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Composition and Identity: A Theoretical Approach to First-Year Composition

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COMPOSITION AND IDENTITY:
A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Identity has, for some time, been a feature of discussions of social and political issues under the cover of Cultural Studies. In Composition, however, identity has not often been discussed in its psychological or individualistic terms, even as studies have shown that identity is the major influence on what and how people write (Newkirk, 1997; Bracher, 1999; Alcorn, 2002; Tobin, 2004; Tingle, 2004). Resistance to psychological identity in composition is likely due to a lack of understanding of identity, apprehension about how identity can be addressed in composition classes, and how writing that helps students construct their identity might look.

This dissertation examines identity in composition and seeks to define and explore the nature of identity, to understand its role in writing, and to then open a new dialog within Composition Studies. Identity is the central feature of literacy (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1995; Heller, 1997; Finn, 1999; Brandt 2001; Spellmeyer, 2003); as a projection of self, identity is the means by which we join a community. McAdams (1993) and Nienkamp (2001) provide two concepts which provide a framework for the role of identity in composition: the mythic self and the rhetorical self. Erikson (1959) provides support for the idea that first-year composition is the right time and the right place to develop writing projects which assist students in

constructing their adult identity. Psychologists Kohut (1966), Lacan (1977), and McAdams et al. (2006) and compositionists Newkirk (1997), Bracher (1999), Alcorn (2002), and Tobin (2004) support the idea of the influence of identity on all linguistic activity, especially the composing processes of the young writers who enter first-year college composition classes.

This theoretical study compares both composition and psychology texts with the experiences of the researcher-as-writer and researcher-as-writing-instructor through the use of narrative inquiry. By correlating insights developed through self-narrative with psychoanalytical scholarship, an understanding of identity and its influence on the writer and the effects of writing on identity construction is explored. This will lead to new ways of addressing identity as an important function of the first-year composition class.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What you have here is the sixth version of my dissertation—possibly seventh, depending on how you count it. Some might wonder *What's the problem? Why does it take so long?* My parents asked me that—a lot. So did friends and colleagues as they waltzed to their graduations. I can only answer that the subject of this dissertation—identity—required that I live a little more, a little longer, and grow more from the experience. I might suggest, therefore, that the process of researching and writing a dissertation is much like living a life: two steps forward, one step back. I could not have completed this project without living my life exactly how I did live it. Otherwise, it might have been a different project.

And so, to my parents, life-long educators and reluctant financial sponsors of this project, I give a humble and grateful thanks. They have always valued education above all else. They preferred that I devote my time and attention to study rather than to work. Fortunately, I agreed: studying was always more fun than working, so long as I could study what interested me. That was part of my identity. But they can put away their checkbook now.

Thanks go to my colleagues at IUP who seemed to never tire of asking the question *So what are you writing about?* And thanks to those who stopped to listen to the answer, especially Mysti Rudd, who told me what she really thought of it all and didn't snicker even once. Thanks to the legions of students who showed great tolerance with me during the first-year composition classes we shared. I think most of them got some benefit from my preliminary efforts to introduce them to a

forerunner of I-Con writing.

I wish to thank my dissertation committee for their great patience with my project, for abiding the twists and turns it took, and being willing to see the vision I was seeing. Thanks to my director, Gian Pagnucci, who accepted with only mild amusement my constant shifts, loops, hyperbole, overwriting, underciting, and digressions and tangential vacations—but could not accept my tangent about the feral children. I wish to thank Mike Williamson for giving me a firm push when I was just hovering at the edge of the psychological abyss, staring down into it, wondering whether or not to take the plunge; suddenly I found myself swimming in it, almost drowning at times, yet I came to enjoy the lively, often dramatic, yet very valuable detour that has set the direction for my future research. And I wish to thank Jean Nienkamp, first, for sharing her concept of the rhetorical self at the early stage of my project, a concept which seemed to mirror what I was thinking; it seemed an uncanny connection to what I was really interested in investigating. And, secondly, for her insightful presence on my committee—whose main task often seemed to be to bring this project in on-time and under budget.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Origins of the Study: A Necessary Explanation of My Approach to Understanding Identity

T. S. Eliot suggested in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1922) that it is the “impressions and experiences [which] combine in peculiar and unexpected ways” inside a poet’s mind that enables poetry to be created. From a haphazard collection of random materials something new may be born, something of which not even the artist may control or be aware. I believe the same is true of researchers. The spontaneous and undirected coming together of different ideas can give rise to new ideas. And so it is that I have stumbled into this topic from a diverse collection of ideas which through the process of researching have come together in peculiar and unexpected ways.

My initial inquiry concerned the differences between composition pedagogy, essentially the teaching of the essay genre, and that of creative writing. That led me to wonder about the conflicts within English Studies and to suggest that borrowing some of the methods of the creative writing workshop and even allowing students to write creatively would enhance the composition class experience. Coming from a background where I participated in MFA fiction and poetry workshops and subsequently applied some creative techniques in my composition classes, I believed there was a significant benefit for first-year composition students to experience some of the activities common to fiction and poetry writing courses. In later reading, I found that composition and creative writing, while

seemingly two sides of the same coin, often were at odds with each other in a struggle over territory. That seemed a worthy topic of study.

At the same time as I began investigating the CW/Comp disjunction, I found myself coming to terms with the consequences of a personal crisis that was then waning, one which prompted me to deeply examine myself in terms of *Who am I? How did I get here?*—a “dark night of the soul” kind of experience. It was a crucial moment of realization in my life, where questions about my career goals, my relationships, my age and health came together. It was this “peculiar and unexpected” set of experiences that forced me to confront some unpleasant realities, caused me to seek answers in psychology books, and forced me to rethink many of my assumptions about my life. I was beginning to finally accept that everything might not be as it had always seemed to be. This personal situation dovetailed interestingly, though not always easily, with my graduate courses in composition theory, literacy theory, and writing pedagogy. I took all of that input and let each ingredient somehow retain its own flavor. This is where Eliot enters.

By then, I was planning to interview professors at three schools about their writing pedagogy. I planned to talk with those who were trained in creative writing yet taught composition. I would also talk with those trained in composition who somehow found themselves teaching a creative writing class. I expected that comparing the interview data might yield some interesting and useful ideas that would support my argument for merging all kinds of writing instruction into a single course. Yet, as I prepared for this next stage of the investigation, some of the students in a research writing class I was teaching became interested in how people presented themselves in online social networking sites such as Facebook

and MySpace, as well as in their emails and through Instant Messaging. A few students proposed to write a final project on that topic. So we discussed “identity”—what it is and how it is constructed and maintained. I had only begun to refresh my long-forgotten knowledge from Psychology 101 at that point but I realized that what truly interested me in my own research was less about moving CW into the Comp class than the psychological factors that made me write and how the very act of writing made me *me*.

I had already argued in my graduate courses that literacy was about self-identity. As we grow, we are mostly concerned with fitting in with a community and fitting in requires learning and using the knowledge of the community. Most modern communities require knowledge of a language system, that is, reading and writing—the coding and decoding of a set of symbols which serve to create and preserve experience as the collective knowledge of the community. I could see how some communities might not value reading and writing yet people in such communities would still be considered “literate” if they understood the oral histories and lessons passed on to them. This could be a primitive society somewhere in the world today where the skills of the hunt are required for “literacy” or even the street society of many urban areas where a sixth-grade drop-out might still be “literate” in his community because he knew what he needed to know to function in that society. E. D. Hirsch (1988) similarly argued for a set of knowledge that anyone in the U.S. should know to be considered “culturally literate.” Such a list of facts and ideas raised a lot of controversy but he was half-right, I think. However, this view was only a step on the road to the present study. I focused on this idea about literacy because I perceived an important link between self-identity as a feature of

literacy and the function of identity in writing.

What we need to know to function in a society can be considered “literacy.” It follows, then, that knowing who you are and how you fit into the society is a part of literacy, too. My thinking gradually became informed by the work of New Literacy theorist James Gee (2004a, 2004b) who similarly argues for a new definition of literacy. In fact, a group of literary theorists have noted the heavy influence of technology on literacy and are compelling educators to reconsider just what does constitute being literate (Selfe, 1999; Selber & Hawisher, 1999; Warshauer, 2003; Selber, 2004; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004). For example, it may no longer be enough to just know how to read and write; we now expect students to know how to “word process” and run computers, which are the tools of knowledge in our society. A new view of literacy clearly is needed. As I came to understand literacy, I considered how language is a tool also for constructing identity. It was then a small step for me to go from literacy to identity. I shifted my focus from how to teach writing in a composition class using creative writing techniques to how writing helps to construct and maintain identity.

For some time, this was the connection I sought. As new designs for this study emerged from the changing directions of my research, I began to see that the connection was not literacy but psychology. While self-identity may be a central feature of literacy, what eventually occurred to me was that the foundation of my study of identity was, obviously, the psychological concept of self. In essence, we are psychological beings and almost all of our behavior has a psychological basis. We act to protect or assert our ego, to engage in social groups, to make ourselves feel good or avoid feeling bad. The reason to study identity, therefore, is simply and

fundamentally because identity—as it is in all behavior—is an important factor in what and how the writer writes. At the same time, writing can help shape identity. There does not need to be any connection to literacy in order to engage English scholars and practitioners, as I had once thought. The reason for those in the field of English to be interested in identity is very simple: we all have identity (perhaps a few *identities*; see chapter 2), and that identity or identities has major influence on all aspects of writing. Understanding what identity is and how it influences writing is something to which compositionists should be giving a lot of attention.

Focus of the Present Study

My interest in the present study is how identity is constructed, how writing aids in that construction, and how writers make use of their identity in writing. To begin to answer such questions requires that we first understand what is meant by identity and how identity influences everyday behavior. We can then turn to the identity a writer may use in the act of writing, an identity which may or may not be the same one used when the writer is not writing. How does a writer choose an identity? How is identity constructed, both in a writer and in a person. Research indicates that identity impacts what writers choose to write, how they choose *what* they write, *how* they write it, *what* choices they make about how to present their ideas in writing, and connects with various psychological factors that may aid or inhibit their choices (Bracher, 1999; Alcorn, 2002; Tingle, 2004). Putting together ideas from my reading in psychology and composition, and comparing what I read with my experiences both as a writer and a teacher of writing, I concluded that it is a writer's *identity* which has a large part to play in the writing process.

Some compositionists may call it a writerly *persona* or *voice*. However, what

I am interested in exploring is the identity which resides beneath or behind those writing features. Such surface representations of self originate, I believe, much deeper than what writing teachers usually deal with. Though a writer may choose a different “persona” or “voice” depending on the writing task, these features seem to emanate from, or sit at the core of, a person’s sense of self—which, for reasons I will explain in the next chapter, I call *identity*. What an essayist might use in affecting a certain voice (e.g., a sarcastic persona in Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”) or what a fiction writer does in “acting” through a character’s identity is different from what I mean here. For example, one problem I have seen composition teachers face is student writing that “sounds” similar to the way students speak. Most first-year college writers tend to “be themselves” as they write, affecting not so much a conscious identity but essentially replicating who they believe themselves to be. In first-year composition, they may try to write in an academic “voice” out of necessity but it may not come easily or comfortably to most of them. They prefer to “be themselves” because that is the “voice” with which they are familiar and thus communicate more convincingly—at least within their own communities. Still, there is something psychological which is supporting or resisting the writing effort.

There are a few compositionists who are interested in the psychological issues that influence writers (Newkirk, 1997; Bracher, 1999; Alcorn, 2002; Tobin, 2004; Tingle, 2004) and they have discussed the intimate relationship between what we might call the writer’s *will* (the “thought” part of composition) and the writer’s *action* (the “writing” part of composition). It is the *will* part of composition which interests me: the what, how, and why of writing. These psychoanalytically-oriented compositionists each directed me to the work of Jacques Lacan. So I read

more and began to consider Lacan's (1973) concepts of *desire* and *jouissance*. I considered both of these concepts in terms of narcissism. After all, "writing begins as a narcissistic gesture," writes Alcorn (2002, p. 18). However, in discussing writing in terms of narcissism it is important to note that the term *narcissism* as Kohut (1966) and others use it (and as I will make use of it in the current study) is actually a neutral term which generally describes any self-serving behavior. For example, writing for one's own pleasure as I have done many times in writing stories and poetry can be seen as narcissistic simply because I enjoy what I am doing and I do it purely for my own enjoyment, even though the activity may seem pointless or frivolous to an observer. My study of Lacan also allowed me to become aware of the variety of psychological factors operating in a writer's mind during the writing process. For a writer, the act of writing may be what is *desired* and what may be necessary for *jouissance*.

In Lacanian terms, *desire* is the action resulting from one's attraction to something one encounters. As Lacan (1977) writes, "Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need" (p. 310). In effect, there is a gap between wanting and obtaining which creates tension in the mind; into this gap grows desire (see also Appendix B). The second term is *jouissance*, which cannot be directly translated into English, though it has been called 'extreme pleasure or enjoyment.' However, enjoyment has the connotation of pleasure while *jouissance* is an "enjoyment that always has a deadly reference, that is, a paradoxical pleasure which reaches an intolerable level of excitation" (p. 319). Lacan (1973) suggests that what we do—including, as Bracher (1999; 2006) and Alcorn (2002) assert, the choices writers make about a writing topic, the style and

voice they use, the way writing organizes a paper, and even the attention writers pay to surface details—is based on subconscious efforts to bolster or defend the ego, to fulfill *desire*, and to experience *jouissance*. Further exploration of Lacan's concepts led me to compositionist Nick Tingle (2004), who led me to psychologist Heinz Kohut (1966), who both argue that a person's writing efforts are often subconsciously (sometimes consciously) designed to fulfill some kind of *narcissistic* goal. Of course, writing often involves work which must be done without regard to how it makes us feel. However, to a greater or lesser degree, we usually wish to be acknowledged, have our existence confirmed, and be praised for our efforts and talents (Bracher, 1999; Tingle, 2004).

Writing allows us to (re)present ourselves in certain ways which may be advantageous to bolstering or defending the ego, thereby more easily fulfilling our *desire* for recognition and praise. I instinctively understood this idea—an assertion which is not scientific, admittedly, but which I felt was accurate when I stopped to consider it within the context of my own writing experiences. Since the scholarship on composition and identity is rather sparse, one thing I want to do is add to the work of Newkirk, Tobin, Bracher, Tingle and others by clarifying and defining identity, then positioning identity within composition research, and finally inviting change in writing pedagogy that would assist first-year composition students in constructing their adult identity through identity-focused writing projects.

Framework of Study and Methodological Considerations

As a teacher, I have strived to develop a pedagogy that teaches reading and writing skills, but I wish to also be able to help students understand who they are and how they came to be who they are. The act of writing can aid in understanding

one's self, which is one way to begin the construction of the adult identity. My interest in studying the place of identity in composition also has a lot to do with a search for my own identity, that is, in my belief that, for each of us, everything begins with the subjective *I*, both for teacher/writers and for students. In trying to understand who I am and how I have become who I am, I want to understand how the construction of identity bears upon the writing students do, especially in first-year composition class. By reflectively examining how I learned to write, how I developed my identity through writing, and how I teach writing, I hope to offer a way to look at identity in composition which impacts how writing is taught.

This framework suggests using reflection and metacognition as methods of inquiry. I will explore identity and composition both as a writer reflecting on the nature of writing and as a teacher of writing reflecting on the nature of teaching writing. In this way, I can compare the reflection and metacognition operating within an individual who is constructing identity through language use. At the same time, language, as an agent of culture, constructs the individual through the choices it makes available. It also may limit as well as inspire creative self-expression. One way to examine the inner life of the writer is by offering myself as a kind of guinea pig by reflectively writing about those literacy experiences which have impacted me most. Dewey (1933) defined the nature of reflective thought as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (p. 9). By reflecting on my experiences both as a young writer and a mature writer, and as a teacher of writing, I hope to gain insights into the way writing constructs identity and the ways identity serves the writer. This method, however, might raise

questions in some readers, so let me explain its value.

Defining Theoretical Research

When phenomena cannot be directly observed, such as the subject of this dissertation (identity), the only recourse to studying it is to rely on indirect sources (e.g., studies showing how a writer's identity exhibits itself in writing) and analyze, for example, various cause-and-effect relationships that may lead to new understanding about the phenomena. Theoretical inquiry can serve as a guide for empirical research and allow us to ask "what if" questions using very simple systems which are called *models*. In the physical sciences, models often serve as useful explanations for actual phenomena. The results of such investigations can suggest new questions that might prove valuable for empirical research. Theoretical research can also suggest results we might expect to obtain from such empirical studies.

Regarding the humanistic field of composition, however, Houlette (1984) states that theoretical research

proceeds largely by introspection and argument by example. What we believe about writing and how to teach it depends on how we perceive ourselves as writers and what we accept as examples of good writing. To teach the composing process, we must first believe we understand how we ourselves compose. (p. 108)

Because composition is a field which generally deals with more subjective phenomena than the physical sciences, the results of composition research are likely to have a wider range of interpretations. Furthermore, as teachers everywhere will attest, the same lesson delivered in the same way to different

groups of students can often have different results. Therefore, pedagogical experimentation results are hard to replicate, which is one criteria considered necessary for a study to be scientifically valid. The process of writing is also a phenomena for which a wide variety of approaches may yield a similar result or a single approach may produce a wide variety of results.

Voss (1983) cautions against following scientific models, noting how much research in composition studies has derived its methodology from social science. Emig (1971), writes Voss, uses case-study methodology in her report on the composing processes of twelfth graders, and Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981) “borrow the technique of protocol analysis from cognitive psychology, where it is often used to identify psychological processes in problem-solving tasks” (p. 8). Voss explains how Perl (1980) examines the composing processes of five different student writers, yet Perl actually skews the empirical nature of her study by revealing that she selected the students who would participate in her study by how they wrote (p. 9). However, Raymond (1982) suggests that rhetoric is the proper methodology for the humanities, though he says there are good reasons for doing scientific empirical research. To limit ourselves to empirical, particularly qualitative research, writes Raymond, “would be to deprive ourselves of the mainstream of insight in rhetorical theory from antiquity to the present day” (p. 783). These researchers help set a foundation for theoretical work in composition studies and their work has become stock-in-trade for more recent research in all areas of composition.

Kirsch and Sullivan (1992) list the kind of research methods currently used in composition studies: ethnography, case study, hermeneutical scholarship,

discourse analysis, experimental or descriptive research, and historical study. They note that other research often addresses political and cultural questions related to composition, such as teacher-based research, that is, a teacher's self-examination of her role as teacher. Kirsch and Sullivan include a "memoir" by Lisa Ede that describes her development as a scholar in the context of a critical examination of key works on composition studies. Such a memoir becomes a research tool, Kirsch and Sullivan state, because it relies on the researcher writing about researching. This points to the possibilities for including those research methods which are not empirical but instead are reflective. Ede's memoir also suggests the value of researchers reflecting on their own discoveries as practitioners in the same area they are researching. This kind of reflective inquiry anticipates the method I employ in parts of this study.

Furthermore, Johaneck (2000) states that in composition, scholars have been moving away from more traditional qualitative methods for years, primarily because they have recognized that some subjects of study are better served using different methods, methods particular to composition (p. 27). Theoretical research methods are appropriate for the present study because I am not so much attempting to prove something through empirical methods as I am arguing for a shift in pedagogy or accommodation in current practice based on existing theories from current literature, ideas which have not previously been brought together. Theories of self and identity are more common in the fields of sociology and psychology than in English Studies, so the application of these theories has been largely ignored in composition. The current study seeks to help remedy this.

On the Use of Narrative Inquiry

While the majority of this dissertation is a theoretical work, I also employ as a research method the kind of personal, reflective, narrative writing that can help to understand identity. Initially, I sought to call this kind of writing *autoethnography*.

Ethnography, state Hammersley & Atkinson (1983), comes chiefly from cultural anthropology and refers to a research method involving the observation and description of a community. The ethnographer, therefore, “participates, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned” (p. 2). Recently, ethnography has been useful in exploring such cultural communities as high school students (Hersch, 1998; Wiseman, 2002) and sports organizations (Sands, 2002). Sometimes, however, the data a researcher seeks resides principally within the mind and recollected experiences of the researcher himself. Such an exploration is labeled autoethnography by Reed-Danahay (1997), who calls autoethnography a postmodern construct:

The concept of autoethnography . . . synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question. The term has a double sense—referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Thus, either a self (auto) ethnography or an autobiographical (auto)

ethnography can be signaled by “autoethnography.” (p. 2)

When a researcher thus employs autoethnography, the researcher may be seeking an understanding of the process(es) by which the researcher has produced something, whether a body of knowledge, a particular ideology or viewpoint, or a work of art. The process of psychoanalysis often parallels the self-reflective nature of the autoethnography (Bracher, 1999). Both processes involve the researcher pursuing an understanding of herself by observing and describing her thoughts and behavior.

However, the term *autoethnography* has become somewhat clouded. For example, what an anthropologist might do as an autoethnography while studying a group of people in their natural setting could be very different from what a writing teacher might do in asking students to write about themselves. Similar to the often confusing term *identity* (see chapter 2), the term *autoethnography* can also mean different things to different people. Because I wrote deliberately, as though I were observing myself from a fictitiously objective vantage point, I considered my writing effort an autoethnography. However, such descriptive and reflective writing also fits criteria of *narrative inquiry*.

Narrative Inquiry is the process of gathering information about a subject, after which the researcher writes a narrative of the experience. That seems, to me, a lot like the personal narrative essay typically assigned in first-year composition classes. I still hear my high school English teacher’s voice droning: “Write about an experience you had and what you learned from it.” It seems as though we can learn something from writing about an experience and then reflecting on it. But not in academia, it seems, according to Gian Pagnucci (2004). Narrative inquiry is a

name we use in academia for what otherwise comes naturally to most of us: telling stories about other stories in order to gain some understanding that then leads us to create a newer story, and so on (p. 40-48).

As such, the researcher's field notes, subject interviews, research journals, letters (including email), autobiographies, and oral stories are methods of narrative inquiry. In this way, the researcher and the subject of research essentially enter a collaboration. Narrative inquiry could also be writing about someone the researcher is studying, as in life story research (McAdams, 1993; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). When the subject of a study is the researcher himself, however, and the focus is on the researcher's own behavior in practice, the narrative inquiry could be said to become a self-narrative. The result of such writing or gathering of story material may be similar to autoethnography; in both instances, the writer is the subject of the writing and the writing is designed to explore the subject.

To avoid confusion, I will refer to the writing project I have done in the present study as *narrative inquiry* and the product of my narrative inquiry as my *self-narrative*. Of course, I could use the term *autobiography*, but to my mind, the term *autobiography* has other implications than what I am engaging in here. Rather than a story of my experiences, as an autobiography might be defined, my writing procedure for the current study was focused on particular encounters with identity construction. I ignore other events. Also implicit in my self-narrative is the quality of exploration. In each of my writing sessions, I simultaneously focused narrowly on a known source of identity material and allowed myself a wide latitude of thought about the known source in order to explore what connections might be revealed. Indeed, I hoped for and eventually found much that had become hidden over the

years (or *repressed*, to use Freud's term) and which, through writing, returned both welcomingly or uncomfortably to me.

Implications of the Researcher as Subject

The researcher studying himself—whether as autoethnography or, as I have done, as narrative inquiry—may present challenges in terms of validity. It may also open doors to new ways of understanding. Stenhouse (1975) argues that “when teachers become researchers investigating their own practice, this results in educational research that is more relevant and also transforms teaching” (cited in Hammersley, 1992, p. 135). If the goal of the research is to understand practice, study of the practitioners seems obvious; practitioners studying themselves can offer data not otherwise available. Hammersley (1992) argues that research must serve practitioners' needs and the practitioner in the environment of the practice is the ideal observer (p. 137). A common criticism of autoethnographic research, and by extension all narrative-based research, Hammersley notes, is that

while closeness to and involvement with the phenomena being investigated have some relevance for the validity of findings, the epistemological assumption that sometimes underlies this argument—that knowledge comes from contact with reality—is unsound. This is because all knowledge is a construction; we have no direct knowledge of the world. (p. 143).

Practitioners often have access to their own intentions and motives in a way that another observer does not. Thus, the practitioner has a deeper understanding of her personal behavior than an outsider could have. The practitioner will usually have long-term experience with the setting and know its history and other relevant

information which would take a longer time for an outsider to acquire.

Using narrative inquiry as a research method is appropriate for the present study because the subject is the identity of the researcher-as-writer and how the researcher-as-writer constructed and uses various identities. Because identity primarily concerns the self, writing a reflective self-narrative may be the best way to extract data about the self. Studying one's own experiences in a tightly focused and reflective manner can provide a unique understanding of the effects of that experience. For example, we might ask *How did we come up with that idea?* In response, we might suggest *Let's examine the path of thinking which led us to this result.* As we have come to value experiential learning for our students, we should also value experiential learning as researcher-practitioners.

Examples of Using Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry can take several forms, some of which are similar to or use features of the *autoethnography*. A discussion of autoethnography can also provide an understanding of how narrative inquiry might similarly be useful as a research method since both rely on particular features of writing.

One good example is Holt's (2001) work depicting his experiences as a Ph.D. student teaching at the university level for the first time. Holt calls his study an autoethnography and the genre becomes an important point of conflict as he focuses on a series of clashes between his more personal teaching history and the teaching ideology of the research institution where he was employed. Holt drew inspiration from another autoethnography by Sparkes (1996), which concerned Sparkes' experiences as "a white, male, middle class, former elite athlete with a chronic back injury that ultimately curtailed his sporting career" and "linked his

personal experiences to social, sporting, medical, and academic discourses via a thorough sociological self-exploration” (Holt, 2001). Holt remarks:

I was attracted by the powerful and emotive way in which [Sparkes’] experiences were communicated. I especially liked the connections he made between his personal experiences and the wider (sub) cultural settings in which he was located (i.e., sport, the medics who ‘treated’ him, his family, and his academic career). I thought autoethnography could be a useful way for examining my teaching experiences in a self-reflexive manner. (p. 5)

Holt took inspiration from Sparkes’ use of autoethnography and found it to be quite useful for his own project. These examples suggest how certain information can only be discussed in personal terms, how it can only be retrieved as data when told as story, and how autoethnography can enable the researcher to access and report that information. I consider that what Holt and Sparkes have written seems similar to what I am calling *self-narrative*; they use the term *autoethnography*.

Nevertheless, the use of narrative inquiry also has political implications in the world of research. Tierny (1998) asserts that using an uncommon research method, such as narrative inquiry, “confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders” (p. 66). Sparkes’ (1996) and Holt’s (2001) self-narratives report on their personal experiences as a source of data. Both use self-narrative to report their experiences of being, as Holt (2001) writes, a “somewhat marginalized figure portraying the personal tensions I experienced integrating my pedagogical approach with the mandates of the

university teaching program” (p. 6). Thus, narrative inquiry provides an important venue for reporting research outside the sometimes restrictive paths of mainstream research traditions; it can be an end-around run to say something that may not otherwise be allowed to be heard.

Evaluating the Product of Narrative Inquiry

In the case of narrative inquiry, the form of narrativity may seem anathema to traditional research venues, where the similarity to “story telling” may create confusion in evaluation of data. Questions of validity and reproducibility were raised by reviewers of Holt’s (2001) “autoethnographic” research. Reviewers pointed out that there were no criteria for evaluating such research. One reviewer complained: “Your paper does not show clear relationships and patterns, does not have completeness in the narrative, nor does it hold the phenomenon up to serious inspection” (p. 10). Holt responded that since the project was about a person’s life experiences we must understand that life is not orderly, does not always provide easy patterns, and until one dies remains incomplete.

So how then do we evaluate narrative data? Ellis (1995) argues that a story could be considered valid if it evokes in the reader a feeling that the experience is authentic, believable, and possible. That has always been the test of good fiction, too. Richardson (1995; 2000) suggests that autoethnography could be evaluated by questions such as *Did the paper have an emotional or intellectual impact?* To differentiate good fiction from an autoethnography, Richardson (2000) sets out five factors for reviewing narrative research, including analysis of both evaluative and constructive validity techniques:

- 1) Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our

- understanding of social life?
- 2) Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring?
 - 3) Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?
 - 4) Impactfulness. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action?
 - 5) Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience? (pp. 15-16)

Narrative research manuscripts might also include as criteria: dramatic recall, unusual or special phrasing, and evocative metaphors and imagery which invite readers to "relive" certain events with the author. These guidelines may provide a framework for directing both investigators and reviewers.

Because my research focus originated from my reflection on my identity and the ways in which I have been constructing my identity, in large part through my writing, it seems appropriate for me to continue that process through self-narrative. The point of the self-narrative passages included in the present study is twofold: first, to explain how I have used writing to construct my identity and how my identity has influenced my writing; second, I want to offer examples of what can be done both by students examining the construction of their own identities and by suggesting ways of teaching others how to write reflectively for understanding their identity. My intention is that these reflective passages will serve to illustrate and/or provide models of constructing identity through writing.

Narrative inquiry has an important place in identity research (McAdams et al., 2006). It has a place in composition research, as well, given that self-writing is already part of what many of us teach. In composition research, narrative inquiry might be also classified as *lore*, in the sense that North (1987) uses the term to mean “the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which Practitioners understand how writing is done, learned and taught” (p. 22). Hence, for North, *lore* is knowledge which comes from the everyday acts of teaching and writing and is passed on not as provable facts resulting from empirical research but as a system of probabilities and possibilities, something akin to “this worked for me; maybe it will work for you.” *Lore* often is valuable to practitioners. The repetition of reporting any theory based on experience is a valid outcome of theoretical research where, as Shamon and Schwegler (1995) state, “theory allows us to intervene in current practice with the aim of changing it, not simply critiquing it” (p. 282). That is my goal in this study of composition and identity.

Overview of Chapters

I see the subject of identity in composition, in the writing students do, and for their lives in and out of school, as important for future pedagogical directions. In the present study, I explore the nature of identity and its relationship to composition. To do so, it may be best to begin by answering two obvious questions: 1) What exactly is identity? and 2) Why should we who teach writing be concerned with something perhaps better dealt with in a sociology or psychology class? Unfortunately, while answers to the first question remain complex, the answer to the second is rather simple: we are all psychological beings, acting from impulse, drives and fantasies, trying to assert our ego and protect our ego. We act from a psychological basis

when we write, too—perhaps, especially when we are writing reflectively and narratively. This idea brings identity squarely into the agora of current discussion about the role of first-year composition.

In chapter 2, I discuss identity and the often contradictory concepts called Identity Theory, which are central to further study. To understand identity, we must begin by understanding a few concepts of the self and then proceed to explore how different disciplines consider identity and identity theory. This process will lead to discussion of identity in social contexts and then psychological contexts. Finally, I will discuss the link between identity and composition.

In chapter 3, I want to discuss two concepts of identity that work favorably with the process of composition. I introduce the “mythic self” and the role of the “rhetorical self.” McAdams’ (1993) studies suggest that we subconsciously write a life story as we live it, and that by being more aware of this process we can benefit both as writers and as people. Nienkamp’s (2001) research suggests that we possess a self that is “made up of a colloquy of internalized social languages, interacting rhetorically to adapt attitude and behavior to personal, cultural, and environmental demands” (p. 127). Taken together, these concepts support the idea that we can assist first-year composition students in constructing an adult identity by addressing the mythic self that exists within them, through the rhetorical self that speaks to them and for them in negotiating identity.

In chapter 4, I discuss Erikson’s (1959) life cycle developmental studies and its relationship to identity. At the time most first-year students enter composition class they have reached a vital stage of identity construction. This is the right time and the right place for students to pause and assess themselves before proceeding

into the next stage of adulthood. Understanding how every stage builds upon the previous and lays the foundation for subsequent stages is crucial in any consideration of first-year composition students' efforts to construct identity.

In chapter 5, I discuss the natural links between narrative and identity and offer the narrative paradigm of Walter Fisher (1987) as a framework for assisting students in identity construction. I argue for more self-aware writing by describing how autobiography might be used in composition classes and by sharing some of my autoethnography. Identity construction writing is, after all, more narrative and more self-reflective than what traditional composition classes usually offer.

In the final chapter, I address the goals of first-year composition and the implications of an identity constructing writing pedagogy. I also try to answer concerns regarding ethical issues in personal writing, reading and assessing such writing, and writing teacher preparation. I also suggest further research others may wish to pursue and briefly map out my own continuing research. I propose solutions which make an identity constructing writing course beneficial both to students and their instructors, beneficial in developing critical thinking and wordcrafting skills while also providing a significant measure of development of a student's psychological situatedness.

The result of this study I hope will be to establish the importance of understanding identity in writing and, from this, advocating seemingly small but rather profound changes in writing instruction as well as laying a theoretical foundation for other researchers to embark in empirical studies of identity in composition.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTIFYING IDENTITY THEORY

Recently, the term *identity theft* has entered the popular lexicon. In common usage, we get the sense of something tangible and valuable that can be taken from us and used by another person. Someone can become us by stealing our identity. This identity exists on paper and in computer files, a tally of data that is associated with our existence and our behavior. Yet it is not us, not the *self*. Someone cannot take away our *self*, just our identity, thus making identity something portable, even transferable, while the self is innate, permanent though malleable, and personal. There are unfortunate exceptions, however. While one's self is fixed in our psyche, one can nevertheless lose contact with it through stroke, Alzheimer's disease, or mental illness. We are aware of brainwashing techniques which also essentially destroy one's self or sense of self in order to "rebuild" a new self as whatever the brainwasher determines. In normal everyday life, we consider that my self *is* me, and it is through this *me* that I experience the world and it is also how I express my thoughts about the world through my writing. Discussions of self and identity quickly become complicated and attempts to distinguish between self and identity become confusing. My goal in this chapter is to provide a better understanding of self and identity.

