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Publication Date

2013

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**EXAMINING FIRST-YEAR NON-DOMINANT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES
AS ACADEMIC WRITERS: AN IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

EDUCATION

by

Dora Marinova Panayotova

September 2013

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ABSTRACT

Dora Panayotova

Examining First-Year Non-dominant Students' Experiences as Academic Writers: An Identity Perspective

This dissertation reports on a study investigating the identity of first-year university students as writers. The longitudinal project explored how students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds construct their identities as undergraduates and as academic writers in their first year. The research was qualitative and interpretative, and used identity and identity in writing as theoretical lenses. The setting was a 4-year institution of higher education in California. The participants were 4 first-generation college attendees from educationally underserved communities participating in the Equal Opportunity Program Bridge program at the university. Data collection included interviews with the students and faculty, observations and field notes from classes, students' written coursework and other student-produced documents, course materials and documents, and conversations with students about specific pieces of writing. By researching the participants in different academic settings (e.g., courses, lectures, tutoring, support services) and through examining their writing, this project illuminates how students' understanding of self is affected in the process of negotiating academia.

I examined how students construct their identities as undergraduates and as academic writers from the texts and discourses available to them. Student identities are inextricably linked to the writing process and their writing products—student

papers. I found that the participants in this study experienced complex power relationships as they attempted to build their identities in institutionally acceptable ways. Both the immediate educational contexts (e.g., students' disciplines, discourses, and majors) and the larger social structures that position students (e.g., race, gender, and sexuality) affected students' academic writing. If the participants could not reconcile their personal worldviews with the ideologies they perceived to be associated with a particular discipline, they switched to another major. Larger social structures (outside the academic context) that shaped the participants' understanding of themselves (such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality) interacted with nonacademic identities shaped through lived experiences and personal histories. Both the larger social structures and the influences from the more local, academic contexts were traceable in the participants' writing.

This study demonstrates the potential of an identity lens to reveal and understand the personal connection between a student's writing self and her written products. It provides a heuristic model of student writing identity that connects how students' identities in contexts outside their texts (extratextual identities) relate to their textual construction of author and authority (intratextual identities). The findings suggest that students would benefit from writing assignments that are not only culturally appropriate and relatable, but are also socially relevant and explicit in discussing race, gender, and class. I conclude by arguing that faculty in writing and other disciplines and staff in learning-support programs and services, like researchers,

view student identity as relational and situated, and as pertinent to the academic experiences of undergraduate writers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the immense support from mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. A heart-felt thank you to:

- My adviser, Dr. George Bunch. I am deeply indebted to you for the unwavering encouragement and assistance with this project, and for the infinite patience in steering me in productive directions during my intellectual meanderings.
- My other committee members, Dr. Brad Olsen, Dr. Lucinda Pease-Alvarez, and Dr. Andrea Lunsford, for their generosity of time and intellectual guidance. All of you have been instrumental in my growth as a researcher and have contributed immensely to my development as a human being.
- The participants in this study who so generously offered their time. Thank you for your commitment to this project and time you dedicated to it. Thank you for letting me be part of your academic lives and for all the insights you shared throughout the journey.
- My fellow graduate students, especially Melissa Nievera-Lozano, Carrie Cifka-Herrera, Dena Sexton, Alisun Thompson, Yunnice Synder, Mele Wheanton, and Bill Zahner, for the writing collaborations, the stimulating intellectual atmosphere, the emotional support, and plain, old-fashioned friendship.

- Gillian McGuire, Gina Wilkins, and Bryony Cohelan for their kindness and prompt assistance even in the busiest of times.
- *La mia famiglia* for reminding me what matters most. To my husband, Alex, for keeping me sane in times of insanity. To my energetic sons, Max and Adrian, for never giving me a dull day. Обичам ви много, на мама разбойниците.

Благодаря и на моите родители, Виолета и Марин, за насърчението в моите академични начинания.

CHAPTER 1: CONTENT OF INQUIRY

Introduction

Students often experience college writing as personal in nature because texts have the ability to reveal detailed information about the writer, even if those texts are produced for courses focused on specific disciplinary content (Ivanič, 1998). Texts expose the writer's position relative to the topic at hand, the audience, and the audience's values. Because texts contain records of the identity negotiations that went into the composition process, student papers provide a valuable insight into how the authors of those papers construct their identity(s) as writers. Especially in the case of non-dominant students¹, writing research can illuminate how they are initiated into the "dominant code of literacy" (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 13), how they manipulate the academic discourses available to them, and how the discourses are used to construct and define the diversity that students bring to the classroom. Examining how non-dominant college students construct their writers' identities can offer important insight into the processes that come to bear on students' academic writing.

"How do first-generation college students construct their identities as writers as they negotiate their first year of undergraduate education?" was the question that guided me in designing the present study. I conducted a year-long investigation of the (re)negotiations of the writing identities of four first-generation college students

¹ The term *non-dominant* is used here to refer to "students who have been historically marginalized in educational processes in the United States, to capture the collective historical circumstances of these students and account for issues of power relations in schools and other institutions" (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 43).

during their first year of undergraduate studies. I sought to understand how educational and lived experiences were implicated in the construction of students' academic and writing identities.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and Four-Year Institutions

In California, at all levels, institutions of higher education represent a bottleneck in the pipeline of non-dominant students' educational careers. This obstacle is particularly visible at four-year institutions. Because admissions are restricted to the top 12.5% of the high school graduates, the pool of eligible candidates shrinks significantly, usually eliminating the majority of the non-dominant students who are most likely to come from traditionally marginalized communities. Moore and Shulock (2007) argued that, with the projected increase of the non-White population in California, failure to diversify higher education to reflect the ethnic/racial ratios of the general population would mean "placing the economic health and social fabric of the nation at risk" (p. 1). Moore and Shulock's conclusion was based on Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, and Sum's (2007) concern that the educational system in California is not producing sufficient graduates to fill the positions vacated by better-educated workers who, under current trends, upon retirement, will be replaced by less educated individuals.

Both Moore and Shulock's (2007) study and that of Kirsch et al. (2007) argue in favor of providing non-dominant populations with economic success, improved life quality, higher job security, and social and personal mobility. There is another side to the discussion: some researchers and administrators see institutions of higher

education as uniquely positioned to use the increased interest in obtaining a college degree and the changing racial/ethnic composition of California to affect a positive change to the existing social disparities. There has been increased commitment in higher education to support educationally underserved populations. Initiatives such as the Educational Opportunities Programs (EOP) and Bridge, which aim to improve the retention and academic success of first-generation college students from low-income families and disadvantaged backgrounds, are designed to provide these student populations with additional services such as academic and personal counseling, free one-on-one and group tutoring, academic success workshops, professional information, internships, and faculty-mentor programs. In this study, EOP Bridge served as an access point to what the university considered the most vulnerable student populations.

Overview of the Dissertation

Having introduced the rationale for the study in this chapter (Chapter 1), I lay out the theoretical context in Chapter 2, which includes a review of the literature that framed the question of inquiry and a discussion of the conceptual framework that informed the design of the study. Chapter 3 introduces the research design of the study. In that chapter, I outline the methodology and the methods I used in analyzing the qualitative data. I introduce the participants and the setting, describe the data collection and organization process, and report on the procedures for analysis.

The next three chapters report on my findings. In Chapter 4, I investigate how the participants perceive themselves in relation to academia. That chapter analyzes

EOP Bridge's influence on the participants' educational experiences and the impact of EOP Bridge on the participants' understanding of themselves as undergraduates and as writers. Other academic spaces discussed in Chapter 4 are the disciplines and majors with their inherent value systems and ideologies. In Chapter 5, I analyze students' interviews about their current academic experiences in relation to previous educational and lived experiences, and I describe the issues of race, class, gender, culture, and family that emerge from our conversations. In Chapter 6, I explore how the participants experience writing and how they construct themselves as writers, both in interviews and in their papers.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 7, offers a reiteration of the findings and discussion of the implications of this study for theory, practice, and research. In that chapter, I provide a model of identity (in writing) that was shaped, both by my theoretical assumptions and the empirical findings of this study. The chapter explains the process of identity construction as the sum of influences (from the individual lived histories, the immediate educational contexts, and the larger social structures of race, gender, class, and sexuality) that come to bear on student writers as they attempt to align their values and beliefs with the ideologies inherent in the disciplinary discourses.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

This study is informed by and attempts to extend two main research strands: research on the effects of schooling on non-dominant students' understanding of self, and research on identity in writing that documents the construction of the author's persona. In this chapter, I explore the literature on these two strands and situate my research at their intersection.

Non-dominant Students and their Academic Identities

Researchers investigating how academic experiences influence students' identities have explored the relationships between lived experiences and educational opportunities, students' values and disciplinary ideologies, and language use and sense of identity. Those studies have documented many influences of the academic context and their negative effects on the sense of self (Bartholomae, 1985; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Johns, 1997; Karach, 1992; Norton, 1997; Ivanič & Roach, 1990). For example, Ivanič and Roach (1990) reported that the initial impact of academia on new students is frequently associated with internal conflicts, faltering confidence, even alienation. Karach (1992) reported on students experiencing a sense of their funds of knowledge being devalued (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) within their institutions of higher education.

Findings from these studies are supported by research conducted from a discourse perspective. This perspective focuses on identities assigned by others to the students, depending on their discursive interactions in a particular setting. In this category fall studies on *discourse communities*, defined as “groups of people held

together by their characteristic ways of talking, acting, valuing, interpreting, and using written language” (Ives, 2008, p. 14). Bartholomae (1985) stated that students must learn “peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of the community” (p. 4) because student progress is assessed “by their [students’] abilities to take on the role of privilege, by their abilities to establish authority” (p. 162). Belcher and Braine’s (1995) research supported Bartholomae’s point: although undergraduates are not expected to enter a disciplinary community, they are assessed on their ability to engage with its specialized discourses. Starfield (2002) addressed the discrepancies some undergraduates experience between the identities of their home cultures and those needed for participation in academia. According to Starfield (2002), academia is a “profoundly textual universe . . . where texts circulate as currency and meaning is primarily textual” (p. 125) and discrepancies are explained through “differing amounts of knowledge about texts, and about the relationships between texts” (p. 124), which both dominant students and non-dominant students possess.

Starfield (2002) and others disagreed with the view of identity as a private experience (Norton, 1997) and adopted a social understanding of identity as a need for affiliation and belonging through, for example, “networks of social relationships which bestow approval” (Hyland, 2002, p. 1092). Ivanič (1998) stated that an apprentice member of the academic community can become a full member “by copying, adapting and synthesizing from the work of other members” (p. 4). It follows that students can evolve in a community through learning the discourses of

that community, a process that requires them to adopt “[the community’s] perspectives and interpretations, [to see] the world in the same ways and [take] on an identity as a member of that community” (Hyland, 2002, p. 1092). For some students, this metamorphosis is a natural continuation of their home literacies, but for other students, the ways of the academic community conflict with who they perceive themselves to be. Reflecting on students’ sense of identity as writers, Ball and Ellis (2008) stated that

[t]he nature of a student’s home experiences, family makeup, and exposure to literacy practices early in life are all implicated in how students come to know themselves as literate individuals. The saliency of students’ out-of-school experience will influence the in-school experience of students in different ways. (Ball & Ellis, 2008, p. 503)

Literature exploring the relationship between students’ lived experiences and educational opportunities are helpful in examining the conditions under which students reproduce or challenge dominant practices and discourses. Studies in this category are concerned with the discursal constructions of self outside of the texts students produce, not with how student identities influence their writing. This type of research does not investigate the connection between the writers and their authoritative voice. The next section reviews research that focuses on the identities students project in their actual writing.

Identity in Writing: Authorial Projections of Self

The body of literature examining students’ textual representations of self comes primarily from the field of composition studies, where academic and other texts are viewed as textual representations of the authors (R. Clark & Ivanič, 1997;

Freedman, 1995; Herriman, 2007; Hyland, 2002; Ivanič, 1998; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). These textual representations are not considered reflections of the writers as objective pieces of reality, but as textual constructs. Studies in this category investigated self-referencing as a way of establishing an overt authorial presence. Hyland (2002), for example, researching second-language writers from Hong Kong, compared how students and professional academic writers create “authorial identities,” which he defined as the sense of credibility² as an author.

Hyland (2002) used *I* as a marker of the authorial presence and found that second-language academic writers underuse the pronoun. Similar studies compared texts written by experts and undergraduate students to find that native students overuse first person reference (Harwood, 2004), while nonnative students may use *we* or *us* to signify group belonging and not necessarily to take a stance (Tang & John, 1999). Tang and John (1999) complicated the comparison by adopting the perspective of writers’ roles in discussing the possible identities behind the first person in academic writing. They distinguished between eight different roles of the pronoun *I* that make its meaning spread out along a continuum; for example, writers may use *I* as a generic pronoun as a proxy for a larger group of people, or as “the recounter of the research process” (p. S28), or as “the opinion holder” (p. S28).

Herriman (2007) furthered the investigation to the function of self-references; she described the differences in types of authorial presence used by the student and

² Hyland (2002) defined credibility as “projecting an identity invested with individual authority, displaying confidence in their evaluations and commitment to their ideas” (p. 1091).

professional writers. Herriman built on the notion that “[l]anguage does not serve merely to reflect an existing reality, but actually creates that reality” (Tang & John, 1999, p. S24). She showed that the “writer persona,” as she called the writer’s projection on paper, is involved in various reader-writer relations (Herriman, 2007, para. 23), concluding,

the students’ presence tends to be that of the opinionated writer relying on emphasis as their chief means of persuasion. The professional writers’ presence is more complex and varied, bringing more personal experience and emotive involvement into their argumentation. (Herriman, 2007, para. 23)

Canagarajah (2004) investigated concepts of academic discourse, language, and identity in his study of how learners negotiate different subject positions in conflicting discourse communities. Considering how selfhood might be constructed in the process of writing, Canagarajah conducted a “textography” (Swales, 1998), analyzing texts in a specific context to understand an individual’s writing and to place that writing in a wider context. Canagarajah (2004) developed a taxonomy of strategies multilingual writers may use to negotiate identity: (a) avoidance, a one-sided, univocal move to the dominant discourse; (b) accommodation, resolving identity conflicts by adopting the dominant discourses to gain approval—also univocal; (c) opposition, representing self through univocal vernacular discourse in opposition to the dominant academic discourse; (d) appropriation, infusing dominant academic discourses with strengths from personal discourses in an act of resistance; and (e) transposition developing a dialectical “third voice” (p. 285) that works against conflicting discourses and forms a new, transcendent discourse, acknowledging the tensions between identities, using the tensions as strengths for a new discourse. On

the basis of these strategies, Canagarajah (2004) argued that writing is both shaped by and shapes the self: “Writing itself is a linguistic activity that shapes the self in complicated ways” (p. 270). He contended

[this self] has to be negotiated in relation to our historically defined identities (such as race, ethnicity, and nationality), institutional roles (like student, teacher, and administrator in the educational system), and ideological subjectivity (i.e., our positioning according to discourses such as “responsible citizen/lazy immigrant/dependent foreigner” . . . which embody values according to the dominant ideologies in the society. (Canagarajah, 2004, pp. 267–268)

Canagarajah called for classrooms that acknowledge and confront the conflicts in discourse and identities and for teachers who see multilingualism as a resource rather than a hindrance for achievement.

The literature I reviewed investigating the construction of author in students’ texts contributes to an understanding of the constructed nature of the authorial presence in a text. This understanding is useful in linking the construct of the author to particular textual features and discursal choices. This body of research, however, does not necessarily consider how the authorial persona links to students’ social and cultural identities, which I discuss in the next section.

Linking Academic Identities to Textual Projections of Self

The previous two sections of this chapter reviewed research that investigated the impact of the non-dominant students’ understanding of self by the multiple social, cultural, and linguistic contexts in which students are positioned, as well as views of the author as a textual construct that links the writer’s construction of authority to his or her voice and stance. There is little research that attempts to connect these two

areas by exploring how students' identities in contexts outside their texts (extratextual identities) relate to their textual construction of author and authority (intratextual identities).

One researcher who considered how writers position themselves through discourse in writing is Ivanič (1998). Ivanič has viewed writing as an act of identity in which people align themselves with socioculturally shaped subject positions. Her work has demonstrated that identities are dynamic and shaped through dialogic processes, such as writing. Ivanič (1998) identified four aspects of identity, distinguishing between "autobiographical self," "self as author," "discoursal self," and "possibilities of selfhood" (p. 24). The autobiographical self connects the writers' lived experiences to features in the text. The discoursal self links the self to the writer's discoursal choices, addressing the writer's rhetorical strategies and constructed through discourse characteristics "which relate to values, beliefs and power relations in the social context in which they were written" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 25). The self as author positions the author, to some degree, as authoritative. Self as author refers to the deliberate choices of the writer to create a more visible author foregrounded by textual features such as frequent use of *I*, or a more subtly present author that puts the content on the forefront (Ivanič, 1998). While autobiographical self, self as author, and discoursal self describe the relationship of the writer to a particular text, the possibilities of selfhood refers to the subject positions that are available within the sociocultural context of writing for the students to occupy.

According to Ivanič, the first three aspects of identity in writing shape and are shaped by the fourth aspect.

Ivanič's work explored the intersection of students' negotiation of academia and the construction of their textual identities. As Ivanič acknowledged, more research in this area is needed, especially studies focusing on incoming college students, to illuminate how these individuals develop a sense of authority as they project their identities in their academic essays, and how writing affects students' understanding of themselves as writers. This dissertation is intended to contribute to this area of inquiry.

Purpose of the Study

The literature reviewed for this study revealed undergraduate students learning to write for academia must position themselves authoritatively to create persuasive arguments. What constitutes “authority” and what rhetorical tools are available to students depend on the discipline and its history, the postsecondary institution and its history, and the context of the specific course for which students write. The question of how students incorporate themselves in their texts suggests identity as a key lens for researching academic writing.

The purpose of this study was to document how students who are new to academia engage in the writing process to produce successful texts. It also illuminated how students' sense of self is affected as they encounter discourses that legitimize only certain identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) and privilege—some particular criteria for belonging (such as class, race/ethnicity, or/and language)—over

others. These goals were set in response to the call from Ball and Ellis (2008) for more research “that focuses explicitly on the intersection between identity development and the writing of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students” (p. 511). This study represented an attempt to illuminate how writing affects students’ identities. This study also responded to McDonough’s (2004) observation that most studies concerned with the transitioning period between high school and college are conducted at the K-12 setting, while the context into which students transfer, higher education, has been examined to a much lesser degree.

This study sought to contribute to the theorizing of student identity, which, as Lin (2008) pointed out, has been “under-theorized and often only partially understood” (p. 199) in educational research, despite having long been the focus of theoretical discussion in other disciplines (e.g., philosophy, literature, sociology, cultural studies, and anthropology). In addition to addressing the lack of focus on identity in education in general and writing in particular, this study addressed gaps in identity research identified by Schwartz (2005): (a) the need to include poor and less educated individuals in identity research, (b) the need to include non-White participants in identity research, and (c) the need for longitudinal research on identity.

Last, most identity studies have a cross-sectional design that involves data collection at only one point in time. To address that shortcoming, this study documented undergraduates’ identity negotiations that occurred throughout their first year of college, as interpreted through interviews, writing samples, and other data collected multiple times during that year.

Research Questions

To achieve the goals of this study, I articulated the following research question and subquestions:

- How do first-generation college students construct their identities as writers as they negotiate their first year of undergraduate education?
- How do students experience writing, and how do they define and negotiate their identity(s) as writers?
- What is the role of the academic context (the institution of higher education, disciplines, the courses, and coursework), including interaction with others (faculty, administrative staff, classmates, and friends), in students' understanding of themselves as writers?

Theoretical Framework

To examine the negotiations that take place in the process of becoming an academic writer, this study drew on multiple larger and finer sociocultural lenses to articulate a framework that allowed viewing the learner as embedded in sets of activities and contexts without losing the focus on the individual. The key theoretical constructs that underlie this study are as follows.

I viewed the participants in this study as socioculturally positioned human beings, born to particular culture(s) and language(s), belonging to particular communities (in the case of these participants, to non-dominant communities) and operating within particular times, spaces, and histories (educational histories included). I used the term “identity” to describe the students' shifting understanding

of who they are in relation to the multiple contextual influences that come to bear on them and their writing. Identity is the students' understanding of self, as continually shaped and reshaped by the participants' interaction with their layered contexts (sociocultural, educational, personal, and textual).

Nature of Academic Discourse/Writing

Students are introduced to a field of knowledge through texts and must demonstrate fluency on a subject matter by creating texts (Lea & Street, 1998). Academic reading and writing is a means of participating in the discourses of a disciplinary community and of communicating disciplinary understanding. It is a central process through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study (Lea & Street, 1998). The ability to use academic discourse is crucial to achieving academic success. Learning effective disciplinary writing is important for learning to think like the experts. The ways of knowing in a discipline are integrally related to its ways of writing. Transitioning from high school to college is the time when many students find out that successful navigation of the postsecondary environment demands adapting to new ways of interpreting, organizing, and displaying knowledge in writing (Shen, 1989). Those ways or discourses, developed for the specific purposes of an academic community, are imbued with the values and ideologies of that community (Gee, 1989; Starfield, 2002). These discourses are not neutral—they are created by a system of power. Academic discourses contain a predefined set of lenses to view the world; they control and limit the available possibilities to realize one's identities. The acquisition

and use of academic writing cannot be viewed as a simple tool to manipulate the discourses—for non-dominant youth coming from communities somewhat removed from academia, academic writing becomes a political and ideological act (Canagarajah, 2002; Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1996).

Becoming a full member of the academic community might seem to some undergraduates a process of becoming “somebody else.” Undergraduate students learning to write for disciplinary courses must position themselves authoritatively to create persuasive arguments. What constitutes authority and which rhetorical tools are available to students depend on the discipline, the postsecondary institution, and the course for which students write. Each discipline constitutes its own culture, creating its own conventions and rules of what characterizes effective and appropriate writing for that discipline. Each uses language differently: disciplinary writing varies in subject matter, purpose, and format. Each discipline cultivates its own discourse (Gee, 1990), thereby shaping the worldviews of those participating in it.

Conceptualizing Identity

The term *identity* has roots in many disciplines: philosophers, linguists, sociologists, and psychologists define the term variously depending on theoretical assumptions and methodological paradigms from which they operate. Depending on the school of thought, the term is understood in significantly different ways. For example, traditional psychology, utilizing the cognitive perspective, views identity as stable, immutable and agentive. In addition to examining mental states and processes, social psychology investigates the role of the individual's actions in social situations

as a contributing factor to one's understanding of self (Brewer and Hewstone, 2004). Sociologists generally view the individual as a practicing member of a community and examine the complex contextual influences and constraints that guide the social negotiations of associating oneself with particular groups. Modernist sociology attributes deterministic nature to the larger social structures (such as class, race, and gender) on identity formation.³ For linguistic anthropologists, identity is “the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories” (Kroskrity 2000, p. 111).

These varying perspectives account in part for the widely differing, even conflicting, theoretical assumptions around identity that underpin educational research. This wide range of theoretical orientations produces, even within single paradigms, multiple ways of looking at human beings in practice. For example, the constructivist paradigm, which I adopt in this study, views knowledge as socially and culturally constructed. Researchers working within this paradigm, parting from the view that learning is behavioral conditioning, emphasize the relationship among the activities, the cultural contexts, and the mediating linguistic (semiotic) systems. With this tradition, different researchers may focus more heavily on one or more of those components as units of analysis. For instance, researchers adhering to the cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) examine the human activity as “a process that involves artifacts that act as technical tools and signs that act as psychological tools available in the social environment” (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 13). Other

³ See Lawler (2008) for overview of important sociological debates about identity.

researchers looking at the various communities of practice in which people participate (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991) are concerned with the human beings themselves as socially linked in their cultural contexts. Critical theorists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1991) concentrate on the mechanisms for constructing identities (including the role of language) that produce and reproduce inequalities.

Despite this theoretical diversity, the definitions of identity within the constructivist paradigm have common elements. These can be plotted on two continua: (1) the role of nature and nurture in shaping who human beings think they are, and (2) the role of agency and social determinism in constructing identity. These two continua reflect a long-standing debate among scholars about the nature of identity that could be traced back to antiquity and Plato and Aristotle's conceptualizations of the world. In *Allegory of the Cave* (Jowett, 1941), Plato presumes the existence of an ideal form (an Idea) that accounts for the similarity between the objects of any class. Ideas, or Forms, represent concepts and as such are abstract; hence they are cannot be experienced through the senses. Knowledge, according to Plato, is eternal, universal and can be gained independently of sensory experiences. Aristotle, on the other hand, in *Metaphysics* (Ross, 1924), attributes independent existence to all objects—the phenomenon exists in, and never outside, its physical and temporal locations. Learning, therefore, is the process of arriving at the universal through repeatedly experiencing the individual.

Plato's and Aristotle's conceptualizations are at the center of two opposing schools of thought regarding how knowledge is constructed: rationalism and

empiricism. While rationalists privilege reason and attribute learning to the works of preexisting categories and principles that assist human beings in sorting out and organizing their experiences, empiricists rely on information received through the senses as the basis of all knowledge. Debates about the importance of reasoning and evidence in knowledge production are relevant to current discussions about how reality is experienced and organized by individuals and social groups, and to questions surrounding the relationship between individual agency and social positioning.

For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) argue that, in linguistic anthropology and related fields, research on identity has long considered issues of power and subjectivity and as such has become vulnerable to charges of essentialism (p. 370). Writing specifically about scholarship on language and identity, the researchers point out that how people group themselves on the basis of “linguistic, social, cultural, historical, and/or political criteria” (p. 371) is inadequately explained by the presence of pre-existing and recognizable similarities. Bucholtz and Hall propose instead that the act of identifying “is a process not merely of discovering or acknowledging a similarity that precedes and establishes identity but, more fundamentally, of inventing similarity by downplaying difference” (p. 371). That is, “identity work” often seeks to obscure intra-group differences while simultaneously highlighting differences between “in-group members and those outside the group” (p. 371), what Buchholtz and Hall call “same difference”. Since claiming an identity is ultimately a political act, this process of categorization is used for group’s efforts at empowerment.

However, it may also be perceived as homogenizing the group's cultural variation and richness, leading to claims of essentialism. The challenge for researchers, according to Buchholtz and Hall, is to move away from the essentialism of conceiving of social groups as belonging to pre-existing categories while still acknowledging the political potency of categorization.

While Buchholtz and Hall's work has been a strong influence, I also draw heavily on various other *sociocultural* frames from a range of academic disciplines such as sociology and social anthropology (Goffman, 1971, Holland et al., 1998, Lave and Holland, 2001); literary theory and philosophy (Bakhtin [in Holquist] 1990); and sociolinguistics and critical theory (Gee, 1992, Buchholtz and Hall, 2005, Fairclough, 1995). I discuss all of these influences in the next two sections.

I acknowledge particular debt to Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) for my own understanding of identity. Holland et al. define identity as constructed through "practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed 'worlds'" (p. 7). They use the metaphor of "authoring" to describe the agentive powers of any human being to create and alter its existence. However, they deny boundless agency to the "I" because "[i]n authoring the world, . . . the 'I' draws upon the languages, the dialects, the words of others to which [the 'I'] has been exposed" (170). The acting self is constrained by the values and ideologies embedded in the words of others that one ventriloquates (Bakhtin, 1981). Holland et al. insist that the heteroglossia that characterizes the cultural resources available for "personal formation" constrain the act of self-authoring:

The space of self-authoring, of self-fashioning, remains a social and cultural space, no matter how intimately held it may become. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 282).

Holland et al. place importance on the interplay between personally held, socially constructed, and culturally embedded understandings in creating dialogic, interactional, and discursive identities. They assign to human beings an active role in creating their own existence out of their interactions and interpretations. But they contend that the individual's agency is restricted by multiple factors such as the social and cultural contexts, histories and practices in which the individuals engage.

Fluid and dynamic as identities might be, they are embedded in, constructed by, and transformed through language and interaction. Symbolic Interactionism (SI), a sociological perspective, offers a theoretical and methodological lens to approach identities' discursal and intersubjective nature. Blumer (1969), who coined the term, describes 'Symbolic Interaction' as resting on three premises:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they have for them ... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 2).

Consistent with SI's focus on the co-construction and individual mediation of shared meanings, I conceptualize identity as simultaneously social and personal, as dynamic and flexible, molded by social interactions, and constructed moment by

moment through language. I attribute agentive power to the individual within the constraints of the social situation or contexts.

I also draw on Goffman (1959), who provides a useful metaphor about how social factors are implicated in constructing the Self. He frames identity as a performance: individuals act out various identities in different contexts. Individuals possess a complex set of identities defined in part by society, rather than one true identity. The individual, which Goffman calls “character,” puts a performance (“performed character”) in an attempt to influence the audience in a desired way by anticipating reactions, by complying (or not) with social norms, and so forth. Depending on how well the character understood the context and anticipated the reaction of the audience, the audience does or does not interpret the performed character as intended: the audience gives its own meaning to the performed. Goffman places the means for producing the self not within the self, but in the dialog with the audience for which the performance is acted and thus assigns a relational aspect to the performed self. While the “character” preexists the interaction, “the performed self” is a product of that social interaction. This last point is important for the claims that this research makes: while the interpretations I offer *are* derived with the help of rigorously selected analytical tools, the data itself is a record of a series of performances.

