic groups.

"Well Worth the Risks:" Patricia Bizzell Reexamined. This argument has taken as its point of departure Patricia Bizzell's "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College" and her argument on academic world views. In engaging with Bizzell, I would like to contextualize her overall argument and emphasize the strengths of her argument. First, Bizzell clearly acknowledges that she gears her argument toward basic writers, which she describes as those

students “least well prepared for college” (15). I have taken the liberty to re-contextualize her argument on academic world views to apply them to not only basic writers but also African American students who enroll in regular composition courses. I have done so because the characteristics of basic writers that Bizzell describes, such as differing dialects, discourse conventions, and ways of thinking, are applicable to students beyond the basic writing course. Also, the challenges that basic writers face, such as becoming bicultural and acquiring an academic world view in addition to their original world view, are also applicable to the lives of African American college students outside the basic writing classroom. In dealing with the portions of Bizzell’s argument that relate to non-basic writing college students within the African American community, I have expounded on what I believe to be several limitations of Bizzell’s argument.

Nonetheless, Bizzell makes several valid points within her article. For instance, students may feel compelled to relinquish their original world views, wholly or partially, as they become immersed within a new academic community. Some beliefs instilled within students by their home communities (such as racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.) would not be conducive to an academic environment wherein students are required to collaborate with peers from various backgrounds. Also, I concur with Bizzell that students may find certain aspects of the academic world view beneficial. The ability to analyze, assess, and engage with opposing points of view while maintaining an objective stance is a valuable trait among not only academics but also other professions. Finally, I agree that helping students to understand the concept of language communities, rather than simply focusing on individual students’ dialects, would be more beneficial to students’ educational careers.

In acknowledging the strengths of Bizzell's arguments, I nevertheless maintain that Bizzell's perspectives on the acquisition of academic world views may be somewhat myopic. First, biculturalism still emphasizes the assimilation of non-mainstream students into White middle class culture without considering that mainstream students may benefit from acquiring other cultural views. Next, English professionals should fully explore what students may relinquish from their home cultures when they acquire academic world views. As evidenced by the African American students within this case study, some minority students are motivated by their cultural world views to succeed within academia. In relinquishing their cultural world views, students may find themselves relinquishing their motivational factors as well. Finally, admission into another language community, specifically the acquisition of Standard American English, is never an act of linguistic innocence. In remembering that the foundation of this overall argument is that language and identity are tied inextricably together, one must acknowledge that the sense of community that students embrace within their cultural language communities can never be replaced, even if they acquire a secondary language community. By analyzing Bizzell's argument on academic world views to explore the limitations of such a point of view, English professionals may engage more critically with the implicit hegemony found within an academic world view, thereby questioning whether its acquisition truly is "well worth the risks."

Incorporating MySpace.com into the Composition Classroom: Research on Societal Identity. At the time of this case study, Myspace ranked as the largest social networking site with over 110,000,000 users (Brown 211). Although it originated as a social network, many educators have since implemented MySpace within their classrooms. The use of MySpace.com as a pedagogical tool may be a recent trend among educators, but the debate over elitist or "high"

culture and popular or “low” culture has been an ongoing conversation within English studies. Dating back to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS), cultural studies as a movement responded to the rise of non-elite populations as well as their common ideas and social practices by departing from traditional ideas of “worthy” texts (i.e., literature) to be studied. Along with several other programs of study, composition and rhetoric has appropriated cultural studies to respond to the needs of its scholars and pedagogues. Diana George and John Trimbur assert that “two commonplace practices” of cultural studies pedagogy include “close readings and interpretations of text” (82). However, cultural studies pedagogy does not limit itself to a traditional definition of “text,” but includes “malls, city streets, classrooms, work places, [and] the rituals of everyday life” in addition to media and advertising (82).

MySpace.com has been added to this list of cultural texts worthy of study; as such, educators are increasingly implementing this social networking site into their classrooms for various pedagogical purposes.²⁴ Indeed, in “In Between Lauding and Deriding: A Pedagogical Review of MySpace,” James J. Brown, Jr. and Lacey Donohue state the following:

As we have noted, there are also visual and aural arguments happening on many MySpace pages, and this makes MySpace a great tool for expanding rhetorical analysis to consider the images, page layout, video clips, and songs posted by a user. Thus, texts are multiple in MySpace, and the words on the page are only part of how a page is presented. The multimedia experience of MySpace could give many students an accessible example of what we mean when we say “everything is a text.”

For example, in “Reach for Me Again: MySpace and the Brit Lit II Survey,” Daniel R.

Mangiavellano discusses how his students employed MySpace in their survey of the Romantic,

²⁴ Other social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter also constitute cultural texts that can be implemented within the classroom. However, this argument focuses on MySpace due to certain technological features available on the website. For example, students are able to play songs, decorate their profile backgrounds, and upload videos on MySpace.com.

Victorian, and modernist periods. According to Mangiavellano, “For four weeks in the semester, these groups [of students] pulled Blake, Burns, Keats, Mary Shelley, Arnold, Dickens, Christina Rossetti, Wilde, and Wolfe out of the past and transplanted them within the, at times, self-indulgent world of MySpace” (152). Mangiavellano explains that the students projected the personalities of the authors by analyzing their works of literature; the students then decided who would have been MySpace friends among the historical authors. “The role playing and social networking that make MySpace so popular with our students breathe new life into the literary figures on the syllabus as students initiate and manage speculative conversations in the same way that they, themselves, use MySpace to talk about the world around them,” Mangiavellano claims (153). The various groups of students decorated the backgrounds of their MySpace pages according to the characteristics of the literary authors based on the details that history has left to us about these historical figures. The students’ critical engagement with MySpace is evidenced by one example in particular concerning Matthew Arnold:

[T]he Matthew Arnold group kept their site completely bare of any ornamentation. The group premised their site on the simple notion that Matthew Arnold would hate MySpace: “In *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, Arnold states that criticism should ‘keep a man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarizing.’ The very nature of MySpace rests in the formation of a website devoted to one’s self, and by doing so, this suggests that the creator possesses the very ‘self-satisfaction’ that Arnold believes to be so debilitating. Considering this, Arnold would condemn the function of MySpace as it exists in the present time.” (156)

Mangiavellano’s example illustrates how the students delved into the thoughts and writings of the literary figures in their British survey class. Accordingly, he argues that incorporating students’ interest into the classroom through MySpace allows them to “defrost the literary figures they think of as living in the cold distant past” as they create conversations between authors who were separated by years of history.

Also, Leandra Preston utilizes MySpace in her Women's Studies courses in "A Space of Our Own: MySpace and Feminism Activism in the Classroom." In connecting a service learning project with MySpace, Preston argues, "Assignments that ask students to engage in cultural production within (and outside of) their own spaces can function as powerful forms of political activism while meeting course goals and learning objectives" (15). Due to its popularity, Preston chose MySpace as a potential political space. Preston explains that she decided to implement MySpace in her classroom when a student critiqued it for its antifeminism. The author writes: "While I applauded my students' critical reading of popular culture, I partially disagreed with their claims, based on personal experience with MySpace, including my own 'friends list' full of feminists and MySpace groups promoting political enlightenment and activism" (16). Accordingly, Preston encouraged her students to write about the feminist and antifeminist aspects of the social networking site. The students discovered an array of information, including pages promoting peace in Iraq as well as pages with "emancipated women draped on cars" (16). As such, Preston does not endorse MySpace as a wholly constructive site; rather, she encourages her students to critically engage the site for what it contains: "Like feminism, social networking sites enable agency through possibility, and can be vehicles for consciousness raising" (17). Preston concludes her argument by admonishing educators to stay abreast of technological spaces in order to "effectively reach and teach students" (81).

Similar to Mangiavellano and Preston, I also incorporated MySpace into my classroom. In a freshman composition class, which focused on African American experiences, at a predominantly White university, I utilized MySpace to help students explore their various and sometimes competing identities. Incorporating new waves of technology that reflect students'

interests, specifically MySpace.com, provides students an outlet to explore facets of their identity in ways that fall outside the scope of academic discourse.

Theoretical Underpinnings of MySpace.com within the Composition Classroom.

Before incorporating MySpace within the classroom, compositionists should be aware of the underlying implications of such a practice, which can be found in cultural studies theory and technology pedagogy. In “Cultural Studies and Composition,” Diana George and John Trimbur discuss the history of cultural studies as they review a list of works that “marked a decisive break with established ways of thinking about culture, literature, and history, thereby constituting what Stuart Hall calls ‘the caesura out of which . . . “Cultural Studies” emerged’” (George and Trimbur 73). Cultural studies pedagogy is not always easily enacted; students sometimes resist controversial topics, such as class, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Although no direct correlation exists between cultural studies pedagogy and these high-risk topics, cultural studies does open the door for such topics to enter. In “Composition and Cultural Studies,” James Berlin acknowledges the political aspect of cultural studies:

Cultural studies is thus concerned with the ways social formations and practices are involved in the shaping of consciousness. [. . .] Ideology, furthermore, is inscribed in language, in the signifying practices of social groups. These signifying practices are situated at the very center of cultural study [. . .]. (49)

Discussing a cultural studies freshman composition course in the English department at Purdue, Berlin notes that “culturally specific categories of race, gender, and class” were explored in relation to semiotic codes as he openly states, “The intention of forwarding this method is *frankly political*, an effort to prepare students for critical citizenship in a democracy” (51, emphasis added). Many educators and scholars oppose cultural studies within the composition classroom due to such politics, including Maxine Hairston. In “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching

Writing,” Hairston asserts, “Writing courses, especially required freshman courses, should not be for anything or about anything other than writing itself” (179). As Hairston critiques the new teaching model within composition, she argues, “It’s a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student,” when the composition classroom should be a “process-oriented, low-risk, student centered classroom” (180). Hairston notes that many composition instructors utilize their composition courses as “vehicles for social reform” (180). She observes that these composition instructors use freshman composition courses to advance their own political agendas, and they immerse themselves in trendy theories. Graduate students who teach the course also teach their own theoretical interests because they are ill-equipped in teaching composition (185). From Hairston’s perspective, students are intimidated by such political agendas; accordingly, their writerly voices are not given the opportunity to mature within composition courses. Students are left feeling “confused, angry—and cheated” (185).

Although Hairston provides very logical arguments against issues at the heart of cultural studies pedagogy, cultural studies does not have to be implemented in such a political manner that intimidates students. If teachers allow students to explore larger implications within our society while refusing to indoctrinate them with their own personal ideologies, then teachers will succeed in creating the “low-risk” classroom that Hairston advocates. Popular culture itself is neither political nor high-risk--though the power structures behind popular culture potentially are both.

Undoubtedly, many educators will contest MySpace within the classroom because it opposes the high/low binaries of literature versus popular culture. It encourages students to explore overarching societal issues underlying the social networking site (issues of language,

access to technology, culture, etc.); however, students will be able to explore freely all aspects of their identity that they bring with them to academia, thereby enacting a low-risk, multicultural classroom. Hairston endorses “creat[ing] a culturally inclusive curriculum in our writing classes by focusing on the experiences of our students. They are our greatest multicultural resource, one that is authentic, rich, and truly diverse” (190). This should be the goal of any educator who seeks to implement MySpace.com into the composition classroom--not indoctrination, but exploration.²⁵

Similar to cultural studies pedagogy, technology pedagogy possesses both advantages and disadvantages in relation to MySpace.com. A great benefit of technology in the classroom would be students’ increased ability to use technology. Many students are familiar with Microsoft Word® or other word processing software, but they may be unfamiliar with writing html codes. Practice with writing html codes²⁶ (as well as formatting) would greatly benefit the students by providing them with more than a rudimentary understanding of technology, which several scholars argue will benefit students on the job market. In “Reimagining the Functional Side of Computer Literacy,” Stuart Selber argues for a level of functionalism concerning technology. Selber reviews the origin of the negativity attributed to functional literacy and reinforces his own argument that students should be able to control technological resources, understand online writing and communication, compete in the job market with technological proficiency, and enact change (475). Accordingly, Selber “propose[s] five such parameters—

²⁵ See Jeff Rice’s “The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine: Hip-Hop Pedagogy as Composition” and Lisa Delpit’s “No Kinda Sense” for ways that educators have incorporated cultural studies within the classroom without political indoctrination.

²⁶ A more accurate phrase would be *copying html codes* since MySpace provides links to websites that have already written the codes. However, I am familiar with individuals who prefer to memorize and write the codes themselves, rather than always following a link to another website. I anticipate that some freshman students will make similar decisions.

educational goals, social conventions, specialized discourses, management activities, and technological impasses—as distinguishing qualities of a functionally literate student” (475).

Selber gears his article towards an audience of educators who endorses critical literacy, which segues into the disadvantages of technology pedagogy.

When incorporating technology into the classroom, it is necessary for educators to encourage students’ critical awareness of larger social implications of technology. Functional literacy prepares students for the job market, but critical literacy demands that students examine underlying issues, such as why some individuals are able to afford technology, while others are unable to do the same. Accordingly, a disadvantage to technology pedagogy is that while all of the students will have equal access to technology during class time, the students will have unequal access to technology outside of the classroom. Charles Moran and Cynthia Selfe contribute to the conversation on technology in the classroom in “Teaching English across the Technology/Wealth Gap.” The authors assert that teachers who strive to incorporate technology into the classroom must be aware of three points: technology widens the gap between wealthier students and poorer students, other teaching resources must be cut from budgets in order to provide technology, and commercial and political goals do not correlate to educational goals of implementing technology. According to the authors, “Most writers who have access to this technology at home and at school have an edge [. . .]. Technology illuminates and exacerbates the wealth gap--a gap that, as economists agree, is rapidly widening in this country and around the globe” (Moran and Selfe 49). As such, technology pedagogy illuminates students’ unequal socioeconomic levels and should not be implemented within composition classrooms uncritically.

Issues that arise when using technology pedagogy will not entirely dissipate. However, teachers are able to ameliorate these disadvantages within their individual classrooms. In reference to access, my students were equipped with laptops during class time, but they also had libraries or 24-hour computer labs that they could access outside of the classroom. Certainly, a chasm exists between one's personal computer and public access to a computer. Nevertheless, between the laptop classroom and the campus's libraries and computer labs, the students had sufficient time and resources to complete their required assignments. Not all students can have personal laptops, but all students can have some form of access to technology on campus outside of the classroom.

Another challenge associated with technology pedagogy concerns the marginalization that some female students experience when using technology, as argued by Christine Tulley and Kristine Blair in "Ewriting Spaces as Safe, Gender-fair Havens: Aligning Political and Pedagogical Possibilities." According to Tulley and Blair, males have dominated technology, and women and girls traditionally have been marginalized in using technology because there were no safe spaces in which they could interact. Accordingly, the authors outline five suggestions for creating safe spaces for women and girls in the computer classroom: redefining computer literacy, providing various ways for students to enter the technological writing environment, collaborating to establish ground rules, establishing a buddy system, and providing technology mentors (57).

Regarding gender, some of the most technologically adroit students in my composition class were females, so these students were able to look to one another for positive examples of technologically proficient females, which communicated the message that technological proficiency is not contingent on gender. Also, because the students created their MySpace pages

during class time, they collaborated among themselves to ensure that their peers who were new to MySpace understood the intricacies of the site. Admittedly, not all students willingly collaborate with their peers. If such a case arises, then educators could follow Tulley and Blair's suggestion to establish a buddy system, in which educators could pair technologically proficient students with technology novices.

Another larger social implication of technology pedagogy includes issues of culture and representation on the Internet. In “(Cyber)Conspiracy Theories?: African-American Students in the Computerized Writing Environment,” Samantha Blackmon explores the idea of a “cyber human,” or a “raceless, sexless, genderless, classless entity” who relinquishes his or her distinguishing characteristics in order to identify with other individuals in cyberspace (154). Using the example of three students, the author argues that specifically African Americans resist technology and the Internet due to the misrepresentations and stereotypes of their race online. When teachers allow the Internet into their classrooms, they cannot control the images of students' culture that will be presented; accordingly, certain students may feel marginalized due to how their culture is represented to the world.

However, MySpace allowed my students to create how they wanted to be represented. Sites connected to MySpace provided them with a wide range of graphics and backgrounds that they could choose from. Additionally, the students were able to upload their own pictures and songs to represent their identities; therefore, students were able to re-write race, class, and gender representations of themselves and/or their cultures as they deemed appropriate.

Students' Right to Their Own Language: Reappropriating Language Policy for the Postmodern Subject. The implementation of MySpace.com in the composition classroom relates to the history of language and language policy within the field of composition and

rhetoric. A recurring issue among many English teachers regarding the Internet involves how students write when they are online. It is commonly known that students will write “ttyl” for “talk to you later,” “lol,” for “laugh[ing] out loud,” and “omg,” for “oh, my gosh.” Such acronyms appear unproblematic; however, students also write texts that have the potential to cross over into the composition classroom.

A freshman college student wrote the following statement in a formal, academic essay: “I am a Female African American student at the University, and I believe that id u dream it, you can achieve it.” Admittedly, the student’s use of “id” was apparently a typo, in which she meant “if.” More importantly, the student uses “u” for “you,” though she later uses the conventional spelling in the same sentence. (Notice also non-standard capitalization.) Although the student was aware that course guidelines clearly indicated that Standard American English should be used for academic writing, she nevertheless inserted language typical of texting and social networking. The question arises, *is students’ specialized writing used online negatively affecting their academic prose?* Many English teachers seem to think so. In *Teens, Technology, and Literacy; Or, Why Bad Grammar Isn’t Always Bad*, Linda W. Braun addresses such concerns:

Over and over again teachers and librarians lament the language teens use in real-time electronic communications. There is concern that using these technologies to communicate and using language that is not what one would traditionally consider grammatically correct will cause language and the future use of language to change, for the worse, forever. (13)

This argument has been articulated numerous times in textbooks, general conversation, and on radio shows. Nonetheless, educators should not seek to restrain students’ non-academic writing when they are online. I continue to require students to use Standard American English (SAE) in their academic papers in an effort to maintain the standards of the curriculum, but I do not require them to use SAE when they comment on each other’s MySpace page in my classroom.

