COMPOSING VIOLENCE: STUDENT TALK, UNIVERSITY DISCOURSE, AND THE POLITICS OF WITNESSING

by

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ABSTRACT

COMPOSING VIOLENCE: STUDENT TALK, UNIVERSITY DISCOURSE,

AND THE POLITICS OF WITNESSING

This study examines undergraduates' discourses on their writing about violence. In the last twenty years, composition scholarship has often turned to examples of student writing about violence in order to critique or justify personal writing assignments, while writing about violence in other genres is under-examined. This study demonstrates that students are writing about violence in courses across the university and in a variety of genres. In adopting an ethnographic approach, this study illuminates students' behind-the-scenes writing practices and offers a more expansive view of how discourses of violence shape and are shaped by students' academic writing practices than has been available to scholars and instructors up to this point.

Thematic and discourse analysis of interviews with students, as well as analysis of the students' essays, reveal that students' discursive engagements with violence are partial, contingent, and contextual. When writing about violence, students must negotiate competing, context-specific, and disciplinary understandings of violence. Furthermore, students' experiences appear to mediate—and are mediated by—the process of writing about violence. At times, this complexity, struggle, and experiential engagement is not

visible in the essays themselves, but is revealed in students' talk about their writing.

These findings suggest that writing about violence can be an opportunity for students to reconsider their understandings of violence, reshape their experiences, and confront their positions within histories violence. At the same time, the partiality of students' discursive engagements with violence can also essentialize victims of violence, divorce violence from the structures that produce it, and reproduce boundaries between students and the violence they write about. These findings point to the political and ethical importance of acknowledging that higher education is a crucial, but often ignored, site for the production of—and engagement with—discourses of violence. This dissertation calls for pedagogies that take seriously the experiences, ethical insights and theoretical savvy that many students already bring to their writing about violence. Such pedagogies must also work to make explicit the disciplines, theories, and ideologies that help shape the discursive field of violence in a given essay, course, or university, ultimately helping students locate themselves within histories of violence.

Chapter One

LOCATING VIOLENCE: PERSONAL WRITING AND THE GLOBAL TURN

I began my teaching career in a public New York City middle school just south of Harlem. As a humanities teacher, I taught my students about US social movements, histories of colonialism in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the politics of the war in Iraq. I taught them to write memoirs and poetry, fiction and research essays. Yet, it would take me years to see that violence was often at the center of what we read, wrote, and talked about. Like many teachers, I tended to focus on the depictions of violence that disclosed the worrisome realities of some students' lives. I assigned essays about Jim Crow without a second thought yet spent hours worrying over my students' poems about gang violence or memoirs about domestic abuse, seeking advice from the guidance counselor and delicately calling students' parents.

In my second year of middle school teaching, I asked my students to write an essay defining the word feminist—we were studying the women's movement. Many students chose pop-culture examples to illustrate their definitions, but I also asked them to write about whether they, themselves were feminists. A student named Julia carefully selected serious Latina women to illustrate her definition of feminism but struggled when she had to write about herself. "I know I'm a feminist" she explained to me, "but in my definition, feminists stand up for other women. I don't do that." After more serious thought, Julia ended her essay this way: "I am a feminist… I debated in class about how

some women are forced to prostitute themselves because of low self-esteem and because they are not offered good enough jobs that pay really good money…When you are a feminist you stand up for the rights of women, you protest, and try to make things fair just like I do…" I have never been sure what made Julia finally select this example of her feminism. I've wondered what it means that she picked a group of women to defend with even less power and privilege than she has. I've wondered too, what it means that she picked an in-school example of her feminism. And I am always struck by her sophisticated notion that the conditions of economic inequality compel some women to take up roles they might not otherwise choose for themselves.

In the same year that Julia wrote this essay, her mother filed for divorce from her abusive husband. Julia, a strong and conscientious student, would pour puddles of quiet tears onto her math worksheets before a classmate would finally notice and alert the teacher. I know that for Julia, our study of feminism was fraught with import and anxiety. Her experience of powerlessness at home, her sense that she wasn't doing enough to stand up for her mother and sister, made her wonder if she could call herself a feminist. At the same time, she was unwilling to use herself or her mother as examples in a public writing assignment like an essay, so she struggled to find a way to write an essay that honored her life. As her teacher, I had to decide how far to push Julia to reveal herself; I had to learn how to read the silences in her texts and decide how to ethically respond to them. The essay Julia wrote about feminism took risks that another student might not have to make. For my students, writing about their homes or neighborhoods required that they make a series of choices about what they couldn't or wouldn't share. I want to

imagine that Julia's writing choices were deliberate, that she chose to keep secrets, never feeling forced to disclose them.

This experience encouraged me to develop a far more expansive—and less anxious—sense of the interrelationships among experience, violence, and writing. I began to wonder if the divisions we make between personal writing and other academic writing are too stark and to consider what invisible networks of experience were informing student essays on slavery, the holocaust, or Jim Crow laws. If Julia was indeed using academic writing to make links among the violence of her lived experience, her own subjectivity, and a historical social movement, then there was more to be learned about student writing about violence than simply when to call the guidance counselor. Perhaps the anxiety I had experienced about students' autobiographical accounts of violence was preventing me from considering less apparent relationships among student writing, experience, and violence.

I've thought back to Julia's paper frequently over the past couple of years as I've conducted research studying undergraduates' talk and writing about violence. Having now talked with twenty-six undergraduates about their writing and thinking on violence, it is clear to me that students are writing about violence in courses across the university and in a variety of genres. While some students shared writing that included first-person accounts of their experiences with violence, most students shared essays that no composition instructor would characterize as "personal writing." Yet, much of this writing was "personal." One student, Morissa, shared a term paper about Nazi experimentation on mentally disabled people. She described feeling angry, betrayed, and ashamed throughout the writing process because neither her family nor her Hebrew

school taught her about the Holocaust experiences of non-Jews. Morissa claims that this writing process changed the way she understands her identity and responsibilities as a Jewish American.

The field of composition studies has paid minimal scholarly attention to student writing about violence. What references there are to student writing on violence appear primarily in the field's debates about the status of personal writing.[1] This dynamic echoes the experience I had in my first teaching job. My colleagues and I spent a lot of time concerned about students' first-person accounts of experiences with violence while never considering the invisible networks of experience, ideology, and politics that help shape and are shaped by students' writing about violence in other academic writing genres. Furthermore, our inattention to the broad range of student writing about violence left unexamined the complexity of the writing process and the sophisticated tools that students bring to bear on their writing, ultimately limiting the political and ethical potential of students' discursive engagements with violence.

In this dissertation, I argue for the necessity of studying the expansive discursive terrains students traverse when they write about violence. Countering a scholarly legacy that has conflated personal writing and writing about violence, I present an account of student writing about violence that highlights the ethical insights, political agency, and theoretical savvy that many students already bring to their writing about violence. At the same time, I demonstrate that students' discursive engagements are often partial, unpredictable, and contradictory. As students write about violence, they must grapple with competing definitions of violence, the shifting contexts in which violence occurs, and the challenge of discerning their own positions within histories of violence. Yet, in

[1] I provide a review of this literature in the following section.

the essays that students produce, very little of this complexity, struggle, or experiential engagement is visible. Many students believe they must remove emotion, personal history, and political conviction from the final written product. The writing produced is fundamentally divergent from the process. In adopting an ethnographic approach, I illuminate students' behind-the scenes writing practices and complicate previous composition scholarship that focuses exclusively on students' personal essays about violence and instructors' encounters with those essays.

I also argue that the university—in its promotion of disciplinary ways of knowing, uses of particular pedagogical materials and writing genres, and global multicultural curricular goals—also plays a powerful role in shaping the discursive field of "violence," helping to determine its definitions, actors, and representations. At its best, college writing about violence compels students to confront their own positionality—their responsibility, complicity, or victimization, for instance—by engaging their experiences and emotions and challenging their political and ethical preconceptions. At other times, the partiality of students' discursive engagements with violence reinforces rigid boundaries between witnesses to violence and victims of violence, results in generalizing definitions of violence, and it produces reductive interpretations of both the perpetrators and victims of violence.

These findings have implications for composition scholars, teachers of writing, and university educators more broadly. First and foremost, I hope this study makes visible the wide variety of writing about violence in which undergraduates are engaged, thereby combating some of the assumptions about writing on violence that emerged out of the personal writing debates. More specifically, these findings contribute to ongoing

conversations in the field of composition about the role of experience in student writing, demonstrating that the process of writing about violence actually reshapes students' experiences and offers them opportunities to position themselves in relation to histories and discourses of violence. These findings also compel us to revisit the strict boundaries we make between personal writing and other academic writing genres, for students are clearly experientially and affectively engaged with their research essays, persuasive essays, and other academic writing about violence.

These findings also suggest that students' talk about their writing is a valuable pedagogical and methodological resource for learning more about students' writing practices and understandings of violence. Students' affective and subjective engagements with the writing process were largely invisible in their essays, but talking with students revealed that these were, indeed, meaningful and significant aspects of their writing practices. Talking with students about their writing also provided them with opportunities to revise or revisit their understandings of violence; while it is commonplace in writing courses to ask students to reflect on the writing process, few of my interviewees had opportunities to reflect on the content of their writing, their shifting understandings of violence, or their own ethical or political positions on a particular incident of violence.

These findings also have implications for university educators, more broadly. They reveal that students' understandings of violence are partial, shaped by the regional, sociopolitical, and historical contexts they're writing about, and also shaped by the disciplinary frameworks and genres in which they write. This suggests that students would benefit from pedagogies that illuminate the contextual and disciplinary nature of

engaging with discourses and histories of violence, as well as tools to help them think about their understandings of violence across courses and writing genres.

In the following chapter I argue that in the last twenty years, student writing about violence has often been used as the evidentiary material in debates about personal writing. This has resulted in a conflation of personal writing and writing about violence, which may help produce scholarly and instructional expectations that writing about violence is automatically autobiographical and apolitical. The conflation of personal writing and writing about violence may also reproduce the perception that writing about violence is a marker of difference and it may position students who write about violence as exotic others or vulnerable victims. Finally, we can see traces of this ideological complex—that writing about violence is apolitical, autobiographical, and a marker of difference—in the way the global turn has canonized themes of violence. While a global multicultural curriculum may not require students to write autobiographically, it reproduces a similar set of assumptions on writing about violence, with its focus on autobiographical, apolitical narratives of victimization. I hope that the accounts of students' writing and talk about violence that I present in the following chapters might help us expand our expectations of what writing about violence looks like.