Although a great deal of behavior occurs automatically and unconsciously, many complex human behaviors involve some degree of self-reflection, such as in planning or expressing emotions such as anger or shame. While other phenomena do not necessarily require self-reflection, they are usually modified whenever

people think about themselves, for example, in order to conform to the group or cooperate in activities. Self-reflection, of course, relies on the existence of what we call the self. Take *shame*, for example. According to Jacoby (1990, 1996), it may be viewed as the result of a disconnect between one's ideal self and one's actual self. Shame requires self-reflection to the extent necessary to recognize the disconnect. The person recognizes that the self which was presented (actually an identity; see below) was not the self he wished to present. We note that self and identity are invariably linked, and various theories have evolved to describe and explain them and their relationship. In order to understand identity theory, it is necessary to understand the concept of identity. In order to understand identity, it is necessary to understand concepts of self and its function in everyday life.

In this chapter, I want to review commonly held views of self and identity and then explain identity theory in its three most often encountered forms. I will then discuss social identity theory and its presence in cultural studies, so much a part of many English departments. I will conclude this chapter with an exploration of personal identity theory in the context of a psychoanalytical writing pedagogy. It may be helpful, first, to offer some background about the development of self research. What will follow is a rather brief overview of what is otherwise a much more detailed, complex, and thus more easily misunderstood accounting of Identity Theory as each discipline interprets it. We must begin by understanding that identity research originates in self research.

The Origins of Self and Identity Research

Leary & Tangney (2003) point out that intellectual discussions of the self, usually traced back to Plato, begin even earlier for Eastern writers. References to

the self occur in the *Upanishads* in India as well as the *Tao te Ching* in China. Discussions of the self have often been addressed in religious contexts. During the Enlightenment, Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant wrote about the problem of the self. Self was the province of philosophy and religion until the late 19th century, when American psychologist William James first offered a *psychological* discussion of the self in *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Behavioral sciences, however, generally ignored James' work, preferring to avoid the idea of a ghostly entity such as the self in favor of physical entities that could be observed and measured (Leary & Tangney, 2003). At the same time, those in psychology continued to use Freudian terms for concepts described by James. In the 20th century, Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Blumer (1937) promoted the study of the self in sociology, and, later, Goffman's (1959) discussion of self-presentation led to renewed consideration of the self in psychology. These various theories were important in their time and many continue to have influence. However, my purpose here is to give a very broad background that makes the more recent theories of self and identity more clear.

Neo-Freudians such as Jung (1957), Adler (1954), Erikson (1959), later Kohut (1966), Kernberg (1975), and Lacan (1977) began offering perspectives on the self that diverged from Freud's original notion of the ego and, at the same time, began linking the ego to various intrapersonal processes. Thus, the ego became synonymous with the self in psychology. These ideas evolved into the clinical perspectives of Ego-Psychology, Self Psychology, and Object Relations Theory (Kurzweil, 1989). Allport (1955) reintroduced and reinterpreted James's concepts of self. As a result, much of the work within psychology began to have a more

humanistic focus, as represented by Maslow's (1954) work on fully functioning individuals and Rogers' (1959) theories of personality and methods of psychotherapy.

The first empirical research on the self began in the 1960s, coming from an interest in understanding self-esteem. Rosenberg (1965) and Coopersmith (1967) demonstrated that self-esteem is a psychological construct and is central to individual behavior. Their work, based mostly on subjects responding to detailed questionnaires, also created a methodology for self-reporting data and that new methodology stimulated further research. Research into self-esteem led to greater interest in how people maintain their self-esteem in various situations where their ego is threatened. Theorists such as Aronson (1969), Gergen (1971), and Greenwald (1980) began to use self-esteem motivation (i.e., behavior that protects or bolsters one's self-esteem or ego) to explain a variety of phenomena: social conformity, self-serving attributions, reactions to self-relevant feedback, attitude change, pro- and anti-social behavior, and behavior in groups. This kind of research, according to Leary & Tangney (2003), helped to create a cognitive movement in psychology and also brought with it the introduction of metaphors and models of information processing borrowed from the emerging field of computer science.

Much of the empirical research on self and identity relied on self-reporting protocols and self-monitoring. Therefore, scholarly journals in the 1970s offered various schemas for measuring self-related traits. Once systems of measurement for self-report data became available, more research was conducted, producing an increasing amount of self-reporting data as the self became a central focus of

research for many areas of psychology and sociology (Markus, 1977). Interest in self and identity research remains strong today, helped in part by popular culture's hijacking of the terms *self* and *identity* in the service of many self-help books, New Age spirituality, and TV confessionals. Yet the self and the identities linked to it also serve us in more meaningful ways.

Defining Self

It is appropriate to begin by defining self. This has not proven easy due to the many ways the word is used and misused in a variety of contexts. Not only have we lacked a single, universally accepted definition of self, but often the word is used to describe widely different phenomena. Leary & Tangney (2003) list five ways in which behavioral and social sciences commonly use *self*, while Olson (1999) discusses eight different uses of *self* by philosophers. Often these two lists overlap. The first use of self by Leary & Tangney is in reference to the total person, as writers commonly refer to *oneself*. Uses that equate the self with the whole person, however, do not usually refer to the psychological entity that is of interest to researchers. According to Olson (1999), "most behavioral and social scientists do not think that a person *is* a self but rather that each person *has* a self" (cited in Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 6). *Self* is used to refer to an individual's personality, too, suggesting that the self is "a collection of abilities, temperament, goals, values, and preferences that distinguish one individual from another" (Tesser, 2002, p. 185). When Maslow (1954) wrote about "self-actualization," he was referring to actualization of one's *personality*—something which was "integrated, nondefensive, and optimally functioning" (cited in Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 7). The uses of *self* can be confusing; in psychology and sociology, self and personality are quite

different while in everyday popular usage they are often considered synonymous.

I and Me: The Dual Self

William James becomes significant in this discussion because at the time his textbook on psychology appeared in 1890, his views were considered new and provocative and ran counter to prevailing religious views. According to Leary & Tangney (2003), James' view of self has become one of the foundations of American psychology—as much as Freud has had in European psychology. In his textbook (1890), James rejected both the view of the subjective 'I' (which he also called 'soul') that he ascribed to Plato and Aristotle as well as to Hobbes, Descartes, and Locke, and the transcendental view proposed by Kant. For James, the words 'I' and 'Me' are grammatical constructions that merely indicate or emphasize different interpretations of the same stream of consciousness, that is, interpretations either as the *thinker* or as the *thought* about oneself. These interpretations are inseparable because, as James (1890) asserted, "thought is itself the thinker" (p. 401). Thoughts are the thinkers because current thoughts, including thoughts about oneself, are always connected to past thoughts, which are felt in the margins of one's consciousness, and are, therefore, the basis of any future thoughts. Thus, James (1890) introduced an important distinction: the self is two interlinked entities which can be understood as the self-as-subject and the self-as-object. In this conceptualization, the self-as-subject, or "I," is the psychological *process* responsible for self-awareness and self-knowledge, what James (1890) called the "self-as-knower" (cited in Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 7).

Self-Awareness and Soul-Searching

Many people perceive the existence of something inside the mind that registers their experiences, thinks their thoughts, and feels their feelings. People report that this mental presence *is* or is *at* the core of who they really are or who they believe they are (Olson, 1999). Although there is no specific physiological structure tied to this experience, the people who were studied would not deny the subjective sensations of a conscious entity existing within them. In contrast, the self-as-known, or “Me,” is the collection of information about ourselves that is saved as a database of our knowledge and experiences that the self-as-subject, or “I,” draws upon when interacting with the world.

Buss (2001) writes that, if the I-self represents cognitive processes, the me-self represents the content, that is, our feelings about our bodies, our talents, and *us* in general. To show this difference more clearly, Simon (2004) explains that, because the word *self* refers to perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about one’s self, whenever we speak of a fragmented sense of self we typically mean that our *beliefs* about ourselves do not form a coherent whole. When people strive to enhance the self, they are actually attempting to increase their own positive feelings about themselves. This suggests the difference between our sense of self and our knowledge of self.

If we accept the behavioral and social scientists’ consensus about the dual nature of the self, we must consider how these dual selves are related, how they work together to serve us and how they may conflict and harm us. The idea of one self watching what the other self does, then reflecting on it seems key to understanding the self. Later, in chapter 3, we can connect this discussion of the

self with Nienkamp's (2001) concept of the rhetorical self and internal rhetoric.

For now, Harré (1998) suggests two underlying ideas about the self: that we have a particular point of view of the world and that we have a sense of being the same person over time and across different situations. Smith (1978) offers a set of characteristics which also consider existence, awareness, and reflection:

Selfhood involves being self-aware or reflective; being or having a body; somehow taking into account the boundaries of selfhood at birth and death and feeling continuity of identity in between; placing oneself in a generational sequence and network of other connected selves as forbearers of our descendents and relatives. (p. 1053)

The capacity to self-reflect appears to support the existence of the self and the dual nature of the self.

The Western concept of self, writes Roy Baumeister (1987, 1997), is just the most recent stage of a historical sequence that started in the Middle Ages, a time when each person was placed into sharply defined roles within the rigid structure of medieval society. In Medieval society there was little place for individualism and therefore a limited sense of self; in this period one was simply a member of a group, identified by family or job skill. It was promotion of the Christian idea of salvation which compelled each person to consider the totality of one's life and thus to examine one's actions and the motivations behind such actions. As such, Baumeister (1997) explains, people in the Romantic and Victorian eras became aware of the existence of an inner life of the mind, and people were encouraged to look inside themselves (or their "soul") to discover their true self, while outside appearances continued to serve the social needs of the self. This trend of personal

introspection continued into the 20th century, writes Allport (1961) and the need to know one's self intensified. It was "the waning of religious influence and the decrease in stable, extended families that reduced the effect of what might be called the collective self, thereby allowing an increasing emphasis on personal uniqueness to emerge" (p. 116).

Another way of considering the self is as a decision-maker, that is, as an agent which produces and regulates behavior. Baumeister (1999) discusses this executive function of the self as being unlike the concept of a homunculus or a kind of psychodynamic ego that has frustrated social science researchers.

Csikszentmihalyi (1993) describes the common view of this inner-person: "a tiny person sitting somewhere inside the brain who monitors what comes through the eyes, the ears, and the other senses, evaluates this information, and then pulls some levers that make us act in certain ways" (p. 22). However, the executive self described by Baumeister (1999) is seen as a cybernetic, self-control process.

When we consider processes of self-control and self-regulation, Baumeister suggests, we understand this executive feature of the self as the entity ruling us.

Self as a Process

Others question whether or not the self is a "thing" at all. Turner (2003) refutes the idea of "a mental entity stored in the cognitive system, rather than a dynamic social psychological process" (cited in Simon, 2004, p. xii). Instead, Turner (2003), who, like Simon (2004), promotes a social psychology perspective of self and identity, gives a succinct set of criteria:

1. The self is the *process* by which individual psychology is socialized, by which individual psychology in society interact. Self-

identities are social definitions of the perceiver

2. The adaptive flexibility of human behavior . . . is made possible by our *capacity to construct self-regulating self-identities* in light of and on the basis of changing social circumstances. . . .

3. Human psychology and social life are characterized by emergent processes and properties made possible by the functioning of the self and irreducible to principles unaffected by a self-process. . . .

4. Human cognition is not purely individual, . . . but takes place within a social field in which individuals always, implicitly or explicitly, test the validity of their beliefs against the views of others with whom they share a relevant social identity. . . .

(cited in Simon, 2004, p. xiii-xiv, emphasis added)

If the self is not a thing but a *process* then we must consider how an individual constructs it. Loevinger (1976) writes that “the synthetic function is not just another thing that the ego does, *it is what the ego is*” (p. 5, original emphasis).

This idea is further developed by McAdams (1997), who introduces the term *selfing*. For McAdams, “to self . . . is to apprehend and appropriate experience as a subject, to grasp phenomenal experience as one’s own, as belonging ‘to me.’ To self, furthermore, is to locate the source of subjective experience as oneself” (p. 56). In this sense, we all go around *selfing* every day. Instead of asking “How are you?” we might inquire of each other “Have you selfed today?”

What concerns me in this present study, however, is not so much the social influences that a person receives or how they are gathered nor what the process is called, but, rather, what the mind does with the experiences a person encounters.

If the self is constructed, to some degree, through a person's encounters with society and its culture, how does an individual use this input? The organization, analysis, interpretation, and response to such input is a psychological function. How the mind incorporates these many social aspects into a constructed self remains a line of inquiry which I have begun examining through my self-narrative. The matter is further confused when we introduce the concept of identity. For many people, self and identity are synonymous: one's self is one's identity. As we shall come to understand in the sections that follow, each of us has only one self, which is presented, at any moment, through one of possibly several identities that we construct throughout our lives and use automatically as needed.

Defining Identity

Identity in the Physical Sciences

In a 1956 essay by U. T. Place, "Is consciousness a brain process?" Place credits E. G. Boring (1933) with coining the term Identity Theory. In the essay, Place reinterpreted the idea of type-identity physicalism (see below) originating in Boring's work, work based on studies by Paul Broca and Carl Wernicke in the late 19th century demonstrating that different places in the brain were associated with different activities, both physical and mental. MRI technology confirms this relationship: certain parts of the brain "light up" when a person thinks of certain ideas, moves a certain muscle, or feels a certain emotion. From these examples, psychologists and neuroscientists began to associate mental states with physical states. This "identity theory of mind" begins with the biology of the brain as the basis for all cognitive activity. Rather than a primarily social basis for identity, this biological view provides the link to understanding the influence of one's identity on

any individual activity such as writing. It follows then that all mental states and events, such as dreaming, believing, hoping, fearing, or feeling pain are identical with physical states or biological processes in the central nervous system. In other words, a thought is not simply an ephemeral entity but a bio-electrical process, not a self-contained “thing”; therefore, a seemingly abstract mental event is actually a physical, biological event.

The example given in most descriptions of the theory uses a comparison of pain in both its biological/physical aspects and its mental/emotional aspects. The sensation of pain is actually a neurological act involving millions of c-fibers in the body. Stated in reverse, if millions of these c-fibers are activated, the sensation of pain must occur. From this basic equation comes the idea of identity as the degree of sameness and difference.

There are, however, always arguments against a theory and Identity Theory, in terms of Boring’s and Place’s type physicalism, is no different. Bealer (1997) offers one argument which goes like this (pp. 75-77): For any given neurological state (e.g., c-fiber stimulation), it is necessary that one have, say, 75,000,000 functionally related non-conscious parts; it would not be a c-fiber unless it had this sort of composition. Thus, if I am having c-fiber stimulation, then I am having the stimulation of something that has 75,000,000 or more functionally related nonconscious parts. But the experience of having the stimulation of something that has 75,000,000 or more functionally related nonconscious parts is stated in semantically stable words. Thus, it is impossible for anyone to know for certain whether or not all 75,000,000 parts are functioning, and if even one of them does not function then the state of “pain” cannot be considered “pain.” At least,

semantically. Anything less than 100% is 0%, it follows. I tend to believe, however, that a majority of people would agree that if *most*, or at least a high percentage, but not all, of those 75,000,000 c-fibers were firing, then pain has probably occurred. To most lay people, this would be “close enough” to constitute identical states.

Researchers in the physical sciences divide the theory into two foci: The *type identity theory* claims that every *kind* of mental state is identical with a particular *kind* of physical state. Thus, not only is the pain I feel when I hit my elbow identical with the firing of c-fibers, but *all* feelings of pain are identical with the firing of c-fibers. Of course, we understand that there are a variety of kinds of pain, and each person experiences each kind of pain differently. The *token identity theory*, on the other hand, states that every mental state *is* a physical state (my pain is just a c-fiber firing), but mental states as a type are not identical with or correspond to physical states as a type (my pain tomorrow may not be identical with a c-fiber firing). In short, identity is a matter of distinguishing sameness and difference. To take the above example further, such questions as *Are all c-fibers alike? Do they all fire in the same manner?* and *In what sense is pain experienced by different people?* create doubt in the validity of the theory. Most people are oblivious to these considerations when the topic of identity arises. The point to be taken from these two views of identity is that mental states are *similar* to biological processes (my emphasis).

This view of identity is not part of my main discussion but lends a context to discussions of identity in the humanities. While these kinds of measurements, definitions, and explanations of identity have engaged many people over the centuries, most people today would not apply such a limited view of identity in their

everyday lives. We tend to prefer, on a functional level, less scientifically-based concepts of identity. We are willing to have a little faith in a view or definition that cannot easily be proven following empirical methods yet nevertheless seems to be true. We can usually accept that *most* of the c-fibers are firing when we feel pain and we don't really care if a few of them are on holiday. It still hurts. Though questions remain concerning how mental states are both consciously and subconsciously affected, considering identity as degrees of sameness and difference opens the door to understanding identity from social and psychological perspectives, views which make it possible for us to consider how identity operates in composition.

Identity in the Humanities

Identity in the social sciences and humanities is decidedly different from that in the physical sciences. Social sciences researchers are concerned with people and society and focus on identity in terms of the individual and the group. When we hear someone mention "identity" in casual conversation, for example, we usually take it to mean some sort of self-representation, as though we are speaking of our twin or shadow: my self = *myself*. It is this popularized idea of identity that we consider important; without an identity, we cease to exist. Consider those people who have entered a coma. We tend to see them less as the person we knew because we no longer have any active connection to their identity. We get no sense of them. Without the will and ability to express some essence that is uniquely their own, they don't have the same identity to us. Brain-death is a loss of identity and the vanishing of the self along with the physical changes. The person's *self* no longer exists so we mourn the passing of the *persona* as much as the

person we knew by seeing various “presentations of self” and by our connections to the identities the person shared with us. We try to preserve the self of the person through photos, things created by the person, letters written to and from the person, shared memories, and so on, yet these are mementoes of the mind, the self, the identity of the person and seldom include anything physical from the body other than, perhaps, the cremated remains.

When we hear someone say she is trying to “find” herself, we usually do not believe she has actually lost herself, or her *self*; rather, she has a desire to *understand* her “true self,” as opposed to a collection of alternate “selves”—more accurately called *identities*—which have been constructed from experiences throughout her life. This “search,” suggests Gergen (1977), seems to be for “a stable and unifying core of existence, a firm touchstone which can provide us with a sense of authenticity and coherence, and which can serve as a criterion for action” (p. 139). To use a geological analogy, the person “seeking herself” might dig down through several layers of memories to find a true self, the real one, that is *her*. This *her* is the one she refers to when she discusses herself or “the real me” with her friends and family. The layers of self, to extend the analogy, have been laid with each experience she encounters and “sticks” to her self with each period of integration (i.e., a pause which lets the “sediment” settle); each rubs against previous layers and will rub against new layers. Trauma may, like the occasional earthquake, shake up the layers and reform them in different patterns. On the surface, however, remains her principal identity—the most salient identity—which, in most moments and situations, represents the self, that is, the identity which everyone sees and, thus, the one to which she devotes most of her care and

attention to maintaining because of its importance in her social connections. She learns as she grows up that her “real self” is not always appropriate for every situation and so her “self” splits into two, then three, four, or more *identities*—what Goffman (1959) calls “presentation of self,” similar to an actor who comes on stage to play a part and, having played it, exits stage-left in favor of the next actor or identity entering stage-right.

As I see it, then, the presentation of the self *is* an identity, perhaps one of several slightly different but nevertheless distinct identities. We may have a few identities which we use alternately as a situation requires; such identities have been created (or, perhaps, sheered off of the main identity) because of different situations we have encountered. Identities may be like actors in a “theater of the mind.” How many actors reside in one’s theater troupe can vary from person to person, depending on each person’s history and needs. The crucial factor to understand is that these various identities are representations of a unified self (or an intimately linked dual self, following James’ model) and are not, as sometimes expressed in pop psychology, multiple *selves* or multiple personalities.

Identity Construction as Developmental Goal

Identity construction is a process which occurs throughout our lives, sometimes in a brief, rushed period and other times developing at a slower pace. According to Ryan & Deci (2003),

Infants are not yet defined in terms of institutional affiliations, self-representations, and social roles by which others recognize that the identity that a child will later have [which] results from a developmental process that takes place within a cultural context.

Individuals acquire identities over time, identities whose origins of meanings derived from people's interactions within the social groups and organizations that surround them. (p. 253)

Therefore, identity construction has become for historical, cultural, and economic reasons a central developmental task. We understand that throughout history people have struggled with identity issues, frequently forced into roles or lifestyles unsuited to them. In similar fashion, many of today's youth risk failure when they attempt to negotiate often tricky postmodern pathways to adult roles, responsibilities, and relationships that having a secure identity provides. Many youth, however, end up adopting problem-fraught identities due to such failure. The desire to experience some kind of aliveness becomes prominent in their lives as they fight off depression and eschew nihilism.

Identity construction is a lifelong process, one that can be especially noticeable when an individual shifts between social contexts, such as the shift from high school to college or to a new work environment. Struggles to construct identity are especially acute for adolescents and youth because establishment of a secure, stable identity is crucial for passage into the adult world (Erikson, 1968), as I will discuss in chapter 4. Identity is typically marked by adolescents' attempt to define a place for themselves within society. Society is usually represented by smaller groups related to home, school, neighborhood, or other social organizations. However, according to Piaget (1967), the adolescent's motivation and capacity for adapting to different situations with different identities can be made difficult by the onset of the particular kind of egocentrism common in adolescence. Furthermore, an adolescent has the tendency to see himself or herself primarily from the

perspective of others and thus he/she becomes overly conscious of the place he has within various social contexts. This usually, but not always, leads to greater self-awareness. At the same time, this process can create considerable anxiety and the need for conformity in order to avoid feelings of rejection by the group.

To aid in fitting in with a certain social group, identities may sometimes be easily bought or conveniently borrowed. Popular critics from Lasch (1979, 1984), Postman (1982, 1985, 1995), and Healy (1990) to Hersch (1998), Shlain (1998), Wiseman (2002), Quart (2003) and White (2003) agree that in market-based societies the range of possible identities available to any individual is larger than ever before. The latitude given to individuals to pursue different identities has also expanded. Because individual identities are not preordained or even self-apparent, individuals can at least superficially define themselves to others through their selection of clothes and other commodities, which serve as markers of a person's interests, status, and affiliations. In this view of identity, you are what you buy; what you choose to buy for yourself indicate something about how you see yourself or how you would like others to see you. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace rely on participants self-categorizing by interests, likes and dislikes, and so on. In the U.S., people are encouraged to consume their way into identities. In the absence of the strong identity constraints of family, job, church, etc. as in past generations and with the widening availability of ready-made identity models—the choices and the pressure for self-commodification—the developmental task of “finding oneself” within the social world has now become among the most difficult of life's challenges.

Salience and Spatiotemporal Continuity

Another concept in Identity Theory that has importance for both social and psychological theories of identity is *salience*, or prominence in a hierarchy. The salience we attach to each of our identities determines how much effort we may put into each identity and how well we perform each identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). According to Stryker (1968), the various identities that comprise the self exist in a hierarchy of salience, where the identity ranked highest is most likely to be invoked in many situations and, therefore, seems to stand in for the self. What influences the salience of an identity is the degree of commitment one has to the identity. Commitment has both quantitative and qualitative aspects (Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994). Quantitative commitment reflects the number of people with which a person has connections through a particular identity. The greater the number of people to whom he/she has ties, the greater the commitment to further developing or maintaining that identity. With qualitative commitment, the stronger or deeper the ties a person has to other people through a particular identity, the higher the degree of commitment he/she has to that identity. Stryker (1968) suggests that with the greater the commitment to an identity comes the higher placement of that identity in the salience hierarchy.

Another way of considering identity is through its spatial and temporal aspects. The continuity of identity through time and space has long engaged philosophers, in fact, back to Heraclites, who wondered how anything could continue to exist through change—i.e., if something changes, is it still the original thing or something new? In response, Brody (1980) writes:

It is widely believed, for example, that spatiotemporal continuity is a

necessary and sufficient condition for the identity of physical objects. In other cases, there is an ongoing debate about the conditions for identity. Thus, philosophers are continuing the long-standing debate as to whether personal identity should be analyzed in terms of the identity of the relevant bodies or in terms of some sort of continuity of memory and character. (p. 3)

When we consider continuity, we must remember that the cells of a human body die and new cells are born at regular intervals, such that every so often we will have a completely new set of cells that constitute the body. Because brain cells are also replaced, we might say that we have a new brain every so often, too—and yet our mind and our memories remain. We continue to have the same sense of self through this constant transformation—unless it is disrupted by stroke, Alzheimer's disease, or mental illness, etc.

Identity, Need Satisfaction, and Self-Determination

Ryan and Deci (2003) advocate two theories that help to explain the motivation behind identity construction: *needs satisfaction* and *self-determination*.

First, identities are created to serve basic psychological needs:

People develop identities first and foremost to help them secure, maintain, and solidify their connectedness to social groups. People find a way to fit into social contexts by adopting roles, beliefs, and practices that are recognized and appreciated by others. (p. 254)

The principal function of identity construction, Baumeister & Leary (1995) agree, is to facilitate the experiencing of secure belonging or relatedness. Identities are constructed because they support feelings of competence, such as when people

gravitate toward identities through which they can engage in optimal challenges, gain skills and knowledge, and feel generally effective. Identities also fulfill the need for autonomy and provide a suitable venue where people can develop and express their personal interests, values and beliefs, and talents. Identities can also be adopted for defensive purposes, such as to avoid feelings of vulnerability, to gather strength for oneself, to gain power over others, or simply to protect the ego. Thus, ultimately, people create identities to satisfy psychological needs.

Secondly, Ryan and Deci (2003) suggest that the process through which identities are acquired or created and organized within the individual begins with the recognition that each individual has multiple identities and that each of these identities is more or less well assimilated to the self of the individual. They call this process Self-Determination Theory, which

describes variations in the relative assimilation of identity to the self and argues that these variations have empirically testable and clinically relevant implications for human functioning. The identities we wear can vary, and may be forced on us by the contingencies of our social contexts. They may be partially assimilated as introjects or they may be well integrated into the self so that they serve as a personally meaningful and abiding guide to life. The theory suggests that the more one's life roles and pursuits remain only partially assimilated to the self, the more they fail to fulfill one's psychological needs. (p. 255)

The acquisition of identities, like the acquisition of any psychological structure, occurs primarily through the process of assimilation. That is, people are

naturally inclined to imitate, explore, and take on various social roles and practices and transform them into aspects of themselves. However, because people cannot assimilate every identity they encounter, and because family or society may discourage some identities, the process of identity construction is often determined by individual interests as the person interacts with various social pressures, constraints, and reward systems. Many of the identities people construct are direct outgrowths of the things they love to do. (Ryan, 1995)

Nevertheless, over the course of socialization, people are exposed to identities, or aspects of them, that may or may not be intrinsically appealing but that still may have value or importance. Internalization refers to the process of taking in external models and values and transforming them into self-identity and personally endorsed values (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-Determination Theory proposes that variation in the extent and quality of people's internalization of various identities serves to explain differences between authentic and vital lives that some individuals exhibit and the alienated, half-hearted, or conflicted enactment of identities that afflicts others.

There is a lot to digest in understanding the nature of identity. The focus today seems to boil down to debate between a social or psychological basis for identity. I find that we can understand identity more easily by following a model proposed by Harré and Gillett (1994), who regard the self as being composed of "four coordinated manifolds." They consider identity simultaneously as "a location in space or a point of view; a location in time, or a 'trajectory or path through time'; a location of responsibility, or agency; and social location in a 'manifold of persons, ordered by status, age, reputation, and the like'" (p. 163). We may all be able to

agree on these general factors; sorting through the details still remains.

Social Identity Theory and Cultural Studies

Identity theory in sociology seeks to understand the ways self and identity are linked to the role relationships and role-related behavior of individuals in groups (Stryker, 1968). Identity theorists in sociology argue that the self consists of a collection of identities, each of which is based on occupying a particular role (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identities thus can be defined as how one answers the question *Who am I?* (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). The answers are often linked to the roles we play, so they are often referred to as “role identities” or, simply, “identities.” These role identities influence behavior because each role has a set of associated meanings and expectations for the self (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). This understanding leads to a social perspective of individual identity.

Group Discrimination and Socialization

Social Identity Theory was put forth by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1986) as a way to understand the psychological basis of group interaction. Their research (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982) involved what they called “minimal group discrimination.” According to Buss (2001), Tajfel wished to correct what he saw as a tendency by American social scientists to emphasize in their research the individuality in personal identity rather than considering the social sources of identity. When an individual identifies with a group, *who I am* becomes *who we are*, after all. Tajfel argued that the motivation for and expected outcome of group interaction is enhanced self-esteem. The process involves comparison between one’s own group and other groups (p. 108). Tajfel says this comparison occurs through three possible elements. *Categorization* refers to the ways we tend to put

ourselves and other people into categories for purposes of comparison.

Identification is where we associate with a certain group, which serves to bolster our self-esteem. In this sense, the degree of sameness equates to familiarity and lends support for a group-based identity: the more characteristics members have in common, the closer their association. *Comparison* is when we consciously or subconsciously line up the characteristics of our group with those of another group and determine relative strengths and weaknesses, and so on, yet always inferring the superiority of our own group.

In Tajfel's group experiments, individuals were grouped in terms of the most trivial of criteria (e.g., their preference for painting styles), yet even in such seemingly trivial grouping the members displayed in-group bias by awarding more points to in-group members. Group members displayed this bias even when doing so reduced their own individual gain. From these studies, Tajfel (1970, 1974, 1981) concluded that the process of categorizing oneself as a group member gives an individual's behavior a distinct meaning, creating a social identity that is positively valued within the group. This group identity becomes an integral aspect of an individual's sense of *personal* identity. As a consequence of group-based identity, individuals want to see themselves as different from and superior to members of other groups, and to establish solidarity with members of their own group.

Social identity theory does regard the impact of individual differences. Tajfel (1981) asserted that behavior can be represented in terms of a bi-polar continuum. At the interpersonal pole, behavior is determined by the character and motivations of the individual as an individual. At the opposite, inter-group pole, behavior is determined by an individual's group membership. Where individuals place

themselves on this continuum depends upon the special interplay between social and psychological factors. Each individual has a repertoire of identities (social and psychological) and the identity which is most salient (i.e., most used, or principal, identity) for an individual at any time will vary according to the social context.

Social Identity and Psychological Situatedness

According to Stryker (1980), social psychologists see individuals as always acting within the context of a certain social structure in which they and others are labeled in such a way that each recognizes the other as occupying positions or roles in society (p. 11). Beyond the initial distinctions of gender, race and ethnicity, age, height/weight, etc., we tend to describe a person by the superficial features of identity he or she presents to us, which of course leads to stereotyping behavior (e.g., “nice guy” or “kind woman”).

However, I would like to argue that each individual constructs an identity which is personal and based on psychological operations *despite* what input may come from a person’s experiences in socialization. Simon (2004) argues that to understand the dual role of identity in both a social and a psychological view requires us to understand its role as a mediator in people’s experiences and behaviors in the social world: “Identity results from interaction in the social world and in turn guides interaction in the social world. . . . It describes a causal chain in which identity serves as a critical mediating link” (p. 2). Thus, we understand that identity is a multifaceted phenomenon. Accordingly, it has “attracted the interest of scholars from a wide spectrum of scientific disciplines: philosophy, anthropology and cultural studies, political science, sociology, psychology” (p. 3). To Simon’s list, I would like to add English.

Some limited work on identity and composition has been done. For example, critics like Giroux (1992) and hooks (2003) have addressed identity but only from the perspective of a person's membership in a community. We do draw our identity, in large part, from where we live, our occupation, and the people around us through our membership in groups defined by race, class, gender, and so on. The place where we live and work, as well as the commonalities shared with members of other groups, influences our identity, such that one may even prefer to live in a certain place *because* the features of that place reinforce one's identity just as one may *choose* to affiliate with a certain group because of the support to one's ego that is found in membership.

Giroux (1992) acknowledges the situatedness of students' experiences and how their experiences are locations of relevant connections that are necessary to the learning process. Though referring to actual happenings, this kind of situatedness is similar to the collection of experiences that help with one's identity construction. In *Teaching Community* (2003), hooks discusses the *situatedness* of race and the pervasiveness of racism in society, that is, the political and social "place" of the issue. To "teach community," she writes, means to work against the effects of such socialization and to resist even the subtle ways in which racism is reinforced (p. 33-37). In hooks' example, identity is seen as the group's identity, drawn from the group's solidarity rather than members' individuality. We also encounter situatedness when we distinguish between academia and the "real world" our students face upon graduation (p. 41-49).

In the current study, I wish to consider psychological sources of identity. Personal identity, what Erikson (1950) calls "ego identity," is influenced by the

communities that support and sustain the individual (or sometimes fail to) through each stage of life. While I accept the influence of social connections on identity, my concern, however, is on what I will call the *psychological situatedness* of the writer in the process of constructing an identity. By psychological situatedness, I do not mean to infer an individual's state of mental health nor do I employ any diagnostic criteria for determining mental health. I use the term, instead, to describe a psychological "place" in much the same way compositionists use *situatedness* to describe a physical place or community membership from which the writer draws influences and identity (Blitz & Hurlbert, 1988; Faigley, 1992; Couture, 1999; Haswell & Lu, 2000; Carroll, 2002; Banks, 2003; Tingle, 2004; Fulkerson, 2005).