Defining Identity in Writing

Textual identities are constructs created for specific intratextual purposes (such as claiming authorship or guiding an audience through the essay). I argue that

these constructs are not completely detached from the writers, but are based on extratextual realities.⁴ The relationship between intra- and extratextual realities is strong. Writers create their authorial identities from the discourses available to them (Shotter & Gergen, 1989). What discourses writers use and how they author themselves in texts and in interviews is not a simple matter of choice—discourses may be socially assigned (Freedman, 1995; Menard-Warwick, 2008). Fairclough (1989, p. 32) used the term “subject positioning” to describe the social process of assigning identities. The push and pull between self-authoring and positioning is particularly strong in academic writing; the author is expected to build on the ideas and authority of others while constructing an individualized voice. To understand the impact of the pressures of higher education on students’ acquisition of academic writing, studies must examine this relationship between constructing textual identities and negotiating academia.

⁴ By extratextual realities, I mean the writer’s lived experiences and communities (of practice) whose discourses students use.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Employing identity as a theoretical lens requires a detailed insight into the participants' understanding of themselves, their perceptions of their context, and their interpretations of the world. Longitudinal design allows a deep understanding of the participants' subjective experiences as they engage with social and academic structures. I followed the participants throughout one academic year, a time period selected for several reasons. First, a central focus of this study was student understanding of themselves as writers. One academic year is the time frame within which students must satisfy entry-level writing requirements that were not met upon admission. These students' schedules were rich in writing classes, which provided the opportunity for close observance of participants' experiences with academic writing.

Second, recognizing that non-dominant students might benefit from additional academic assistance, the university provided support structures for the first year. The pool of students from which the participants in this study were selected consisted of conditionally accepted students (i.e., those who did not fulfill the admission requirements). One year was allotted to them to close these academic preparation gaps and change their status to regular students.

Third, according to university statistics from the last three cohorts of conditionally accepted students, academic achievement declines gradually after the first quarter, dropping significantly after the second quarter. A one-year study allowed a better understanding of the challenges students encounter.

In this study, I used a case study approach. This approach is appropriate for investigating issues of identity because case studies allow a deep engagement with and exploration of “the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

Setting: Golden Sands University

Golden Sands University⁵ is a mid-sized public Californian institution, located on the outskirts of a small city but within a short drive to urban sprawl. It has a reputation of being a liberally inclined campus with strong social science programs and physical sciences. The university is organized by colleges, each of which has its own theme. Core courses within each college emphasize that theme to “foster a strong sense of community and a common intellectual foundation among freshmen at each college” (Golden Sands University, 2012, p. 2).

I chose Golden Sands as the setting for this study because of a previously established relationship and because the site possessed some characteristics that were important for my study. The mission statement of the university explicitly encourages campus diversity and its “About” web page includes a pledge for support of students from educationally underserved communities. University statistics indicate 30% of the 2011 graduating class consisted of first-generation college graduates.

Each year, approximately 400 students are offered acceptance through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and Educational Opportunity Program, Bridge (EOP Bridge), run by the university. EOP Bridge is an undergraduate program

⁵ To maintain anonymity in this study, the name of the university has been changed.

that serves “first-generation college, low-income, and educationally disadvantaged student populations.” The aim of the program is to bridge students’ transitions from their low-performing high schools to college. Students participating in EOP Bridge have failed to satisfy some or all of the university admissions requirements, such as the entry-level writing requirement (ELWR) or math requirements. Through Bridge, this group of students is provided with additional academic support, such as “preparation in academic reading, writing, and mathematics skills, [introducing] students to university resources and academic success strategies, and build[ing] a strong and supportive community among the Bridge students” (Golden Sands University). EOP Bridge students are provided with additional services such as academic and personal counseling, free one-on-one and group tutoring, academic success workshops, professional information, internships, and a faculty-mentor program.

Participants and Participant Selection

The participants in this study were four first-generation college students from educationally underserved communities and low-income families. I selected the participants from the incoming 2009-2010 EOP Bridge cohort. For the initial selection, I advertised my project at the second-week lecture of the Educational Philosophy class—a class specifically designed for and exclusively attended by students participating in the EOP Bridge program. I advertised the project during the class on the second week because I wanted to give the students a week to settle in.

I was not deliberately looking for racial, cultural, and gender representativeness, as demonstrated by my inviting participation by and distributing questionnaires eliciting demographic information to all 106 students in the class. The purpose of the questionnaire was to verify the minimum age (18 years) of all potential participants and to provide a framework for structuring my first meeting with each participant. Twenty-five students filled out and returned forms. Six of them ultimately scheduled interviews. In short, the participants self-selected whether to participate or not in the study. As a consequence of this self-selection, the participants were less likely to represent equally the members of the population I sampled. One participant dropped out after two interviews, and another participant was excluded from this study because I became a support person and a mentor to that person, and this role had not been factored into the study design.

A quick overview of the participants is provided in Table 1, followed by a short synopsis of each participant.

Table 1. *Overview of Participants*

Student and Sex	Race/ethnicity	Family history	ELWR ^a	other
Layla (♀)	African American	Mother: “half Belizean” and “half Creole.” Father: half African and half French, from Senegal. 1 Spanish-speaking grandmother and 1 grandmother speaking African dialect.	P*	
Huy (♂)	Vietnamese origins	Orphan; mother died 5 years earlier; father died mid-winter quarter	NP**	The youngest of the participants—was still 17 by the beginning of Fall quarter; homosexual
Guang (♂)	Chinese origins	Born in the United States, raised in a Chinese enclave community	NP**	Considers himself an ESL student
Tuan (♂)	Vietnamese origins	Single child; born in Germany; after moving to the United States, lived with his uncle and his wife.	P*	

Note. ^a Entry-level writing requirement. * P = Pass. ** NP = No Pass.

Layla

At the class in which I recruited participants, Layla stood out as one of the more memorable students. She sat close to the podium and actively participated in a discussion spurred by the instructor. Among more than 100 students in the auditorium, Layla articulated her opinions clearly and passionately. Layla’s

appearance was also distinctive—a tall and athletic young woman dressed in bright colors, wearing oversized earrings, her numerous braids tied in a high bun.

Layla is an exuberant young woman whose presence in a classroom is demonstrated by her engagement and outspokenness, and not the least by her skin color. I immediately identified her as African American, although I later learned that her own racial identity was complex and evolving.⁶ Although she is considered a first-generation college student, her father, an immigrant from Senegal, was educated in France and worked for a long time “with computers” for IBM. Layla’s mother, who is “half Belizean” and “half Creole,” moved to the United States to work for a modeling agency and later opened her own beauty salon. Layla’s father left IBM when she was 7 years old and opened reggae music shops in California. Both parents had remarried, giving Layla and her brother two additional siblings: a half-brother and a half-sister.

Layla grew up in urban areas between several cultures and languages. Her family spoke four languages (English, Spanish, French, and Wolof), which were passed on to Layla. Her grandmothers in Belize and Senegal raised her until she was of school age, so Layla first spoke Spanish and she was first literate in French. Hopping between countries caused Layla to view herself as a citizen of the world, which complicated her relationship to the construct of race. She opposed strongly any attempt to be stereotyped and categorized.

⁶ Her relationship to the African American community is described later in this study.

Although the family did not have a large income, Layla and her younger brother were always provided for. Layla suggested that her parents' experiences as immigrants influenced their parenting style: "They always said that they don't want their kids to go through the things that they went through. So they try to provide just the best for us, and give us whatever we needed." For Layla's parents, providing included expensive educational choices whenever necessary. In middle school, Layla's brother became disengaged and was in danger of dropping out; Layla's parents enrolled him in a private school. As Layla explained, they considered this "pricy option" was the only one they had "because in public school, if you don't care, they don't care." It was a lesson Layla learned early. She attended low-performing schools, but was supported and encouraged by the family to perform well. In high school, she tested high on the gifted child examination test (GATE), allowing her to join a science magnet school within her urban, low-performing high school.

Tuan

Tuan was born in Germany to a family of Vietnamese immigrants. He was raised and schooled in Germany until the end of middle school, at which time the family moved to the United States to be close to relatives. To provide some stability for Tuan during the switch between countries, cultures, and educational systems, his parents placed him with his childless uncle in Colorado until they settled in California.

In Colorado, Tuan attended a competitive high school, graduates from which were regularly accepted to Ivy-League universities. Teachers' and administrators'

expectations of their students were so high that Tuan recollected seeing “kids crying in the hallway . . . because of the way they were so stressed out.” Students were advised to join clubs and organizations that would make them “look [good] on your college application,” even though they might have no real interest in those particular activities. This “very intense atmosphere” wore out Tuan after three years, to the point that Tuan lost interest in learning. Tuan described receiving strong academic preparation and study skills and “above average” grades. However, he had the tendency to undermine his achievements and he qualified his school performance as “mediocre.” Nevertheless, his grades exempted him from the math assessment at Golden Sands, and he had sufficient Advanced Placement credit that “satisfies C1 and C2 [writing] requirements.”

Tuan felt particularly confident in the area of writing, having done well in all his writing-heavy AP classes. He explained that while English provided him with solid skills in rhetoric and analytical writing, history required him to construct strong, clear arguments that demonstrate deep understanding of historical events. In his junior year, an AP biology class introduced him to the foundations of scientific writing. The grades he received indicated to him that he was ready for college writing. Tuan received additional confirmation in the form of passing the ELWR Golden Sands: “Yeah, I saw that I was ready for it - not that my writing was college level, but that I could eventually adapt to it quickly enough without too much pain or too much discomfort.”

After junior year in high school, Tuan's uncle, a software programmer, was reassigned to India and offered to take Tuan with him. Tuan chose instead to move back with one of his separated parents.

Guang

Guang was a US-born Chinese American who was raised in a Chinese enclave in southern California. Because of his upbringing, Guang considered Mandarin his first language and was classified as an English learner in school. He applied to 11 institutions of higher education and accepted "the better of the two offers." He learned from his favorite elementary teacher that a diploma from a four-year college "weighs more." That elementary teacher kept in touch with Guang throughout high school and urged him to "set the goal high for [his] family" because he was the first one from his immediate and extended family to go to college.

I'm the oldest in the family so, right now, I'm setting the—the standards for my cousins and my little brother, that they should do better than—than I am. I feel they're looking up to me. I hope to get better though.

This statement was representative of Guang's work ethic: he was proud of what he was doing but hoped constantly to improve. Being humble about his achievements was a characteristic instilled in him by his family, who also raised him to accept that the burden of academic achievement and improvement was on him and not the teachers. For Guang's family, doing well in school was a moral obligation:

bad students are lazy. My parents were telling me that my Chinese friends will not want to play with me if I don't do better. I had to be better than them so that they come to me to play.

Guang carried that same attitude into his college studies. I was never able to learn his opinion of any class—for Guang, it seemed, *like* and *dislike* were categories that did not apply to academia. He indicated that he had to do what was asked of him and do it well to prove to himself and his instructor that he was serious about his education. According to Guang, low performance meant the need to seek more academic support, visit office hours, and attend tutoring sessions and study groups.

Although Guang's high school teachers considered his writing in no need of further improvement because he was a top student, Guang did not consider himself a good writer. His opinion was substantiated by his ELWR score, which was so low that he was placed in a pilot two-quarter writing class aimed at particularly underprepared students or students with possible language issues. The instructor used an elaborate progression rubric that divided each essay features (composition, vocabulary, grammar, and so on) into five proficiency levels. Guang tended to identify with the least successful features of his papers.

Guang defined success in college as knowing how to write. It was a skill that he found difficult to master and control when he needed to produce great volumes of text for his classes. The closest Guang ever came to complaining was when, in his Winter quarter, he described his first year in college as "heavy in writing": "I'm writing, like, every week. Not only for the Writing program. Every week. So, like, a whole essay for every two weeks, I'd say."

Not all prompts were (equally) appealing to Guang, but he conveyed that in the interviews indirectly or by omission. For example, he shared that he had difficulty

engaging with a particular prompt as follows: “The topic is getting interesting like because then I got—I understood what we were talking about, the prompt. Because I went to the library and I started learning about it.” Guang ultimately satisfied the ELWR though portfolio⁷ at the end of Fall quarter, but he was obliged to complete the two-quarter sequence. Finding a positive spin on the experience, he said, “I’ll be better prepared not to fail Writing 2.”

Huy

Huy, a single child born in the U.S. to a family of Vietnamese immigrants, was the youngest of the participants. He turned 18 years of age during the second week of the quarter, but because of his small stature and round, dimpled face, he looked even younger. His mother was part of the janitorial staff at a large company. After Huy was born, she became a stay-at-home mom. She passed away when Huy was 13 years old. His father worked odd jobs. During the Fall interviews, Huy’s father staffed a parking toll booth of a large company. Huy’s father commuted to a big urban business area, worked long hours, and saw little of his son during the week.

Huy remembered being alone most of the time, both at home and in school. Studying was his coping strategy, he recalled. He described himself as an average student who did not stand out in any way, but “then through the help of some teachers I became somebody in particular. I really tried to succeed in high school and tried to learn more.” He described himself as a “mediocre” writer. He did not like writing

⁷ Students were allowed to compile a portfolio of their writing done for any writing class as an alternative means of satisfying the ELWR.

outside school. He found his in-school writing assignments often difficult because he had to “tak[e] the author’s point of view and argu[e] certain things of the book.”

Huy was the first in his immediate family to attend college, but there had been several trailblazers in his extended family. Most of Huy’s cousins were already attending institutions of higher education and he was expected to follow suit. He applied to six institutions and was accepted by “only four.” He ultimately chose the institution that had been more “forward” in inviting him to attend. Huy’s impression of being more welcomed was the additional academic support he was offered through the Golden Sands EOP Bridge program. He had been invited to that program because his high school was considered a low-performing urban school at which he could not take many AP classes. Although Huy took a class at a community college to satisfy an admissions prerequisite, he did not meet all the requirements, but the EOP Bridge program offered him a place at the university and pledged academic support.

Once on campus, Huy described the transition from high school to college as easy. The biggest issue he described was learning how to live with other people and share common spaces. In a sense, Huy shared with me, being away from high school, family, and his community was a positive experience. Away from external pressures, he found freedom to explore his sexual orientation. Huy declared himself openly gay, wore the colors with pride, and became heavily involved with the LGTB community: he joined three queer student clubs, volunteered at the LGTB center on campus, and participated in LGTB events. Finding a community where he belonged and “finally living [his] life,” Huy quickly slipped into the identity of an undergraduate. He

described the feeling as “you’re more mature, basically want to learn more, be independent.” Academically, the transition was also seamless: “I mean I was already kind of prepared through high school so I would expect like similar material or harder readings. It’s just more stuff being taught.”

Huy did go through a crisis, but it was one of a personal, not academic, nature. His father died suddenly “of natural causes” days into the Winter quarter. Huy was composed when I met him after the news, but he was deeply affected. He insisted on going forward with the interview because he wanted to get through his days as scheduled, but did not discuss the topic. He stated that he was unsure yet how to deal with his loss.

After his father’s death, Huy was left without financial support, but he was quick in finding the right kinds of support to secure his stay at the university—he reached out to friends, his Fall quarter professors, and on-campus counseling. During holidays, he stayed with one of his aunts, who did not approve of him staying all alone in his parents’ house. Although Huy’s aunt lived in a “noisy house with lots of relatives,” Huy was offered his own space and he gladly secluded himself there.

Whenever he could, Huy traded his aunt’s house for his boyfriend’s place. Shortly after his father’s death, he met an older man online and started, as he put it, “an unconventional relationship”: Huy’s partner described himself as polyamorous and he requested a wider personal freedom than Huy was comfortable with. Huy was learning how to be in a relationship as well as how to be in this particular

relationship. He used the space I provided for thinking through his life changes, which made the topic of him being queer a heavily represented one in the interviews.

Classes Participants Took

Participants in this study had heterogeneous class schedules throughout the academic year, with the exception of the Fall quarter, when most of the classes were mandated by EOP Bridge (see Table 2). As part of the terms governing these students' acceptance to the university, the participants had to take Philosophy of Education, Academic Skills (both of which were specifically designed for EOP students), a Core writing class, modified supplemental instruction (MSI) sessions in the non-EOP-related classes, and mandatory writing tutoring. Because students could take an elective class during the Fall quarter, Tuan chose to enroll in Astronomy and Guang in Biology. Winter and Spring quarter dispersed the students onto different parts of campus as they pursued classes in their intended majors.

Table 2. *Classes Participants Took*

	Quarter		
	Fall	Winter	Spring
Guang	Academic Skills Core Writing Philosophy of Education MSI and mentoring Biology	Economics Core Writing Math PE: Basketball MSI, community building meetings and mentoring	Economics (lecture and lab) Writing 2 Physical Ed. Theater: Walt Disney MSI, community building meetings and mentoring
Huy	Academic Skills Core Writing Philosophy of Education	Chemistry Math/Economics Environmental Studies Leadership	Chemistry (lecture and lab) Swimming Statistical Methods

		Quarter		
		Fall	Winter	Spring
		MSI and mentoring	MSI, community building meetings and mentoring	Writing 2 Queer Men of Color Club MSI, community building meetings and mentoring
Layla	Academic Skills Core Writing Philosophy of Education MSI and mentoring	Intro to Feminist Studies American Studies Personal Computers Leadership Writing 2 MSI, community building meetings and mentoring	Leadership Health and Nutrition Intro to Sociology MSI, community building meetings and mentoring	
Tuan	Academic Skills Core Writing Philosophy of Education MSI and mentoring Astronomy	Physics Game Design (lecture and lab) Calculus MSI, community building meetings and mentoring	Programming (lecture and lab) Linear Algebra Intro to Humanistic Psychology Martial Arts MSI, community building meetings and mentoring	

Data Collection, Organization, and Analysis

Studying identities requires multiple data sources and methods that capture various aspects of how students engage with their environment. To capture the interaction between the individuals and the context within which identity is constructed, I used field notes and field-related documents, faculty communications, interviews, student writing, and other student-produced artifacts leading directly to the completion of a written assignment, such as research notes and drafts. Because I conceptualized identity as multiple and fluid, I found it important to arrive at a

nanced understanding of the phenomenon under examination. As such, the value of these multiple sources was in their cumulative richness.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Interviews. I conducted eight open-ended, semistructured interviews with each student over the course of the academic year. To document possible changes in the participants' worldviews in relation to being an undergraduate and a writer, I scheduled the interviews at regular intervals: two times during the Fall quarter and three times each during Winter and Spring quarters. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours. Eleven⁸ of those interviews were in part "discourse-based" (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983), meaning that students discussed papers identified as key writings.⁹ These interviews required the interviewee to work with a discourse sample (written assignments in this study) and to verbalize content, structure, organization, or other phenomena in which the interviewer was interested. Discourse-based interviews are a useful tool to gain insight into how students talk about their textual representations of self (their identity in writing), the texts (both written and cultural) they used to write their essays, and the opinions and values reflected in the writing.

⁸ The number of interviews was not standard across quarters because during Winter and Spring quarters, the participants attended an uneven number of classes requiring paper writing.

⁹ *Key writings* are defined, for the purposes of this study, as expository, argumentative, or research papers that contributed directly and significantly to the students' final grade for a class, where "directly and significantly" refers to the percentage towards a final grade as described in the course syllabus.

To capture the identity phenomenon, I kept the interview space as open as possible for the students to insert themselves beyond simply answering my questions. To that specific aim, I created interview protocols that allowed my conversations with participants to be only loosely structured. As a result of the lack of structure, not all participants responded with equal length to the research questions. The interviews were individualized, and the collected data yielded some participant-specific codes concerning sexuality and race.

All interviews took place in conference rooms in my academic department. Because the interviews were not conducted in neutral or student-appointed locations, the setting emphasized some the different power relationship between the participants and me. To amend that disparity, I employed a “conversational” tone to the interviews, allowing topics and issues discussed to emerge “naturally” in the course of the interview with as little steering as possible. Because the goal of the interviews was to capture lived experiences, attitudes, and general mind-sets of the participants (rather than to collect factual data), I purposefully provided less formal interview structures to avoid creating pressure on the participants and to minimize the power disparity resulting from differences in age and academic status.

To contextualize student experiences and to collect additional viewpoints, I tried to schedule interviews with faculty members and teaching assistants who had knowledge of the participants and their writing. Busy schedules limited availability and I managed to conduct formal interviews with only two instructors teaching different writing classes and one teaching assistant from a writing-heavy class. I

supplemented those interviews with notes I took during and after informal conversations with instructors after class observations with the second goal in mind of understanding how academic language and academic writing are constructed locally (on a course-by-course basis). The instructor interviews were conducted after I had observed their classes at least once.

Student writing and other student-produced artifacts. For writing-heavy classes,¹⁰ I collected 70 papers, of which 37 were accompanied with other student writing that contributed directly to a class paper (e.g., library research notes, drafts). Those supplemented papers are identified by an asterisk (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Class Papers and Other Student Writing*

Student	Quarter			total
	Fall	Winter	Spring	
Guang	*6 essays for Core Writing; 2 midterms and 1 final for Academic Skills; 1 final for Philosophy of Education	6 essays for Core Writing	*5 papers for Writing 2	21
Huy	*5 essays for Core Writing; 2 midterms for Academic Skills	1 midterm and 1 final for Environmental Studies; 1 reflection paper (journal entry) for Leadership	*5 essays for Writing 2	15

¹⁰ I define “writing heavy classes” as those for which students were producing written arguments and essays and in which writing was the primary means of student assessment (such as writing classes and classes in sociology or psychology vs. math and economics classes for which the writing component in assessments consisted of short explanations or definitions, or multiple choice and complete-the-sentence questions.)

Student	Quarter			total
	Fall	Winter	Spring	
Layla	*6 papers for Core Writing; 4 midterms and 1 final for Academic Skills; 1 final paper for Philosophy of Education	1 midterm and 1 final for Feminist Studies; 1 final for American Studies; 3 reflection papers (journal entries) for Leadership; *5 essays for Writing 2.	1 final for Sociology; 1 reflection for Leadership	25
Tuan	*5 essays for Core writing; 1 final paper for Academic Skills; 1 final paper for Philosophy of Education	2 papers for Game Design	-	9

Note. * Supplemented papers.

Field-related documents such as course materials, syllabi, and handouts. I

collected course documents to gain a better awareness of institutional understandings of academic writing and academic language and what it means to be an undergraduate. I used these documents to inform the protocols of subsequent interviews, and I asked students to discuss these documents during interviews to tap their understandings of them.

Observations and field notes. Field notes taken during and after observations are crucial to constructing case studies. The rich, descriptive quality of field notes is helpful in revealing how negotiating academia affected students' understanding of self in relation to their studies and writing. Observing classes provided an immediate experience of some of the participants' educational contexts. I sought to observe at least twice each course taken by a participant. I informed both the participant and the course instructor of my planned visits. During these observations, I recorded how the

participants interacted and behaved in their immediate educational context. I was specifically looking for connections (consistencies and inconsistencies) to the information already gathered during interviews preceding the observations. I also noted if and how the instructors socialized the students into the disciplinary values, academic language, and principles of disciplinary writing that were articulated in the course syllabus.

During observation, I took two kinds of notes: those that pertained to organizational details, such as seating arrangements, number of students and their gender, activities, participation patterns, topics discussed, and wording from the discussions; and interpretative notes reflecting my thoughts about the participants' general demeanor and participation in class. I also recorded questions that I wanted to pursue further.

Journaling. I kept a field journal in which I recorded thoughts and preliminary inferences after each interview and observation. During these writing sessions, I filled any gaps in the observation notes and recorded my evolving understandings and interpretations of the data. These journaling sessions resulted in documents containing additional data for analysis.

Table 4 summarizes type of data, sources, and collection timeline.

Table 4. *Data Sources*

Data	Type
Student writing	Papers, drafts, notes
Observations and field notes	Lectures, courses
Interviews and discourse-based interviews	Students, faculty

Data	Type
Field-related documents	Course materials, syllabi, handouts, prompts
Journaling documents	Introspective writing sessions immediately following observations and interviewing

Transcription and Analysis

It is difficult to separate completely the data collection phase from the data analysis of a qualitative research project. Interviews and field notes were transcribed as soon as possible after observation/taping. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed without any further formatting or other alterations. Although I embraced the notion that transcription is analysis (Ochs, 1979), I edited the transcripts in several ways as I wrote this dissertation. In Guang’s case, I altered some second-language expressions of his speech to convey his intended message. Some passages, if left unedited, would have been utterly misleading in their meaning.

Layla’s heavy overuse of fillers, such as “you know,” “like,” “and such,” and “and stuff like that,” detracted from her otherwise articulate, powerful messages. The following example shows how these fillers obscured her meaning. When discussing the difficulties Layla encountered in producing a paper for a writing class, she identified articulating the thesis as her biggest hurdle:

Like, I don’t know, a lot of ideas to go, like, like, along with my writing, but my problem was, like, always getting my, like, thesis out and stuff like that, you know. But like now that I’m becoming, like, more, like, able to, like, organize my ideas. And like, you know, form stronger, like, you know, opinions and stuff like that, like, like, I won’t—I guess you can say it’s easier for me, like, like, to be able to, like, to identify your thesis or see, you know, that there is a thesis lacking, or I need to add a thesis, and stuff like that.

All the words that Layla inserted while she was thinking about the issue made it difficult to follow her train of thought. After editing, the text looks like this:

I don't know, a lot of ideas to go . . . along with my writing, but my problem was . . . always getting my thesis out. But now that I'm becoming . . . more . . . able to organize my ideas . . . and form stronger . . . opinions. . . . I won't—I guess you can say it's easier for me to be able to, to identify your thesis or see that there is a thesis lacking, or I need to add a thesis.

Because I wanted to acknowledge that the removed expressions indicated that Layla was thinking through her answer as she was delivering it, I used ellipses to indicate slowed pace of speech or virtual pause.

Besides providing material for “thick descriptions” (i.e., for heavily contextualized and detailed accounts using emotive language that shows rather than tells of an event, situation, environment, culture; Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973), the transcription sessions served as a space in which to generate my first interpretative understanding of how the participants operated in some of their contexts. These initial understandings were recorded in analytical memos. Writing analytical memos during data collection and during the reiterative reading phase was the first stage of turning descriptive reflections into preliminary analytical insights. These memos also provided space to record descriptions and reflections on events that were not included in the observational field notes, but which I came to understand as significant as I became more aware of the participants' contexts, drives, thoughts, and values. The analytical memos yielded preliminary coding schemes that were developed and refined in the later stages of analysis.

All data sources were digitalized and entered into the qualitative research software HyperRESEARCH. I organized the data by student participant, which was my unit of analysis. Using the software, I coded the data using three types of codes: organizational codes, internal validity codes, and analytical codes. The function of the organizational codes was to organize the data sets for easy and immediate access. They were further divided into codes that identified the type of data (e.g., interviews or field notes) and codes that served as a tool to transform the data virtually according to different organizational principles (e.g., by quarter, by class/course). These organizational principles arose from the participants' educational experiences: the academic year was divided in three 10-week quarters, each of which was structured around the specific classes students took.

Although some amount of analysis goes into creating any code, the organizational codes were used solely as a tool for quick data organization and access. In contrast, other codes were used to establish the internal consistency¹¹ of the data. These codes aided me in determining whether and how the different data sources, as well as the main meaning-making agents (the researcher and the participants), shared understandings of key concepts. For example, central to understanding how students negotiated their identities as writers are the concepts of writing and being a writer. I coded all the data for definitions of those two concepts

¹¹ Verification that all participants shared meanings on key concepts.

and, using HyperRESEARCH, produced reports¹² of the two codes. I then examined the two reports by comparing how participants talked about the concepts and contrasted them with my own definitions. I performed this analysis while I collected and transcribed data to learn the language of the participants. I reflected the acquired language in the consecutive interview protocols.

Examining key concept definitions was useful beyond the common vocabulary it produced—in subsequent rounds of analysis, the key concept definitions were helpful in explaining some unexpected answers to the interview questions. Mismatching definitions between the participants and I were not uncommon in the data. Some were (relatively) easy to spot. For example, when I asked Huy what kinds of writing he had done previously, he answered: “I don’t really write much. I type more.” I was interested in the genres Huy was exposed to but Huy’s reply made a distinction between different modes of writing. Such analysis allowed access to the participants’ language and concepts and prevented me from occasionally misinterpreting the data.

Not all mismatched definitions were obvious. I asked Guang what kinds of writing he was exposed to in high school. “We read a lot of books in AP English,” he replied and did not elaborate on what specific writing was assigned for those books. Follow-up questions revealed that most of the books Guang read for AP English were not associated with any particular writing assignment. He elaborated on how he

¹² The reports consisted of lists of the source texts, coded with “definition of writing” and “definition of being a writer,” organized by case and source.

worked with and around the books despite my repeated attempts to convey my interest in the papers he produced for his classes. Guang's answers led me to believe that, in his mind, his answers were relevant and to the point. The concept definition analysis revealed that what Guang called "writing" was broader than the actual writing assignments I was interested in—he was describing writing as a literacy practice that included a broad range of activities leading to the actual text production. In Guang's high school experiences, the final text production appeared to be a small part of a writing process, which was dominated by activities that generated knowledge about and material around the writing topic.

The third and final group of codes was the analytical type. Analytical codes were created to address the research questions of the study. They were generated both inductively and deductively. Deductively derived codes were a product of the interview questions and the theoretical framework. For example, to test my theory-derived identity model, I coded for representations of self, available subject positions, and interactions between those two. Inductively derived codes were generated through reiterative readings of the data and open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 223). For example, participants spoke with varying degrees of emotional attachment/detachment of and displayed different levels of engagement with a shared class. This emerging theme resulted in a series of codes addressing the participants' attitude towards the subject discussed (e.g., attitude to Academic Skills class, attitude to EOP, attitude towards campus).