When Personal Writing Turns Violent

In the last twenty years the field of composition has offered numerous accounts of how it is that "personal writing" has become such a contested genre in the field. Robert Connors attributes the popularity of personal writing in the early twentieth century to changes in literary taste, the Romantic Movement, and a focus on the individual student

(169). Joseph Harris cites the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar's efforts "to define English as a school subject and outline the ways in might best be taught" (1) as the moment that inaugurated "a renewed interest in personal and expressive forms of talk and writing" (8). Another oft-cited explanation for the origins of the personal writing debates is David Bartholomae and Peter Elbow's discussion in a 1995 issue of *College Composition and Communication.* While their conversation is most explicitly about the role of the first-year writing course in students' larger university education, personal writing provides much of the backdrop. Bartholomae argues for the importance of asking students to write about published texts in order to understand the power dynamics at work in the university and academic discourse. In contrast, he critiques "expressivist" teachers who imagine their classrooms as an artificial "pure and open space" where students are free to "express their own thoughts and ideas" (64). Meanwhile, Elbow justifies the use of personal writing because it allows him to invite first-year students "to write as though they are a central speaker at the center of the universe" rather than feeling that "they must summarize what others have said and only make modest rejoinder from the edge of the conversation to all the smart thoughts that have already been written" (80). While this was a conversation about the role of the teacher, definitions of academic discourse, and the politics of the first-year writing classroom, the debate over the status of personal writing was one of its most significant legacies.

Candace Spigelman, in her case for the evidentiary nature of experiences, takes a brief look at the evolution of expressivism as a pedagogical approach. She uses *personal writing* and *personal narrative* interchangeably, suggesting that content and genre have become blurred in pedagogy that privileges the personal. She argues that the "personal

expressive essay" has evolved into "emotive or confessional writing" because methods like free writing or journaling became associated with "a change in the expectations about content, in which personal feelings and insights now gave the essay its own reason for being" (70). Thomas Newkirk, in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, also places expressivism at the center of the personal writing debate; however, rather than suggesting that expressivism has gained ascendancy, he claims that it has been misread by advocates of cultural studies. He argues that autobiographical writing – Newkirk's term for personal writing – does not necessarily suggest that an authentic, coherent, individual self exists.

A particular focus of feminist pedagogy has also been on the political and pedagogical importance of acknowledging experience as a valuable source of knowledge. However, as with expressivist pedagogies, contemporary theories of feminist pedagogy and research have been informed by postmodernism and the social turn. In "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research," Kirsch and Ritchie argue that it is not enough to "claim the personal and locate ourselves in our scholarship and research"; researchers must also "theorize their locations by examining their experiences as reflections of ideology and culture, by reinterpreting their own experiences through the eyes of others, by recognizing their own split selves, their multiple and often unknowable identities" (8). Anne Ruggles Gere offers still another schema for understanding the pedagogical role of the personal. In this version, there is no single pedagogy that lays claim to the personal; rather, expressivist, psychoanalytic, and social discourses all have a stake in the uses of personal writing. In her essay, "Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing" she points out that "personal writing" is used

interchangeably with “personal narrative,” “personal experience essay,” and “autobiographical writing”; her definition of *personal writing* is “prose that gives significant attention to the writer’s experiences and feelings” (204). She is concerned, however, that when students *do* write about their experiences and feelings, they are not provided with strategies to keep their writing from being colonized (219).

These accounts of personal writing’s status in the composition classroom and field are immensely useful for understanding the pedagogical risks and rewards of assigning autobiographical writing, as well as the theoretical approaches to writing and teaching that underpin various stances. I would like to offer a slightly different perspective on the history of personal writing in composition studies, one which attends to the ways student writing about violence increasingly became utilized as the evidentiary material within scholarly conversations about personal writing. I suggest that this has produced a conflation between personal writing and writing about violence that has not only shaped instructors’ perceptions of students’ personal writing, but the field’s inattention to writing about violence in other academic writing genres.

Personal writing and writing about violence haven’t always seemed related. Robert Connor’s historical account of personal writing assignments demonstrates that writing prompts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were more likely to produce writing about violence when they were not autobiographical. He cites John Walker’s 1801 *Teacher’s Assistant in English Composition* as typical of the period’s focus on “regular subjects” and “themes,” which includes topics such as “Education,” “Government,” “War” and “Peace.” Seventy years later, as narration and description fell into favor, John M. Hart published his *Manual of Composition and Rhetoric*, which

"opened the floodgates to personal writing in composition courses" (Connors 173). The suggested topics for personal narratives in this book include, "How I Spent My Vacation," "Ascent of Mount Washington," and "Going to School." By 1910, composition textbooks were fully invested in the value of having students write from experience and assignments included topics like "How I Caught a Woodchuck," "An Hour in the Study Hall," "The Loneliness of Freshman," and "Why I came to School" (Connors 177). These early personal writing topics demonstrate that historically, personal writing assignments seem to have very little to do with violence. Indeed, it is the earlier, non-autobiographical writing that appears to be more likely to produce writing about violence with subjects like "war" and "peace."

In 1985, William Coles and James Vopat published *What Makes Writing Good: A Multiperspective*, a text that includes forty-eight student essays, the assignment to which they respond, and commentary from each student's teacher explaining "to a student audience why he or she finds the paper to be praiseworthy" (Coles and Vopat viii). The text is noteworthy both because it includes student essays (rather than the texts of established authors) in a composition textbook and because it provides examples of the kind of writing that—at least forty-eight—writing instructors think is praiseworthy. The text has become infamous, however, because of its centrality in the personal writing debates of the early nineties.

Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg published an incisive review of the text the following year, noting that "the overwhelming majority of the pieces in *What Makes Writing Good* are descriptions of the students' personal experiences, focusing on such intense moments as a family quarrel, the death of a relative or friend, the writer's own

serious illness, or a disturbing historical event. The teachers praise these pieces in terms of their ability to convey these experiences vividly and sincerely" (244). Bizzell and Herzberg register their concern that the textbook implies that "all good writing shares the virtues of the personal essay," when, in fact, much student writing does not "owe [its] excellence to emotional intensity" (245-6). They also argue that the textbook "serves a profoundly conservative political agenda" by making "socially dominant standards seem 'naturally' superior" (247). These critiques are important, but they exaggerate the intensity of the autobiographical writing found in the text. There is precisely one essay about death, quite a few essays about family—many of them relatively mundane—and an essay about a student's visit to Auschwitz.

What is actually telling about the text—and the teachers' responses to the essays—is how narratives of relatively commonplace events are celebrated for their "honesty." The text includes personal essays about gymnastics, Disney World, the West Texas sky, the mall, a student's parents not liking her boyfriend, being a mother, and the family dog. While many of these essays do include moments of intensity, it is not, as Bizzell and Herzberg lead us to believe, necessarily the subject matter of these essays that is intense. By no means do I mean to diminish the importance of their critique, but their elision of the more mundane narratives and references to the narratives about death, illness, and a "disturbing historical event" mark the beginning of a trend in the personal writing debates—the characterizing of personal narratives as somehow automatically about violence and loss.

What Makes Writing Good actually contains five essays that are explicitly about violence. There is the essay about a student's visit to Auschwitz, which is actually more

of a meditation on evil than it is a traditional personal narrative. There is an essay entitled "Why America has the Highest Crime Rate," which is not a personal narrative. There is an essay about a student shooting a raccoon. There is an essay based on an interview the author conducted with the proprietor of an adult bookstore who also works at a home for teenage runaways. The runaways are subjected to a range of sexual and physical violence. The fifth essay about violence is entitled "A Personal Reading of Ernest Hemingway's *Our Time*," in which the author reproduces journal entries about his reading experience ranging from suspicion of Hemingway, to musings on the theme of the "hell of war," to a brief reflection on how the men in his own family had dealt with their own participation in war. Yet, except for the Auschwitz essay—which is somewhat misrepresented—these essays about violence are not referenced in the reviews or critiques of *What Makes Writing Good*. The violence depicted in these essays—except for the case of the student who kills the raccoon—is violence that happens to and is perpetrated by other people. These essays don't fit into the argument that personal writing assignments compel students to disclose intense personal experiences, so they get left out.

What Makes Writing Good also makes an appearance in Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality*. In his examination of the assumptions composition studies makes about the status of the self in student writing, he contrasts a report reviewing a 1929 college admissions test with the essays in *What Makes Writing Good.* At the end of this comparison, Faigley explains,

> the student selves we encounter in *What Makes Writing Good* are predominantly selves that achieve rationality and unity by characterizing former selves as objects for analysis—hence the emphasis on writing about past experience rather than confronting the contradictions of present experience. (129)

According to Faigley, essays like those found in *What Makes Writing Good* lead students to believe in the "illusion of a unified knowing self," a self who can look back and evaluate their prior experiences from a stance of stability and rationality (125). To make this argument, Faigley cites two essays from *What Makes Writing Good,* Norma Bennett's essay about two separate summer vacations, one with each of her newly divorced parents, and an essay by Lindsay Lankford on writing letters. Neither of these essays engages issues of violence, though Bennett's essay does reveal some of the difficulties of her particular family life.

It is Faigley himself who introduces violence into his account of students' personal writing. In critiquing two of the book's commentators who claim a student's honesty "betokens an unusual trust in the reader she has in mind, her teacher" (Vopat and Coles 79), Faigely counters, "I have read narratives written for large-scale writing assessments that deal with intense personal events such as the experience of being raped, yet the writer had no knowledge of who would read the paper or what would become of it" (121). The example of rape is a strange addition to the conversation in which Faigley is engaged. None of the essays he cites mentions rape or any violence at all, yet he includes it here as an anecdotal example to disprove the notion that "honesty" in student writing indicates trust between the writer and the teacher. His mention of rape is notable, as well, because it is the first time rape—or any sort of interpersonal violence—appears as an example in the personal writing debates.[2]

[2] By the time *Fragments of Rationality* is published, the personal writing debates have referenced writing about interpersonal violence several times. However, a version of this chapter, including the same example, was published in *CCC* in 1989 at which point rape had not been mentioned, as far as I can tell, in any published composition texts on personal writing.