Psychological situatedness, therefore, refers to a psychological "place" from which the writer draws influences and identity. Such a situation is in the mind. Such a situation results from the combination of experiences—all events, impressions, images, sounds, thoughts, behavior, and so on that, as Eliot claimed for poets, "combine in peculiar and unexpected ways." These experiences combine and become embedded in the psyche or self, perhaps as what Jung calls "complexes," and may be revealed through thought and action—including writing. Psychological situatedness affects the writer during the process of writing. The act of writing can be a powerful tool for releasing such embedded experiences and through the act identity is constructed, maintained, redirected, or repressed. In short, the writer's experiences, say, in childhood and youth, might continue to influence in the present how the writer sees himself or herself and how that conglomeration of sensorial and experiential stimuli which provide the materials for constructing identity also can influence the person's writing. Based on my self-narrative exploration, I believe

strongly that they do.

For the present study I would like to borrow William James' model and add my conceptualization of self and identity to create a new model that I will rely on in the following chapters (see Figure 1). James' model sees the self as a whole unit consisting of two parts—a dual-self. The self-aware spokesperson that is “I” is called Ego and the collected knowledge and experiences that serve as a database that is “me” is called Self. Here, I want to graft onto James' model of the dual-self my concept of identity. Let me use an analogy to make the idea clear. The Ego projects through the Self rather like a flashlight shining through a lens, and what image shines on the wall is an identity. If the Ego-flashlight shines its light at a slightly different angle through the Self-lens, then a different identity is produced on the wall. In actuality, where the Ego connects with the Self and a somewhat different bit of knowledge or experience is accessed, a different identity is created or called up than if a different bit of knowledge or experience was accessed. It is the unique way in which the Ego projects through the Self to create or use an identity in a certain circumstance is what I call psychological situatedness. In short, what combination of knowledge and experiences serves as a lens through which a writer's Ego comes to act as an identity? Each situation is different. We may react differently to the same situation. Each person is different. And different experiences make different psyche, that is, a different self. This psychological uniqueness is a kind of situatedness. This is only a conceptual model, of course, and the variables are many. However, beginning with some kind of working model of the inner world will make further discussion of identity in composition more understandable.

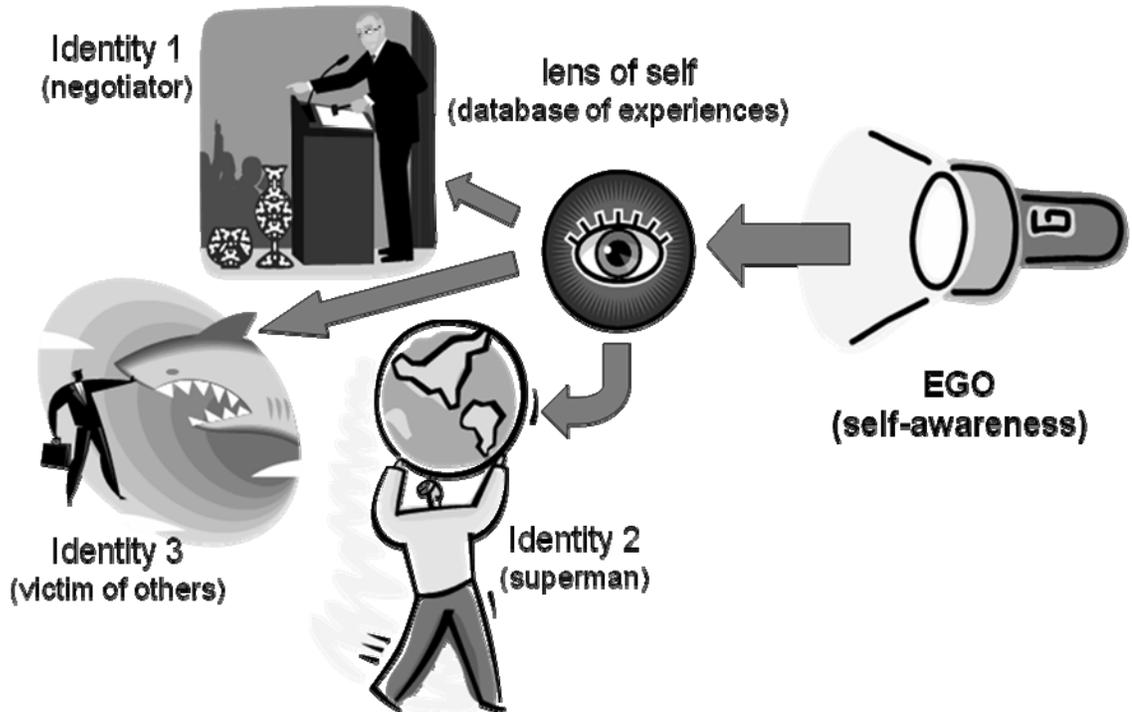


Figure 1. A Jamesian concept of the dual-self projecting various identities.

Finding a balance between socialization and individuation is difficult in any identity construction. The trick is for the individual to recognize the different influences he or she has encountered and to place such experiences in a meaningful context. I want to argue that the work one does to recognize whatever has impacted and influenced one's identity can have significant results. We need to acknowledge both the social influences on psychological situatedness and the psychological influences on social behavior. We then need to accept that there is no universal way the individual manages influences nor manipulates the social input in the process of identity construction. I can offer my own examples through my self-narrative, but they will just be examples and examples of just one possible way. Usually the individual may not be fully aware of these identity influences or know how they have affected or may continue to affect identity, yet it is happening

every day, with every encounter with an “other.”

Seeking Identity in Composition

My interest in the psychological situatedness of writers prompted me to examine my own psychological situatedness both as a student writer, in hindsight, and as a mature writer and teacher of writing. Throughout this process of self-reflection, my identity and my realization of my identity has changed, reverted, and changed again as I seemed to stumble upon new and different concepts in my psychology reading. Earlier versions of this project, I might consider, served as a way to explore the subject; now, in revision, I can more assuredly tell where I’ve been and what I’ve seen. This is part of my identity, too: researcher treading into unfamiliar territory, required to return with new treasures to share. Yet I have always been more comfortable—and, therefore, more productive—when I am able to write from a personal perspective (such as in this paragraph), and even more so when I am allowed to inject a more fanciful style of prose.

I tend to also incorporate automatically much of what I have read without being able to recall exactly where an idea originated. This is probably the case with most people and certainly with many first-year composition students. We learn to explain the world, and find personal truths in it, based mostly on our identity—which is constructed from the experiences we have had and, more importantly perhaps, how we interpret those experiences, how we make sense of them in such a way as to encapsulate the highlights as memories. We might consider that through the examination of a memory of a particular experience we may find some level of personal truth that, once understood, sheds some light on the present circumstance—much like psychoanalytical therapy.

In this chapter I have tried to condense a very complex subject into a rather manageable portion. There is still much that, by necessity, must be left out. My goal here has been to provide a context for understanding identity as I apply it in subsequent chapters. In this chapter, I began by introducing concepts of self, which is the starting point for any discussion of identity because identity is a projection or presentation of the self. Several versions of Identity Theory have been proffered to explain the nature of self and identity and the many ways of considering identity. These identity theories have brought issues of identity into modern research and scholarship, separate from their older philosophical or metaphysical use. I then discussed how the physical sciences consider identity as a measurement of sameness and difference, and then how identity is considered in the humanities. The primary distinction in the humanities is between social and psychological origins and functions of identity. Social Identity Theory advocates that identity is socially based and socially constructed, through language, from cultural materials. Psychology argues for a biological or cognitive approach to the construction of identity. I acknowledge that socialization has a great influence on identity; however, what I focus on in this current study is how the social aspects are dealt with psychologically to produce a personal or psychological identity. This identity (or perhaps one of several identities), however constructed, has great influence over many factors in student writing, from the choice of topics, development and organization, to surface errors of grammar and syntax (Bracher, 1999). It is this way of considering identity's role in composition that I have sought to understand and will use to develop a theory of identity construction through writing.

To conclude this chapter, let us remember that issues of identity have in the

past century turned from philosophers' problems to psychologists' problems. The influences of popular culture have also weighed heavily on our understanding of identity. Advertisers rely on images designed to induce the sense of identity an individual might wish to present. In the last few decades, we have become a more individualistic, *me*-centered society. The self, and the identity through which we see it, have been greatly misunderstood. "The self has fallen upon hard times," write Holstein and Gubrium (2000):

After decades of attention to self-awareness, self-improvement, and self-esteem, an embattled self cascades from all quarters. Some claim that self-indulgence is society's downfall, with the narcissistic individual undermining community . . . that we must nurture, sustain, and safeguard the self are giving way to new, playfully dismissive signals that all therapeutic efforts are ultimately futile. Coherence and constancy, it seems, don't amount to much any more in a postmodern world of instantaneous communication, hyperkinetic consumerism, and electronically mediated imagery. In such a world, the self is everywhere and thus nowhere in particular—fleeting, evanescent, a mere shadow of what it used to be. (p. 3)

Identity, in its "public self" façade, has been subjugated, pushed aside and devalued. But it remains active and vital in each of us, continuing to affect what we do and how we do it, and, most importantly, why we do it.

As a writer exploring identity, it is easy for me to equate living one's life with reading a book. If we take the idea one step further, we actually write the book in the way we want the story to proceed. We want to make things work out in the end.

I can see how I have both unwittingly and deliberately constructed my identity step by step throughout my life, a great portion of it through writing. This writing reveals some of the connections and influences between identity and writing which I have experienced. What I have worked through is a process similar to what occurs in all people, I suspect, though each of us naturally will have different experiences and combine them in different ways to construct different identities. It is the process, according to McAdams (1993), the vehicle, according to Nienkamp (2001), and the timing, according to Erikson (1959), that may be similar. In the next two chapters I discuss these issues as a framework for bringing identity into the composition classroom.

CHAPTER 3

THE MYTHIC SELF AND THE RHETORICAL SELF

In this chapter, I want to present a conceptual framework for writing that assists in the construction and development of identity. In doing so, I will explore two ideas: the mythic self and the rhetorical self. Taken together, I believe they provide both a reason and a vehicle for aiding students in the construction of their identities. It is not enough to simply argue that it is important to consider identity in composition. Rather, I wish to show that constructing identity and maintaining and adapting identities is an on-going function that *also occurs* in the composition classroom. Just as identity is built up through experiences that come to constitute a kind of narrative, the writing that students do in composition class can also be used to assist them in identity construction. By focusing on the role of story in identity, I want to argue that what we do in composition class, and what I am proposing, is not an unnatural activity perhaps reserved for those with special needs but, rather, one which we do every day.

The Making of the Mythical Self

The Stories We Live By

In his book *The Stories We Live By* (1993), Psychologist Dan P. McAdams, introduces the idea of “personal myths.” McAdams sees these myths as the stories that we compose and frame as self-serving commodities in order to get through our lives. In this “lifespan developmental theory” (p. 5) of identity, “each of us comes to know who he or she is by creating a heroic story of the self” (p. 11). This concept instantly captured my attention; I knew instinctively what he meant because I had

begun to recognize how, throughout my writing life, I have created stories about myself—or someone I presumed to be me, or perhaps how I want to be. After all, a novelist's first published work is usually a thinly-veiled autobiography. Beginning in my late teens, I have seen my life not as a series of unconnected events placed randomly on the pages of my life story but a whole book I must “read” through and “live” chapter by chapter and page by page. McAdams (1993) suggests that we construct identity in a similar way to how a storyteller composes a story, that is, drawing from our real experiences and imagery (archetypes, imagoes, symbols), melded with selective analysis and interpretation, and with consideration of the audience and our purpose—the purpose being to present ourselves to ourselves and others in a way that serves our ego/self. This realization compels me to see my life even more as a story I am writing. The power to create my life, to make it happen exactly as I want it to, is quite the young man's dream! Of course, the reality is usually quite different. Still, I often look at an event, a happening, a situation, or a crisis as something that is set purposefully in my life in dramatic fashion by some unknown author, like a plot device instead of a real situation. It makes me question how this or that act will play out in later chapters. So I predict the outcome. I try to flip ahead through the pages, and try to sneak a peek at the end. I imagine how someone else, or a different identity of *me*, might respond to the challenge. The final chapter, however, is sacrosanct, unknowable by me—who is strangely both author and protagonist. This is how I see McAdams' concept of the “mythic self” connecting with my writing experiences.

McAdams' (1993) work is an on-going investigation of “how modern people create identities through narrative, beginning with the origins of narrative tone in

infancy and ending with the older adult's efforts to craft a satisfying ending for the life story by establishing a generative legacy of the self" (p. 5). He describes this current approach in psychology that relies on narrative: research based upon the life stories that people tell about themselves correlated with observation of the storytellers in a natural, life setting. From people's stories, McAdams defines a person's identity as what it is about someone's life that "provides her with meaning, unity, and purpose" (p. 6).

This goes beyond the core of a person's *self* and a circle of identities to include what it is that the person understands and often projects:

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. I must come to see in all its particulars the narrative of the self—the personal myth—that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years. It is a story I continue to revise, and tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living. (p. 11)

McAdams explains that this is not a matter of "delusion or self-deception" or simply telling ourselves lies, but that "through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life" (p. 11). We tell stories to make meaning, and so we can tell ourselves stories as a way to make sense of our lives, to put things into context—or sometimes to unpleasant put things away, as I describe in chapter 5 with regard to my own life story.

Working with volunteers in a 1986 social-science research study, McAdams asked people to tell their life stories as he listened carefully for what he terms the

“self-defining myth—the kernel of the narrative” which he believes “most clearly characterizes [a person’s] identity as an adult” (p. 20). This is the central story, the myth, behind all of the little stories and anecdotes a person tells about himself. I see this concept being nearly synonymous to what Lacan (1977) terms a person’s “fundamental fantasy.”¹ McAdams (1993) recounts one volunteer in the study whose personal myth revealed a lack of any real childhood foundation “steadfast enough to sustain her growth and assure her happiness” (p. 20). This particular myth might make for a typical fairy tale: the innocent child, abused or abandoned, grows up to be the self-loathing troll who hurts others. Western culture is full of this kind of story, commonly depicted in the many teenage “slasher” films (e.g., *Friday the Thirteenth*, *Halloween*, and *Saw*), where we meet the misunderstood monster behind whose actions is a tragic story of early victimization. This mirrors common reports that children today who suffer from abuse and abandonment may grow up to become damaged and thus unproductive, unhappy citizens. That these stories are repeated in many cultures and social groups also makes them “mythic.” In fact, the form of communication known as *story* “appears in every known human culture” because it is “a natural package for organizing many different kinds of information” (p. 27). Thus, story, or narrative, is a basic vehicle for processing information through anecdote, parable, allegory, novel and film.

The Narrative Mind and Narrative Truth

I have previously argued this idea about “narrative truth” in scholarly papers and I will repeat it here: there is a kind of truth which when presented through a story is believable in ways which can be quite different from the persuasiveness of

¹ For further discussion of Lacan’s concept of the fundamental fantasy, see Appendix B.

compiled data from an empirical study. McAdams (1993) seems to concur when he writes that

much of what passes for everyday conversation among people is storytelling of one form or another. This appears to be so pervasively true that many scholars have suggested that the human mind is first and foremost a vehicle for storytelling. We are born with a narrating mind. (p. 28)

We can imagine that when primitive people settled in at night after a day of hunting and gathering, they would pass the time telling stories. Or, as McAdams (1993) states, these people would “pass the time by making sense of past time” (p. 28): *I remember when* is a common beginning to stories. Stories preserve time. In fact, the stories told around the campfire at the end of the day “create a shared history, linking people in time and events as actors, tellers, and audience” (p. 28). Thus were born discourse communities, groups of people united by a common lore.

While telling stories is a conscious act, telling ourselves stories is generally done in our subconscious, according to McAdams (1993). We seldom notice we are doing it, perhaps because of the nature of story and how it deals with “narrative truth.” McAdams (1993) writes:

Stories are less about facts and more about meanings. In the subjective and embellished telling of the past, the past is constructed—history is made. History is judged to be true or false not solely with respect to its adherence to empirical fact. Rather, it is judged with respect to such narrative criteria as “believability” and “coherence.” There is a narrative truth in life that seems quite removed from logic,

science, and empirical demonstration. It is the truth of a “good story.”

(p. 28-29)

I think that the *kind* of truth stories bring us is a personal truth that fits the world view of both storyteller and audience. It is seldom about recording the empirical facts; it is about making sense of the facts as we find them. In other words, what matters to people has less to do with any attempt at objectivity than what they *want* to believe, what they find comfortable to acknowledge, and what is accepted in the community—with the notion of “fitting in” being implied. Thus, “literacy” has often meant knowing the stories common to the community; today we need to be able to read and write “stories” to be considered literate. The same idea of universality applies to religious ritual, which anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1972, 1973) sees as primarily a system of symbols used to maintain community solidarity and less about worshipping deities (p. 4). Part of that community solidarity is embedded in the stories that are shared, much like Western civilization has been built on the shared literary heritage of Hebrew, Greek, and Roman stories, including stories in the form of mythology.

Stories form the basis for many activities. “Some stories,” writes McAdams (1993), “gain wide acceptance for their ability to communicate a fundamental truth about life. These stories are incorporated into the culture of a particular group of people. Such stories may be deemed sacred, and we reserve for them the term myth” (p. 33-34). The personal myth is thus sacred to its author. For the making of a personal myth, I know that I must “get along” with myself, and I may do this by telling myself “Everything will be all right,” or “I’ll get it right next time,” or simply an enthusiastic “Way to go!” I tell myself the way things should be or could be.

When it comes to modern humans, we still employ stories as a means of creating solidarity (e.g., talking about the weather), asserting the storyteller's identity (e.g., someone aware of meteorological phenomena), establishing the audience (e.g., someone wishing to know about the weather), and, conversely, also presenting the audience's identity ("Well, *I* think it'll be sunny."), and the storyteller's own stance as audience for the other speaker ("No, it will definitely rain.") when the second person shares his story with the first person ("I heard on the six o'clock news that it'll be sunny."). Together they build a kind of solidarity—or, occasionally, conflict—and thus create a new story that merges each of their stories into a single story ("I met the most stubborn person today, who didn't know *anything* about the weather!"). And life goes on.

That we "write" our life stories as we live our lives provides a framework and an opening for actually writing our life's stories as a way to construct or maintain, adapt or adopt, revise or deconstruct our identity. In the creation of stories lays identity, as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 5.

The Rhetorical Self

Listening to the Voice(s) Inside

The kind of myth-making McAdams (1993) describes is a subconscious effort that involves the self engaged in speaking, essentially negotiating, with itself about who it is. I see these "selves" as separate identities, or perhaps a primary or salient identity addressing the singularity of the self. Either way, this is an example of an "internal rhetoric" directed by a Rhetorical Self. Jean Nienkamp (2001) uses this term to describe a self that is "made up of a colloquy of internalized social languages, interacting rhetorically to adapt attitude and behavior to personal,

cultural, and environmental demands” (p. 127). In fact, such language practices are internalized precisely because of their suasive power. From an early age, we learn that gestures (and eventually language) influence people around us; likewise, we are shaped by the hortatory gestures, language, and images that tell us how we are to be in the world. [The rhetorical self] consciously and unconsciously practices rhetoric within itself, among its constituent voices, both to maintain a fragile equilibrium of personal identity and to resolve ambiguous or conflicting imperatives for attitude, decision, and action (p. 128)

Few things require more effort than the successful maintenance of one’s personal identity. And perhaps nothing is more difficult to persuade (or occasionally easy) than ourselves. Rather than “our perceptions of having a continuous self [being] illusory,” Nienkamp writes, “a significant portion of primary internal rhetoric functions to maintain a tentative equilibrium among the voices of the rhetorical self” (p. 128). These *voices*, like identities discussed earlier, rather than symptomatic of some clinical problem, are a natural province of the human psyche.

As I negotiate my sense of self through conversations among the collective *voices* my rhetorical self possesses, I may try out different identities. For example, I may rely on one basic “voice” or identity most of the time (e.g., my most-salient identity as a happy-go-lucky intellectual wannabe, what I jokingly have been calling “the professor,” even long before I was one). I seem to use a different one for the classroom (e.g., the firm but fair professor with a wry sense of humor, sometimes called “everyday teacher,” a conglomeration of the best qualities of teachers I have

known). And I know I use another one for dealing with the relatives I see once or twice a year (e.g., how do I want to present myself at this New Year's party?²), as well as one for whenever my "most-salient" identity doesn't seem to be working effectively, and even one for, let's say, if I should need to speak with a person of authority such as a doctor, counselor, legal advisor, or hiring committee. These are not roles I consciously choose to play but "personas"—identities—applied instantly as the situation requires. I recognize them and recall their appearance "on stage" only after the fact.

Recently, for example, I had to speak with my elderly father about a serious matter and I suddenly realized in the midst of our conversation that I was nervous, my throat tight, even sweating (though there was no rational reason for my reaction). Despite my thirty years of adulthood, I felt as though I were seven years old again, ready to accept punishment—just like when I confessed that I was the one who had broken the garage window by practicing my softball pitching against the brick wall next to the garage door with the window, exactly where I had been told not to. In this recent exchange, I knew what was happening. I knew which identity was in control at that moment, but I was quite powerless to stop it or change it to another identity. I could only break the spell by exiting the room and recomposing myself. I realized that for some reason, this long-repressed identity had suddenly jumped to the surface without my calling it forth. Perhaps it was just a response to the increasingly emotional content of our conversation that touched

² For example, one relative of mine has a very obvious dual-identity. A salesman by trade, he will present himself either as a rich philanthroper or as a clever and frugal schemer. In the first identity, he wishes his relatives to see him as so financial successful that he need not be concerned with how much something costs and boasts about what he has purchased. In the second, he wishes to show us that he is so smart that he can finagle a good deal in any transaction and thus pay less than an ordinary customer. To his parents, he uses the first; to other relatives he uses the second.

a Jungian “complex,” thus triggering the response that had embedded in it the identity of a seven-year old boy. Identities can be quite powerful at times.

And yet, I think that in order for these identities (“voices”) to be called up instantly and automatically requires that they already be a part of me, connected to my consciousness as facets of a singular identity as my *self*. Erving Goffman (1959) developed the idea of the self as being socially situated and dramaturgic. The self is presented to others, staged in order to simultaneously accomplish particular moral ends and, as I believe Lacan (1977) suggests, to defend the ego, or as Kohut (1966) explains, to protect the continuing flow of “narcissistic supply.”³ Goffman, however, sees the self not as a lone actor on stage but a full company of actors, a group of what I want to call a spectrum of identity⁴ where each identity participates in the realizations each of us may desire. Lacan (1977) sees these presentations of self—the emergence on stage of a salient identity—as being motivated by subconscious drives or fantasies.

I see these various identities as acting essentially as a separate “person” (as the word *persona* is defined) but they all originate in the same real “person”: the self. As an example, I am often aware, usually in hindsight, of a particular identity taking over in a situation (as I described above), but I seldom realize at the moment of hijacking that my self has changed. The realization (and thus recognition) comes later, when I might question why I said that or why I acted that way when it was not at all what I had planned to do. Identity is both a representation and a presentation of self. *Role*, however, I want to define as a specific conscious act of behavior while

³ Narcissistic supply, in general, refers to the ego-stroking words and acts which provide sustenance to the narcissistic personality.

⁴ For further discussion of the concept of a spectrum of identity, see Appendix A.

it is *identity* that appears as an automatic action originating in the subconscious. It is usually only in reflection that we detect these different identities at work.

Self, Rhetoric and Consciousness

I see Nienkamp's (2001) concept of the rhetorical self as the result of the evolution of the conscious mind, a development necessitated by basic biological functions. Csikszentmihalyi (1993), describes how consciousness evolved into the concepts of mind and soul:

The capacity for reflection emerged in response to the brain's millions of neuronal bundles, each evolved to perform a limited task [such that they] eventually reached a level of complexity that made it necessary to have an internal traffic cop to direct and prioritize the flow of perceptions and sensations. . . . [C]onsciousness is more like a magnetic field, an aura, or a harmonic tone resulting from the myriad separate sensations collecting in the brain [where evolved] a distinct self, capable of taking charge of the domain of consciousness, and deciding which feelings or ideas should take precedence over the rest. Having had this experience of something inside us directing consciousness we gave it a name—the self—and took its reality for granted. (p. 23)

Consciousness, therefore, is rather like the idea of identity in the physical sciences: it is a biological process that only *seems* to exist as a spiritual entity or mental agent. Perhaps this “truth” matters less—like exactly how many c-fibers are firing—than how we perceive of the various sensations that allow us somehow to interact with the self or even how we have come to rely so completely on this mysterious

force for much of our daily activities. The details of how it all works remain perpetually fascinating but drown quickly into the practical actions of our everyday lives and the need we have for controlling our thoughts and behavior both for our own benefit and that of society. Part of this control, I want to suggest, rests in the structure of the stories we tell ourselves: stories *about* ourselves, which serve to create structure and organization for our actions, stories which create meaning.

Only by focusing our thoughts are we aware of the story we are creating about ourselves. Beginning in my late teens, for example, I found myself teased by vivid images of my life that seemed to stretch back into the past as well as far into the future, almost as though they were video clips on a long, unrolled spool of film. Life is a story; it is a story full of other stories about storytellers telling about other storytellers. As I explore my identity through my self-narrative, I see how I might consider my life as a kind of “grand narrative”—to use Lyotard’s (1979) term—a narrative which I seem to be following despite my best efforts to go astray, even as I try to make myself believe everything is happening surreptitiously. I step to the right, trying to rebel against the “path,” and I discover that the step to the right was what I was supposed to do all along. So I step to the left, just to resist Fate, and I find that I once again did exactly what Fate decreed I do. It is often maddening. However, understanding this arc of life as a single commodified *thing*, rather than a long-term set of seemingly random actions/reactions without connection, helps me get through the day. This is my “story.”

Perhaps this is one reason why I find McAdams’ (1993) ideas so appealing: I have, at last, noticed the writing of my life story that is occurring—and my shock is similar to Dorothy’s as she pulled back the curtain on the Wizard of Oz. Yes, these

are only my particular experiences, but I share them as a way to demonstrate how *someone* might begin to make connections between the events of one's life, one's thoughts, and one's writings in order to understand how one's identity came to be constructed. This is data I am collecting through my narrative inquiry: rather than inventing these ideas to fit into these chapters, I reflect on my identity-constructing experiences and the connections are (re)discovered, connections which had been hidden until my reading of identity issues in psychology and other texts unlocked them. My way is not necessarily the best and certainly not the only way to consider identity as a self-narrative. These experiences and perspectives have helped me see my life as a story and not as a series of unrelated events; that is, as a book with many chapters and not as a string of unrelated and unconnected images, impressions, and experiences—as a noun, not a list of verbs. A noun is saved and becomes a commodity that has value and may be shared or traded whereas verbs quickly begin and just as quickly end, and with the ending they lose their value and are not commodified. Story captures action and makes it a thing with value. And we crave value in our lives (Pagnucci, 2004). Having, or recognizing, identity creates at least the illusion of having value. Even identities which seem to be tragic stories of wasted lives demonstrate a person's search for value, perhaps by identifying oneself as a tragic figure in need of redemption (Gergen, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Hawkins, 1995).

Tragedy . . . comedy These are the two sides of myth, the two sides of life. The naturalness of storytelling, of narrative, makes construction, maintenance, and presentation of identity rather automatic. However, myth is fundamentally different from story, as McAdams (1993) explains:

Myths incorporate archetypal symbols that remain viable today if our imaginations are active enough to make us conscious of, and curious about, our origins and our destiny. Myths capture a given society's basic psychological, sociological, cosmological, and metaphysical truths. A society's myths reflect the most important concerns of a people. By giving narrative form to a diverse collection of elements, they help to preserve the society's integrity and assure its continuity and health. (p. 34)

If "public myth" is a story that lays the foundation for an entire society, then personal myth should lay the foundation for an individual also to build a system of values and meaning. McAdams (1993) writes that a "personal myth delineates an identity, illuminating the values of an individual life. The personal myth is not a legend or fairy tale, but a sacred story that embodies personal truth" (p. 34). It is, therefore, a story worth writing.

The Influence of Imagoes

In my fiction writing, I see how my earliest characters were based on me, that is, on different identities, using the one which served the story best. I wanted the hero to be a perfect person, someone I may have wanted to be but could not measure up to. Instead, the fictional me could act as I wished to act. The problem soon became apparent. The fictional character based on what I considered to be the "heroic-me" (see Appendix A) succumbed to the righteousness I presumed he and I shared. In other words, he was ineffective in many matters; he was too kind, too neutral, too governed by moral principles to ever win, or even stand up to his opponents. To let him win against archetypal opponents—the evil twin, the devious

lover, the invisible monster, a gang of alien warriors, the wrath of nature—I had to give up ownership of him and let him be his own person, even a “bad” person. The more real the character became, the less he acted like me. It was, nevertheless, difficult to let go of the character, to let him fend for himself and watch him possibly fail or, worse, to succeed better than the real me would have.

These story heroes are what psychologists call “imagoes”: characters which serve our story needs much like archetypes but instead are created from the real experiences and the real people who intersect our lives. Imagoes take on aspects of who we believe we are now, who we were, who we might be in the future, as well as who we wish we were or even who we fear we might become (McAdams, 1993, p. 127). Imagoes, as Haswell and Lu (2000) explain, are commonly seen in composition as “the way we personify our self” or the “kind of person or persons we imagine ourselves, ideally, to be” but not “the central personality construct or archetype” (p. 129). Instead, imagoes “project the teller’s identity through a person that stands outside them” (an identity as writer, not as student or even as person), and thus they “run the risk of looking like fictional heroes, characters that take on the shape of role model” (p. 130).

It may seem strange, at first glance, to be discussing the idea of multiple identities, multiple personalities, multiple voices as though they were perfectly normal things and not clinical disorders. The point that McAdams (1993) and Haswell and Lu (2000) make is that what we do in our minds *is* a normal activity. It is only the extreme forms of this inner-thought process that can be denoted as abnormal. This is actually similar to what many fiction writers do: gather useful characters, voices, snatches of conversation, off-beat ideas, strange juxtapositions

of information from around them for the purpose of constructing a special identity that becomes the protagonist or antagonist of a story created for entertainment. Fiction writing requires a certain kind of insanity, perhaps similar to but quite unlike schizophrenia (Flaherty, 2004). Yet average people also do it, of course internally, McAdams (1993) suggests, but for more critical purposes.

It is interesting to note here that in Self Psychology, Kohut (1966) relates narcissism to problems with the *parental imago*, and postulates, following Jung, that narcissistic problems in adulthood often take the form of a search for a partner who represents the “image” of the opposite-sex parent (pp. 99-103), based on the parent’s real or perceived qualities. Alternately, a person may subconsciously search for someone who may serve as a same-sex parent figure, in mentorship rather than partnership. The person with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) places all efforts related to constructing his *selfobject* upon the other person, and so he is frequently disappointed by the lack of “perfection” that was expected (Rothstein, 1984). This mirrors folk wisdom that recognizes how we may tend to choose as a spouse someone who reminds us subconsciously of our opposite-sex parent. Parental imagoes, therefore, represent figures similar to archetypes but which are based on actual personal associations. Kohut (1966) explains that just as our *desire* or *libido* requires certain obtainment to achieve an acceptable degree of satisfaction or equilibrium, finding the right partner to “mirror” the narcissist’s image of himself is as important as finding a partner who meets the qualifications of the *idealized parental imago* (p. 100-101). Problems occur when that idealized parental imago does not live up to our ideal.

Another interesting juxtaposition of information about “multiple selves”

occurs when we compare what McAdams (1993) has written with what Nienkamp (2001) writes:

The rhetorical self explains how we can experience our “selves” as both unified and contentious in that much psychic energy is expended on negotiating a comfort zone between the extremes of psychological unity (obsession, monologism) and diversity (schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder). If people are socially constructed into multiple, often contradictory voices, then internal rhetoric allows us to maintain various degrees of coordination among those voices, giving us that sense of the continuous “I” that postmodernists consider fictive.

Thus, the rhetorical self (in the singular) denotes not a unitary self but a collective self: the repertoire of inner voices that people have to draw on at any particular time, in all situations, in their lives. What the rhetorical collective implies is a common ground, an agora of the psyche, in which these differing voices work out which attitudes and actions a person will take. (p. 130)

I see these two concepts working together to create a framework for identity writing experiences in first-year composition. In McAdams’ (1993) concept of the mythic self we have a model of self-narrative. Though it is subconscious, it is ongoing, according to McAdams’ studies. In Nienkamp’s (2001) concept of the rhetorical self, I see the reference to “inner voices” as mirroring the concept of multiple identities I have suggested is actually a spectrum of identities. Thus, the rhetorical self idea strikes me as a model of the self controlling various identities which it

selects as needed for different situations.

For example, often repeated “rhetoric” may sometimes become embedded as scripts which we recite whenever we hear a repressed cue. I often find myself running through such dialogues with my parents, lines from the script we created when I was a child or a teenager. Once we recite our lines, we continue the conversation quite innocuously and in a naturally spontaneous style. We may scarcely notice we are running through our lines; we accept them as part of the communal story we have constructed over the years. These are not different selves or identities but rather, one particular identity (a presentation of self) that is reciting a script, in our mandated role as, in this case, parent and child.

These two concepts support the notion of a single person speaking with multiple voices (i.e., identities) which nevertheless stem from a single source, the self. McAdams (1993) sees this action being based on the personal myth an individual constructs as a way to make sense of his or her life, the “mythic self” which is the protagonist, a character in the book we write that is our life. Identity, therefore, can be seen through the rhetorical self. Nienkamp (2001) writes that the rhetorical self talks to itself, and suggests that it is a matter of an internal rhetoric, of competing voices that negotiate what a person will do—comically illustrated by an angel and a devil, one on each shoulder, who whisper alternately: “Go on, eat the chocolate; a little won’t hurt.” and “If you eat that chocolate, you’ll get fat!” However, I suggest that, in the model of identity I am building through this study, it is indeed the rhetorical self that is the actual self and the voices through which it speaks are actually a spectrum of identities.