Some of the deductive codes were common for all case studies, while others were case-specific. For example, Huy’s homosexuality became a recurrent topic that became one of the lenses through which he made sense of his lived experiences. Sexual orientation was not mentioned in interviews with any other students, making the deductive code of being queer a case-specific one. Similarly, Guang’s comments about his understanding of himself as a second language learner introduced the ESL theme (coded as ESL-related) that was completely absent in my conversations with the rest of the interviewees. Codes and coding are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. *Codes and Coding*

Codes	Subcodes and examples
Organizational codes	Codes that named the type of data (e.g., interviews, field notes, field documents) Codes to transform the data according to different organizational principles by quarter (e.g., Winter quarter) or by class (e.g., Educational Philosophy class)
Internal consistency codes	Definition of academic writing, definition of being a writer
Analytical codes	Inductively derived codes, a product of the interview questions and the theoretical framework (e.g., interactions with context, sense of self) Deductively derived codes, generated through reiterative readings and open coding across cases (e.g., attitude to Academic Skills class, attitude to EOP, attitude towards campus) and case-specific deductive codes (e.g., being queer, ESL-related)

Using HyperRESEARCH, I generated reports for each code, listing the coded data excerpts organized by case. The reports were both a means of reducing the data and a form of content analysis: for each code report, I wrote a narrative around the interview excerpts, explaining them and linking them thematically while examining them against quotations that deviated from or directly countered them.

Synthesizing the code narratives, I created profiles for each participant. I refer to those larger interpretative descriptions as profiles rather than case studies because they were derived from the interviews only and addressed specific questions I asked of the data. This stage of content analysis produced some preliminary findings of claims and assertions that were consecutively examined against the other sources of data for confirmation or refutation.

The final stage of analysis involved examining the student profiles to interpret themes and patterns across cases. Table 6 summarizes the stages of data analysis in this iterative and overlapping process.

Table 6. *Analytical Stages*

Stages	Description
1	Transcribing interviews and field notes, iterative data reading, writing analytical memos, developing a preliminary coding scheme
2	Refining coding scheme, generating reports for each code, compiling profiles for each participant
3	Engaging in broader interpretations beyond the individual cases.

Content analysis. The main methodological tool I used to analyze the interview data was content analysis because it is a flexible method that “can be used to develop an understanding of the meaning of communication . . . and to identify critical processes. . . . It is concerned with meanings, intentions, consequences and context” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, pp. 108–109). I used both inductive and deductive content analysis. Because I entered the data after having first conceptualized identity and identity in writing, I used the deductive approach, which allowed me to move from the general (identity phenomenon) to the specific (the individual participants)

while analyzing. As a result of this approach, I was able to test my theoretical assumptions and conceptualizations. The inductive approach, on the other hand, enabled me to analyze and arrive at unexpected findings (presented in Chapter 5). Using content analysis, I analyzed the manifest content (articulated meanings). In some instances I had to rely on latent content (implied meanings, such as pauses, sighs, gestures, and laughter) to understand unfinished utterances.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA). The participants in this study reported experiencing complex relationships of power as the context positioned them through language. I used CDA (Fairclough, 1995) to explicate those power relationships and how they were perpetuated through language.

Fairclough (2001) posited that social contexts are composed of language activity, and that language is not a reflection of social processes; instead, it is a social process. I used CDA in Chapter 4 to understand how the participants were positioned and constructed through a document that they had to sign (an academic contract). I followed the three steps of CDA analysis outlined by Fairclough (1995). First, I used description to identify textual features that gave the contract a defining power over the participants. Second, I identified deeper meanings embedded in the contract that arose out of the ideological and power relationships between participants and their social context. Last, considering the “more durable social structures which shape and are shaped by these events” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 22), I attempted to explain how the contract positioned the participants through language.

Semantic discourse analysis. Semantic discourse analysis (Palmquist, Carley, & Dale, 1997) was helpful in exploring implicit meanings arising out of the relationships between concepts in a text. I used semantic discourse analysis to identify concepts related to identity and academic discourse, and explored the semantic association between them. Semantic analysis can reveal whether certain concepts are positively or negatively related, thus uncovering implied attitudes and meanings. This process allowed me to examine instances of ambiguous words in relationship to words or phrases to which they were linked semantically. For example, analyzing the participants' papers, I found that comments such as "state clearly," "audience," or "grammar" had synonymous meaning, which accounted for the participant's confusion (discussed in Chapter 4). I used this type of analysis both for the interviews and for the written samples.

Indexicality. Indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) is another tool I used for locating the writer in his or her paper. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) defined *index* as "a linguistic form that depends on the interactional context for its meaning . . . the concept of indexicality involves the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings" (p. 594). I used the linguistic means that Bucholtz and Hall listed to analyze how identity is produced in student writing. These linguistic means include: (a) explicit labeling or naming of identity categories and labels, such as African American or queer; (b) implicatures and presuppositions that hint at the writer's identity positioning; (c) evaluative statements made in specific interactions in

the light of the participant's roles (i.e., positionings); and (d) linguistic alignment with the ideologies of specific persons or groups.

Researcher Positioning

Denzin and Lincoln (2007) describe qualitative research within the social sciences as an “art of interpretation,” (p. 28) a practice in which the researcher plays a major role as the instrument through which data is collected, co-produced, transcribed, analyzed, and disseminated. Particularly because I operate within the paradigm of Symbolic Interactionism, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the meanings which I present in this paper were constructed in the interaction between me, the researcher, and the participants. Working within the SI paradigm presupposes the possibility that this research was affected by the researcher's worldview. Being mindful of that, I kept journaling my thoughts, feelings and attitudes throughout the data collection. I examined them closely in order to distinguish clearly between the emic and etic perspectives that emerged during the analysis process. Following Given (2008) I understood the different perspectives contained in the data not as “competing truths but rather . . . multiple stories and truths that exist simultaneously and are co-created by research itself” (p. 767).

Whenever possible I worked with colleagues to explore alternative meanings in an attempt to separate out my “presence” in the interpretation that I present in this paper. However, I am conscious of the fact that data analysis and interpretation are “often intertwined and rely upon the researcher's logic, artistry, imagination, clarity, and knowledge of the field under study” (Barrett, 2007, p. 418). Some researchers

even argue for linking “our statements about what we study with statements about ourselves, for in reality neither stands alone” (Krieger, 1996, pp. 191–192). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) point out an impossibility to separate the two because “people orient to consistency in their accounts of themselves and other people” (pp. 17-18), i.e. the interview process itself, depending on the local conditions, factors in the narrative construction. They argue that identity itself “is contingent on the local conditions of the interactional context” (pp. 17-18). During an interview the participants’ positionalities are affected by multiple factors such as settings, lived experiences, age difference, power dynamics, the skills of the interviewer and so on.

To become conscious of my potential influence on the way the participants constructed their stories, and of factors that undoubtedly played a role in how I interpreted the data, it is important to reflect upon and acknowledge the identities with which I entered the research. For example, my life experiences of growing up in socialist Bulgaria (especially coming of age during the times of the political and social turmoil that changed the system of government) made me leery of centralized power. Although I attempted to separate my own discomfort with institutional authoritativeness from the attitudes that the participants were displaying towards Golden Sands University or EOP Bridge, it is of course impossible to completely leave such attitudes behind. By acknowledging my own positioning throughout the research, I strove to disentangle students' own positions from my own.

It is also important to acknowledge several roles I had related to this study before I commenced this research. As a writing instructor at Golden Sands, trained by

the Golden Sands' Writing Program, I entered this research with substantial knowledge of the writing demands placed upon students in writing courses and was thoroughly acquainted with the pedagogical practices adopted by the Writing Program. In addition, four years prior to this research I was employed for a quarter as a Teaching Assistant for Philosophy of Education, a course specifically developed for and offered to EOP Bridge students. This experience was helpful not only in familiarizing myself with the general academic needs of this student population, but also in experiencing the commitment of the faculty and staff serving the EOP Bridge community. These experiences influenced the multiple lenses through which I viewed the data for this study.

To be clear, then, I acknowledge that my values and understandings of reality were inextricable from my research process. An interpretivist perspective rejects that the researcher can be theory-neutral and value-free when engaging with the researched. It is also important to acknowledge that the data contain socially constructed meanings that reflect the relationship I built with the interviewees and how the participants positioned themselves towards me and the subject matter discussed. Finally, I make no claims regarding representativeness of the students I interviewed (who self-selected to participate) or generalizability of the findings. Instead, the goal was to provide a rich interpretation of individual cases and explicate the various ways in which they might interconnect.

CHAPTER 4: ACADEMIC SPACES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WRITER IDENTITIES

Being a writer is part of the institutional role of being a student and an undergraduate. This chapter investigates how the participants perceived themselves in relation to academia and how the academic contexts shaped that perception. Students' individual classes were not considered as one academic context but rather as elements in larger academic spaces with inherent value systems and ideologies, such as the disciplines within which students operated and the majors students chose. Because EOP Bridge had a noticeable impact on the participants' understanding of themselves as undergraduates, I considered it a separate academic space. In this chapter, I demonstrate that EOP Bridge asserted the most influence over students' identities and how they experienced the individual classes, disciplines and disciplinary discourses, and the majors students chose.

EOP Bridge as a High-Impact Educational Space

When I designed the study, I had not planned to frame the participants in terms of EOP Bridge; in my mind, they were not "EOP Bridge students" but rather non-dominant students whose educational contexts included participation in EOP Bridge. However, conversations about the program, although not solicited beyond the first two interviews, were abundant throughout the interviews. Data analysis revealed that EOP Bridge played an important role in how students understood themselves as undergraduates. The sheer volume of activities and classes mandated by EOP Bridge made it, as Layla put it, "The factor that is trying to define me here. I want not to

think about it but it impossible. It's like trying to think of you as a student without thinking about the university where you are.”

The ubiquitous nature of EOP Bridge shaped the educational experiences of the participants because it was so prevalent in their academic lives. It became the defining quality through which they developed their academic identities. Their first experience of academic writing at Golden Sands was an online summer assignment they needed to complete before Orientation Day. On the first day of school, the EOP and EOP Bridge programs held a Welcome Day, organized especially for the incoming EOP students. During the Fall quarter, two out of the three mandatory classes students took were EOP Bridge-specific. Additionally, students had to sign a contract with EOP Bridge that mandated the students meet regularly with counselors, attend mentoring meetings led by former EOP Bridge students, and participate in tutoring and supplemental instruction sessions. During Winter and Spring quarters, these activities decreased significantly to include only counseling, mentoring, and occasional community-building meetings, but discourse around EOP Bridge persisted in the interviews.

I discuss here the three EOP Bridge factors identified by participants as exerting the greatest influence on their educational environment and understanding of self: the Welcome Day, the contract students needed to sign, and the ubiquitous nature of EOP Bridge during the participants' first academic year.

EOP Bridge Welcome Day

Welcome Day was an orientation event on campus organized by EOP Bridge specifically for the incoming EOP Bridge cohort and parent body. Because, for most students, including the four participants in this study, the Welcome Day was their first visit to campus, it played a major role in how the students were first socialized. The event took place a month before the Fall quarter started and for many families, the day marked their first occasion to visit Golden Sands. The event lasted from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and included light breakfast during check-in, campus welcome from university officials and EOP Bridge staff, followed by break-out sessions for the students. During student break-out sessions, the parents were offered campus tours and meetings with faculty and staff. The event concluded with a lecture for the families that discussed the EOP Bridge program.

For me, Welcome Day represented the starting point of data collection. I was impressed with how well-organized, colorful, and energized the event was. The families were welcomed not only by university and program officials, but also by successful students from previous EOP Bridge cohorts. Members of these cohorts spoke extensively about the rich campus life and the endless opportunities to pursue personal and academic interests. The speech that stood out for me was given by a former EOP Bridge student; the speech presented academia as a land of unlimited possibilities and urged the new students to show initiative by joining student clubs and political causes: “If you do not have a cause, join one! If you don’t find a club to support your cause, create one!”

Throughout the day the ethnically and racially diverse students-speakers presented themselves as politically engaged individuals who held strong personal convictions and were deeply involved in the campus life. At least some of the parents, who conversed with me, appeared impressed. Overheard conversations suggested that the incoming students had similar reactions. For one of the participants in this study, however, Welcome Day showcased students selected to represent a specific type of student, that of the student-activist. Reflecting on the day in his first interview, Tuan noted that there appeared an absence of speakers who represented “more low-key personalities” or who, “instead of leadership and activism, prefer[red] to get research experiences, a profession, how to make a living”:

I got worried. If this is the successful student, man! I mean, is this place for me? I don't plan to join the barricades. I'd like to come, get my degree quietly and be done fast. [pause] But then I looked around and there were some other quiet newbies. I'll be OK.

Similarly, Huy wondered if he should be worried about fitting in. Layla was enthusiastic, although she noted the underrepresentation of African-American student speakers. All four participants shared in interviews that Welcome Day constructed Golden Sands as being “progressive” (Huy) and “liberal” (Tuan).

My first interviews with the participants yielded statements that connected their previous knowledge of the university and the messages they received during the Welcome Day. Most participants spoke approvingly: “[the university] is a pretty liberal campus” (Layla), “It's a very liberal environment here” (Guang), and “This place is quite out there! It's cool!” (Huy). But Tuan struggled both with “the Golden Sands student” construct and the perceived left orientation of the university. He

shared, with some frustration, that “if you're looking for a mainstream career like political science or law or pre-law or legal studies, you're not in the right place here. Too liberal compared to the rest of America.”

The participants articulated these perceptions of the university while discussing their first impressions of EOP Bridge. For them the distinction between the function of EOP Bridge and the university as an institution seemed blurred: they spoke of the former as standing for the latter. In Chapters 4 and 6 I explore how EOP Bridge, perceived as imbued with the power of the university to make decisions about their education, impacted the participants' academic experiences.

The Bridge Contract

A content analysis of the interviews identified another EOP Bridge factor as an important one in the participants self-perception as students: the EOP Bridge contract. Each student, accepting the offer of college admission through EOP Bridge, entered a contractual agreement (Appendix A) that spelled out the students' requirements for completion of the program. It laid out the terms of participation in the program, the course selection in the first quarter, and the EOP Bridge-specific activities that students were obliged to attend.

My preliminary reading of the document suggested that it was meant as a space where the EOP Bridge program and its participants acknowledge their responsibilities and obligations to ensure the success of the students. It spelled out the kind of relationship that I, while serving as a teaching assistant for an EOP Bridge class a few years earlier, sought to establish so that students were reassured of my full

commitment and support. I was surprised at first that for most of the participants the dedication and enthusiasm of EOP Bridge staff did not come across. Huy, for example, expressed unease with having to commit to such a relationship with EOP Bridge, while Layla and Tuan openly resented the document. Only Guang, who interpreted the contract as making a personal commitment to his own success, welcomed it as a motivation factor:

EOP Bridge is how we're under a contract, and, uh, we should try our best to tell them that, yeah, I deserve to stay in [the university]. I should deserve to stay here. So I felt like that—that was a, like, it gave me extra boost, so, like, okay, I got to stu—work hard. Yeah.

For Guang the contract contained the kind of message that matched his background: his parents used tell him that if he were not a good student in school, his friends would not socialize with him. Such “not worthy of” challenges from his parents made him apply himself even harder to achieve his goals.

For Layla, Tuan and Huy, however, the subtext of the contract was that, as conditionally accepted students, they were not necessarily deserving of a place at the university. This implicit message became a major point of contention. For example, at the end of Fall quarter, Layla explained that,

you sign a contract with them saying that you'll do this, this, and that so that you can stay at the university. It's been really hard because, at first, at times, I've been like, “You know what? I don't even care anymore.” I'm just like, “Whatever,” because it's, at first, they told us, “Okay. You were chosen based on some,” I don't know—some stuff. “We saw some quality in you,” blah, blah, blah, this and that, whatever. Then all the sudden, it's like, okay, now we are not enough.

The indignation Layla showed came from having been accepted at other institutions of equal reputation as a “regular” student:

Even though that might not seem like something you want to get accepted into, but my dad kind of liked that, kind of as an opportunity to basically bridge you from high school to college, to be able to give you that stepping stone. Just because we came into Bridge doesn't mean we are retarded.

The last sentence pointed to Layla's association with the Bridge program as being considered "retarded" and that she was being treated as, in her words, a "second-hand student." In her experience, EOP Bridge equated the lack of resources the students had experienced (educationally underserved communities, low-income background) with lack of abilities (i.e., the program used deficit thinking).

During my teaching involvement with the Program, which preceded this study, I experienced EOP Bridge as a caring and supportive ally to the participating students. I wondered about the deficit message Layla had received. She painted a complex picture of overly simplistic EOP Bridge classes, of condescending academic counselors who interacted with the students "as if you are stupid," and of general misinterpretation of who she and her colleagues were as people and as students. It was the defeatist statement Layla made regarding the EOP Bridge contract that affected me the most: "I signed that I am stupid. I was stupid to sign! [pause] Which proves their point." She did not elaborate on that statement beyond asking if I had read the contract (for full text of the contract, see Appendix A).

Throughout this study, Layla expressed her opinions categorically, usually as critiques rather than constructive criticisms. However, Layla's repeatedly negative statements regarding how the EOP Bridge contract positioned students were echoed both by Tuan ("Innocent until proven guilty? Not in EOP.") and Huy ("I don't know why they made us sign that thing. It felt criminal."). Collectively, their words

suggested that they genuinely viewed the EOP Bridge program as a power structure of dominance that contained deficit frames.

It could be argued that the contract does not represent an EOP Bridge-specific discourse, but is indicative of all academic contracts. Nevertheless, the participants appeared sensitive to what they perceived as a power relationship that subjected them. To explore this power relationship, which had previously been invisible to me, I analyzed a copy of the contract through the lens of CDA. I also relied on my knowledge of the participants' sensibilities to gain insight into the reasons why they interpreted the contract the way they did. This reading of the contract represents my attempt to understand the text through the eyes of the participants and to see in the contract the deficit subject positions seen by the participants.

The text begins with a congratulatory note from the EOP staff, but in the second line, the text establishes the EOP and its staff as an entity possessed of the power to speak on the behalf of the university ("welcomes you to the [Golden Sands] University"). From that established position of power, it informs the students that participation in the EOP Bridge is a condition of their admissions: successful completion of the program "is required in order to continue your enrollment into your sophomore year." This sentence establishes the EOP Bridge mandated classes and activities as high stakes.

The text switches to first-person narration in listing seven obligations to which students agree by accepting the offer of admission:

1. Complete the requirements of my Conditions of Admission, including the successful completion of the EOP Bridge Program during my freshman year.
2. Attend the Bridge Orientation Program at [Golden Sands] July 19-22, 2009. Attendance is mandatory.
3. Participate in the new student orientations, meetings, and programs as required by the EOP staff.
4. Enroll in and attend writing and mathematics tutorial programs as required by the EOP staff throughout the academic year.
5. Attend advising appointments as required by the EOP staff throughout the academic year.
6. Follow the recommendations of the EOP academic counseling staff, college academic preceptor, and academic department adviser regarding course selection throughout the academic year.
7. Enroll in and complete a set of courses based on college requirements, placement exams scores, and Bridge Program requirements during fall quarter 2009 and winter quarter 2010. (EOP Bridge Program; see Appendix A)

The contract concludes with the students waiving their right to privacy regarding their academic progress and acknowledging the disciplinary measures for breach of contract:

During any given quarter, the EOP Office will have access to all records pertaining to my academic standing, including course enrollment and any changes in my academic program. I understand that if I do not comply with any above of the above items, my admission to [Golden Sands] can be withdrawn.

Similar to the second line of the contract, the language used in these seven items blurs the boundaries between EOP, EOP Bridge, and the staff. Conflating these three entities symbolically imbues any one of them with the institutional power of all three to determine students' academic paths. Although the students are the subjects of the text, they are positioned as objects of the controlling institutional authority.

Repetitive phrasing establishes the EOP staff and other university officials as having the authority to dictate the students' educational experiences: out of the seven items,

five reiterate that they are mandated by “academic counseling staff,” “college academic preceptor,” “academic department adviser,” and three of the items use the phrase “as required by the EOP staff.” In the light of this analysis, I could understand why Layla viewed the contract as effectively agreeing to give up her agency to make educational decisions in her first year (hence, “I was stupid to sign”). Positioned as the rhetorical speaker, Layla had to ventriloquate the dominant ideological discourse. That institutional voice is visible in the second “obligation,” in which the speaker in the sentence “Attendance is mandatory” shifts from the student to the institution.

The EOP Bridge contract clearly articulates the students’ obligations and responsibilities. Obligations and responsibilities of the program and university are not explicitly named. Tuan revealed his awareness that the second party was never mentioned, which, in his view, made the contract “skewed putting emphasis on how I am deficient.” When he showed me his copy of the contract, he exclaimed: “I signed my life away. What am I getting in return? Nothing that I can hold them [EOP Bridge] by!” Tuan interpreted the role of the contract as obligating the students to comply with the terms of their university acceptance. He also pointed out that the contract is based on the assumption that, without it, the students would not honor the terms of their acceptance: “Innocent until proven guilty? Not in EOP. You are a criminal by default.”

Tuan’s statements touched upon the question of whether occupying any given subject position is an agentive act or a predetermined outcome. In this instance, Tuan experienced the subject formation as completely determined by the dominant

ideology (Althusser, 1971). While protesting against how he was being constructed, Tuan acknowledged that the ideological discourse left little space for active resistance or agency.

The one-sidedness of the contract that the participants highlighted for me seems to construct the students as potentially problematic and requiring EOP/EOP Bridge to anticipate preventive measures. These assigned identities clashed with how the participants in this study thought of themselves, and that disparity created inner conflicts. These “identity traps” (Youdell, 2003, p. 3) position the students in a lose-lose situation, which Layla expressed by exclaiming, “I signed that I am stupid. I was stupid to sign!” Students must choose between becoming successful academically by acting out a different persona, or staying true to who they are at the cost of accepting the prescribed negative identity.

To sum up, the contract paints participation in EOP Bridge as high stakes. It was distributed to students and parents at Welcome Day along with a packet containing an overview of the goals and requirements of the EOP Bridge program. In that packet, the stakes were clearly articulated: “Students who do not successfully fulfill the requirements of the EOP Bridge program will be redirected to their local community college for additional academic development before returning to [Golden Sands].” Academic success in this context is defined as being successful in the program and through the program, making EOP Bridge one of the most important educational contexts for the participants.

Constructing the “Bridge Student”

My analysis of different EOP Bridge materials and spaces exposed the limited and contradictory subject positions that this framing provided for the participants. An interesting construct emerged from my analysis of observation notes, interviews with participants, and informal conversations with instructors and administrators—that of “the Bridge student.” The cumulative weight of various EOP Bridge discourses concerning the participants enrolled in the program produced a stereotypical student: educationally underprepared (hence needing fundamental learning techniques and habits); culturally and sometimes linguistically nonmainstream (hence possibly confused and disoriented); and of a social and economic background that prevented a smooth transition into college (hence in need of help). The EOP Bridge-determined schedule of classes and events during the Fall quarter incessantly hailed the participants as the stereotypical EOP Bridge student.

The attitudes and reactions to the monolithic construct of the Bridge student varied widely. In general, most administrators, counselors, and instructors referred to the Golden Sands students who participated in EOP Bridge as Bridge students, potentially assigning to them an identity that the participants in this study considered deficit-charged. The EOP Bridge staff spoke enthusiastically about their responsibilities and challenges of serving those students and doing transformational work. Discussing the construct with the participants in this study inevitably provoked strong and not always favorable reactions: Guang embraced the identity of a “Bridgie,” as he fondly called himself and his fellow students, while Layla, Tuan, and

Huy rejected the label and struggled with what they perceived as negative implications of having been placed in that group. For example, in Winter quarter, Layla spoke with frustration about the incompatibility of the identity of the EOP Bridge student with the identity of being an undergraduate:

I feel more like an undergraduate this quarter just because I was able to do my own thing, whereas last quarter, I still felt I was still in high school because I felt I was being babysitted and they chose our classes for us. I felt like I was a little baby that couldn't do anything on their own, or at least that's how they treated us, the Bridge students.

The impact of the Bridge student label that Layla described was a consequence of the uneven power relationship between the students and the organization that served them. Power has the ability to speak reality into existence (Foucault, 1977) because when named, the individual is “called into account by the other's ideology” (Althusser, 1971, p. 162). During Fall quarter, Layla's attention was constantly solicited (interpolated in Althusser's [1971] terminology) by EOP Bridge. The label “EOP Bridge student,” in Layla's experience, fixed her in a category that she reported as clashing with her own understanding of herself as a person and a student. Her struggle during Fall quarter was to withstand the power of ideology to assail her and alter her in undesirable ways.

Tuan rejected being labeled as an EOP Bridge student. He could not change the subject positions that were made available to him, but by not participating in certain discourses, he tried to avoid co-opting the existing power relations and ideologies that othered him:

I've got more used to it [the term EOP Bridge student], but I never liked the concept of it. I, I felt it has always made me, always made me feel less of a

college student. You know, I, I like being normal. I don't like being pulled out of a crowd. So I don't . . . no, I don't talk to other people about it [participating in EOP Bridge]. I don't present myself in that way. Last quarter [Fall] I didn't have a choice. I, I, I depended on their grade. But this quarter I don't go [to the EOP Bridge community meetings] whenever I can find an excuse. I just don't go. I just ignore them. I don't participate.

Huy's strategy for, what appeared to me as, resisting EOP Bridge involved constructing an identity of a fledging queer activist that dominated any other aspect of his identity. As he learned how to participate in the queer community and how to fight and protect himself from homophobia, misperception and disinformation, Huy's nonacademic life occupied the majority of his time, making his queer identity his strongest identifier. Additionally, Huy tried to maintain a clear-cut separation between his academic endeavors and his private life. Elaborating on this delineation, Huy remarked that being queer "it's more of an identity that's not associated with education and so I don't bring that part of me into my work." As a result, he did not experience the label of the EOP Bridge student as adversely as Tuan or Layla did. Moreover, while Huy spoke of the EOP Bridge label as "this ill-fitting . . . monolithic . . . monster mask," being queer was a multifaceted, plural identity: he explained that depending on the social context he would be "a queer person, queer youth, or a queer man of color, Asian queer. Many ways to be queer and still be me."

Huy hinted at the existing social positionings and social structures (in Huy's case, race, gender, age, and sexuality) that affected how the participants in this study understood themselves and the world around them. Huy's case illustrates how the most prominent positionings and structures can turn into lenses that students use to interpret what is occurring to them and around them. Layla's lens, for example, was

often that of a woman of color in a predominantly White environment. Observed through this racial lens, being mandated to take an academic skills class as an EOP Bridge student appeared to her as the dominant culture evoking pejorative stereotypes: her assessment was, “you don’t expect me to succeed, you expect me to fail.” The data on Huy, Layla, and the other two participants suggested that these social structures that capture the individual in particular power dynamics could render the individual highly sensitive. The participants appears to have reacted to the subject position of the EOP Bridge student from this place of heightened sensitivity and critiqued the motives and intentions of the Bridge EOP program.

The Role of Disciplinary Contexts in Constructing Writers’ Identities

Scholars such as Gee (2001) and Lave (1996) discussed how learning in the disciplines is contingent on developing disciplinary identities, and that these disciplinary identities are dependent on engaging with disciplinary discourses and practices. Gee (2007), for example, explained that:

[p]eople cannot learn in a deep way within a semiotic domain if they are not willing to commit themselves fully to the learning in terms of time, effort, and active engagement. Such a commitment requires that they are willing to see themselves in terms of a new identity, that is, to see themselves as the kind of person who can learn, use, and value the new semiotic domain. (Gee, 2007, p. 54)

The argument that participation in disciplinary practices and discourses is a key to achieving and maintaining disciplinary membership is a popular one in social practice-theory identity studies (Lave, 1988; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Inspired by such sociocultural perspectives, I set out to understand how that relationship between disciplines, disciplinary

discourses, and identities is represented in my data. To address that purpose, I created two separate codes: disciplines and disciplinary discourses. I examined the reports generated by HyperRESEARCH for implied attitudes and meanings using semantic relational analysis (Palmquist et al., 1997) and reviewed how the coded instances were linked semantically to the participants' positionings. The following paragraphs present what the shifts in positioning revealed about the participants' attitudes towards the disciplines and disciplinary discourses.

Having done some conservation work that made him fall in love with marine biology, Huy came to Golden Sands intent on majoring in Environmental Studies. "For me," he stated in our first interview, "the environment is priceless." The introductory class he took in Winter quarter, however, did not meet his initial expectations of nurturing the conservationist in him:

Basically [the instructor] started explaining that framework of his which was the capitalist framework in microeconomics and he was using terms like maximizing benefit, determining efficiency of—efficiency level of pollution, so I was thinking—I mean, that's totally different than what I expected.

Huy's reaction to the particular ideology that saturated the class discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) revealed a connection often expressed by the participants in this study between their worldviews and the ideologies inherent in the classes they took. In Huy's case, his appreciative and nurturing attitude towards the environment clashed with the theoretical framework that the environmental class adopted. When at Week 3 of the quarter, I asked Huy how he felt about Environmental Studies, he stated that he "like[d] it and hate[d] it." He liked the class for introducing him to the idea that there are alternative ways of looking at the environment, and he hated it for

its particular “capitalist” lens. Because language has the property to “construct (construe) [reality] to be a certain way” (Gee, 2003, p. 82), as time passed, Huy became intrigued and more accepting of the framework and he grew accustomed to the capitalist discourse. By Week 5, I detected a notable change in Huy’s attitude:

It’s been a really interesting class so far just because they’re tying in environmental problems with economics and policy and so I know they’re both interrelated. . . . It’s just very interesting to learn about the relationship and how they’re affecting each other and our society.