By the early nineties, however, scholars were referencing examples of rape, suicide, abuse, assault and other types of violence in their discussions of personal writing. Three essays, in particular, all published between 1992 and 1994, used multiple examples of student writing about violence to illustrate the ethical challenges and pedagogical rewards of assigning and responding to personal writing. In an essay written for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler (a literature professor and two psychologists who work at a university counseling center) report on the "negative consequences" of requiring students to write about their lives (B2). They refer to possible student writing about "childhood traumas like sexual and physical abuse," the suicide of a teenaged friend, rape, and incest (B2). Relying on their own experiences in the classroom and counseling center, Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler explain that students' recollections of previous traumas are "endemic whenever students are asked to write about themselves" (B2).

Richard Miller considers the professional activity surrounding one student essay, "Queers, Bums, and Magic" in order to explore the challenges of truly treating the classroom as a "contact zone" even when racist, sexist, and homophobic sentiments surface. "Queers, Bums, and Magic" was first referenced in an MLA workshop on "Composition, Multiculturalism, and Political Correct-ness" in December 1991. A CCCC panel also focused on the essay in 1992, as did a follow-up workshop in 1993. In the essay, the student author describes a trip he and his friends took in order to study "the lowest class…the queers and the bums," which includes a description of the young men urinating on a homeless person and kicking him until they thought he was dead (392). Miller also describes audience members' responses to the essay; the most common

suggestion was to remove the student from the classroom and report him to a counselor or the police. “Such a response, audience members argued repeatedly, would be automatic if the student had described suicidal tendencies, involvement in a rape, or having been the victim of incest” (392). Here, the audience members assimilate a very specific incident of violence into the growing cannon of troubling things students write about. This reveals the presence of an ongoing conversation about students writing personal essays on violence but fixates on the most incendiary versions.

A third essay from the early nineties, “Crossing Lines,” by Carole Deletiner reflects on her experiences reading and writing about pain with her students at Hunter College. She includes many examples of the pain she encounters in the classroom including: a student on suicide watch, a student whose father tried to kill him with a machete, a hostile student whose parents are divorcing, a student whose father physically abused her mother, a student whose parents are compulsive gamblers, and many more. Deletiner explains, “only a few weeks into a new semester and I know who the recovering addicts and alcoholics are; I know who's been battered and sexually abused; I know who's ashamed of being Salvadoran or Russian, of being from a welfare family; who had a child when she was fifteen; who dropped out of high school and has never told her husband” (812). The examples Deletiner uses are notable for both their specificity and diversity. This is different than Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler’s vague references to sexual and physical abuse; Deletiner gives each student a story and even when she’s generalizing—as she does when she describes what she knows about her students after the first few weeks—she clarifies the full range of topics that “cross boundaries” from teen pregnancy to sexual abuse.

Deletiner's essay provoked two critical responses in *College English*, and while both critiques raise important points, they're relevant here for two reasons. First, the specificity and diversity of the examples of students writing about pain that Deletiner lists are reduced in the introduction of Cheryl Alton's response to "writing about personal pain, trauma, and grief" (66). Deletiner never uses the word "trauma" when talking about her students, but Alton, who's interested in exploring the problems with writing teachers acting as "pseudo psychiatrists" applies the label to Deletiner's students, nonetheless. Second, the comments place Deletiner's essay squarely within the middle of composition's personal writing debates. Echoing Faigley's critique of personal writing as promoting a sovereign subject and Bartholomae's critique of the apolitical nature of the personal essay, Kathleen Pfeiffer writes, "what Deletiner teaches in this weepy world of confessions and revelations is a fundamentally egocentric sort of self-absorption" (671). While Deletiner's essay is certainly worthy of critique, both of these commentators make a set of assumptions about her course and students that belie a growing conflation between writing about violence and personal writing. They assume that Deletiner is assigning primarily personal narratives—although she claims in her response that she does not—that the students who wrote these essays had experienced trauma, and that the essays are solipsistic, and by implication, apolitical.

The conflation of personal writing and writing about violence was reinforced throughout the nineties. Wendy Bishop's essay, "Writing Is/And Therapy?: Raising Questions about Writing Classrooms and Writing Program Administration," cites examples of student writing on suicide, murder, and rape (508). Marilyn Valentino's address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, "Responding

When a Life Depends on It: What to Write in the Margins When Students Self Disclose" explains that undergraduates are contending with violence, family abuse, drug use, eating disorders, and suicide, which they may disclose in the classroom (2). Dan Morgan's, "Ethical Issues Raised by Students' Personal Writing" references student writing about murder, abuse, date rape, suicide, eating disorders, and gang participation (87-89). Even Thomas Newkirk's book, *The Performance of Self in Student Writing,* which focuses largely on typical examples of students' personal writing like essays about a favorite teacher, participation in high school athletics, or the death of a grandfather, assumes a conflation between personal writing and, in this case, trauma. He writes, "when students are invited to write about 'significant' events in their lives, writing teachers read about the full range of trauma—divorce, child abuse, eating disorders and other addictions, dysfunctional families, loneliness, and deep unhappiness" (19). Newkirk's book itself does important work by reminding us that one of the challenges of teaching the personal narrative is precisely that this writing can be mundane, yet here he reproduces the assumption that personal writing assignments will lead to writing about troubling topics that include incidents of violence.

The personal writing debates have contributed to a number of important conversations in the field over the last twenty years. They've required writing scholars and teachers to examine their assumptions about the construction of student selves, to question the ethics of disclosure, and to consider the goals of first-year writing. Increasingly, however, these arguments have been made using student writing about violence as the evidentiary material. Even when, as with Vopat and Coles, personal narratives are not necessarily about violence, the proceeding conversations fixate on the

"intense" essays, erasing more mundane examples of personal writing. Or, as with Delenir's essay, examples of student writing about violence are assumed to emerge from personal essays. The effect of this conflation is two-fold—it assumes that students' personal writing about violence is somehow an effect of the psychological experience of trauma and it ignores the other genres in which students are also writing about violence.

The examples of student writing that I offer in the following chapters challenge both of these assumptions. I demonstrate that students are indeed writing about violence in a range of academic writing genres and show that when students do write personal essays about violence, they resist readings of their experiences as traumatic.

The nature of the personal writing debates not only perpetuates the assumption that writing about violence happens primarily in autobiographical genres, but it may also shape how instructors respond to students who write essays about violence in a range of genres. In particular, I am concerned about the ways conversations on personal writing may perpetuate the sense that experiences with violence are a marker of difference, leading to the exoticizing or pathologizing of these student writers. In the following section, I focus on exactly that – the ways that composition scholarship and instructors' responses to violence in student writing mark both the essay and the student who wrote the essay about violence as somehow different from typical student writers.

Exoticizing and Pathologizing Student Writers

Anne Ruggles Gere acknowledges in "Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing" that she and other writing teachers may gain some pleasure from "a voyeuristic look into the intimate details of another's life" (210). When writing instructors privilege

writing that provokes affective, empathetic responses from readers it can position students who write about violence as "other" and may fix them into one-dimensional and essentialized identity categories.

Scholars theorizing about testimony, a version of autobiographical disclosure, argue that what can feel like a productive empathetic response to troubling personal disclosures might actually be pleasurable because it reaffirms the distance between the reader and "traumatized other." Danielli's work on countertransference suggests that therapists can easily slip between responses that include Privileged Voyeurism, Viewing the Survivor as a Hero, Me Too Feelings, Guilt, Rage, Dread and Horror, and Defensiveness. Gillian Whitlock argues that affective responses that feel like empathy might actually be the regulated voyeuristic consumption of trauma, which allows readers to reaffirm the normalness of their own lived experiences within predictable dichotomies of self and other. The discloser becomes the exoticized other with experiences that we might empathize with but are pleased to affirm are not our own.

We can see this exoticizing of students in Dan Morgan's "Ethical Issues Raised by Students' Personal Writing." He recounts in vivid and often disdainful detail the range of essays he has read in which students problematically disclose. In one such description he writes:

> Last year, one of my students wrote a persuasion essay in which she explained in disturbing detail her involvement with an abusive man who was on crack. In my view this woman (who is waiting for the man to come out of prison in five years because after all, he is the father of their child, and, she believes, is bound to be changed for the better by the prison experience) revealed far more about herself than she may have considered and really needs to reexamine her decisions. (88)

Morgan's response is not one of empathy, but it is wrought with voyeurism. While he places the description dismissively in parentheses, Morgan nonetheless recounts the personal thoughts and experiences of an "other" presumably quite different from himself. He feels invited by this text to judge the choices made by its writer, diving into the life of someone else. Phrases like "after all" and "bound to be changed for the better" point to the rhetorical distance Morgan has put between himself and this student. At the end of his essay, Morgan blames the prevalence of this sort of writing on the reality of the "complicated and thoroughly non-traditional lives led by most of our students" because we "live and work in a broken society" (93). Morgan's condescension almost shouts off the page, as he paints a picture of students dramatically different from those he used to teach or the student he presumably was.

Lad Tobin reminds us that as composition teachers we are never objective readers of student writing; we "create the meaning of our students' texts, particularly if this creative act is largely the result of our unconscious biases and associations" (75). While Tobin calls this relationship between teacher, student, and text "co-authorship," Morgan's reading looks more like co-option. Describing her resistance to including the personal in her own academic writing, Ellen Cushman likens some self-reflexive researchers to "the butterfly that has become exoticized and chased after" (45). She compares some readers to butterfly catchers who pin butterflies

> onto a black-felt display case where they can admire them all they want whenever they want…To position the butterfly, one must invade its space, capture it, and reduce it to a unidemensional and bloodless representation of what was once its relation to the world. (43)

When teachers and scholars position students who write about violence as "exotic others," we run the risk of making students feel captured and gazed upon. Worse perhaps

is that we read students – and ask students to read and write themselves – in a single dimension. The student who discloses an experience with violence becomes "my suicidal student" or "the student who was raped."