Conclusion: A Framework for Identity Construction

I want to argue that the *reason* our rhetorical self “talks” is to affect or shape our identity, to construct our personal myth. This process requires us to negotiate between various competing identities to determine what exactly is, as Couture (2004) labels it, our “public identity”—even as our “private identity” remains hidden and mostly unchangeable. That negotiation relies on all that we have experienced: action, talk, images, readings—no matter if it is good or bad, long ago or recent, welcomed or unexpected—and includes everything we have done, seen, heard, felt, and lived. As Nienkamp (2001) writes,

The rhetorical self is thus, to a large extent, *unconsciously acquired and maintained*: We are exposed to familial experiences and positionings long before we are self-conscious, and throughout life we are continually barraged by societal messages about whom we should be as teenagers, physical bodies, women or men, consumers, citizens, workers, and so forth. These pervasive messages are internalized and transmuted, creating primary internal rhetoric that does more than passively echo the cultural voices around us, but actively selects and adjusts these voices according to personal history and circumstance. (p. 131, emphasis added)

Conversely, McAdams (1993) believes that *we* decide for ourselves, deep inside who we are and what, if anything, we will do. Such decisions come not so much from what Lacan (1977) calls societal discourse but from that base of identity which is a subconscious construction of foundational myth. And where does that base of identity originate? It comes from the often strange and unpredictable

experiences we have that, as Eliot (1922) remarks with regard to poetic ideas, “combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.” Experiences we accumulate at each stage of our lives, and from a generally subconscious yet deliberately constructed personal myth, serve to explain to ourselves and to others who we are, how we got to be who we are, who we want to be, and who we are even as we strive to become the self we believe to be ideal.

Turning to the field of composition, we glimpse the possibilities for student writing. First-year students come to us at the right time for constructing their adult identity through the reading and writing experiences typical of the composition class—even as we continue to address the features of writing craft. In the next chapter, I will review the stages of the life cycle, according to Erikson (1963), and how each stage has its own identity-forming tasks set as challenges to either overcome or fail, and how these experiences significantly impact the construction of identity, especially at several crucial times in our lives.

CHAPTER 4

THE LIFE CYCLE AND IDENTITY

Psychologist Erik Erikson, in *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959/1980)⁵, first describes a series of stages people go through as they grow and develop from birth to old age. This may seem to be an obvious observation to us today, but Erikson recognized, in particular, that each stage has its unique psychological focus and purpose that also affects later stages. That purpose, says Erikson, includes a major task or problem to be overcome in order for us to advance to the next stage. Identity⁶ develops, Erikson writes, “according to steps predetermined in the human organism’s readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with, a widening social radius, beginning with the dim image of a mother and ending with mankind” (p. 54). Because each stage has its psychological “chore” to either master or fail, failure may force the individual to become “stuck” in that stage, sometimes for the rest of his life. To be successful in developing our identity, we must succeed at each stage and so advance to the next (pp. 56-57). Part of that process, I believe, is the recognition of who we are and how we got to be who we are, especially at two important transitions: the move from youth to adulthood and, later, as one moves from adulthood into old age. In my model, this is where McAdams’ (1993) concept of the personal myth comes in.

When we are growing up, always busy as playful children, often lethargic as

⁵ This 1980 volume, a reprinted edition containing three major papers on identity, offers a concise description of the stages and so I will use it here. Erikson’s original research on identity and life cycle stages was reported in *Childhood and Society* (1950, 1963) and *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968). A final updating of his study was published as *The Life Cycle Complete* (1982).

⁶ Erikson (1968) actually uses the term “ego identity”; however, I find his description synonymous with the general concept of identity I am exploring, so I will use the term “identity.”

moody adolescents, frequently active as rebellious teens, or quietly fearful as youth on the threshold of adulthood and adult responsibilities, we seldom have the opportunity to step outside of ourselves and examine the precise moment in time that we are experiencing. Composition provides an ideal place to momentarily freeze time and commodify the past so that we may examine it multi-dimensionally—much like examining a Cubist painting where we are asked to see all sides of the work simultaneously. By writing in reflection, we can confront the issues of the past and present in an organized and efficient manner and address the needs of the person who is writing at whatever stage that person currently may be.

Erikson's Model of Life Stages

The Early Years: Where Foundations Are Created

“At birth,” writes Erikson (1959/1980), “the baby leaves the chemical exchange of the womb for the social exchange system of his society, where his gradually increasing capacities meet the opportunities and limitations of his culture” (p. 53). In Stage I, we see that “trust versus mistrust” is often experienced in the first year of life. A sense of trust requires a feeling of physical comfort balanced with some fear and apprehension about abandonment. Trust in infancy sets the stage for a lifelong expectation that the world will be a good and pleasant place to live. In this first stage of life, identity is formed around “I am what I am given.” An infant defines himself by those things around him. When deprived of essentials—e.g., touch, pleasant faces, soft voices, milk, warmth—an infant will fail to thrive. Those who learn to trust can have faith and grow. (p. 53-55)

In Erikson's Stage II, “autonomy versus shame and doubt” is the focus and occurs in late infancy and the toddler years (p. 71). After gaining trust in their

caregivers, infants begin to discover that their behavior comes from their own will. They start to assert their sense of independence or autonomy. If children are restrained too much or punished too harshly at this stage, they are likely to develop a sense of shame and doubt about their freedom to exercise their will (p. 68-70). Identity in this stage is formed around the concept that "I am what I will" (p. 87). This stage offers the lessons of how to cope with separation from the mother, both by being reassured in the eventual return of the mother to ways of comforting or occupying oneself during the separation. Whether or not this lesson is learned often has significant repercussions for the adult: imperfect experiences at this stage can lead to borderline personality disorders in adulthood, according to Kohut (1966).

Erikson's Stage III is about "initiative versus guilt" and occurs during the preschool years. As children encounter a widening social circle, they are challenged more than when they were infants. Active, purposeful behavior is needed in order to learn to cope with these challenges. Children are asked to assume responsibility for their bodies, their behavior, and their toys and pets. Developing responsibility increases initiative. Uncomfortable feelings of guilt may arise if the child acts irresponsibly and is criticized too harshly. Erikson, however, believes that most guilt is quickly compensated for by a sense of accomplishment. Identity in this stage is characterized by "I am whatever I can imagine I will be" (p. 87). Children play dress-up and begin to brag about themselves and their families. Some parents may suppress children at this stage by calling the products of their imaginations "lying"; too much suppression and children are left with a personality that cannot imagine themselves as a better person. (pp. 78-83)

Stage IV in Erikson's model covers the primary school years and focuses on "industry versus inferiority." Children at this stage learn to be productive or face criticism for being lazy. They learn there are tasks to complete and rules to follow. The world takes on a restrictive structure which both supports and limits their identity formation. Identity at this stage is about "I am what I learn" (p. 87), and so children draw more directly from their experiences to form their self or its principal identity. School life varies between "an extension of grim adulthood by emphasizing self-restraint and a strict sense of duty in doing what one is *told* to do, and . . . the natural tendency in childhood to find out by playing, to learn what one must do by doing steps which one *likes* to do" (p. 88, original emphasis). Children who have trust, autonomy, and imagination well integrated into their personalities are willing to try new things. Children work and play alongside or with others. What is created from this effort is seen as an extension of oneself. However, there also comes the potential for feelings of "inadequacy and inferiority" which are linked to the insufficient resolution to the preceding stage's conflicts (p. 91).

Although the stages Erikson sets are not firm, at this stage children also begin to have sufficient facility with language to use it to begin constructing their worlds, including the worlds of their own imagination. This may be the start of more conscious identity formation, based on adopting the traits of a role model, whether from real life or from their play. Children often fantasize and may invent invisible playmates at this stage, someone they can control yet also engage in play. They take on roles they have seen on TV and manufacture plots out of thin air. School also introduces them to a whole cast of historical people to consider emulating. For example, as a child of six, I could never miss an animated show about Hercules

every afternoon. I often went out in my neighborhood dressed in a similar costume I put together from available clothing, complete with the magic ring by which I, like Hercules, would call forth powers from Zeus. And later, in fourth grade during recess, a friend and I acted as the two leading characters from a TV spy drama, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* Mixed among these role-playing experiences for me were sports-related modeling, where I took my identity from the current sports stars of the local football and baseball teams. I also at various times took Beethoven, a TV magician, Daniel Boone (the Fess Parker TV series version), and King Arthur in the musical film *Camelot* as identity models, wanting to link myself to the traits I believed each of them to possess.

The Middle Years: Where Identities Are Created

Stage V, according to Erikson, is the end of childhood and the beginning of youth, extending roughly from ages 12 to 18, where development is concerned mostly with “ego-identity versus role-confusion.” This stage is all about one’s identity, where the singularly important “chore” is to define one’s social role, that is, fitting in. This is why youth are suddenly so concerned about how they look, with fashion and hair styles, with complexion problems and awkward growth spurts, with beauty and fitness, with practicing adult roles. All their previous identities are questioned, and others emanate from or become aligned with the individual’s basic drives and fundamental fantasies, what talents they may be endowed with, and what opportunities may come their way (p. 94). They are not fooled by empty praise but must feel valued for their real uniqueness, and, therefore, they need to have opportunities for real accomplishments and true recognition in society (p. 95). The drive at this stage is to take hold of some kind of life. Young people at this

stage can see the future, one that closely resembles a future of which they would like to be a part. They identify with “heroes” or rock stars, anyone who seems to “have a life” or “the perfect life” and they may sometimes over-identify with idols and form unhealthy obsessions (p. 97). The intolerance of certain roles, models, or identities that seems to be exhibited at this age stems from a genuine concern that life as an adult may be approaching too quickly and they worry they are not ready to define who they will be the rest of their lives.

This “identity crisis”⁷ or “identity diffusion,” as Erikson calls it (1968, p. 97), is perhaps one of the two most critical points in a person’s life. Youth are often “bewildered by some assumed role, a role forced on [them] by the inexorable standardization of American adolescence” (p. 97). The identity crisis often gains momentum through the middle school and high school years and lands fully upon a person at the time he/she begins a first career job or enters a family situation—or perhaps on the college campus. At this point in time, the individual has either achieved some sense of acceptance about his/her identity or, alternately, is still in a state of confusion and takes the next few years of college life to try to define a suitable identity. Therefore, it is easy to understand how the period of high school and college, taken together, is the greatest time of experimentation with roles, selves, and identity that one usually has in life. Everything that comes next to us depends on figuring out who we are now and who we want to be before we enter what is often called the “real world.”

⁷ Erikson (1968) notes that “identity crisis” was first used for clinical purposes during World War II to mark those soldiers who had suffered no physical injuries but who through the trauma of war had developed a loss of their “inner agency” and thus their “ego identity” had become diffuse. It was later recognized as a “common dynamic pattern of a group of severe disturbances . . . belonging to a particular stage of individual development. . . . Thus, we have learned to ascribe a normative ‘Identity crisis’ to the age of adolescence and young adulthood” (p. 16-17).

Only when one's identity as a trusting, autonomous, imaginative, and industrious person with a unique, workable way of approaching life is at least partially established can he/she move on to the adult stages. Based on Erikson's theory, I see the transition between Stage V (Youth) and Stage VI (Adulthood) as the place where those in composition tend to meet these young people. I believe this crucial point in life, where the adult identity begins to be formed in earnest, can be positively influenced by introducing the concept of the personal myth in first-year composition classes and by addressing the nature and function of identity in the writing we ask students to do. This transition point in the life cycle is the focus of this current study. It is here, at this stage of the life cycle, that I see a need and a possibility for those in composition to address identity and aid students in identity construction more meaningfully.

One composition scholar who has addressed identity is Nick Tingle (2004), who argues that this development is necessary not only for the young person to be successful in composition class but, also, to fully participate in the academic community and in the world of work beyond (p. 16). Composition thus becomes a companion to, and a metaphor for, a process which parallels these concepts of developmental psychology. Students working their way through a first-year composition course seem to parallel the process of growing up, in that both include the awkward and often painful destabilization and fragmentation we encounter in youth, and the subsequent journey back to a stable position where we reclaim and perhaps redefine ourselves for the subsequent stages of the life cycle. And yet, no matter how unpopular an idea the notion of challenge may be at the present, Tingle (2004) implies that, rather than making academia more accommodating, it may

serve its function better as a place which is more difficult through which to pass. Keeping academia rigorous and demanding may better serve the purpose of identity construction by forcing change. Allowing it to be easy serves only to protect fledgling identities and does not encourage them to grow. To twist Nietzsche's (1882/1974) famous axiom, what does not kill us makes us stronger; similarly, what does not challenge us does not make us grow. Psychologist James Hollis (1993, 1998, 2001) similarly recognizes, paraphrasing Jung, that it is only through crises that we can affect change and thus growth.

How to challenge and thus "force" identity construction will be discussed in the final chapters. For now, let us finish this discussion of the life cycle so that we will know how the story ends. Knowing where we are going, after all, usually helps us get there in good order.

The Later Years: Where Myths Are Created

In the first adult stage, Stage VI, Erikson (1959/1980) places the focus on "intimacy versus isolation." Individuals may experience various conflicts in attempting to join together as couples and so most generally remain alone during the early adulthood years. They act as individuals not as partners. At this time, individuals face the developmental task of forming serious, long-term intimate relationships with others (p. 100). Erikson describes this intimacy as finding oneself yet losing oneself in another person. For a person's normal psychological development, this move toward intimacy is important. If the young adult forms healthy friendships and a relationship with another individual, intimacy will be achieved; if not, then isolation or repudiation will result (p. 101). Identity becomes especially relevant in this effort because, as Erikson (1959/1980) writes, "the

condition of a true twoness is that one must first become oneself” (p. 101). In this stage, one’s identity expands to include the identity of the other person. The individual’s identity, which is subconsciously positioned during courtship and coupling, remains intact while influencing the individual despite attempts to merge identities with the Other. Later problems in the relationship may stem from the conflict between the now-repressed individual identity and the idealized dual-identity of the couple. In middle age, some adults may come to regret losing “who they were” as a result of forming a relationship with another person.

According to Erikson, Stage VII, focuses on middle adulthood’s problems with “generativity versus self-absorption,” characterized by the gradual shift from independent adult to the roles previously held by one’s parents or, conversely, the increasing isolation of the self-directed adult who, for whatever reason, may be free of family ties. In essence, says Erikson, we must make the transformation from being the children of our parents to being the parents of our own children. We revisit many of the stages we have already passed through as we experience them again from a new perspective as parent (p. 103). This stage compels us to begin seeing our lives not as disconnected random events as they may have seemed in childhood and youth, but as a whole experience—as an arc of life, as a grand narrative, a cycle of life and death, of children and grandchildren. So we gain a kind of 20/20 hindsight, which allows us to plan for our final years, plan for our children and grandchildren to be taken care of and for them to be as happy as we hope we have been.

On the other hand, for the self-absorbed or self-directed adult, it is the career and other achievements that may take the place of children and family

interests. In place of children, some adults may work to create some other tangible thing for future generations. Alternatively, they may revert to a kind of childhood existence full of nihilism or hedonism and completely indulge themselves to the detriment of themselves and/or the next generation, or else become self-focused to the point of stagnation (Erikson, 1980, p. 103).

Regardless of the form middle age takes, we tend to plan in some way for a future after us. "As we move into and through our middle-adult years," writes McAdams (1993), drawing upon Erikson's model, "we become increasingly preoccupied with our own myth's denouement [because] mature identity requires that we leave a legacy that will, in some sense, survive us" (p. 37). Psychologist Carl Rogers (1980) has a similar view of what our goal is: individuals attempt to fulfill their own self-concepts or the images they have formed of themselves through a self-actualizing tendency. This idea, I believe, is similar to McAdams' personal myth concept. When an individual's "real self" matches the potential or "ideal self," writes Rogers (1980), the individual has become a fully functioning person in that they have achieved a kind of closure (pp. 121-122).

The final stage of Erikson's life cycle model is Stage VIII, where "integrity versus despair" gives us two ways to see our final years. In the later years of life, we look back and evaluate what we have done (p. 104). This is the second of the two important transitions where people pause to consider their lives and perhaps reassess themselves. Through many different routes, the older person may have developed a positive outlook in most of the previous stages. In such a case, the retrospective will reveal a picture of a life well spent, and the person will feel a sense of satisfaction and typically a kind of integration will be achieved. If, on the

other hand, the person resolved many of the earlier stages negatively or failed to resolve them, the retrospective likely will yield doubt or gloom about the end of one's life, which brings the despair Erikson (1959/1980) describes (pp. 104-105). Either way, there is generally an attempt to tie up loose ends, to synthesize disparate experiences, to reconcile the good with the bad, and to prepare for the end. Integrity is reached with the acceptance of the responsibility for one's whole life. Despair is the summation of crises that have been left unresolved.

Many individuals, at this point in their lives, refashion their myths to ensure that something of personal importance is passed on (McAdams, 1993, p. 37). We might well reason that if our ultimate goal is to arrive at the end of the life cycle ready for integration rather than despair, then we would be advised to address the critical tasks of each stage more conscientiously and deliberately, and assist each other in accomplishing these tasks. We usually can do little to help other people's children in the early stages, yet we do have the opportunity to have a positive effect on what I am arguing is the single most important transition: moving from Stage V to VI, from youth to adulthood. It is also the transition we see most often in first-year composition classes.

Connecting the Life Cycle and Personal Myths

I have reviewed Erikson's life stages model because McAdams (1993) bases his ideas of personal myths on that model. The focus of my study, however, is the time in the life cycle that we call late youth and early adulthood. Therefore, I will limit the discussion which follows to those people who are involved in the transition from youth to adulthood.

Though only about half of American young people go to college today,

those who do are typically about 18 years of age when they arrive on campus. Some postpone it for a year or two, or opt out of college, in order to gain valuable life experience through work, military, or volunteer service. It is also true that many people cannot afford the financial or time commitments involved in attending college. Some simply are more interested in “finding themselves”—which is what identity construction is really all about. College or not, this age, this life stage, is where a major effort to construct identity occurs. As McAdams (1993) explains,

We first become self-conscious mythmakers in our late-adolescent years, when we confront head-on the problem of identity in human lives. The adolescent begins by consciously and unconsciously working through an ideological setting for the myth—a backdrop of fundamental beliefs that situates the story within a particular ethical and religious location. Therefore, the transition from adolescence to young adulthood is an especially significant phase in the development of human identity. A fundamental challenge of mythmaking in adolescence and young adulthood is to formulate personally meaningful answers to ideological questions so that one’s identity can be built on a stable foundation. People tend to establish the ideological setting in late adolescence and very early adulthood, and for most the setting remains relatively intact and constant for the rest of their years. (p. 36)

People of the same age group who do not go to college, I believe, still confront the same identity issues as young people who attend college. The difference is that the college student usually encounters a greater diversity of ideas to challenge his

identity and a wider range of information from which to construct identity. The young person who does not attend college but focuses on work or family also has unique material to use in constructing his or her adult identity but the experiences encountered through work or family might tend to become routine over time and may eventually lack sufficient motivation for identity construction or modification beyond what may be initially achieved at the cusp of adulthood. A person may stop construction prematurely because life imposes its own demands on a person's time and attention.

The focus of this current study, however, is on the impact and influence of identity in the first-year composition class. It is not my intention to judge the quality of experience or value of education. Whether or not to partake of higher education is often based on financial reasons or a subjective view about its value. Society promotes higher education as a necessity for success in life and industries have risen to support college-bound youth. Many people today believe more education is a good thing and encourage young people, and their parents, to pay for additional classes that will certify them as knowledgeable or skilled in a field. Open admissions, remedial courses, etc., attempt to aid the transition and support those "non-traditional" students in their efforts. Issues of self-esteem may be especially important for these students, which shows the need for addressing identity even in "remedial" or basic English classes.

McAdams (1993) believes we begin to gather material for our "self-defining stories" in infancy and childhood and we work on them throughout our adolescence and youth. Toward midlife, these myths give each life a sense of unity and purpose, and later in life perhaps a sense of closure. Recognizing this process and

anticipating it can make the effort purposeful and beneficial along the way. At the traditional age that first-year college students experience composition class, young people are facing their most critical life juncture. Four years of educational limbo may only be a respite from the inevitable entrance into the “real world.” During this brief time, compositionists can introduce the concepts of personal myth, the mythic self, the rhetorical self, and an understanding of self and identity to students and through writing they can (re)discover the origins of their identity.

For now, we need only to understand how our lives usually proceed, how we gather material for our identity, how we fashion from resources our identity and manifest it publicly, and how we subconsciously construct a personal myth that only becomes apparent in our late-middle years as we begin to see the arc of our lives as a single thing and not a random series of unrelated events. Using the metaphor of writing to describe how we construct identity is not surreptitious; it is through language that we do write this personal myth within us as surely as we might sit down consciously at the keyboard, or with pen in hand, and write a story in which characters much like us act in ways similar to how we might act in settings roughly synonymous to our real world. To write the personal myth with more conscious effort, rather than leaving it to chance in the unconscious, can only better support our destiny and the paths we traverse to achieve our goals in life.

This time of transition between youth and adulthood is one of the two times in our lives to write about our lives. The other is at the transition from middle adulthood to older adulthood, what most of us would consider the transition from a career to retirement, where the purpose of writing is to produce unity and create generativity. The purpose of writing in the first transition is more than simply taking

stock; it is the beginning of the main part of life, the major effort we put forth, the principal activity for which we will be known and hopefully remembered. The story of our lives is not just a random collection of experiences but a journey that is as real and vivid as life. Even if fictionalized or exaggerated, an autobiography reveals the essence of the author's identity for better or worse. When the author likewise recognizes this effect, the author grows and becomes stronger.

It is a purposeful voyage of discovery, not just drifting randomly with the currents. It is purposeful but it is not vainglorious. McAdams (1993) reminds us that constructing identity, like creating one's personal myth,

is not an exercise in narcissistic delusion, or a paranoid attempt to establish oneself as God. Instead, defining the self through myth may be seen as an ongoing act of psychological and social responsibility. Because our world can no longer tell us who we are and how we should live, we must figure it out on our own. The making of a personal myth is a psychosocial quest. (p. 35)

We need to consider identity an important aspect of what we are trying to have students develop in composition classes, and we need to take identity seriously for our students, many of whom come from environments where their identity is fragile or challenged daily or remains relatively unconstructed. This effort benefits our students because it is, as McAdams (1993) states, a "psychosocial quest" for significance in the world.

Identity and Composition

At this point, I may seem to be insisting that nothing on identity exists in the composition classrooms we see today. The point I want to make in this final section

is that identity is *already at work* in our classrooms and in our composition literature but we may not recognize it. I see identity in several composition books, though the authors either do not draw our attention to it or they are interested in other aspects of composition. One such book that I see as addressing identity issues does so through the student writing that is shared. In Blitz and Hurlbert's *Letters for the Living* (1988), I see students' identities emerge through their writing, and the varying subjects of their writing point to the sources of material used in constructing their identities. Often they are the hard, dangerous realities of the neighborhoods in which they live. These students write to express their particular realities, yet in doing so they unwittingly reveal some of the identities that they have constructed. Similarly, in *The Private, the Public, and the Published* (2004), Barbara Couture writes about the conflicts between private and public selves, and how they become merged in our postmodern society, ever more visible and increasingly more important. Blitz and Hurlbert's students share their "public selves"; what may lie beneath that surface, their "private selves," may be ultimately more necessary for students to understand as they struggle to fit into society. Identity as an issue is gaining prominence in society but more slowly in English Studies.

Gina Shaffer (2005) also writes about postmodern identity in "Virtual Writing and the Transformation of Identity," drawing examples from the dual identities of the protagonist in *The Matrix* film, one the "real" identity as a rebel with self-awareness and a body, the other a virtual identity given to sublimate an electricity-generating comatose body. The extremes depicted in the film are intended to show us the world we live in today, where we have found a split identity to be a convenient norm. By seeing the extremes the film depicts we are urged to do

something about it, to reject that vision of the future. The implication in Shaffer's analysis is that through composition we can help the two identities merge into a congruous whole. Shaffer shares Derek Owens' (1993) insightful observations about the role of writing in constructing identity:

To write . . . is to fashion not so much our identities but bridges that connect various facets of our experience within an incomprehensibly dense and unmapped personal landscape [where] the goal may be not only to hypothesize the contours of such a psychic terrain but to revel in the act of serving as the architects (or cartographers) of our own imaginations. (p. 110)

Owens' description is properly poetic, bringing us almost full-circle in the long history of composition and identity: from the self to the community and back to the self, all framed as a voyage of discovery.

We often ask our students to write a personal narrative essay, to share something of their lives, to prompt their reflection of an event, so the *process* is not new. The *reasons* are different, however, if we accept that literacy is about identity. We might recall the admonition, common in martial arts, to visualize the action before we do the action. I want to argue that this is similar to writing for the purpose of constructing identity: if students can reflect on their lives thus far and write about their lives reflectively, then through their writing they may imagine their identity in its best form, say, as an idealized self. They may then, possibly, be able to actually create such an ideal identity. Understanding who we are and how we got to be who we are can positively impact our students' lives.

My argument from the start has been that identity is an important factor in

everything people do, including the writing students do in composition classes. I have also been arguing that those in composition need to address identity more seriously in first-year composition. To this end, I first discussed and defined identity in chapter 2 and in chapter 3, I introduced two concepts that form a framework for writing that serves to help students explore identity. In this chapter, I have offered Erikson's life stages model to support the idea that first-year composition is both a suitable and viable venue for identity exploration and that first-year composition is the time and place where young people may encounter the need and the means of exploring and coming to some basic understanding of their identity. Because I see such identity exploration (indeed, identity construction) writing being primarily narrative and reflective, I will discuss in the next chapter the role of narrative in identity construction. To illustrate ways of writing to explore and/or construct one's identity, I offer some of my own self-narrative writing. Through these examples, I will show how I have used writing to construct my identity and how my identity also influences my writing—and how similar narrative writing can aid in students' identity construction in their first-year composition classes.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVITY AND IDENTITY

Identity Construction in Practice

Personal history is a funny thing. It usually exists simultaneously in several versions and always seems to be rewriting itself to cover up messy missteps and smooth over rough experiences, to present the best possible view of one's self. Sometimes it hides or fears discovery. At other times it asserts its right to be on stage, no matter the disdain or clamor of the audience for a different identity. All we can do is try to understand it—perhaps like we might dig down to the root of a mighty tree that sprouted long ago and now expansively shades us, covers us, protects us, yet seems ready to collapse under the fury of an unexpected storm: understanding the roots helps us understand the fruit.

As an only-child, I began my life living in my grandparents' house, then college student housing, then in neighborhoods where there were seldom any children of my age to play with—they were either much older or much younger—except for all-too-brief periods. I also seemed to have spent a lot of time with my parents and their adult relatives and friends. Consequently, I was surrounded by adults more than other children. I cannot be sure how this situation may have affected my maturation, my intellectual development, or my literacy (i.e., my self-identity). I can, of course, consider the ways in which my particular childhood experiences have affected me through a focused reflection on those events now embedded in my memories. I can also examine relationships between those past episodes and how I live my life today, trying to locate the origins of some of the

significant influences on my present identity.

One effect that I believe was significant, for example, was that my lack of same-age playmates combined with the exposure to adult conversation about adult interests was probably a major reason I learned to entertain myself. I might also have begun to see the world more as the adults around me saw it rather than as a child would. Because of this situation, I began constructing my identity largely through my reading and writing experiences, and what I read and tried to write involved adult characters rather than what typical children's literature might have. My first stories were about fully-formed adults in typically adult situations, not about children and their interests. Of course, I could not really portray such characters because I was not an adult and had no direct knowledge of what it was like to be an adult. Then, when I was older, I also had difficulty writing child characters because my childhood was so different than the typical childhood.

My isolation from other children compelled me to entertain myself—but without computers, internet, or video games, which had not yet been invented. So I read books and I wrote stories. In the basement of my house, I also role-played with toy soldiers and Matchbox cars, built castles and towns using what materials I happened to find there, and always created narratives about the people and places I invented. I often took role-playing out into the world by acting out some scenario, as children often do, in the forest and fields near my house, e.g., a fugitive from justice desperately hiding from the cops or an astronaut exploring an alien planet. My isolation also caused me to be shy. Without the socialization that occurs when one is a member of a group, I did not learn how to act or interact with my peers. I did learn, however, how to act around adults, who would generally welcome me as

the cute and clever special guest among them, a “child prodigy” who could entertain them with unexpected jokes and stories. Back among other children, though, I did not know how to relate to them so I usually remained quiet. . . .

Thus begins my self-narrative, a search for the origins of my identity.

A first-year composition student might begin similarly by reflecting upon childhood experiences and making connections between events and how they influence thoughts and actions today. With a little preparation, a suitable prompt, guidance and coaching, first-year composition students could begin to investigate the origins of their own identities. It is a project which can give first-year students a firmer identity foundation for their college career and set them confidently upon their journey through adulthood. Unfortunately, I waited too many years to begin this project. Still, there is a certain empowering confidence, or quiet acceptance, that comes from these discoveries.

As I have stated previously, my investigation into identity and its influence on writing began with the desire to understand who I am and how I became who I am (or think I am) today. The impetus came from several factors coming together at this point in time: concerns about my career and family, my age and health, my relationships, and my continued creativity. I began to deliberately retrace the steps back through my life, thinking about how I got to this point, how I had developed the identity I always seem to use or bounce back to, even when I attempted to switch to some alternate, better identity. In my narrative inquiry, I planned to visit a few episodes, a few places in time, that I knew had been significant. I also expected that other stops along the path might provide rich details. I was often surprised at what I found, of course, and just as often embarrassed to discover something that I had

thought had been put away forever. I also found connections I had never previously realized. The result of this effort was the creation of a kind of matrix of experiences, each with its own cause-and-effect label, each a strange yet seemingly logical link in a Lacanian chain of signifiers. My reading in psychology has helped me place what Jung called “complexes” (i.e., emotionally charged memories or associations) into an understandable context. As I deliberately focused for this chapter on just the literary influences—reading and writing, certainly, but also including other literary experiences such as film—I began to see how these experiences which helped to shape my identity also shaped my writing. My writing, as I discovered through my narrative inquiry, also helped shape my identity.

I have alluded to my self-narrative in preceding chapters. This chapter begins and ends with examples of self-narrative which focuses on understanding identity construction. By offering these examples as illustrations of possible ways identity-construction writing could be done, I want to first show how identity constructed may proceed from various sources in our lives (for my examples here, literary sources), and, second, how such identity then develops and takes on mythological qualities, as McAdams (1993) suggests. These qualities often connect with the psychological motivations Lacan (1977) calls our drives and fantasies⁸, as well as the socialization that helps us construct identity. This chapter opened by briefly setting the stage. In the example which follows, I discuss how some universal questions were answered for me from the books I read, and how the resulting themes have been subsequently projected throughout my life as well as in

⁸ See Appendix B for further discussion of the influence of drives and fundamental fantasies on conscious behavior.

my writing. From these personal examples, I will move to the broader concerns of writing teachers.

Three Stories that Inform One Story

In my youth, as I began to write seriously, I was greatly influenced by science-fiction author Roger Zelazny. In *Nine Princes in Amber* (1970), the first volume of his Amber Chronicles cycle of novels, the hero, Corwin, awakens from a coma in an asylum where he has been kept sedated on orders from his evil kinfolk. He learns eventually that his true identity is a Prince of Amber, a magical realm which is accessible through a variety of doorways—as are a myriad of other, parallel or “shadow” worlds such as Earth. Corwin returns to right the wrongs perpetrated against him and in subsequent novels faces and conquers many other obstacles in his quest to become king. What I wish to point out is that Corwin has and uses alternate identities throughout his adventures: the identity he has on Earth as a comatose patient awakening, those identities he uses on other “shadow” worlds he passes through, and his true identity as a prince and heir to the throne in the real world of Amber. While this may be seen as just role-playing, much as an actor does on stage while always remaining the same person underneath, I see this as an example of someone *becoming* a different person for very good reasons: sheer survival. Corwin adopts different identities in different situations. This might illustrate the idea of *finding who I really am*, of determining my true identity.⁹

In *The Eternal Champion* (1970), the first volume of Michael Moorcock’s

⁹ Another equally significant and influential work of Zelazny’s (though read by me a few years after) is *Lord of Light* (1967), where the Hindu-Buddhist history is played out again on a planet settled by refugees from a destroyed Earth. Its protagonist, Mahasamatman, becomes god-like with the power to bind demons, etc. His omnipotence coupled with sardonic humor framed my idea of what a god should be; the character was therefore very attractive to me as a young person facing the real world.

Eternal Champion cycle, we also find a reluctant hero who awakens from a mundane existence and takes on the role of a powerful warrior who rights wrongs. In this, his first instance of being snatched from his true identity and forced to fulfill a different role as hero-at-large, he is compelled to go to another world where he takes the side of those he believes are the “good guys” only to soon discover that they are, in fact, the “bad guys.” He switches sides and, with his help, justice prevails. I recall that this was an important lesson for me: the good guys are not always the good guys. This was the first story I read where this kind of moral ambiguity was illustrated for me. In this story, a simple earthling changes identities to combat evil and bring truth and justice to a “more real” world. The Eternal Champion does not know why he is pulled through time and space to fulfill this role as perpetual hero, nor is he able to refuse the forces that affect him. He tries to resist the alternate identity each time, but his efforts are always in vain. He constantly questions the unfairness of his existence. I saw my own life in a similar way, questioning my purpose: *How did I end up at this school, with these people? Why couldn't things be different? If only I could change everything!* This exercise in fantasy escapism also has lessons in identity. This story illustrates the idea of *finding my true purpose*, purpose being a kind of skin that identity must wear; a different purpose might call up a different identity.¹⁰

A final theme I have poured into my identity is cleverly illustrated in Robert

¹⁰ An equally influential novel of Moorcock is *Behold the Man* (1968), which twists the Crucifixion story: a 20th century inventor travels back in time and haphazardly becomes the person who is crucified. As many Christians take facets of their identity from the religious narratives they study, I took from this novel the megalomania and delusions of grandeur implicit in this protagonist and his story. For a youth dealing with teenage angst, the combination was seductive (e.g., “They’ll be sorry they treated me that way when I am gone!”). I simultaneously wanted to be historically significant and a martyr of some kind, not necessarily for any religious belief but for myself.