At this point in the quarter, Huy’s way of expressing himself when talking about the class showed that he was comfortable with the terminology and was becoming fluent in the environmentalist discourse employed in the classroom. By Week 6 of Winter quarter, he could narrate at length the differences between the “anthropocentric view” of the environment (which pitches against each other the ideas of the “human species bettering the environment” and the “egotistical nature of mankind [that] benefits from the environment”), and the “economist point of view” focusing on “efficiency standards” and “safety standards.” It appeared that by Week 8, Huy’s exposure to the discourses favoring the economist side of the debate reached saturation. These discourses, coupled with the power relationships existing in the class (and in any academic space, for that matter), mediated Huy’s “ideological becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 341) of a particular kind of environmentalist that was moving away from the conservationist persona with which he initially identified.

Thinking of a future occupation after finishing his studies, Huy no longer favored the idea of doing fieldwork. Other options included “do[ing] stuff in the laboratories,” “do[ing] stuff in the econ,” “teaching,” and “do[ing] research.”

Somewhere in the process of disciplinary socialization, as Huy learned to reproduce the specialized language of the course, he came to accept the epistemologies that were ideologically entwined in these disciplinary discourses. Towards the end of the quarter, when I asked about what an environmentalist is, he stated, “You’re basically dealing with how society’s impacts are affecting the environment. How money and trading are getting involved. This is the real good part of it.”

When I first analyzed this quotation from Huy, it seemed to me to be providing evidence of Huy’s complete assimilation. He seemed to have abandoned his initial understanding of and, relationship to, the environment. However, accepting certain assumptions did not result in him adopting them. As readings were discussed in class and concepts were unpacked, Huy’s views morphed, but not in an assimilatory way. Rather, Huy shifted his focus from the biological, ethical, and aesthetic side of environmentalism with which he came to the class to “the social side of things,” as he put it.

Huy attributed this shift towards the social to factors other than his exposure to alternative environmental ideologies. In interviews, he referred to forces outside the environmental class. Huy’s status as an openly gay young man shifted his social standing and consequently changed his positioning towards his social environment. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the process of becoming conscious of what it meant to be an active member of the gay community on campus and in society at large refocused his awareness of and attention to ensuing social issues, which affected a more general interest in the social factor.

Not all participants experienced such explicit ideological contradictions because not all of them found their classes so, in the words of Tuan, “politically skewed”. Often, the assumptions contained in the disciplinary discourses were less visible, especially if the disciplines were grounded in ideologies of logic and objectivity (e.g., math and science classes) or if the specialized terminology resembled everyday language (e.g., writing classes). For example, as Tuan’s classes shifted from social sciences during Fall quarter to math and science during Winter quarter, Tuan noted a switch from openly ideologically saturated discourses to ones that appeared to him ideologically neutral. Not having overtly politically charged classes was a welcome change for him: although Tuan described himself as “pretty liberal,” his experiences with what he described as an “ultra-liberal campus” caused him to “become disillusioned with it [liberalism] and it distanced [him] from politics.” Tuan spoke with enthusiasm about the “linear,” “logical,” and “objective material” to which he was exposed: “there’s no right wing or left wing math . . . it’s math.” But he soon realized that nonpolitical does not mean nonideological. Game Design, initially perceived as an “objective” class because it was oriented towards providing practical skills of how to create computer games, became “just awfully lopsided and biased”:

You don’t see it, but once you think about it, it’s there because. . . . It all points towards very independent, indie game design like small companies or even individuals, small studios that just make the games and publish them on the Internet. . . . Everyone here hates Big Business.

Tuan, more than any other participant in this study, was aware of what Fairclough (1985, p. 739) called “naturalization”: the process of creating common

sense out of the ideologically saturated discourses. On several occasions, Tuan expressed frustration with his classmates, who did not problematize the implicit assumption that creativity and innovation are achievable exclusively where there is independence from big money. He described his classmates as unaware of the ideological character of the used discourses and as accepting of the inherent ideology as if it were rational: “They are like sheep, sheep for slaughter! Can’t you see? Are you blind? Why do you always agree? Because he is the professor? That doesn’t mean that he is not biased.”

My observations revealed that naturalization was present especially in cases where specialized language resembled widely used everyday phrases. The familiarity (at least in appearance) of the language used in classes created an illusion of clarity and explicitness that obscured the disciplinary ideologies. The complex relationship between the discourses that coexist in the participants’ educational environment and their conventions and norms is what Fairclough (1995, p. 55) called “orders of discourse.” The orders of discourse consist of discourses that are created to assist the construction of knowledge in a specific knowledge domain, and of genres, which are connected to the particular types of activities in any educational space. Orders of discourse is a helpful concept to understand the relationship between language and its social and cultural uses.

The participants in this study provided plenty of examples of how the orders of discourse mask the ideologies inherent in classroom talk and how it occurs despite the instructors’ efforts to provide transparency. For instance, in his Fall quarter

writing class, Guang produced lengthy papers that were returned to him with brief comments such as “state clearly,” “audience,” or “grammar,” which perplexed him. Guang had apparent issues in understanding what constituted clarity: he repeatedly asked me what “state clearly” meant to me because, from his perspective, his thoughts were expressed with sufficient clarity and that further explanation would be verbose and redundant. Analysis of Guang’s papers suggested that “state clearly” was used in at least three different ways. First, there were instances in which the comment was used synonymously with another frequent comment: “audience.” The combination of comments referred to the need to explain concepts Guang imported from other classes. In a reading response paper to the book *The Wal-Mart Effect*, titled “Consumer’s Shopping Habits,” Guang used economic concepts to his understanding of the primary text:

The low prices Wal-Mart has created are maintainable by the method of outsourcing and parting with traditional economy. This absolute advantage positively benefits the consumers and enables them a higher power of purchase. Wal-Mart tries to control interdependence by offering to customers easy accessibility and a “one-stop shopping.” (Fishman, 2006, p. 160)

Terms such as traditional economy, absolute advantage, and interdependence are self-explanatory in situations where the addressee shared similar knowledge and background. Guang’s familiarity and frequent use of those concepts rendered them invisible to him: he was unable to understand how their present use created structural flaws in his papers. For his writing instructor, the lack of sufficient contextualization in the essay was an indication of Guang’s inadequate sense of audience.

Second, “state clearly” referred to another central concept of Guang’s writing class: voice. It indicated the places in his text where he needed to separate his understanding and interpretation of a primary text from that of the author. It referred mostly to the use of “orphan quotes”—words from the primary text that Guang appropriated and “ventriloquated” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) because he found them more powerful or articulate than his own. For example, in an essay titled “Environmental Justice,” Guang stated,

The workers that live near the factory do not need to drive their cars to work because they live close. “Mobile sources are the biggest cause of estimated excess cancer incidence” (Pastor, 2007, p. 307). Therefore, the workers who does not drive their car will produce less mobile emission over time which helps environment produces less air toxics.

Although Guang marked the quotations with quotation marks and cited the source to indicate that his intent was not plagiarizing, he incorporated them in the flow of his text as if he were the speaker uttering them. This error of quoting improperly was much more difficult for Guang to “fix” than the discussed instances of insufficient contextualization. To separate one’s opinion from the voices of others requires a clear sense of one’s individual voice, a drawn-out process that might take more than five papers produced in 10 weeks of intense writing.

The third use of the comment “state clearly” was strictly associated in Guang’s papers with the second language features his texts sometimes contained and was used interchangeably with “grammar.” While nonnative use of language can impede understanding, there was nothing inherently unclear about Guang’s grammar errors. However, the instructor’s comments provided such frequent association of

faulty grammar with lack of clarity that Guang started to connect the two implicitly, even in instances that were not marked by the instructor:

Guang: Without grammar, it's really hard to like explain to the reader the story.

Dora: Okay. And what do you mean by not clear?

Guang: Like—like the grammar. I have bad grammar. It's the whole— the essay's not going to be clear – it's not clear to the reader what's going on. . . . Like here [points to paper] subject-verb agreement, uhm, verb tenses. I used, uhm, used them wrong. . . . Like “My parents have been motivating me to do well in school, ever since I started elementary.” So I should change that to had. “My parents had.”

Dora: Okay. Um, but I understood the sentence. And the instructor didn't mark that instance. Grammar doesn't necessarily impede understanding of what you want to say. Uhm, but you think it does?

Guang: Not really—I don't know. The issue is, I know the rules, [but] I don't see those grammar mistakes.

Guang's last comment pointed to the problematic nature of dealing with second language features in writing—it takes nonnative speakers much longer than a single course to start producing native-like utterances. I asked Guang's instructor about her expectations around grammar use of nonnative speakers; she described those mistakes as distractions that are interpreted by other instructors as an indication of poor writing:

Every new quarter. . . . I am getting these calls from colleagues about not having taught my students anything. How could I have passed them. “They cannot write a full sentence without some problematic wording. I am not a grammar teacher, this should have been addressed in your class!” I address those things. I do. Repeatedly. But such things take time and students do not have so much time. For me, as long as they [the students] are functional, their English, in classes [shrugs shoulders in a gesture that conveys “it's sufficient”]. But I cannot tell them [her colleagues] that. Because for them

“functional” means “not giving me problems.” I can just tell them, “Send them to tutors.”

While this dissertation analyzes and presents the participants’ point of view, this quotation complicates the instructors’ standing by placing them inside various subject positions that limit their agentic power. I must acknowledge that while the participants consider instructors as significant players in assigning academic identities, the instructors themselves operated within the constraints of larger educational and academic contexts. Specifically, the quotation points to the existence of discourses around ESL that are based on the belief that grammatical errors indicate sub-college-level writing.

Such discourses, I believe, are a testament of how deeply embedded in academic culture is the connection between language use, knowledge making, and artifact production. That Guang did not question the link between clarity and proper grammar use was a result both of his recent writing experiences and of discourses around ESL that he brought with him from high school:

I am really bad at word problems because my English isn’t that great. I’m struggling with the wording and the problem solving. I’m like, “Oh what does this mean, what am I supposed to do?” Just like in high school. Because English did affect my writing skills. Because some of the prompts, I really didn’t understand the word- the wording that’s in it. So how am I going to write an essay if I don’t understand the prompt?

The combination of the ESL discourses and the academic beliefs around text production has the potential to marginalize nonnative students. This potential for marginalization made Guang acutely aware of his command of the English language.

It appeared to me that he was sometimes overcritical of himself and attributed any language-related difficulties to what he perceived as insufficient English skills:

- Guang: My English isn't great for me to—my English level isn't really that high for me to understand a prompt, to analyze even. The concepts that—teaching us big, like these words—I was like, “What is ‘critical literacy’ and all this stuff?” Like the terms in math. The rate of change, that means derivative. Velocity also means derivative. What else also means derivative, uhm, ahh, the speed also means derivative. The tangent line also means derivative. There's so many words that leads onto “find the derivative.”
- Dora: I see. Are you saying that you're learning the language as you are learning the concepts, and as you are learning how to do problems? Is that something, do you think that's something unique to you, or do you see other colleagues of yours, kind of struggling with the same . . . ?
- Guang: Yeah. Well, no. I've seen my colleagues struggling with the wording and the problem solving. They're like, “Oh what does this mean, what am I supposed to do?”
- Dora: And those colleagues too, are they—are they, are there native speakers as well?
- Guang: Yeah. Well, it's not necessary of secondary language issue because that will be—that is my, you know, fear. I don't know, it kind of, it also affects, it also relates to their, relates to their background, so if they have a well-educated background, then I'm pretty sure they understand English better than me.

This interview excerpt demonstrates that Guang's thinking around language, writing, and the disciplines reflects a complexity of factors involved in one's school performance. He acknowledged how his English proficiency affected his educational experiences, which was probably more imaginary than a reality. At the same time, it highlighted the additional challenges to (former) ESL students to understand the underlying assumptions in disciplinary discourse. Guang's ability to understand the meaning assigned to terms, such as “state clearly,” “audience,” or “grammar,” was affected by the normalizing function of the “common sense ways of knowing”

(Fairclough, 1992) of a discipline. More than a second language issue, I understood Guang's difficulties in terms of clashing orders of discourse. Fairclough (2003) defined them as "networks of social practices in its language aspect" and called them "the social organization and control of linguistic variation" (p. 2), that is, a particular social situation dictates which discourses, genres, and styles can be combined and which cannot. Thus traditional economy, absolute advantage, and interdependence in the social context of a writing class become specialized terms that need elaboration.

Guang's question of what clarity means was echoed by all participants in this study: as they branched out in their chosen majors during Winter and Spring quarters, they faced the question of what counts as appropriate knowledge, argument support, authorial presence, and so on in any particular context. New classes brought into the interviews numerous examples of the participants' needs to find out again and again, as Huy put it, "what the teacher wants." Often, students reported that teachers do not spend time explaining the language students should use in their writing. The disciplines to which the participants were exposed treated writing as basic knowledge with which students should have been familiar before they started attending the specific class. Only two participants received, in one class each, coaching in the genre conventions for the discipline.

Analysis of student papers revealed that the sciences seemed to privilege a more impersonal, objective language because the field provides the appearance of generality to the claims. In Tuan's Astronomy class, for example, there was a marked preference for the use of passive versus active case and for longer sentences that

answered the question to the point without foregrounding the personalized way in which students understood the subject matter. Tuan's Astronomy instructor repeatedly crossed out phrases such as "In my view" and "to my understanding." The phrase "I think" was double crossed on Tuan's final paper for the class. The instructor commented on it during an informal conversation: he was not interested in what students think (in students' "musings"), but in whether they learned the material—he wanted students to give him only the facts. I then asked Tuan why he felt the need to preface his sentences with those phrases. His response was,

It is like, it's—I need a disclaimer. It's dense stuff, astronomy. I can give him [the instructor] only what I got out of it. How do I write "something is" if I am not sure that it is?

This example shows a discrepancy between the instructor's understanding of the function of personalized writing and Tuan's motives for using it. The instructor suggested that he believed in objective facts that the students could recite back to him. Tuan could not separate what his teacher called facts from how he experienced them subjectively. This disconnect was a mismatch between two profoundly opposite worldviews: one treated the physical world as existing independently of the observer, and the other placed that physical world within the human consciousness.

Tuan's "disclaimers" would have been more appropriate in Layla's Introduction to Feminism class. The most common comment on Layla's papers was "connect to self." In another informal conversation, Layla's instructor shared that, for her, learning that produces a qualitative change in the students and society in general "happens only through experiencing, living and reliving the concepts" she taught, that

is, through embodiment. She favored language that demonstrated the students' personal connections to the ideas. This presented a problem for Layla, who did not subscribe fully to the philosophy of the class:

I feel like there's some truth to some of the things they [feminists] are saying, but as far as—one of these extreme feminism—I feel that's a bit off the wall. I feel like society does have its downfalls when it comes to women. I understand all of that, but still—I don't feel oppressed and helpless and victimized the way they want me to believe. This zeal—that's just not me.

Layla's last phrase reveals her ability to understand the ideologies inherent in a discipline and to identify the positionings that she needed to occupy in order to be successful as a Feminist. Gee (1990) called these positionings "identity kits," or "particular ways to act, talk, think, feel, believe and value that are consistent with the norms of the community and enable them to take on a particular role that others would recognize" (p. 142). Because it appeared to Layla that feminists marginalize and single out women even more through their ideas, she did not want to participate in that discourse. Her papers tended to give responses based on summarizing the primary texts rather than reflecting on them—she did not think that the "zealous" instructor would appreciate her "timid-looking" opinions.

As the participants of this study attempted to socialize into their new (academic) environments, they inevitably imitated and sometimes assimilated the discourses that surrounded them. The following section discusses in detail the intricate relationship between student identities (including writer identities), the disciplinary discourses, and the majors through miniature case studies and vignettes.

Choosing a Major as an Expression of Identity and an Identity-Shaping Act

The previous section discussed how the ideologies inherent in the disciplines and disciplinary discourses produced a shift in positioning that allowed a student to be functional within a discipline (Huy) or clash with the participants' own worldview (Tuan, Layla). In the case of Guang, language use obscured meanings and slowed his successful navigation of academia. I suggested that it was students' nonacademic identities that accounted for their reactions. Similar mechanisms influenced what educational decisions students make around the choice of major: analysis of the data revealed that adopting a major is a process of reconciliation of who students think they are and value with the ideologies inherent in the disciplines. The participants in this study revealed that choosing a major can be a personal quest. In preparation for their lives after academia, students assumed, both in life and in writing, the type of person that they thought they needed to be to be part of the discourse community to which they wanted to belong professionally. Layla, for example, revealed that link by likening writing for a major to self-exploration:

After you've declared, okay, now you can start developing yourself, as a— within your writing. And you start getting more passionate, because you declared your major. You're stuck with this. This is what you're going to get a degree in. . . . You're writing within the discipline, and also because you chose that discipline for yourself. It kind of goes both ways. While you are learning to become a better writer within the discipline, you're also learning about yourself in that sense.

The connection between self-exploration and disciplinary writing that Layla discussed is one manifestation of a theme that emerged in the data, namely that students try on majors and switch to a different one if they cannot achieve harmony

between their worldviews and the values and ideologies embedded in the discourses of those disciplines. A concrete example is Layla's exploration of Feminism as a major. She took an introductory class and concluded, "I don't think I could ever be a feminist":

I feel like to have Feminist Studies as a major, you have to have a certain—you have to be at—you have to at least be a feminist to a certain degree. . . . I feel like feminists are all about women's rights and a woman's empowerment. . . . They just make it seem as if women are just suffering and they—they have to—they—society has to, um, change their views so that women can be—I don't know—I just think feminists are too out there and that's just like that's not me.

The enthusiasm with which Layla started the introductory class dwindled quickly and, by the end of the quarter, she dropped the idea of majoring in Feminism in favor of Sociology. She eliminated Psychology because she "couldn't care less about what's going on in people's minds. That's not me."

During Spring quarter, Layla underwent similar self-exploration that revealed another irreconcilable incompatibility between her and her intended major:

Social worker is the only sensible thing I can work with Sociology. The career center gave me a list with some very exotic occupations though. Ridiculous things like urban planner, community developer, ahm demographer. Oh, gerontologist too! [laughs]

As she examined the work opportunities after graduation, Layla decided that she felt more attracted to helping people not at the personal but at the community level. At the end of Spring quarter, she expressed a desire to "do something with social justice and the communities. I want to do something, bring about change, be a leader!" Layla was left with even fewer options: Ethnic Studies did not have an African American focus. The existence of Community Studies was threatened by budget cuts, and becoming a

social worker required taking classes in Psychology or Sociology, neither of which appeared to her as “in touch with my reality.” By the end of the academic year, the only option Layla saw was to transfer to another campus.

Tuan was also articulate about viewing a major as a state of being:

I’m trying to figure out my place in the world or what I’m going to be like in the future. Um, I mean it’s, it’s sort of how you define yourself really that’s the question, and to me, to me it’s like, it’s you define yourself by the things you do, the friends you have, the things you say, and—I enjoy going to movies and having casual dinners with friends and partying and being in Game Design. I’m a Game Design major.

Associating with the persona of a game designer did not come easily for Tuan: his introductory class to game design, in his words, “glorified the creativity and innovativeness of independent gaming companies” and that contradicted Tuan’s interest in the consumer point of view, from which perspective “indie companies are failures” because “sometimes people just want to blow stuff up and have [the game] look really, really cool.” Tuan’s orientation towards big companies stemmed partially from the career goals he set for himself (“I want to work for a giant like Sony or EA because I know they’ll pay me well, and I’m less likely to get laid off”), which likely originated from the work insecurity of family and relatives. He repeatedly stated in interviews that he wanted to learn the ways of power that would open doors to the corporate world—a need that was met neither in Introduction to Game Design nor in the rest of the major-specific classes during his first year of college.

Tuan credited other aspects of designing a game that allowed him to negotiate an identity as a game designer (“to be the game designer I want to be”). One of these

aspects, he reported, was the freedom of expression that resulted in “creating whole worlds out of nothing”:

You are literally creating the world. You start from the ground, well, you don't even have ground, you have literally nothing than you establish the big foundations, the physics and the mechanics then you build on to that so you literally build the world from nothing using code and art and you are creating a physical world, I mean, it's not tangible but it's real. I don't want to say it's like playing God, but it certainly gives you creative power, you get to shape your vision of what you want and it's a very empowering feeling. It's got a bit of appeal to be able to create whatever you want, however you want it.

The satisfaction of creating a world was paralleled by another theme that emerged from his interviews: Tuan struggled with creating a space in the physical world to belong to. I explore in detail in Chapter 5 factors such as race, nationality, ethnicity, language, and class that contributed to this struggle. Here, I will only elaborate on the factor of personal history: Tuan's life was marked by frequent physical relocations and cultural transitions that required him repeatedly to establish himself anew while recreating the sense of belonging.

Born in Germany to Vietnamese parents, Tuan relocated to the United States at the end of middle school. As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, Tuan's comments indicated that he did not feel a sense of acceptance in either country. Around the time of the move to the United States, his parents' relationship deteriorated and they split up. In an attempt to provide a more stable environment for him, Tuan was sent to live in another state with the family of a childless uncle. That meant another uprooting—in the new school, Tuan had to reestablish himself yet again, which felt like having to rebuild himself from scratch because, as he put it, “every time I go to a new place, I pretty much leave my entire past behind and I start all over.”

After his uncle's job was moved to India, Tuan faced the prospect of relocating yet again to another continent, but settled on spending his last high school year back home with his mother's second family. Tuan characterized the transition to college as just another transformation that he had to undergo. He spoke with detachment about the frequent changes in his social and educational environment and saw himself as a person who, having "learned how to blend in easily anywhere," was going to be successful everywhere:

I've done it four times I think in the last four years. I barely keep in touch with people when I move to somewhere new and I just start, I start all over again. I make new friends. I do new things. It's, I guess a lot of people see it as a lot of work, but to me it's not work really. I learned how to blend in easily anywhere.

Tuan's sense of belonging seemed to undergo several iterations during his first year of college, which I explain in detail in Chapter 5. When he was taking Introduction to Game Design and Programming during Winter quarter, he called himself a "citizen of the world" and associated not with a particular ethnicity, nationality, class, or race, but with what he saw as "fundamental human characteristics that give every human being the same build and the same claim on equality." There was a parallel between how Tuan described himself and how he spoke of the games he would create as a game designer:

[Programming a game] is having to go into the detail of every little thing, every little thing! It makes you realize that everything came from somewhere and someone had to build it and someone had to think of it. Every single object, like, say in this room, someone had to build the structure, someone build the screw—designed the screws that held the tables together. Someone wrote these things on the wall. Someone put them up. Just kind of makes you appreciate humanity as a whole more.

Tuan's appreciation of the "essence of humanity," as he called it, was echoed in the word choice and rhetoric he used when describing the work of the programmer:

It's that by doing all the programming and designing and the coding and all that you get a visual piece of work that you can look at, also like a painting, you know, the way after a painter works really hard and long, on a certain portrait, and he hangs it up and he looks at it is the same way as the game, you really work hard on a game and then in the end you have all the work you put together and then you see the end product, you get an appreciation of how much work goes into every single object of the game. It's sort of like an awakening of being aware, of that everything in civilization has been done by humans. People understand that, but they don't really think about it. Then you look at random things and now I find myself thinking like where did that come from, who built that and it's—you just realize that there's a lot that goes in the essence of humanity.

Programming a game allowed Tuan to connect to those common fundamentals on the basis of which societies develop their individual characteristics and thus to claim belonging to humankind, being "a citizen of the world." It also allowed him to create a reality that "work[s] according to you how you want it, basically creating a world in your liking."

A game designer, according to Tuan, is not only a creator, but also is a translator:

The game designer [has] the role central to the game. There's a programmer that actually creates the code for the game. There's the artist to come up with the animation but artists and programmers don't always connect on the same level as would be imagined so the game designer fills in that goal, that central point where he can—he is a translator and game designer is proficient or understands both programming and/or so is . . . the game designer understands all the aspects of the game.

The game-designer-as-translator inhabits, in my understanding of his words, the border space between the social aspect of game playing where the fundamentals are found and the game designer's individual vision of a virtual world. The game-

designer-as-translator must find a common visual language between himself or herself and the player(s) to translate those ideas with success. Tuan slipped easily into the translator role: when his classes advanced and their specialized language outgrew my knowledge of the subject matter, he repeatedly used writing as a metaphor to make me understand the intricacies of Java as a programming language, for example. Tuan described learning the Java library (a list of predetermined codes and commands) as “learning the words so that I can write sentences and paragraphs” and ultimately to achieve “writing a reality into existence”:

You’re restrained to the building blocks, the words and paragraphs of Java and a certain format for it [the game] to be understandable. In writing, the words have to stay to the paper or the ink has to stay to the paper, and in gaming if you were to do something there’s no physical limitation of that. When my “readers” play, inked code becomes ideas.

This quotation reveals that, for Tuan, a game designer is not only a creator and a translator, but also a writer who has at his or her disposal a wider variety of materials and building blocks than does a conventional writer. The excerpt also illustrates that Tuan speaks of writing in two different ways that often intermingle in his speech: as a metaphor to make specialized language understandable (“the words and paragraphs of Java”) and as one of game designer’s identities (game-designer-as-a-writer: “programming is a language to help build a world, a digital world. . . . You could say that it’s writing a world, literally.”)

The identity of game-designer-as-a-writer is closely associated to another identity Tuan spoke about: that of the game-designer-as-communicator. He appreciated that programming made him extremely detail-oriented and taught him

how, in communicating, to be “very exact and precise and how to think in a very precise and logical manner.”

It [programming] makes you aware of how much isn't said or understood in like the real world between people. . . . In a regular conversation between two people or a debate, there is always the underlying assumption of something and then the computer program takes it a step further. . . . You're arguing with a person and both of you assume something, assume that you're right. . . . And if there was a computer program, you'd have to start with nothing, build the common ground, not assume anything, no assumptions that, that there is a staircase underneath your feet. You have to verify that the staircase is there. . . . There is so much assumed when people talk; it used to bother me a little, but now it's—I kind of appreciate it. It's just—programming.

Associating with the persona of a game designer was not a smooth process for Tuan. Sometimes, he related differently to his classes, which produced a varying degree of association with the multiple game designer identities (game-designer-as-creator, game-designer-as-translator, game-designer-as-a-writer, and game-designer-as-communicator). An example was Tuan's ambivalence towards taking the many mandatory programming, math, and physics classes: although he understood and accepted that for becoming a game designer, he had to satisfy the requirements of the major, he found the classes and lectures both useful and boring:

You know the class lectures [math and physics] were kind of boring. I am probably not going to be particularly a fan of programming either, but I am going to be interested in the result that the programming allows me to do, the work, that programming lets me do.

This statement from Winter quarter differed from a similar statement at the beginning of Spring quarter in the degree of association with the game designer persona: when he started his Advanced Programming class, Tuan shared his observation that liking designing games did not save him from “actually completely lacking appreciation and

patience for acquiring the tools I need to do that [programming].” This dissociation with the game-designer-as-a-writer identity deepened over time and posed questions about what that meant for his life on the job, which put in question his ability to assume the identities of the game-designer-as-creator, -translator, and -communicator.

According to Tuan, his attitude towards his classes was not the sole reason he started doubting his choice of major: life events contributed as well. First, Tuan said that he realized that game design, while genuinely appealing to him, was chosen because of the promise of stable financial future and because of the relatively affluent lifestyle that he enjoyed while living with his uncle, who worked in the high-tech industry as a programmer. The choice was a result of, as he put it, “going with the familiar,” but might not be where his heart was. In mid-Winter quarter, Tuan shared this comment:

You know, my uncle—he doesn’t like programming. But he does it because it pays the bills, and he’s good at it, you know? That’s not necessarily what I want to do. I would prefer not to be sitting in a cubicle. If I am with a cubicle job, I will probably quit after awhile. I’m not—I’m serious. I just, that doesn’t appeal to me. I can’t sit. I’d want there to be windows.

Second, when his long-term, long-distance girlfriend broke up with him over e-mail in mid-Winter quarter, Tuan described entering a period of reminiscing and soul-searching, the turmoil of which made him question his life choices, including his decision of a major. Tuan turned to introspection and self-analysis, and was astounded to realize the degree to which he relied on predictability to create a sense of normalcy for himself:

School is like the constant throughout my whole life. I’m always, there’s always work to be done in school and reading and math problems and

designing a game, but then there's everything else around it that's sort of shaping my experience here, and it just—it used to be really predictable. My life used to be really predictable. I'd, I'd go about my day, I'd talk to my old girlfriend once a week, no college on the weekends, Skype, and then I'd hang out with my friends and not do anything special.

Tuan became painfully aware that he had been “bending myself backwards to maintain a broken relationship in the name of stability”:

It's got me thinking about a lot of things, like identity and who I am and that kind of stuff. Yeah, it's just. . . . It's just we were together for, for a while and after a while things started getting worse because we were too different. And a lot of the time I was with her, I tried to change a little, so she like me more and then afterwards I realized that people should not have to compromise who they are and ever since then I am just confused about it . . . who I am really. Or what I do or what is it, I don't know. . . . When I was with her, it used to be just a little bit comfortable and nice and now there is this . . . a lot of uncertainty and a lot of space around me.