In "'When I was a Young Soldier for the Revolution:' Coming to Voice," bell hooks describes her position as the only black student in many of her writing classes. There she was encouraged to write more poems in the dialect of black Southern speech, because her teachers and classmates found it to be "most authentic" (52). Hooks read this notion of authenticity as masking racial biases, pinning her to a single version of black identity and selfhood. In her all black segregated school she had come to understand herself and other black poets as capable of writing in multiple voices, not as "unilateral, monologist, or static" (52). As scholars and teachers of writing we may be tempted to celebrate writing that gives us special access to the "other, exotic" experiences of our students, allowing us to empathize or identify with them. However, the irony of identification is that it also allows us to exploit and consume those "exotic" experiences, experiences that are actually the lived experiences of the students we teach.

In addition to exoticizing students, the conflation of violence and "trauma" has also prompted a pathologizing of students. "Trauma," from the Greek for *wound*, originally connoted physical injury. The modern category of trauma is far more expansive and includes psychological wounding under its diagnostic umbrella. The language used to understand trauma, however, is still quite indebted to the word's origins in medical language and the description of bodily injury. As trauma theory has proliferated through the humanities and social sciences, it has persisted in carrying strong traces of this original, medicalized language.

Today many human experiences are cast as traumatic, and those experiences are frequently discussed in the language of symptom and pathology. In many ways composition studies has resisted the commodification and consumption of trauma that has occurred over the last few decades in other academic fields (Yaeger). At the same time, composition is not immune to the pathologizing effects of therapeutic discourse. Because the language of trauma, once adopted, almost automatically medicalizes, psychologizes, and ultimately pathologizes the range of human experience considered "traumatic," the college classroom may be a site where writers are at particular risk of being rendered vulnerable, unstable, or ill. Michelle Payne has argued that students who write about bodily violence "are often constructed as both vulnerable and in need of protection (especially from professors) …" (11). These professors tend to see student texts through "psychotherapeutic discourse"—"only seeing the students as vulnerable and unstable" (11). Payne's study suggests that writing instructors, like others who encounter writing about trauma and violence, tend to interpret trauma writing and writers through a psychotherapeutic lens.

Payne is right to suggest that psychotherapeutic discourse affects how we view survivors of bodily violence outside of classrooms. Louise Armstrong argues, for example, that the "incest industry," made up of mental health professionals, the media, and publishing industries, suppressed the political messages of feminist consciousness-raising groups, and then medicalized therapeutic discourse converted those messages into "the need for personal growth" (562). Alan Feldman has noted the medicalization of human rights testimony in media depictions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Rather than depicting testifiers as sociopolitical agents,

speaking to enable structural change, the media portrayed the TRC testimony as a healing salve of curative narratives.

Certainly classrooms – and the teachers and students in them - may be influenced by therapeutic readings of survivors in popular culture and academia; however, the field of composition has developed a deep skepticism about the notion of writing as curative. When compositionists do invoke therapeutic discourse it is rarely to argue that writing is curative, but instead to theorize through a psychoanalytic lens the complex relationships, mediated by language, between teachers and students through a psychoanalytic lens (Tobin, Welch).

Lad Tobin argues that many composition scholars resist a therapeutic understanding of composition because issues like "role-making, sexual tension, even transference in the teaching of writing and the teacher-student relationship...make them uncomfortable (which they should)" (79). As a result they "deny their significance and suggest that we focus on the writing process and product as if it existed in a decontextualized situation and relationship" (Tobin 79). As teachers of writing, we may be afraid of being positioned as therapists, concerned that we are unqualified for such a role or that it undermines our scholarliness (Welch). However, the fear that student writers may position their instructors as therapists has another, more latent intellectual legacy. Composition theory's contested relationship with the personal may lead to a misreading of student texts that only appear to be therapeutic.

Many of the women in Payne's study report writing about traumatic experiences in order to make their experiences normal. Payne argues that while students may adopt some rhetorics and strategies that affirm a unified curative narrative, they are also

"continually in the process of accepting fragmentation, otherness, and difference" and insisting that their readers accept that identity as well (44). Payne acknowledges that student writing about trauma and violence is ripe with the potential to be misread, in part because these texts may adopt some therapeutic tropes. However, as Newkirk points out, underlying such misreadings is a "questionable assumption – that students write about these topics because they *want* us to assume a counseling role – in most cases, this represents a presumptuous misreading of student intent" (Newkirk 19). Like Tobin, Newkirk suggests that these misreadings stem from instructors not wanting be read as therapists; however, I think it also suggest the field's discomfort with the possibility that students write to create a cured, coherent sense of self. Ironically, this discomfort may lead to a misreading of student intent. Scholars seem so concerned with the possibility that students might be writing in solipsistic ways, they often ignore the moments when students do not. Payne reports that students wrote about trauma and violence in order to "argue for the choices they have made and hope others will make upon reading their essays" (22); they wrote to present an identity that is not deserving of abuse (22); "they engaged in sophisticated analyses and critiques of the social and institutional contexts within which they lived" (24). The field's disciplinary anxieties about teachers acting as therapists, the role of politics in the writing classroom, and the problem of the postmodern subject may be limiting what we expect of our students when they write about violence and marking those writers as different.

Violence and the Global Turn

While examples of student writing about violence appear most often in the composition scholarship on personal writing, Min-Zhan Lu has noted that the application of postcolonial theory to the project of multiculturalism has contributed to the canonization of themes of abuse, trauma, and migration in literature and composition classes (31). In this section, I offer a reading of a textbook, *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing*, which is advertised as the "first argument reader of its kind" for its focus on globalization. I also offer a brief discussion of the ways composition's global turn, global multicultural curricula, and postcolonial theory have been mobilized in the service of teaching students about "relations of domination in which only 'others' but not ourselves are implicated" (Lu, 31). I suggest that composition's increased attention to (neo)colonial "others" points to a new context in which students are reading and writing about violence. I am concerned that the way violence is perceived in the context of the global multicultural curricula efforts may map onto preexisting perceptions of writing about violence as apolitical, autobiographical, and a marker of difference.

In an essay for PMLA, Wendy Hesford suggests that rhetoric and composition studies has taken a global turn with its critiques of English monolingualism, global multiculturalism as a pedagogical strategy, service learning's forced volunteerism, and the transnational identifications of teachers and students. She argues that rhetoric and composition studies has important contributions to make as we begin to imagine "a global citizenship free from the language of fear and from the civilizing mission of providence, a global citizenship that gives substance to human rights and encourages

intercultural and transnational dialogue" (795). The global turn in composition compels us to consider how students' representations of violence may textually and politically harm others, and to investigate the ways in which the composition classroom, the university, and the field of composition may be complicit in this process. In particular, the introduction of global multiculturalism to the composition classroom runs the risk of reinforcing a logic of identity/difference as it canonizes the themes of abuse, trauma, and migration (Lu, 31). When students are asked – or choose – to write essays about global issues like rape as a tool of warfare or domestic violence in the Middle East, the identity/difference binary may be mapped onto a first-world witness/third-world victim ideology. Well-intentioned efforts to educate students to global inequality or cultural difference end up reinforcing the very ideologies that sustain those differences.

As we've seen, composition theory can conflate personal writing and violence; I am concerned that the global turn has become assimilated to a preexisting condition of thinking about violence as personal. If the conflation of personal writing and writing about violence in composition studies produces an ideological complex in which student writing about violence is automatically viewed as autobiographical and apolitical, we must be careful that this logic is not simply repurposed as writing themes turn from students' inner lives to the lives of the victims of global violence.

Deepika Bahri has located part of the theoretical and curricular underpinnings of what Hesford calls the "global turn" in composition's engagement with postcolonial theory. In the partial adoption of postcolonial theory, notions of hybridity, marginality, difference, and distance can often serve as "grist for the University's diversity mill," displacing the specific historical and geographical locations of the postcolonial and de-

policitizing its effects (Bahri, 76). Bahri has delineated some of the theoretical, pedagogical, and political problems produced by the slippages between postcolonialism and multiculturalism. She suggests that the postcolonial – within the context of global multicultural curricula – can serve as a distraction for students dealing with difference in their own contexts, for it suggests that "the other" is distant and categorical, rather than suggesting that difference is produced within specific contexts (77). In this way, "multicultural" becomes the generic name for all difference. Not only does this work to other or exoticize a wide range of student subjects – who may or may not be enrolled in the "multicultural" course – but, the euphemistic use of "multicultural" as a stand-in for all difference diverts attention from the historical particulars of marginality or otherness by "submerging it within liberal discourse on the subject" (77). While postcoloniality offers an important ethno-racial critique of U.S-centric multiculturalism, this critique is essentially dissolved as difference is displaced via geographical distance.

The slippage between postcoloniality and multiculturalism that produces a disciplining global multiculturalism also works in relation to composition's existing notions about discourses of violence. Postcolonial theory actually offers a way out of the inherited associations of violence with apolitical, autobiographical accounts of individual violence, with its understanding of violence as structural and endemic to the colonial situation. However, what has happened, instead, is that global multiculturalism has assimilated partially the topos of postocoloniality in a way that elides the systemic nature of violence in the colonial or neocolonial context, while reinforcing the view of violence as individual victimization. For Franz Fanon, violence in the colonial context is always structural. Violence is not only the subjective violent acts that transgress the norm, but

also the violence that sustains the colonial order. This violence is produced by guns and machines, the police force and the army, but it is also "the phantom of terror," that has "ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life" (40). It is this same violence, Fanon argues, that "will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters" (40). The violence of decolonization, for Fanon, is about addressing political violence to the everyday violence of the colonial order, its prisons, its schools, and its everyday humiliations. Fanon's depiction of violence reminds us that violence must not be considered within a frame that individualizes injury, relies on victim/perpetrator binaries, and ultimately detaches violence from the structures that produce it.

Composition studies' historical engagement with discourses of violence tends to conform to this individualizing frame even when colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial violences are introduced into the classroom. Composition's version of violence is not characterized by the oppositional forces that structure Fanon's careful descriptions of colonial violence and decolonization. Instead, composition's depictions of postcolonial violence are thematized through an ideological complex in which writing about violence is viewed as apolitical and autobiographical. There are no searing bullets or bloodstained knives in these courses; instead, themes of psychic trauma, abuse, and migration are canonized (Lu, 31). This is related to global multiculturalism's decontextualization of difference. To discuss structural violence of the sort Fanon describes, students must have

knowledge about the socio-political and historical contexts that produced such violence; yet, psychic trauma or abuse is treated as, somehow, more universal and mobile.