Silverberg's novel, *Son of Man* (1971).¹¹ In this story, "Clay" awakens as if he has just been whisked into existence by God. He learns who he is and what the world around him has to offer, first by touch, then by other senses, remaining cynical throughout. The twist is that he is now millions of years in the future and, alas, everything has changed; he is Adam all over again, trying to make sense of a new world—a world into which he finds himself "thrown"—what Heidegger (1962) has conceptualized as "*Da-sein*." Heidegger defines this "thrownness" as the sensation of being tossed rather haphazardly into existence; we do not know why we are here and we do not feel at home in the world we find ourselves thrown into (pp. 184-188). This strange situation causes us anxiety, but for Heidegger anxiety reveals our freedom. We must not run from our anxiety but face it, says Heidegger, and live in recognition that life comes to an end, that it is a totality. Accordingly, authentic life is the one that is lived in anticipation of death (pp. 276-277). Heidegger uses "*Da-sein*" to describe the "being-in-the-world," which is the existing being that has the power to ask the question of being—what might be called self-awareness.

This is what I felt as a teenager, though I had never heard of Heidegger or "dasein" at that time. As an adult, I was eventually introduced to these concepts and realized they described what I had felt about my identity in my youth. Dasein, this "being-in-the-world," is an entity or consciousness that is able to comprehend the very nature of being, to support the question of being, and thus the concept of identity at the core of being within each of us (pp. 26-27). For Silverberg's hero,

¹¹ While not Silverberg's most popular nor my favorite novel (the first I read was *In the Time of the Great Freeze*, 1964), this novel cleverly articulates the view of identity I wish to offer.

Clay, it is an existential awakening like Dr. Frankenstein's "dasein" creature experiences in Mary Shelley's novel (Swartz, 2001). But it is the alternate identity theme that prevails here inasmuch as the hero, Clay, is god-like with power over his domain. In some ways, I believe, we all relish control over our world. The seeking of perfection, desiring the attainment of *flow*, needing to have everything going "my way" is what Rothstein (1984) calls narcissism—not "self love" but "self satisfaction." Awakening from Nothing into Being is a theme I embraced as an awkward teenager seeking identity: *given that I am here, who am I and what should I do?*

The responsibility for answering these questions of identity, purpose, and existence is usually entrusted to religion; I did not get sufficient answers from my religious connections, however. These science-fiction experiences, as identity material, offered me scenarios where I could consider possible answers. I could contemplate the nothingness of an alien planet first being explored. I could explore the nature of being through consideration of new and different species. I could afford to indulge myself in "what-if" situations. Instead of simply being told the answers, I could role-play scenarios and through that effort come to some kind of understanding directly. I can recall how that teenager-who-once-was-me wanted to remake himself into something more, better, or ideal but did not know how or into exactly what new form. He was learning about the world, learning about identity. And he was trying to construct an identity that served to protect him and sometimes provided a mask to use whenever he metaphorically went out into the world to do battle. The examples here refer only to my book-based identity sources; identity source material comes from many places, many situations. In my case, however, I

realized the impact these books had in helping me “invent” myself, helping me construct my identity.

Searching for one’s identity, the transformation of identity for a purpose, and the idea or experience of existential awakening are themes that have shaped my life, especially during my teenage years and even through my undergraduate years in college. I have also incorporated these themes into my writing almost automatically. In each example above, we have a hero who awakens from a simple, mundane existence and finds he is called forth to do great things as in any myth or legend. The character then is transformed or transforms himself into an alternate identity which allows him to go and do those great things. In their original forms, each character is quite ordinary and rather ineffectual. Once transformed, the character’s new identity is able to shake the universe. In my youth, this concept was attractive for two reasons.

First, I was a shy kid who dealt better with fantastic possibilities I could manipulate than concrete realities I could not. These examples of “heroic fiction” showed me that we are not limited to what we are born with, that we can really transform ourselves—much like the sickly Robert E. Howard wrote the *Conan* series not only as an outlet for his creativity but also to live in an alternate identity as a powerful warrior (de Camp, 1983). If a slave boy like Conan can grow up to be a king by his own hand, I might muse, then perhaps I can at least be noticed in school and appreciated for, say, my musical talent, and maybe get up enough confidence to ask that girl in History out for pizza and a movie. Even accepting that the idea of some mighty figure dominating a world as heroes do in heroic fiction—much less a romantic, socially-acceptable engagement with the young lady from

my History class—was just a pleasant fantasy nevertheless gave me inspiration and hope that could serve real, earthly purposes.

Second, the idea of alternate identities gave me some understanding at that young age of the dual nature of reality, of public and private selves, indeed of a whole spectrum of selves (actually, multiple identities of one dual-self; see Figure 1) that come into play in different situations. The Eternal Champion takes on a different persona (identity) and outward appearance in each of the novels, even though he remains the same “person”/self underneath. He constantly remarks how he feels carried or swept along to his fate in each new form. I felt almost swept along by my fate, also; perhaps many youth do. This idea gave me permission to invent my own alternate identities, and a place to play where I was able to wear different identities in the forms of the characters I created for my stories. In this way, science-fiction and fantasy reading and writing provided me with validation of who I was and an understanding of the imperfection and negotiation of reality.

Perhaps this is the primary benefit to me of reflecting on these particular identity sources through my self-narrative: I finally figured things out.

Denouement, With Some Analysis

The “essay” I have shared introduces the idea of identity being linked to narrative. Psychologist James Hollis (1993) writes: “Many of us treat life as if it were a novel. We pass from page to page passively, assuming the author will tell us on the last page what it was all about” (p. 8). McAdams (1993) also sees our psychological life as writing a story of our “mythic self”—i.e., creating a narrative about ourselves. What I have done in the previous section is to examine my own mythic self. I described reading heroic narratives and how each of the stories

presented to me an alternative view of life. My reading of these books is also a narrative. The writing I did as a result of reading these books—emulating these authors, as many young writers do—is certainly a narrative. I began with this short piece to show what might be possible in a composition class. Anyone can do some self-reflection and come up with a few concrete examples of what things or events have been most influential to one’s present identity. Such influences on identity could be from books, TV, film, computer or video games (of which many are based on fantasy narratives), and from real people we meet, both family and friends but also teachers, co-workers, perhaps even strangers. It is a seemingly simple project which, set up as a self-discovery task, can benefit writers.

I also opened the chapter with the stage-setting section and the preceding essay in order to introduce myself—that is, *me*, the guy named Stephen Swartz—as opposed to being the author of this dissertation, some generic researcher. Introducing myself seems a strange concept in this work of academic prose yet I see it as precisely the point: I am writing about identity yet the genre in which I must write seems designed to avoid any mention of the author’s identity. I am, it seems, forced to adopt an identity with which I am not quite comfortable (let’s call it the “staunchly academic scholar”), an identity through which I do not feel I can say what I want to say in the best manner possible. So I make this new introduction because I want to share with YOU what I have discovered about MY self and MY identity through the reflection implicit in a self-narrative.

What did I do? The above essay is the product of my reflection; I did not plan what I would write but, rather, simply wrote what I could remember of the topic—the origins of my identity—until I realized I had discovered something that

proved significant. Later, I went back and revised what I wrote—for the sake of clarity or to solidify my initial impressions, not at all to embellish or soften facts. I wrote as a stream-of-consciousness while keeping my mind open and allowing my thoughts to turn back the pages of this novel that is my life, (re)discovering faint memories, seeking that first or original influence that started a Lacanian “chain of signifiers” that have, for better or worse, made me who I am today. I could have gone further, deeper into the past, but the task was, at the point in which I stopped, becoming mentally and emotionally exhausting.

Composition teachers often ask students to write a “personal narrative essay” which typically is a description of a single event (sometimes a few related events) that culminates in a lesson the student learned or some other resolution. Like Thomas Newkirk (1997) and Lad Tobin (2004) report, I also typically find students who appreciate the “opportunity to write and reflect on life experiences” (p. 19). Newkirk points to criticism of the personal essay for its invasion of privacy (p. 19-20), yet student authors are not usually forced to reveal anything in their lives which they are not comfortable sharing. However, in most such cases in my classes, those who do share controversial or obviously private information do so because of its healing effect: they share it to get it out of their psyche, and they do so to benefit themselves, not to entertain or impress peers or teachers. This is what I, too, have done in sharing some of my identity connections in the above essay. To conclude this chapter, I offer another example which will, perhaps, be a little uncomfortable for both you and me as I share some of my less magnificent moments in identity construction.

What I have done in the opening section, without following any particular

“writing prompt,” is to simply name and describe sources of identity construction material. These connections between the book references and my experiences in daily life serve to create a narrative of a period of my life. I realize, of course, that there are many non-book sources influencing my identity throughout my life, but, for the sake of brevity, I simply limited the examples to a manageable portion. I could certainly write whole books on how each of my parents has influenced my identity, including long lists of concrete examples, the good and the not so good. Or I could write further on how this or that teacher, fellow Scouts, classmates, musical personages, both TV/film characters and the real actors’ personalities behind those characters, assorted neighbors and friends from every place I have lived—they all could have had an influence on who I am today. Tracking down these references may be another exercise in identity (de)construction. For now, however, I have limited this discussion to just a few literary influences that I recognized through my narrative inquiry.

Let me now offer a model of narrative theory that supports an understanding of identity and composition.

A Theory of Narrative Identity

Narrative is Natural

“Narrative is natural” may seem to be such an obvious statement that it often goes unnoticed in academic circles. After all, what is natural is not what is learned; it is innate. And so narrative, being the province of the natural, that is, the product of play that proceeds from innate origins, is generally seen as not requiring instruction. According to Pagnucci (2004), this is anathema to the academic world, where everything must be learned because it does *not* come naturally. This brings

us to Narrative Theory.

Like Identity Theory, there are several theories of narrative. Most originate with the Russian Formalists and the Structuralists, designed as a way to analyze literature. There are also those which deal with narrative more broadly, almost as theories of human communication. Fortunately, I think we can deal with them to our satisfaction here as one theory. As I tell you about narrative theory, I want to keep going with the identity I previously established in writing about my most significant early literary influences. By telling you a story about narrative theory, I hope the theory will better make sense and be more easily remembered.

Let us recognize, first, that most people enjoy stories and that it is natural to want to start telling our own stories whenever we encounter the stories of others. Pagnucci (2004) remarks that it is a basic human need to share stories (pp. 40-41). Some of you may prefer not to believe this, but I feel that those who do not enjoy stories have simply encountered too many bad stories—"bad" in the sense of not well-constructed or not sufficiently engaging to provide an enjoyable experience. Nevertheless, stories are, in general, narratives and we understand them to be sequences of events which, taken together, present a certain view of something the author feels is worth sharing. The author may be a participant in the story or merely a *narrator*, someone who tells what happens. According to Jerome Bruner (1986), the term *narrator* is derived from the Latin word *gnarus* and the older Indo-European *gnu*, meaning 'to know.' Thus, the one who knows what happened is the *narrator*. A narrative is what is *narrated*; that is, whatever a *narrator* tells us, whether it is pure invention or a factual record of events.

The particular narrative theory I want to present here, for its usefulness in

understanding identity in composition, was coined by Walter Fisher in his 1987 essay, “Technical Logic, Rhetorical Logic and Narrative Rationality” and further developed in his subsequent book, *Human Communication as Narration* (1987). Fisher initially discussed narrative in contrast to argumentation. Fisher was studying the structure of political speeches and began to realize the power of the stories used in them. Fisher read philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre’s book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981), which led Fisher to propose a new framework for understanding communication, specifically in public moral argument, such as political speeches. Fisher called this framework the “narrative paradigm” (1987, pp. 57-59). In *Human Communication as Narration* (1987), Fisher quotes MacIntyre’s statement regarding the narrative character of man: “Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” (p. 58). The sharing of stories is one of the essential human activities, claims MacIntyre, and it only takes the observation of two strangers left alone long enough that simple communication grows into stories to see the truth of his assertion.

However, Fisher (1984) makes clear that *narrative* in this case is not “a fictive communication whose propositions may be true or false and have no necessary relationship to the message of that composition” but, rather, “a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (p. 266). This distinction is important because it sets apart one set of “narrative” theories, focused on understanding stories in the general sense, works of fiction and creative non-fiction, from other theories which focus on general communication of all kinds. I see this relating to my initial research inquiry involving distinctions between teaching composition and

teaching creative writing: yes, meaning in writing can be conveyed through a presentation of facts as well as through the flow of a story, but which is better? Others had similar questions. Thus, in a 1995 article written in response to criticism, Fisher defined *paradigm* as a “representation designed to formalize the structure of a component of experience and to direct understanding and inquiry into the nature and functions of that experience—in this instance the experience of human communication” (p. 2). Here I can see mirrored Gian Pagnucci’s (2004) declaration that narrative is more than a writing genre, it is a way of life (p. 44), and is, therefore, also a paradigm or way of viewing the world.

Fisher’s definition of narrative—communication as symbolic action with embedded meaning—is useful for understanding identity in composition because it expands the idea of narrative from “just a story” to “communication with meaning.” The narrative must have a purpose and an effect on the audience. I like this way of thinking about narrative and stories because of how it connects to the kind of writing about identity I am proposing. The stories that students write to explore identity are not the kind of narratives that fail to stand up to academic standards, that fail because stories are seen by academia as being too easy and too simple, and (I would add) too easily “made up” (See Pagnucci, 2004, pp. 39-55, for a discussion of conflicts between academia and narrative in writing and research). Rather, I want to argue that students’ stories (and those their teacher may share) often are quite sophisticated (in the sense of *sophia* meaning *wisdom*), complex in subtle ways both author and audience can only imagine, and perhaps even sufficiently taxing on the author or moving for the reader as to produce catharsis. An example of the view that narrative is “too easy” would be the writing which, prior

to the present study, clearly consumed more time and effort in research than any “academic” writing I had ever attempted. My M.F.A. thesis was a novel entitled *A Beautiful Chill* (2002). Its creation involved researching different cultures and languages, applying gender politics, and understanding identity issues. The project also required me to do considerable research in anthropology, history, geography, and religion, plus learning about oil painting and clay sculpture techniques, botany and zoology in the arctic, northern ocean currents, and Viking shipbuilding techniques. Because I was not already familiar with these areas, I needed to become knowledgeable, even gain a certain degree of expertise, in order to make the characters think and act in a believable manner. Ironically, the research I did for this novel went toward producing something real, something *realistic*, not fictive.

Jerome Bruner (1990) says that story “mediates between the canonical world of culture and the more idiosyncratic world of beliefs, desires, and hopes. It renders exceptional comprehension [and] reiterates the norms of the society without being didactic” (p. 52). While some scholars promote the value of story writing, the academy often devalues narrative (Pagnucci, 2004). I learned this myself early in life from my father, a high school social studies teacher turned librarian, who often stated to me that he had no reason to read fiction because it was not true. At the time, I chose not to argue with him, knowing for myself that a story can often present a kind of truth that is unable to be presented in any other way. There is a lot more I would like to say about the value of narrative but we must move on. So let’s return now to how Fisher’s conceptualization of narrative can help us in teaching composition and identity.

The Narrative Paradigm

The narrative paradigm is based on the idea of *narrative rationality*, which Fisher (*Human Communication*, 1987) says contrasts with the conventional model of formal rationality whereby human communication is supposed to follow the rules of formal logic. Thus, Fisher redefines rationality, saying it involves the principles of *narrative probability* (a story's coherence and integrity) and *narrative fidelity* (a story's credibility, established by the presence of "good reasons" (p. 64), which are, following Wallace (1963), "a number of statements, consistent with each other, in support of an *ought* proposition or of a value-judgment" (p. 107). These criteria seem also to match those deemed necessary to assure authenticity in any autoethnography or narrative inquiry. If the account seems coherent and well-constructed, details presented in a realistic way, credible purpose established, then the "story" could be considered true—i.e., it *ought* to be true. Fisher defines "good reasons" as "those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical" and is "inextricably bound to a value—to a conception of the good" (p. 107).

This redefinition of rationality can provide a foundation for social-political change, says Fisher, who was interested in how such change could be brought about through the power of language in political speeches. Unlike the traditional notion of rationality, Fisher's new definition also allows for interpretation of public moral argument such as in political speeches. It also allows us to see narrative as a tool for uncovering or creating self-identity, inasmuch as narration requires an identity, thus a point of view based on such an identity. Therefore, Fisher's narrative paradigm can be summarized as follows:

1. Humans are essentially storytellers;
2. The paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is “good reasons” which vary in form among communication situations, genres, and media;
3. The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture and character;
4. Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of narrative probability, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity; and
5. The world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life. (p. 64-66)

This list supports the idea of how identity influences composition.

Take the first item in Fisher’s list. When we ask students to write about their lives, they either are happy to do so because they perceive such writing as easy and not requiring much work because telling a story is innate in their usual communicative activity. Many writing teachers consider it easy, too, and assign the narrative essay first in a sequence of essay writing. Conversely, students may feel constrained because in their previous schooling they were forced to abandon stories; they are hesitant to strike out into what is now unfamiliar territory. And yet, following Fisher’s paradigm, writing the story of your youth, with an eye toward self-discovery of past instances of identity construction, should come naturally.

The second item in Fisher’s list supports the notion that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed—as is social identity (see chapter 2). When students write about the experiences which have helped to shape their identity,

their interpretation of how the event links to the present is never wrong. We may question its clarity, focus, or the author's view, even the accuracy of the author's memory (see Appendix C). Ultimately, however, what matters is the author's own "take" on what happened and how it influences the present identity. Even if there were a way to determine the correctness of such an interpretation, it does not matter to us (as potential readers) but matters completely to the author. In other words, it is what the author believes that is more important to identity construction than the factual, literal truth of the experience.

The third item links storytelling to the shared culture of the storyteller and the audience. This mirrors Social Identity Theory, which holds that people take their identity from membership in a group, accommodating and drawing upon what is collectively experienced and known, generally accepted and considered valid by the group. In a composition class, a visiting international student may write about his identity construction episodes but, being from a different place, may have experiences quite different than his classmates. Nevertheless, in this exercise of gaining self-awareness of one's identity construction, it is the author who makes the distinction of what is accepted and what is not. In this way, the storyteller and the audience are the same, and, therefore, should understand each other.

The fourth item gives the most basic criteria for evaluating stories. It is similar to the criteria I listed in chapter 1 with regard to determining authenticity in autoethnography and narrative inquiry. There is a "benefit of the doubt" rule that always accompanies fiction; we suspend disbelief to allow ourselves to experience the story. If our reading becomes uncomfortable because what we read is no longer believable, we recapture our disbelief. The mantra of the M.F.A. workshop

may also apply here: a good story is one that seems plausible given the setting, characters, and situation. Real life, of course, is not always neat and logical, nor is how we remember the past.¹²

The fifth item is really what this section is all about: what Gian Pagnucci (2004) calls living a narrative life. We are surrounded by stories. We ourselves are stories, McAdams (1993; 2006) and Eakin (1999) assert. We live our lives as stories and we express our wishes, desires, thoughts and actions as stories—stories which naturally elicit more stories, which cause other stories to be told, and in the end all of our stories come together to make one great story of humanity. Or, in a psychological vein, which is perhaps not so Romantic as McAdams' (1993; 1996) view, item 5 expresses the idea that we tell our stories to both place ourselves into the world, a matter of proving our existence, and as a way to construct our identity. I have previously referred to this concept as a person's psychological situatedness. We also tell our stories to protect ourselves (i.e., our *sel/ves*), to protect the ego, through the choice of identities, identities which are linked to certain situations and the stories implicit in those situations.

The reason for looking at narrative in an investigation of the influence of identity in composition is that narrative provides us with a convenient source of information about how identity informs writing as a natural mode of expression for our identity. To some people, narrative and identity are also synonymous. Eakin (1999) writes that

narrative's role in self-representation extends well beyond the literary;
it is not merely one form among many in which to express identity,

¹² For discussion of the accuracy of both memory and recall, see Appendix C.

but rather an integral part of a primary mode of identity experience,
that of the extended self, the self in time. (p. 137)

We live through time so our identity also extends through time. “Narrative and identity are performed simultaneously,” writes Eakin (1999), so narrative is “not merely *about* the self but rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self” (p. 101, original emphasis). Narrative helps identity live on.

Taken together, narrative theory and Fisher’s narrative paradigm, in particular, offer a good foundation for exploring identity through the personal writing we invite students to do in a composition class. Given the right “prompt” or direction, this autobiographical writing allows students to study themselves and their identities through narrative writing. The basic form of narrative that connects with identity is, obviously, the autobiography.

The Intersection of Narrative and Identity

Self-Expression, Self-Discovery

Nick Tingle (2004) suggests that students often view a writing assignment as a task where they must decode what the teacher wants and then struggle to give it to her (p. 110-111). Certainly, part of this response is the desire to please an authority figure, someone who may be seen by the student as a parental imago, but also implicit in the writing is the desire to please one’s self. Mark Bracher (1999) also sees the writing that is done in composition class as an opportunity for recognition: “We cannot admit our need for recognition to the Other or to ourselves when our identity includes master signifiers such as “independence,” “strength,” and “self-reliance” that preclude such please for recognition” (p. 120). However, we cannot help but want recognition. It is, writes Bracher (1999), a fundamental need

arising from our earliest days: “We are continually trying to repeat . . . the original experience of being loved or recognized that constitutes the core around which our ego is constructed” (p. 130). Lad Tobin (1993, 2004) sees this concept reflected in the various student writing he has read over the years. I agree with these researchers that there seems to be a struggle going on between identities, a fight for control of the self as it is presented through what one writes.

What I have seen in my years teaching college-level writers, so similar to what Bracher (1999) and Tobin (2004) report, is that first-year students generally do two things when writing a paper for a class:

- 1) They try to write in such a way as to attempt to create a product that closely models a sample piece of writing they have read and studied, or
- 2) They give up trying to model, finding it too difficult, and instead write straight from their hearts, in whatever voice they can find and using whatever common language they have at their disposal.

In the first instance, young writers may include flowery language and lofty sentence illocutions that may not be a part of their usual mode of thought, often to the point where the writing sounds false or even incoherent and, thus, the writing may fail because of its artificiality or superficiality. In the second instance, teachers may praise the “risk” the author takes in writing from personal experience and using what is seen as “honest” or “natural” language while marking down a paper for demonstrating less-than-ideal grammar and syntax.

I have argued in previous chapters that an understanding of identity is important for understanding how students write. In this chapter, I have argued for *what* students should write: personal, reflective, narrative writing that focuses on

the experiences of their lives and helps them see how those experiences have helped to shape their present identity as persons, students, and writers. Writing is a valid and valuable means of self-discovery. In fact, this idea connects with what James Berlin (1988) says about the value of self-expression. According to Berlin, the identity of the writer serves as a means of discovering truth:

Authentic self-expression can thus lead to authentic self-experience for both the writer and the reader. The most important measure of authenticity, of genuine self-discovery and self-revelation, furthermore, is the presence of originality in expression; and this is the case whether the writer is creating poetry or writing a business report. Discovering the true self in writing will simultaneously enable the individual to discover the truth of the situation which evoked the writing, a situation that, needless to say, must always be compatible with the development of the self, and this leads to the ideological dimension of the scheme. (p. 485)

I see this self-discovery, this uncovering of the “true self,” as a revealing of the writer’s identity.¹³

However, Thomas Newkirk (1997) points out that Berlin subsequently switches views and in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* (1996) actually sets out to call attention to “the false promise of expressivist classrooms” (Newkirk, 1997, p. 6). Such classes, it seems to Berlin, are the kind where students share their personal

¹³ Berlin (1996) calls it “voice” but through descriptions elsewhere in the book seems to mean identity as I have been using the term. We can see the need for a firm definition of identity—Is it voice? is it personality? is it a dialogic self? What Berlin refers to a “true self” is somewhat of a misnomer; I believe what he means is the Self (in opposition to Other), which is considered synonymous with Ego, i.e., a singularity of individualism which is projected through one or more identities.

experiences through writing and allow the peer groups and the teacher to give feedback, responses which ultimately shape the writer's identity, resulting in the collaborative construction of the "true self" (cited in Newkirk, 1997, p. 6). While Berlin (1996) calls for abandoning autobiographical writing in the composition class in favor of a cultural studies model, I believe Berlin is still half right. Identity *is* influenced by everything and everyone we encounter. Initially it is our parents, then our school and work colleagues, later society at large. In this way, identity is collaboratively constructed, as Berlin suggests. However, what goes on inside the mind of each individual—what a person does with these external influences in order to transform them into internal influences—is something psychologists are currently trying to understand. We know that something happens and we can see the result of this mental juggling through the writing that people do. This kind of self-discovery relies on writing that is self-directed and self-centered (Bracher, 1999). Although a certain degree of self-knowledge can come from the process of studying any subject, I believe that writing for self-discovery—following Bruner (1996), Tobin (1996, 2004), and Bracher (1999)—is achieved best when written in narrative form, especially as autobiography or as self-narrative.

Teaching Identity through Self-Narrative

An autobiography provides writers with a traditional way in which they may revisit the various experiences which have influenced their identity construction down through the years. Autobiography, however, often takes different forms: short or long, directed or open, serious or light-hearted. Autobiography is generally broader in scope while self-narrative is a focused writing that limits the range of topics and considers them within a particular context such as identity construction.

In any form, there are personal benefits that come to the author through the effort expended. In this section, I want to explain some of the ways I use narrative. I will introduce more concrete pedagogical ideas in chapter 6. For now, I want to provide an overview of identity construction projects that specifically make use of self-narrative writing.

In recent first-year composition courses, I have had my students write a long paper (e.g., five single-spaced pages) that is essentially an autobiography. I say *essentially* because I frame it as “What events in your life have helped make you who you are today?” The project is not intended to cover everything in their lives but, rather, to be limited to only those experiences they find most significant. In this sense, it is a self-narrative rather than autobiography, but I call it *autobiography* because that is a word students understand. It is a broad genre, nevertheless.

I give little other direction for them because I want them to find their own direction back through their lives. The thinking, searching, and writing are the goals, less so the finished product on paper. Having students “figure it out” is an important part of the exercise. They achieve more by blazing their own trails back through time than if I acted as gatekeeper or spirit guide. I give students basic information on the nature of self and identity to help them know how to look for events from which they have drawn identity materials, but I resist giving any more instruction in psychology. Instead, I constantly emphasize the reflection aspects of the task: “Do not just tell what happened; add your thoughts and feelings—your reflections—about what happened.” As students work on their self-narratives, I oversee the writing itself through one-on-one conferencing and peer review in groups of three or four. Even at the beginning, I know students will gravitate into

one of two paths: those who think it will be easy to write about themselves only to discover how difficult it really is and those who initially believe it will be impossible to do yet discover instead how easy it is for them to write about themselves.

Initially, students often struggle to organize their thoughts and begin to put them down on paper, perhaps figuring out first what their identity actually is. Then comes what I call the “birth paragraph” or perhaps another significant event opens the paper. This is followed, typically, by a listing, paragraph by paragraph, of each age or year in school and a general run-down of what they remember. There are few details and fewer reflections about their present identity. But I let this develop, working more on surface clarity at this point. Later, after students have a complete draft, I focus their attention on the content and try to draw out more of their reflections about events. I try to get students to see cause-and-effect relationships, even chains of causes and effects, and how those experiences have helped to shape their identities. Rather than lengthen their papers, I ask them to “deepen” and “thicken” them by writing more about the psychological and sociological aspects of their experiences. This is when their self-awareness begins to unfold. They begin to see who they are and come to understand their present identity by comparing the Lacanian “chain of signifiers” that have become linked throughout their lives.

Invariably, most students state at the end of the course that this was the most worthwhile writing project they have ever done and they are appreciative of the opportunity to think about their lives and identities in that way. They also find it ultimately enjoyable, not only because they can return to their memories and re-experience them, but also because they can now make sense of those events.

There is often a degree of catharsis, too, depending on what kinds of experiences students have had and how openly they allow themselves to (re)examine those experiences in terms of their identity development. Many students' papers end with projections into the future based on the present position they have achieved as a result of their self-discovery. Only the few students who do not take the project seriously seem to fail to benefit from this exercise in self-awareness and identity construction.¹⁴

Before reading McAdams (1993), several studies of literacy (Stuckey, 1991; Heller, 1997; Finn, 1999; Brandt, 2001) had convinced me that to know ourselves more intimately by examining past experiences and putting them into a personally meaningful perspective could aid us in living our lives better in the present and future. I realize that this work may have a "warm-fuzzy" feel to it; such idealism is always attractive were it not for the intrusion of reality. In one graduate course, we were asked to write our own "literacy autobiography," a project I felt eager to write because I knew that I had a wealth of experiences to share. The challenge was to place the events into a hierarchy and only write about the most significant ones. This became my way of having first-year composition students look at their writing projects. Of course, I, like my students, began with accounts of childhood books that were read to me and the ones I soon read to myself. I described the stories I wrote and the awards I won for poetry. I made some connections between the events in my childhood and who I am today; somehow, I was finally able to make those connections. I was pleasantly surprised to discover some connections which were never apparent before. However, what surprised me most were the few new

¹⁴ See Appendix D for a more detailed explanation of these identity constructing projects.

revelations that hit me unexpectedly as I wandered through the past, some of them unpleasant. In one instance, I was able to finally figure out the relationship between Micro Man, a superhero I created in sixth grade who could shrink himself to escape from danger, and the abusive teacher I had that year: I had wanted to shrink out of sight in that class. Yet it was not until that writing task, at this later point in my life, that I was able to put that together. The purpose that this writing served may be just my own peace of mind, or it could simply be the closure of a disagreeable episode.

In the next chapter I will discuss the pedagogical implications and future directions of identity research in composition. Before that, however, I would like to close this chapter with another portion of my self-narrative. This two-part “essay” was my attempt to do what I ask my students to do. I could phrase it as:

Think about something you experienced in your childhood or early adolescent years which continues to be a significant influence on your identity today. Think about how it got started, whether it was beneficial or detrimental, and what effects it may have on you today.

I started to write, leaving my mind open to all of the memories and sensations that came to me. Then, as all proper English students instinctively know to do, I revised the resulting text for clarity and consistency, even added a few citations. I offer it as an example of one kind of self-reflective narrative writing, part autobiography and part psychoanalysis. Perhaps it will be instructive.

Role-Playing Reality as Identity Construction

Or, How I Became Christine Kaufmann's Lover and Lived Happily Ever After

In the city where I grew up, one local television station showed historical dramas late at night on Saturdays and I grew to love these movies for the opportunity they gave me to see different times and places. Yes, they were often corny, badly acted, and the words I heard characters speaking sometimes never matched the movement of their lips—but the costumes were colorful, the deeds heroic, the stories grand, and the stage vast. Looking back, I realize how these films, among the many possible sources of identity material available to me, were especially significant as I subconsciously constructed my identity.

One significant film was *Taras Bulba* (1962), featuring Yul Brynner and Tony Curtis as a Cossack father and son who fought the Poles in the 16th century. I focused more on the son and his *verboden* Polish girlfriend, played by German actress Christine Kaufmann (who later, briefly, was the wife of Tony Curtis). When I was able to finally record it on videotape (the VCR was becoming more common by then), I played the film over and over, imagining I was Andrei Bulba romancing the pretty girl, Natalia Dubrov. I can understand now, from my psychology research, what I must have been experiencing as an adolescent. The way I role-played and daydreamed that particular scenario was my attempt to create a personally satisfying “fundamental fantasy”¹⁵ (Lacan, 1977), a situation or set of criteria that I subconsciously seek throughout my life to replicate. I can see, now looking back, how this germ of an idea has continued to play out in many subsequent

¹⁵ For further explanation of Lacan's concept of drives and fundamental fantasies and how they inform not only everyday behavior but also writing, see Appendix B.

experiences in my life. As this might be what psychologist Heinz Kohut (1966, 1977) would label as my *selfobject*—that is, my “love interest” or focal point *object* needed to “complete” my selfobject—became linked with and idealized in the character played by actress Christine Kaufmann in *Taras Bulba*. By comparison, I later saw the actress in other films and was not likewise smitten by her; it must have been the *character* she played that impressed me rather than the real woman. It was her identity in that film which drew me; it was my identity when I was “with her” that I enjoyed.

The identification I had with Christine Kaufmann’s character evolved into an obsession whereby I invented what did not really exist: a young female friend named “Kristine Kaufmann” who bore a striking resemblance to the actress. The change of spelling was simply for aesthetic purposes, I believe. At the age of 15, I went so far as to present to my family and friends the idea that this person was indeed my girlfriend. I was saved from having to introduce her in the flesh by conveniently claiming that she lived in another state, that we had met back at the summer music camp I’d attended, which was plausible. To what end I did this I cannot be certain. Perhaps it was simply to impress everyone that I, a shy and awkward teenager, was worthy of having a beautiful girlfriend. It probably didn’t matter so much to others what stories I told, I suspect now, nor whether they even recognized them as stories or believed them unconditionally as true, but it provided a rich fantasy life for me that I found comforting. With the realization of the comfort, it became easier (and thus more frequent) to indulge in such “virtual reality.”