More shocking to Tuan came the realization that holding onto the familiar had been his way of compensating for his self-labeled “nomadic life” (which he thought did not bother him): “I've had a nomadic life for a long, long time. Change, uncertain—uncertainty. I was OK with it. But it is so—so uncertain at times.” He wondered repeatedly in our Winter quarter interviews how far the inertia of going with the familiar informed his choice of a major and whether choosing game design was living up to his full potential.

Tuan soon seemed to have managed to make positive out of the negative. He shared that after the initial shock of the breakup, he slowly started embraced the uncertainty surrounding him and welcomed the opportunities for new experiences. For example, he explained that in Spring quarter he started taking martial arts classes as a remedy against heartbreak and was delighted that it introduced him to a different

crowd. Tuan's instructor, an ex-marine, challenged his students physically, almost to a breaking point: training included weekend-long hikes in pouring rain and sleeping in the open, exhausting midnight canoeing beyond the horizon line and cave exploring equipped only with basics for survival. Tuan described hating the cold, the mud, and the physical exhaustion, but loving the appreciation it gave him of the simplest everyday givens, such as running water and electricity, a hot shower, a comfortable bed. He started thinking of joining the military or working for government security agencies:

I like game design. I could see myself working in it, and you know, if all else fails and I end up as a game designer, I can still be happy. But I feel like I wouldn't live up to my potential because everyone tells me, it's like, "Oh wow, you speak so many languages. Why don't you go work for the CIA or the FBI?" So I think I can do it, and I just think it'd be a lot more exciting than the game design. I mean, game designing, design is quite a step up from regular computer science and programming and sitting in a cubicle. But working for the federal government would be a few steps up.

Tuan seriously considered those options; he even enrolled in a Mandarin language class to boost his qualifications for governmental work and discussed with councilors the idea of switching majors to a field that would bring him to the East Coast, such as economics. Tuan kept evaluating his options until the very end of the school year without coming to a conclusion: both staying in game design and joining the military or doing governmental work were equally appealing to him. In our final interview, Tuan shared his last thoughts on the subject: "I'm going to stick with this major because I can articulate exactly why I like it. But working for the CIA or the FBI is a dream I cannot let go of."

Tuan's and Layla's stories illustrated that whether students stayed with a particular major or moved on to the next depended to a large extent on how well they managed to reconcile the ideologies intrinsic in the disciplinary discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) with their own worldviews (Layla) and with their lived experiences (Tuan). Interestingly, when a student assumes the identity of a person majoring in a particular field, he or she acquires the discourses.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL POSITIONING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WRITER IDENTITIES

In this chapter, I discuss how the social structures and contexts larger than the participants' immediate educational environment affected the construction of academic identities. In doing so, I describe how the participants negotiated who they are in relation to what Canagarajah (2004, pp. 267-268) called

historically defined identities (such as race, ethnicity, and nationality) . . . [and] "ideological subjectivity" ([i.e.] our positioning according to discourses such as "responsible citizen/lazy immigrant/dependent foreigner" . . . which embody values according to the dominant ideologies in the society).

Because the study was not designed to capture ideological subjectivities, the data contained mostly instances of Canagarajah's historical identities, which I analyzed as follows.

The strong presence in the interview data of discourses around gender, race, and sexuality was both unexpected and important because the study was not designed to capture these larger social contexts. I expected the participants' noneducational identities to inform their identities as undergraduates and writers, but early in the process of data collection, I noticed a much stronger trend: the participants explicitly described their academic identities and writing as intrinsically connected to larger social structures such as race, sexuality, gender, and class. Their lived and educational histories were merely mediating that connection. As a result, I modified the already semistructured interviews to allow even more space for the participants to insert topics and discuss questions and issues that they perceived as important and that they related to their identities and their writing.

Although gender and race were discussed often in interviews, sexuality as a theme came up in only one student's responses, but did so prominently: it was the predominant theme in Huy's interviews. In this section, I discuss the theme of sexuality first and then dedicate the larger portion of my discussion to the two more significant themes of gender and race.

Seeing the World through Queer Eyes: The Case of Huy

Huy was open with me about his sexual orientation from our first interview. He described himself as queer and almost always wore a purple dress shirt. Huy understood queerness as a political stance, a worldview, and a lifestyle that transcended the constructs of gender and sexuality. He understood it would affect his personal life as much as his future professional life.

Without the pressures of high school conformity and heterosexual normativity of his immediate family and the Vietnamese American community in which he grew up, Huy felt free at Golden Sands to explore his sexuality. When referring to himself and to his new community, Huy applied the term queer. He placed this term at the intersection of sexual orientation and gender, and defined it as both a positioning that challenged the normative oppositions of male-female and homosexual-heterosexual as well as a term implying a collective, communal consciousness. Huy's understanding of the term was reflected linguistically in his speech: whenever he referred to himself as queer, he spoke in the plural:

A single person cannot be queer without the queer community. *Queer* basically means that we're not the typical norm. That's how we define ourselves. . . . Those terms [the normative oppositions] they kind of separate

people into different categories. [We] feel like it's not a good thing and so [we] break down that barrier and just have everyone be called queer.

Participating in a number of queer-oriented student clubs provided Huy with support and gave him access to the experiences and mentoring of members who had lived an openly queer life for some time. He particularly valued the preparation such meetings gave him for the type of attitude queer youth could face. Declaring himself openly queer upon entering college meant that Huy was learning as actively outside class as in class. The club meetings provided him with new perspectives and valuable knowledge about how to be and what to expect as an openly queer person: "it's just another learning process at this point like I learn about interpersonal and social conflicts, stories of people's lives and how it impacts the whole society." Although Huy was psychologically preparing himself for the professional life outside college as a queer young man, he did not see his being queer as a reflection on his academic learning experiences. In the following paragraphs, I present the connections that I discovered between Huy's private experiences and school.

Participating in the on-campus queer life exposed Huy to activities that informed and supported others. He volunteered heavily at the Queer Youth Center¹³ and gradually seized any opportunity to address and educate his peers (e.g., setting up information booths, speaking at public events). Over the duration of this study, he emerged as an activist and a leader, but those were identities that he purposefully fostered. During Winter quarter, like Layla, he took a credit-bearing leadership class

¹³ Pseudonym.

that would have allowed him to apply for a position as community assistant. Huy saw the position above all as an opportunity to reach out to people who would otherwise not necessarily be exposed to the political platform of his queer community. Huy entered the class as a queer person and brought with him his particular point of view of equality and normativity. Although he never reflected on the relationship between his activism and academic life, taking the leadership class did represent a connection between Huy's in- and out-of-school life in several ways.

Some of the links between Huy's identity as queer and his academic experiences came across in subtle ways. For example, he recalled that the writing assignment in high school about which he felt most passionate was an analysis of a short story. As part of the assignment, he had to explain what the author had tried to convey through the characters:

It was about a man who proposed to a woman and he wanted to marry her because then, he would have someone to clean after him and she wanted to marry him because she wanted to be married, basically. Just to get a marital status. And I argued that it was kind of, like an egoistic cynicism, like, people really just want to comply with social norms just for selfish gains. I used lit. devices to explain that.

Being queer seemed an additional analytical lens through which Huy evaluated the world, even during the years when his queer identity was a hidden one.

In another example, while discussing a reading for his Philosophy of Education class on how schooling constructs students as within or outside the socially prescribed norms, Huy explained that he identified with the outsiders because they were carriers of change:

Huy: because they know that's there's something wrong with society and

they're trying to really push forward a better society.

Dora: So in what ways did you do that in school?

Huy: Well, I think I kind of challenged the typical norm, I guess uhm . . . because like I'm Asian and people stereotype that as like if you're Asian, you're really smart in Math or Science. And there's that uhm. . . I'm also queer. I don't feel that plays a really important part in school, but people labeled me differently because I'm not attracted to women.

This quotation contains one of only a few instances in the data of ideological subjectivity—in this case, the ideological subjectivity of being Asian and being queer. It is also one of many examples of Huy's developing understanding of what it meant to be an active member of the gay community on campus and in society at large. That realization refocused Huy's awareness of and attention to ensuing social issues, which resulted in a more general interest in the social factor. At the end of Winter quarter, Huy explained that positioning himself as openly queer helped him developed a more intimate understanding of

how people are structured through school and how that's affected through social problems, gender, race, and class, and then sexual orientation. That helps me in some perspectives with what I learn. It's all about social construction. I am somebody who is acting outside the socially prescribed norms.

Identity Construction in Relation to Race, Ethnicity and “Belonging”: The Cases of Tuan and Layla

For the participants in this study, the connection between race, ethnicity, and identity was complex. Self-identification in terms of ethnicity and race was often closely associated with related concepts such as nationality and sense of belonging, which were often coupled with language and culture. These themes repeatedly emerged as contextual factors influencing the participants' writing and were visibly connected with features in their papers. Although the topics of race and ethnicity were

evident across all participants, they were particularly prominent in Layla's and Tuan's interviews. The following section offers a analysis of the interviews as a means of contextualizing the actual student texts presented in Chapter 6.

Layla's Struggle for Self-Definition

Among all the participants, Layla exhibited the most complex orientation towards race and ethnicity. In the class from which I recruited the participants, I identified her as one of only three African American students in the otherwise diverse class of 105 students. She had dark skin, was dressed in bright colors and bold patterns, wore oversized earrings, and had long hair done in thick tresses that were tied in a high bun. I soon learned that she did not associate with the African American community. Layla's ancestry had more to do with French and Spanish colonialism rather than the history of the US African American community: she described her mother as "half Belizean" and "half Creole" and her father as half African, half French Senegalese immigrant. Both her parents had secured good-paying jobs in the United States before they immigrated: Layla's mother was signed by a New York modeling agency, while her father came to the United States as an IBM employee after his postsecondary education¹⁴ in France.

The initial financial security of the family provided Layla with relative privilege and enabled her parents to expose her to their native languages and cultures. Layla spent much of her early childhood with her Belizean grandmother, who spoke

¹⁴ According to Layla, her father attended a university, but, because of the differences between the educational systems of the United States and France, she was not able to explain what degree he received.

only Spanish with Layla, and Layla became verbal first in Spanish. Later, Layla was sent to Senegal and spent the two years before elementary school with her father's mother in a household that spoke primarily the "African dialect" of Wolof.¹⁵ There, Layla attended preschool and French, the official language of Senegal, became the first language in which Layla learned to read and write.

Layla's life between two continents and multiple languages and cultures produced a complex understanding of self, which inevitably was mirrored in her papers (see Chapter 6). Growing up, she never felt she had to belong to a particular group, which allowed considerable space for self-definition but also produced confusion in childhood. She recalled an episode in fifth grade of taking the standardized test and needing to bubble in her ethnicity/race. "I didn't know what to bubble in"—Layla shared—"So I just bubbled in other." The available categories were not sufficient for her to define herself. Belonging to many places created for Layla a deconstructed notion of ethnicity and race. Layla harbored strong feelings when it came to self-definition, Layla said,

I don't believe in race. I believe—I believe in the human race, but I don't believe in race itself. I believe that everybody is human at the end of the day, no matter what color they are. So to classify people into a race is stupid to me, and until people get over that, there will always be racism, sexism, classism, that will always exist until people learn that race doesn't matter. So I don't believe in race. I don't really need that. . . . I just really don't analyze it. I just let it be.

At the same time, Layla was painfully aware of how prominent a feature her skin color was in people's thinking: society pressured her to fit in categories that her

¹⁵ "African dialect" was the term Layla used to describe Wolof.

personal history and beliefs defied. She admitted that “the majority of my race is equal to African American, I guess, or Black or whatever you want to call it,” but she vehemently fought the loaded nature of the label of race. Layla’s comments indicated that being ascribed to the African American community placed her at the extreme end of the Black-White racial continuum. She often equated “White privilege” with what she called “the center”— the place of power, of dominance, and, ultimately, of oppression. In her experience, African Americans were positioned as being the antithesis of Whiteness, which brought about such a profound othering that the word “race” sounded to her synonymous to “species.” Layla fought the sense of dehumanization of such othering by completely rejecting the concept of race. She explained how she answered to people who ask her to identify in terms of race: “Do you want to know my ethnicity? I can tell you what that is, but as far as what race am I, I am the human race. I am a person just like you are a person.”

As her answers to my opening questions demonstrated, Layla was more comfortable describing herself in terms of ethnicity, although the category was also complex: she considered herself all four—Belizean, Creole, African, and French. In Layla’s thinking, ethnicity was a set of social givens into which one was born and which became an integral part of one’s identity. In this sense, ethnicity has a much more deterministic nature than does race. It is also a term that, for Layla, was much more synonymous with culture: “ethnicity is basically cultures that are embedded within you, and there’s really nothing you can do about that. You were born into those cultures. You can accept them or you cannot accept them. That’s up to you.”

Layla embraced her cultures, not the least because they made her a much richer individual: “I feel that allowed me to grow as a person.” Even so, what she perceived as strength was sometimes became a nuisance for her. Because fitting neatly in categories was socially constructed as the norm, Layla’s ethnic background set her apart and provoked “billions of questions” that she believed she was expected to answer. In our interviews, she expressed outrage by the entitlement of others to question and define her. Layla pushed back on attempts to use ethnicity as another means of othering. She constantly questioned the status quo of the privileged to be the center, to occupy the unmarked social space. For example, Layla explained that her reaction, when asked how it felt to have such a diverse background, was to turn the question against the speaker—“It feels regular. . . . How does it feel not to be four ethnicities?”

Layla’s rejection of the markedness of certain ethnic and racial categories was not an indication that she wanted to be part of the group constructed as normal, or what Ogbu (2004) termed “acting White” (p. 3). She was keenly aware that she was being socially constructed as the antithesis to Whiteness and, by extension, she was marked as “something unusual, unnatural” (Layla). In our interviews, Layla argued with hypothetical opponents that even if she were different than the norm, markedness did not suggest deviant qualities; it indicated great value. As I am describe in Chapter 6, Layla actively sought ways of bringing her marked differences into the papers to claim and maintain ownership of them.

A telling example of Layla's understanding of being different as having worth and merit is her discussion of how she understood culture. Layla's definition of culture contained a historical component. She saw the individual as embedded from birth in discourses forged in rich sociohistory, much the way Bakhtin (1986, p. 84) discussed language (chains or strings of utterances) as historically positioned within and inseparable from its community, time, and place. For Layla, the individual was the unit carrying and transmitting culture. In her opinion, this involuntary participation in that rich sociohistory explained "why you are the way you are." For her, markedness was a necessity to possess culture. Layla described mainstream individuals of White, middle-class privilege as cultureless:

If they trace their ancestry back, it's just basically going to be White male Protestants. Do you see what I'm saying? Like, yeah, they came over from different countries and founded America, but it's like, where is the culture in that? . . . I feel they have history but they don't necessarily have culture.

Initially, I thought that Layla's thinking about the cultureless mainstream was prompted by the ubiquitous nature of Whiteness that might have become invisible to her because she was immersed in it. A more detailed look at the data, however, revealed that Layla was aware of this potential for invisibility:

I mean, I stand out for them [White people] because of my color. I am the "different" in the ocean of Whiteness. But that doesn't mean that I am less or worse. But they have the power to categorize me and label me as bad, as something unusual, unnatural. If they go to Senegal, they will be the ones standing out and I will be the default. They will be these same people, marked as "different."

This quotation illustrated Layla's understanding that the power of the default to name and create realities came not the least from its invisibility. The excerpt also revealed

of Layla's awareness that markedness in society was not an inherent quality of a particular privileged group, but that it was contextual. Because of that awareness, she perceived culture as a set of conditions that aligned the value of various elements of the marked and thus subverted the marked-unmarked paradigm. As an example, Layla described her father as someone who had culture because he belonged to various places of value:

My dad, he's half African and half French. I feel like when, like, when—if I were to trace back, like, his ancestry, I could see the culture, the different things they do, their people do to celebrate their culture and show their beliefs and show their morals and traditions. I don't see White people doing that. I just don't see them having a culture embedded in them, like, a big sense of culture.

This quotation spoke to Layla having seen her father's origins as deeply rooted in specific "beliefs. . . . morals and traditions" produced by a specific sociohistory. As I understood her, what Layla termed culture was a coherent symbolic system, the significance and value of which stemmed from its distinctiveness.

Layla considered culture as a much more meaningful common denominator than race:

Even if two people look identically the same, they might not necessarily have the same culture. Because—just because if you look at me, you might identify me as African American, it doesn't necessarily mean that I'm an African American.

The quotation illustrated Layla's state of mind for most of the first quarter of the academic year: Layla's understanding of who she was clashed with the African American identity that she was assigned by her social and educational contexts. Her struggle to fight against this categorization had a long history that started before her

arrival at Golden Sands. Speaking of her high school experiences, Layla explained that:

[In high school] I was never just a typical Black girl, because—because I was one of, of a few, a few, a handful of African American students in my magnet program, because I went to a magnet school. . . . Our own magnet school was only 100 people. Out of those 100 people, maybe—it was three Black people. Like, two Black girls, and one Black boy. . . . Most of the people that I knew that (*sic*) were African American were not in the magnet. They were more—they played sports and stuff like that.

This quotation was a representative example of the sentiments Layla expressed during the Fall quarter: whenever we talked about her relationship to the African American community, she stressed on the differences rather than any similarities. She perceived any pressure to fit in as an attempt to erase those differences and redefine who she was. Speaking generally, she shared her belief that, “when you change somebody, you take away who they are. . . . As people, we really don’t have anything but our identity.” Losing her identity under outside pressure was a real threat to Layla because she believed that identity formation contained an involuntary component. For example, speaking of the microcontext of her family, she stated that it influenced her as a person, that “shaped my identity, but not by choice.”

Layla’s family context set her on the path of active citizenship and social justice orientation. Coming to Golden Sands gave her the opportunity to develop the activist side of her identity: she joined a social justice oriented college on campus through which she got involved with Habitat for Humanity, took leadership classes, and spent Spring break rebuilding New Orleans. Not the least because she was admitted through EOP Bridge (“the way the university recruits minorities”), Layla got

interested in the issues of non-dominant student populations. The African American group, she informed me, represented “less than 0.001% of all students.” The miniscule number of African American students and her appearance, which placed her into that group, made Layla feel visible on campus. On the one hand, that visibility as a member of that group made it more difficult for her to distinguish herself from that group. On the other, being placed in such a small group gave her the opportunity to speak up, within as well as outside her texts, against racism from a place of power that gave weight and credibility to her voice.

Layla was conscious of the different ways racism permeated campus:

That number [of African American students] says volumes about the campus—the climate on campus. [Golden Sands] has the reputation to be not racist. But what about the numbers? There are not even enough people to [create] an African American community!

As Layla became more passionate during Winter quarter about the “African American cause on campus,” she started seeking explicit ways to associate herself with that community. She joined a few student clubs for Black students, researched the African American sorority on campus and, upon determining that it is “not [a] legitimate” sorority, she reached out to the Delta Sigma Theta sorority at a nearby university. Layla began to see the category of Black as less restrictive because it did not connote common origin or history, and, at the end of the Winter quarter, she accepted the label. The antagonism between being categorized and the right to self-define did not disappear completely, but Layla found ways in which to work around the complicated situation. For one, Layla utilized the ability to cross social borders

and cultural boundaries by enacting context-appropriate versions of herself, depending on the context.

The flexibility that she acquired while being raised between two continents and four cultures was a form of cultural capital that Yosso (2005) called “cultural wealth” (p. 76). Second, Layla’s initial resistance to being labeled stemmed from her opposition to what she perceived as deterministic forces. As she completed the journey of affiliating herself, Layla realized that she exercised agency: she was the one to make the choice to associate with the African American community to be able to speak on issues that were important to her from a place of authority and power.

Layla went through several stages of rethinking her racial belonging before accepting the label of African American. At first, she rejected it and fought against it. During Winter quarter, she accepted membership into the African American community at the level of joining student clubs to expand her professional network and accepting the label of Black as a less restrictive term. Towards the beginning of Spring quarter, Layla sought openly affiliation with the African American group at a level that went beyond local recognition (student clubs)—she decided to pledge at a nationally recognized Black sorority. Eventually, she identified fully with the African American community, stating that, “I bubble in African American because it’s what I consider myself.”

This process of positioning and repositioning produced an identity and sense of self that was inscribed on and reflected off Layla’s body. It also affected her conceptualization of knowing: for her, learning was experiencing. As she said, “You

cannot learn from books; you learn from other people. That's why I love to travel. My brain absorbs better if my body experiences it." This embodied way of learning affected Layla's writing. She described the secondary materials available to argue her standpoint as "limited" and "univocal" because they were nonrepresentative of her background and experiences. Speaking of the restricted subject positions with which the writing context provided her, she stated,

The voices of the minorities are still not there. So to go in the way the teacher wants you to go, it's like you're removing yourself, your individuality from the paper and from your writing, which in the long run is going to end up hurting you more than it's helping you. Because wherever the spirit cannot go, the body cannot either. It is difficult to imagine myself, an African American in this world [the university]. There is such silence in academia.

The last remark represented Layla's metaphor for nonexistent voices, which indicated nonexistent subject positions.

Tuan's Struggle to Find a Sense of Belonging

The theme of race, ethnicity, and belonging was heavily represented in Tuan's case. His life circumstances exposed him frequently to new cultural, educational, and even home environments. Tuan's life before college was a string of changes and adaptations, of painful and hopeful new beginnings, and struggles to gain full membership. He was reluctant to talk about his past. Until our sixth interview, Tuan did not narrate the story of his life, of living in Germany with his Vietnamese parents, of relocating to the United States at a time when he was going through a rebellious self-definition phase, of being shuffled between family and extended family across different states until he finished high school. Discussions touching on who he was

(identity) required him to think through difficult questions of ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and race that, for him, had no simple answers:

I was born in Germany! That's the thing: in Germany, in Europe, it's [identity] been more based on nationality. Here it's more based on ethnicity. I have noticed that. . . . In Germany you would say, "Oh, yeah, I am German," because in Germany you know what it means to be German—you are a German citizen.

In contrast, in the United States, the geographic origins of Tuan's family defined him as Vietnamese. He was placed in the Vietnamese American ethnic group, which, in Tuan's experience, had a particularly complex sociohistory in relation to the American mainstream to which he did not relate.

Tuan was bothered by having been assigned an identity according to his ethnicity. Like Layla, he found the concepts of race and ethnicity too politically and ideologically charged to be useful. In our initial conversations, Tuan refused to accept that determinism of having "the box. . . .ticked for me":

I don't divide the humanity up too much. I just think we are all people. I wouldn't judge a person—I would judge them by themselves, not in relation to whatever else is out there. And here, I think here people sort of push me to think of myself more as Vietnamese from Germany.

Tuan did not wish to be considered different or to be singled out in any respect. Tuan consciously developed the persona of "someone who can blend in anywhere."

Paradoxically, his amazing skill of "adapt[ing] to whatever . . . situation comes forward" was a result, he admitted, of having had to navigate the unfamiliar so often:

I mean, Germany was, was fairly easy. I was born there—it was my native language. I think when I first moved to [the United States] and started eighth grade, that was a bit of an adjustment. Well, for one, they don't really give nearly as much homework as in Europe, at least not in Germany. . . . I spoke the English I learned in Germany and that was very standard English, but then

the school I went to had a lot of slang language, but I got used to that. And then after eighth grade, I moved to Colorado, but transitions have been fairly easy for me, I didn't have great difficulty. In terms of friends, I am, I didn't hang out that much with other people in high school. I don't know why, but I didn't feel the need to hang out with these other people for some reason.

Not attaching himself to places and people seemed to have been one of Tuan's coping strategies to his frequent life changes. Another strategy seemed to be the way he guarded his privacy. Guarding his privacy might have been one of the reasons, he shared, why he did not like talking about his past: he expressed doubts that "people can relate" to his experiences. In his mind, those lived experiences separated him from the rest of his peers.

Blending in did not always provide Tuan with a sense of belonging. Even as a legitimate, full member of a particular group, Tuan felt that his status was of a stranger who has gained acceptance. The example he gave was of his language abilities: he was a native speaker of English in the eyes of people unfamiliar with his background, but he connected stronger to his first languages (Vietnamese and German). With this example, Tuan illustrated how his frequent life changes and adaptations came coupled with the unsettling sense of "being both an outsider and an insider."

The awareness of always being somewhat different might have contributed to Tuan's ambiguous attitude towards belonging. On the one hand, Tuan seemed to understand his otherness as a sign of his worth as an individual with unique experiences. On the other hand, he described a longing for stability and normalcy that he tried to achieve through settling into the routine of going to classes, spending the

evenings playing computer games with people from his dorm, and talking to his girlfriend in Colorado once a week. Tuan described himself as somebody who liked his schedule to be predictable and his life to be without surprises. During the whole Fall quarter, he described himself as a simple person with a simple existence:

I feel like I am a very primitive person compared to other people. I, I, I go after basic needs, you know. I am like, "Oh, I am hungry," or "I want to go have some fun," and "I want to relax." I don't, I don't sit there and consciously think about my identity. . . . I don't feel the need to stand out much, but usually where I go, I just I put a smile on and I face the world, I just I don't think about it too much.

This quotation contained a hint at the coping strategies Tuan used in the face of the frequent changes in his life: constructing himself as somebody who fit anywhere required general detachment and superficial involvement from the present and environment that he eventually would have to leave behind. Part of being someone who blends in meant, for Tuan, not to be "pulled out of the crowd." Over the period of this study, this strategy was demonstrated in expressions such as "wish to fit in" and "be part of," as well as his increasing association with "the American kid next door." Speaking of his relationship to American-born peers, Tuan stated, "So, how I see myself, I guess, I mean I might as well be an American. I might as well say I am an American, because I don't see how I am any different from any other American kid."

Tuan also held on to some elements of previous experiences that provided continuity. For example, he found safety in predictability, which included attempting to maintain a somewhat dysfunctional long-distance relationship with his high school girlfriend. At the beginning of Winter quarter, his this component of Tuan's stability

crumbled when his girlfriend broke up with him. His long-distance relationship was not ideal, but he liked the comfort of it being one stable element in his life (“just knowing what the next day, the next week, the next month is going to be like”). He described the sudden change as shaking him more than he expected:

I and my girlfriend broke up. I think I just—It’s just been a little different. It got me thinking about a lot of things, you know. Just outside of school. It’s got me thinking about a lot of things, like identity and who I am.

Tuan’s simple life was thrown into chaos when he realized that for the sake of keeping his relationship afloat, he had been trying to change “so she likes me more.” The breakup left him “confused about who I am really.” Tuan felt the uncertainty of the situation even more strongly (the situation became more visible to him) because it coincided with the time in the quarter when “stuff like math is getting harder. Physics is getting harder too. We have quizzes and homework.”

But the discomfort of the situation came with a positive side as well. In the interviews, Tuan reflected on how the breakup provided “a lot of space around me.” Trying to readjust to the uncertainty helped him realize that “there is so much out there . . . drifting around”:

Now it’s like, “Oh, I don’t know what’s going to happen this weekend. It might get crazy, it might not, or I might leave town. I might go snowboarding in Sacramento.” It’s—that’s the kind of uncertainty I’m talking about, just not knowing what the future is going to bring. . . . I feel like there’s a lot of potential for greatness.

That potential for greatness, he explained, was one of the main reasons why he did not want to be associated with EOP Bridge—it was a closed society of selected

individuals treated preferentially by the university. Throughout the whole academic year, Tuan skipped as many EOP Bridge activities as he could get away with.

That wish to belong and be recognized as a member guided Tuan's choice of major: he enrolled in game design, hoping that the combination of computer skills and proficiency in several languages would get him a CIA job. Meanwhile, he saw his meandering life story as potentially problematic and casting doubt on his US "membership." This doubt was one of the main reasons why he started considering joining the army after college: he would be recognized as a patriot and would experience less scrutiny.

CHAPTER 6: WRITING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WRITER IDENTITIES

This chapter examines how the participants in this study strove to assume the writer's persona required for producing successful academic writing in a particular class and how the identities with which they entered the class obstructed or enabled a successful transition. Before investigating the issues of identity that affected the participants while they were composing their papers, I examine the construct of academic writing as it emerged from my analysis of syllabi and class assignments. I then discuss the analysis of the written documents produced by the participants in conjunction with the discourse-based interviews accompanying them. In those discourse-based interviews, the participants reflected on their thought and writing processes and explained their decisions around positioning and language use. Because their personally held views, internalized social constructs, and interpretative frames were constructed through the interaction between the self and the set of contexts in which the student and the self were embedded, an examination of these contexts is needed to understand student identity.

Role and Definitions of Academic Writing in and for Individual Classes

The participants in this study had wide-ranging class schedules (see Table 2) in terms of times and disciplines. Writing assignments and writing instruction varied from course to course, and each reshaped and redefined for the participants what academic writing meant. I first report on the variation within the definitions. Then, I examine the role of writing as a tool for socializing students academically and for rehearsing the use of disciplinary discourses. Last, I provide an example of how the

participants' appropriation of disciplinary ways of thinking and valuing reshapes and expands students' understanding of disciplinary writing and transforms writing into an act of identity.

The data suggest that few of the disciplinary classes provided explicit writing instruction or support. An exception was Philosophy of Education, one of the reading- and writing- heavy classes that provided some writing support, but it was primarily the Core writing classes that taught composition explicitly during the Fall quarter. Despite the four participants having taken different Core classes, they received a relatively coherent idea of what academic writing is because Core faculty was staffed through the writing program at the university. The writing program had a strong view of college writing and writing pedagogy that produced a close-knit community of instructors, a coherent approach to writing instruction, and relatively uniform definitions of academic writing. In syllabi for the Core writing courses, the concept of what constitutes academic writing, if articulated, was usually presented in the sections describing the goals of the various courses. The definition was further elaborated in the prompt of each writing assignment.