One writing textbook, *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing,* is advertised as the "first argument reader of its kind" for its focus on globalization. For an undergraduate writing textbook, this book does a number of things very well. The first chapter introduces students to multiple definitions of globalization and explores the stakes of each definition; it offers a number of perspectives on any given issue, giving students opportunities to build opinions and arguments of their own. Here, however, I want to discuss the ways the text may also perpetuate notions of individual injury and discipline a Western gaze. I focus on the section dedicated to "Human Rights: Trafficking of Women and Children and Forced Child Labor" in order to illustrate some of the way ways the text represents violence. There are ten readings and two testimonies in the chapter. The ten readings include: three op-eds from *The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Independent;* one public policy magazine article; advocacy statements from Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, and Global Exchange; and three academic articles, two of which are from medical journals. Of the ten readings in this section, not one places the trafficking of women within a specific geographical context; the readings themselves include examples ranging from Eastern Europe, to China, to Central Africa, but together they suggest that trafficking and forced labor are universal problems endemic to the developing world and disconnected from imperial histories or the pressures of global capitalism.

This textbook section is not only characteristic of the work global multiculturalism does to decontextualize and universalize particularized instances of

global violence, but it also works to model a disciplining, western gaze for undergraduates. With articles from *The New York Times, The Independent*, and Human Rights Watch, among other western commentators, these articles turn the stories, experiences, and bodies of trafficked women and child laborers into subjects disciplined by a western gaze and the human rights regime. NGO's and reporters declare themselves global citizens—with a powerful moral (and material) authority—in part because they claim the authority to critique the treatment of third-world subjects. Their institutions subsume these subjects into a global citizenry and take hold of their stories for the sake of a social cause, publication, or education. In turn, students may also be encouraged to adopt the logics of liberalism under the guise of global multiculturalism's supposedly inclusive pedagogies, ultimately reproducing the technologies of power such pedagogies purport to resist.

The same section of *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing* also includes two testimonies under the subheading "International Voices" titled "Testimony of a Child Domestic Worker in Zambia" and "Testimony of a Trafficked Woman in the Sex Trade." That these testimonies are set off from the other essays in the section works to reinforce a logic of identity and difference. Third-world victims testify to their own experiences, while western onlookers comment, critique, and theorize about the experiences of these distant others. Yet, often these testimonies have already been crafted to suit the discursive expectations of a western audience. Leigh Gilmore, writing about the limits of life writing, has argued that the human rights regime requires testifiers to let their stories stand in for others, all the while representing themselves as unique. In cases of human rights testimony, individualism and universalism are two sides of the same

coin; both discursively require decontextualization. In order to gain intelligibility and ultimately redress, a survivor must highlight the individual nature of her experiences to prove the veracity of her testimony and point to the uniquely atrocious nature of the abuses she suffered. At the same time, she must also make sure that her testimony conforms to the official account and tells the same story as the other testifiers. While the textbook's demarcated sections suggest that these testimonies are "authentic" texts—which require interpretation by western commentators—the nature of testimony itself often divorces text from context, simultaneously reinforcing notions of individual injury—as opposed to structural violence—and interchangeable "third-world" subjects.

In this way, global multiculturalism participates in a circular production of discourse about violence. The same logic that produces global multiculturalism within the classroom also seems to inform, in the case of this textbook, the production of the testimonies that become canonized within the global multicultural curriculum. By reproducing testimony already constrained by the imagined presence of a western audience, this textbook produces the illusion of authenticity using texts that have already been coded by western, rights discourses.

The testimonies reproduced in *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing* are already meant for western audiences, yet the textbook positions them as examples of "Third World" "authentic voices." These testimonies, accompanied by western commentaries, are then used to train Western political subjects, who, in turn, reproduce the discursive expectations that constrain such testimonies in the first place. This circularity not only reproduces liberal ideologies, but at each step, the "aura" of authenticity offers a lure, the promise of empathy, which keeps the circle going. All the

while, this empathy tends to reaffirm the distance between the western student and the "Third World victim," regulating the voyeuristic consumption of trauma and ultimately allowing students to reaffirm the normalness of their own lived experiences within the predictable dichotomies of identity and difference.

The circularity contained within the discursive production of difference in the curricula of global multiculturalism is precisely the problem Edward Said confronts and unpacks in *Orientalism*. Said argues that what "gave the Orientalist's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West" (40). In the same vein, the "Third World" is often legible in the classroom only insofar as it is intelligible within the logic of liberalism. Global multiculturalism creates the "Third World" within the walls of U.S classrooms and on the pages of its textbooks and then trains students to discipline—from a distance—the subjects it produces. As with Orientalism, a study of global multiculturalism reveals less about the "Third World," than it does about the educational and scholarly institutions that project their disciplining fantasies onto the screen of the "developing world."

Composition has utilized examples of trauma and violence as evidence in the personal writing debates for decades, so in some ways, the deployment of violence discourses to contest or justify the current ideological framework is not a departure from previous scholarly trends. As in the scholarship of the personal writing debates, violence—within the context of global multiculturalism—is figured as apolitical and autobiographical. Take again the textbook that anthologizes two "international" testimonies followed by decontextualized, western commentary. Here, violence is figured

as something that happens to women and children. The pairing of the testimonies with the authorizing western—mostly male—commentators strips them of any political valence. The western commentators are the advocacy journalists, the authorizing witnesses, and the cultivators of empathy; "Third World" testimony becomes the evidence upon which they can build the appearance of political engagement (Whitlock, 156). Thus, both the genre of testimony and the very experiences of the testifiers are positioned as evidence and raw affective material; neither autobiographical texts nor their vulnerable authors are understood to be making theoretical or political interventions.

Composition scholarship has not come to a consensus about the effects of the "global turn," but by considering how violence might be figured in the curricular efforts of global multiculturalism, we have an opportunity to consider how we, as teachers of writing, position students in relation to this discursive and potentially depoliticizing framework. Do we ask students to be the witnesses to global violence, exploitation, and poverty? Do we ask them to be the Western mediators and consumers of Third World suffering? Do we impose on them, through the mechanisms of university discourse, the necessity of accommodating themselves to the affective circuitry and circularity that sustains global inequality? In the following chapters, I explore how students at an elite U.S. university think about violence, and how they are positioned in and by a violent world, in their writing, and in their talk about their writing.

Chapter Two

Method: Approaches to Students' Discourse on Writing about Violence

Recent scholarship in the fields of transnational feminisms, human rights, and testimonial studies identifies institutions—the courtroom, publishing industry, human rights tribunal, and the nation-state—as crucial sites for studying the (re)production of violence discourses. My project contributes to this focus by turning attention to the university as an institutional site for the production of violence discourses, and by describing and analyzing the discursive terrains university students traverse when they speak, read, and write about violence. I call upon this same scholarship to articulate the ways in which discourses of violence are governed by "regimes of intelligibility" that help determine which violences and subjectivities are allowed into "speakability" within the context of the university and the college classroom (Butler).

While testimonial studies is largely concerned with first-hand witnessing and experiencing of violence, it has provided a useful starting place for considering how representations of violence cannot be divorced from the institutional logics within which they are offered. For instance, Leigh Gilmore explains that "testimony refers not only to bearing witness, but to the protocols in which it must be offered" (5). Gilmore offers a critical departure from the Holocaust Studies understanding of testimonial discourse by suggesting that testimony is never an unmediated reflection of an individual testifier's unconscious or repressed memory. Rather, by Gilmore's definition, testimony is

produced by and produces the social rules – or protocols — that govern it. Likewise, students' discursive engagements with violence are produced by and productive of university discursive protocols. Therefore, I have undertaken a study in which I analyze not only students' writing about violence, but also importantly the ways they talk about that writing. This allows me to consider not only how the university might shape students' discursive engagements with violence, but also how students' talk about violence helps shape the university.

Anne Cubilie and Carl Good have noted that testimonial studies tends to either theorize testimonial speech as a working through of psychic trauma or as political intervention. Scholarship that insists that testimony has a "predetermined political orientation or is encountered only in contexts that work clearly within the goals of a redemptive politics or ethics" can also ignore the discursive terrain that testimony covers (6). Cubilie and Good argue that testimony should not be defined by what listeners and critics do with it. Rather, testimony should be understood as discourse that acts on speakers and listeners. The ways in which testimonial discourse functions often reveal less about the events being described and more about the conditions that allow some testimony to affect speakers and listeners, certain testifiers to be recognized, and certain subjectivities to emerge.

A similar argument can be made about student writing about violence. Critiques of students' personal writing about violence present a similar either/or dichotomy; student writing about violence is often understood as either therapeutic or political, but rarely neither or both. This scholarly and pedagogical conception of students' discursive engagements with violence emerges out of an institutional context that has already

determined the bounds of appropriate or expected student writing about violence. Thus, if testimony reveals the conditions that allow some testimonies to exert influence and some subjectivities to emerge, a similar argument might be made about student writing on violence. While previous scholarship has been concerned with how instructors have responded to student writing about violence, this project attempts to expand the boundaries of those expectations by presenting students' contingent, contextual, and multiple discursive engagements with violence, while also noting the limits of those engagements.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler aligns Foucault's "regime of truth" with what she calls a "regime of intelligibility." This is a helpful concept through which to examine discourses of violence, because it acknowledges that it is possible – but risky - to produce discourse that works outside of the standard protocols. Butler's position aligns with the theoretical stance of this study; it acknowledges that university discursive protocols—and I would add, students' *perceptions* of these protocols—play a role in shaping how students speak and write about violence. At the same time, it affords student writers some agency, by suggesting that university discursive protocols aren't fully determinative of students' speech and writing. Butler explains that "the very terms…by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms…" (21). While students' discursive engagements within the university and the writing classroom are shaped by social norms, they also have the potential to establish new ones. Butler's theorization also aligns with the ethical stakes of this project, compelling me to consider the ways that both conforming to the regime of intelligibility (by adopting the rules of an authorized

testimonial protocol) and resisting it may come at a cost to students. By focusing primarily on students' talk about their writing, rather than simply the writing itself, my analysis works to iluminate students' often-invisible writing practices. This focus on student talk allows me to expand the expectations of writing about violence that help shape the regime of intelligibility, while simultaneously considering which definitions of violence, student subjectivities, and writing practices students believe are "allowed into speakability."