Notably, the above example of “u” for “you” was found in a student’s writing who was not enrolled in the class implementing MySpace.com; furthermore, such errors occurred in only one student’s essay. Explaining and reinforcing the appropriateness of various discourses (i.e., SAE for academic essays versus slang for texting or social networking) will moderate most negative effects on language when using MySpace.com within the classroom. But more significantly, educators may have to prepare themselves for evolving language conventions that seem inevitable with future generations of students.²⁷

To understand such a position on language, one must understand the history of language policy, which can be found in the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s position statement “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”: “We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or *whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style*. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity” (CCCC, emphasis added). Although Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) generally is used to support multicultural students and their home dialects, it can be re-contextualized to protect the new idiom that is emerging among the Millennials.²⁸ The position statement further states, “The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another” (CCCC). The United States has a history of one group attempting to exert its dominance over another group. Usually such domination occurs between races, ethnicities, or genders. However, with the idiom of the Millennials, this domination occurs between generations. Some

²⁷ See Chapter 5 for an in-depth discussion of error within student writing.

²⁸ In “The Digital Divide,” Stephanie Vie identifies the Millennials, also known as Generation Media, Generation M, and/or Generation MySpace as the individuals “born between the early 1980s and late 1990s, [who] are fascinated by and often highly comfortable with technology” (12).

individuals find no value in the idiom of the Millennials, and they believe that it has no place within a college classroom. Also, SRTOL asserts, “We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language” (CCCC). Just as I do not require my students to employ SAE in their personal writings or during class discussions, I do not require them to use SAE on MySpace.com. I seek to maintain the unpolished, unedited appeal that technology possesses regarding students.

In addition to a historical understanding of language subordination, one must understand an essential, though implicit, idea underlying MySpace within the college classroom, which can be found in Lester Faigley’s *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, wherein he describes the postmodern subject:

Because the subject is the locus of overlapping and competing discourses, it is a temporary stitching together of a series of often contradictory subject positions. In other words, what a person does, thinks, says, and writes cannot be interpreted unambiguously because any human action does not rise out of a unified consciousness but rather from a momentary identity that is always multiple and in some respects incoherent. (Faigley 9)

Here, Faigley argues that in postmodernism, no coherent subject exists; rather, each subject contains multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identities. Such a view of individual subjectivity sharply contrasts to a modernist subject, in which one characteristic is “[t]he existence of a stable, coherent self” (8). Many individuals look upon postmodernism with disdain as they characterize it with a “fragmentation of the subject, the loss of faith in science and progress, and a rising awareness of irrationality and chaos” (9).

However, the age of postmodernism can be regarded as an era of liberation. Postmodernism allows individuals to explore multiple facets of their identity, whereas modernism requires one unified subject—something that may never have existed for any

individual. All individuals are comprised of various ideas, feelings, emotions, dispositions, thoughts, and views at any given time; postmodernism allows all of these components to reside unapologetically with one another.

An understanding of postmodernism aids MySpace.com within the composition classroom because the site encourages multiple identities. MySpace users are welcome to modify their identity at any given time; it allows its users to decorate their webpages according to their personalities by using differing colors, graphics, songs, blogs, surveys, and media. For example, the students who utilized MySpace.com in the composition classroom changed their pages according to each unit: Who am I as a student?; Who am I as a family member?; Who am I in society?; Who am I as an individual? Many of the students soon realized that they were different people in each area of their lives.

Many times African American students feel disconnected with their home communities because their home discourse and their academic discourse often conflict. Hence, Alice Ashton Filmer notes a dichotomy that is forming within the African American community. In her essay “African-American Vernacular English: Ethics, Ideology, and Pedagogy in the Conflict Between Identity and Power,” Filmer states, “My own research (Filmer, 2001) confirms what Baugh and others have found: that African-American students who speak standard English report being (or having been) criticized by their vernacular-speaking peers for ‘sounding white’” (265). In many African American communities, Standard American English is not valued; consequently, students who conform their language to “the way white people talk” are ridiculed within their home culture (261). To avoid such criticism, Filmer advocates “bidialectism” or “code-switching:” “From my point of view, it’s not about giving up AAVE, but about being able

to switch back and forth as the context warrants. It's about code-switching, or being bidialectical" (261).

Although I have serious concerns with bidialectalism, it is one way in which students are able to ameliorate the conflicting discourses between their home languages and academia.²⁹ With MySpace.com, I illustrate to the students that they do not have to choose between being proud African Americans or successful young scholars. It does not have to be "either/or;" rather, it can be "both/and." As the students portrayed their home identity in our unit on family, they used songs, graphics, and language that reflected how they viewed their home discourse; accordingly, they were welcome to implement African American Vernacular English (AAVE) on their MySpace pages.³⁰ Conversely, in our unit on academia, students were expected to decorate their "spaces" based on how they view themselves academically; therefore, Standard American English was the required language for that particular unit because it is the conventional language of academic discourse. Understanding the postmodernist concept of subjectivity enables greater comprehension of MySpace's ability to aid students in negotiating conflicting identities. Indeed, such a website is very conducive to the postmodern concept of subjectivity and the liberation that it encourages.

²⁹ According to one principle of bidialectalism, an individual uses one language or dialect in one setting and a different language or dialect in another setting. When employing bidialectalism, minorities tend to use SAE in academic and professional settings and their cultural language or dialect in informal settings. In such a case, SAE is privileged over individuals' cultural languages, which enacts a hierarchical rank of languages/dialects with SAE reigning at the top. In such cases, speakers of SAE are at a distinct advantage of speakers of other languages/dialects. So although bidialectalism provides a means for cultural groups to maintain their home language and advance in their education and careers through the use of SAE, it proves problematic in its implicit privilege of one language (and people) over another. See Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion of bidialectalism, biculturalism, and codeswitching.

³⁰ Here I do not intend to imply that all African Americans speak in AAVE; in fact, many African Americans speak solely in Standard American English. However, students who identified AAVE as their home language were encouraged to create blogs and other writing assignments in the language of their choice (AAVE, SAE, Southern American English, etc.)

The role of MySpace within the classroom improves educational practices by engaging the students in the curriculum while maintaining the standards of the curriculum. MySpace does not detract from the goal of the composition classroom, which emphasizes increased writing skills. MySpace simply captures students' interests so that they further interact in a classroom setting.

The Role of Educators and Academic Discourse. Educators need not disconnect academic discourse from students' interests. In implementing MySpace.com within the composition classroom, I sought to embrace students' multiple identities while maintaining their interests; however, a major role of a freshman composition teacher is to help initiate students into academic discourse. Patricia Bizzell discusses such discourse, as discussed earlier. She notes that one of the approaches to analyzing basic writers' difficulties when they enter college includes "a clash, not of dialects, but of discourse forms," which includes "verbal devices used to achieve coherence" as well as "ways of organizing information" (16).³¹ Again, basic writers often find that an academic worldview greatly differs from their home culture's worldview. Although I maintain that Bizzell is rather astute in her analysis of the risks that non-traditional students take by assimilating into academia, such as being ostracized in their home communities, she nevertheless implies an "either/or" option, which was refuted earlier. Upon entering college, if students are taught that they can maintain their personal identities while excelling in academia, then they will not be included in the body of students that Bizzell references as she states, "But what is to prevent these academically successful students from going on simply to secure their own financial advantage, forgetting about their home communities?" (20). I seek to eliminate, or at least greatly decrease, such concerns for my students—though they are not basic writers.

³¹ As noted earlier, Bizzell's argument pertains to basic writers; however, the principles that she outlines for basic writing students are largely applicable to students in other writing classes.

As Lisa Delpit asserts, “The object is not to lower standards or just teach what is interesting to the students, but to find the students’ interests and build an academic program around them” (45). By incorporating MySpace.com, I hope to illustrate to students that they do not have to lose their home identities when they acquire academic discourse; rather, they are able to reconcile these often conflicting discourses. MySpace.com and postmodern theory allow non-mainstream students to maintain their various identities while excelling academically.

Chapter Four: Applying Students' Right to Their Own Language While Upholding the Standards of the Curriculum: A Case Study

In this chapter, I explore two units from a semester-long case study on the intersections among African American language, identity, and technology. As stated earlier, the overall goals of my research are to interrogate the privilege awarded to Standard American English, advocate equality among all cultural dialects, and affirm pedagogical spaces for students' linguistic identities. An underlying premise of this argument is my concession that Standard American English exists as the language of the academic discourse community; accordingly, students will benefit from learning certain discourse conventions. The reading audience should not misunderstand my work as an effort to negate Standard American English, but rather as an effort to create spaces for other cultural languages in addition to Standard American English. First, in conceding SAE's place within academia and the nation at-large and, second, in adhering to the goals of the First-year Writing Program within my local English department, I taught and emphasized SAE throughout the semester. Hence, in the first unit that I will share, cultural language is not emphasized—never negated, just not emphasized. The unit was based on academic identity, and as such, SAE was the central language of the unit. But the students' work will demonstrate that regardless of my emphasis on SAE, their challenges and insecurities about language emerged in their writings.

However, in the unit that focused on societal identity, cultural language was emphasized. Students' composed their MySpace blogs in the language of their choice, which was not the case

with the blogs for the unit on academic identity. In this unit, the complexities of language, identity, and technology are elucidated.

In reviewing this research, the reading audience should understand my work as a whole: one semester in a writing course wherein I taught the curriculum and upheld the standards of the FWP (i.e., Standard American English) but also created assignments that allowed students space to employ their cultural language. In this manner, I upheld the Conference on College Composition and Communication's position statement Students' Right to Their Own Language while also upholding the standards of the course curricula. Composition specialists may not feel compelled to center every writing unit around cultural language; I do not understand such efforts to be the goal of SRTOL. Instead, composition specialists should feel compelled to create assignments wherein students are welcomed to explore and utilize their cultural languages within the classroom. Educators have an array of ways to create such assignments. This case study shares only one way that one composition teacher chose to do so—and the results of such an effort.

Upholding the Standards of the Curriculum: A Study of Academic Identity. In *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*, John Russell Rickford and Russell John Rickford suggest several ways to reclaim Spoken Soul, their label for African American Vernacular English. Among their suggestions, Rickford and Rickford list striking phrases such as “bad English” and “broken English” from African Americans' vocabularies when describing AAVE (229). Gilyard goes one step further as he argues, “Students, not dialects, have been broken, and negative responses to language differences have been much of their problem” (*Let's Flip the Script* 83). In a realistic sense, dialects are not broken; rather, the speakers of the dialect suffer from mental and emotional brokenness when members of society continually cause them to feel

sub-par. As he describes his experiences with language and education, Gilyard states, “I now feel that students who are vested in writing the way I was, in the sense of purposefulness, not necessarily particular persuasion, have the best chance to achieve writing standards set by academic institutions” (*Let’s Flip the Script* 127). In the first unit of our case study, the African American female participants explored their academic identities and discovered such purposefulness in the process.

The first unit that we explored as a class was “Writing to Share Experiences,” which built upon the basic concept of a personal narrative. Our specific topic of inquiry was “Who Am I as a Student?” The students’ task was to share a particular experience that they felt illustrated their academic identity. To achieve this task, students were free to choose between two approaches. One, they could share a single experience that illustrated various components of their academic identity. Two, they could share several experiences that illustrated one particular characteristic of their academic identity. In adhering to the suggestions of our text, *The Brief McGraw-Hill Guide*, students were to consider various rhetorical devices, such as audience; purpose; voice, tone, and point of view; context, medium, and genre.

Going into the semester, I had to remind both my students and myself that regardless of our use of MySpace.com or African American readings, our class was a writing class. Composition specialists who choose to implement this study into their own classrooms should be aware of the challenges associated with the educational uses of social networking sites. At the time of this case study, MySpace ranked as the largest social networking site with over 110,000,000 users (Brown 211). Needless to say, the students were excited to use MySpace.com. We reviewed the following statement from the course syllabus:

MySpace.com in the Classroom: We will be using MySpace.com this semester as a classroom resource, in addition to our two textbooks and our handbook. Although

MySpace is generally regarded as a social network, we will utilize it for our academic goals in this class. **Students are to login to MySpace during classtime only when they are instructed to do so.** MySpace is a great resource for us this semester, and we will have fun using it. However, we must remember our overall goal in the composition classroom, which is to improve our writing skills. All students will follow specific directions concerning MySpace.com, or they will not be allowed to use it within the classroom.

I also distributed a handout titled “MySpace.com within the Classroom” when we were getting ready to use MySpace.com for the first time.³² Only once throughout the semester did I have to issue emails to individual students cautioning them that their MySpace page did not reflect the specific unit that we were exploring—and that warning pertained only to students’ choices of songs.

As stated in Chapter 1, the change in FWP directors necessitated a certain precaution as I performed my classroom research. I was careful to meet all goals of the FWP, as should any composition specialist seeking to conduct classroom research. One goal of the FWP stated, “Students will understand their part in the university discourse community and how its written conventions operate.”³³ As such, my pedagogical emphasis on Students’ Right to Their Own Language did not preclude my fulfillment of the FWP requirements. In our unit on academic identity, for example, students were encouraged to compose their MySpace blogs in Standard American English because it exists as the language of the university discourse community. Conversely, for the unit on family identity, students were encouraged to compose their blogs in their cultural language. In such a manner, the expectations of the university discourse community were upheld, but we created space for the students’ cultural language as well.³⁴

³² See Appendix B for this handout in its entirety.

³³ See Appendix C for the FWP’s goals for English 101 in their entirety.

³⁴ Regardless of the unit, students submitted all formal academic papers in Standard American English.

Initially, I expected the African American readings to be an integral part of the course; indeed, initially they were. I constructed and posted the following statement in my course syllabus under “Additional Information”:

EN 101-xxx is designed to be a special topics section of English composition in which we will focus on various aspects of the African American experience. I encourage students to express their personal viewpoints in their written essays as well as in class discussions. However, I also encourage students to express their opinions in a **respectful** manner at all times. We must establish an environment of respect in a course that addresses differing opinions regarding controversial issues. Accordingly, no disrespectful comments, opinions, or points of view will be tolerated. Express yourself—but remember to respect your peers.

I attempted to choose readings that correlated to the class theme, “Who Am I as a Student?” Our first reading was “Finishing School” by Maya Angelou. I was new to the short story and misread the title: I understood “finishing” to be a verb, rather than an adjective. Imagine my surprise when I read the essay and discovered the true message of the story, which had nothing to do with academics, but identity instead. I kept the reading on the syllabus and focused the class discussion around naming and identity.

Each day I gave a five-minute quiz based on the homework reading for two reasons. First, as a composition teacher, I have found that students do not always complete homework reading assignments, which can greatly hamper one’s teaching agenda. Second, the quizzes required students to write a fully developed paragraph, so they were guaranteed to write daily. If they gave a correct answer but failed to compose at least one paragraph, then they received only half credit for the quiz.

The quizzes were rudimentary in that I inquired about descriptive details to see if they performed an in-depth reading of the text, rather than just skimming for main ideas. Also, the quizzes were more comprehensive in that I often formed questions that gave students the chance to provide their own views. My personal pedagogy emphasizes students’ voices, so I cherish any

opportunity that I have to hear the thoughts of the students' themselves. The first quiz was as follows: "According to the essay, what used to be Miss Glory's name before Mrs. Cullinan changed it? Explain how Miss Glory felt about her name change. How do you feel about Miss Glory's name change?" In these three questions, students demonstrated their ability to recall descriptive details, infer into a character's feelings, and provide their own points-of-view. After I collected the daily quizzes, I then opened the floor for students to share their answers to the quiz, which easily led into class discussion. Students already had an answer because they had just articulated their thoughts in order to answer the quiz.

In focusing on students' voices, one must also remember that students do not always utilize the most objective or non-offensive language to communicate their opinions. Hence, for the first several classes, I re-emphasized the portion of the syllabus that articulated my expectations of a respectful learning environment: "We must establish an environment of respect in a course that addresses differing opinions regarding controversial issues. Accordingly, no disrespectful comments, opinions, or points of view will be tolerated. Express yourself—but remember to respect your peers." If a student stated an opinion that might be offensive, then I was able to gently yet firmly emphasize the class's keyword: RESPECT. The students did a fine job on this first class reading and discussion. "Finishing School" dealt with issues of race, yet the students were able to contextualize the reading to encompass larger issues of naming and identity.

Such quizzes also provide insight into the students themselves. For example, certain students answered the quiz with views that Miss Glory knew who she was as an individual; therefore, it did not matter what Mrs. Cullinan chose to call her. Other students wrote that they would never allow someone to change their name because they counted such an act to be

egregiously disrespectful. Although teachers should be careful not to place too much value onto such miniscule glimpses into students' personal views—remember, this was a five-minute quiz—, they should appreciate these glimpses in an effort to continually understand the students as individuals. Many times class discussions fail because the topics are quite sensitive and no one feels comfortable being the first to speak. However, slowly building a foundation with the students that will allow them to get to know you as you get to know them contributes to a relationship of trust—a relationship that is utterly needed before tackling high-risk topics (race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.)