Analysis of the syllabi and writing assignments within the Core classes, supported by the class observations I conducted, revealed that academic writing was assigned several characteristics. First, it was defined as a process of constructing an argument through multiple drafts. For example, instructions from a Writing 2 class from Winter quarter explained that students should “revise the larger structures and overall strategies, including paragraphs, revise smaller sentence level style and edit

and fix the grammar, usage spelling and punctuation errors” (syllabus). Second, academic writing involved examining evidence and counterevidence from multiple reliable sources, analyzing and evaluating the multiple positions articulated in these sources, and constructing a well-justified argument in which the writer aligned himself or herself with one of the evaluated positions. For example, instructions from a Writing 2 class from Spring quarter advised students that while drafting their essay, they should

try to describe the facts. (1) What you and your audience need to know about it. Then talk about (2) how to understand it, the theory behind your point of view. In college we are mostly concerned with making sense of something, with understanding. The third goal is (3) to act to do something about it. In a way that goal is political. It means we have to make our world better. (syllabus)

The third characteristic of academic writing was that it is embedded in and arises out of social activity. The following quotation is taken from a different Winter Quarter Writing 2 class:

Four primary tools of inquiry and exploration are essential to our work in this course: essay writing, peer workshopping, analytical reading, and class discussion. Your engagement with these tools will help you. . . strengthen your knowledge and command of the principles of academic essays. . . . Additionally, you will participate in weekly writing workshops designed to help improve the style, content, and structure of your written work. (syllabus)

Pedagogy employed in all of the Core classes taken by the participants assumed that writing is acquired through the act of writing. As a result, students were provided with ample opportunities to write: they were required, over a 10-week period, to produce five to six academic essays, each consisting of at least two drafts, to maintain

a weekly journal, to produce in-class writing on a discussed topic, and to engage in writing activities to create material for the essays.

This relatively uniform definition of academic writing accounted for the comparatively small variation within and across the participants of their understanding of expectations in the context of writing classes. For example, Tuan described the academic writing he did for his Fall quarter writing class as “always [having] some sort of central thesis or idea that the rest of the paper tries to support or refute, but in my opinion, any academic paper, in essence, an academic paper is an argument of some sort.” Similarly Huy described academic writing for his Fall quarter writing class as “having structure,” “be[ing] focused on specifics,” and using “[textual] sources to support our argument.” Guang stressed repeatedly that to build an argument, one needed to provide “solid textual evidence” while “convey[ing] an idea through various examples and then tie[ing] it all in together.”

Although classes the participants were prepared for a certain kind of writing by their writing course, their other courses provided little opportunity to engage in composing academic papers. Math and science classes rarely required students to produce any writing, and when text was involved in assessment, it usually took the form of multiple-choice tests. Classes within the Humanities and Social Sciences, such as Philosophy of Education, Introduction to Feminist Studies, or Introduction to American Studies used writing in the assessment repertoire, but outside the take-home midterm and final exams, texts were usually produced in class in one sitting. For example, in Philosophy of Education, each lecture ended with a 10-minute quick-

write assignment on a quotation or specific question. Texts produced on demand under time constraints in disciplinary classes (as opposed to Core writing classes) did not allow students to engage in writing as a process (i.e., to produce multiple drafts). Producing papers in one sitting makes little space for development and argument, and usually leaves no time to pay attention to essay form.

In-class writing, although not ideal and no matter how short the allotted time, provided students with some opportunity to engage in a dialog with the discipline and to exercise their use of disciplinary discourses. As such, the quick-writes represented an important part of the socialization process of the students into the field of knowledge. Although the faculty members did not expect answers to be formally structured in any way, their feedback on student papers had a double focus. The instructors commented on sentence structure and punctuation, as well as on whether course-specific vocabulary was used and whether the answer was complete (i.e., the instructors sought evidence that the students were using the appropriate disciplinary writing conventions to demonstrate their knowledge of primary sources).

This reading-writing connection has been explored in research on knowledge making and identity construction in highly textual environments, such as academia. For example, Goldstein (2003) stated that through engaging with a narrative, the individual acts upon himself or herself to construct his or her own subjectivity. As individuals acquire knowledge of, identify, with or distance themselves from the position or argument with which they are presented, they acquire a richer repertoire of subject positions to construct their identities. On the other hand, Goldstein observed,

exposure to new texts influences opinions and worldviews and, in the process, changes the users of these texts. In my reading of Goldstein, the texts affecting the reader have a dual role—on the one hand, texts serve as tools for shaping the self; on the other hand, texts become the context within which the self is shaped. Goldstein gave unequal consideration to the two roles. He focused on how the subject is constituted by discursive practices, the basic assumption being that “when a subject engages a narrative, the subject is transformed by that narrative” (Goldstein, 2003, p. 230). Goldstein called the potential of a narrative to construct subjectivity *ontological narrativity*.

Evidence of ontological narrativity can be found in the participants’ ever-evolving understandings of what writing was. In Chapter 4, I described how students slipped into and experimented with the different identities provided by the majors they explored. As part of that process, the participants incorporated their own definitions of writing new literacies and the new ways of being, acting and valuing into what it meant to write. For example, at the end of Fall quarter, Tuan conceptualized the audience as a passive entity. He was instructed to write an academic paper with minimum ambiguity: Tuan thought of interpretability, which I would attribute to any text, as a writing flaw that has the potential to weaken the argument. Once he had embodied the identity of a game-designer-as-a-writer, his views of interpretability changed:

[while writing] the ink has to stick to the paper, otherwise it won’t be able to read it . . . once you read it, that’s where the words do not stick to the paper. That’s where the words are interpretable and that’s where I can put, um, thoughts that could be interpreted and that allows the reader to come in and in

a way be a co-author of that paper. At that point the words become ideas. . . . That can be the same with games too. . . . Apart from what you see, those things can become . . . ideas too. . . . Just like in writing. It's not your baby any more. It's its own person.

This quotation illustrated how Tuan's thinking around the construct of audience had evolved from a passive entity to an agentive receiver of the text that activated their own meanings together with those of the author. In addition to embracing interpretability, Tuan introduced the notion of interactivity to his understanding of writing: through interacting with what he wrote, the audience gave his text a new life independent of the author's intentions. Such an understanding of audience is different from the construct of his Fall writing classes, in which the role of audience was discussed as something to predict and to address or meet.

These changes in the definition of writing occurred near the time when Tuan declared game design as a major and began thinking and behaving like a game designer. In the interview from which the quotation was excerpted, Tuan explained to me interactivity and interpretability as basic notions of game design. These parallel developments support Ivanič's (1998) and Ivanič and Camps's (2001) view of writing as an act of identity in which the writers align themselves with available, socioculturally shaped "possibilities for selfhood" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 28), when subject positions represent the writer's standing relative to the dominant practices and discourses of the context, as well as the values, beliefs, and interest that they embody.

Key Writings

I identified the key papers examined in this chapter after analyzing how the participants spoke about their writing. The discourse-based interviews concerned

writing that the participants considered significant in two ways: first, the papers were high-stakes items that they constituted a high percentage of the final grade for a class, and students described being personally affected by the prompts, the papers' content, or the writing process (i.e., writing these papers evoked strong negative, positive, or mixed reactions for the students). I added a third characteristic for identifying the key papers: in some instances, reflecting on the papers produced personal realizations or meta-awareness that the participants were able to verbalize in the interviews. In sum, content analysis of the students' spoken words revealed three dimensions of importance of the key papers for the students: (a) high-stake papers, (b) personal reaction (positive or negative) to the writing task, and (c) importance for the student's meta-awareness. The papers discussed in this chapter were written for courses whose explicit goal was to teach writing (e.g., Writing classes, Core classes), and for those courses that were situated within a particular discipline/field of study but were writing-heavy¹⁶ (e.g., Leadership class, Game Design class).

High-stake papers describe papers such as midterms or finals that contributed a high percentage towards the final grade. All participants were required to write high-stakes papers at one point or another during their involvement with the EOP Bridge program. Layla, who was interested in classes from the humanities and social sciences, and Guang, who took writing classes throughout the academic year, wrote multiple high-stakes papers for courses in every quarter. Tuan's and Huy's Winter and Spring quarters, on the other hand, were mostly devoid of writing longer than half

¹⁶ The bulk of the final grade came from those papers versus multiple-choice exams.

a page: in the courses these participants took, they produced mostly short-quiz answers and occasional five-minutes in-class writing.

The second dimension concerned the participants' personal reactions to the writing task, including contextual factors, such as the subject matter of the class, the prompt, the particular topic of the paper, the required format, and the perceived subject positions available to the writer to author himself or herself. Those personal reactions could have been positive, negative, or mixed, but had to have an impact on the writing process to be considered in this category.

Papers involving a reaction allowed me to gain insights into the identities with which the participants entered a class and the subsequent identity negotiations that took place. These texts revealed the clashes and continuities between the writer's persona required for the paper and the participants' identities. For example, reading Layla's final paper for her Introduction to Feminist Studies through the emic lens provided by the interviews revealed how the identity negotiations in the class influenced her choice to position herself as a particular kind of leader, politically engaged person, daughter, and budding feminist (examples of the paper are discussed later in this chapter).

Papers that triggered the students' meta-awareness produced an "Aha!" moment for the participants. In the process of writing a paper, the students sometimes arrived at a meta-awareness (e.g., about the topic, the class, the writer, the university, the world outside) that contributed to them becoming conscious of the deeper political processes and meanings embedded in ordinary occurrences (or what I call political

consciousness). The papers in this category allowed me to articulate how the larger social structures and subject positions were implicated in the writing process. They were also the papers that allowed the participants to articulate implicit and subconscious links and truths related to the particular subject at hand, to the writer’s self and/or to the larger world. This qualitative change that occurred in the students’ consciousness produced meta-awareness, or learning. For example, Huy never questioned the validity of the scientific method until he realized that when certain experiences are rare, they are classified as anecdotal—beyond scientific proof. Writing the paper on the scientific method made Huy recognize that “when you are too much of a minority, you are invisible.”

I analyzed the student-identified key papers through the lens of these three dimensions and tried to categorize them. Although they were distinct, the dimensions were not mutually exclusive and they often overlapped. As a result, even student writings that appeared to belong to one particular dimension often contained elements of the other two. Because the purpose of this study was to investigate the intersection between identities, educational contexts, and writing, I initially examined only those papers that I identified as being at the intersection of all three dimensions (see Table 7). Later, and as explained in Chapter 6, I revised the criteria slightly so as to be able to include a paper from Guang.

Table 7. *Three-Dimensional Key Papers*

Student*	Quarter		
	Fall	Winter	Spring
Layla	AS class (midterm)	Leadership class	--
Guang	Core writing class	--	--

Huy	Technology and ethics (Writing class)	--	--
Tuan	--	Game design (final)	--

Note. * For full texts, see appendices B, C, D and E.

Layla Brings Activism, Race and Gender into Her Key Papers

Reconciling the “Successful Writer” with Sense of Self

The Academic Skills class was situated at the intersection of identity and academic preparedness. Its prompts encouraged students to make explicit connections between themselves and their identities out of school and the school subject matter. In a way, the students were expected to be able to seamlessly bridge their identities as undergraduates with their identities outside of school. If those two identities were contradictory, students were supposed to switch strategically between them.

The essay discussed in this section was written as part of Layla’s midterm for Academic Skills, a first-semester class. It meets all three characteristics of a key paper. First, Layla singled it out during a Fall interview as an example of a high-stakes paper in a high-stakes class. In her words, the paper “perceived [her] in a negative way.” Second, the paper revealed Layla’s identity because she shared that the agent and activist in her “felt the need to own” the essay, despite her aversion to the topic. Last, the experience of writing the paper and verbalizing the writing process in discourse-based interview led to a revelation that strengthened Layla’s impression of the class, the university in general, and affirmed her understanding of herself and what she termed her “worth as a human being.”

During Fall quarter at Golden Sands, Layla was obliged to participate in EOP Bridge during her first academic year. She spoke often about that requirement and the negative effects it had on her and on her academic trajectory. EOP Bridge was

conceptualized as a pathway for underprivileged students into higher education, but Layla's individual and (from how she describes them) traumatic experiences of fighting against categorization and for the agency to self-define clashed with the articulated purposes of EOP Bridge: being grouped into an underprivileged group looked to Layla like covert racism. As a result, Layla developed an aversion to the EOP Bridge-mandated classes. She found the experience of going through the two-unit Academic Success class particularly painful, because she found the content offensively elementary and interpreted the attitude of the instructors as an unnecessary exercise of power.

Layla's papers written for the Academic Skills class, if read word for word, did not reveal the aversion she had to the class. However, in our discourse-based interviews, where the participants discussed particular papers, Layla pointed out elements in her papers that contained resistance to the system: the following analysis addresses one of Layla's Academic Skills midterm papers and is informed by a discourse-based interview. For her Academic Skills midterm, Layla was required to write four essays on topics that she described as being so "unimaginative" as to make the whole exercise "torture." The assignment of this particular paper was clearly highly upsetting for her: she felt "denigrated." The prompt asked students to

[e]xplain all the steps to create a weekly or a quarterly time management schedule. Illustrate your understanding of this process by including an example of a well-planned weekly or quarterly time schedule. Then explain the challenges that you are experiencing as you juggle all of your assignments and personal interests this quarter and how effective time management skills can help you be a more successful student.

The lexical choice in the prompt revealed a few embedded assumptions.

"Challenges" and "juggle" suggested the assumption that students had difficulties

reconciling their school schedules and their personal interests. The text also assumed that students were overwhelmed by their workload, because of which they were asked to describe how they “juggle *all* of your assignments and personal interests.” There was a stated conviction that the time management method taught in the class was helpful. Layla insisted that, worded as it was, the prompt asked students for a confirmation of this statement, not for an opinion.

Layla struggled to reconcile the need to write what she termed a “martyr story” with what she experienced as freedom. She spoke about college being the time of her life when she “took the training wheels off.” She felt empowered and enthusiastic to be part of on-campus life. She had an educational goal that was achievable in her view and she grew into the role of being an undergraduate with ease. In her midterm essay, Layla needed to find a way to tell a story that never happened while keeping her integrity as a person and student. Her dilemma became, in her words, how to write a “fake essay” without presenting herself as a “fake person.”

Layla produced a two-page essay that she opened with faux quotations from fictitious students supporting the assumptions that students were overwhelmed and lost. Layla attributed the problems expressed in the excerpts not to the EOP Bridge students, but to “people in general.” This expression represented a moment of resistance, as broadening the group of students affected by poor time management skills allowed Layla to undermine the importance of categories and labels. She discussed the opening of her essay as her way of “sneak[ing] in an implicit protest”

against this “widely spread stereotyping . . . [used to EOP Bridge] students’ detriment.”

Layla expressed annoyance at the pettiness of the assignment and struggled with demonstrating knowledge of a particular time-management method that she did not use in real life and about which she did not understand the usefulness:

We have time management grids. Which is a piece of paper that has times on it. It says “time management grid” at the bottom so we have to write in our classes—color it in. Put in our sleep pattern—color it in. Study time—color it in. Travel time between classes—color! That is so elementary it’s ridiculous. And I feel like that demeans our education. We are not going anywhere with [Academic Skills]. (For full transcript, see Appendix B; Layla)

Additionally, Layla described her Academic Skills instructors as utterly inflexible, making disagreeing with them a dangerous undertaking, and yet she had the urge to “be entitled to [her] own opinion and to stand by it [her own opinion].” She explained that she needed to insert in her essay that “[t]ime management is really not a necessity.” As a safeguard against potential harm, Layla inserted a time distance between her statement and her present situation by adding “in high school” at the end.

Careful positioning like the example above gave Layla some freedom to be herself. Besides being risky, this double-voicedness (Bakhtin, 1984) was difficult to sustain, so Layla used another tactic in the introductory sentence to the thesis. Understanding the absurdity of needing to disguise her meanings, Layla turned to ironic hyperbolic exaggeration. In the sentence, “Coming to college has given me some experience and practice with time management and it has been a great help in my life,” Layla, for the first time in her essay, left the distancing third-person narrative for the first-person perspective. It was also the place where she

acknowledged her resistance to creating and coloring charts on a weekly basis by referring to the pervasive practice of the class as “*some* experience and practice.” Having associated herself with the content of the sentence (by using I), Layla placed herself in a precarious position that can be counterbalanced only by an even bigger, positive statement. As a result, Layla “confessed” ironically and hyperbolically that “it has been a great help in my life.” She finished her introduction with another exaggeration: time management “really helps many students get their lives together.” The irony is highlighted by this hyperbole is her thesis.

A bigger problem for Layla was to write about experiences she had not had. Asked explicitly in the prompt to write about the difficulties she faced while filling out her weekly grids, Layla had to invent an answer. “My pencils keep breaking,” she joked in a discourse-based interview. In her paper, she listed a few invented challenges and concluded, “By completing the chart though, you prevent yourself from having to lose that time later on. With the grid, you’re prepared for almost everything.” The peculiar use of the word “everything” instead of “anything” was not a grammatical error—it was a resistance moment. Read with the knowledge that Layla spoke perfectly fluent Standard English, “you’re prepared for almost everything” gives the sentence a sense of being unfinished. The expectation of the phrase to continue with “but” signals an unspoken critique, one that was explicit in our interviews: Layla despised the time spent in coloring grids and considered it wasted time that could have been used for working towards her major. Academic

Skills prepared her for perceived challenges she would face as a student, but hindered her in the most important challenge—her academic progress:

I can be, instead of taking [Academic Skills] which is a 2-credit class, I could have been taking another class for my, maybe for my intended major. Which could have been a 5-credit class and I could have actually been learning something. Like right now for our midterm for [Academic Skills] we have to write. . . . how we feel about our time management grids. Like how, how demeaning is that? How do you ask a person “How do you feel about a grid?” and expect them to write an essay on it? And expect the essay to be good?

In the light of this excerpt, an earlier sentence, “Another difficult aspect of filling out the grid is incorporating enough study time into the week,” acquires a meaning of displeasure and critique.

Layla wrote this midterm paper when she was able to put together a few realizations stemming from experiences of having writing assignments for various college classes. As a result, reflecting on the paper analyzed above produced an “Aha!” moment for her. One of these realizations was discussed previously: Layla equated writing with self-exploration. For her, acquiring academic writing skill was a journey of “learning about yourself.” It was difficult, if not impossible, for Layla to separate herself from her ideas and therefore from her writing. As a consequence, Layla experienced the grading of her essays as judging her person: “How can you compare one person’s writing to another person’s writing? . . . It’s like they’re two different people! They have two different points of view! They’re coming from opposite hemispheres.”. Second, Layla found writing a formal essay so restrictive that she likened it to editing her persona out of the text.

Lea and Street (1998) noted that students may feel their personal identities are challenged by the discourses, genres, and writing norms. In response to these feelings, students may they become defensive and resistant. As Lea and Street (1998) expressed it, “Emphasis on identities and social meanings draws attention to deep affective and ideological conflicts in such switching and use of the linguistic repertoire” (p. 159). Layla tried for a time to “just write and be done with. Just fake it,” but found out that such a strategy was not sustainable on the long run. At least within her major, she needed to be able to project herself in her writing. That condition was part of her test of whether she could align her worldview with the underlying ideology of the classes she was taking.

Third, Layla insisted on being able to do more than “just insert” herself rhetorically—she was looking for personal validation. For her, the lens of personal history was not only a valid means of demonstrating understanding, but, in her own words, “is also [an act of] analysis.” Understanding allowed ownership of the paper on a deeper level, where “people can actually see you as a person from the paper without you having to say a word” (Layla). Speaking specifically of her midterm paper, Layla explained, “Even if they ask you, ‘What is your perception?’ it’s what you think their perception is going to be of what you think. That’s hide and seek. That’s double life. Where is my worth as a human being?” While verbalizing the experience of writing her midterm, Layla made the realization that verbalizing the writing process in discourse-based interview led to a revelation that

we’re writing to write how the university wants us to write so when people read it [the paper] there’s, they’re not seeing it through our eyes, they’re

seeing it through the eyes of how the university wants us to write. But that's not how it goes. Whenever you write, you can always throw a little bit of yourself into the paper, but you just have to make it so that it is cohesive with the rest of the paper. . . . I know it sounds sneaky to you, but I'd call it subversive. That's just how I stay sane.

In the paper analyzed above, I could see that Layla was putting her words into practice: whenever her personal opinion contradicted what she thought was expected, she incorporated her true thoughts by using irony and exaggeration as well as by disguising alternative meanings in her papers that required contextualization and reading between the lines to decode.

Bringing Race, Gender, and Identity to Writing

Whenever allowed by the class subject matter or the prompts, Layla's writing reflected her experiences of a person of color at odds with academia. Layla's papers for Winter and Spring quarters paralleled a particular identity she started to foster, namely that of a Black student who understood the world through action. In this section, I discuss Layla's nonacademic identity as a Black activist to provide contextualization for a key paper she wrote for a Leadership class.

As Layla became more involved with social justice issues pertaining to the African American community on and off campus, she started to accept her place in that community and gradually became more comfortable being associated with that label. Calling herself an African American was a strategic move on Layla's part. She shared, at the end of Winter quarter, that allowing herself to be identified as an African American strengthened her identity as a leader and activist by providing her

with legitimacy and authority in voicing social justice issues pertaining to that community.

Layla's extracurricular activities reflected her political engagement: she joined the African/Black Student Alliance (ABSA) for networking and "opening lines of communication," sought ways to join a recognized African American sorority, and she got involved with a student group planning an alternative Spring break working with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans. The alternative spring break, an alternative to one organized and funded by her college, was a student-led enterprise. The idea originated with the floor assistant of her dorm and another student, the community (college) adviser. The trip required planning and fundraising "more stressful than finals." Layla became deeply engaged with the issues around rebuilding New Orleans. On multiple occasions, Layla expressed social criticism by quoting widely known statistics, namely that only 30% of New Orleans had been rebuilt, out of which 23% was middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. While helping with Habitat for Humanity, Layla used any means possible to inform others about what she experienced. She blogged in real time and posted pictures on Facebook regularly to make the point that "the people or the places that always need the most help never get it" (Facebook post).

Social media was the first place where Layla started to merge her writing with her identity as an activist. Taking a Leadership for Social Justice class during Spring quarter strengthened that link. The purpose for taking that class was to gain a more active role in the undergraduate community: it was a required class for applying for

the position of community assistant (CA) at her dorm. The class facilitators acquainted themselves more closely with the students through students' writing. Because all CAs were selected from the class participants, composing the weekly reflection journal became a high-stakes endeavor for Layla. It was also a forum in which she engaged with topics that occupied her mind outside class (e.g., what leadership and social justice meant for her, how she connected her background to the idea of a leader) and as such, the writing, personal as well as emotional, provoked strong feelings and reactions. Here I discuss only one section of the quarter-long journal that Layla identified as key: she described that piece of writing as reflecting her strongest understanding of the intersection of race, gender, and identity (for a full transcript, see Appendix B).

Layla wrote the journal entry towards the end of Spring quarter. The text was produced in one spontaneous writing session without any rereading or edits. She did not correct nonstandard grammar, plug in the words she failed to incorporate while typing, or spell-check for errors. Layla shared with me that the topic was so close to her and her daily struggles that the words were coming faster than her fingers could type. Layla explained that she did not have the emotional strength to look at the text a second time.

We discussed the paper in our last interview after Layla had received feedback on it and had gained the distance needed to engage anew with the paper. The journal entry was only slightly over a page long, but the density of Layla's emotions when she wrote it was evident from the writing style and expressions. For example, when

she discussed the implications of being an African-American, she shared her SAT-taking experience in a run-on sentence containing emphatic language typical of colloquial usage: “I was in a room of more than 100 people, and I was the only African American in the room. Period.”

The sentence ending is indicative of how laden with meaning Layla’s text is. The discourse-based interview was illuminating of the depth of unspoken meanings behind the simple expressions. When I asked Layla to verbalize for me how it felt to be the only Black person taking the test, she provided an explanation that was consistent with the other ways in which she constructed herself as an activist: she discussed what Golden Sands needed to do to bring more African Americans into higher education and what changes to introduce in schools “to get people to understand the African American culture instead of just brushing it off.” As Layla explained it, the sentence in her journal entry contained an implied social critique, anger against “the current state of affairs in our schools,” and the passive attitude society adopted. Layla proceeded to explain how disappointing the low enrollment of African American students in Golden Sands was to her and how even more disappointing she found the measures the university was taking to retain those students: “Bridge was the way they found to bring African American students here and try to keep them here, so that’s why they have them sign Bridge contracts.” In her journal entry, Layla discussed the implications of the low enrollment of African American students for her:

As I’m getting older though, I finding ways to coupe (*sic*) with the struggle because I do realize that African Americans are enrolling in institutions of

higher education at lower rates, so the higher I go in my pursuit for knowledge the less likely I am to see people that look like me.

Interestingly, the reader grading her paper considered the statement above a mere assumption and corrected her stating that “[e]nrollment has gotten higher over the past years. It continues to get higher.” Layla reacted strongly to that comment: “We have the smallest percentage of African American students at this school! Even [XYZ University] has more African American students than we do. And it’s way harder to get into [XYZ University] than [Golden Sands] and I wonder why.”

The only other marks on Layla’s paper (apart from the final “Thanks for sharing” comment) was an underlined text segment explaining Layla’s high school experience of being the only African American female in her classes. “Are they trying to praise me for being *unique*?”¹⁷—she wondered. “First, this emphasis I am being atypical. Then correcting incorrectly my information. That’s rewriting my essay! No wonder I didn’t get the job.” Layla complained that the students who were hired after the end of the class were not able to take a stance:

A lot of the people they hired are pushovers and then when somebody brought this up [in class], the staff was very quiet. They didn’t have any response. There were a lot of the people that they hired are people that they know that they can manipulate really easily because they want certain people on staff, people that will not stand up to them, people that will not voice their opinions. So, really, in reality they really don’t want leaders. They want people that they can shape to be the type of leaders they want them to be. . . . If they [the moldable people] are going to be a pushover to you, they’re going to be a pushover to the next person and the next person and so on and so on. So what are you going to do when it comes down to the point where they’re a pushover to their residents and they can’t control their residents? Then what? And they [class facilitators] don’t have answers to those questions, so you know what

¹⁷ Italics indicate that the word was pronounced with a sarcastic intonation.

they do? They change the subject. They start talking about something else. I cannot be a pushover. Not on this issue. And I knew what I was doing, but I did it anyways. I am a rebel and now I am paying for it.

This interview excerpt was just a portion of Layla's reflective monologue. I let her speak freely because I purposefully opened the interview space to discuss issues about which the interviewees felt strongly. In the case of Layla, after the end of Fall quarter, our interview sessions became a space for her to reflect and articulate issues that were on her mind at the time. The discussion of this journal entry was illuminating for Layla in that she had an "epiphany," as she called it, that made her conscious of the political and ideological nature of how the university operated:

I feel like the only thing we really have control over is our identity. Attempting to shape you into a certain mold, um, not just confined to this class, you know. They [the university] are trying to silence the minorities on this campus.

Tuan Embodies the Identity of a Game Designer

Tuan's key paper was his midterm for his Winter quarter Game Design class. It consisted of a six-page comparison and contrast of three video games. For the first time, he spoke with enthusiasm about a writing assignment. He distinguished between his attitude towards his writing class assignments and the personal importance of his game design paper. In this section, I comment on Tuan's writing for his Writing class to explain which elements made his key paper different and demonstrate how he purposefully sought writing models after which to style his comparison-contrast essay.

Tuan wrote well-structured, clear papers for his Writing classes, and his writing skills were recognized by his instructor who, in an informational interview

with me, called him “the easiest student ever,” and added, “His progress was immense this quarter. But he came with a lot of skills that other students did not have. So I didn’t teach him. I just steered him. He had it all in him. The easiest student ever.” (Tuan’s teacher).

Tuan’s success in the Writing class was not aided by personal engagement with the prompts. He described himself as “apathetic” towards the topics of the papers. He perceived the class as “about skill and writing proficiency and steering a paper in the right direction” and described the papers he wrote as “mechanical”:

What I see from this is when you take out the words these could as easily be papers about another topic. Social arguments, logic, um, organization, um, and supportive evidence. I saw these papers as a test of skill rather than an idea, a principle.

To be satisfied with the quality of his game design paper, Tuan searched for the idea, the principle that would keep his audience’s attention. He perceived his fellow programmers or game designers as capable of understanding “what the game is about, the factual and the logical” if he wrote the text in the manner in which he used to write for his Writing class. But Tuan reasoned that he needed to be much more convincing if his audience was a game producer “who wanted to know why they should produce this game.” He described his writing class papers as lacking “a certain element of grace I need to capture the essence of the game.” Tuan considered the “essence” of any good video game to be its ability to pull the player in, immerse him or her in the world of the game world, and elicit “real human emotions.” Writing a multigame analysis for his game design class required from Tuan “a certain degree of elegance [in writing] to convey some of that emotion.”