Students who write about violence might be at particular risk for having their writing or experiences misread, making the focus on student talk even more essential. Richard Murphy's oft-cited essay on the risks of assigning the personal essay helps provide a brief example of how attention to students' behind-the-scenes writing practices can shed light on—and potentially expand—university discursive protocols and make intelligible students' writing about violence. Murphy begins by confessing that he had initially doubted the veracity of a student essay about anorexia. He believed that the essay's sentimental writing sounded more like a teen magazine and its fragmented structure led him to believe it had been plagiarized. It is not until the end of the term, when he was reading his students' journals that Murphy discovered that this student had not plagiarized this essay, for her journal revealed that she had been writing about her own struggle with anorexia all term. Despite Murphy's initial misreading, his article makes a compelling case for studying the writing practices and discourses of students engaged with issues of violence. In Murphy's case, he had access to the student's prewriting exercises, a writing conference, and the other writing she produced. Together,

these materials pushed Murphy to revise his judgment of his student's essay and subjectivity and to acknowledge the power he had to render them unintelligible.

Some of the students I interviewed reported being misread in ways that resemble Murphy's account. In some cases, violence that students described as ordinary during an interview was understood as exceptional by their peers. In other cases, violence that students described as structural was understood by their instructors as individually injurious. In taking an ethnographic approach to this project, I read the same essays that students' teachers and peers had access to, but I also listened to students *talk* about their writing. Through this talk, I was exposed to the largely invisible processes through which these students understood themselves as writing subjects. Just as Murphy's reading of his student's journal gave him new ways to interpret her essay and subjectivity, analyzing students' talk about writing and violence has provided me with new ways to interpret student writing about violence and the contexts in which they produce this writing.

Research Design and Method

Previous scholarship on student writing about violence has tended to focus exclusively on students' writing and instructors' encounters with that writing. In order to reveal the range, complexity, and contingency of student writing about violence, this study focuses on students' often-unheard talk about their composition practices, in addition to writing itself. I have analyzed twenty-six student essays about violence, twenty-six interviews with the students themselves, and three group discussions. In adopting an ethnographic approach, I illuminate students' behind-the-scenes writing

practices and contribute qualitative data to conversations about student writing that tend to focus on anecdotal cases.

Students' talk and writing are at the center of this dissertation. I was continually impressed by students' ethical insights, sense of social responsibility, and theoretical savvy. Throughout the dissertation, I put students' talk in conversation with existing scholarship. In some cases this means that students' words directly contradict those of an established scholar, while in other cases students and scholars are in alignment. I draw on this scholarship not to undermine the authority of the participants, but to elevate it—to suggest that students' voices should be an integral part of composition scholarship.

Research Questions

In response to a scholarly legacy that often conflates personal writing and writing about violence, I designed a study that would expose me to a range of student writing about violence. The question that initially drove this design was, quite simply, how, why and under what circumstances are students writing essays about violence? The data I collected allowed me to fine-tune my research question as I spoke with students, read their essays, and began to engage in analysis. Eventually, I chose to narrow my focus on three particular issues: students' understandings of violence, the role of experience in students' writing about violence, and discrepancies between student writing about violence and their talk about that writing. My study was eventually guided by the following questions: What do students' discourses about writing and violence reveal about their definitions of violence and its representations? How do students' appeals to experience shape their writing about violence and how are their experiences shaped by

their writing? What understandings of writing, violence, and the university emerge through attending to student talk on writing about violence?

Research Participants and Recruitment

The students featured in this dissertation represent a mere fraction of the students writing about violence at the University of Michigan and an even smaller fraction of the college students who engage with these issues in the U.S. Students self-selected to participate in this study and their reported motivations to participate included: interest in the causes of violence, curiosity about qualitative methods, the desire to improve writing instruction at Michigan, pride in their essay, service to their community, and the desire to talk with someone who shared their passion and interests. Throughout the data collection phase of the study, I was struck by the participants' maturity, theoretical acumen, social engagement, and intelligence. More than once, I found myself thinking that the study participants seemed more engaged than many of my own students; I worried that the sophistication of my participants would comprise the validity of my findings. While there is no doubt that self-selectivity is a factor, I also think the research context invited a certain kind of engagement from students; it allowed all participants—even those who do not consider themselves to be strong writers or even successful students—to act as experts on writing, understandings of violence, and their own educations. This study makes no claims about what the majority of college students write, think, or experience; instead, it reveals that student writing about violence is varied, contingent, and unpredictable.

The twenty-six participants in this study were all recruited in either the summer or fall of 2009. During this time period, I visited over thirty writing-intensive classes at the University of Michigan. While participants were welcome to share essays from any university course, I recruited in writing classes for two reasons. As a member of the writing program community I had access to these courses; I was able to get permission from the writing program director, knew a number of the instructors, and could make a case for the importance of the research. Second, it meant that participants had already developed a vocabulary for discussing their writing process and practices and had given some thought to the ways the university and writing classroom shaped their approach to writing.

In each class that I visited, I described the purpose of my study and the requirements for participation. The qualifications for enrollment in the study included: participants must be eighteen or older; they must be willing to participate in an initial interview, discussion group, and an exit interview; participants must have written an essay about violence for a University of Michigan course and be willing to share that essay with me. I made a few other points clear in my recruitment visit. Participants could choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Their participation would remain totally anonymous, and their identities would be disguised. Finally, I made clear that I was not approaching the study with a predetermined definition of violence or of writing about violence. If students believed that they had written an essay about violence, they were welcome to participate.

This last stipulation meant that I received a wide range of essay topics and genres. Students brought in essays about Darfur, racial profiling, Josef Mengele, urban school

violence, a grandmother's experience in Auschwitz, sex trafficking in Russia, and military history, to name a few of the topics. They'd written research essays, personal narratives, literary analyses, and persuasive essays. They produced these essays for writing classes, psychology classes, history courses, and ethnic studies classes. My openness to definition resulted in a number of surprises. For example, three participants had written essays about military history for very traditional history courses; I realized that I had been largely focused on students' discursive engagements with relatively contemporary instances of violence. Yet, the writing of these three students has helped me articulate the ways that writing about violence has been a part of university curricula long before the introduction of global multicultural curricula. These students' engagements with violence discourses are gendered and canonized in some very different ways than those of the students writing about racial profiling or rape-warfare.

I also spoke with a number of students who pushed at the boundaries of violence's definitions. For some students this meant taking on issues of social import linked to discrimination, like racial profiling; these students carefully articulated the links between structural violence and physical violence. Other students pushed at the boundaries in different ways, discussing sports rivalries or drinking on campus; these students were often more self-conscious about their participation, worrying that the issues they had written about weren't serious enough for the study. Yet, these students were often also articulate about the ways certain social environments can foster or produce everyday violence. These essays that probe the boundaries of violence all share a sense of site-specificity. Whereas some students wrote about violence experienced by distant others, each of these students made links between violence and the contexts of their own lives; in

some cases this meant their experiences with discrimination and in other cases, this meant experiences with binge drinking.

Students' racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and class identifications often bore some relationship to how they defined violence and the issues they chose to write about. As such, I attempted to recruit as diverse a participant pool as possible. This was difficult for a variety of reasons. The diversity of University of Michigan's writing courses is limited first, by the range of diversity present at the university itself and second, by the fact that many of the university's "under-prepared" students take their courses in the Comprehensive Studies Program; this program did not allow me to recruit in their classes. Of the twenty-six students that I did successfully recruit, eleven are male and fifteen are female. Six are students of color. Of the twenty white participants, eight reported that their ethnic or religious backgrounds significantly impacted how they define and write about violence; a number of these students also reported experiencing discrimination as a result of their immigration status, ethnicity, or religion. The following table presents each participant, along with his or her academic year at the time of the interview, paper topic, course the paper was written for, and the identity categories they mentioned in the interview. This table is meant to provide a snapshot of this study's scope, not to invite assumptions about the relationships between these various data points. Indeed, later chapters suggest that there is no obvious or easy correlation between students' racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and class identifications and their writing practices, topics, definitions, or school congruence. Participants are listed in the order in which they were interviewed; where more than one course and essay topic are listed, the student brought more than one essay to the interview.

Table 1: Study Participants

	Essay Topic	**Essay Genre**	**Course**	**Self-Identifications**
Amoi	Study abroad: Issues of race and gender	Creative Nonfiction	English	Female, African American
Melisa	Racial Profiling	Persuasion	English: fye	Female, Bosnian Refugee
Lauren	Israel and Palestine politics Spain & the ETA	Reflection Research Essay	Political Science Political Science	Female, White, Jewish
Marcy	Zimbardo prison test Case study: Down's Syndrome	Demonstrating knowledge Demonstrating knowledge	Psychology Psychology	Female, White
Katie	School violence in Detroit	Reflection	Fine Art: service learning	Female, White
Jessica	Family conflict	Creative nonfiction	English	Female, Asian
Chelsea	Murder of George Tiller	Persuasive letter	English	Female, African American, Baptist
Michael	Violence in Darfur	Argument/analysis	History	Male, White
Erik	Rape in *Streetcar Named Desire*	Comparative analysis	Drama	Male, White
Carly	Grandmother's experience during WWII	Reflection	Slavic Studies	Female, White, Polish decent
Morissa	Joseph Mengele Survival in Auschwitz	Research Essay Lit. Analysis	Dutch Studies	Female, White, Jewish

Chris	Military history /Greece	Synthesis	Classical Civilizations	Male, Asian
Sam	Rwanda	Rhetorical analysis	English	Male, White, Jewish
Jake	Spartan society	Synthesis	Classical Civilizations	Male, White
Amanda	Sexual violence	Literary analysis	English: fye	Female, White
Max	Football rivalry	Creative nonfiction	English	Male, White
Allison	Violence in hockey	Persuasion	English	Female, White
Sara	Child abuse	Personal narrative	English	Female, White
Ben	Drinking on campus	Persuasion	English	Male, White, Jewish
Karen	School shootings	Argument/multi genre	English: fye	Female, South Asian
Tim	Racial profiling	Argument	English: fye	Male, White
Jared	Anti-discrimination policies Apocalypse Now	Argument Film review	English: fye	Male, White
Peter	Greco-Persian Wars	Research/analysis	History	Male, White, Russian Orthodox
Shaun	Urban Gun Violence	Personal Narrative	English: Practicum	Male, African American
Liz	Zimbardo Prison	Demonstrating Knowledge	Psychology	Female, White
Ermira	Domestic Abuse	Personal Narrative	English: fye	Female, White, Albanian

After presenting my study to a class, I passed around a written description of the project and a slip of paper on which interested students could provide contact information and other students could simply acknowledge that they were uninterested or ineligible. This way, there was no way for the instructor, the other students, or me to know who had signed up. Approximately eighty students expressed initial interest in the study; out of that pool, twenty-six actually came in for an interview. I never heard from a number of the students who initially expressed interest. Of the students I did hear from, most reported that they didn't think they had time to participate in the study, though there were surely other factors, as well. A thirty percent participation rate seems reasonable for busy college students, though the relatively high number (a third of each writing class) of students who thought they were eligible may be worth further investigation. In the interviews, many students referenced my visit to their class; hearing about the study in person seems to have given a number of the students additional encouragement to participate.