Also, composition teachers should remember that the students are evaluating teachers' responses just as teachers are evaluating students' responses. For this reason, certain composition and rhetoric specialists advocate teachers' transparency as much as possible when teaching. In "Composition and Cultural Studies," James Berlin describes a class taught at his institution wherein he and other faculty implemented cultural studies pedagogy. He addresses the teachers' practices of openly sharing their political ideologies:

The politics of the teachers in the course is, however, never concealed. The views offered by them are contestatory and socialist, supporting a radically democratic sharing of power in economic, social, political, and cultural areas. There is never any doubt in the minds of the students about where the teachers stand, and the teacher is always an important part of the audience for whom the student is writing. (54)

Regardless of the hierarchical stratifications of power that exist within a classroom, Berlin maintains that the students within these cultural studies classrooms are not indoctrinated by their teachers' beliefs. He argues that because students have a right to free expression within the classroom, they are protected against indoctrination:

Indeed, one of the more notable features of the course is that students do feel free to resist their teachers, to disagree rather than simply conform. The class thus encourages open debate and confrontation in students who have been prevented

from protesting about any feature of their experience. [. . .] In short, no indoctrination takes place. (53-54)

Berlin assumes that an atmosphere ripe for open debate guards against indoctrination; therefore, composition teachers should be able to openly share their personal opinions concerning the course curricula. Other composition specialists support such pedagogical approaches as well.³⁵

Elaine Richardson also advocates teachers' transparency. In *African American Literacies*, Richardson provides an overview of her composition class that centered on African American rhetoric. Richardson describes the course's goals: "A part of the work in the course then was to try to identify why cultural practices such as African American language were identified by us as lower-class, uneducated, language of poverty, etc. etc. etc." (143). She later adds her personal insight:

That was my point—to help students become critical about these experiences, to see them from vernacular perspectives. For the majority of their educational experiences, students are encouraged to analyze life through standardized and official perspectives. This flipping of the script is not done in an effort to bash Whitey, but to affirm and celebrate our humanity, our resourcefulness, and to encourage us to develop strategies for making ourselves and the world better. (143)

Richardson requires her students to critically reflect on their cultural experiences and to analyze the cultural forces at work in our society.

However, Richardson's open sharing of her personal ideologies includes certain challenges. In internalizing—and perhaps misinterpreting—Richardson's personal opinions, her students felt pressured to reflect her beliefs in their writing: "Some students complained that the students who wrote 'racist stuff about White folks' were the ones who got the best grades on

³⁵ In this article, Berlin neglects to address fully the immense authority that classroom teachers hold and the consequences of such authority on students' psyches in relation to accepting new ideologies. Therefore, this particular discussion of indoctrination in relation to hierarchical stratifications of power seems underdeveloped.

their papers. In fact, two students commented in an exit questionnaire that they thought their writing was not appreciated by me because I made them ‘revise, revise again, and re-revise’ papers that did not conform to my ideology” (145). Richardson denies such allegations by reinforcing her expectations, which she outlined in the course curricula. Through Berlin and Richardson, one receives two perspectives on how to create an open classroom environment wherein the composition instructor is welcomed to share more intimately in the learning experience with the students.

Although I was aware of Berlin and Richardson’s approaches, the approach that I utilized in order to construct a safer classroom environment was to withhold my personal opinions. I informed students that I would not contribute my opinion unless I discerned that the class discussion was becoming one-sided. In such cases, I would interject the opposing point-of-view so that the discussion could take into account more perspectives. Indeed, certain composition and rhetoric specialists will support Berlin and Richardson and thereby disagree with this decision. Nevertheless, I valued pushing students to look beyond their own preconceived notions of the world more so than I valued sharing my notions of the world. Each semester, I emphasize to the students that they are not required to change the preconceived notions that they bring with them into the classroom; it is not my place as the instructor to change their points-of-view on controversial topics. However, I also inform them that it is unacceptable that they never (re-)examine those preconceived notions. They are not required to change their views, but they are required to (re-)examine them. Accordingly, students are allowed to construct their own views of the world, regardless of whether I agree or disagree with those views.

Considering that I am often a cultural minority within my own classroom, I approach these issues preparedly. Composition specialists who attempt to implement the position

statements of our professional organization may be well advised to do so as well. Karen Kopelson discusses pedagogical techniques to deal with student resistance. In “Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning; Or, the Performance of Neutrality (Re)Considered as a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance,” Kopelson critiques Linda Brodkey’s argument that compositionists should foreground difference as the main subject within composition (Kopelson 120). She argues, “But such de-contextualized, rather shockingly a-rhetorical calls for instructors to foreground their politics deny the specificity of both teacher identity and of student ‘audience’” (120). Kopelson advocates that teachers, especially minority teachers with physical characteristics that differentiate them from the dominant culture, should engage in a *performance of neutrality* in order to combat students’ resistance: “The performance of neutrality may allow such teachers to work with and, in many cases, work against their own identity markers and, in that process, to work with and against student antagonism to identities and issues of difference more generally” (121). Kopelson’s suggestions may be beneficial for those composition specialists who do not desire to find themselves polarized between Berlin and Richardson’s technique of openly stating their political positions and my technique of little-to-no input.

Indeed, I consider my role as teacher to be more of a facilitator than equal participant in students’ discussions and analyses of societal issues. Besides, in acknowledging the overarching power structures of a teacher in comparison to the students—for many students, she who holds the grade book holds the “right” answer—I question whether teachers can ever truly be “equal” participants in a classroom environment with their students.

Again, I emphasize that the first theme was academic identity—not family, not societal. This was no random choice. I desired the first unit to be low-risk. Going back to the essay “Finishing School,” I could easily have led class discussion in the direction of Mrs. Cullinan’s

supposed racial and socioeconomic superiority versus Miss Glory's projected racial and socioeconomic inferiority. However, I did not feel that we as a class had yet built a camaraderie that would allow us to objectively and subjectively explore such topics. Many composition students are in our classrooms directly from high school plus summer vacation; accordingly, we are teaching high school seniors, in a certain sense. Analyzing texts, respecting others' opinions, exploring beyond one's own preconceived opinions, and sharing one's opinions respectfully are skills that must first be taught by teachers and then gradually acquired by students. Besides, as the two units on academic and societal identity will demonstrate, students were able to work their way successfully through issues of race, gender, and class without the teacher's input. Other class readings for this unit included Terry McMillan's "Discovering the Writer in Me," Arthur Ashe's "Send Your Children to the Libraries," Malcolm X's "My Self-Education," Grady Wells' "Bringing Technology to the African American Community," and Langston Hughes' "Cowards from the Colleges." These readings aided the students in thinking about the role of the academic community, issues or challenges within the academic community, and their place within that community, all of which prepared them for their first formal academic essay of the semester.

Who Am I as a Student?: The Students Speak. Our first unit did not focus on cultural language. Nevertheless, issues of language readily emerged. Students were free to write on any aspect of their academic identities, and two African American students wrote on their insecurities about language. Lily hailed from a rural Southern county and battled her insecurities about language throughout the semester. She writes on the self-perceived challenges that she needed to overcome in her new academic identity, specifically her use of AAVE:

People often say first impressions are everything, until recently when I noticed I was being looked over because of my *lack of articulation*, I thought this saying only referred to appearance. Nevertheless, I quickly realized *Ebonics is not acceptable language in the classroom*. I must distinguish when it is necessary to

speaking correct English. I realized that I had to teach myself to talk similar to my peers who had spoken correctly their entire life. This trait will help me as a student because I will become a [sic] better understood by my peers and help others understand what is being taught. (emphasis added)

Lily's phrase *lack of articulation* can refer to several aspects of AAVE, including but not limited to plural *s* and *dem*, absence of third-person singular present-tense *s*, absence of possessive 's, or *finna* and other tense-specific markers (Rickford and Rickford 110-119). Her contrasting labels of *Ebonics* versus *correct English* evidences the impact of her new academic community.

Interestingly, Lily does not state that Ebonics is unacceptable elsewhere—only “in the classroom.” Accordingly, one may infer that she has found AAVE to be accepted in other areas of her life.

The false student-sponsored agency appears in Lily's repeated use of “I:” “I must distinguish when it is necessary to speak correct English;” “I had to teach myself;” “I will become a [sic] better understood by my peers and help others.” From her perspective, the responsibility to communicate with her peers rests solely on her shoulders. Never does she state that her peers have a responsibility to extend themselves in order to connect with and communicate with her. Her opening statement on acceptance based not only on appearance but also on language suggests that she is motivated to change her language because she will not be accepted otherwise—she was being “looked over.” Lily does not forsake her cultural language to assimilate into mainstream culture because she finds the acquisition of an academic world view well worth the risks; she assimilates because her peers (and later professors) present no additional options. Lily presents an excellent case of false student-centered agency.

Mary, another African American female in the course, also expressed insecurities about her language, though not with the depth that Lily discusses the subject. As she concludes her essay on academic identity, she almost casually states, “Lastly, if I just pay attention to what is

said around me, what I do, and *how I speak*, it will pay off eventually.” Pedagogically speaking, one can critique her essay for introducing an idea in the conclusion that she has not explored elsewhere within the essay. However, moving beyond writerly concerns to examine this seemingly casual statement connects us once again to Bizzell’s argument on academic world views. Mary assesses her responsibility: listen to the content of others’ speech (“what is said around me”), but manage the linguistic structures of her own speech (“how I speak”). She seeks entrance into another language community and is willing to monitor how she acts and what she says as payment into this new community. However, the problem is that a prerequisite to gain entrance into this new community involves a diminished sense of self. She willingly sheds her non-mainstream behavior and language, yet neglects to question why the members of the academic community are never compelled to accommodate her.

Such assimilation does not constitute an authentic academic world view. In describing an academic world view, Bizzell draws from William Perry’s research on Harvard college students. For Perry and Bizzell, academic world views have certain characteristics. First, academic world views are incompatible with Absolutes, or “standards of right and wrong that hold good for all times and places” (19). Rather, academic world views are conducive to the concept of Commitments wherein individuals compare and contrast varying views and eventually commit to certain ideas (19). Next, academic world views “cannot coexist peacefully with another world view in which standards for commitments are different” (20). For example, if a student hails from a world view that contradicts the values of the academic world view, then the student will be compelled to adhere to the academic world view: “the academic world view makes a strong bid to control all of a student’s experiences” (20). Finally, academic world views prevent “simply self-serving behavior”—or at least “true mastery” of an academic world view prevents

such behavior (20). Students will connect with other like-minded people, but not necessarily like-minded people within their home communities. Bizzell explains what she terms the *economy of Commitments* that are associated with the academic world view: “But the Perry model does suggest an economy of Commitments, a desire not to sever connections with any group to which one might potentially make a Commitment and, moreover, a desire particularly to foster Commitments that preserve integrity—in both the senses of honor and of coherence—in the individual’s life” (20). For this reason, Bizzell believes that students may possibly preserve their connections within their home communities.

David Bartholomae contributes to our understanding of academic thinking—though he does not speak in terms of world views. Instead, Bartholomae discusses the characteristics of academic writing. In his landmark essay “Inventing the University,” Bartholomae reminds English professionals of the characteristics of academic writing, such as speaking from an authoritative stance and questioning community knowledge or wisdom. He writes, “At an advanced stage, I would place students who establish their authority as *writers*; they claim their authority [. . .] by placing themselves both within and against a discourse, or within and against competing discourses, and working self-consciously to claim an interpretive project of their own, one that grants them their privilege to speak” (646, original emphasis). Academic perspectives must critically question accepted knowledge or wisdom. Hence, African American students who assimilate into the world of the White middle class are not acquiring the academic world view of which Bizzell speaks. In fact, one may question whether uncritical assimilation on any level is congruent with an academic world view, especially when one considers Perry’s concept of Absolutes versus Commitments. As Mary seeks entrance into an academic community, she

never explores what she has to offer to the community. She simply accepts the conversations, values, and discourse conventions of her White peers and professors.

Mary's last clause, "it will pay off eventually," brings to the forefront the work of Bruce Horner. It is unclear how Mary feels that her actions will pay off (economically, socially, academically, etc.). However, Horner argues that students should be aware that linguistic capital does not equal or ensure social capital, and certainly not monetary capital.³⁶ Horner argues that "dominant approaches to language and 'error' have failed to understand language as material social practice" (742, "'Students' Rights,' English Only, and Re-imagining the Politics of Language.>"). He advocates for writing to be viewed as a site for students to *mediate* their language and social identity—not simply take on the language and characteristics of any given community unquestioningly. Horner calls for students' active power/agency in examining and analyzing linguistic power structures. Mary neglects to mediate her cultural language and identity with the language and identity of the members of the academic language community. She readily accepts their standards.

Another challenge that African American females encounter in academia involves the silencing of the African American female voice. Various scholars have written on such silencing. In her writing, Lily reveals that she also deals with the silencing of her voice, though she does not recognize it as such. From her perspective, she is at fault and labels the problem as pride:

Pride can be defined as, justifiable self-respect, however, too much pride can evolve into conceit. My grandmother sometimes tells me "A proud man is always looking down on things and people, and if you are always looking down you can't see what is above you." Of course, what is above me in school are my professors. The experience I mentioned earlier [using Ebonics in the classroom] was also a great example of me letting my pride become a problem. Instead of speaking up

³⁶ See Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion of Bruce Horner's work.

and expressing my opinion I remained silent because I did not want anyone to look down on me. I am afraid that one day my pride will become what ruins my academic life. I am a good student but sometimes allow my pride to cripple me and get in the way of me finding out important things I need to know.

Earlier in her essay, Lily comments that her peers do not acknowledge her; in this particular passage, she comments on the role of her professors. Notably, she does not perceive her professors as problems. Although Lily perceives herself as possessing too much pride, one questions her true challenge.

Lily previously acknowledges that her peers “look over” her. Now, she does not want her professors to “look down” on her. In “‘Identities on the Ground and All Around’: African American Female Literacies, Critical Black Discourse Studies, Rap, and Rhetoric and Composition,” Elaine Richardson addresses the role of professors in the lives of their students: “In this view, it is not enough to teach unequal power relations and Standardized English. Language and literacy educators should use *students’ own discourse practices* to critically engage them in research and action, to confront and change racist discourse practices and institutions that promote them” (W458, emphasis added). From Richardson’s perspective, professors have a responsibility to engage the discourse practices that students bring with them to the college classroom. If Lily’s professors had created pedagogical spaces that affirmed her linguistic identity, then she may have been encouraged to contribute to class discussions and seek the assistance that she required.

Admittedly, many students experience what Lily describes; they are intimidated by their peers, the knowledge/authority of their professors, and the college classroom itself. However, Lily’s specific challenge goes further than mere intimidation: Her writings reveal feelings of inferiority based on linguistic and cultural differences. Richardson addresses the mental and emotional effects of power relations on African American students:

In *African American Literacies*, I asked what good is the flawless sentence, the rhetorically stylish argument, if that still leaves you powerless? Racism is a major influence in the shaping of worldview and critical literacies that undergird African American people's responses to the environment, and it is these literacies that are generally suppressed in the school setting, though probing these literacies may be vital to a Black person's physical, psychic, social, emotional, and political well-being. (W457)

Indeed, Lily suppresses her cultural world view in exchange for an academic world view, and the effects of such suppression evidence themselves in her interactions with her peers and professors.

The silencing of the African American female voice is not a phenomenon unique to the twenty-first century or the college classroom. Furthermore, the silencing comes in various forms, including denial. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was the most prominent, active, and productive African American woman speaker of the 19th century. Yet, her White audiences had difficulty reconciling her articulate nature and intelligent mind with her African American body. Some denied the authenticity of her voice by denying her ancestry; they proclaimed, "She is not colored, she is painted" (Logan 49). At other times, the African American female voice is silenced at the threat of death. After speaking out against the lynching practices of White Southern males, Ida B. Wells's life was threatened. She was forced to stay away from her home, Memphis, Tennessee. Furthermore, her newspaper office, the venue wherein she was able to protest the gross injustices of lynch mobs, was destroyed. She writes, "My friends declared that the trains and my home were being watched by White men who promised to kill me on sight" (*Crusade for Justice* 62). At still other times, the African American female voice is silenced through negation. Geneva Smitherman acted as an expert witness in the 1979 linguistic rights case in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and she was a pivotal figure in developing the 1974 CCCC's position statement Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL). Furthermore, her scholarship includes over 100 articles, books, and newspaper columns. Nevertheless, John

Simon labels Smitherman's speech at the 1978 NCTE convention "a piece of black rabble rousing" (Faigley 64).

Yet, African American females have found ways to empower themselves through the silencing of their voices as well as ways to recover their silenced voices. Elaine Richardson writes on the silencing of her voice to liberate other African American females who experience similar challenges. She addresses educational issues that African American females encounter, such as the negation of their voices, thoughts, and ideas if not presented in the right language.

Richardson draws upon her personal challenges to illustrate her point:

I've had several undergraduate educational experiences and several graduate ones, where because I articulated my opinion through story-telling, influenced by my Black and female socio-cultural orientation, my thoughts were not acknowledged or even seriously engaged. [. . .] I understand playing the game, but I don't want to erase my voice from my work. (*African American Literacies* 91)

Additionally, Richardson explains how African American females may use silencing as a means of resistance. She reviews Perry Gilmore's research on "Stylized sulking" (90). Based on this behavior, African American female students "[resist] a teacher in a dominant/subordinate relationship by using silence and body language" when they find themselves in student-teacher confrontations (90-91). In such cases, African American female students silence themselves in resistance to authority figures.