As soon as Tuan realized that the skills provided by his Writing class were not sufficient to tackle his game design writing assignment in a professional way (“like I am a game designer, like I care”), he searched for writing models from specialized publications. Ultimately, he purchased a textbook, the introduction of which provided “the kind of language that conveys a great importance.” Tuan read out loud for me the following below, which I have reproduced in full length because it relates directly to his multigame analysis paper:

Since there have been games, there have been game designers. The names might have been lost in history, but at some point the first clay dice were found and the first smooth stones were placed in the pits of newly carved Mancala board. These early inventions might not have thought of themselves—inventors might not have thought of themselves as game designers. Perhaps they were just amusing themselves and their friends by coming up with competitions using everyday objects around them, but many of their games have been played for thousands of years and although the history stretches as far back as the beginnings of human culture, when we think of games of today we tend to think of the digital games that have so recently captured our imagination. (Fullerton, 2008, p. 1)

The sense of “great importance” that Tuan admired came, he explained, from the way in which the author contextualized digital games historically and categorized gaming as a deeply human activity. Tuan described the author’s “the feel of the language” as “convey[ing] the magic of games in the way that first kisses are magic or earning your first medal is magic.” He took that notion of magic to introduce his own argument in his paper:

The magic in games, especially computer games, is their ability to elicit emotion and promote player choice. By forcing the player to make choices, and go certain directions in a computer game, the player becomes invested in the game, due to the player’s need to have his choices and, by proxy, his character validated by the game. From here, the player’s decision will cause different reactions in the game, and thus elicit different emotions from the

player. While this choice/emotion mechanic directly affects storyline and ending, in other games, it changes the gameplay itself by promoting certain feelings over others. (Tuan; for full text, see Appendix C)

In this introduction to his paper, Tuan addressed the prompt indirectly by interweaving his understanding of what a good game was (“to elicit emotions”) with how eliciting emotions translated in the difference of playing style. Tuan’s multigame analysis followed the prescribed format for an academic compare-contrast paper that he learned in his Writing class, but he did try to emulate the “liveliness of the language” he admired: “It might turn out crap [laughs], but I feel like I owe it to myself to try to write a more compelling paper.”

Tuan’s interest and emotional involvement in writing the paper directly related to his emerging understanding of himself as a game designer. He called the paper “a much more personal argument” when he spoke of the connection between writing and a game-designer identity: “I want to be a game designer and to myself I think, you know, at least I need to be able to write a compelling essay about something I do.”

Although this midterm paper was the only writing assignment he had during the quarter, he shared that he felt much more compelled to write. He noted that his sudden heightened interest in writing coincided with him being able to articulate why he wanted to become a game designer:

Last quarter, I didn’t know what I wanted to do and I was just thinking to myself, I couldn’t—for all the other majors I’ve considered, I couldn’t nearly compel myself to come up with such a structure of arguments as I’ve been able to do with videogame design. And that’s why I think I’m going to stick with this major because I can articulate exactly why I like it. This time, while

last quarter I did it for the grade, but this time, it feels more like I've been doing it for myself.

Huy Discusses Science Ethics and Queer Identity

If Layla's papers examined how larger social frames such as race and gender were projected in her writing and Tuan's essay reflected his identity as a game designer as shaped by his immediate academic context, Huy's writing demonstrated the effect of personal frames, such as sexuality, on the construction of writers' identity. In this section, I discuss how Huy's self-definition as a queer young man had an impact on his writing. In Chapter 5, I unpacked Huy's notion of queerness as implying a collective, communal consciousness and showed how he embodied that plurality by referring to himself as queer in the plural. Here, I discuss further how being queer was reflected in a key paper that he identified.

Huy placed the term queer at the intersection of sexual orientation and gender. Emerging slowly as a young queer activist, he joined "the first ever frarority" (a student organization taking its name from blending fraternity and sorority) as a gesture challenging normative male-female, homosexual-heterosexual oppositions. Huy and the queer community on campus defied traditional gender norms:

Society basically pressures us into falling under a norm, which is basically how heterosexuality others us. So that's basically the norm now, whereas queer would be defining it as against that particular norm. There's nothing wrong with that, the society states there is something wrong with that.

Huy admitted that the political consciousness he gained from getting involved with queer life on campus was translating into new perspectives on knowledge, academia, and learning in general. He shared that his new belonging "help[ed] with

what I learn [in class].” Even so, he did not believe that his personal identification was reflected in his writing. He insisted that, “I do not write like a queer person. I write like an undergraduate.” My analysis of his key paper and the discourse-based interview that contextualized it contradicted his statement. Huy took writing decisions that aligned the text he wrote with his worldview and perspective. For example, the notion of being othered as abnormal (see the previous quotation) translated directly into the key paper discussed here.

Huy produced the discussed essay in mid-Fall quarter for a Writing class themed around ethics and science. Entitled “The World of *Gattaca* and Its Effects Upon Humanity,” the course was supposed to discuss, as mandated by the prompt of the essay, the ethics of science around genetic selection and modification. Complying only generally with the assignment’s guidelines, Huy opted to explore how the movie *Gattaca* portrayed the consequences of mankind’s quest for genetic perfection and offered an analysis through his own lens of what human value consisted of. He focused on how the relationship among the three main characters (Vincent, Jerome, and Irene) was “strengthened by their desires to disrupt the dominant norms of society.” The title itself provided a twist: while I initially interpreted the word “humanity” as a synonym for “mankind,” Huy explained that “it refers to what makes us human.” From the beginning, he framed his paper as an implicit critique of heterosexual normalcy: “[*Gattaca*] is about eugenics and a hierarchy that it can establish. But it could be metaphor about us [queer people]. Who is to say where they’ll stop?”

Making his essay about the “imperfects” who “are able to overcome the adversity set by genetic discrimination” (Huy) was only one aspect of how Huy’s nonacademic identity influenced his writing composition. Another example was provided by the following excerpt from his key paper:

Vincent is imperfect physically, but through ingenuity and deception, he is able to go on a space mission, which, supposedly, can only be conducted by a person with perfect attributes. Jerome lends Vincent his identity willingly, but at first they clash because Vincent is nowhere near “perfect.” Jerome hated the swap at first as, despite his perfect genetics, he is crippled and severely limited. Together they learn to give meaning to their tragic lives; Vincent takes on a new persona to achieve his dreams and Jerome utilizes Vincent’s success to justify his ironic misery. (for full text, see Appendix D)

In discussing the paper, Huy explained to me that the text was composed according to the paragraph organization instructions with which he was provided in class. He could not produce the handout, but recollected that “it was about organizing like cause and effect, or problem-solution, or description, listing, uhm timeline, things like that. But they are all to—writing the paragraphs like most important information first.”

Complying with this principle, Huy consciously decided to foreground “ingenuity,” which he considered a greater factor for social success than “genetic perfection.” Because of his chosen emphasis, he aimed rhetorically at undermining the initial personal clash between the characters in favor of underscoring that it was their physical imperfections that gave renewed meaning to each other’s lives. Huy explained to me that “basically I wanted to defend, to make the point that genes or life adversities they don’t make you abnormal. They make you different. But ingenuity matters.”

Thinking of the linear narrative of the plot of the movie, the instructor did not understand Huy's organizational pattern and requested Huy to rewrite it chronologically. The instructor's misunderstanding of Huy's organizational principle continued in the next two paragraphs. Because she did not recognize the organizational thought behind Huy's writing, she repeatedly insisted on seeing the sequence of events.

Huy interpreted the instructor's comments as disinterest in the reasons behind his composition decision. He repeated emphatically how "she doesn't want to get it!" even when he tried to explain in office hours:

Dora: What did she say?

Huy: That it doesn't work for an academic essay. [sarcastic imitation] "That's not how we structure academic prose!" [Sighs deeply, slows speech down] I don't want to be a drama queen, or a punk. I don't feel entitled or anything. I am just frustrated. I feel alone and misunderstood. Academia is a lonely place.

Articulating his experience of feeling disconnected and isolated in academia, was prompted by an e-mail Huy showed me that requested him to cut from a previous draft the following sentence: "The ones [individuals] that do not choose to have 'superior' genes would be disadvantaged and would eventually be ostracized in society, as depicted in *Gattaca*." The reason cited was that "[t]he connection is only proposed, not proven." Huy's reaction to the instructor's comment came from a place outside the movie and his paper. His frame of reference was much broader than the immediate educational context of the writing class and the prompt. Hinting at his minority status as a queer young man, he exclaimed, "What does she know of this kind of discrimination? It exists. I don't need proof to experience it. Why do I need

proof to write about it? [pause] When you are too much of a minority, you are invisible.” Huy left me with the impression that, in that writing class, he was fighting not only for the right to own his paper, but for his queer lens to be recognized as valid.

In this chapter, I presented the participants’ different stories to show how identity permeated the act of their writing. Layla’s and Tuan’s cases explicated the negotiations behind reconciling the “successful” writing persona with one’s sense of self. Tuan perceived the identity of a game designer as multifaceted and plural, and aligned himself, with various degrees of ease, with the different aspects (of the game designer as creator, as writer, and as translator). Layla consistently perceived her immediate educational environment as positioning her in unfavorable ways and searched actively for ways to resist occupying the unwanted subject positions. Layla used rhetorical means such as hyperbole and irony to comply with the assignments requirements while continuing to resist.

The chapter also explicated how belonging to social groups defined by race, gender, and/or sexuality affects student writing. Layla’s and Huy’s cases point to the influence of identities created through participating in such groups on the participants’ writing outcomes (i.e., the identities factored in major ways in the writing process). Whether or not students aligned themselves with the identities they perceived as needed to be successful academically seems to have been influenced by the degree to which students managed to insert themselves and their lived experiences in their papers. In turn, assuming an identity (of a game designer, for example)

sometimes changed the participants' definitions of writing to incorporate major beliefs from the disciplines. This give-and-take relationship demonstrated that writing is inseparable from student identities and that the relationship between writer and text is bilateral.

Guang: Academic Writing as a Personal Achievement

Selecting a key paper from Guang that met all three selection criteria proved challenging: while he had a sufficient number of high-stakes papers, he avoided speaking of his personal reactions to the writing tasks and did not indicate a moment of meta-awareness produced by composing a paper. Guang rarely took the opportunity in our conversations to reflect on where he stood regarding the content of his papers, making it difficult for me to discern his attitude toward the writing tasks. He would usually express neither particular enthusiasm nor adverse feelings towards his writing assignments. What seemed important for him was to complete the assignments the best he could to meet the instructor's expectations. Guang's pragmatic approach to studying was a pattern—he measured his success in a class by how efficiently he fulfilled the requirements to complete the class. Guang's focus on his completing the products for a class instead of describing to me the process of learning was probably the reason for my identifying no "Aha!" moments in our conversations about his writing. Since none of Guang's papers met all three criteria to be considered "key" as discussed above, I modified the third criterion and chose a paper that met the first two criteria and seemed to represent a personally important moment for Guang (albeit not a moment of "meta-awareness").

Guang's key paper, titled "Black, White, and Gray" (see Appendix E), is a four-page essay discussing the effects of Wal-Mart's policies on the U.S. economy. It is built on reused arguments and wording from a previous paper, titled "Consumer's Shopping Habits," excerpts of which I discussed in Chapter 4. The paper that I discuss here is the cover paper of Guang's ELWR portfolio, a means of satisfying the college's writing requirement.¹⁸ Guang's portfolio consisted of two self-selected papers he wrote for the course, the drafts leading up to them, and a letter from him describing how his writing skills had improved. The key paper analyzed below was selected from the portfolio because 1) as the strongest piece in the portfolio, it carried a lot of weight in a high stakes situation, 2) in a rare display of affect Guang labeled it his "best work", and 3) Guang associated with it the beginning of his understanding of himself as an academic writer.

Guang was the most reserved of the four participants in this study—he would rarely deviate from the immediate topic at hand or provide information about his personal reactions to writing. However, when he shared that the portfolio was successful in satisfying the ELWR, he spoke enthusiastically, calling it "one of my

¹⁸ Students accepted to Golden Sands who have not satisfied the ELWR upon admission are given the option to do so through completing a lower level writing class offered by Golden Sands' Writing Program. Guang's ELWR test identified him as a particularly unskilled writer who would require a longer sequence of writing courses than other "low performing" students and was consequently placed in a special two-quarter course. At the end of Fall quarter, the students in the course were allowed an attempt at satisfying the ELWR by submitting for evaluation a portfolio representative of their progress.

proudest” moments. He was particularly delighted with the response of his writing instructor to his request to submit a portfolio:

Talked to my Professor, she said she is going to support me. For some students, she doesn't support because she hasn't seen any improvement in the writing or in the English. So, she told me I sh... I have been a lot -- I have improved a lot. [big smile] I still have to take the second part [of the two-quarter writing course]. It's just, I just wanted to see if I could appeal so, so I can satisfy earlier. And she supported me. [pause] I improved, so that's good. (Winter quarter)

The improvement of which Guang spoke referred to his progress since he originally took the ELWR. To help me understand how monumental his writing achievement was in his eyes, Guang described in detail what an ordeal taking the ELWR had been for him. He recounted a “very traumatic” experience of reading an article-length text about “what we had to do to lie.” Attempting to answer the two questions related to the article turned into a “nightmare,” according to Guang:

They gives us a story, gives us a summary. We had to read it. So, while reading it I was kind of like they had a lot of big words and I was pretty lost I was like ugh-oh, I don't understand this. So I was reading it over and over again. So, and then later on I just made an argument in my essay and I liked it and I don't really had the time to do something. Should I think of ideas of ahm lying like to be successful? So my thesis was . . . my thesis was: to survive you need to lie. So. I tried to think of like facts to back it up, but I can't think of anything because we really had two hours, so I was just like rushing. I was like what can I think of? I couldn't really think of much.

Guang recalled that his confusion about the prompt turned into mental paralysis because he did not think he could or should ask for clarification:

I wanted to ask but I don't think so. It's on our own. It's individual. So if you don't understand the prompt, basically it's just saying we understand. It was, I can't, can't wake up, can't wake up my brain. [brief pause] No. English is acquired language. Because then I don't know how to construct the ... my essay. If I don't understand prompt, how am I going to write it? It's like what are they talking about?

Two dictionaries were provided for the test-takers and Guang had limited access to one of them, which added to his anxiety. His immediate thoughts, he recalled, were:

College... the vocabulary is really tough. Reading it will be tough compared to high school. My reading style isn't that great, isn't that high compared to other students.

Guang received 5 points out of a maximum of 12. Guang appeared to view his instructor's support for his portfolio as an enormous compliment after such a discouraging initial writing experience:

I saw the improvement. I learned a lot of... I learned many ways to write a better essay. I have improved, yeah. She [the instructor] told me I've improved. She's been working with us since the beginning of the first quarter so she knows how we write in the beginning from now. She said a lot of us have improved. Yeah – yeah, that's a good sign.

Speaking favorably about himself in the first person was a rare moment during our interviews. Compared to his lack of evaluative language in other interviews, Guang's words betray a great deal of personal satisfaction. As the excerpt shows, perhaps fearing that I might judge him as boastful, Guang presented himself as one of many students who had improved.

The quotations above, taken from a Winter quarter interview, are representative of two recurrent themes: 1) Guang often compared himself to other students and consistently expressed fault with himself, and 2) he repeatedly expressed concern with his command of the English language. Both themes are indicative of the identities with which Guang came to Golden Sands (he repeatedly presented himself as a self-conscious, hard working ESL student) and both themes were represented in the key paper as well as the discussions we had around that paper.

“Black, White, and Gray” is an essay, whose topic, Wal-Mart’s economic policies, was close to Guang’s professional interests. As an Economics’ major, he felt comfortable with the subject matter and terminology he had to use to build his argument (discussed in Chapter 4). Guang shared that the diminishing amount of unfamiliar concepts and vocabulary that he encountered in new texts was a true sign of progress that gave him encouragement that he will succeed as an undergraduate. During Winter quarter, he equated being a successful undergraduate with being an academic writer:

Dora: Do you think of yourself as a writer?

Guang: That’s what college is about. Writing essays, proving points, research, better English... Writing and reading and becoming a better thinker... Critical thinker...

For Guang, the key paper represented all of those qualities, but was especially proof of his “improving English”:

Look at this: “Wal-Mart’s mass expansion is a smart business strategy to lure consumers, because in ‘every seven days more than one hundred million Americans shop at Wal-Mart’, demonstrating the result of Wal-Mart’s easy accessibility (Fishman, 2006, p. 6).” See how smooth? The quote that you pick from, that you take out from the book has to back up your argument. You analyzed it because it won’t flow into your essay. Like one of the biggest improvements other than organization was integration of quotes, so like, integrating quotes in to my own analysis, like analyzing.

This quotation is representative of how Guang spoke of college writing: he was mostly preoccupied with adhering to the formal features of academic writing such as 5-paragraph format with clear thesis and topic sentences, APA-style formatting, logical organization of the argument, and supporting claims with “textual evidence.”

“Textual evidence” was a term that Guang coined to represent the references he makes to the secondary materials with which he was provided.

Using textual evidence to construct an argument left Guang with very few opportunities to incorporate knowledge gathered through his life experiences. He perceived these constraints as a “restrict[ion] from, um, expressing myself.” The second difficulty with academic writing that Guang reported was his perception that he should confine his use of secondary literature to the texts provided by the instructor. Discussing specifically his key paper he stated that

[t]hey had to be specific articles. And didn't you feel that it's okay to do research on your own and use *articles outside— uh, our professor said we couldn't use Wikipedia, we couldn't use anything else, except the [Wal-Mart] book. For our textual evidence. Yeah.*

A conversation with the instructor revealed that what Guang perceived as a ban on outside materials was most probably resulting from a misunderstood argument against using the internet as a reliable source. Real or perceived, the limitation on the use of secondary sources restricted the available points of view, or subject positions, for the students to use. In contrast to Layla, Tuan and Huy, who in similar situations experienced serious conflicts, even silencing, Guang remained largely unaffected. He considered it as his responsibility to meet the criteria for passing the class, his only comment to me (from Fall quarter) being: “It's possible to do that, or they won't ask it of us.” Guang kept this attitude throughout the academic year.

Guang experienced some “culture shock” during Fall quarter when he realized that he needed to learn more about writing for academic purposes. His response to the challenge was to apply himself even harder and to become the college writer that he

thought he was expected to be. Probing what coping mechanisms Guang used to align himself with the perceived writer's persona produced revealing information about managing potential conflicts. When he needed to reconcile opposing views Guang would choose putting aside (within reason) his opinion and would comply with the demands of a class.

Dora: So if you disagree with a particular opinion of the book, how do you back it up?

Guang: "However, blah, blah, blah." My opinion.

Dora: Yeah. But isn't your opinion just that, an opinion?

Guang: Yeah. You can't really back it up. That's why you have their [the authors of the secondary sources] opinion and their part, and then you put "However". You change it around. So that's how my professor wants us to write when you disagree with something. But you can't really back it up.

Dora: How does that make you feel?

Guang: It doesn't really bother me. I don't really like to disagree because it goes around, it gets more complicated. I cannot do complicated yet. So I just agree with it and yeah. Unless I really disagree with the opinion, the... Like child abuse, I would.

This interview excerpt suggests that backing off from his stance has also produced benefits that outweighed any possible discomfort: it allowed him to scaffold the task. By "not do[ing] complicated" Guang simplified the assignment to in order to master writing at his own pace.

Guang admitted that even his willingness to mold himself onto the requirements would have limits. How would he, in a potential case of unavoidable conflict, justify his need to disagree? Guang's answer, given in Fall quarter, was revealing both of how he perceived the role of the undergraduate writer, and of what he thought the elements of a good essay were:

Guang: As writers – I guess we’re researchers, kind of, or like – like the professor says we’re researchers for the – the UC system. So, um, it’s just bringing our opinions out and giving what we think is right or wrong.

Dora: Are you a writer?

Guang: A poor writer.

Dora: A poor writer?

Guang: Yeah.

Dora: Why?

Guang: They [his colleagues] are better writers. Because it’s just the – the style they write. Um, their style is more – it’s more – it’s like – it’s a higher level of what I am right now. They use words, like transitional words and, um – in their essay. And their paragraphs. They just know what to put into like their opinions and how they word it. Their diction, kind of. They have really diction.

In later interviews Gang added complex syntax, transitions, “higher level words,” and “efficient editing” to the list of academic essay features.

One of the reasons why Guang considered the key paper his “best work” was because it provided evidence that he mastered “complicated,” he embodied the writer-researcher, and he acquired the right “diction.” In his key paper he used knowledge obtained in other classes (including during high school) to neither agree, nor disagree with the primary text. Instead he argued that Wal-Mart’s policies shouldn’t be viewed as black or white, because they are both black and white with “gray areas.” His thesis presents a multifaceted argument:

The effects of Wal-Mart are not always black and white; while some people solely benefit or lose, there are gray areas where they both benefit and lose. To a certain degree people are being positively and negatively affected by the Wal-Mart effect, but in a socially just community people with different roles should be able to experience fairness and have human rights.

The interweaving of the economist perspective of losses and profit with the social justice theme adds an additional layer of complexity. In addition, when the primary

source provided insufficient substantiation of his argument, Guang ventured quoting two external sources, albeit in passing. Last, he privileged passive, hence in his view impersonal, sentence structures that allowed him to foreground the use of “textual evidence.”

Interestingly, when I asked Guang to point explicitly to the features of his paper that represent the most important advancement in his writing skills, his answer went beyond the paper:

It's in the reading, reading essays. Without those your grade will never improve, if you don't improve, if you don't know how to write with the structure of introduction, thesis, body, topic sentences that go back to thesis and the conclusion of tying them together. Then your, your essay won't be at the UC standard level.

It was not until Spring quarter that Guang said more confidently that he finally felt like a writer. Even then he called himself a mediocre one and highlighted for me his areas of improvement. He credited, however, this key paper as the point in time when he “got hopeful” that, writing-wise, he would succeed.

Guang's case posed for me the question of to what degree, if any, students who appear to write their papers in a more disengaged, mechanical manner “own” their papers. How far do they get engaged with the writing process? How far is the construct of the author connected to, and possibly modeled after, the writer? Guang's writing suggested that it might be possible for the text instead to shape the identity of the writer. Guang inevitably brought elements from his academic and non-academic identities into his essays, but more evident than that was the opposite process, that of him shaping himself after what he perceived as an academically successful writer's

persona. In so doing, he was relying on messages he gleaned from multiple sources such as writing-specific EOP Bridge classes, the work of “better” students, writing tutors, even TAs from non-writing classes, but most importantly from the feedback of his writing instructors.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: IDENTITY AS AN INTER- /EXTRATEXTUAL DISCURSIVE PROJECT

This dissertation investigated how four non-dominant students attending Golden Sands University negotiated their first year of undergraduate studies while constructing, enacting, and remaking their identities as writers. I investigated how the forging, rehearsing, and remaking of academic identities happened in the participants' immediate academic context and on paper. I examined the nature of the connection between the academic context and the textual artifacts students produced, as well as in how far participating in activities requiring usage of disciplinary discourses helped students assume the type of persona needed for being successful in their majors and in writing. Analysis of what affected students and their talk about themselves as writers directed me to investigate the impact of larger social contexts (race, gender, sexuality) on student writing. This chapter consists of several sections: it presents (a) a review of key themes and summary of the major findings; (b) a discussion that connects the findings to deeper, theoretical underpinnings; and (c) implications for research and practice.

While examining the role played by the immediate academic contexts (disciplines and disciplinary discourses, majors, and EOP Bridge) in the participants' understanding of themselves as writers, I found the students experienced complex power relationships as they attempted to build their identities in institutionally acceptable ways. One of the contexts that the participants experienced as particularly restricting was the program through which they were accepted at Golden Sands—

EOP Bridge. Although the EOP Bridge was not a focus of this research, I found that the program played a significant role in how the participants understood themselves as undergraduates and as writers. Because they were admitted through EOP Bridge and were mandated to attend EOP Bridge-specific activities, the participants' experiences at Golden Sands were filtered through the lens of being EOP Bridge students.

Layla, Tuan and Huy reported that, initially, they were welcomed as full members of the community. However, they experienced a gradual and subtle repositioning by EOP Bridge from agents to passive receivers of the pre-assigned identity of the EOP Bridge student. The three participants reported that the monolithic identity of the EOP Bridge student was forced onto them in a process by which the EOP contract they were asked to sign played a prominent role. In the opinions of the participants, the contract was an expression of unequal power relationship: as they signed the contract, they agreed to identities that appeared laden with deficit qualities.

Guang was the one participant who experienced the contract as an invitation, and additional motivation, to “apply [himself] more.” His belief that he would succeed through hard work and his focus on bettering his academic skills did not clash with the perceived message of the contract. For the rest of the participants, however, the contract was an example of what Gee (1996) called a dominant discourse—it had the capacity to assign social goods, to rename, and to define what is normal. Given the institutional authority that EOP Bridge claimed in the document, the norms that the contract established became naturalized (i.e., they became norms

of the university itself rather than solely the position of one particular program). Thus, prescribing identities were potentially problematic within and beyond the Bridge program as these identities became part of the academic environment that mediated what Bakhtin (1981) termed “ideological becoming” (p. 341). Ideological becoming refers to how humans build their complex system of ideas and concepts that embody their whole selves. Because “the individual consciousness . . . lies on the borderline between oneself and the other” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293), the identity of the EOP Bridge student, which some participants experienced as an articulation in deficit terms, became another hurdle for them to overcome.

I found that EOP Bridge exerted a direct influence on the participants’ academic identities, but it had a less direct impact on their understanding of themselves as writers. Academic contexts, such as disciplinary discourses and the majors students chose, had a much more significant impact on what and how students wrote in their papers. The participants in this study attempted to take on the disciplinary discourses and, by doing so, they attempted to assume the identities inherent to these disciplines. If the participants could not reconcile the ideologies (Bakhtin, 1981) intrinsic in the disciplinary Discourses (Gee, 1998) with their own worldviews and lived experiences, they moved to another major. For example, Layla switched majors several times as her worldview did not align with the worldview she thought was embodied in the discipline. On the other hand, Tuan’s wish to become a game designer only strengthened as the number of specialized classes grew. The detail-oriented nature of programming a game in turn influenced his appreciation of

the everyday objects around him. In other words, the analysis revealed that choosing a major was to a large extent a process of self-exploration. Interestingly, the participants' attempts to assume certain academic identities influenced directly the arguments and stance of their papers. The most telling example is of Tuan's key paper, the writing style of which he modeled after a specialized book from his field. He did so solely because, as he put it, "I feel I owe it to myself to try to write a more compelling paper."

The data analysis yielded some unexpected findings. It showed that larger social structures (outside the academic context) that shaped the participants' understanding of themselves (such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality) interacted with nonacademic identities shaped through lived experiences and personal histories, and were traceable in the participants' writing. This finding was unexpected because the study was not designed to capture and examine those larger social structures. Their influence on students, however, was significant enough to be detected in data collected for this study. For example, Layla struggled throughout the period of the study with her socially imposed membership in the African American community with which she did not associate. As she negotiated this positioning, her self-perception changed to full acceptance of the label "Black." In the process she reflected on the insignificant size of the Black community on campus and the ensuing social consequences. Layla took the "cause of the African American community" as her own by helping with the rebuilding of New Orleans, by considering African American Studies as a major, and by seeking traditional Black sororities to join. This

personal journey was heavily present in her papers both in the form of shared life experiences and more subtly as particular stances on issues of equity and social justice.

As Layla's example illustrates, I found that most of the participants in this study (Layla, Tuan and Huy) associated with their papers on a personal level. I discussed student texts to illustrate how deeply these students' identities were implicated in the writing process and, as such, influenced directly and indirectly students' writing outcomes. I also discussed the case of Guang, which suggested that the participant's writing was influenced more by the requirements of the writing tasks than by the identities with which he entered the writing task. It appeared that Guang was consciously and purposefully attempting to assume a writing identity assembled from the messages circulating his educational context.

Whether forging one's writing after one's self, or molding oneself onto the contextual demands, the participants' identities as writers were negotiated in the interaction between students' sense of self and the influences of various contexts within which students operated.

Implications for Research and Theory

This study revealed that the academic identities and writing identities are constructed through influences ranging from educational and lived histories to race, gender, and sexuality. Most of the participants in this study experienced the act of writing as highly personal. Layla was the most articulate in describing the clashes between her personal views and the opinions represented in the prompts and the

secondary materials. How she saw herself constructed in terms of race and gender brought about conflicts and the need to negotiate, and sometimes compromise, her identity. An important implication for writing research is that, to understand how writing is produced, future studies should consider not only the processes influencing students within their immediate academic context, but also the larger social structures that affect students' positioning in their texts.

This study contributes to theory by demonstrating the potential of an identity lens to reveal and understand the personal connection between the writing self and the written products. It allows for a deep and nuanced attention to the processes that come to bear on students' understanding of themselves. As a useful heuristic for analysis, I present my understanding of the mechanism of identity construction in writing in the form of an identity model. This model is both theoretically and empirically derived, as it connects my theoretical framework to the findings.