Interviews

All twenty-six volunteers participated in an initial interview and each shared a copy of the paper they had written about violence. I used a semi-structured interview process. I prepared a set of interview questions oriented around the students' essays. The questions asked students to discuss their writing process and practices, the course, their perceptions of audience, responses from readers, and the exigencies of their writing. While these questions, along with students' essays, gave the interviews some structure, I worked to make sure they did not overly-constrain students' speech. Often, participants

used these questions as launching points to discuss issues and experiences that mattered to them. For some participants, this meant sharing previous writing experiences and for others this meant sharing previous experiences with violence. Often, students found themselves describing theories about violence or writing that they had never expressed before. Thus, this approach allowed students to discuss and contextualize their writing on their own terms; it provided me with a lens through which to approach analysis of their essays; and it also gave students an opportunity to be metacognitive about their learning experiences and writing practices.

I wanted interview participants to feel as if they had power and authority throughout the research process. Therefore, it was important to adopt an interactional approach to the interview that gave students space to speak about the issues and experiences that were important to them, without pushing them to discuss issues they did not feel comfortable sharing. At the same time, there is no doubt that my presence shaped the nature of our conversations. As a privileged, white, female researcher and instructor in the English Department Writing Program, I knew my own positioning would work to determine who chose to participate in the study and what students might say. And yet, I was not fully prepared for the nuanced ways meaning would be co-constructed in these interview settings. For example, two of the women who self-identified as Jewish talked about feeling betrayed by their Hebrew school educations once they got to college and learned more about Jewish history. For them, learning and writing about violence became a way to connect in complex ways with a Jewish heritage that had been presented to them in childhood as simple and morally straightforward. I had a very similar experience as an

undergraduate. I nodded vigorously as they spoke about these experiences and follow-up questions came to me easily.

In other cases, my position as a researcher who cared about issues of violence seemed to impact the co-construction of the interview. A number of the students I spoke with cared passionately about issues of social justice and regularly indexed me as politically like-minded. For example, one participant consistently characterized the university, and writing courses, as reproductive of structural violence and inequities. It was not unreasonable of this student to intuit that I might be sympathetic to this argument; it is notable, though, that in this instance my positionality as a writing instructor was superseded by my role as a researcher about violence.

Deborah Brandt has noted that interviewees may tailor their responses to what they believe the interviewer wants to hear. This was undoubtedly true, but just as the participants responded to their interpretations of my expectations, politics, and identities, I was often doing the same with theirs. Thus, these interviews cannot represent some "truth" about students' experiences or writing practices. Instead, I draw on them to consider which subjectivities, writing practices, and definitions of violence students have available to them; to ask why they made the particular indexical, performative, or narrative choices they did in the context of the interview; and to consider what these choices might reveal in relation to the students' essays and the larger institutional logics of the university. The interviews I present are not a literal depiction of each student's writing practices; instead, I simply offer a series of accounts produced for a particular audience and purpose. In analyzing these accounts, I have tried to acknowledge the ways

my position and those of my participants work together to co-construct a particular version of each student's discursive engagements with violence.

Focus Groups

Of the twenty-six study volunteers, twelve were available to participate in discussion groups. Initially, I had conceived of these discussion groups as a way to triangulate my data, to gain a sense of how students talked about writing and violence when I was not their only interlocutor. The discussion groups were useful for this purpose; they helped me see how students positioned themselves in relation to one another, which was sometimes different from how they positioned themselves in relation to me. The discussion groups also provided valuable insight into how students link issues of violence with their everyday lives. The discussion group participants did not know one another before entering into their shared conversations and they continually relied on—and pushed against—common experiences, such as being of the same generation and being students at the University of Michigan. I did minimal facilitating of these conversations, so the participants largely directed them. Without direction from me, each of the three groups' conversations eventually crystallized around a single driving issue. One group talked about their shifting perceptions of violence and race after 9/ll; another group focused on their impressions of good academic writing and the relationship that such impressions bore to writing about violence; a third group talked about sexual assault and violence on campus and its relationship to their in-class learning about violence. These conversations were very much determined by the experiences, knowledges, and subjectivities of the discussion group participants. I worked to balance each group's

composition in terms of race and gender, while also incorporating a range of essay topics; however, scheduling the focus groups was a difficult task. Participants cancelled at the last minute or didn't show up at all, impacting my careful construction of each group. The group that discussed sexual assault and violence on campus, for example, was made up of three women who suggested that they would have been unlikely to have the same conversation if men had been present. While the largely random groupings of students foreclosed my attempts to make each group as representational of the larger study as possible, it opened up other avenues of exploration and conversation.

The focus group data has helped me elaborate theories of how students create meanings around violence through interaction and talk in ways that much more closely resemble the work they do in classrooms. Occasionally, participants pushed one another to elaborate on their definitions of violence and make sense of their writing experiences in ways that I hadn't felt authorized to in the interviews; they created and explored disagreement. More often, however, the focus group conversations privileged politeness, minimized conflict, and disguised difference. In many ways, the focus group data opened up more questions than I am able to answer within the scope of this particular project, particularly about how students interact with one another around issues of violence. Thus, I have used the focus group data largely to bolster or complicate my analysis of the interviews. More research will be necessary before I can look at it on its own terms.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed (by me and by a third party service) so that I could analyze interview data in written form. The transcriptions are verbatim but do not include

markers of accent or dialect. Pauses are indicated by a dash, but I did not include any marks for the length of the pauses. I chose this method for a number of reasons. This study is not concerned with grammatical structures, pronunciation, or dialect. One of the goals of this study is to treat students' discourse and writing as meaningful texts in the study of writing about violence. Rendering student discourse in a way that is easy to read and resembles published texts about violence helps to demonstrate that student discourse about violence is theoretically savvy and worthy of sustained attention. At times, this transcription method didn't satisfactorily communicate students' intonations or hesitations in making sense of a particular utterance. In these cases, I would listen to the audio again and add in the pauses or hesitations necessary to make full sense of the utterance.

Thematic Coding

I began my analysis by utilizing thematic coding. I selected five interviews that represented a range of student backgrounds, as well as paper topics and genres. These were also the interviews that most directly responded to my research questions in the sense that they complicated, contradicted, and expanded my sense of how and why students write academic essays about violence. With each of these interviews, I used a process of "open coding," in which I was "breaking data apart and delineating concepts" (Straus and Corbin, 195). I used in vivo codes—the words used by interviewees—whenever possible. An early analysis of my interview with Amoi included codes like: "topic choice" "invalidation" and "stigmatized identity" An early analysis of my

interview with Melisa included codes like: “topic choice” “emotion” and “oppression.” All of these are words that students themselves used in the interviews.

Next, I began to compare these codes in order to determine their dimensions and properties and connect them according to higher-level categories. For example, by looking at all of the interview segments labeled “topic choice,” I could see that most students described why they had chosen their topic, rather than simply describing their paper. I also noticed that students tended to appeal to experience in these descriptions. Furthermore, I began to identify codes that, while not identical, could be related like “stigmatized identity” and “oppression.” Returning to the transcripts, I first elaborated my analysis within each interview. In Amoi’s case, I began with the utterances in which she most explicitly references the concept of stigmatized identity and expanded my code to the following concept: A stigmatized identity provides access to and knowledge about structures of violence. Next, I recoded the interview to see if this elaborated concept needed revision or nuance; in fact, I found a number of other moments in the interview text that confirmed this concept. I followed the same procedure with Melisa’s interview and expanded the code “oppression” to the concept: Experiences with oppression lead to courageous writing. Next, I tried to identify what these concepts might have in common, determining that both students viewed experiences with structural violence as a writing resource. I recoded the other three interviews in light of this concept and found confirming examples in each interview. At the same time, I was careful not to erase the differences between each student’s description of this phenomenon; while they may share the perception that experiences with structural violence are a writing resource, these experiences and their perceptions of them are quite varied.

At this point, I organized the concepts I had identified into categories and subcategories. For example, the concept of topic choice and the concept of structural violence as a writing resource both rely on the larger observation that students appeal to experience to make sense of their writing choices. Thus, experience became a major category of analysis while topic choice and experience with structural violence were subcategories that helped define the dimensions and properties of the larger category of experience. This process helped me to identify the three major categories around which I would structure each analysis chapter: definitions of violence, experience, and the relationship between talk and writing. These concepts and categories continued to shift and become more nuanced as I coded the rest of the interviews. I also found a number of counterexamples in this process. Some of these counterexamples helped further define concepts. For example, I had to account for a participant who disavowed any experience with structural violence.

Discourse Analysis

I compared utterances in order to derive thematic codes, which helped me draw out patterns within and across students' discursive engagements with violence. I turned, however, to discourse analysis to reanimate the contradictory, varied, and situated nature of students' talk. I found that the thematic coding seemed to flatten out differences between students' accounts of violence and their own experiences. For example, Lauren's account of her experience with structural violence entailed coming to terms with the way her family's attitudes toward Israel might contribute to US policies that perpetuate the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Meanwhile, Melisa's account explored her experiences

with racial profiling and deportation within her family. While thematic coding helped me see that both students were drawing on experiences with structural violence as resources when they wrote their essays, discourse analysis was necessary for drawing out the distinctions between the two students' experiences with structural violence. Discourse analysis also helped me to explore the contradictions within an individual student's talk. A single interview often included multiple and competing definitions of violence, for example; discourse analysis helped me to identify the contradictions, the shifting ideologies that informed them, and the ways in which the interactional context of the interview might help to produce those definitions. While the process of thematic analysis helped me to identify salient patterns in student talk, most of the analysis is comprised of close readings of student discourse. I selected utterances to analyze that were either especially representative of a particular theme or complicated the theme in illustrative ways.