Present-day African American female college students, such as Lily, are situated within a tradition of silenced African American females. Most importantly, informed African American females must educate uninformed African American college females about the history of African American female rhetoricians and the historical silencing of the African American female voice, even if other members of the professoriate neglect to do so. Lily concludes her essay by writing the following:

In conclusion, I never believed my background would affect who I am as a student. Nonetheless, now that I see it does I am striving to become the student I would like to be. I never understood why some people went to college and changed their dialect but now that I am a college student I understand how changing something as simple as the way you talk could really make a difference.

Not only African American females but also members of the professoriate at large should understand that changing your authentic voice is never “simple.” Students such as Lily may benefit from understanding that cultural outsiders have continually persisted in silencing African American female voices in various manners, yet these women have persevered to make their voices heard. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Ida B. Wells, Geneva Smitherman, and Elaine Richardson consistently exercised their voices, despite the persecutions that they encountered. Richardson writes on composition courses that indoctrinate African American students on the values of White culture through language:

Black students deserve centered literacy experiences. Students have a right to know “When and where [they] enter.” African Americans and other historically excluded groups have a history of struggling to expand the discourse to include their voices, experiences, and rights. This is a point that is often marginalized in the classroom rather than the center of inquiry for students, especially for students of African American heritage. (“Identities on the Ground” W457)

African American females should understand the history of silenced African American female voices and learn to critique the politics of linguistic innocence.³⁷ Then they will be empowered to critically engage with linguistic power structures in order to achieve genuine student-centered agencies.

The final, and perhaps most dominant, theme to emerge from the African American females’ writings involved their senses of community. Five out of the seven African American females referenced their communities in some manner. Several of the young women connected

³⁷ See Min-zhan Lu’s “Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence” for a discussion of the politics of linguistic innocence.

their academic identities to volunteerism by giving their time and resources to other community members. Conversely, only one of the remaining fourteen non-African American students discussed community. This one student wrote on family from a more social and/or affluent perspective as she wrote about lunches at restaurants with her grandmother and aunt.

Keith Gilyard acknowledges the continued role of education within the African American community. He notes that although African Americans are aware of the negative effects of the American educational system, they still value education:

One thing that now has to happen is that we tap into the fundamental valuation of education that exists to this day in the African American community. Although African Americans have become highly skeptical about certain educational practices and remain dismayed because even institutional certification ensures equal opportunity for them only sporadically, they still view effective schooling to be a key aspect of communal healing. It still represents great possibility. (*Let's Flip the Script* 108)

To be sure, the African American students within the case study demonstrated the value of reaching out to others to assist them with their educational pursuits, even as the students themselves strove for educational success. For example, Barbara expressed her dedication to community as connected to race: “Being the first black student elected to a Senior Class Office position, it was also my responsibility to represent the minority students at my school. By obtaining this position of power, subsequently, other doors were opened for me to demonstrate responsibility.” Rather than exhibiting American individualism, Barbara viewed her election to office as a means to uplift the other minority students at her school. She then utilized the subsequent doors of opportunity that opened to her to help another facet of community:

“Another leadership position I came into at school was with the first female-only minority organization at my school, the Girls Minority Achievement Council. GMAC was dedicated to uplifting and mentoring the African American females at our school.” Elsewhere in the essay

Barbara notes that she was elected the president of GMAC. Her communal focus now encompasses African American female students. Yet, Barbara does not stop there. She then explains how her connection to community expands to include her religious beliefs. She writes, “Helping build homes in the community my church is in taught me responsibility in a special way. It made me realize that it is my job to give back to my community and to continue doing work in God’s kingdom.” African American rhetoricians dating back several centuries have emphasized the importance of the African American church within the African American community. Through Barbara, one understands that the church’s essentialism to members of the African American community continues even into the twenty-first century. If students disconnect from their cultural world views to acquire [uncritical] academic world views, they may lose their religious beliefs; Bizzell concedes such a point. Therefore, educators must fully explore the varied ways that students’ religious beliefs propel their lives. Certain individuals, such as Barbara, connect their religion with their giving, volunteerism, and sense of community. If educators compel students to relinquish their cultural world views, and by extension their religious views, then they may also be compelling them to relinquish admirable works within their local communities.

Two other students, Pamela and Mary, associated their community with socioeconomics. Due to Pamela’s limited family finances, she realizes that students from similar backgrounds may not have the means to afford tutors in order to receive the help that they need. Therefore, she uses her academic skills to assist these students: “By helping other students who could almost be classified as my very own peers, I was overwhelmed by the fact that I was a resource to students who did not really understand the sophisticated language that the teachers were using, or whose parents were like my own, and just could not afford a personal tutor.” Since she was a

bit more advanced than her peers, Pamela felt a responsibility to elucidate the academic jargon that their educators used. Her sense of community propelled her to help those who could not help themselves.

Community and socioeconomic factors affected Mary differently. Throughout the semester, Mary discussed her family background wherein she was one family member in a long line of educated African Americans. Her family was able to provide for her college education, which motivated her to excel:

Be inquisitive rather than ignorant, and ask as many questions if I need help. [. . .] College is expensive, and far from free for me, so every A I make, is paying my mother back for all she has done for me. I can honestly say I am determined to be a positive produce [sic] of the _____ County School System. I am determined now, more than ever to make my family, friends, and most importantly God proud.

Again, one sees the effect of religious upbringing as well as community on an African American student's academic identity. Mary's community encompasses not only her family but also her school system and her religious community. Though she does not allude to any volunteerism, she nonetheless is influenced by a strong sense of community.

Rachel also links her academic identity with community service and volunteerism.

Rather than a community of her peers, Rachel connects to a community of younger students:

As a volunteer for _____ Elementary School, I had to become a very patient person working with twenty to thirty kids every day. [. . .] I realized that I have a desire to work with children who need guidance. That is why I want to use my writing to touch kids that need a positive role model. I ultimately would like to become a guidance counselor or a motivational speaker.

Rachel desires to utilize the skills that she learns within the academic realm in order to launch a career in community giving. As a counselor or a motivational speaker, she undoubtedly would have a positive impact on various children.

Last, but certainly not least, we revisit Lily. Her mentioning of community is somewhat vague, yet still discernable. As quoted earlier, Lily states, “My grandmother sometimes tells me ‘A proud man is always looking down on things and people, and if you are always looking down you can’t see what is above you.’” She uses this piece of community wisdom to launch a discussion on the negative relationship between her self-perceived pride and her educational success. Although she is in college, Lily draws strength from the teachings that she has received from her grandmother to strengthen her to do what is necessary in order to succeed, i.e., seeking the help that she needs from her professors.

The students express various aspects of community, including family networks, community outreach, and volunteer work with peers. Regardless of the individual type of community that they possess, all five students utilize their community networks in order to excel within their academics. In “No Kinda Sense,” Lisa Delpit explores the power of community in the lives of African American female students, specifically her eleven-year-old daughter. While immersed within a predominantly White private school, Delpit’s daughter’s self-esteem plummeted. The girl questioned her physical appearance to the point of requesting plastic surgery because “her lips were ‘too big’” (34). Delpit transferred her daughter into a school with a population of 98% African American students, and her daughter’s self-esteem soared. In this example, the power of community is apparent. Other issues arose; the girl acquired AAVE, which troubled Delpit. However, Delpit never denies the positive effects of community on her daughter’s self-perception and self-esteem. For Delpit, the positive effects of community outweighed the negative effects.

Similarly, English professionals should explore the positive effects of students’ cultural world views. Academic world views are beneficial, but the same is true of cultural world views.

English professionals should be aware that when acquiring academic world views, students may become estranged from their home communities—Bizzell concedes as much. Subsequently, these students may lose their sense of community, which motivates many students to excel academically, as evidenced by five of the African American female students within this case study. Furthermore, English professionals should be aware of examples such as Delpit's daughter wherein a loss of community resulted in a loss of self-esteem. In assessing the advantages and disadvantages of academic world views versus cultural world views, English professionals can better inform students about the life choices that will affect their academic identities.

Who Am I in Society?: The Students Speak. When hearing about this case study, the question that most individuals ask is, “Why MySpace?”³⁸ Although MySpace was relatively popular at the time of the case study, it has since declined in popularity. At the time of this writing, Yahoo! News® reported that News Corp sought to sell MySpace (“News Corp Puts MySpace on the Block” 02/02/2011). It is unclear how a new owner may affect MySpace. However, for the current time, it is still an effective classroom resource:

- MySpace is free. In “Teaching English across the Technology/Wealth Gap,” Charles Moran and Cynthia Selfe caution teachers who strive to incorporate technology into the classroom. As asserted earlier in this text, according to the authors, technology widens the gap between wealthier students and poorer students, other teaching resources must be cut from budgets in order to provide technology, and commercial and political goals do not correlate to educational goals of implementing technology. Because MySpace is free,

³⁸ MySpace was the technological medium that I chose in order to create a cultural space for the students. English faculty can use any mode of technology as they uphold language policies within their individual classrooms.

poorer students need not purchase any additional classroom resources. No other teaching resources have to be cut. And although MySpace may not have been created with pedagogical goals in mind, it can nevertheless be reappropriated to such an end.

- MySpace's features are multimodal. Myspace is conducive to both visual learners and aural learners through the pictures and songs that users may upload or download. Furthermore, the blogs allow students to write longer prose while the commenting feature allows them to write shorter prose.
- MySpace embraces both the individual and the community. The social networking site's name itself lends itself to the individual: *MySpace*. However, because it is a *social* networking site, the individual is compelled to relate to a larger body of users. Such a site is conducive to the classroom because teachers may assign individual or group work with ease.
- MySpace has security settings. On the first day that I asked my students to set up MySpace accounts, I also required them to set their security settings so that no one could view their pages except for other class members and me. Such security settings ensure that outside influences will not interfere with the classroom environment.

As stated in Chapter 1, the students used MySpace.com with each writing unit. They had access to technology within the English department's laptop classroom. They were assigned individual laptops for the semester, which were equipped with wireless Internet connections. The students read essays from *Heritage*, engaged in class discussions, and peer critiqued their rough drafts. After they fully explored the topic for each unit, the students submitted the final draft of the essays. On this day, the class would log onto MySpace.com to re-create as a visual, aural, and written text what they had learned. The students' backgrounds/decorations, songs,

pictures, and blogs for their MySpace pages corresponded to the unit that they were ending. MySpace.com was a different way to explore what they had articulated in academic prose in their final essays for each unit.

For our unit “Who Am I in Society?”, student were required to write an informative essay. The specific readings that we had for the unit are as follows: “Double Consciousness” by W.E.B. DuBois, “I am a Black Woman” by Mari Evans, “Black Men and Public Space” by Brent Staples, “Respect on the Streets” by Elijah Anderson, “Positive Affirmations among African American Men and Women” by Jason Orr, and “To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals” by Gwendolyn Brooks. As always, students were required to compose their academic essays in Standard American English. However, they had the freedom to compose their MySpace blogs in the language of their choice.

The assignment was as follows:

DIRECTIONS: Write a **4-5 page** paper on a topic of your choosing that addresses one issue that you face as a member in society. You have a range of possibilities. For example, this topic might address a grievance that you have with society, or it might address a privilege that you hold in society. You are required to interview two individuals who are in the same societal position that you address in your essay. For example, as a single mother, if you decide to focus your essay on the plight of single parents in American society, then you should interview two single mothers for their points-of-view on single parenting. As an African American male, if you decide to focus on African Americans in higher education, then you should interview two other African American males who are also in college—though they do not have to attend your specific college/university.

In addition to the two interviews, students were required to incorporate scholarly data on the background of their topic; specifically, they had to include at least one article from one of the library’s databases. The interviews and the scholarly articles were designed to provide the students with additional insights into their topic so that they would not focus entirely on their own subject positions.

Although the African American students composed interesting essays throughout the semester, they especially engaged with the curriculum during the unit on society. Notably, five out of the six African American students who participated in the study articulated their identity in terms of race and/or gender, which sharply contrasts with the non-African American students within the course. Only one out of fourteen of the non-African American students expressed his identity in terms of race and gender. In describing himself as a “white, male college student involved in a fraternity,” this student spoke in terms of privilege, in which he benefitted from the social networking, social life, and leadership positions afforded to him through his fraternity. However, the African American students spoke in terms of disadvantage; their topics included racism, sexism, and stereotypes. But whereas the African American students’ academic papers focused on the negative aspects of their social identities, their MySpace pages communicated empowerment and positivity. They achieved success as they engaged with the course curriculum and articulated their cultural identities when utilizing their cultural language.

In stating that the students achieved “success” within the unit on societal identity, “success” is measured by the students’ ability not only (a) to perceive and acknowledge the sociocultural barriers of education but also (b) to transcend such barriers to articulate a positive cultural identity. The result was that the African American female students achieved their own versions of what Gwendolyn Pough refers to as *womanist theology*.

In “‘Each One, Pull One’: Womanist Rhetoric and Black Feminist Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom,” Pough opens with Alice Walker’s definition of womanist:

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. Of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘You acting womanish,’ i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one. Interested in grown-up doing. Acting grown-up. Being grown-up.

Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious*. (qtd. in Pough 67)³⁹

From Walker’s definition womanist, Pough launches a discussion of womanist rhetoric and womanist theology. Pough clarifies the skills required to overcome oppression within womanist theology:

“Womanist theology is largely about taking the skills, many of which are rhetorical in nature, that black women have used throughout time to overcome oppression and use them to conquer contemporary situations. To out wit, out maneuver, and out scheme requires a thought process that takes into consideration not only one’s own feelings and knowledge but also the feelings and knowledge of others who might seek to oppress you. (68)

Pough also explains that womanist rhetoric as well as black feminist pedagogy both concern themselves with being “upfront and unflinching” (72). The result is classrooms that “hold the potential for students to move past their discomfort and toward change” (72). One discerns such upfront and unflinching approaches to racism, sexism, and oppression within the writings of the African American females. Their writings may be described as somewhat confrontational in that they neither disguise their oppression nor the sources of such oppression. After open discussions of their challenges within their academic discourse, they freely move toward healing within their non-academic discourse.

Such open discussions of oppression should not be overlooked or undervalued. Other cultural scholars discuss the difficulties involved in pushing students to “[consider] not only one’s own feelings and knowledge but also the feelings and knowledge of others who might seek to oppress you” (Pough 68). For example, in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks writes of the challenges that she faces when she compels students to perceive and acknowledge the injustices of the world that are reinforced by the American

³⁹ See Gwendolyn Pough’s “‘Each One, Pull One’: Womanist Rhetoric and Black Feminist Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom” for Alice Walker’s complete definition of “womanist.”

educational system. In the women's studies courses, hooks addresses both racism and sexism.

Yet, her students attempt to divide the issues:

Whether in the classroom or while giving a public lecture, I [hooks] am continually asked whether or not black concern with the struggle to end racism precludes involvement with feminist movement. [. . .] Commitment to feminist politics and black liberation struggle means that I must be able to confront issues of race and gender in a black context, providing meaningful answers to problematic questions as well as appropriate accessible ways to communicate them. (112)

White students feel that issues of race deflect the course's focus away from true feminist politics; conversely, African American students feel that issues pertinent to feminism are not as pertinent as issues related to racism. hooks attempts to educate the students about oppression in general, which includes sexism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.

In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," Audre Lorde also addresses the seeming divide between White, African American, and Third World women's versions of feminism. Lorde emphasizes the value of accepting difference: "How do we redefine difference for all women? It is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences" (122). Lorde critiques White feminists for aligning themselves with White patriarchy as a means to secure power (118-19). In describing herself as a "Black lesbian feminist," Lorde notes that different groups of women constantly try to magnify one aspect of her identity while ignoring the rest (120). She resists such fragmentation and affirms her unified identity.

Acknowledging the differences that divide a group of people exists as a formidable obstacle to overcome. Whether in women's studies, composition and rhetoric, English studies, etc., countless works have been written on acknowledging difference and overcoming

oppression. Nevertheless, the African American female students who participated in the case study never sought to emphasize one form of oppression over another; they addressed their societal identities as they deemed appropriate. When utilizing academic discourse, the students unflinchingly acknowledged the barriers that they encountered within the American educational system, including sexism, racism, and classism. But on their MySpace pages, they managed to transgress these barriers within themselves to speak positively of their culture and of themselves.

One instance of the sharp contrast between the African American students' academic discourse versus their non-academic discourse on MySpace.com can be evidenced in Lily. In her academic discourse, Lily described her societal identity as an African American female at a predominantly White university. The issues that she faced due to her societal identity included racism and sexism, as well as the struggles to prevail over these issues. Lily references the 2008 presidential election as evidence of the racism that still exists in America (though she does not elaborate on the details of the election). She says that she has encountered individuals who believe that racism no longer exists in the United States. In her arguments regarding sexism, Lily listed individuals such as Queen Latifah, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucy Stone as fighters of such inequality. Later in her academic essay, Lily notes that she has been stereotyped due to her physical appearance in being called "ghetto." In a rhetorical move that is very reminiscent of Elaine Richardson's *African American Literacies*, Lily also notes that she experiences gender stereotypes: due to a supposedly "too emotional" nature. Lily writes, "This stereotype angers me because I hate when people consider me to [sic] emotional because I consider other people's feelings. True, I do consider other people's feelings but I will never let

them get in the way of what I have to do as a student or as a professional.”⁴⁰ In a rather moving statement, Lily asserts, “I have experienced these setbacks my entire life, when I came to [this university] I was hoping for more of the people here but expecting less.” She ends her academic essay by acknowledging the power of stereotypes when they aspire one to greater achievements in life to compensate for preconceived notions of one’s abilities.