The downside, of course, was that this process prevented me from easily developing a realistic perspective of the world and a true understanding of myself

and my identity. Rather than dealing with the static reality around me, I tended to consider it as one of many alternate realities and, as Prince Corwin of Amber did, I moved effortlessly and seamlessly among different realities and adopted different identities for each of them. Like many youth, I was experimenting, trying to find or construct an identity with which I could act (or project my self) most effectively. One goal of teaching composition and identity, after all, is to help students recognize and not so much avoid such identity conflicts as to make sense of them. It wasn't that I had given up on reality and was content to live in a fantasy world; I knew the difference. At times, I felt shame for having a fantasy life. I would justify it to myself and others by promoting my fiction writing as a suitable excuse for fantasizing. Even so, inside I knew the truth.

This conflict caused me to experience frustration at the struggle to either make the fantasy into reality or to replace the fantasy with a better reality. I also feared the exposure of my fantasies as fantasies which when exposed (as it was in several instances) caused me a great amount of shame. In those traumatic instances, I was called "liar" rather than "fantasizer." That label did not fit my identity, my sense of self, and that is why the accusations were so painful. My identity was under attack! It would have been easier on me, I think, if it had been merely my body that was wounded physically. Slinking off to lick my wounds, I would cower for a time in seclusion—until I thought the world had forgotten my transgression. During these times of introspection, I would add to my identity in two ways: I would deny that I had actually done anything wrong but rather was simply misunderstood by my accusers, and I would vow to myself never to get into that situation again. In the first instance I was protecting my ego and in the second

instance I was making a corrective plan. Both acts added permanent layers to my identity.

The cure for the shame of exposure was for me to constantly seek out real relationships—or else to escape into my fiction writing where such fantasizing was tolerated and where everything always worked out according to my desires. Writing about real relationships in stories was difficult, I discovered, because I had no real relationships experiences to write about. My writing tended toward generalities, toward roles characters rather than fully-formed personalities. This effect of identity (what I presumed mine to be) on writing has been discussed by Mark Bracher (1999), who links psychological issues with writing issues. Rather than, say, a comma-splice sentence being the result of a writer's imperfect learning of syntactical rules, it reveals a kind of mental block which is, in turn, based on some psychological event in the writer's past that is tapped whenever the writer tries to address a certain topic or situation. This makes perfect sense to me because in our writing we project our identity; our writing *is* or *becomes* us, that is, who we want the world to see. And if that presentation is of an imperfect identity, one we ourselves are not comfortable showing off, then we compensate by making adjustments in style, voice, syntax to cover that imperfection. The writer may sacrifice perfection in writing to cover the imperfection of identity. Or the writer may simply give up on the writing and refuse to present his or her identity, fearing the response. I believe in my youth that I over-compensated in my writing, making my writing more eloquent, more flowery, more effusive just to cover up what I perceived as imperfection in *both* my identity and my writing. I went out of my way to impress my readers (generally limited to my teachers) by using elevated language.

However, my writing seldom changed my real life. Whenever I would fail at establishing real relationships, I would always fall back into the fantasy life. Whenever I was looking for real friends, especially real girlfriends, I always tried to find a person who most closely fit the fantasy *imago*, rather than allow myself be happy with whoever I actually met. Those with whom I did begin relationships were soon cast aside because they were never as good as what I had in mind—literally *in my mind* as fantasy imagoes.

I eventually gave up on “Kristine.” I was exhausted having to keep up the fantasy and I no longer believed I could successfully continue it anyway. I told myself it was not working; my identity was tied up with that imago—just as tied up as though I were actually in a restrictive relationship which was stifling my individuality, my freedom, my creativity, etc. I realized that I needed to move on. So one day I blithely announced to everyone that we had broken up. I packed that pathological lie (i.e., “story”) away in a mental trunk and conveniently forgot it until I was compelled by my current identity research to go looking for it again, even at the risk of embarrassment.

Now it is possible to reveal this episode because it serves as an example of the reflective implicit in self-narrative writing. This is not, however, an example of confession for confession’s sake. I did not start out to do so but fell gradually into the revealing of the past through my reflective writing. Though the self-knowledge rediscovered through the process of narrative inquiry may not seem relevant to my present life, I see it as “explaining” many instances of behavior I have exhibited in my life, especially in the area of relationships. I feel some comfort in understanding finally how the experience caused me to think this or do that, how something I did

in the past has continued to affect me even while I believed I had safely put aside those episodes forever. Psychologically, everything we do continues to influence us by influencing our identity. So, in the “confession” comes a certain catharsis. I feel as though a burden has been lifted from me, as though a shackle has been sawed off at long last, though I can still feel a kind of “phantom pain” where it was clamped around my ankle and remember the weight of the ball and chain.

It is useful to note that, according to some proponents of autoethnography and this present kind of narrative inquiry, a certain degree of “confession” is required for authenticity. I have offered such honest reflection in the previous section. The Christine Kaufmann affair revealed a negative influence on my identity. Perhaps I have tried to outlive the past by behaving differently—that is, by inventing new identities without ties to that past. Or, as I illustrate in the following example, I found other sources of identity material which suited me better, which allowed me to grow in a direction I thought better represented who I wanted to be.

How I Thwarted the Peasants’ Revolt and Lived to Analyze It

Another influential historical fiction movie was *Michael Kohlhaas* (1969),¹⁶ which I saw only once, late at night, a few years after first viewing *Taras Bulba*. *Michael Kohlhaas*, produced in Germany, cast with German actors, and dubbed poorly into English, nevertheless seems to have influenced me more profoundly than *Taras Bulba*. The essence of the story was that Michael Kohlhaas, a horse trader in a 16th century German principality, takes his horses to the town fair to sell them but is stopped unexpectedly by a new toll bridge; to pass he must leave two

¹⁶ The original German title of the film was *Michael Kohlhaas - der Rebell*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff and starring David Warner as Michael Kohlhaas and Anna Karina as his long-suffering wife, Elisabeth. The film also had an uncredited appearance by Rolling Stones musician Keith Richardson.

horses as collateral, which he will buy back with money he gets at the fair. A problem arises when he returns to discover that his horses have been worked and abused and are now worth nothing. Kohlhaas refuses to pay the previously agreed price and complains to the local authorities who do nothing. Increasingly angry at the injustice of the situation, Kohlhaas sets on a course of rebellion which culminates in him leading a peasants' revolt and storming the prince's castle before the initial wrong can finally be righted. Even the cleric Martin Luther becomes involved on his behalf. In the end, despite his victory, Kohlhaas is left to ponder whether justice has truly been done and whether or not it was worth all the strife he has caused in the land.

When I saw this film during my early high school days I knew nothing of the original 1810 novella by Heinrich von Kleist. For some reason, however, the story stuck with me; I saw it only *once* as a teenager and can still recount the details of scenes now thirty years later! The film affected me so powerfully at the time that the story and its themes were burned into my subconscious, influencing my view of the world and of myself—more openly in my youth but continuing unconsciously to the present day, as well. I can see instances of its influence today. Like Kohlhaas in the film, I similarly saw myself as beset upon by forces of injustice: I was navigating the injustices within my high school. Though I was never a bully, nor was much bullied myself, I witnessed countless acts of injustice, the kind of verbal, physical, and emotional cruelty only teenagers can perpetuate upon each other. I wanted to stop it all. I wanted to lead a rebellion—or run away from the situation. I enjoyed playing a role similar to that of the fundamentally good horse trader who wishes he could simply escape an unjust world for a private paradise, a proverbial

“land of milk and honey,”¹⁷—just me and the requisite “love of my life,” together in some beautiful and fertile valley hidden in the mountains, living our lives in peace. Of course, I could never be alone in such a scenario; I always required a special girl or woman to make the situation complete. At that time, this became for me the perfect scenario for which I would strive, both as high school student, then as college student. This became the identity I sought. I sought it because it brought me comfort. And, similar to the oft declared postmodern Valentine cards says “I love you for who I am when I am with you,” I also liked who I was in this scenario. I liked my identity, and wanted it to go on.

The Michael Kohlhaas story gradually faded into my unconscious, yet I can look back now through the lens of psychoanalysis and see how it has subtly influenced many aspects of my life, including much of the writing I have done since I first encountered the story. Even today, I sometimes dream of a similar situation, and it takes on a mythic feeling. I dream (in the sense of the Lacanian concept of *desire*) of living a happy, care-free life, just me and my Love, alone in some sylvan paradise. Were a psychoanalyst to listen in, she might recognize this “me and my love” dialectic as being mere symbolism representative of “me and my self-love” (*selfobject*, to use Kohut’s term) wanting simply to be alone in paradise.

Psychologists have alluded to this desire of two-ness in a paradise as an unconscious desire to return to the bliss of the womb, a theme which has infected

¹⁷ I cannot recall when or how this phrase became associated with this film, though I recognize it as originating in the Bible. Whatever the reason, it became an important motif in an outline I made for a novel I would someday write, a rip-off of *Michael Kohlhaas* but set in a post-apocalyptic future, somewhere in a peaceful, isolated central Asia. Why there? Perhaps I had seen some scenery of that location in another old film, *Genghis Khan* (1965, starring Omar Sharif). Recently, such bucolic scenes re-entered my consciousness when I saw a friend’s travel photos of the mountainous Tian Shan region in western China, pictures which helped me recall my original plans for the novel.

Western civilization in the form of religious concepts and motifs in the arts (Hollis, 1998). In this context, my analysis might mean that the very identity I sought (the best *me*) might be called paradise. Yet it is not a physical reality but a state of being where no persecution or injustice exists—i.e., an identity which is safe from conflict. It could be described also as a place free of *narcissistic injury*, which is an unexpected loss of agency, a situation where one becomes powerless to protect one's self from humiliation and shame, for example, if the falseness of a masking identity were to be exposed (Rothstein, 1984; Lowen, 1985; Kreisman & Straus, 1989)—something I constantly feared during my Kristine Kaufmann escapades.

Like with studying any literary work, we could see this in several different ways. The most likely interpretation, I think, might be that the “milk and honey” motif represents an endless source of *narcissistic supply*, that is, the ego-stroking words and acts which provide sustenance to the narcissistic personality. The conclusion or lesson of this analysis might be: *I want to love myself and be whole*. Religious people might see this motif as wanting to be “one with God” or some similar expression of ultimate universality. I continue to be amazed, even as I write this, how a simple story told in a foreign film I saw only once has been taken so strongly into my subconscious and internalized as a driving force for my identity (i.e., a “drive”) for both my conscious positive behavior and subconscious defensive behavior for several decades. The identity I was determined to construct compelled me to act in such a way as to promote, even fight for, its existence. What I seemed to be fighting against, however, were other identities which wished me to abandon my favorite one as unworkable, as an identity unsuitable, unrealistic, unavailable for me. I just couldn't pull it off.

As my identity research took me into psychology, especially the subject of narcissism that led to the Self Psychology of Heinz Kohut, I came upon a paper by Kohut in which he specifically discusses the story “Michael Kohlhaas” in terms of the protagonist’s narcissism. The extreme actions taken by Kohlhaas are seen by Kohut (1972) as his attempts to recover his lost identity, in part, his reputation as a fair businessman and rational member of the community. The seemingly minor injustice is taken by Kohlhaas as a personal attack, that is, an action which results in narcissistic injury and thus exposes his dark side—what Jung would call the “shadow,” a place where hidden insecurities reside—and then serves as a key to unlock his potential for violence. Kohut sees the actions taken by Kohlhaas as symptomatic of *narcissistic rage*, which is a violent reaction to attacks on, or attempts to dismantle, a constructed identity. We could compare this model with everyday crime. Some criminal acts, especially personal confrontations which lead to violence, are likely caused by narcissistic rage. When a youth feels he is not “respected” by a stranger, believes his identity is being attacked, fears loss of his mask or shield, and lashes out to save himself from humiliation and shame (Kohut, 1972; Lowen, 1985; Hollis, 2007).

When I first saw *Michael Kohlhaas* as a youth, I knew nothing of narcissism except for the old Greek myth. I identified with Michael Kohlhaas and his situation perhaps because, at that time, I felt likewise unfairly persecuted, as well. Perhaps I believed that people around me had it in for me, which in turn caused me to think I was somehow more worthy, more just, more intelligent, and more moral than they were—despite frequent behavior on my part which showed quite the opposite. For example, I often told lies simply to improve the way others saw me and thought of

me. Remember Kristine Kaufmann? I told lies to myself and to others: my parents, relatives, classmates, friends, teachers, even the random stranger. Such lies were more embellishment or exaggeration than any deliberately malicious deception—a fine line, perhaps. I did remain honest in matters of serious consequence and, ironically, always considered myself to be morally upright, trustworthy, and honest. Periodically, I vowed to stop the creation of falsehoods and lead a life of truth only to quickly slip back whenever situations could be made better by telling a small white lie. This might have been simply a conflict between identities, I believe: the attempt to change to a different, better identity only to return, as if by gravity, to what was, unfortunately, the most salient identity available to me. I never meant to hurt anyone or to deceive them out of malice; I only wanted to be admired, liked, praised. I wanted to present myself as better than I was, or as I believed I was. That is the truth that comes in reflection.

A Reflective Conclusion

As I edited and revised this last section, I continued to dig deeper into my previously locked trunk of memories, uncovering and bringing to light all of these influences, connections, and interpretations—regardless of how they might be considered by other people. What I, the one experiencing and being influenced by them, consider them to be are kernels of meaning that have been used as material for my identity construction. Only through this effort in going back and looking again at these experiences, this time through a psychoanalytical lens, did I really see how I became who I am today. Only through the writing and thinking, focusing and remembering, analyzing and synthesizing have I been able to make sense of some past events. Working on an identity-focused writing project in a composition class

gives students the opportunity to similarly explore how the significant experiences in their past have continued to influence their identity in the present. By reflecting on *Michael Kohlhaas*, I have been able to (re)discover lasting influences as well as effects which I had never suspected until my recent psychoanalytical research allowed me to place those memories into a meaningful context. Indeed, it seems the more I write about my past experiences, the more I think about my identity. And the more I recall of the past, the more connections I find between past experiences and my present identity. The unexpected juxtaposition of different elements (memories, film and story, Kohut's references to the story, photos of faraway places, my present mindset, etc.) combines within me "in unexpected ways," surprisingly but evocatively, as I wrote.

The point of such a reflective exercise is not to confess or reveal one's secrets *per se*. Rather, the purpose is to tell one's self what one has discovered. None of what I have written above needed to be shared with others in order to benefit me. But I share it for two reasons. First, in producing a self-narrative, a certain degree of authenticity is achieved by its confessional content and tone (see chapter 1). Secondly, in sharing that particular content—how I thought and wrote about these past influences and through the process discovered something previously hidden yet quite significant to who I am today—readers might see how the product of a writing pedagogy that was, in part, aimed at identity-construction might look.

Let me emphasize that the benefit to the writer comes in the reflection, in the self-awareness, in (re)discovering particular cause-and-effect relationships of past and present experiences and their influence on the present identity. This kind of

writing about identity may seem too close to confession for teachers to be comfortable presenting in a composition class, yet confession to one's self is, as I have experienced in writing the self-narratives included in this chapter, highly cathartic. So-called "confessional" writing is also, as Newkirk (1997) and Tobin (2004) remind us, a well-established and highly influential writing tradition that began with Augustine and continues up to the present day—including, as I see it, much of what now constitutes daytime talk shows on television and in the newsstand tabloids. In this autobiographical society, what is at issue is identity.

And yet there remains resistance to autobiographical writing, personal writing, and personal identity issues. In the next chapter, I discuss what I believe to be the reasons for this resistance: a general lack of understanding of the nature of identity and how it influences composition, and confusion about how identity can be addressed in the composition classroom. I also discuss the pedagogical implications of using this identity construction writing model in the composition classroom—or what I like to call "I-Con" pedagogy.¹⁸

¹⁸ An 'icon' is a representation of something greater and more significant than the icon itself. We use icons in computer operations to stand for a collection of actions. Bringing the multiplicity and complexity of operations under a single symbol makes it easier for us to understand and implement them. This metaphor applies to this kind of writing pedagogy because of the complex actions involved in constructing an identity.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Identifying Composition

In this final chapter, I want to make clear three ideas I have been wrestling with during this project, ideas I have attempted to clarify for composition scholars and practitioners through the preceding chapters. First, there is not much research and discussion about psychologically-based identity. There needs to be more talk, more scholarship, because of how psychological identity impacts the thinking and writing done in composition. Second, I suspect this lack of research and discussion is due to many people in the field simply having a general misunderstanding about what identity actually is, how it could possibly ever relate to composition, and what practitioners who understand identity's impact on writing might do in the classroom to address it. A movement to correct this situation seems to start every few years but inexplicably falls silent. Third, once we accept the importance of identity in composition studies and thus make room for it in the first-year composition class, we need to determine how teachers can design writing projects to help students construct identity at the same time they work on other facets of the composition class. In chapter 5, I demonstrated how writing which is done to discover how one's identity has been constructed might look and suggested how such writing projects could be designed. I would like, in this chapter, to address the questions readers may have regarding these three ideas and to then build further upon the writing examples I have provided in the previous chapter in order to define the goals and methods of Identity-construction ("I-Con") pedagogy, and how it can fit easily yet

significantly into current composition practices.

Research and Discussion of Identity in Composition

In March 2007, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) held its annual gathering in New York City. The theme of this national conference was “Representing Identities,” which the chair, Cheryl Glenn, described as a consideration of identities “as they are constructed through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and silence” (CCCC conference brochure). I was excited to see Identity become the main focus for a prominent gathering of composition scholars. Unfortunately, the reality was disappointing. It seems as though the CCCC believes that Identity is a worthy topic of study yet the numbers do not bear this out. Flip through the conference program book and you will see only about 60% of session titles and presentation titles having wording that suggested the topic of identity. Of those that did, almost all were exploring a *social* identity based upon gender, class, ethnicity, etc. (see chapter 2). Of the few which did seem to focus on psychological identity, I found many to be misleading: the session or presentation titles seemed to indicate one view of identity (psychological, personal, cognitive) while the actual presentations offered views (socially-based identity, or about “voice”) which were quite different. It seemed to me that there must be a great discrepancy in how we define identity and how it should or could be applied to composition studies.

The journals typically read by English faculty also suggest little attention to psychological identity, preferring to favor discussions of identity that emanate from group affiliation. I began this project by searching through journals going back ten years, eager to find instances of identity as a topic. I found very few, and no articles in the 2007 issues. That is, up to the November issue of *College English* where I

found Peter Elbow's article "Reconsiderations: Voice in Writing Again: Embracing Contraries," an update of the debate on voice and self which comes close, but not all the way, to mentioning identity, focusing on the relatively superficial aspects of wordcraft rather than the underlying psychological basis for voice. There are a few other exceptions: three of the more recent articles (though still back in 2006) were an odd assortment: Jill Swiencicki's article "The Rhetoric of Awareness Narratives" (*College English* 68:4), which seems, at first glance, to be about identity discovery through narrative is actually a narrow discussion of "post-civil rights narratives about white identity" (p. 338)—hence, identity as a member of a group, in this case based on race. Donna LeCourt's article on working-class identity (*College English* 69:1) and an article by Lorraine D. Higgins and Lisa D. Brush about personal experience narratives (*CCC* 57:4)—though both articles use identity discussion in the service of social activism—round out the literature on identity published recently. While interesting, informative, and worth sharing, I would have liked to have seen in these articles more of the psychological perspective of identity, given that social factors influence psychological factors and vice-versa. Looking further back, in 2003 *College English* devoted an entire issue to answering questions about the place of the personal in academic writing (66:1), which would seem to suggest identity as, at least, a peripheral topic. Articles by Patricia A. Sullivan ("Composing Culture: A Place for the Personal") and Amy E. Robillard ("It's Time for Class: Toward a More Complex Pedagogy of Narrative") join with Jane E. Hindman's article ("Thoughts on Reading 'the Personal': Toward a Discursive Ethics of Professional Critical Literacy") to position the subject of personal identity for promoting social issues, revealing class struggle, and assisting in gender

awareness—all valid uses and certainly worthy goals, but focusing exclusively on social or group identity. Little is acknowledged, in this *identity* issue, of the *individual* who is doing the writing.

In the same issue, Melissa A. Goldthwaite (“Confessionals”) outlines the history of confessional writing and offers a few of the benefits as well as cautions concerning ethical issues arising from applying this technique in the classroom. She concludes that the social and cultural forces imbedded in classrooms make such personal writing a problem of power dynamics between teacher as a kind of priest/voyeur and student as a confessor/victim. Goldthwaite promises to keep on writing her personal tales, but as for requiring students to do so, *well* And William P. Banks (“Written through the Body: Disruptions and ‘Personal’ Writing”) uses a personal narrative to inform readers about how he wrote the essay about personal narrative that appears in this same issue of *College English*. His article focuses on the personal events in students’ lives that they choose to write about and of the healing that often results. These two articles imply that identity, as it is considered in composition, is something which can be damaged through various experiences in life and only restored through gaining an understanding of the self and its identities. This almost points in the right direction to address identity in the individual, but there is not much discussion of how writing reflectively, writing a self-narrative, or writing with a psychoanalytical focus can provide assistance. These authors suggest that only those who have “problems” or something to “confess” can benefit from self-reflective or autobiographical writing.

Other publications toss an occasional article to the identity readership. In one example, the March 2007 *PMLA* offers Nancy K. Miller’s “The Entangled Self:

Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir” which argues for the continuing development of autobiography as a field of study and research, suggesting ways to begin mapping the subject. Although this article begins with discussion of self, Miller applies *self* only in the service of explicating the value of the memoir genre. Memoir, as a form of personal writing, I see as being in the same arena as I-Con writing: writing which requires (as part of the conventions of the genre) a certain degree of self-disclosure and self-reflection. My search uncovered no articles on identity in the three previous years.

Research in the Teaching of English and *Journal of Teaching Writing*, in recent years, have also ignored identity as a featured subject of research or commentary. Recently, however, *JTW* made a brief mention of identity but only in the service of a larger subject, in this case identity in virtual reality writing (*JTW* 22:1)—an interesting approach to considering the transformation of “real” identity to “virtual” identity. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* also rarely includes identity as a subject in its articles, preferring to offer articles (as recently as the December 2006 issue) which support the mandate to teach correct “grammar and syntax” (*TETYC* 34:2), as well as various cultural issues through writing (i.e., writing about things outside oneself, separated from one’s personal identity).

There are certainly many other issues that are relevant to English studies; I am arguing that a psychological perspective of identity should be one of them. By mentioning these articles, I do not intend to disparage the authors or the journals for what they publish; rather, I simply wish to point out that the topic of identity in writing, from psychological perspective, is not yet present in our scholarship today. Obviously, editors have not had many submissions of psychological identity-based

articles to publish. I hope that I can assist in changing this situation.

Locating and Positioning Identity in Composition

In each of the cases I noted above, identity is positioned as a peripheral issue among many, more important writing factors to be addressed in composition pedagogy. When identity *is* mentioned, authors typically position identity as coming exclusively from one's membership in a group based on some classification, not as self or ego and not in terms of individual agency. Psychology studies have suggested that identity is a product of the self and factors into every action people do—including writing. My current study argues that identity is *the central issue* behind most of the writing that people do, and especially so for first-year students. More research needs to be done to fill out and strengthen this concept. The work of some compositionists (Tobin, 1993, 2004; Newkirk, 1997; Bracher, 1999; Alcorn, 2002; Tingle, 2004) actively considers psychological identity as an issue in their students' writing. Similarly, Blitz and Hurlbert (1988) and Hurlbert and Blitz (1991) look at student writing for purposes other than discussing identity, yet the excerpts they share nevertheless present such writing in terms which, to me, seem clearly to be related to identity. I see in the excerpts writing that is produced from or through a fractured, lost, or rejected identity.

I also see the issue of identity in composition as being about agency: the writer as creator, not as just a responder. Many composition classes are designed around a collection of readings to which students writing in response. I do agree that there is a need for learning to write, perhaps analytically, in response to texts. That is one facet of composition, a facet that generally prepares students for success in college. In fact, we may actually be responding to *something* whenever

we write, even if no paper text is close at hand. Subconsciously, we tend to see our actions as originating from within us, as part of our agency, rather than in reaction to an external Other (McAdams, 1993; Bracher 1999; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). However, the writer does bring to the writing act an assortment of background experiences, as well as impressions and feelings about those experiences, and may never be aware of how that *mélange* influences the many choices a writer makes and the ways in which the writer writes. By understanding how identity is constructed; how identity projects, bolsters, and defends the self; how identity gives us self-satisfying avenues of self-expression; how identity serves our desires and enables us to work toward *jouissance*, we can better act in our everyday lives. This includes having greater awareness of our writing abilities and choices, why we write a certain way, why we make certain “errors” in writing, and why students often resist writing.

The point I want to make is that identity profoundly influences everything we do and in composition that activity is chiefly writing. Understanding identity and how it influences us can only improve how we teach writing. More research needs to be done to determine exactly *how* identity influences writing so that teachers can then shape writing pedagogy to better assist in identity construction at this crucial time and place in the lives of the young people who pass through first-year composition classrooms. Identity is acknowledged in the field as important, yet the emphasis is almost exclusively in support of a sociological focus. While membership in society and an understanding of other societies is important (and, to me, as equally fascinating as the psychological perspective), what the individual does to construct identity—no matter the sources of identity material used—should be placed near

the forefront of composition research. Society is made up, after all, of *individuals* who more or less agree to be participants in the society, not a nameless legion of automatons who simply follow orders, get their membership cards stamped, and gather alternately as homogeneous or diverse herds led by certain cultural cues or compelled to act by calculated media prompts. If promotion of a liberal education is intended to create a model citizen, as Dewey (1933) and, later, Berlin (1987, 1996) assert, then that liberal education requires the presence of an independent-thinking citizen who *chooses* to participate in society. By understanding identity and how it influences everyday thought and behavior, an individual can live a more purposeful and meaningful life which can benefit society as a whole. Through the self-focused writing that can be done in composition, young people can understand the impact of identity in their lives and make conscious efforts to construct an identity for success in adulthood.

Overcoming Resistance to Identity in Composition

The Goals of First-Year Composition

I frequently notice some confusion among my colleagues about what the goals of a first-year composition class should be. Our views might stem from our own experiences as student in first-year comp and our training as writing teachers: we might tend to follow our mentors' approach, at least initially. In a discussion of goals in composition, we can review how we got to where we are today, beginning with the history of composition in higher education. However, the history of writing instruction has been covered very well elsewhere. One comprehensive volume is James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* (1987). At this point we need only concern ourselves with more recent views of what first-year composition should teach. Back

in the 18th and 19th centuries, according to Berlin (1987), writing was taught simply as a prelude to oral communication; that is, what was written was intended to be delivered as public oratory rather than to be read by a populace who were less literate generally than now. The purpose, therefore, was more about instilling a wide knowledge of culture in order to create a democratic citizenry, according to the founders of several major universities, Berlin cites. To enter the public debate for the good of the community, society, and the nation was a calling for the sons of the elite, imagined as the next generation of leaders. Writing instruction, prior to the 1940s, either had not existed at many colleges and universities or it had existed only as a part of other courses in which papers were assigned. In fact, once the need for writing instruction was commonly agreed upon in the wake of returning soldiers who needed to be retrained in the 1940s, writing was quickly seen as something that was best done in a literature class. The only suitable subject for students to write about was the literature they read, according to Randall Stewart of Brown University (Berlin, 1987, p. 108). This view has generally held up, deep into the 20th century—even as the expressivist movement of the late 1970s and 1980s attempted to bring self-expression and personal writing, long a tradition of belle lettres, back into the classroom.

William Riley Parker gives a succinct history in his famous soliloquy, “Where do English Departments come From?” In this 1967 essay, Parker sums up the disappointing situation as it stood then, setting the stage for current problems:

To sum up: the ancient subject of rhetoric, which at first showed signs of adapting itself to changing times while preserving both its integrity and its vitality, in the nineteenth century . . . permitted oratory

to become identified with elocution, and, as for written composition, it allowed this to become chiefly identified with that dismal, unflowering desert, freshman theme-writing. It is little wonder that speech and composition were readily accepted by administrators as appendices of English literature Increasingly, thereafter, college entrance exams linked composition with literature, and, not unnaturally, linked high school work in “English” with beginning college work in composition. (p. 349)

First-year composition, some say, has unfortunately become a remediation project of for what is lacking in high school. And as long as we are teaching students how to write, we can teach them how to think, what to think, what to write, and so on. This is a regrettably cynical view, but I want to suggest that while wordcraft may be considered the core of a writing course—the actual writing of text—we have tried to add this and that continually to writing as a way to further one agenda or another. While each agenda may have its own worthy goals, it seems as though such extra features or “goals” of the composition course take writing away from the central issue and make it a vehicle for learning other things.

During my years as both a student and a teacher at six institutions of higher education, I see that this situation is still alive and well. The main conflict, as I see it, is mostly between three approaches: 1) a composition course which is focused primarily on what I call *wordcraft* in order to improve a student’s writing skills, which is chiefly a benefit to students for their success in other courses; 2) a composition course which sees writing as only important for the development of rhetorical or argument skills, considered necessary in higher education and in public discourse;

and 3) a composition course where writing is an end product of other interests, a class with various readings which may often have a social or political emphasis and writing is chiefly used to express a response to such readings.

The first course is appropriate for basic writing and shares characteristics of a fiction workshop, where authors look at individual sentences and paragraphs in a meta-editing effort to improve the effectiveness of the text. The second course seems today to be a throwback to Classic traditions when people would actually debate the issues of the day and a well-composed oratory would win over critics. With modern media, there seems to be less of that kind of public debate—except for the political commentary that dominates Sunday morning television and the club of radio talk show hosts who espouse political views. The need for public debate, may be more necessary than ever. However, an uncomfortable complaisance has set in which is likely to only grow with each generation that is slowly pacified with a plethora of pastimes. The third course replicates the literature-based writing course I have experienced most in my travels through higher education, and today may be seen in the Cultural Studies model. Writing here is about ideas, about thinking critically, or, in its extreme forms, demonstrating “right” thinking as a way to produce a democratic citizenry that embraces popular ideals such as “diversity” and “liberalism,” and so on. None of these courses, in themselves, is a “wrong” approach, I think; perhaps they could share more among themselves.

But questions remain in my mind, certainly rhetorical questions. Are we teaching people how to put words together to effectively express their own and someone else’s ideas? Are we instilling our ideas, ideas which we believe students should also have? Are we preparing students to be modern orators, to be involved

in current events, to have an opinion and express it confidently? Are we able to create model citizens of a democratic society by eliminating the comma-splice or enforcing the topic sentence requirement? Are we doing something, anything for students' benefit, or are we making them into the kind of person we think they should be? Do students write for their own benefit (that is, beyond a grade), or do they learn that they can write for their own knowledge, pleasure, purpose, and even health? There is much that is and can be amended to current first-year composition courses, however, much of it takes away from the writing. I want to argue that an I-Con writing pedagogy can bridge the general approaches to writing instruction and allows for new ways that first-year composition can benefit students. Ignoring the psychological foundation of self and identity, James Berlin (1993) writes that composition studies

since its formation in college English departments a hundred years ago, has in many of its manifestations attempted to become a variety of cultural studies . . . an activity that studies the construction of subjects within social formations, focusing on . . . signifying practices . . . and the implications of those practices in power and ideology.

(p. 102)

Looking at psychological identity allows the individual to subsume his own power.

In composition today, identity is seldom discussed in psychological terms, though studies have shown that identity is the major influence on what and how people write (Newkirk, 1997; Bracher, 1999; Alcorn, 2002; Tobin, 2004; Tingle, 2004). But there are more questions to answer. Resistance to a psychological focus on identity may be prompted by apprehension about dealing with a subject

that is so private. Identity makes some people uncomfortable. Identity makes some teachers wary of ethical issues, of being asked to diagnose, of putting oneself in an even greater position of power than that of the teacher/student relationship we already must consider. Discussing one's psychological situatedness seems as *verboden* as discussing sexual orientation or religious views. Or, perhaps, this resistance is more simple, more obvious. Maybe we just don't know what we are talking about. *What is identity and what do we do with it?* Answering these questions may be the most important result of this study. Pushing others to ask additional questions, to seek their own answers, both within themselves and within their own areas of research and practice, may be an equally important result of this study. I believe that composition scholars and teachers may resist discussion of psychological or personal identity in the classroom and among both themselves and their writing students because they are unsure what it might mean for classroom practice. In short, what can we do to address identity in our classes? Furthermore, how can we have students write in a way that helps them come to understand their identity?

Writing that Assists in Identity Construction

What kind of writing projects can be done to help students consider their identity and the ways theirs has been constructed? This is the main question I face whenever I discuss I-Con writing pedagogy. There is not a single answer I can give, however, because I recognize that there is no one way to help students understand their identity and then begin to construct, reconstruct, or deconstruct who they are. There are some writing projects which seem to help. They help by pushing students to focus on their lives and experiences and put the events into a

context that allows for the “big picture,” comprised of seemingly small, random, unconnected incidents, to become more clear to them. These writing projects do not need to be introduced as something new and different from what students have come to expect in a composition class. The “new and different” aspects are embedded in the I-Con writing process model described below. In this section, I want to introduce and discuss writing projects and the writing process in general that can help students become aware of the influence of their identity. Awareness of one’s identity is one of the goals of an I-Con writing pedagogy.