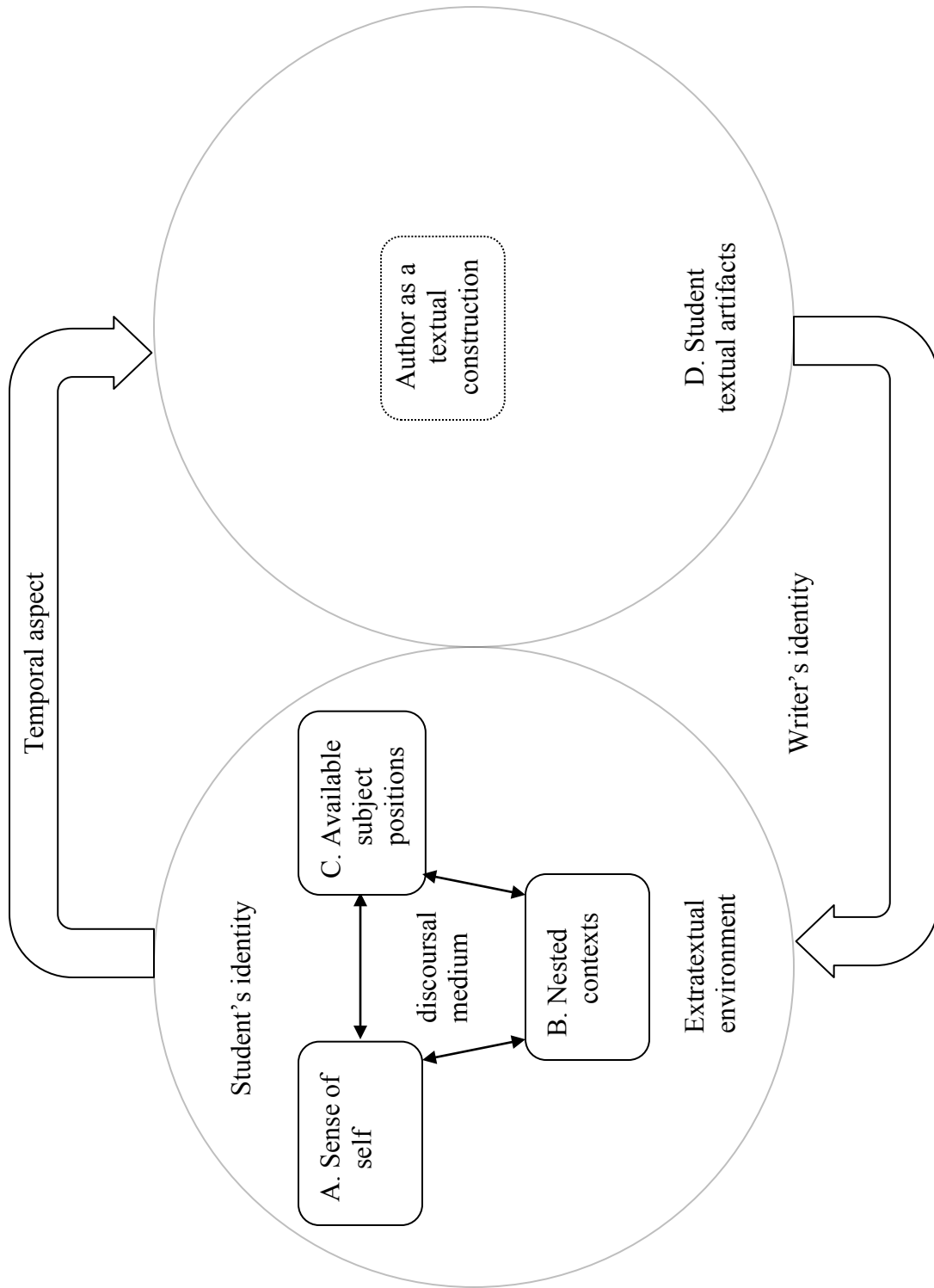
The themes I discussed in this study demonstrated the wide variation within the data: the participants' diverse life circumstances and educational influences made different impacts on their identities and writing. The representations of self, however, when examined across the participants, revealed a shared mechanism of identity production: as the participants interacted with their nested contexts, they constructed representations of self that were constantly changing in response to their educational and lived experiences and their positioning within the larger social structures of race, gender, and sexuality. For example, interacting with the Discourses (Gee, 1998) of his Environmental Studies class, Huy modified his ideas of conservationism and of

utilizing natural resources. At the same time, engaging with the social aspect of environmentalism seems to have been aided by Huy's emerging consciousness of how becoming an openly gay activist repositioned him in his local contexts and in society *et large*.

Identity, including identity in writing, manifested itself through these changes as a discursive project of incessant assembling and reassembling of the participants' selves. While there were many factors that influenced how identities were constructed, I compile here the most pertinent ones in this model of identity production (see Figure 1). The process of forging writers' identities emerged to contain three main dynamic and interrelated elements:

Element A: The sense of self, including writing self, with which the participants came to their current academic context, assembled from previous schooling and lived experiences. For example, Guang started his first college year conscious of the fact that he failed the writing requirement and was conditionally accepted. He attributed his low test performance to his high school preparation. For his strong learning habits and work ethic he credited his family background. He considered himself primarily a Mandarin speaker and was not completely comfortable with the English language. These are some of the factors that contributed to Guang's sense of self at the beginning of Fall quarter.

Figure 1. Writer's identity as inter-/intratextual discursive project.



Element B: The nested contexts within which participants operated. Relevant to writing, those contexts are the university and its structures, the disciplines and the discipline communities, the individual classes and teaching faculty, and staff associated with the classes (instructors/teaching assistants/tutors). In addition, larger social structures within which the individual is situated, such as race, gender, and sexuality, influence the writing outcomes. These nested contexts affect different aspects of the participants' lives; hence they are not always directly impacting students' writing and academic performance. For example, Huy and Layla were constructed as people of color, a positioning that Huy did not dispute, but Layla kept negotiating. Both of them brought over elements from their experiences to their writing (see Chapter 5). Guang and Tuan related that in certain contexts they experienced pressure to meet stereotypical expectations of excelling in math and science because they were Asian American. In Guang's case, an average performance on a test or paper resulted in a heightened awareness of failing short and in increased apprehension of the academic preparation with which he came to Golden Sands. In turn, the affects he suffered interfered with his writing confidence.

Element C: Subject positions available to the participants *a priori* or negotiated through the interaction of Element A and Element B. While assembling a writer's identity, the participants have to work within the constraints, or subject positions, afforded by the contexts. In constructing their identities as writers, participants position themselves in certain ways. As they interact with the contexts and react to the messages emitted by those contexts, they reposition themselves

accordingly and, by that action, trigger a response from the contexts. In the process, some subject positions might be lost and new ones created. Although it could be argued that the subject positions are a characteristic of the nested contexts, I chose to discuss them separately because their presence or absence changes the relationship between Element A and Element B. For example, in his key paper Guang was expected to either agree or disagree with the prompt. In previous papers he chose the subject position of supporting the opinions of the primary sources. As his writing skills and confidence rose, he created a new writer's subject position and argued for a more holistic approach to the complexity of the Wal-Mart effect.

As these three elements interact, they influence and reposition each other. It is in this interplay that identities are constantly forged, rehearsed, and remade. This give-and-take relationship is easily revealed through the drafting process, in which both the writing self (Element A) and the reader (Element B) negotiate the subject positions that the author should occupy (Element C). Guang, for example, considered the instructor's comments for every consecutive draft, but reserved the right to assess for himself whether to oppose the primary argument. Taking the subject position of a supporter changes the type of the instructor's responses, and so on.

The constant reevaluating the task at hand and the subsequent repositioning occur within and through the medium of discourse. I view the individual and the nested layers of contexts within which he or she operates as semiotic systems, or texts. Within discourse I distinguish between two other terms I use—textual and extratextual. *Textual* refers to the realities created by students in their texts.

Extratextual refers to the realities in which participants operate outside their papers. For example, if I agree with Tuan that programming a game is an act of creating, hence an act of writing, then his finished product would be textual. The act of writing the game influenced Tuan's extratextual existence: he gained a new appreciation for the genius of small everyday objects such as a screw or a staircase.

In his key paper Huy created a textual construct of a writing self (an author) who recognized the potential for discriminatory practices in a world like *Gattaka*'s. The instructor's feedback (Element B) affected Huy (Element A) in that she asked Huy to reconsider the validity of his claim. Huy had to consider the options of gathering and presenting more evidence, or of taking another subject position (Element C). In other words, each draft of Huy's paper became a new context which affected the following step. But it was also the medium through which this repositioning occurred. Because of this dual function I identified the student textual artifacts as a separate element in the model (Element D).

The recurrent act of positioning and repositioning clearly links the construction of the author in a text to the extratextual writer (i.e., identity is inextricable from student writing). These *intra-/extratextual* interactions within and between the different contexts in which the individual operates give identity a temporal dimension. Moreover, this continuous movement reveals identity to be fluid and moldable. In other words, being constantly in the making, identity becomes a longitudinal discursive project. This identity model suggests that the temporal

dimension of identity must be taken into account in constructing one's research, and that capturing identity requires a longitudinal study design.

Implications for Practice

In this section, I revisit the findings to offer suggestions for improved policy and practice. The implications considered are applicable to organizations that support students' learning such as learning services, academic support, reading and writing labs, and tutoring services. For example, I found that most of the participants in this study felt estranged from the EOP Bridge program despite its aim to aid and support non-dominant students. Because the participants considered some EOP Bridge articulations and subject positions as problematic, they perceived the program as constructing them in deficit terms. The EOP Bridge contract, specifically, appeared particularly problematic for three of the four participants. The students described the contract as a one-sided agreement and opined that having to promise to apply themselves frames them as uncommitted. Programs such as learning services or student academic support might reexamine the language used in their documents for constructs that could affect students negatively.

Making students' university admissions contingent on the EOP Bridge-mandated courses added to the participants' understanding of the program as overly authoritative and limiting. Programs such as EOP Bridge could consider repositioning themselves as less intrusive by highlighting their academic support functions. The EOP Bridge program at Golden Sands had a dual role of providing academic instruction for high-stake classes and of offering supplemental learning and

counseling services. These two roles are seemingly contradictory, if not incompatible; in the eyes of the students I interviewed, the academic development function of EOP Bridge represents high-stakes situations while its service function requires a relationship build on trust. In addition, EOP Bridge appeared to be an administrative gatekeeper by virtue of its authority to determine whether students fulfilled the conditions in their “conditional” admission.

The participants in this study assembled their identities as writers from elements within as well as outside the particular classes for which they were writing. This process suggests a need for writing instructors to assess holistically who their students are and to engage the whole student in the text production. I am aware that no instructor can afford the time to get to know their students with the same depth as I did, but they should be aware that multiple dimensions to their students’ identities exist, even if they cannot become knowledgeable about the details about how each of these dimensions impact each student. Students’ writing needs should be understood against a background of institutional practices, power relations, and identities. Instructors could help students unpack the influences that affect their academic writing (and performance in general) as well as raise their awareness of how ideologies work and how discourse is implicated in the process.

Writing classes often stress that students should use textual support when constructing their argument (i.e., using secondary texts to align with or distance themselves from other authors’ opinions). For some of the participants in this study, arguing one’s opinion through the opinions of others appeared oxymoronic. The texts

suggested to students for selecting textual evidence did not always represent the experiences and opinions that students held. In such cases, because inserting personal opinions was discouraged, the participants in this study experienced a silencing of their voices and devaluing of their lived histories. Students would benefit from writing classes that give them more opportunities to insert themselves in their papers and allow them to build an authoritative voice when narrating and reflecting on their personal experiences.

Facilitating access to the disciplinary discourses becomes an important factor in promoting students' success as well as opening the discursal spaces for alternative viewpoints where students can insert themselves. The disciplinary discourses and the genres that serve those discourses are situated and modified by factors such as departmental practices or individual preferences of instructors. In terms of creating writers' identities, this information is significant in that instructors, for example, play a critical role as mediators between students and the disciplines. As they present their own version of a discipline, instructors have a relative power to leave space for exploration and representations of students' own points of view. A step in that direction could be for instructors to give students prompts that are not only culturally appropriate and relatable, but are also socially relevant and explicit in discussing race, gender, and class.

To truly value non-dominant students' perspectives, academia must allow these students' voices to participate in the larger (disciplinary) conversation through changing its norms and through opening up to different ways of thinking. Accepting

the personal as academic means changing the ideologies underlying the disciplinary discourses. Such a shift in the current paradigm, if at all feasible, would occur over a long timespan. In the meanwhile, in terms of pedagogy, writing instructors—and instructors in general—should be less concerned with teaching formal text features, and more concerned with being mediators to facilitating students’ socialization into the norms and discourses of academic writing. Instructors, like researchers, need to view student identity as relational and situated, and as pertinent to the academic experiences of undergraduate writers.

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APPENDIX A: EOP BRIDGE CONTRACT

Educational Opportunity Programs 2009-10 Bridge Contract

The staff of the Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP) congratulate and welcome you to the University of California, Santa Cruz. Participation in the EOP Bridge Program is a condition of your admission to UC Santa Cruz. Successful completion of the EOP Bridge Program is required in order for you to continue your enrollment into your sophomore year. Print a copy of this contract for your records.

In accepting this offer of admission, I agree to:

1. Complete the requirements of my Conditions of Admission, including the successful completion of the EOP Bridge Program during my freshman year.
2. Attend EOP Bridge summer program (late June 2007) and participate in the new student orientations, meetings, and programs as required by the EOP staff.
3. Participate in the new student orientations, meetings, and programs as required by the EOP staff.
4. Enroll in and attend writing and mathematics tutorial programs as required by the EOP staff throughout the academic year.
5. Attend advising appointments as required by the EOP staff throughout the academic year.
6. Follow the recommendations of the EOP academic counseling staff, college academic preceptor, and academic department adviser regarding course selection throughout the academic year.
7. Enroll in and complete a set of courses based on college requirements, placement exam scores, and Bridge Program requirements during fall quarter 2007 and winter quarter 2008.

During any given quarter, the EOP Office will have access to all records pertaining to my academic standing, including course enrollment and any changes in my academic program. I understand that if I do not comply with any one of the above items, my admission to UC Santa Cruz can be withdrawn.

APPENDIX B: LAYLA'S KEY PAPER

Time Management

"I don't have enough time to fit everything into my schedule." "I feel overwhelmed by all this work I have." "I feel like I'm going to have to pull an all nighter tonight." These general statements are made by so many students on a daily basis. People in general have a huge issue with getting everything on their list done; this is especially true for students. Time management is really not a necessity in high school; students don't really see that with a little organization, they would have so much more time to do things. Coming to college has given me some experience and practice with time management and it has been a great help in life. Every week in Oakes 15, we fill out a weekly ^{To Do List} time management sheet and turn in. Though sometimes filling out the chart might bring certain difficulties, it really helps many students get their lives together.

Creating a weekly time management grid always begins with filling in your classes. Classes come before anything else because the rest of your daily routine revolves around your classes. Once all your classes are filled in, than based on that you can fill out your wake up time and your breakfast time. After filling out the first part of your day in the time management sheet, then comes the second part of your day. You can then start by filling out the second part of your day, such as your lunch, dinner, study time, rest time and sleep time. If you keep a steady time throughout your schedule for most of your activities, that can allows you to maintain a better balance in your life. Balance is really what time management is all about, without balance people's lives become chaotic.

Juggling everything you have to do is difficult let alone adding in all the things that you want to do. While filling in your weekly time management chart, you start to realize that sometimes the stuff you want to do have to take a backseat to the things that you need to do. Problems tend to come in during this time. Life should never only consist of work, so therefore individuals' wants are an important part of their weekly do(s). Another difficult aspect of filling out the grid is incorporating enough study time into the week. Having study time is as important as attending the class itself. Sleep time can also be a part than can give you difficulties. Many people don't sleep at the same time every night. So many difficulties come to the surface while you're making your time management chart. By completing the chart though, you prevent yourself from having to lose that time later on. With the grid, you're prepared for almost everything; you know what you need to do and when you need to do it.

The time management grid is one of the most helpful tools you can have in college. Being in school, every aspect of life is important, though sometimes so things might take a backseat to others. These aspects can range anywhere from studying to sleeping. If one does not have a good balance between everything they need to do, that only makes success that much harder. Good time management skills can make a student's life so much easier because having things in order can ease so much stress and tension. With the mastery of time management, any student can make themselves that much more prepared than their counterparts. Time management is something that can help you all throughout your life. When students use the tool of time management, they saves them time later on down the road.

APPENDIX C: TUAN'S KEY PAPER

Journal #5

The identities I am most conscious of are my race and my gender. I feel like I'm more conscious of those identities primarily because that is how others identify me. I feel like being an African American female means that I have to work that much harder to be successful. Living in a society where neither African American nor female are dominant identities can have its shares of struggles. I feel excluded because of who I am all the time. When I was in high school, I was always the only African American female in my classes. When I took my SAT's, I was in a room of more than one hundred people, and I was the only African American in the room period. Everything I get around people that don't necessarily look like me or embody some my cultural beliefs, I feel excluded. I feel like I can't really relate to them. I also feel like somewhat of an outsider looking in. As I'm getting older though, I finding ways to cope with the struggle because I do realize that African Americans are enrolling in institutions of higher education at lower rates, so the higher I go in my pursuit for knowledge the less likely I am to see people that look like me.

Enrollment has gotten higher over the past 50yrs. It continues to get higher

Treating others differently simply because of the way they are or the way that they identify has never been something I did. I'm not saying that I'm perfect, but because of the struggles I have experienced growing up I have never been one to put others down because of their identities. I have always felt that actions speak louder than words, so that's what I perception about people on. The struggle I have with diversity is looking at diversity as more than just culture and race. Living in a diverse community, I'm starting to see that diversity relate to everything from race to religion to

sexual orientation. The more I get involved in my community the more I am able to learn about diversity, allowing for me to overcome my struggles.

Thanks for reading my story!

APPENDIX D: HUY'S KEY PAPER

Playing Style and Consequences in Setting in MGS: Portable Ops, AC: Bloodlines, and GTA: Vice City Stories

The magic in games, especially computer games, is their ability to elicit emotion and promote player choice. By forcing the player to make choices, and go certain directions in a computer game, the player becomes invested in the game, due to the player's need to have his choices and, by proxy, his character validated by the game. From here, the player's decision will cause different reactions in the game, and thus elicit different emotions from the player. While in some games, this choice/emotion mechanic directly affects storyline and ending, in other games, it changes the gameplay itself by promoting certain feelings over others. Games like this may have linear gameplay with no open-ended story, but the variation in gameplay and mechanic can greatly increase their replay value. Game mechanics like this used to depend on larger stationary consoles, such as the Playstation and Nintendo consoles, but with the advent of high performance portable systems like the PSP and Nintendo DS, it has become possible for developers to create games analogous to their bigger counterparts. Examples of these types of games include third-person action games such as Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops, Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines, and GTA: Vice City stories. Each of these games raises the difficulty of attaining success in the game based on the actions taken by the player. In GTA, being mindlessly violent and shooting innocent bystanders will earn the police's attention, who will inevitably kill the player and force him to restart the mission,

while in Metal Gear Solid and Assassin's Creed, capturing enemies' negative attention will make completing the objective considerably harder. Thus, the manner in which the player goes about his style of play directly results in how the game responds in difficulty, but also how it sets the mood and tone in response to the player's actions.

All three of the previously mentioned games are third person action games, but each with their own characteristics and different mechanics. In Metal Gear Solid, the player takes on the role of Big Boss, a legendary soldier who has been framed for treason, and must stop a nuclear weapon from launching. To do this, the player must travel around different locations in a hypothetical peninsula and progress through numerous levels to reach the goal. This can be done in a variety of ways, but the preferred method is to move stealthily without attracting enemies' attention. Similarly, in Assassin's Creed, the player takes on the role of an assassin trying to stop the Crusades in the Middle Ages and must progress through the story by slipping past guards and suspicious enemies. In both games, once the player is detected, more enemies will appear and will make completing the objective much more difficult, and at times, being detected can even cause a mission to fail and force the player to restart. In contrast, characters in GTA are neutral to the player until he becomes violent. In this case, police will be increasingly numerous and eventually lay waste to the player and stop him in his psychopathic tracks. While there are some differences, in all three games, if the player attracts too much negative attention, the mood and setting of the game will dramatically change and force the player to quickly adapt.

Similarly, in Metal Gear Solid, player presence and negative attention are measured by different phases. Depending on each phase, the characters in the game will act differently, and other effects, such as music will set the tone for the phase. If Big Boss is undetected, the guards and enemies are walking along predictable and repetitive paths. In the “Caution” phase, usually triggered when the enemies see or hear something suspicious such as footsteps, they will be more alert. In addition to their heightened sensitivity, an green timer will also count down from 99 seconds until the guards return to their normal state. However, the tension increases as more backup units will appear and force the player to take quick action, such as hiding under a truck, to avoid going into the “Alert” phase. In this phase, the music changes dramatically to a faster paced piece, and creates a sense of panic in the player, which is only amplified by a flashing exclamation mark over the enemies’ head as well as a sudden, loud and sharp alarm sound going off. At this point, the player is forced to either run and evade the enemy effectively, or fight. The number of enemies that appear is quite large, and there is a high chance that the player won’t survive a firefight. Hiding also becomes increasingly more challenging as the map will be filled with enemies. In this game, the preferred method would be to sneak to the objective, but the player could also attempt to fight his way through to the objective, which is possible because he only has to rid himself of the enemies directly in his path. Regardless of the player’s playing style, the choices he makes have an immediate result on the mood of the game. Should he be stealthy, the environment will be completely devoid of any indicators of awareness, the music will blend faintly with the background, and only the sound of footsteps will be audible, but there will be a lingering feeling of tension that the player could be detected at any time should he make

the wrong step. This nagging sensation of tension remains until the player clears the level, or kills all the enemies on the map before they can call in reinforcements. By creating this default state of tension, the game forces the player to stay constantly alert and absorbed in the game. Once detected and in alert mode, whether by choice or mistake, the player is startled into a state of surprise by the aforementioned environmental factors, and the tension vanishes only to be replaced by rapid intensity and a sense of urgency to take decisive action. The silent and serene environment is disrupted by shouts, bells, and the sounds of gunshots zipping by the player, and all of the sudden, the environment that seemed like a quiet place to hide suddenly turns into an all-out battlefield. Here, player choices directly influence the type of environment he will find himself in, whether or not he is aware of what the environment will be once he makes the choice.

Similarly, Assassin's Creed employs a similar stealth and enemy mechanic that differs only slightly from the previous game's. In Assassin's Creed, the player is thrust into an environment different from Metal Gear Solid's, one that is full of civilians and noncombatants. Here, stealth becomes a social status, as is indicated by a social status indicator. The default state of the guards placed among the city is that of constant suspicion, unless the player takes action to "blend in". If the player happens to perform a suspicious action, such as running by the guards, they will be alarmed of the assassin's presence and engage him in combat. The game employs similar mechanics to instantly change the environment from that of a serene city to that of a battlefield. Once detected, the screen is interrupted by a blue flash, and characters will begin screaming and yelling as the environment is thrown seemingly into chaos, and once again, the player is faced

with choices of how to act. He can run and break the line of sight, or attempt to kill all the enemies in sight. Both choices are plausible but they have different effects on the resulting environment. If the player chooses to run and hide, after a certain amount of time, he can return to being anonymous, with people being less aware of him. However, if he chooses to kill all the guards, the surrounding bystanders will react differently and thus the player is more likely to be discovered by guards. When enemies are aware of his presence, the player's actions become very restricted and at times, this will even cost him his mission, and he must restart. Once again, the actions the player takes dictate the environment he will find himself in. The result of this design structure is that the game sets a preferred style of play, but allows the player to take a different path, should he be comfortable playing in a nonstandard and uncomfortable environment.

The same holds true for GTA: Vice City stories, although some of the mechanics differ. The gameplay in Vice City Stories is entirely open world which allows the player to roam the entire city and act in whatever manner he wishes to. The distinctive feature in the game is that the player is not considered a threat or an enemy until he commits a crime or an act of violence, at which point the indicator will show one police star, which can increase up to six stars. Once he does however, he will earn the ire of the police who will pursue him. At the lowest levels, the player can return to a state of anonymity by evading the police for a certain amount of time, or he can choose to kill the policemen. Doing so, however, only gains him more notoriety with the police who will increase their numbers until he is killed. While some missions require the player to commit crimes and gain stars, it is entirely up to the player to decide on how to handle the police attention. Players can choose to bribe police and find secret stars to lower their "wanted" level, or

they can choose to fight the police and continue onwards. The latter option results in much greater difficulty when on missions, but some players become used to being followed by a fleet of police cars as they go about the city. The shift between states of peace and turmoil is less noticeable in this game's environment than it is in the two other games. The music does not change, nor are there visual indicators other than the Wanted meter. The player will just suddenly notice an influx of police cars, personnel, and eventually, tanks and other heavy equipment. What this game lacks in terms of subtlety, it compensates for with blunt obviousness. Should the player fail to take quick action against the police and evade them, he will end up dead, and should he attempt to fight back, the game will become considerably harder and more brutal to play as hordes of enemies close in and death seems inevitable. Depending on whether the player takes evasive action or takes a brute force approach to the game, the setting will change to reflect the state of mind of the player.

At the center of these games is a core mechanic that changes the feel of the game. From peaceful city settings, to a nagging sense of tension and alertness, to a sense of full-on battle, war, and fear, these games change the setting and environment depending on the player's actions. While some playing styles are preferable to others, playing "outside of the box" is not an automatic recipe for failure. Games like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Assassin's Creed* favor stealth and cunning, but it is entirely possible to complete the game via brute force. By playing against the favored style of gameplay, the player dramatically changes the tone of these games as they go from low key and tension-filled games to all out battles that last through multiple levels, as the style of play directly influences the setting. It should also be noted that these games are all parts of bigger

franchises to portable game systems. Varying styles of play and the implications of such style were once limited to bigger game consoles, but the evolution of game systems has allowed for such important game mechanics to be applied to portable systems, further expanding the limits of gaming experience.

APPENDIX E: GUANG'S KEY PAPER

1 wiki. 2 outside (you found) (crit, review, articles) (essays)

1 & reader + concrete ref. to films. Citations

movies.

die in common goal approach - avoid unnecessary injustice or harm! consequence ↑ new word.

Ethical Judgments in Emerging Technologies

"Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should." (*Jurassic Park*) Scientists have a responsibility to make ethical judgments by considering both foreseeable and unforeseeable consequences of their work. Without the proper judgment, their research can cause devastating results, both intentionally and unintentionally, as seen in *GATTACA* and *Blade Runner*.^{and WW II} Research such as genetic engineering and nuclear energy can produce serious consequences such as discrimination of people based on their genes, bloody rebellions of an entire sub-specie and world-wide warfare. It is important to consider how society would be affected when dealing with the unknown in science.

Genetic engineering can lead to modification of the human race to possess superior, homogenous DNA. While scientists can engineer people to have the same genetic information, not every human would choose to have "superior" genes. [This connection is only proposed, not proven] The ones that do not would be disadvantaged and would eventually be ostracized in society, as depicted in *GATTACA*.] Discrimination down to the basis of one's genetic material would be a severely negative consequence of genetic engineering, as people are treated differently just because they do not possess a certain gene or they have "bad" genes. As seen from history, discrimination can cause harm to minorities, and it has. If we allow genetic engineering to progress to the point where people are allowed to modify their genes, discrimination will change, but for the worse. Scientists need to consider both foreseeable and unforeseeable consequences of genetic engineering, ~~as~~ even though mankind can be proliferated by it, mankind can also lose its humanity due to it.

Aside from genetic modification, genetic engineering can also lead to the creation of sub-human races, like the replicants in *Blade Runner*. As they were made to serve the human race, replicants eventually rebelled against humans due to mistreatment and injustice. They ended up killing the people that watched over them. [a possible speculation scenario if scientists were to create other sub-human species] The replicants were stopped eventually by Blade Runners, specialized people whose job was to track down and eliminate replicants. However, as there were only a few replicants remaining in the movie, the possibility of replicants decimating the human race would have been quite small. If scientists created an abundance of another specie, that specie can cause a considerable amount of damage to mankind. This can lead to the destruction of mankind, given a high enough population of the race. Scientists need to think about the possible consequences if they were to create an entire sub-race, as a simple lab experiment can wipe out millions given the proper circumstances.

historical present
speculation
emphasize on mistreatment causing problems.
small rare
determined/consider/etc

Nuclear energy in
Blade Runner to
GATTACA?

Nuclear energy was discovered and was intended to be used as a new energy source, rather than a destructive weapon. It was eventually synthesized to become a deadly bomb, which was utilized to decimate entire cities. If scientists went forth and developed it further, mankind would probably have multiple deadly nuclear weapons ready on hand. World-wide warfare would be quite probable at this point, as people would have the power to destroy a significant amount of life. Scientists should have determined the possible outcomes from creating this new energy source, before they made it. If someone were to develop nuclear energy even a tiny bit further, he or she could cause tremendous harm to countless humans.

connect similarities & emphasize consequences of n. energy

Countless research may be occurring, but it is important to consider how such advancements in the science world affects mankind. Without proper judgment, scientists could unleash into the world something that can threaten the existence of humans. Many people abhor extinction, so naturally, people believe that actions leading to such a fate should be prevented. If scientists did not rely on responsibility and continued on with their research, advanced discrimination, promotion of warfare and

conducted at the moment

tie back to foreseeable & unavoidable consequences. Marie + Curie → n. energy, shouldn't take Japan in WWII to

the decimation of an entire race may result from two "harmless" research like genetic engineering and nuclear energy. In order to promote both human society and science, one must traverse the field of research carefully, taking into consideration all possibilities that awaits.

- Perhaps get a stronger conclusion (unless if you don't have it yet). I like what I'm reading, and quotes from sources will strengthen your argument. Also, you can use better diction. I feel like it gets somewhat weaker on the second page.

- Sometimes connections between what has happened ^{in the movies} and what could happen have little merit, such as humans being discriminated by their DNA or new species ~~being~~ wiping out humans.

The similarity b/w nuclear energy and genetic engineering could be stated more clearly, but your paper was great! Very organized and clear otherwise. 😊