However, Lily’s MySpace page connotes an entirely different tone. One of the first things that one notices about Lily’s page is that she distances herself from academic discourse. Her “I”s become “i”s; a few fragments and overemphasis on certain words complement the non-academic tone. Rather than dwelling on the setbacks that she has endured her “entire life,” Lily emphasizes the positive aspects of her societal identity. Whereas her academic essay described her current identity, her MySpace page described her future identity: “a successful accountant who gives back to the community and strives to help others achieve there [sic] goals just like i did.” Additionally, Lily’s academic discourse lamented the stereotypes that she endures; however, the MySpace page connotes her spunk: “I am not your average type of girl so i don't want to be viewed as everyone else is viewed.”

What especially stands out about Lily’s page concerns her thoughts on other African Americans who have endured similar struggles. Particularly, Lily dedicates a portion of her MySpace blog to rapper Tupac Shakur, which deserves to be quoted at length:

Well my page as [sic] somewhat a dedication to tupac and some of what he stood for. When you enter the page there is a quote from tupac saying “For every dark

⁴⁰ In *African American Literacies*, Elaine Richardson argues, “Some of the major socializing values surrounding African American females’ literacies—life protector, nurturer, and independence—have been used against them in their in and out of school literacy experiences,” and she further explains, “Classroom research has shown that African American females are socialized to function as ‘messengers,’ ‘caretakers,’ and ‘enforcers’” (89-90). Arguably, Lily experiences her socialization as a nurturer and caretaker being used against her in an academic environment.

night there is a brighter day.” The background says “now that i’m grown I got my mind on doin something dont wanna b anotha statistic doin’ nothin’ Trying to maintain in this dirty game keep it real and i will even if it kills me My young niggaz stay away fom these dumb niggaz Put down the gun and have some fun nigga.” My background fits me in society for numerous reasons. 1st i feel as if Tupac as a person had a great message but was overlooked by some members of society. I often feel as i am overlooked for some reasons and that it is not fair. 2nd i believe that everything happens for a reason and if the lord is putting you through something painful he is doing it so you can learn to accept and appreciate something good. Tupac says all this in that short quote “for every dark night there is a brighter day.” Lastly, my background describes me because now that i have come to college i have defiantly [sic] put some of my childish ways aside so i could better my self, adjust to my new enviroment [sic], and become the productive society member i would lke [sic] to be.

Certainly James Berlin would oppose Lily’s second reason; nevertheless, the empowered tone here is unmistakable.⁴¹ When using audio and visual texts, Lily has transformed from victim to victor. Although the topic has not changed (Who am I in society?), the non-academic discourse of MySpace has somehow allowed Lily to express an inner strength that was not conveyed in her formal, academic essay. When using her cultural language, Lily was able to communicate her cultural identity, a feat that she was unable to accomplish when utilizing academic prose.

Another student in the class, Mary, followed a similar trend in her academic and non-academic discourses. Her formal academic paper explores her societal identity as an African American student at a predominantly White university. As an opening for the paper, Mary creates a scenario in which she invites the reader to picture himself or herself in an unfamiliar place that contains no other faces that mirror his or her own; she reasons that the reader would feel “alienated, frightened, alone, or even worse invisible.” Mary then reveals that this was her experience when she first came to college, and she continues, “I have never felt so tiny in my

⁴¹ In “Composition and Cultural Studies,” an essay within *Composition and Resistance*, James Berlin discusses the cultural studies classes at his institution wherein he and other faculty members oppose students’ worldviews that accept injustices by excusing them as good for building their character.

life!” The arguments that she explores in her academic discourse include combating stereotypes, defeating White supremacy, and developing a strong work ethic in her efforts to prove herself “worthy of an once segregated, [name of college/university] education.”

Mary’s academic discourse also expresses a tone of struggle, though she expresses a certain sense of agency. In her essay, she references a text that analyzes the racist climate of predominantly White universities as well as some positive aspects of such universities. Mary had recently attended a lecture given by Dr. Cornel West, so she included within her academic discourse a discussion of ethnocentrism, Jim Crow laws, and de-facto segregation. She quotes West as saying, “We killed Jim Crow, Sr. but Jim Crow, Jr. is alive and well.” In her assessment of stereotypes, Mary asserts, “As a double stereotype of being African American and female, I must work harder because I have to prove myself worthy of a lot.” Such a statement adheres to Patricia Hill Collins’s assessment of African American stereotypes, specifically the “Black lady.”⁴² Mary’s agency presents itself as she informs her audience that she self-educates herself by reading the works of Marcus Garvey, Carter G. Woodson, Maya Angelou, and Nikki Giovanni; she then uses her knowledge to educate others.

Although Mary’s academic discourse gave glimpses into her unique imagination and writing style, her MySpace page releases all of her creativity. This time, she presents the following scenario as an opening to her blog: “Imagine if when you were born the doctor said, ‘It’s a loud, emotionally unstable, and weak baby girl!’ or even worse, the doctor exclaimed ‘Oh my! What a violent-prone, slow-learning, and unintelligent African American baby!’ You would

⁴² According to Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought*, one stereotype of African American womanhood exists in the “Black lady,” which Collins defines as “middle-class professional Black women who represent a modern version of the politics of respectability advanced by the club women” (88). Collins asserts, “These are the women who stayed in school, worked hard, and have achieved much” (88). Emanating from the mammy stereotype, the Black lady represents the African American woman who “works twice as hard as everyone else” (89).

be outraged, judged before you could even speak.” Unlike Lily, Mary maintains almost the exact same societal identity (she includes gender on her MySpace page), though with a tone of positivity: “I am a young African American woman at a predominantly white university and I am living proof that not all stereotypes are true.” She includes societal figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack Obama. Her MySpace page takes on a humorous and fun-loving tone, which sharply contrasts to the seriousness of her academic discourse. Full of pithy quotes and overemphasis, Mary’s page follows in the tradition of African American rhetoric.⁴³ For a song, Mary chooses “Yes, We Can.”⁴⁴ This song seems to truly inspire Mary:

The song is very inspirational to me, because I sometimes let excuses over power my results. I have adapted a new philosophy since I stepped on [this college] campus, ‘If I can believe I can do it, I can get it done!’ The song also makes me think about Unity. There are so many different people, celebrities, all ethnicities [sic], it is just BEAUTIFUL!

Mary’s energy and life burst forth from her MySpace page; here, she is able to free herself from the confines of academic discourse to express herself just as she feels.

Furthermore, Mary’s picture is an interesting play on stereotypes. By displaying a photo that provides no details about herself (in the photo, she stands smiling—nothing more), Mary asserts that viewers of the photo would not be able to see her inner qualities; she then argues that, in a similar manner, society stereotypes her because it is unable to see her inner qualities that

⁴³ According to Adam Banks in *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology*, “My understanding of African American rhetoric acknowledges and builds on the focus of the power of the spoken word and Black orators, but also attempts to open it up to all of the means employed throughout Black history—to value the uses to which rhetors have employed design, visual communication, electronic communication, and performance that are often appreciated but dealt with only tangentially” (3).

⁴⁴ Although no artist is credited, “Yes, We Can” is a song that can be downloaded from MySpace.com. It is a tribute to President Barack Obama’s victory.

distinguish her from the status quo. The audio and visual texts within the students' MySpace pages open spaces for analysis and expression outside the confines of academic discourse.

Pamela, the final subject of analysis, constructed a mostly feminist critique of her social identity, identifying herself as a “black female college student with a major in Civil Engineering.” She acknowledges the gendered stereotypes of her field of study as she states that she encounters various male authority figures who “agree with James Brown’s ‘This is a Man’s World.’”⁴⁵ The arguments that she presents in her academic essay relate to discriminations based on gender and physicality due to her chosen major. Pamela cites an article that argues that females experience discrimination from males as well as other females but disagrees with the findings of the scholar’s research. In her experiences, discrimination has come from her male counterparts—not female. After interviewing one male engineering student and one female, Pamela realizes that the students’ views differ from her own. However, she maintains that the male’s answer differs due to his gender while the female’s answer differs due to her particular branch of engineering, which was computer engineering. Pamela argues that her female counterpart may have experienced less discrimination because more females have careers in computer engineering, whereas civil engineering has been historically underrepresented concerning females. Overall, Pamela’s academic discourse exerted a tone of adamancy, regardless of the views of the scholarly article and her two engineering peers.

Similar to Lily and Mary, Pamela’s MySpace page reflects a different side of her.

Although she maintains the same subjectivity, Pamela now expresses a tone of admiration for the

⁴⁵ Elaine Richardson’s *African American Literacies* also speaks to Pamela’s experiences: “Even when African American females pursue careers in fields where they are not expected such as sciences and engineering, they often meet resistance. Research on African American students on predominantly European American campuses has shown that when African American females show up in majors such as engineering, they receive less support, are asked to change their majors, and are expected to fail by White male professors” (90).

ranks of female engineers that she hopes to join. The opening lines of her blog communicate a process of self-examination and reflection. She begins by hailing the unit on societal identity as “one of the best that we have had.” Pamela then admits that although she thought it would prove an easy task to identify her societal identity, she realized that it was a longer process than she originally assessed it to be.

Instead of choosing a picture of herself, Pamela posted a picture of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) to represent her identity. She asserts, “The women that belong to this organization are the women who inspire me to follow in their footsteps and be successful.” Interestingly, her background includes various geometric configurations to symbolize the varied configurations of engineers—both male and female. Her song, “Superwoman” by Alicia Keyes, reflects her mother’s assessment of her work ethic. She ends her blog on a note of empowerment: “It does not matter that I am left-handed, pigeon toed, and short [5’2”]... I will always remember where I came from. And yet, I will always KNOW HOW to make it through [sic] the rain.” By dedicating her MySpace page to the SWE, rather than dwelling on the gendered injustices that she faces in her major, Pamela expresses a level of positivity, similar to Lily and Mary.

Other African American students in the class followed related trends. Alfreda wrote about sexism and racism; she also discussed how other individuals constantly question her ability to succeed. On her MySpace page, however, she labels herself as a believer and focuses on the success of Barack Obama in the 2008 election. In her academic discourse, Barbara argues that she faces misrepresentation, social degradation, and racism; on the other hand, her MySpace page asserts, “I am a African American female student in society. I enjoy the sense of pride I feel from being Black. I love being a girl and everything that comes with it. I love school. I am so

happy and blessed to be a student at such a great university. I would not change who I am in society for anything in the world.” The only African American student who did not follow this format of academic discourse versus non-academic discourse was Rachel, also the only African American student who did not construct her societal identity in terms of race and/or gender. She expressed a constructive view of her identity in both her academic and non-academic discourses.

By far, the unit on society produced the most compelling data. For the unit on academic identity, all of the African American students changed their topics when switching from academic to non-academic discourse; however, the tones of the discourses were overwhelmingly positive in both cases. The non-African American students changed their topics between the two discourses at a rate of 79% to 21%. Again, the tones were positive.⁴⁶ For the unit on individual identity, not enough African American students participated to cull their data separately; as a class, the students were almost evenly distributed between changing their topics when on MySpace versus keeping the same topics: 47% to 53%. No one presented his or her identity in negative terms. Thus, this argument does not seek to present MySpace.com as a panacea for hegemony. MySpace is simply one pedagogical tool that may enhance students’ comprehension of their various identities. Although it does not detract from academic discourse, it does not replace it either.⁴⁷ Throughout the semester, the students expressed interest and excitement when using MySpace.com. They always looked forward to logging into the site to change their

⁴⁶ The data for the unit on familial identity is not included because the students were not required to write on their personal familial identities, due to issues of privacy. Instead, they were free to write on any issue dealing with family, such as divorce, adoption, interracial marriages, etc.

⁴⁷ Interpreting why the African American students responded so strongly to the unit on society as compared to the other units on identity falls outside the scope of this paper. However, the results of the case study illustrate that their articulation of their societal identities greatly differed from their other identities.

profiles for the latest unit. Regardless of the academic unit, the students expressed positivity and enthusiasm when on their MySpace pages.

Thus, in these two units on academic identity and societal identity, the students themselves gained greater insights into their multifaceted natures. In both units, we upheld the standards of the curriculum, i.e., Standard American English in formal essays. However, for the unit on societal identity, I created a pedagogical space wherein the students were free to utilize their cultural language, which provided even greater insights into their individual character. Though this performance of Students' Right to Their Own Language may contain various weaknesses and flaws, it also demonstrated that even rudimentary efforts to preserve students' cultural voices can have substantial academic rewards. The goal of implementing SRTOL is not to be perfect, but rather to take chances, move beyond one's pedagogical comfort, and remember that linguistic differences do not equal linguistic deficits.

Chapter Five: “I Respect Language Rights, but This Here is Something Else!”: Addressing ‘Error’ within Students’ Essays while Affirming Linguistic Difference⁴⁸

Inevitably, after reading this text thus far, certain audiences are pondering the practical application of my argument. Many educators do not necessarily oppose students’ linguistic identities, but they are divided over the larger implications of such an argument. For example, Maxine Hairston is persuaded that “one could argue with more force that the instructor who fails to help students master the standard dialect conspires against the working class” (“Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing 184). Richard Rodriguez is convinced that minorities can succeed by embracing English as a “public language” (*Hunger of Memory* 18). David Bartholomae believes that “academic writing is the real work of the academy” (“Writing with Teachers” 63). And to a certain extent, I concede that these individuals maintain valid arguments.

Yet, the findings of various research cannot continually be ignored, or simply read and appreciated but never acted upon. In attempting to do so, I uncovered the unspoken concerns, challenges, and disparities that exist when African American females enter academia. To be sure, certain inequities within our society exist that may never be mitigated. But other inequities can be mitigated if English professionals would push past our individual comfort zones to enact

⁴⁸ In the historic film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, the maid Matilda (“Tillie”) confronts fellow African American Dr. John Prentice for his engagement to an uppermiddle class White woman. Matilda expresses that although she supports civil rights, interracial marriages are an extremity and fall beyond the scope of the Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, many English professionals support students’ cultural voices but feel that the egregious “errors” that present themselves in these students’ essays are beyond the scope of Students’ Right to Their Own Language.

change, rather than continually requiring only minority and working class students to push past their comfort zones.

Nevertheless, change does not come all at once. Realistic concerns present themselves, even within the pedagogies of individuals who uphold the language policies of our professional organizations. Therefore, I further contribute to the conversation on SRTOL by moving in the direction initiated by Geneva Smitherman and other committee members when they spent almost four years “assembling a publication of practical classroom assignments, activities, lectures, and teaching units that would show and tell how to apply the philosophy of the ‘Students’ Right’ resolution to the day-to-day experience of teaching and learning” (“SRTOL: A Retrospective” 24). Specifically, I address the concern of educators who earnestly desire to enact change but still have certain reservations: What is the line between addressing students’ writing errors and silencing their cultural voice? How do I address students’ errors without negating their cultural voice? When is an error actually an error, and when is it evidence of cultural language and identity?

In this chapter, I review several scholars’ views on writing errors. I align myself with certain positions endorsed by Bruce Horner and Min-zhan Lu. Also, I revisit Peter Elbow’s position in what has become known as the Bartholomae/Elbow debate within the field of composition and rhetoric. In revisiting this conversation, I extend Elbow’s work to argue that within the composition classroom there should exist assignments, spaces, and opportunities for self-expression wherein students’ works are validated in-and-of themselves—even in classrooms not implementing the portfolio system or write-to-learn projects—without progressing to a supposedly inevitable stage of editing or revising. Such changes to English professors’

pedagogies will not only uphold the language policies of our professional organizations in concrete ways but also affirm spaces for linguistic identity within the composition classroom.

As a point of departure, I offer Bruce Horner's views on "error" as the position with which I am most aligned. In "Re-thinking the Sociality of Error": *Representing the 'Other,'*" Horner explores what he terms the sociality of error. He examines today's classroom as he describes what the dominant culture calls "errors" as products of a particular cultural agreement (142). Horner asserts that errors are social constructions, and he argues that minorities do not make more errors than other writing students; rather they fail to reach an *agreement* with the dominant culture as to what constitutes errors (142). Therefore, designating Standard American English as the preferred language in education and academic discourse creates a linguistic hierarchy that disadvantages minority cultural groups. Horner notes that language tends to reflect the dominant culture's form of dialect and argues that any research based upon the social implications of error is false and must be reexamined. Everyone speaks dialects; therefore, one cultural group's dialect should not be emphasized over another's.

When considering approaches to students' error within their writing, one should also consider Min-zhan Lu's stance in "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence." Although Lu critiques Shaughnessy's pedagogy with her basic writing students, Lu makes several arguments that are applicable to students outside of basic writing courses as well. She begins by critiquing "an essentialist assumption about language that is dominant in the teaching of basic writing. This assumption holds that the essence of meaning precedes and is independent of language, which serves merely as a vehicle to communicate that essence" (57). Many individuals maintain an essentialist assumption about language, whether or not they comprehend such terminology. These individuals believe that

regardless of how a person utilizes certain words or terminologies, the essential meaning remains in tact; therefore, the exact wording may be critiqued, revised, or edited. Next, Lu explains the “politics of linguistic innocence,” or “a politics which preempts teachers’ attention from the political dimensions of the linguistic choices students make in their writing” (57). In applying the concept of linguistic innocence—on a very elementary level, mind you—one could assert that the following sentences contain the same meaning:

- He hungry.
- He is hungry.