Bracher (1999) suggests some writing projects that help to promote an understanding and awareness of identity for student writers. Though Bracher sees composition through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis—which I believe is the direction further research into this area should go—these writing projects are potentially useful at any level of instruction:

Ask students to write about a particular writing experience in which they felt conflicted or troubled in some way in order to show the student the conflicts between “what I want” and “what society/friends/teacher wants.” (p. 174)

For example, in one of my usual writing projects, I invite students to examine their thoughts and feelings about a past experience and compare how they felt and what they thought at the time with how they see that same experience now after a passage of time. In this way, students come to understand the potential conflicts between perceptions of identity and reality.

Similarly, Bracher (1999) also suggests:

Ask students to write a paper investigating the deeper conflicts

present in social conflicts, which may lead them to recognize that a conflict between “what I want” and “what society/friends/teacher wants” is actually a conflict between two different “what I want”: to be themselves (i.e., to protect or support their identity) and to get a good grade/approval/recognition (i.e., validation of the Other). (p. 174)

Again, my writing “prompts” give students the freedom to investigate the building blocks of their identity in order to understand how they became who they are today, or who they think they are, and perhaps how they might want to be. This is more difficult for students because 1) many believe they have not lived long enough to have significant events happen to them, or believe their lives have not been interesting or worth writing about, and 2) events that actually happened to some students are uncomfortable or even traumatic to recall. Thus, students always have a choice of writing projects to do.

Bracher (1999) further suggests this writing project:

Ask students to write about their most memorable experience, describing what was at stake for them in the experience and how they felt afterwards. Understanding these situations will allow students to become aware of the various types of desire and demands that have been influencing them throughout their lives. (p. 174-175)

While this assignment looks like the standard “personal narrative essay” about some event the student has experienced, the difference is the focus and the format or genre. Writing which accomplishes the goal articulated by Bracher (1999) may be anything from a poem to a fictional story. It need not be an essay. In fact, the rigid structure of the “academic” essay as it is usually taught may thwart reflective

efforts and stifle creativity. As long as students keep the “thoughts and feelings” about the experience at the forefront they should be able to recognize the issues that are at play in their composition experience.

Instructors might also have students do journal writing, says Bracher (1999), yet write for slightly different goals. Bracher suggests that we ask students to keep a journal because “journal writing is to the psychoanalytic writing class what free-association is to psychoanalytic treatment” (p. 180). Requiring students to keep a journal is similar to keeping appointments to meet with one’s analyst. Journals can provide opportunities for students to consider ways of identifying and working through conflicts. However, journal writing may be threatening for some students because it gives them so much freedom, while others fear the risk of revelation, wanting to protect their desires from exposure. Journal writing may give students a place for collecting memories of their past experiences and, once arranged in a pattern, make it possible to see the causes and effects more clearly. This seems to me to be an effective on-going writing task which can provide countless starting points for more specific I-Con writing projects. A paper which describes, then analyzes, the relationships between then and now, causes and effects, and how they ultimately add to or challenge one’s identity could be the part of the project which follows a series of journal entries.

Every semester is a new work, a new vision of identity in composition. And although I make adjustments as needed, the basic plan I have created continues to be helpful in getting students to write in ways that aid them in understanding their identity as well as work on critical thinking and their writing craft. In short, what is done in an I-Con classroom is not so different from a typical course design. The

main difference is in the focus. Instead of giving students writing assignments which only teach them genre or form, argument or critical thinking, I-Con pedagogy slants the writing to include more personal and reflective projects. A few steps are added to the writing process which allow time for understanding the experience of self-reflection and identity.

The Writing Process in Identity Construction Writing

One way I see I-Con writing is following a similar pattern as the typical writing process model. Even as we recognize that each writer may have a different process, and that not all processes are the same, of equal value, or right for every writing task, there does seem to be agreement that writers do go through some process for planning, drafting, and revising what they write. In Figure 2, I have added steps to a generalized writing process flowchart to suggest how the identity elements of I-Con pedagogy might be employed. As with most writing processes, the writing task begins with a prompt or question, some issue to respond to, or comes out of class discussion, freewriting, or other strategies for topic generation. In the I-Con classroom, such discussions would include the nature of identity, how identity is formed from childhood through to adulthood, and practical real-world examples of identity coming into play in a person's life, of the presentation of self, or simply inviting students to share their experiences in which *who they are* is at risk—similar to the way Bracher (1999) suggests students begin writing about themselves to understand themselves, as described above.

The process continues through solo drafting, peer review sessions, and the initial revisions to address clarity, conventions of the genre, the standards of edited English, and so on. At this point the instructor usually will review drafts and give

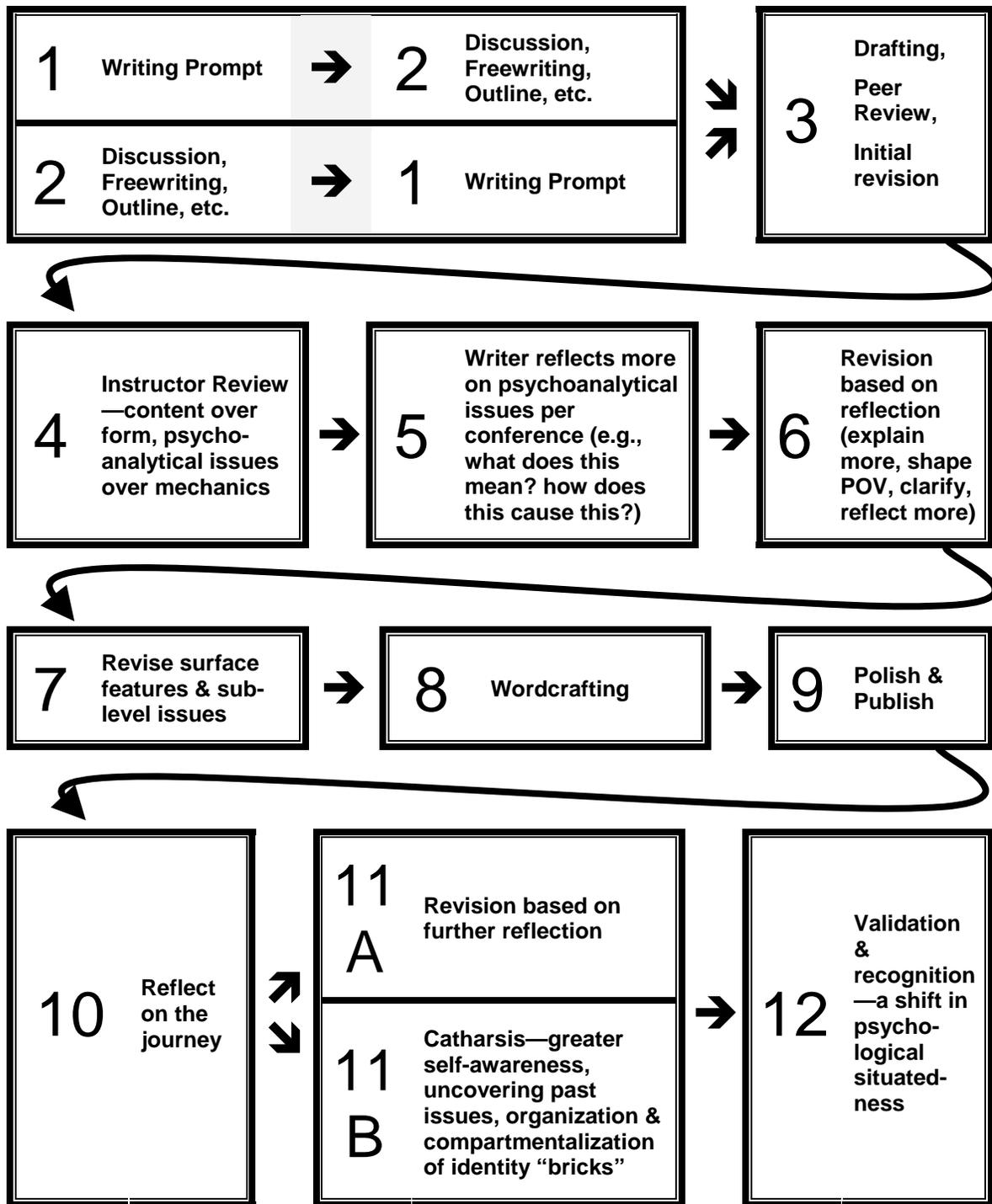


Figure 2. A model of the writing process in I-Con composition pedagogy.

comments. In addition to matters of form and content, the instructor may notice in the text indications of the student’s identity-focused writing—at this point *only noting* them—and ask the student to reflect more on a few issues raised in the text.

The instructor may ask *What does this mean?* or *How does this cause this?*—prompting the student to consider further the story behind the story. The student revises further with an eye toward explaining more fully the issues noticed by both the student and the instructor. Alongside this, further shaping of the text as a clear and concise artifact of the student’s identity continues; i.e., we still may be working on grammar and syntax. The next steps involve crafting the text, much in the usual way writing is revised, edited, and polished in any typical composition class. Many of these steps, including the “reflective” or “identity considering” steps, may be done by students automatically; they are part of the process of drafting and revising and are therefore implicit in composition. Composition scholars and practitioners generally agree that the writing process is an individual process and therefore different among writers. However, though students may, for example, draw upon an experience from a middle school sports team incident to support a particular writing project in composition class, they may do so without much reflection. The reflective steps added to the writing process are more explicitly addressed in an I-Con class.

The final phase involves further reflection by the student on the completed project. This could take the form of a reflective statement guided by questions, or simply a journal-like entry that provides the student an opportunity to consider the project and the thoughts that went into it and place it in a context of then-and-now or a progression of relevant identity constructing experiences. From this step will come either the impetus to work further on the project—for class or beyond class—to deepen or thicken it according to the student’s desires (e.g., aiming for a better grade or simply for personal satisfaction and accomplishment), or the student may find that a certain catharsis has been reached. Catharsis, in this case, might be

recognized by a change in self-awareness, the uncovering and understanding of significant past experiences, and/or the (re)organization of the various episodes related to the student's identity. Recognition within the student of the *process* of identity construction and of the cause-and-effect relationships between various experiences and the resulting (yet still on-going) identity construction is the overarching goal of I-Con writing.

The writing process is not replaced with I-Con pedagogy; rather, a few extra steps are added: 1) the instructor noticing indications of identity and identity issues during the reading of student papers, along with all of the mechanical features of writing that are usually evaluated, 2) the student's revision to bring out or better clarify certain identity features which have been noted, as well as revision which addresses the usual matters of form and content, and 3) a final reflection on the journey through the process of writing about one's identity construction and the adjustment in self-awareness. These are relatively small changes, yet they can have great impact on first-year composition students negotiating their way through academia and preparing to engage the world beyond.

Deconstructing Identity Construction Writing

Though identity construction does occur through our life-long, everyday socialization, much of identity construction is a subconscious and psychological process as the individual organizes and applies the socialization within a personal context that creates psychological situatedness. About the only way to understand an individual's psychological situatedness is through psychoanalysis. However, psychoanalysis is a scary word to many people, especially to teachers who may find it uncomfortable being in a position of "diagnosing" students. And yet, writing

teachers do diagnose their students' *writing* problems; such problems always have a cause and some of those problems may have their origins in the psychological situatedness of the writer (Bracher, 1999; Alcorn, 2002; Tobin, 2004). We need to realize that *psychoanalysis* is actually a neutral term that has been given both connotations of healing and restoration as well as, unfortunately, abnormality, victimhood and powerlessness. The power dynamics that are always present between writing teachers and writing students require teachers to manage a delicate balance. Much of the balance relies on the altruistic nature of the teacher.

In a chapter of *Reading Student Writing* (2004), Lad Tobin psychoanalyzes one of his students. He doesn't mean to; it just happens in the normal course of reading and responding to the student's writing, he says. Tobin admits to disliking certain "aggressive, baseball cap-wearing, male students" (p. 4) and expects them to always write the same kind of "male hero as anti-hero narratives" (p. 57), usually of "car wrecks, sports, and male bonding" (p. 59). When he reads an essay by one of his more resistant students, however, Tobin is surprised to find a substantial degree of style and voice in the writing. Still, he reads it "for error rather than for potential" (p. 58). He has difficulty responding to the student's account of shoplifting until he reads deeper. Eventually, Tobin is able to see the psychological story behind the shoplifting story. He notices metaphors, symbolism, and other hints at what the student might *really* be writing about: the student's conflict with his father or even, as Tobin ponders, the student's conflict with his English teacher. When I read the chapter, I saw the student's essay—through the lens of Tobin's analysis—as a mythic story, i.e., the heroic journey as psychic transformation mentioned by Thomas Newkirk (1997) and Mark Bracher (1999). The student apparently found

something *within himself* during the writing—a certain thing he wanted to project into the story, a certain thing he wanted to show or express, his *identity*, perhaps—and, as Tobin reports, in a conference with the student, this transformation, albeit very small yet significant for its beginning, was finally realized. Another “brick” was added to the student’s identity construction project.

This kind of psychoanalysis—the unintentional consideration of issues that may lie beneath the text—is something many writing teachers do when reading student writing. It happens without any intention to do so. This happens because teachers often *do* consider the story behind the text they read, if only as a way to understand what it is the student is attempting to express so that the teacher can then share with the writer ways to express the ideas better. It may be easy to look for clues about a student’s psychological situatedness in each paragraph, in each interesting word choice, in matters both stated and left unstated. Or we might just as often get the usual teen dramas which rely on superficial generalizations that successfully hide all aspects of individuation (Newkirk, 1997).

In the example above, Tobin shows us that it often takes a one-on-one conference, à la Donald Murray (2004), to discover the situation behind the writing, that is, the psychological situatedness that gave birth to the idea that blossoms in the text—or may show itself briefly only to then be deliberately hidden. The student may, for example, be writing to uncover some repressed memory, often without realizing it. Recognizing it for what it is, in hindsight at the end of the draft or perhaps the completed project (as I did in my self-narrative, shared in chapter 5), the student comes to a catharsis and can then move on, having gleaned greater understanding of himself and his life, perhaps also more healed. With the case of

the superficial narrative Newkirk (1997) discusses, we might consider why the student wishes to keep everything so dull, so uninvolved, so secret. We can ask students to deepen their writing, to add more details, to ponder the story behind the story, and then persuade the student to share the account of some life event, good or bad, with peers and the teacher. In this way, many things are achieved simultaneously. Most importantly, the identity of the writer is better understood, better positioned for future growth, and is thus ultimately enhanced.

Confessions, Expressivism and Personal Writing

It may seem at this point that my discussion of identity is merely an end-around attempt to reintroduce expressivism. There are many similarities between expressivism and I-Con writing. Both use personal writing as the primary focus of writing instruction, allowing and encouraging self-expression as the first and main reason for writing. In my early days as a writing instructor, it seemed to me that my colleagues and mentors used personal writing as a means of getting students to write. Letting them choose topics, using “I” and “me,” relaxing style restrictions, and so on, just seemed a ploy to make writing less of a hurdle. Assigning the personal narrative essay first in the usual sequence of writing assignments made sense in that context: writing personally was easy, a way to ease students into other writing, period. Later I realized my error, yet I agreed with the principle that writing is writing—or, as Peter Elbow (1991) states: “Life is long and college is short” (p. 136). In my MFA program, professors who taught both literature courses and creative writing workshops often declared that “Good fiction writing is *still* good writing!” as though the consensus was that imaginative writing required less effort, was less significant, and had less influence on the world than the essay or other argumentative writing.

This brings me back to my initial inquiry about the conflicts in the English department. While some forms of writing are used more in academia, many other forms are used outside academia. Because most students will spend more time outside than inside academia, they should ideally be exposed to a variety of writing situations, perhaps so they may see the possibilities and come to recognize their own abilities and strengths in one genre or another. At the same time, we can also prepare students for the kind of writing they will need to do in their relatively shorter academic careers while adding, where possible, other kinds of writing. As we do this adding, I suggest that we add writing projects which also help them construct their identity. Rather than reintroducing expressivism, I find it a delightful surprise that both psychoanalytically-focused writing, as advocated by Bracher (1999), Alcorn (2002), and Tingle (2004), and expressivism do have a viable intersection.

I want to make clear before moving to the next section, that there is an important difference between I-Con writing which is “narrative” and “personal” and writing assignments commonly described or labeled as “personal narrative” writing. In the latter, I typically have seen first-person essays which tell about a particular episode in the author’s life and sometimes concludes with a lesson that was learned from the experience. Its chief purpose seems to be to have students produce a particular genre and practice certain writing techniques. The writing done in an I-Con class is narrative (i.e., concerning events that are sequentially structured) and personal (i.e., about the author). Only in this way is it similar to the personal narrative essay. In I-Con writing, what the author writes about the experience(s) and how the author reflects on the experience(s) is deeper and more personally meaningful—and, as Broad (2003) calls it, writing that has “significance.”

Designing an Identity-Construction Writing Pedagogy

The Goals of Identity Construction Writing

The overall goal of an Identity Construction (I-Con) writing pedagogy is to empower student writers by providing them with a useful means of constructing their identity. Achieving this goal involves rewarding risk and stimulating growth of the writer as both writer and as person. Two important criteria for success in an I-Con writing pedagogy are significance and sincerity/honesty.

Significance is defined by Broad (2003) as when “the reader experiences something meaningful, weighty, important, worthwhile, or affecting during her encounter with the text” (p. 40). Significance is a big goal in I-Con writing; yet the significance is more for the writer than the reader to discover. The writer in I-Con will find, indeed construct, a text that is personally meaningful and worthwhile. In reflective writing the student may offer particular insights and self-evaluation that will help the instructor-as-reader understand the significance. By understanding the student writer as a person, the instructor should be able to compare the significance of the writing with the personal growth of the student.

Sincerity and honesty are important in every kind of writing, but they may be defined differently depending on the genre or the purpose of the writing. I-Con writing necessarily relies on sincerity and honesty in personal writing, and to the extent that the student writer allows himself to be sincere and honest to himself, he will benefit from the process of writing that makes relevant discovery of his identity possible. We expect student writers to write with sincerity and honesty but we cannot ensure it or require it; indeed, how could we tell the difference? Once, after I had explained the autobiography project (see Appendix D) to my first-year

composition students, one young man asked if it would be all right if he “made it up.” I explained that, even though he might believe he was writing fiction, his real life would inevitably sneak in and his creation would likely contain elements of his real experiences. No matter what he writes, he will likely reveal something of his psychological situatedness. The point here is to not take great pains trying to ensure complete sincerity and honesty but to simply encourage it for the students’ own benefit. The more honest students are *with themselves*, the more they will gain from the effort. Likewise, the point is not to write a confessional *per se* but through the “confessing” to uncover something personally meaningful to the writer. How much of one’s identity is constructed in a semester can hardly be measured reliably, if at all. Only the one who undertakes the journey can understand the value of the journey.

While I am not specifically discussing assessment criteria for I-Con writing here, I see certain ways of “evaluating” writing discussed by Broad (2003) that are applicable to the goals of I-Con writing. Broad’s study of writing teachers’ assessment criteria resulted in the listing of 89 different ways writing can be assessed, divided into several categories. From the list of the contextual criteria category, one that is especially relevant for I-Con writing assessment is called “constructing writers” (p. 83-84). This criteria involves what Broad’s study participants call the “Teacher’s Special Knowledge” about a student when assessing that student’s writing. What is relevant for I-Con writing is what the teacher knows or understands, is aware of, and considers significant about the student. The teacher is not a psychologist, of course, and is not expected to diagnose or interpret the information that comes out as a result of I-Con writing.

The teacher is, therefore, *not* expected to use “Teacher’s Special Knowledge” of a student in a way that influences the student’s freedom to express meaningful ideas in a meaningful way, nor to use “Teacher’s Special Knowledge” as a guide for assessing the writing of a student. Rather, the “Constructing Writers” criteria is an assessment of the student’s transformation into a writer. Through the writing done in the I-Con class, students will gain facility in their writing skills, of course, and also develop their identity as writers—which should be a goal of all writing pedagogy.

Reflective/Personal Writing

Reflective writing is writing in which the writer talks to herself about her own writing, perhaps also about the writing of others for comparison purposes. Kathleen Yancey (1998) analyzes three forms of reflection: 1) *reflection-in-action*, which looks at the process of reflection within the act of composing a specific text, 2) *constructive reflection*, which examines the effects of multiple texts on a writer’s identity, and 3) *reflection-in-presentation*, which is focused on a formal reflective text written to a specific audience (pp. 13-15). All of these reflective activities are valuable aspects of an I-Con writing class.

The reflection implicit in I-Con allows the student to both address the writing done and the identity construction or personal growth that has occurred through working on the writing project. This consideration of identity in the context of writer/student/person provides the opportunity for the author to reflect on the multiple texts (and roles) not only of the writing project itself and the author’s situatedness but also the various other “texts” in society that connect with that writing project by either supporting or challenging it. The final reflection after the project has been completed offers the opportunity to assess the *effectiveness* of

the writing and/or the expectations of the audience's response. It is important to understand that I-Con writing, contrary to writing discussed in a fiction workshop, is not intended to "affect" an audience (though it still might) or manipulated to achieve any particular effect on the audience—with the exception of the author; the self-aware author is always the first audience of I-Con writing; the writing instructor, a family member, or a peer is perhaps the second audience.

Reflection is such an important aspect of the I-Con writing class that it may seem to be a primary factor for assessment. And yet, when we consider the private nature of such writing, we might wonder how we can "judge" or measure anything tangible (i.e., anything beyond superficial grammar/syntax issues). The teacher is not the student, of course, and can never understand the student as well as the student can understand herself. The writing the student does can only approximate a distantly revealed self and may be recognizable only to the student/author. The teacher, therefore, is left to estimate the degree of growth and development of the student's psychological situatedness. The teacher, having worked with the student throughout the course, is able to understand the student's identity to a certain extent and from that the teacher can begin to determine the "sincerity" or "honesty" of the writing. As the student who writes fancifully simply to fulfill an I-Con writing project cheats both himself and the teacher's altruistic efforts, perhaps the *lack* of personal benefit is penalty enough for indolence. To the best of his ability, therefore, the teacher should assess the extent and depth of reflection, regardless of any indication that the writing is fictitious, as even fiction writing will likely borrow subconsciously from an author's real experiences. Assessment might be guided by asking such questions as *Has the student written reflectively?* and *Does the*

reflective writing show or state that the author has discovered something? What has been shown or stated, the content of the reflection, is not *here* a matter for assessment.

Narrative and Imaginative Writing

In many MFA programs, writers of creative works have a simple formula for assessing writing. Members of the fiction workshops I participated in tended to assess narrative and imaginative writing by reducing the product to two general criteria: 1) “I know a good story when I read I,” which values the audience’s response, and 2) “I got the reaction I wanted/expected from the reader,” which values the author’s perspective. This is obviously inexact. No two readers will read the same text the same way because each reads based on his/her identity, based on a plethora of experiences melded to the self in unpredictable ways. How can we decide, for example, which of two short stories, one in *The New Yorker* and one in an anthology of fantasy tales and science-fiction adventures intended for a juvenile audience? Assessment criteria must shift to match the genre.

The “I know a good story when I read it” response is a measurement of the audience’s subjective reaction to a text. In my MFA workshop, one professor had a well-known preference for the understated urbanite *New Yorker* stories; anything else was shredded in the workshop. One professor preferred Westerns and stories written in plain syntax, though he remained flexible in critiquing other styles and subjects. Another professor embraced the experimentation of postmodern fiction. The point is that each of us has our preferences—which is naturally a part of our identity—and to the degree that something we read matches our preferences, to that same degree we tend to assess it favorably.

The purpose in I-Con writing is not to produce works of positive universal truth, what author John Gardner (1978) called “moral fiction,” but of personal truths; that is, the kind of small truths which Thomas Newkirk (1997) says “are true to the extent that they can work as live hypotheses in our lives, to the extent that they have, in [William] James’ words, ‘cash value’” (p. 84). If a student writer finds it useful to write about himself as a hero in order to explore a specific issue (as I certainly have in my writing life), how can we say it is unacceptable? Most readers are sophisticated enough to know when a narrator is false, and sometimes the fiction author might deliberately invent a false narrator to achieve a certain effect, for example, to let the reader play along in the caper. We often appreciate getting the “inside scoop” from a character we know is feeding us a line rather than the objective, factual truth. The autobiography or self-narrative writer must struggle with the semblance of truth while projecting such truth through a certain favorable lens. As readers, we understand this.

Newkirk (1997) suggests that much of the “transgressive narratives” that students write when asked to write personally and reflectively (e.g., the time I got caught smoking at school), can be seen as a confessional (p. 63). The student reveals the behavior then simultaneously apologizes for it while celebrating the act. Self-narratives such as the autobiography are comprise a long-established genre which fell out of favor in academia only to suddenly reappear on live television as confessionals (e.g., declarations by celebrities of their childhood abuse). I believe most autobiographical *writing* is meant primarily to serve the author. Self-narrative, however, can also offer a vivid and valuable account of knowledge that comes from specific experience. Thus, the experiences that are recounted must be valued for

their personal truthfulness, which is something important to the student's success in I-Con writing.

Tobin (2004) writes succinctly in this summary up the debate:

What counts as an appropriate academic topic or form is not fixed and inherent but fluid and culturally constructed. The contemporary interest in personal writing is not exclusively a contemporary interest and, in fact, goes back to the earliest days of writing and writing instruction . . . to Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, Virginia Woolf, E. B. White, or George Orwell. Suggesting that personal writing is inherently nonrigorous and relentlessly narcissistic is a nonrigorous, narcissistic, and, I suspect, disingenuous argument that reflects more of a lack of respect for our students' abilities than for the form itself. In other words, teachers who would acknowledge that personal writing served writers like Montaigne and Woolf well may still be contemptuous of our students' attempts at the form, arguing that eighteen-year-olds lack the talent, wider perspective, and self-awareness to go beyond solipsism. (p. 106)

Students, of course, will not gain "talent, wider perspective, and self-awareness" unless they are given the space and the inclination to do such writing and learn from the writing experience. Fortunately, this debate seems to be waning in 2007 as many composition teachers begin to welcome—and value—a wider variety of writing in the first-year composition course.

Therefore, what is assessed is not the presentation of "truth" *per se* but the quality of the presentation, the realness or believability of characters (an author

writing about herself should know if she is believable, perhaps by sharing her writing with peers)—thus, it is an approach to personal truths that is believable and, following Fisher’s (1987) narrative paradigm and its acceptance of “good reasons,” also true to human nature.

Narrative writing allows the author to create a virtual landscape and new situations where psychological issues may be safely played out. Though journal writing may be said to achieve the same effect and provide a safe place for a writer to work with personal issues, I believe the more sustained writing project implicit in self-narrative writing allows for deeper and more significant reflection than the usually much shorter journal entries can. In the same way we might tell a friend about a strange dream we had, the writer in an I-Con class would share, through writing, the description, analysis, and interpretation of something originating in the mind, such as a dream, and in the process come to both understand the symbolism and imagery of the dream in a general sense (and, thus, perhaps be able to apply it in future situations) and to apply the discovered knowledge to his immediate situation or condition of existence. Said another way, the content of a dream written out as a story, even as a purely metaphorical tale, allows the writer to explore the symbolism in the psychological concepts encountered in the I-Con classroom. The author learns about himself by writing about whatever he has experienced.

Writing in the I-Con class is not about dreams, of course. Real experiences, encounters, thoughts and actions are just as valuable in bringing self-awareness to identity construction as more esoteric things. The purpose is still to explore the active/physical event or virtual/mental event multi-dimensionally, the way walking around a statue to examine it from all sides is different from standing in one spot to

view a painting on the wall. The benefit is in the exploration of the event or idea—exploration which might not occur but for the deliberate writing prompt that focuses the writer on it. Life happens too fast most of the time; in the I-Con class we can stop and examine a heartbeat for a semester. To assess such writing requires attention to the completeness of the descriptions, the detailedness of the analysis, and the growth of self-awareness as well as the identity constructive qualities of the interpretation.

The I-Con Writing Portfolio

Many compositionists acknowledge the fairness implicit in looking at a variety of a student's writing. Portfolios allow instructors to see writing that shows improvement, that demonstrates mastery of different forms, that shows revision, that gives the student power over his writing by being able to publish his best efforts (Yancey, 1992; see also Yancey & Weiser, 1997). Portfolios allow a teacher to comment and give plenty of feedback on preliminary drafts of student writing without having to assign a grade to them. The portfolio becomes an anthology of the student writer's best work, though some teachers prefer a range of writing that shows improvement. Like many anthologies of a single author—think of a collection of short stories or poetry—not every work is a winner. The teacher can step back, however, and consider the entire collection and sigh with satisfaction that, yes, this *collection* is worthy of the grade of A, or this collection has consistent flaws that run through the works, distracting and serious enough to warrant only a B, while *this* portfolio, unfortunately, shows little concern for either the writing or presentation. Many teachers choose to score portfolios differently, most often considering each work separately and adding up the total scores. Either method of scoring empowers

students by giving them more control over the work they do and what work is ultimately assessed.

The I-Con writing class need not change this method. The collection of writing, however, will be of a slightly different nature than in a typical composition class. Rather than several essays and other academic writing samples, for example, the I-Con portfolio would include major projects of autobiographical or self-narrative writing and perhaps smaller pieces that are psychoanalytical or self-identify-based and serve to focus reflection on the author's experiences. While a standard portfolio may include a narrative essay or a piece about a particular experience, the I-Con portfolio will have mostly writing that is about the author and the author's construction of identity. To the third-party reader, this may seem trivially self-indulgent, at best, or an uncomfortable collection of confessions, at worst. Of course, one feature of I-Con writing is writing that helps the writer understand herself as both a writer and as a person with a particular identity. The purpose of I-Con writing is not first to entertain or inform a third-party reader in the same way a more standardized portfolio of essays or creative writing might be expected to.

I-Con portfolios will vary. One useful structure for a portfolio will consist of three types of writing: directed projects, optional projects, and reflections. All works included in the portfolio should be works previously read and commented on by peers and/or the teacher. First are the major projects. The most important piece is the self-narrative or selective autobiography (described in chapter 5 and Appendix D) which is the product of a more narrowly focused prompt, e.g., *What experiences in my life have helped make me who I am today?* Because this is a major project

spanning the entire course, it should be of significant length and show evidence of substantial revision. Other major projects may be about the student's communities and her connection with each of them. The projection of a current real situation into a future possibility is another possible major project. Second are smaller papers which may only be exercises and which may not have much to do with identity construction *per se* but more to do with fulfilling the needs of the students as writers-in-training. These "minor" projects may also be opportunities for students to try writing in vastly different or experimental genres. Or they might be more typical writing assignments such as argumentative essays on topic X, Y, or Z; there is still room for other kinds of writing traditionally done in composition class. Lastly, the reflection that runs through the major papers can be summarized and focused in the writing of specific end-of-project or end-of-course reflection statements (see Yancey, 1998). These might take the form of a reflection on the entire portfolio's contents, taking into consideration each work, its inspiration, the learning and/or discovery that the author experienced during the writing of it, and so on. Another reflection statement should, ideally, cover the growth of the student as writer and the student as person. This becomes an "after" view of the *starting* of identity construction, and of the psychological work which should continue long after the class is finished.

As with any writing students do, teachers consider the patterns of words, sentences, and paragraphs that serve to present certain ideas to a particular audience using the various special features which are available, intended to make that presentation as effective as possible. These factors are relatively easy to assess. *What* the student writes about can always serve an additional purpose: the

exploration of the self and, from that journey, a more clear understanding of the writer's psychological situatedness and the construction of a more balanced, more grounded, and more self-aware adult identity. This is ultimately more important yet more difficult to assess. In the end, the student/writer will assess herself in each writing situation. The student/author will know success or failure with every subsequent thinking/writing/acting episode, and through the understanding of self and the on-going construction of identity in and out of the I-Con classroom, she will be better able to meet challenges head-on and live to tell (and write) about them.

Composition and Identity

Conclusions are always rife with ambiguities because as long as the Earth goes around the Sun nothing is really finished, nothing decided without recourse to alteration, and certainly nothing in pedagogy can be set in stone. As I look back over this text, seeing it as a model of writing instruction or at least as an impetus for change in composition, I realize, obviously, that much of the need, benefit, and success of this model depends upon the personalities and backgrounds of the instructors and, just as much, the students. No one pedagogy can work in all situations, by all instructors, and for all students. There is a specific situation for which this model can be the best possible pedagogy and certainly situations where this model will absolutely be the wrong thing to do. I would like to believe that some aspects of this model will be applicable in some fashion in many different courses. Incorporating even one I-Con writing project will help students give thought to the fundamental questions they encounter at this point and place in their lives: the first-year composition class.

At the start of this dissertation, I explained how I came to the topic of identity,

how I felt something existing in the shadows behind my writing and sought to understand it. This effort dovetailed with my path of inquiry into my background. Together they became a narrative inquiry, which I used to explore the subject of identity in composition. There is still much to learn and much more that can be said. For one, I found myself turning deeper into the psychoanalytical aspects of writing, following Bracher (1999) and Tingle (2004), yet I limited such discussion here. A few mentions have been made, of course, especially in my self-narrative sections, perhaps enough, I hope, to make some readers curious to know more and seek out further information. That is an area I expect to continue investigating.

I believe there is a wealth of information in psychology and psychoanalysis, some already published yet generally ignored by compositionists, concepts about identity which could have major implications for composition pedagogy. This current project is, by necessity, too limited in scope to be able to affect that change. Other researchers might find worthwhile projects in designing and conducting studies that empirically measure the relationship and influence of a writer's identity, say, as embedded experiences, compared to the actual text produced. Some of my psychology sources have introduced similar studies, but certainly more could be directed with a more pronounced Composition focus. The problem with such studies might be engaging volunteer subjects willing to be in a more explicit kind of written psychoanalysis: e.g., writing and then seeking to understand the writing through a talking psychoanalysis, something more akin to a "thick description" one-on-one writing conference with someone trained in both psychoanalysis and writing.