Rather than aligning herself with the politics of linguistic innocence, Lu supports Marxist and poststructuralist theories of language in which “language is best understood not as a neutral vehicle of communication but as a site of struggle among competing discourses” (57). So, too, this argument views language as a site of struggle; therefore, any discussion of “error” within students’ writing must take into account these struggles among competing discourses.

Lu notes that Shaughnessy acknowledges the tensions between students’ home discourses and academic discourses. However, Shaughnessy neglects to fully explore these tensions and how they manifest within the basic writing classroom. Lu takes up this project by reminding teachers of their responsibility to disclose certain facets of academic discourse: “If mastery of academic discourse is often accompanied by a change in one’s point of view, [. . .] then it ought to be the teacher’s task to acknowledge to the students this aspect of their learning” (63).

Teachers may not accept such a responsibility due to an impending fear that students will not readily accept academic discourse, thus impeding their learning (63). Nonetheless, basic writing teachers, composition instructors, and the English professoriate at large must not only concede the hierarchical status of Standard American English and academic discourse in relation to

cultural discourses. They must also adjust their individual pedagogies to address such hierarchical rankings in an effort to affirm linguistic difference, uphold official language policies from our professional organizations, and create more opportunities for academic advancement among cultures beyond the White middle class.

Finally, as I lay the groundwork for my forthcoming analysis of students' writing errors, I return to the Bartholomae/Elbow debate. I begin with Peter Elbow whose pedagogy most closely reflects my own. Despite the fact that the Elbow/Bartholomae debate has continued for years, I find within the debate two passages from Elbow that, in essence, summarize my positions on the importance of preserving students' voices within their writing. I quote these passages at length. First, Elbow asserts the following on the topic of freewriting:

People who use freewriting tend to notice immediately that it shows more nakedly than other kinds of writing all the junk that culture and the past have stuffed into our heads. Nothing is better than freewriting at showing us how we are constructed and situated. Another way of saying this is that freewriting is the opposite of an attempt to preserve the idea of a self-generated autonomous author. Rather it is an invitation to take a ride on language itself, and (insofar as the phrase has any meaning at all) to "get out of the self": to relinquish volition and planning and see what words and phrases come out of the head when you just kick it and give language and culture a start. ("Interchanges" 89)

My students illustrated Elbow's thoughts in concrete ways most poignantly in our unit on societal identity. First, I differentiate between blogging and freewriting because our blogs were designed with specific questions in mind. However, as the students answered the questions, they engaged at a level of freewriting because they were able to articulate their thoughts clearly and freely without any concern for editing, grammar, punctuation errors, etc. In these blogs, the students *got out of themselves*. The words and phrases that came out of their heads and onto their MySpace pages demonstrated some of their innermost thoughts on language, culture, and identity. And within this specific unit, students were able to articulate the liberty that they

experienced when utilizing their cultural voice in a space normally reserved for academic discourse.

The second extended passage from Elbow that speaks to the power of students' voices is the following:

But it [freewriting] does create freedom in certain crucial ways. It frees the writer from planning, from meeting the needs of readers, and from any requirements as to what she should write about or how her writing should end up—for instance, as to topic, meaningfulness, significance, or correctness of convention. *Freewriting then is a paradigm of the real and the utopian: an example of how we can use our authority as teachers in our institutional settings to create artificial spaces that can heighten discovery and learning. It is a way to take ten minutes of a classroom and make certain things happen that don't usually happen given the institutional and cultural forces at work.* Students discover that they can write words and thoughts and not worry about what good writing is or what the teacher wants, they discover that their heads are full of language and ideas (sometimes language and ideas they had no idea were there), and they discover they can get pleasure from writing. (“Interchanges” 89, emphasis added)

The artificial space that I created for my students allowed them the creative freedom to explore facets of their identity beyond the scope of academic discourse. In other spaces within the composition classroom, students are not granted the freedom to explore their identities via their cultural language. Indeed, the students discovered that their *heads were full of language and ideas*—language and ideas that did not present themselves when utilizing academic discourse. The composition classroom should have goals that extend beyond rhetoric, writing conventions, and the writing process. Within the first-year composition classroom, students are unique in that they are adjusting to a new way of life on a college campus. They are exploring theretofore unexplored facets of their identity and creating new facets with every new experience that they encounter. Without creating a space for students to explore their ever-changing identities, composition teachers—and composition students—are missing essential insights into the students themselves.

In his statement that freewriting allows students to write without regard for “topic, meaningfulness, significance, or correctness of convention,” Elbow hints at another essential component of affirming cultural voice: There should exist within the composition classroom writing assignments that are validated in-and-of-themselves without progressing to the next stage of the writing process. Many composition instructors support freewriting or blogging; however, they view it as a means to an end. Freewriting and blogging are first steps in creating a validated work. However, I argue that some writings should remain raw, ragged, unpolished. When Lily writes, “I am not your average type of girl so i don't want to be viewed as everyone else is viewed,” one may view such a sentence as needing editing and revising for capitalization, passive voice, and increased clarity—what are the traits of an average girl?. However, the spunk and inner strength that she communicates in such a statement would also be edited and revised, which, for me, is an undesirable end. In such cases, the raw, ragged and unpolished language that students write provides them with raw, ragged, and unpolished insights into themselves and their culture at-large, which should be a plausible goal of the composition classroom. Such views also support the epistemological assumptions of context-sensitive text analysis: “Writers try to use language in cognitively efficient ways; there are no two ways of saying exactly the same thing; thus, even minor details of language usage can be significant in interpreting the meaning of a text” (Huckin 86-88). Even the differences in capitalization and supporting details can change the meaning of the students’ texts.

David Bartholomae, however, supports a radically different view of the writing accomplished within the composition classroom. He offers the following definition: “academic writing-the unreadable created by the unspeakable; academic writing-stuffy, pedantic, the price of a career; academic writing-pure, muscular, lean, taut, the language of truth and reason;

academic writing-language stripped of the false dressings of style and fashion, a tool for inquiry and critique” (“Writing with Teachers” 62). He contends that academic writing is the “real work of the academy” and that there is “no writing done in the academy that is not academic writing” (63). Bartholomae opposes the master trope of the “frontier classroom,” a place where freewriting may occur: “a cultural process free from the influence of culture, an historical moment outside of history, an academic setting free from academic writing” (64). According to Bartholomae’s rationale, composition specialists should not view themselves as frontier guides, but rather as managers as they assist students in working with the past, key texts, other’s terms, and the problems of quotation, citation, and paraphrase (66).

In such a site as described by Bartholomae, one may question where is the space for students’ cultural voices. I would argue that no such space for cultural voice exists. If the composition classroom is the site wherein the “real work” of the academy is performed, a place wherein no writing except academic writing may occur, then I would also contend with many composition specialists that no space exists for personal writing, journals, blogging, etc. And so I disagree with Bartholomae’s view of the composition classroom.

I disagree that only academic writing is the real work of the academy. I disagree that composition specialists’ only jobs are to teach students to work with others’ terms. I contend that it is also our job to teach them to work through their own terms. Yes, they should historicize the past, but the problems of the present are glaring before them, everyday that they enter our classrooms—problems that many English professionals continually ignore, problems that include identity, language, and equal access to technology. I do not believe that the answer to these problems are found in someone else’s voice; only until they discover the power within their own voices will they find their own solutions to these challenges, whatever those solutions may be.

And regardless of the undeniable power structures of the teacher that Bartholomae references (63), teachers do not hold the answers to students' unique situations. My students' realizations of language, culture, and identity—without my managerial skills—demonstrate the power of students' voices, if only teachers allow them the classroom space to pursue their voices.

Although anthologized and continually revisited, the Bartholomae/Elbow debate neglects to acknowledge the role of culture within composition. Specifically, Bartholomae ignores the role of culture beginning with the central term of his argument, which is *academic writing*. Within his extended definition of academic writing, Bartholomae includes “the language of truth and reason” and also “academic writing-language stripped of the false dressings of style and fashion” (62). This view of academic writing seemingly presents it as a coherent entity. However, Bartholomae does not mention that truth varies from individual to individual, which is why academics tend to look on concepts of universal truth circumspectly. Also, Bartholomae neglects to acknowledge that reason varies from individual to individual. For example, as cited earlier from *African American Literacies*, Elaine Richardson shares that her reasoning skills (opinions and thoughts) have not been respected due to cultural differences: “I’ve had several undergraduate educational experiences and several graduate ones, where because I articulated my opinion through story-telling, influenced by my Black and female socio-cultural orientation, my thoughts were not acknowledged or even seriously engaged” (91). The view that academic writing is *the language of truth and reason* presumes unified, agreed on notions of truth and reason, which does not take into account the nuances of language and culture.

Bartholomae also describes academic writing as “language stripped of the false dressings of style and fashion” (62). However, in “Geneva Smitherman: The Social Ontology of African-American Language,” George Yancey recounts his experiences at the American Philosophical

Association (APA) conference wherein a White philosopher questioned him on his decision to compose an autobiography in African American Vernacular English. Yancey recalls the following encounter:

He added, “I really enjoyed it, but why did you use *that language* [meaning African American Language]? You write very well [meaning in “Standard” American English]. You don’t have to use that language to make your point.” I listened in silence, realizing that he completely missed the point. Indeed, for him, African American Language was not a viable language, not a legitimate semiotic medium through which my life-world could best be represented. [. . .] By using African American English I had somehow fallen from the true heights of academic professionalism and broken the norms of respectable philosophy-speak. (274)

For Yancey, African American Vernacular English best represented the style of the streets wherein he matured (273). Accordingly, the style of AAVE was essential to his academic writing. Thus, Bartholomae’s definition of academic writing as “language stripped of the false dressings of style and fashion” becomes increasingly problematic. The dressings of style and fashion are what distinguish Yancey’s academic writing and gives it truth. The challenges that he and other African American academics encountered speak to the need for the academy to revisit the concept of *academic writing*.

However, Bartholomae adds description to his definition of academic writing:

If you collect samples of academic writing, within or across the disciplines, it has as many types and categories, peaks and valleys, as writing grouped under any other general category: magazine writing, business writing, political writing, sports writing. Or, I could put it this way: Within the writing performed in 1990 under the rubric of English studies, writing by English professors, you can find writing that is elegant, experimental, sentimental, autobiographical, spare, dull, pretentious, abstract, boring, dull, whatever. (62-63)

With such a definition then qualified by such expansive descriptions, Bartholomae’s general argument that academic writing is the “real work of the academy” (63) and “no writing done in the academy that is not academic writing” (63) loses any practical application. He pads the

definition to such an extent that any form of writing can be academic writing.

Concerning the writing classroom, Bartholomae argues for a “class in time, one that historicizes the present, including the present evoked in students’ writing” (65). Regarding the practice of instruction, he lists the students’ positions as linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and historical (65). However, whose linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and historical position? The prestige and pervasiveness of Standard American English necessarily assumes the position of White middle-class America. Students and academics whose heritage falls outside of White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant are either pressured or required to revise the linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and historical out of their writings. Accordingly, the need is increasingly prevalent to enact SRTOL and create spaces for cultural expression until the concept of academic writing can be re-examined for its underlying hegemonic practices.

Due to the underlying hegemony of the academy and non-inclusive myopic views of academic writing, I do not align myself with Bartholomae’s vision of the writing classroom. Nevertheless, many of the goals and objectives of first-year writing programs across the nation do. In fulfilling the goal of my research, which includes practical applications of Students’ Right to Their Own Language, I concede that composition specialists still must grapple with Bartholomae’s vision of the composition classroom and their supposed roles as site managers.

Special Case 1: Mary. In keeping with the frank and practical nature of this research project, I concede that certain students enter our classrooms who are not easily categorized with the majority of the other students, for whatever reason. Sometimes their writing styles differ dramatically, which reveals a gap in the classroom instructor’s teaching techniques. One such case was Mary. As stated earlier, Mary was one family member in a long line of educated African Americans. Her family was able to provide for her college education, which not only

motivated her to excel but also equipped her with a certain sense of confidence that she expressed from day one. However, Mary's writing style was far from traditional. She possessed great thinking skills and composed creative analogies in her essays. For example, in her essay on academic identity, Mary wrote the following: "When a toddler first learns to walk, they may fall, taking 'baby steps,' to improve their mobility before successfully perfecting the art of walking. As a college student, I am like a baby learning to walk, taking small steps toward academic success, stumbling as I attempt to perfect study habits, and slowly beginning to adapt, to a far broader horizon." Her vivid description was a positive addition to her writing style.

However, for the final draft of her academic essay, her grammar and punctuation errors could not be ignored. She begins, "When *a toddler* first learns to walk, *they* may fall" (emphasis added). Here, one finds a discrepancy in pronoun case. Also, she has an unneeded comma after "adapt" in the phrase, "slowly beginning to adapt, to a far broader horizon." This small excerpt from Mary's writing is indicative of the large scale errors that she had throughout the semester.

Admittedly, at the time of the case study, I was unfamiliar with certain discourse patterns and practices of African American rhetoric. Elaine Richardson describes such patterns and practices:

Given findings on the nature and effect of African American discourse patterns in the experience of African Americans, creating writing that is in any way reminiscent of that of Dr. King's work is an excellent beginning for any student. Black discourse patterns were at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights and equality in this country. Black discourse practices have historically been developed to carve out free spaces in oppressive locations such as the streets, the airwaves, the classroom, the world. ('Identities on the Ground and All Around' 461)

As I reflect on my assessment of Mary's formal academic essays, I often ponder whether the guidelines of academic discourse that I emphasized throughout the semester had negative effects on her writing style. Many times it is all too convenient to focus on sentence-level errors and

organization, rather than to perceive the student's larger writing goals. I have been a victim of such myopic views as well as a perpetuator of such views.

After reading Richardson's work on the discourse patterns of African American rhetoric, I concluded that I should have celebrated Mary's unique writing style more so than I did. By not encouraging such free expression, I perhaps contributed to the silencing of one distinct African American voice within my course. Mary became increasingly dissatisfied in the class. Her peers scored higher with each essay, yet she continually struggled. Here was an opportunity for me to schedule a conference with Mary, celebrate the conventions of African American rhetoric, and discuss ways that she could maintain her unique writing style while also adhering to the conventions of academic discourse. Unfortunately, you cannot celebrate what you do not discern.

Hence, my goal is to make clear certain conventions of African American rhetoric so that other practitioners may recognize them when they present themselves in students' writings. Richardson and Gilyard list certain features of what they term "Black discourse" in "Students' Right to Possibility:"⁴⁹

- Rhythmic, dramatic, evocative language. Use of metaphors, significations, vivid imagery.
- Proverbs, aphorisms, Biblical verses.
- Sermonic tone reminiscent of traditional Black church rhetoric, especially in vocabulary, imagery, metaphor.
- Direct address, conversational tone.
- Cultural references.

⁴⁹ See Gilyard and Richardson's "Students' Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and African American Rhetoric" for the examples that they provide to further explain each discourse pattern.

- Ethnolinguistic idioms.
- Verbal inventiveness, unique nomenclature.
- Cultural values, community consciousness.
- Field dependency.
- Narrative sequencing.
- Tonal semantics.
- Signifying.
- Call/response (structural).
- Testifying.
- Topic association.

In recognizing the conventions of African American rhetoric, composition specialists will be able to work with African American students to preserve their cultural voice while also adhering to the standards of the course curriculum.

Special Case 2: Alfreda. Still, certain cases exist wherein traditional grading techniques or even specialized grading techniques are inadequate assessment tools. Some students simply do not possess college-level writing skills. When supporting linguistic diversity, it is important to recognize the differences among cultural dialect, African American rhetoric, and sub-par writing skills.

Among the African American students that I taught, one student, Alfreda, struggled with her writing throughout the semester. At the beginning of the semester, Alfreda put forth more effort in her academic studies; therefore, traditional grading techniques were effective when assessing her writing. In her essay on academic identity, she wrote about her experience as the first of four siblings to make it to her senior year in high school. She was especially motivated

by her younger brother: “Well, though out the years I did have one motivation other than myself, my younger brother. Because all odds were against me, I wanted to prove to my younger sibling that we could make it without struggle and living the life of the streets.” Alfreda understood that she had certain challenges to overcome in college and was prepared to put forth the necessary effort to succeed: “I have identified the problems I had as a high school senior and came up with my solutions to be a better freshman in college. It is now up to me if I want to follow my plans and make myself a better student.” Because Alfreda was willing to help herself, I was willing to help her, too.

However, the semester continued, and as is the case with many college students, Alfreda became increasingly distracted by tasks other than her academic studies. Her initial effort decreased, and her writing challenges presented themselves more and more. In her academic essay on societal identity, Alfreda submitted an essay filled with writing errors—beginning with the first paragraph.

Rather than choosing to fail the paper altogether, I chose not to accept the essay at all. I informed Alfreda about the campus’s Writing Center and advised her to get one-on-one assistance with her writing. I gave her an extension on her due date, but informed her that the class would continue as scheduled, and it would be her responsibility to stay abreast of the upcoming unit.

She did well. As she continually visited the Writing Center for each formal paper, her writing errors became almost non-existent.

Alfreda’s particular case demonstrates another issue that practitioners must confront when instituting linguistic diversity: the difference that exists between helping students to succeed versus simply passing students through writing courses in the name of cultural diversity.

Because Alfreda's writing errors occurred in an academic essay, I could not ethically excuse those errors as "cultural language," hence, one of the goals of my research: to affirm pedagogical spaces for students' linguistic identities. In affirming such spaces, I created specific assignments wherein students' linguistic identities could flourish. Nevertheless, I understood my responsibility to support the goals of the First-Year Writing Program, which included helping students to "understand their part in the university discourse community and how its written conventions operate." However, the case with Alfreda addressed other FWP goals as well, including, "Students will understand and use the processes of writing and revision as tools for analyzing topics and evaluating their own writing," and "Students will become conscious of their own development as writers." By putting additional effort into her academic prose, Alfreda received a better understanding of academic discourse, revisited the writing and revision processes, and consciously developed further as a writer. She continued visiting the Writing Center for the duration of the course.

Not all composition specialists have established Writing Centers on their college campuses; moreover, not all composition specialists feel comfortable sending their students for external help. Notably, I do not always direct students to the Writing Center; at times, I work with students one-on-one during student-teacher conferences. In these sessions, I implement David Bartholomae's suggestions for addressing errors in students' essays in "The Study of Error." First, he proposes that educators change the way they view errors in students' writing from violations of conventions to evidence of intentions (255). Once educators change their perceptions of errors, then they can "chart systematic choices, individual strategies, and characteristic process of thought" (255). His proposed error analysis groups errors as either random or systematic, in which systematic errors indicate particular, perhaps internalized, rule

systems. Therefore, once educators identify errors consistent with students' writing, they should note whether or not the errors are random or systematic; and if they are the latter, educators should attempt to identify the underlying rule system the student is consistently applying.

Next, Bartholomae groups errors into three categories:

[E]vidence of an intermediate system, errors that could truly be said to be accidents [. . .], and, finally, errors of language transfer, or more commonly, dialect interference, where in the attempt to produce the target language, the writer intrudes forms from the "first" or "native" language rather than inventing some intermediate form. (257-58)

During conferences, I encourage the students to read their essays aloud. By far, more students correct their own writing errors when they read aloud than when I point out an error and ask them to correct it.

Also, as Bartholomae suggests, I allow the students to explain their errors/intentions (266). Students often have very logical reasons for their mistakes, or rather, they provide concrete *evidence of their intentions*. Then, it becomes manageable for both the student and me to note their systematic patterns throughout the text. Next, I explain the grammatical rule that applies—but one time only; thereafter, I require the student to explain and apply the rule if the error surfaces again within the text.

In short, although special cases may present themselves in the composition classroom, composition specialists should not confuse upholding linguistic identity with abdicating one's professional responsibility to teach writing and the conventions of the academic discourse community.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

As with many research projects, the looming question, “So what?” still exists. So what that students’ cultural languages are not recognized? So what that certain students experience greater hardships than others?

I respond to the “so what?” questions by relating my body of research to ongoing conversations of retention among African American students in higher education. In “The Relations among General and Race-Related Stressors and Psychoeducational Adjustment in Black Students Attending Predominantly White Institutions,” Helen A. Neville, P. Paul Heppner, Peter Ji, and Russell Thye present their research findings on retention among African American college students. In a study that included 260 African American college students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs), the authors found a three-factor solution to their research question: race related stress, psychological/interpersonal stress, and academic stress (599).⁵⁰ Such research suggests that African American college students attending PWIs experience greater levels of stress due to their statuses as racial minorities, which affects their adjustment on their college campuses. Race-related stressors accounted for 32% of the variance while psychological/interpersonal stressors accounted for 8.6% and academic stressors accounted for 6.2% (606).

For English professionals who do not consider their involvement with their students to be

⁵⁰ The authors defined “race-related stress” as “psychological discomfort that results from a situation or event that an individual appraises as troubling because of racial discrimination or isolation” (600).

important, the following research finding may carry considerable import: “insensitive attitudes of faculty toward Black students” carried a factor loading of .81, which was the highest rate of any factor of any category (607). Under race-related stressors, other factor loadings that pertain to faculty members or campus-wide issues—which I relate to my argument on linguistic diversity—are as follows:

Low academic expectations of faculty for Black students’ performance: .78
Lack of diverse perspectives among faculty: .76
Limited recognition of the Black culture on campus: .75
Limited tolerance for culture differences on campus: .74
Adjusting to the White-oriented campus culture: .54
Maintaining one’s racial identity in a predominantly White environment: .47

Furthermore, Neville et al. found that the correlations between the Black Student Stress Inventory (BSSI) and the criterion variables suggested that both race-related and general stressors were related to the students’ psychological adjustment (609). The authors also note the following:

Although racial minority college students experience the typical developmental tasks of college students, they also often experience race-related stressors such as racial discrimination, feelings of isolation, and sensitive comments at PWIs [. . .]. Our findings suggest that not only do Black students report these racial issues, but these experiences, in addition to the more general college-related stressors, are in fact perceived as stressful. (612)

As stated in the opening narrative of this argument, *Everyone has to go through the same process. The problem was that the process wasn’t the same for everyone.*⁵¹

In considering the additional stress factors of African American students, Neville et al. recommend finding ways to reduce these students’ stress levels at PWIs. They include stress related to “loneliness, isolation, and self-esteem” (613). Assignments that include students’ cultural language, rather than only Standard American English, is one way that English faculty

⁵¹ See Chapter 1.

may “encourage points of connection on campus for Black students,” thereby reducing the stress related to loneliness, isolation, and self-esteem (613).

Jeanene Robinson and Mia Biran join the conversation on the retention of African American students in “Discovering Self: Relationships between African Identity and Academic Achievement.” In this study, the authors researched 96 African American high schools students to ascertain any correlations between academic achievement, cultural identity, and study habits. According to the authors, “The most important findings was that a sense of collective identity, a subfactor of African identity, was positively related to academic achievement” (46). In noting the traditionally low academic achievement among African American students, Robinson and Biran review various educational approaches, including the victim-blame approach, the cultural difference versus cultural deficiency approaches, and the social structural approach.

The victim-blame approach holds particular import for my research on the intersections of African American language, identity, and technology. This approach maintains, “a person’s low academic performance is a consequence of the individual or of the deficiencies of his or her life experiences” (47). Several students in my case study, specifically Lily, Mary, and Alfreda, may be said to have exhibited certain characteristics of the victim-blame approach. Such characteristics were particularly evident in Mary and especially Lily in the unit on academic identity. Among the subclasses of thought categorized under the victim-blame approach, one way of thinking carries great importance: “African Americans lack the language skills needed for academic success, are unable to think in abstract terms, or have difficulty with perceptual discrimination” (47). Indeed, Lily, Mary, and Alfreda encountered challenges with their language skills and perceptual discrimination throughout the semester.⁵²

⁵² See Chapter 4 for Lily’s and Mary’s challenges and Chapter 5 for Alfreda’s challenges.

Robinson and Biran also discuss the factors that contribute to African Americans' challenges in scholastic achievement. For example, they note that often African Americans' achievements are not emphasized in different subject areas; therefore, African American students have no point-of-reference to guide them towards success in that area. Such is the case in many English classrooms as well. Rather than viewing African American Vernacular English as a validated language with rules that govern its discourse conventions, many individuals—English professionals included—disregard AAVE as “bad English,” “broken English,” or “lazy English” (Rickford and Rickford 229). In affirming pedagogical spaces for cultural language and emphasizing the structural nature of AAVE, English professionals may encourage higher scholastic achievement among African American students who then would be able to discern the a level of African American achievement within the area of language.⁵³

Drawing from the work of K.K.K. Kambon, the authors assert that individuals who are aware of their African American identity “strive toward African affirmation, empowerment, preservation, and possess self-determination” (50). African American students can achieve some, if not all, of these positive attributes of African American identity if English professionals would affirm pedagogical spaces for linguistic identity, thereby affirming cultural identity. As the authors note, “Identity is what anchors a person to a cultural reality, and it is what helps to maintain a focus that motivates academic success” (51). It would be beneficial for English professionals, as well as other educators, to move beyond reading research on the links between identity and retention in order to act on the research findings of such studies.

⁵³ In addition to “(d) lack of emphasis on African contributions to the subject areas” cited above, Robinson and Biran also list the following challenges to African American students' motivation: “(a) the conflicting culturally based expectations of the academic environment and the African American student's community environment, (b) the negative stereotypes of the African student, (c) the lack of African role models in the schools, [. . .], and (e) the exposure to societal expectations that African Americans primarily excel in areas other than in academia” (50).

Indeed, Robinson and Biran conclude their argument by questioning what educational institutions can do to contribute to African American students' pride in and commitment to their cultural communities. They suggest including facets of African American culture into the course curricula as well as hiring African American teachers. Of course, one portion of African American culture can include language.

Concepts of Community in Context. Statistics and concepts of retention, enrollment, and/or graduation rates carry no import unless they are contextualized in relation to the living, breathing students that they represent. Thus, rather than focusing on isolated numbers, we should emphasize creating an environment of community on college campuses and within individual classrooms wherein all students may flourish. Elizabeth Crooke writes, "To understand how community is constructed and the meanings it holds for its members it is necessary to consider how a sense of community contributes to identity formation and the creation of a sense of place [. . .]" (31). So, too, did Robinson and Biran emphasize the importance of identity, though they particularly highlighted that collective identity was positively related to academic achievement. Whether students are able to identify a sense of place within their cultural group or within the campus at-large, they should have spaces available for them wherein they are immersed within a community. Another characteristic of community relates to inclusion, rather than exclusion. In her argument on social initiatives that develop community strengths, Crooke discusses the "sense of togetherness experienced by the community members, rather than isolation; their feelings of integration rather than segregation; and the promotion of inclusion within the community rather than exclusion [. . .]" (31-32). Although I agree with Crooke's argument, I differentiate between the concepts of integration and inclusion versus the concept of assimilation. University communities should encourage minority students to

participate in events that may be indicative of White middle class culture, but White middle class students should also be encouraged to participate in events indicative of cultural events beyond mainstream society. In this manner, members of the university community will experience genuine integration, rather than cultural segregation, which is the case on many college campuses. Additionally, students should experience integrated scholarship. Such scholarship should not be confused with merely the course work performed in public or private institutions; in this sense, scholarship connotes a dedication to inward reflection and lifelong learning. By interrogating the privilege that is awarded to White culture, acknowledging the contributions of various cultures to different areas of learning, and incorporating various cultures into the learning process, university faculty will disturb the status quo and foster the type of scholarship and self-motivated critique that is essential for lifelong learning.

Concepts of community, senses of place, and inclusion in relation to African American college students demonstrate a level of kairos for this argument. At the time of this writing, *Inside Higher Ed* reported on two racially-charged incidents that occurred at one Southern university. Such events led me to research three state universities in the South for their approaches to retention and diversity.

The first university that I researched currently exists as the third largest university in its state. Under “Diversity Runs Deeper than the Data,” UAB maintains that it has a “longstanding commitment to diversity and inclusiveness.” In 2003, it established the Office for Equity and Diversity in an effort both to recruit and retain students from minority cultures. Its programs include the Comprehensive Minority Faculty and Student Development Program, which awards millions of dollars in minority undergraduate and graduate scholarships--\$730 million to be exact (The University of Alabama at Birmingham). Furthermore, 25% of UAB’s incoming freshmen

are African American. The university also experienced increases in undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded to African American students.

However, one statement from UAB was particularly intriguing; it states the following:

But it's about much more than stats and demographics. At UAB diversity runs deeper than the data; there is sense of genuine community among students and faculty from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures. Such an environment mirrors today's world and prepares students for a successful and meaningful careers in the global, knowledge economy. This diverse campus culture has not gone unnoticed nationally. In *The Princeton Review*, UAB has been heralded as a "truly a great American melting pot" and a "mecca of multiculturalism" and, for three consecutive years, ranked among the top 10 universities nationally for diversity.

In this statement, the administrators of The University of Alabama at Birmingham convey the same message conveyed earlier in this argument: community cannot be connoted by statistics and data. Genuine community on a college campus involves a unification of various cultures for the purposes of tolerance towards difference and academic scholarship.

The second largest university, Auburn University, had a fall 2010 enrollment of 25,078 (Auburn University). However, Auburn is unable to boast of any praises from *The Princeton Review* concerning its commitment to multiculturalism and diversity. Ten years ago, Auburn underwent national attention due to the racially-charged actions of two on-campus fraternities that were directed against members of the African American community.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the university took the necessary steps to address the obvious lack of community demonstrated by the students' actions. In "Auburn's Long Road to Diversity: One Year after Blackface Incident, Alabama University Works to Integrate Diversity into Campus Culture - Noteworthy News,"

⁵⁴ *Black Issues in Higher Education* reports the following: "Auburn University fraternities were suspended earlier this month because members dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes and blackface -- one with a noose around his neck -- during a Halloween party. Delta Sigma Phi and Beta Theta Pi fraternities, both with mostly White members, are being investigated for violating Auburn's discrimination and harassment rules, says spokesman Jim Jackson" ("Fraternities Suspended for Wearing Racially Offensive Costumes – Auburn, Ala – Brief Article").

Eleanor Lee Yates reports on the university's efforts to improve the campus climate. Among their efforts, university officials established the Diversity Leadership Council, which is composed of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni (Yates). Auburn also reports "complet[ing] construction of a new facility for diversity that will provide programs for students" and conducting summer orientation camps that "all included sections on diversity" as well as a "convocation on diversity led by the Student Government Association [that] drew more than 1,200 students" (Yates). Amidst these noteworthy efforts, Auburn University also has over 400 courses that include "elements of diversity or tolerance regarding race, disability, gender, and sexual preference" (Yates). When working within regions that are historically rooted in racism and injustice, one cannot reasonably expect that no immoral or unethical acts will ever occur. However, the academic institution's response to such acts either interrupts such a history or allows it to continue.

Auburn's 400+ courses and other measures sharply contrast with The University of Alabama's approach to recent racially-charged events.⁵⁵ UA lays claim to the largest student body in the state of Alabama with an enrollment of 30,232 for fall 2010 and considers itself to be the state's flagship university (The University of Alabama). Yet, faculty, students, and citizens await its response to students' behavior. The president of UA, Dr. Robert Witt, issued a statement concerning the events, but the statement has been largely critiqued for its brevity and vagueness. The Black Faculty and Staff Association (BFSA) at the university also issued a statement. Though the statement itself was not widely disseminated, one particular passage

⁵⁵ *Inside Higher Ed* reports the following: "On Friday [February 4, 2011], a member of a white fraternity shouted racial epithets from inside the group's house at passing student Justin Zimmerman, who is black. The fraternity member, whose name has not been released, called Zimmerman a "nigger," then called out, "come here, boy" (Grasgreen).

deserves to be quoted at length.⁵⁶

[T]he Association once again urges University leaders to design and institutionalize diversity training and educational programming for our student body which would demonstrate the University's commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming campus culture. Now is the time for the University to make unmistakably clear to its students (both current and prospective), its alumni (as are many of us), and to the world that these types of racial epithets or other disrespectful epithets will not be tolerated at the Capstone. Such insidious language does not contribute to "a hospitable campus environment" (see President Witt's Statement on Diversity at <http://www.eop.ua.edu/law.html>) nor does it promote multicultural awareness and respect for differences. Only through systematic and sustained multicultural education will such incidents of racial intolerance and injustice end at The University of Alabama.

One may easily substitute the phrase "hospitable campus environment" with the term "community," in which case, one would readily recognize the previously-cited arguments from Crooke on a sense of place, a sense of togetherness, inclusion, and integration. The BFSA currently is calling for "systematic and sustained multicultural education," which Auburn's faculty also called for. Dr. Keenan Grenell, who served as the interim assistant provost for diversity and multicultural affairs at the time of Auburn's events, asserted the following: "We took an aggressive posture. We told the administration that this was going to have to cease" (Yates). One may reasonably argue that the events on Auburn's campus were more intense and required a stronger reaction from the administration; others may just as reasonably argue that any racially-motivated events deserve an intense and strong reaction from an institution's administration. Only time will reveal how the flagship university of the state of Alabama will respond.

Nevertheless, one should keep in mind UA's efforts at diversity and retention until this point. In "The Recruitment and Retention of African-American Students at Traditionally White Universities: A Case Study of The University of Alabama," UA elucidates its efforts at

⁵⁶ See Appendix _ for the BFSA statement in its entirety.

increasing African American retention and graduation rates. Among their efforts, they include actively recruiting African American faculty, utilizing both African American students and the president of the university as recruiters in African American high schools, and discussing racial issues with increasing candor by arranging hall meetings, public lectures, and university-wide workshops. UA programs that attract high achieving African American students, which also increases retention, include National Achievement Scholars, the McNair Program, and the Rural Health Scholars Program.

Indeed, UA's efforts at retention and increased graduation rates have had significant success. At the time of the case study in 2001, the rate of retention for first-time African American freshman college students was 85.3%, as compared with 82.2% for first-time White freshman college students. Nationally, retention rates for African Americans are consistently lower than those for Whites; however, at The University of Alabama, the retention rates were higher. Such changes have persisted at the University. For the 2008 fall class, the African American retention rate was 86.4%, as compared to 83.3% for Whites ("Retention/Continuation Rates for Full-Time First-Time Freshmen by Race and Sex Classes Entering Fall 1997 – 2008"). Thus, in comparing UA's past efforts at minority retention and increased graduation rates versus the controversy of recent events, students, faculty, staff, and local citizens await UA's response.

One can study 260, 96, or seven African American college students from the Midwest, Miami, or the South. Or one can rehearse past and/or present events on local college campuses. Research findings suggest similar conclusions: Appropriate steps must be taken to assuage the apathy of both faculty and administrators concerning the plights of cultural minorities on college campuses. Such efforts will contribute to creating a sense of community among all students, thereby increasing retention and graduation rates among cultural minorities.