In subsequent chapters, I explored Identity Theory in its many forms by describing how identity is both social and individual, how it is constructed from the

culture through the language of the culture. I explained how identity is constructed through the psychological functions of the mind, how experience is processed, organized, interpreted, and remains part of us forever, sometimes surfacing when we write. From this discussion, I created a new conceptual model of the self and its projected identity, based on William James' dual-self model, which can be useful for understanding the "place" of identity in composition. I called this "place" the writer's *psychological situatedness*. Then I discussed two concepts which I think work well together to inform the intersection between identity and composition. McAdams' (1993) idea of the *mythic self* and Nienkamp's (2001) idea of the *rhetorical self* provide both a reason and a vehicle for having first-year students write about their lives as a way to aid in constructing identity. Erikson's (1959/1980) life stages model supports my suggestion that students in first-year composition are at the point in their lives where it is beneficial to pause and think about who they are and how they got to be who they are. A composition course encountered in the first year of college is the right time and the right place for this kind of experience. Sharing portions of my self-narrative, I explained how writing helped shape my identity and how my identity helped shape my writing. I also showed the kinds of writing students might do to aid in identity construction. Following Fisher's (1987) *narrative paradigm* gives support to personal, reflective writing. I showed, through another excerpt of my self-narrative, how I came to understand some of my identity by writing and reflecting on the connections with experiences in my youth that had been lost to me until now. In this final chapter, I have expressed my dismay at the lack of research on identity in Composition and urged further study while describing how an identity-constructing, or "I-Con," classroom might operate.

In the final analysis, however, what we understand of identity can only come to us through deliberate, focused investigation of our lives and the experiences which have shaped us, through a perception of identity as a projection of self, and the awareness to live our lives, including our writing lives, as a book that those who follow us will want to read. I *am* writing such a book—separate from the sci-fi novel I've often sneaked away to work on when I was supposed to have been working on my dissertation. I'm speaking of the story of *me*. It's going fairly well, so far. Yet I am perpetually curious what will happen when I turn the next page.

With this current study finished, I will begin focusing on my next project, what is likely to be further research into psychoanalysis as it relates to writing. However, realizing the magnitude of such an endeavor, I will seek a brief respite before starting that battle. During this respite, I will read *War and Peace*—again (new translation)—and finish my novel (the one about the average Earthling who plays God on another world). I will read lots of poetry. I will write love letters to my wife and play with my children. I will enter the classroom next semester with renewed vigor and a spring in my step. I will eat healthier food and perhaps exercise more. I will smile more, and be kinder to animals. I will write the next chapter of my life. This is what my next adventure will be. Because *this is who I am*.

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APPENDIX A

A Spectrum of Identity

In this appendix, I will further explain, using some personal examples, one way to consider identity: as a spectrum of self-projections, each serving a need or fulfilling a social or personal role.

In conducting my narrative inquiry, I have recognized eight distinct identities or projections of my self within me. These are identities that I have used throughout my life. This taxonomy is not scientific and only appears through reflection. In the process of recognizing substantially different patterns of thought and behavior that are subclinical yet curiously quasi-schizophrenic, I do not intend to alert the world to my own particular splits in personality but rather to argue that *all of us* to varying degrees have within us *a single dual-self* that is constructed and regularly modified throughout our lives and that this self has (or has the potential to have) multiple projections, each of which should properly be called an identity (See Figure 1). The actual number of identities a person might have is determined by many factors such as one's psychological situatedness, biological make-up, environmental influences, traumas, and other individually experienced factors. I want to argue that we regularly switch from one identity to another as circumstances require and that this switching is automatic, much like a learned script we might follow whenever a certain situation occurs. We are usually unaware of the switching occurring while at other times we might become aware of it only when we switch back to our most-salient or primary identity. This action mirrors the shifting in tone, style, and voice we might make in writing in response to different writing situations.

There are certainly other such taxonomies of “self” and/or “identity.” One such taxonomy, from cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser, consists of what he calls 1) the ecological self, 2) the interpersonal self, 3) the extended self, 4) the private self, and, 5) the conceptual self (cited in Eakin, 1999, p. 22-23). In the first item we have the self as it is perceived in the physical environment and in the second item as engaged in social interaction. The third item sees the self as an autonomous or self-aware entity that exists across time and space. The fourth is seen by Neisser rather like an internal voice, perhaps similar to Nienkamp’s (2002) concept of the rhetorical self. The fifth item, however, points to a self which serves rather like a database of all of one’s knowledge and experiences. I see this last self that Neisser proposes as similar to my concept of the dual self, following the dual-self model of William James, where one side (called Self) is an extensive database of personal knowledge and experience, while the other side (called Ego) is one’s self-aware consciousness and “speaks” as us by projecting itself, much like a flashlight shines through a lens, through our database to create one or more identities.

While I see Neisser’s taxonomy as situating the *self* on a bi-polar spectrum representing the degree of conflict or interaction between Self and Other, from the concrete to the abstract, this is not the kind of spectrum I wish to suggest. The idea of a spectrum of identity, and the taxonomy I have constructed, seems to fit what I have experienced and is therefore a way for *me* to make sense of those experiences, and a way to explain certain things I seem to understand more or less instinctively. I do not presume that my spectrum is the same as what other people may experience. It is possible that each of us can find such a taxonomy through active reflection, which may best be accomplished through writing.

We might consider a spectrum of identity as a universal concept, one people will eventually notice. This is not always the case, of course. Perhaps we know it to be true like we know ourselves to exist. Perhaps such universal knowledge is an illusion, a reflection of flames on the cave wall, not the actual sunlight. Perhaps it is the result of the war between Nature and Nurture. At any rate, I want to suggest that the varied experiences each of us has throughout our lives, and how we interpret our experiences in order to make sense of our lives, creates a unique spectrum of identity for each individual. Each identity, however, tends to believe it is the true self whenever it is on stage, so we might also consider that this is also a *spectrum of selves*.

Some people, of course, may have more identities—perhaps a lot more—than the eight basic identities I find within myself. Some may have fewer. And some people may have more versions of one “basic” identity yet have only one of another basic identity. Schizophrenics, for example, are thought to suffer from too many selves or selves they cannot control. However, it is actually multiple *identities* they have rather than multiple selves. There is only one self—just as there is one soul. Someone who believes he is Napoleon as well as the fellow we all know as George, may be exhibiting a single *self* split into two *identities*, not one self split into two selves.¹⁹ Yet, without disparaging those who suffer from schizophrenia, I am focusing here on those without a clinical diagnosis of “multiple personalities.” Within a course of normal experiences, most of us will unconsciously use the particular identities we possess and may switch between existing identities or create new identities as the situation requires, though different identities may be often be subtle

¹⁹ This explanation is intended to be semantically clarifying, not psychologically diagnostic.

shades of each other (Goffman, 1959; Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1995). The dual-self remains a singular entity.

This spectrum of identities is intended to show only one possible set of identities that someone may present in everyday life. From my perspective, I am able to recognize eight separate identities which I call: 1) the private objective²⁰ or “real me”; 2) the private subjective me; 3) the basic public me; 4) the objective public me; 5) the subjective public me; 6) the heroic me; 7) the “shadow” me, to use Jung’s term; and 8) the moderated me.

We might naturally begin descriptions of these identities with what is real—what we know or presume to be true. However, just as we understand from Plato’s Allegory of the Cave (1973), we can never know exactly what is true because of the corrupting influence of our senses and the quirky bio-electrical processes that misfire as often as they fire. Thus, my *private objective identity*—what I might label as the “real me”—is actually unknowable by me or anyone else. We often misread and misinterpret this identity while other people we encounter may have their own innate biases which prevent them from being any better at seeing the “real me.” Therefore, it is my *private subjective identity* which most people recognize and *believe* is the “real me.” This identity is based on how I see myself when I am free of any exterior influence—any *obvious* influence, that is, for we are constantly being influenced by our environment, subconsciously and consciously. Relating to this identity is something akin to thinking “I know I’m a good person, no matter what they say.” I like to imagine that this “real me” cannot be corrupted and so I can take

²⁰ This is not to be confused with “objective” in the sense of unbiased or factual; here I intend it to mean ourselves as the object of another’s view.

comfort in that illusion.

The *basic public identity* that I like to believe is a fair representation of me is actually a composite based on other people's perceptions and impressions of me that I take in both consciously and unconsciously and use to construct this identity. Here again, I cannot know exactly what those perceptions and impressions are due to the limitations of communicative language, the inevitable flaws in the methods of reporting, and limitations in interpreting those reports. My public identity, therefore, is like my private objective identity in that it arises separately from any of my own manufactured impressions of this identity. The *objective public identity* might best be described as how I think others see me, a view which *does not* benefit from receiving any of their direct feedback, positive or negative. It is purely my own impression of others' impression of me. The *subjective public identity* is how I see myself *based on* the influence of others, their reporting, direct feedback, expressed views, and how I take in all of that data and formulate a version of my self that fits that data, thus creating a particular identity. It is often not who I want to be but, rather, have come to accept because I believe that my friends have some degree of accuracy in their observation of me.

Imagination, however, is often stronger than rationality and can furnish us with identities regardless of the ideas we originate about ourselves or the impressions we get from others. These identities deal in extremes, in fantasy, in idealism, and in archetypes that may represent both the best and the worst of our possibilities. What I call the *heroic identity* is an idealized version of me in which I act, or imagine acting, in a role befitting a warrior or priest, that is, some figure who possesses moral authority and/or has the power to bring justice and right wrongs.

This identity embodies the best I wish I could be, and in this identity I take pride in accomplishing something for the sake of simple goodness (e.g., see my account in chapter 5 of the influence of the *Michael Kohlhaas* film). This identity may seem to demonstrate characteristics common to Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), such as grandiosity and megalomania (Rothstein, 1984; Masterson, 1988; Bollas, 2003). During stress some people will present this heroic identity and only through this identity are they able to act with courage, precision, and moral fortitude. Once the deed is done, they may never recognize the switch of identities but believe they acted with courage through their “real” or primary identity (Kreisman & Straus, 1989; Almaas, 2000).

The opposite of the heroic identity is what I call the “*shadow*” *me*, using Jung’s term for the aspect of the psyche that is kept hidden. In fact, writes James Hollis (1998), “the ego is threatened by the shadow’s autonomy on the one hand, and the largeness of its threat to one’s self-image on the other” (pp. 75-76). This identity is keeper of all the dark secrets I possess, an identity I fight to keep hidden but which may unfortunately also emerge in times of stress, somewhat like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Those who seem to lead more virtuous lives may never see this identity and may not believe it exists in them; the rest of us worry that it might emerge unexpectedly at certain times or in certain situations inappropriately. It may be that negative experiences, especially those that cause lasting hurt or compel us to hold grudges and so on, seem to feed the “shadow” and keep it alive. The person with BPD, for example, has systematic identity disruption or “diffusion” in moments of stress, thus, a minor stressor in the present moment may act as a key that unlocks a virtual vault of all past stressor, thereby flooding the person with

more stimulæ than can be adequately handled. In such a case, it is not that the person switches identities from Jekyll to Hyde but that the new stress serves to compound the negative experience by linking the present stressor to every past stressor, making the present stress seem much worse than it might actually be. For the particular BPD known as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), a cutting off of “narcissistic supply” can spark an episode of “narcissistic rage”²¹—reminiscent of Hyde’s transformation. Indeed, before such a diagnosis was able to be considered in modern times, Robert Louis Stevenson (1887) may have modeled this character on the painful experiences of some unfortunate person he knew. (Kernberg, 1975; Masterson, 1988)

Lastly, we have the *moderated identity* which, as its name implies, is a careful and often deliberate compromise of identities. It is what I seem to most closely recognize as my “true” self inasmuch as it is the identity which I present, more or less consciously, to the world as the “real me.” I construct this identity as a reasonable and reasoning representation of *me*, that is, a rational and restrained identity that does act with forethought and conscientiousness, someone I believe *others* want me to be, crossed conveniently with the sort of person *I* would like to be. For others, of course, the moderated identity may be quite different. A teenager may wish to be seen as a wild party-goer, an exciting risk-taker with whom peers enjoy associating and who continually encourage him to be wild and take risks. Any

²¹ Narcissistic supply is a term for the kind of empathy or connection shown to the NPD person by others which typically feeds the narcissistic traits (mania, delusions, etc.). Narcissistic rage refers to the violent, uncontrollable reaction to the cutting off of narcissistic supply, similar to a feeling of panic or desperation. Narcissistic rage is also a response to the unexpected pulling away of the mask of delusion that reveals a person’s pretensions as mere delusions; he does not wish others to see that exposure any more than he wishes it exposed to his own conscious self so that he must face reality. See Kohut (1972), Kreisman & Straus (1989), or Jacoby (1990/2004).

combination is possible in the moderated identity because it is based on the other identities a person may have in the repertoire. The moderated identity is a conscious construction of *me*, the identity *I* choose or which is patted onto *me* like soft clay being added to an already-fired statue. This statue, however, is only one representation of my self, made up of my experiences, changing views of the world, memories, feedback from others (both solicited and unsolicited) collected in the melting pot of the mind.

Because the self becomes visible only through the presentation of one of a spectrum of possible identities (see chapter 2), it is important to understanding how any of our identities influences composition by understanding how we consciously or unconsciously “choose” a particular identity for a particular situation and not another one. We learn to control our identities for the sake of public decorum or to unleash any of them through the act of writing, especially when writing personal or reflective text. The result is the revelation of what has been unconscious, perhaps for too long.

APPENDIX B

Drives, Fantasies, and Composition

I would like to further explain the role of drives and fundamental fantasies in everyday behavior, including the behavior known as writing. This appendix is an extension of the discussion begun in chapter 5. As such, I also see it setting the direction of future research into identity and composition.

Psychologists have come to recognize that every experience leaves a lasting impression somewhere in us. Wilma Bucci (1997) has called these residual affects “emotion schemas” and “Representations of Interactions that have been Generalized (RIGs)” (p. 195). These RIGs are, as the name implies, a kind of lasting impression from a specific experience which over time tend to become less vivid and are subsequently reinforced by similar experiences that add additional layers of meaning so that the particulars of an experience fade away, leaving only the emotional trace of the experience. Therefore, RIGs typically are at the core of the drives and fundamental fantasies that subconsciously motivate our behavior.

The theory goes like this: a pleasant experience remains lodged in our subconscious, its vividness reduced to a general sensation; the subconscious seeks similar experiences as it attempts to find *jouissance* or sometimes to limit *jouissance* lest the subject become overwhelmed by it. In my writing history, I can identify certain RIGs which 1) originated in specific episodes in my everyday life, and 2) reappear in my writing in almost invisible form and which seem to have returned time and again in subsequent writing. Some might call these themes or motifs, but in my experience themes or motifs are likely conscious choices of the

writer; in the cases to which I am referring they were not conscious choices but subconscious influences or even what might be called infiltrations. It is only by focusing my attention on the subject that I am able to identify these factors.

These RIGs serve to create the drives and fantasies which subconsciously direct our behavior. They may often work subtly as motivations in our writing, too. According to compositionist Mark Bracher (1999),

drives achieve expression through writing not so much by being portrayed in the narrative but rather by having their core activation contours and vitality affects enacted in the social pact that a given piece or aspect of writing is. Writers are usually unconscious of the drives they are enacting. Often they are not even aware of the elements that allow them to contact the drives, and sometimes they are even consciously repulsed by these elements, which they are nonetheless drawn to revisit again and again in various ways. (p. 32)

As a writing teacher, it may be possible that such drives are discovered during the reading and commenting phase. Such discoveries are often worth pursuing for the student writer. The students could expand upon the “nugget” and in doing so can come to understand himself better. The text usually becomes more complete, too.

Similarly, like a mote of dust around which is formed a raindrop, the RIG can serve as a nuclei around which grows the fundamental fantasy, a psychic structure which acts as a motivational theme for both living and writing. According to Bracher (1999), the fundamental fantasy shapes the subject’s desire to reclaim a “mythical lost vitality and achieve or regain its *jouissance*, by locating that *jouissance* in a magical, mystical object or special substance” (p. 31). This “place” is what Lacan

(1977) terms the object *a*, which represents the source of *jouissance* for the subject. However, the situation is such that the subject has lost this “primal source of *jouissance* upon his or her internalization of the Symbolic Order²² and all of the regulation and boundaries implicit in that sublimation” (p. 31). Therefore, Bracher continues, “the fundamental fantasy can involve not only the desire to *possess* this mythical object *a*, but also the passive desire to *be* the object *a* that promises ultimate *jouissance* to the Other” (p. 32). For composition, writes Bracher (1999), we must understand that Lacan’s concept of the fundamental fantasy is

an even more powerful force in writing than are the drives.

Manifestations of fantasy in writing are at times quite similar to manifestations of drive gratifications in life, in some cases both are present simultaneously. We can distinguish the two in principle, however, by noting that drives *enact* particular scenario in relation to a particular object *a* and thus provide an *actual* satisfaction, while fantasies *represent* a scenario of a satisfaction that is *absent*, a lack that renders the desired disturbing and thus visible. (p. 34)

This seems curiously similar to the conceptualization of three states of awareness I had as an undergraduate pondering Life on a rainy afternoon rather than studying. As an exercise in narrative reflection, I can recall how I determined that my behavior, and motivations for it, fell into one of three modes: Reality, Virtual Reality, and Fantasy. Almost all people accept Reality as the fundamental state of being. When some people live their lives, not quite accepting the Reality they

²² The symbolic order is Lacan’s conceptualization of our socialized, language-based experiences.

encounter, perhaps because it does not match their ideal situation or confronting it may be uncomfortable, they may “invent” an alternate version of reality, one which for the most part *is* Reality yet may have a few key items carefully altered in the person’s consciousness in order to make Reality tolerable. The person may invent a situation or a relationship which is not altogether true but based on some degree of the truth or may conveniently ignore or forget some unpleasant factor that is encountered so as to avoid dealing with it.

I confess doing this too often, especially in my youth when things were not always working out as I thought they should. Here is where the writing comes in. Through my writing I could make things work out the way. I could follow my *desire*, seek *jouissance*—both in the writing effort and in the plots of my writing—and control or even become the object *a*. Rather than living a life that was often full of disappointment, as I tended to see it, I could live a different and more interesting life through a character for whom everything works out in the end. Granted, it was a limited experience; I always returned to the reality. However, I see this as similar to someone reading a story and becoming immersed in the plot so deeply that he forgets the outside reality for a while.

The third state in this taxonomy is Fantasy, where a person is aware that something is not real yet welcomes the momentary (or longer) visit to another state of mind. Here the person knows she is living in a fantasy world, out of touch with reality, if even for a moment. However, she does not break completely with reality but rather “takes a break” from reality for the simple momentary pleasure of some kind of *jouissance*, as a welcome relief from the mundane, or a brief escape from some unpleasant reality.

To illustrate these modes, let us consider a man who meets a woman and they become a happy couple. In this scheme, that would be Reality. However, if that man meets the woman and they do not become a happy couple but remain friends, the man may prefer to believe that the two of them did become a couple even as he knows the truth in his head and heart. He knows it is not true yet he finds it more comforting to pretend it is true. He may even act with his friends as though the woman was his girlfriend, perhaps to bolster his status and protect his ego when around his male friends. This is what would be called Virtual Reality. Now, suppose the man sees a woman yet never even speaks to her, perhaps too shy to approach her, so he can only admire her from afar—or, in the extreme, he sees a picture of an ideal woman in a magazine but goes around telling his friends that the woman whose picture is in the magazine is his girlfriend. That would be called Fantasy.

The criteria of these three modes of awareness is simply the degree of self-deception. The man may recognize the Lacanian fundamental fantasy and, having recognized it as something he wants to become true, he will work harder to make it happen. He will either succeed or fail, to varying degrees, perhaps enough to be satisfied that he was successful or perhaps failing badly enough that he decides not to pursue it further. In either case, his awareness of reality adjusts to protect or bolster his ego by enacting various drives and/or fantasies—which may appear in his writing or act behind the writing to motivate his writing.

APPENDIX C

Problems with Memory, Recall, and Narrative Reliability

In this appendix, I want to introduce some aspects of memory and recall for consideration as we ask students in first-year composition to think back to the sources of their identity, the events which seemed to have most significantly impacted how they constructed their identity. We should be aware of the various problems with remembering events accurately.

Empirical studies described in volumes edited by Neisser and Winograd (1988) and Winograd and Neisser (1992) outline the many potential sources of inaccuracy in memory recall. The age of the person when an event occurs, the age of the person when recalling, the reasons for recalling, the novelty of the event when put to memory, the effects of the circumstances at the time of creating the memory, and the influence of researchers in soliciting memory recall all have significant impact on the accuracy of the memory recall ability as well as the substance of what is recalled. Through countless studies, memory recall has been found to be habitually biased and slanted to serve the self.

Not surprisingly, autobiographical memory tends to be more accurate when we recall events that directly involve us versus events we merely observe, such as something on television. It is anecdotal now that eyewitnesses to a crime can be easily led to give the “correct” account of what they saw. Similarly, we want to give to our researchers what they ask for. Neisser (1982) collects and comments on dozens of case studies of remembering, testifying, forgetting, and performing acts of memory recall in order to show the wide range of memory ability, and thus the

equally wide range of fallibility. Meares (2000) reports that our emotions have significant influence on both memory creation and retention as well as event recall. What we can recall and, more importantly, recall accurately, varies substantially between different people and different circumstances, both in how the original event is set into long-term memory and the particular conditions later when the recall is instigated.

Narrative obviously requires a person to recall in vivid detail events, thoughts and feelings from long ago—or even from the immediate past. We all know the unreliability of our memory, from forgetting where we parked or not matching the name and face of someone we met only a few days before. The problem with narrative inquiry comes when we must rely on memory as a source of data. Schacter (2001) notes the faultiness of memory and categorizes these imperfections, while Thompson et al. (1996) explore the recall accuracy of people keeping diaries. In both, the unreliability of memory is often profound. Schacter (2001) shares the famous case of Binjamin Wilkomirski, whose 1996 Holocaust memoir won great praise “for portraying life in a concentration camp from the perspective of a child,” yet Wilkomirski

had spent much of his adult life unaware of these dramatic childhood memories, coming to terms with them only in therapy. Because his story and memories inspired countless others, Wilkomirski became a sought after international figure and a hero to Holocaust survivors.

The story began to unravel, however, in late August 1998, with Daniel Ganzfried, a Swiss journalist and himself the son of a Holocaust survivor, published a stunning article in a Zurich

newspaper. Ganzfried revealed that Wilkomirski is actually Bruno Doessekker, born in 1941 to a young woman named Yvone Berthe Grosjean, who later gave him up for adoption to an orphanage. Young Bruno spent all of the war years with his foster parents, the Dossekkers, in the safe confines of his native Switzerland. Whatever the basis for his dramatic “memories” of Nazi horrors, they did not come from childhood experiences in a concentration camp. Is Doessekker/Wilkomirski simply a liar? Probably not: he still strongly believes that his recollections are real. (p. 2-3)

We are capable of distorting our pasts, some deliberately, some subconsciously.

One study by psychiatrist Daniel Offer at Northwestern University showed just how far off our memories can be from actual events. In the study, men in their late forties were asked a series of questions about their experiences in their first year of high school, questions such as *Did your parents encourage you to be active in sports?* and *Did you receive physical punishment as discipline?* The answers the men gave to questions were strikingly different than the answers they gave to the same questions 34 years earlier when they were high school students. Fewer than 40% of the men recalled any parental encouragement to be active in sports while 60% of the men, when they were adolescents, reported any such encouragement. In their freshman year, nearly 90% of the men reported receiving physical punishment, but years later only one third recalled such punishment. (cited in Schacter, 2001, p. 3)

Memory is often faulty yet in predictable ways. Schacter (2001) divides these malfunctions into “sins” of omission, where “we fail to bring to mind a desired fact,

event, or idea,” what he calls transience, absent-mindedness, and blocking, and sins of commission: misattribution, suggestibility, bias, and persistence (p. 4-5). These flaws can provide significant doubt about the reliability of narrative data. *Transience* refers to a weakening of memory ability over time; the longer away from the event the fewer details can be recalled. This is noticeable in some people only minutes later, such as with those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, while most show the loss over days, weeks, months, and years. *Absent-mindedness*, aside from anecdotal accounts, involves a breakdown at the interface between attention and memory usually due to the person being preoccupied with one thing while attempting to place another thing into memory. In such a case, the desired information is not lost over time but in fact is never registered, or not sought after once it is placed in memory. *Blocking* is where we try desperately to retrieve information, even when we are focusing specifically on recalling the information. We may have the information suddenly arrive hours or days later but for some reason is not immediately available.

The “sin” of *misattribution* is caused by assigning a memory to the wrong source, such as mistaking fantasy for reality—what we want to be true somehow becomes true in our minds. We may also misattribute when we believe some information was read in a newspaper when, in truth, it was told to us by a friend. Similarly, *suggestibility* refers to ideas or information which become implanted due to leading questions or remarks. We tend to want to recall information we are asked to recall; we want to please our interrogators. *Bias*, on the other hand, is the result of socialization influencing us and is subject to our editing and rewriting, both consciously and subconsciously, to fit with a pattern of experience we wish to see

as reality (compare this with the concept of Virtual Reality discussed in Appendix B). What we recall may be skewed to represent how we wish the event to have happened, or how we might want to see ourselves or have others see us in relation to the event. *Persistence* refers to unwanted memories which seem to be recalled without our conscious choice to recall them. Disturbing events, even though we wish to forget them, stick around in our short-term memory. More serious instances may be disabling or life-threatening.

Thompson et al. (1996) describe various psychological issues, such as Freud's concept of *repression*, that can interfere with accurate recall or completely prevent a memory from being recalled. When a person has had some traumatic experience, for example, the event may be shoved so deeply into the mind that the person is unable to realize he experienced the event. We must also realize, write Thompson et al., that "memory for the content of events changes over time from being largely reproductive (i.e., based on retrieval of a quite detailed memory trace) to being largely reconstructive (i.e., based on knowledge of the structure of the type of event and of the characteristics of the individuals, objects, and places involved)" (p. 5).

In narrative research, Nelson (1993) theorizes three sources of information that are used in reconstructing events: generic event memory, autobiographical memory, and episodic memory. *Generic memory* is where we measure events on a scale of regularly recurring time cues, such as days of the week or months. The cyclical nature of these cues aids in placing the memory in perspective. *Autobiographical memory* includes events of significance to the person and thus is presumed to be more stable and accurate even though it is linear rather than

cyclical. Of particular importance are transition events that mark the boundary between two life periods or between two geographical locations. *Episodic memory* concerns individual events which are not necessarily significant to the self but stands as important for its details and relations between events. Information from episodic memory can fill gaps in autobiographical memory. Thus, memory and learning have the general adaptive functions of guiding presentation and predicting future outcomes. The most useful memory for that purpose is generic memory, which describes routines for recurrent situations, but which can only be formed through repetition.

On the other hand, autobiographical memory, which is what is brought to bear in first-person narratives, is different in that

the initial functional significance of autobiographical memory is that of sharing memory with other people, a function that language makes possible. Memories become valued in their own right—not because they predict the future and guide present action, but because they are shareable with others and thus serve a social solidarity function. (p. 12)

Nelson (1993) suggests that this is a “universal human function, although one with variable, culturally specific rules” which is “analogous to human language itself, uniquely and universally human but culturally—and individually—variable” (p.12). Given this relationship, it is the social function of memory that underlies all of our storytelling, history-making narrative activities.

How we try to recall also has great influence on accuracy. Linton (1975) studied her own memory strategies through diary practice. She categorized her

strategies four ways: 1) memories of events in which the exact date was known, 2) those for which the general period was known, 3) those for which time could be determined between two events, a target and a reference with known dates, and 4) those which required guessing. Friedman (1987) also studied memory strategies, placing them into five categories: recall of exact time, landmark relations, cyclical schema relation, duration since event, and guessing. Friedman found that recall of exact time cues occurs in less than 10% of occasions. Linking a memory to a landmark event (e.g., the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S.) seems to improve recall 20 to 30% over memories not linked to landmark events. Despite memory strategies, our recall remains imperfect and susceptible to sometimes tremendous inaccuracy which can be disruptive in any research that relies on subject narratives. We expect authors to tell us about their lives and experiences in meaningful ways; there is a purpose in the telling and so we want to accept their narratives as truthful, and therefore valid data for narrative-based research.

In I-Con writing, however, we are not so much aiming for accurate recall as we are seeking emotive recall. The writer's memory becomes the basis for the subsequent reflection. As a function of psychological or personal identity, the way a memory affects the writer, the way an event is remembered, is more important than the factual recall of events. The writer can then consider how the event has helped to shape how he constructed his identity and how he sees himself today.

APPENDIX D

Classroom Writing Prompts

This appendix is intended to expand upon and give further details about identity-constructing writing projects first alluded to in chapter 5 and discussed more in chapter 6. The following three “major project” prompts are what I have recently used with in first-year composition classes to give students opportunities to investigate themselves and their identity, their lives, and their connections.

At first glance these prompts may seem rather sparse or too ambiguous to work well as writing prompts, yet I found that this style forces students to “figure out” for themselves what to do. I am always available to talk out ideas or help with speculation. In each case, students learn through doing, and along the way come to understand themselves and their world much better.

Many students come to my class used to being told exactly what to write and they have learned how to give the teacher what he or she wants, which is a modeling process that keeps them strapped into expecting only one model whenever they have a writing task. They do not learn to use their own resources—identity resources—to create writing that is personally significant. At the same time, because of its personal significance, it is usually also meaningful and competently produced for a wider audience.

The Autobiography Paper

What experiences or events in your life have significantly helped to shape who you are today? Focus on yourself and consider who you are today in terms of your identity. Remember our discussion of literacy as self-identity,

and how language shapes the world we see. Think about how your particular world has affected you. Think about the environment where you grew up, who you have known, and events that have impacted your life. Tell us how you came to be you.

This paper is chosen by the majority of students each semester, perhaps because they believe it to be the easiest to write. The purpose of this paper is to have students focus on remembering the significant events in their lives and, more importantly, how those events affected them at that time and continue to influence who they are and who they want to be. The reflective statements I have students write at midterm show that most students discover something about themselves that they had forgotten or had never noticed. Many report personal benefit to doing the project and some thank me for the opportunity to write about themselves in such a way that they can better understand themselves.

The Community Paper

What communities are you a member of and how does the community influence you, positively or negatively? Remember our discussion of communities and how you may be a member of dozens of communities at the same time. Consider what characteristics each community has and how communities may compete for your attention. Think about how you influence each community and how it influences you. Focus on the group dynamics rather than on your individual interests and tell us how you fit into your collection of communities.

This paper is the second-most popular to write and is chosen mostly by students who feel they do not want to write about themselves because of events

that have happened in their lives or the sense that their lives are not interesting. Some are group-oriented and tend to see their lives as membership in various communities anyway. The papers typically take two forms: 1) a paper which describes several communities and the people who inhabit them, or 2) a memoir-like story of the adventures the author has had with one or more groups or communities (e.g., the adventures my friends and I have had). Either way, the student is acknowledging, and through reflective writing reinforcing, the various connections between the identity of the author and the communities that support the author. Recognizing the connections and understanding these bi-directional influences is another goal of an identity-constructing pedagogy.

The Future Paper

Take some situation that is relevant or interesting to you, or an aspect of your world, and imagine how it may change in 20 years or so. Be creative and imaginative but logical in your projection of a present situation into a future situation. Consider cause-effect relationships, especially. Focus on your place in the world today and project your vision of your place into the future. Try to imagine yourself 20 years from now, or imagine your community in 50 or 100 years. How will you, or your community, have changed in the year 2025 or 2055 or 3899? The key to this paper is your projection of something that exists today into tomorrow, placing yourself there, comparing yourself in these two different situations. It is not supposed to be some far-fetched fantasy of “anything-goes” or “the-weirder-the-better” but, rather, something based on the reality of today. This may seem deceptively simple but to write a good paper will require

much deep thought and consideration of current social, political, cultural, and ecological issues which confront all of us. One way to do this might be to look back 50 or 100 years and compare how today's world differs from that earlier time. What do you like or don't like about that past? How have we solved or worsened problems that existed back then? Now project our present time ahead 50 or 100 years into the future and write a comparison.

This paper was originally included as a nod to eco-composition but seemed to appeal mostly to those students who enjoyed writing stories over essays. The theme also appealed to those students who liked science-fiction. Although fewer students write this paper, the papers tend to take one of two forms: 1) a "realistic" description of the author in the author's future everyday life, with mentions of career and family taking precedent over larger, global issues, or 2) a science-fiction story set in a post-apocalyptic world full of violence and the struggle to survive. Perhaps not so strangely, the first form is generated mostly by women and the latter form by the men in the class. This has proven to be the case in every semester. Perhaps it is all too stereotypical, but the women in the class seem to see the future as a utopia while the men see a dystopian future; the difference may be gender-biased inasmuch as women tend to focus on home and family while men tend to focus on individual competitiveness and the black-and-white world of winner and loser.

The benefit of this paper to identity construction is that it gives the student a chance to play a role and envision his/her future life and with it a future identity or the extension of the current identity. One of the goals of I-Con pedagogy is to

enable students to choose identities which will serve their future goals and such futuristic role-playing gives them the chance to experiment, plan, project, and select those characteristics which will help them achieve their goals in the future. The identity component becomes involved when the authors put themselves into the story (usually the utopian views but sometimes the dystopian views, as well) and act as though they are not really themselves but another “person” or persona. This paper can be a kind of future autobiography, too. In any case, the benefit comes in the imagining of possibilities.