Implications for Future Research. This project does not explicitly address retention, mainly because the project was never designed to be a longitudinal study. However, in reviewing what we know already about retention from past research across the nation, we understand the links among retention, academic achievement, and a sense of community for African American students.

Although this project demonstrated the advances that African American students achieve when allowed the space to utilize cultural language, the research has the potential to expand in exponential ways. For future studies, researchers may consider tracking the research participants over the course of their academic careers and possibly into the workforce. Potential future research queries include the following: utilizing how cultural language increases African American students' chances at retention within higher education, exploring the role that silence plays among White students in classes that emphasize cultural language, and evaluating how silence becomes invisibility and the consequences of such invisibility in students regardless of race and/or ethnicity.

Final Words. This research is important for English professionals because it contextualizes the experiences of African American college students within the dominant culture. As African American students assimilate into White middle class culture in order to succeed in academia, they are called to relinquish their cultural language and primary discourses. And as African Americans homogenize with White middle class culture, they grapple with their cultural identities. In order to combat the negative effects of assimilation, educators can modify their pedagogies to include minority students who attend college in steadily increasing numbers. These students originate from various linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds. As they enter higher education, they bring with them various experiences and voices that English professionals

should hear and respect. English professionals should remember that students' ways of knowing that differ from the dominant culture do not necessarily signify a lack of intelligence.

Accordingly, educators should implement pedagogies that incorporate all students' voices into the classroom, and not only those presented in Standard American English.

My research has documented a demonstrated need for community, cultural language, and diversity within the lives of young African American women at a predominantly White university. It has offered a practical application of SRTOL in a technology-rich environment. Finally, my work has suggested that by creating culturally-inclusive learning environments, composition specialists may see increases in retention rates among college-level minority students.

Epilogue

This work began with a narrative of my experiences in an academic seminar wherein I came to believe that the challenges that African American females encounter within academia are not confined to bidialectalism and code-switching. Instead, African American females must overcome their personal insecurities about language as well as a silencing of the African American female voice. Through my research, I assert that this silencing is not a new phenomenon for present-day African American females; rather, this silencing has existed for decades, dating back to at least the 19th century. And throughout the years, African American females, including but not limited to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Ida B. Wells, Geneva Smitherman, and Elaine Richardson, have fought to maintain their authentic voices, thereby setting an example for future generations of African American females.

Though I have recovered a portion of my voice with this case study and subsequent dissertation, I acknowledge that a lifelong battle still lies ahead of me. It is not my intention to imply that the silencing of the African American female voice and other language concerns emanate only from White America or other cultural groups. To be sure, some African Americans abhor African American Vernacular English more than any cultural outsiders ever could. Nevertheless, I assert that it is the responsibility of linguists, language scholars, and other informed individuals to educate others about the underlying politics of language. Just as assimilationist attitudes about language originated in educational institutions (as documented by Harvey Graff), these same attitudes can be eradicated in educational institutions. My goal and

the goal of this research is to inspire individuals to move beyond complacency to action. Don't simply sympathize with Lily, Mary, and Alfreda; instead, identify the Lily's, Mary's, and Alfreda's within other writing courses. Educate these and other students, regardless of race and/or ethnicity, concerning language rights. Implement writing lessons and other exercises that inculcate tolerance, rather than upholding the status quo. In short, affirm spaces for linguistic identity within the composition classroom.

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Appendix A

Characteristics of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

These characteristics and examples are taken directly from the following source:

Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling-Estes. *American English*. 2nd ed. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2006.

Please note that these are not all of the characteristics of AAVE; also, some characteristics of AAVE vary depending on where you live. However, below are listed several characteristics of AAVE that can be found in many regions throughout the United States.

- Habitual *be* for habitual or intermittent activity
e.g. *Sometimes my ears be itching./She don't usually be here.*
- Absence of copula for contracted forms of *is* and *are*
e.g. *She nice./They acting all strange.*
- Present tense, third-person *-s* absence
e.g. *She walk for she walks./She raise for she raises*
- Possessive *-s* absence
e.g. *man_hat for man's hat*
Jack_car for Jack's car
- General plural *-s* absence
e.g. *a lot of time for a lot of times; some dog for some dogs*
- Remote time stressed *been* to mark a state or action that began a long time ago and is still relevant
e.g. *You been paid your dues a long time ago./I been known him a long time.*
- Simple past tense *had* + verb
e.g. *They had went outside and then they had messed up the yard.*
Yesterday, she had fixed the bike and had rode it to school.
- *Ain't* for *didn't*
e.g. *He ain't go there yesterday./He ain't do it.*
- Reduction of final consonant clusters when followed by a word beginning with a vowel
e.g. *lif' up for lift; bus' up for bust up*
- *Skr* for *str* initial clusters
e.g. *skreet for street; skraight for straight*
- Use of [f] and [v] for final *th*
e.g. *toof for tooth; smoov for smooth*

Appendix B

Instructor: Regina L. Golar

EN 101

Guidelines for MySpace.com

MySpace.com within the Classroom

Since we are using MySpace.com this semester as a classroom resource, we must approach it with the same discretion that we display within the physical classroom. For each unit (see below), we will decorate our pages according to the theme of that particular unit. Decoration includes the background, profile picture, pictures in albums, music, blogs, etc. Everything about the page should reflect the unit that we are currently studying. For example, the first unit that we will explore this semester is “Who Am I as a Student?” Consequently, your MySpace page should reflect your academic identity. Your background should pertain to academics. Your picture should reflect some aspect of your education. Your song should provide an insight into your identity as a student. *If you cannot find a song that reflects the unit, then feel free not to upload a song.

No songs, pictures, or general decorations that do not reflect the theme of the academic unit will be tolerated. I will be checking your pages regularly to ensure that you adhere to the guidelines set forth in this document. Needless to say, no offensive decorations that disrespect any race, ethnicity, religion, creed, nationality, gender, etc., will be tolerated, regardless of your identity. (Note: Disputes on whether something should be termed “offensive” will be settled by the directors of the First-Year Writing Program and the classroom teacher.)

If you have any questions, then feel free to contact me. I look forward to using MySpace.com with you—but in a manner conducive to the composition classroom.

Below are the units that we will explore this semester:

Unit 1: Who Am I as a Student?	August 20, 2008-September 14, 2008
Unit 2: Who Am I as a Family Member?	September 15, 2008-October 5, 2008
Unit 3: Who Am I in Society?	October 6, 2008-October 26, 2008
Unit 4: Who Am I as an Individual?	October 27, 2008-November 16, 2008
Unit 5: Reconciling All of My Identities	November 17, 2008-December 5, 2008

Appendix C

English 101 Goals

- Students will understand and use the processes of writing and revision as tools for analyzing topics and evaluating their own writing.
- Students will learn to collaborate productively.
- Students will be exposed to a variety of rhetorical strategies and processes of analyzing and will understand the advantages associated with composing in different print, visual, and digital media.
- Students will understand how to use writing strategies and processes to analyze and write about issues aimed at different audiences and different purposes.
- Students will understand their part in the university discourse community and how its written conventions operate.
- Students will begin to learn the basics of citation formatting.
- Students will become conscious of their own development as writers.

Appendix D

The Black Faculty and Staff Association's Statement

Campus Racial Incident on February 4, 2011

The Black Faculty and Staff Association (BFSA) at The University of Alabama abhors racism and intolerance. Accordingly, we are especially dismayed to learn that a black student was called a “*nigger*” [sic] and a “*boy*” [sic] on Friday, February 4, 2011, by a fellow University white male student. Unfortunately, this incident is not an isolated occurrence on this campus. Such hateful language perpetuates an unwelcoming and hostile campus environment.

BFSA requests swift and exact disciplinary action against the accused perpetrator. Moreover, the Association once again urges University leaders to design and institutionalize diversity training and educational programming for our student body which would demonstrate the University's commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming campus culture. Now is the time for the University to make unmistakably clear to its students (both current and prospective), its alumni (as are many of us), and to the world that these types of racial epithets or other disrespectful epithets will not be tolerated at the Capstone. Such insidious language does not contribute to “a hospitable campus environment” (see President Witt's Statement on Diversity at <http://www.eop.ua.edu/law.html>) nor does it promote multicultural awareness and respect for differences. Only through systematic and sustained multicultural education will such incidents of racial intolerance and injustice end at The University of Alabama.

The Black Faculty and Staff Association

February 7, 2011

Appendix E
Sample SRTOL Assignment 1:
All Languages

DIRECTIONS: For each unit (see below), we will decorate our MySpace pages according to the theme of that particular unit. Decoration includes the background, profile picture, pictures in albums, music, blogs, etc. Everything about the page should reflect the unit that we are currently studying. For example, the first unit that we will explore this semester is “Who Am I as a Student?” Consequently, your MySpace page should reflect your academic identity. Your background should pertain to academics. Your picture should reflect some aspect of your education. Your song should provide an insight into your identity as a student. *If you cannot find a song that reflects the unit, then feel free not to upload a song.

No songs, pictures, or general decorations that do not reflect the theme of the academic unit will be tolerated. I will be checking your pages regularly to ensure that you adhere to the guidelines set forth in this document. Needless to say, no offensive decorations that disrespect any race, ethnicity, religion, creed, nationality, gender, etc., will be tolerated, regardless of your identity. (Note: Disputes on whether something should be termed “offensive” will be settled by the directors of the First-Year Writing Program and the classroom teacher.)

LANGUAGE: The language on your MySpace page will reflect the language that corresponds to your specific identity. For example, the first unit explores your academic identity; therefore, the language that you use on your MySpace page should be Standard American English because it exists as the accepted language of the university community. The second unit explores your familial identity. The language that you use on your MySpace page can be whatever language that reflects your familial identity (Standard American English, African American Vernacular English, Southern American English, Spanglish, etc.).

BLOGS: The blog that you write for each unit should describe and explain the following:

- Profile picture
- Background/decorations
- Song

NOTE: Do not forget to include an introduction and a conclusion in each blog for your reading audience.

Below are the units that we will explore this semester:

Unit 1: Who Am I as a Student?

Unit 2: Who Am I as a Family Member?

Unit 3: Who Am I in Society?

Unit 4: Who Am I as an Individual?

Unit 5: Reconciling All of My Identities

**Sample SRTOL Assignment 2:
African American Vernacular English and Standard American English**

African American Vernacular English in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

DIRECTIONS: In the first passage, identify all characteristics of AAVE. Then translate the text into SAE. In the second passage, translate the paragraph into AAVE. Then write the rules of AAVE that you are applying in your translation.

Passage 1:

“The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Everytime I got, I went. I’d go early, before the show started. They’d cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I’d move right on in them pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bath tubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don’t know.” (123)

Translate the above passage into SAE:

What characteristics of AAVE did you identify?

What characteristics that may not have been stated on the worksheet did you identify?

Passage 2:

“She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen. There at last were the darkened woods, the lonely roads, the river banks, the gentle knowing eyes. There the flawed became whole, the blind sighted, and the lame and halt threw away their crutches.” (122)

Translate the above passage into AAVE:

What characteristics of AAVE did you use?

What characteristics did you use that may not have been stated on the worksheet?

**Sample SRTOL Assignment 3:
African American Vernacular English**

DIRECTIONS: In the song below, identify all characteristics of AAVE. Then translate the song into SAE. Answer the questions that follow.

“Fresh as I’m Is” –Bow Wow

[BOW WOW - Verse 1]

When I was 8 I was rhyming not back yard game playin
Watchin Snoop anxiously and waitin for my chance man
Ridin cocky wit it cause I know that I am man
I'm goin down in history like American Band Stand
I stay fresh to def like the neighborhood dope man
I stay on the top cause I keep comin wit dough man
U steady watchin steady but there ain't no hope man
U dealin wit somethin bigger than the US oh man
And ain't no jokin
Fresh like fatlases and dukey ropes and I keep on smokin
Young but I'm ready so that means I'm strokin
Look at me now days girl a dawg is soakin
Addicted to it Jd say I got it bad
18 n**** makin more than yo dad
They think they doin it but I'ma out do em
If you know somebody like that walk up and say to em

[Chorus:]

[JD]

Ye ain't ridin (ye ain't ridin)
Ye ain't bumpin like I'm bumpin
Ye ain't sayin nuthin homie
Ye ain't fresh azimiz
Ye ain't got it (ye ain't got it)
You don't keep it thuggin like I keep it thuggin
Lil buddy you ain't fresh azimiz

[J-KWON]

Ye ain't big (big) whipping
Ye ain't steady ti tippin
No girl getting homie
You ain't fresh azimiz
You think you is (Think ya is) but you ain't
Think u can get it crunk like me but u can't

[BOW WOW - Verse 2]

Now every record that I make I'm tryin to get up out the store man

Every car I drive I'm tryin have u sayin whoa man
Fourth album comeback power like rogain
Records say Columbia but I'm So So man
I stay on my grind bringin in that dough man
From records to movies now a tv show man
Anything given to me I'm gon rep man
Big house, big cars what u expect man
Just to get a glimpse girls breakin they neck man
Blinded by the light glistenin off the ? lane
Bow hot as ever I ain't lost no step
Straight t-shirt, sneaker I ain't tryin to go prep
Like these lil r and b groups that need my help
Wish they had my style wish they had my rep
But oh no, u'll never have it like me man
And if u can't understand this is what I'm sayin

[Chorus:]

[JD]

Ye ain't ridin (ye ain't ridin)
Ye ain't bumpin like I'm bumpin
Ye ain't sayin nuthin homie
Ye ain't fresh azimiz
Ye ain't got it (ye ain't got it)
You don't keep it thuggin like I keep it thuggin
Lil buddy you ain't fresh azimiz

[J-KWON]

Ye ain't big (big) whipping
Ye ain't steady ti tippin
No girl getting homie
You ain't fresh azimiz
You think you is (Think ya is) but you ain't
Think u can get it crunk like me but u can't

[BOW WOW - Verse 3]

I got a spot in MIA to get away from the cold weather
Talk around town as if I'm wit Ciara
Bow fall off n**** that'll b never
I'm rich (yea I'm rich) I can do whatever
I get a kick outta shuttin suckas down in the parkin lot
Especially when they tryin to stunt thinking they hot
All out the window talking loud like they runnin my block
That's when I come through (come through) and all that stop
And ain't another young'n keep it fresh like dis man
Every year, same time come wit them hits man
Tired of makin girls fall out wit a kiss man

Well listen and you're stuck music just like quick sand
Older people say that lil young dude sick man
Young AI and we cool thick man
Difference between you and me is u b bricklin
And I ain't never did that before (no)

[Chorus:]

[JD - repeat 2]

Ye ain't ridin (ye ain't ridin)
Ye ain't bumpin like I'm bumpin
Ye ain't sayin nuthin homie
Ye ain't fresh azimiz
Ye ain't got it (ye ain't got it)
You don't keep it thuggin like I keep it thuggin
Lil buddy you ain't fresh azimiz

[J-KWON]

Ye ain't big (big) whipping
Ye ain't steady ti tippin
No girl getting homie
You ain't fresh azimiz
You think you is (Think ya is) but you ain't
Think u can get it crunk like me but u can't

Lyrics taken from the following:

<http://www.lyricstop.com/albums/bowwow/freshazimiz.html>

1. On another sheet of paper, translate the above passage into SAE.
2. What characteristics of AAVE did you identify?
3. What characteristics of AAVE did you identify that may not have been stated on the worksheet?
4. What did the song gain from this translation?
5. What did the song lose from this translation?
6. What is the better version of this song (AAVE or SAE)? Why?

**Sample SRTOL Assignment 4:
Hispanic American English**

Directions: Write a descriptive essay about any topic that you like. Try to incorporate as many of the Hispanic American words listed below as possible! Make sure that you use the words in appropriate context.

Selected Spanish Words and Phrases

<i>Los campos</i> →	The countryside	<i>Cara</i> →	Face
<i>La chota</i> →	The police	<i>Entiendas</i> →	Understand
<i>Mi papi</i> →	My daddy	<i>Mi abuela</i> →	My grandmother
<i>Pan dulce</i> →	Sweet bread	<i>Primo</i> →	Cousin
<i>Telenovela</i> →	Soap opera	<i>Hijole</i> →	Wow
<i>Feo</i> →	Ugly	<i>Viejo</i> →	Old man
<i>Rancheras</i> →	Old-fashioned songs	<i>Qué asco</i> →	How disgusting
<i>Feria</i> →	Cash	<i>Mocosos</i> →	Snot-nosed kids
<i>Chicas</i> →	Girls	<i>Carnal</i> →	Blood brother
<i>Qué gacho</i> →	What a mess / what a bad thing	<i>Panadería</i> →	Bakery

NOTE: This assignment is designed for a younger audience, but the vocabulary and essay topic can be changed to suit a more mature audience.

**Sample SRTOL Assignment 5:
Southern American English**

Directions: Compare and contrast the dialect used by Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to your knowledge of Southern American English. Answer the following questions:

What characteristics of Southern American English can you detect in Big Daddy's language?

In your opinion, is Big Daddy's language an accurate reflection of Southern American English? Why or why not?

List characteristics of Southern American English that does not appear in Big Daddy's language.

In the following space, write a paragraph on any topic that includes Southern American English. *(Use the backside of this sheet if you need additional space.)*

Appendix F

IRB Approval

Office for Research
Office of the Chair,
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
R E S E A R C H

August 13, 2008

Regina L. Golar
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences

Re: IRB # 08-OR-173 "The Effects of MySpace.com in the Composition Classroom"

Dear Ms. Golar:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your protocol has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the assigned IRB application number. Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Carpaneto T. Myles, MSM, ~~CM~~
Director of Research Compliance & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
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