Interpretative Repertoires

One valuable resource for approaching the discourse analysis of the interviews was Edley and Wetherell's theorization of interpretative repertoires, which are "descriptions and evaluations distinguished by familiar clichés, commonplaces, tropes and characterizations of actors and situations" (Edley and Wetherell, 443). While I do identify some interpretative repertoires in student discourse, it was ultimately Edley and Wetherell's theoretical approach to studying discourse that I found most valuable. Considering the relationship between local instances of talk and larger cultural discourses allowed me to attend to "the ideological thrust of discourse" by focusing "on

contradictions, dilemmas and complex multi-faceted positionings of self and other which can be mobilized in multiple rhetorical directions with varying consequences for social relations" (Edley and Wetherell, 441). This theorization of discourse allowed me to attend to the ways students positioned themselves and me within the interactional context of the interview, the ways they positioned themselves in relation to the essays they had written, and the way they positioned themselves within their definitions of violence. This theorization of discourse also gave me a lens through which I could identify and explore the ideological consequences of particular utterances. My analysis was strengthened not only by considering the rhetorical use-value of a particular utterance within the immediate context of the interview, but also by considering the theoretical stakes an utterance reflects.

When I did analyze a particular interpretative repertoire, such as "no words can express violence," I considered why that repertoire might have use-value within the interactional context of the interview and in relation to students' writing and experience. At the same time, I considered the shared-sense-making resources available to students within the institutional logic of the university.

I offer an example here, drawn from my pilot study that demonstrates how I identified the interpretative repertoires students drew on in our conversations and the approach toward discourse analysis I took to examine them. Jess is explaining that the paper she wrote about the relationship between violence against animals and violence against women hit close to home. When I asked her to describe what she meant by this she explained:

> I guess a lot of the time I was writing it…I guess I was quite an angry person as I wrote this especially the more that I went along. I was like, hey

> I'm being oppressed [both laugh] I'm being oppressed. [Both laugh]. And I think my boyfriend at the time got the brunt of that, you know? I couldn't really explain it to him, just like mennnn, oppression, but ah, yeah, going back to think about that I was pretty annoyed and I don't know, kind of walked around town just kinda seeing all of these places looking at all of these scantily clad models and saying oppression. Oppression. Blah, blah. But I don't know after just kind of calming down saying well, what you're doing is trying to raise awareness you know of these issues just by writing this paper, cause I mean you're not just showing the connection to the vegetarianism but also to feminism and you're bringing up feminist implications.

In this utterance, Jess relies on two competing interpretative repertoires: that violence cannot be expressed in language and that writing about violence is socially responsible. We can see the first interpretative repertoire operating when she says she "couldn't really explain it" to her boyfriend and again when she says "blah, blah." The second repertoire—that writing about violence is socially responsible—emerges at the end of the utterance when she says she's "trying to raise awareness" by writing the paper.

In Jess's description, the places of her everyday life took on the full range of patriarchy's historicity, its "encoded memory" (Butler, 36). The impact was strong enough to produce feelings of anger and leave Jess – at least briefly – without the tools to describe her experience. At the same time, Jess is calmed by the process of writing about the issues that made her angry, because it will help to "raise awareness."

Judith Butler argues that while injurious speech is hurtful, silence can work to lock terms in place, "preserving their power to injure" (38). Keeping injurious terms unsayble arrests "the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose" (38). Butler's theory helps us see that Jess is interested in articulating the historic injury of patriarchy—by referencing her speechlessness—and in reworking that experience. In the second half of this excerpt, Jess re-presents as calming a researching

and writing experience that she initially characterized as victimizing and hurtful. When Jess explains that she eventually calmed down by focusing on "trying to raise awareness" with her paper and "bringing up feminist implications," she deemphasizes the injurious nature of her writing experience. She suggests instead, that it was socially necessary and personally meaningful to rework this experience of injury.

Throughout the project, I draw on scholarship interested in the relationship between writing and violence to identify the interpretative repertoires at play in students' discourse. Making this connection between Judith Butler's theory on injurious speech and Jess's discourse allows me to both identify the theoretical stakes of Jess's discourse and make sense of what seem to be two competing interpretative repertoires. I also considered the commonplaces and tropes that might help shape students' interpretative repertoires. For example, Jess could be drawing on any number of common tropes ranging from the everyday—being too upset to talk—to more extreme examples where, for instance, survivors of trauma repress, and are literally unable to talk about, traumatic experiences. When Jess draws on the interpretative repertoire of speechlessness, she emphasizes the emotionally meaningful aspect of this experience, differentiating it from other kinds of writing assignments.

While the interpretative repertoires that Jess draws from appear to be competing—how can you be unable to express violence in language and find writing about violence to be personally meaningful? —both repertoires have rhetorical use value within our conversation. By saying that she was unable to explain her experience to her boyfriend, Jess emphasizes that researching her paper was an emotionally meaningful experience and that these were emotions her boyfriend didn't have the experiential

resources to understand. By presenting writing about violence as both personally calming and socially meaningful, Jess is able to position herself as a capable writer and a social activist. She is "raising awareness," "showing the connections," and revealing "feminist implications." All of these activities work to index her as a member of an academic discourse community. Jess's sense that it is important to temper her anger with proof reveals that she understands the ways that anger, frustration, and perhaps emotion in general, have questionable status within the institutional frameworks of the university and academic discourse. Jess's emphasis on raising awareness picks up on another common trope: that social activists, even angry ones, must talk about difficult issues in order to educate others.

Indexicality

In keeping with the notion that analyzing discourse allows me to consider both the local organization of talk and broader discursive resources on which participants draw, theorizations of indexicality have been another important resource for my analysis. I found that students are constantly negotiating the relationships among their writing, their experiences, their subjectivities, and myself. It was important to have an analytical tool that allowed me to consider the identity work students did when writing academic essays about violence, when discussing this writing with me, and in considering how students' racial, gender, and class self-identifications are negotiated in relation to institutional protocols, their writing practices, and definitions of violence. Bucholtz and Hall's indexicality principle outlines some of the different linguistic means whereby identity is discursively produced:

> Identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups. (594)

Bucholtz and Hall's principle helped shape the epistemologies with which I approached a consideration of how students' identity relations might operate in discourse. A theory of indexicality not only helped me to identify the identity relations at play in the interviews, but it also helped me to identify the consequences of that indexing.

Data drawn from my pilot study also helps illustrate how I approached analysis of the interviews informed by the indexicality principle. In Jess's discourse about her writing process, she moves through many subject positions, frequently naming her position or defining it relationally. When I asked if Jess had been interested in women's issues before the class, she answered:

> You know, it was only when that awareness was kind of raised, you know, that I was like, "yeah, yeah," you know? "Hey, I am a woman." These issues are very pertinent to me, you know, even the ones that I haven't dealt with personally, I could certainly begin to empathize with more.

When Jess says "Hey, I am a woman" she is overtly claiming the identity category woman. Yet, she does very little work – in this moment and throughout the interview – to explicitly clarify the dimensions of that identity category. A thematic analysis of the interview reveals that, for Jess, one of the most salient elements of the category "woman" is the experience of oppression. Yet, the indexicality principle helps to reveal that Jess's definition of "woman" is not as expansive as she claims. Jess's repeated use of "you

know" indexes me as part of the same "woman" identity category (which is part of the reason Jess is able to avoid further defining this identity), but the experience she wants me to identify with is not one of oppression, but of coming to awareness. That Jess and I are both white women at an elite academic institution suggests that "aware women" also have race, class, and educational privilege in Jess's account. Jess makes a distinction between women who are aware and the women who have experiences that she hasn't "dealt with personally," but can "empathize with." Her use of the word "empathy" helps to reinforce the distance between our privileged status as "aware" women and the women whose experiences she can only empathize with.

Indexicality as a concept helps me to show that while indexing is relational and context-specific, it also has consequences not only for how students understand themselves, but for the groups and individuals that students align themselves with and against. In Jess's case, this means that the academic context of her writing, as well as my presence, contribute to her indexing herself as a woman who recognizes the workings of patriarchy. This indexing has consequences, for it privileges a particular and limited definition of womanhood.

Textual Analysis

The data I analyzed also included student essays. I analyzed these essays only after analyzing the interview data for a few reasons. I wanted to resist any temptations to evaluate student essays; this study is about how, why, and under what circumstances students write essays about violence, not necessarily about the effectiveness of this writing. Indeed, students often spoke about their writing practices and definitions of

violence with a theoretical acumen that their essays don't always convey. This also allowed me to approach my analysis of the student essays with the priorities of the students themselves in mind. For example, many students described having strong affective responses throughout the process of writing their essays. The essays themselves do not necessarily reveal this level of emotional engagement and had I read the essays first, I might have discounted or doubted students' accounts of their affective engagement. However, by reading the essays after completing this analysis, I was especially attuned to the ways the essays themselves appear to disguise student affect.

By design, the essays are backgrounded in both my analysis and this dissertation, for the central focus is on how students talk about their writing. I collected and read the essays to build trustworthiness into the study and they did indeed serve that purpose. I read each essay to determine whether it confirmed the descriptions students gave of their papers, writing processes, and definitions of violence. For the most part, when this was the case, I did not explicitly reference them in my analysis. I returned to the essays frequently as I analyzed the interviews when new issues of trustworthiness were raised. For example, one student shared a paper she wrote about her grandmother's experience as a Polish orphan in Germany during World War Two. In our interview, the student never connected her Grandmother's individual experiences of violence with the larger field of violence in Poland and Germany in that period. A reading of this student's essay helped me confirm that the disconnect between individual injury and state violence present in the interview is also present in the student's paper.

In some cases, the essays and students' talk were quite different. This turned out to be a significant finding and the focus of Chapter Five. With these essays, I analyzed

the generic conventions students appeared to be adopting and the definitions of violence and experience that appear to operate in the essays. Then I would compare my findings to my analysis of the student interviews, noticing differences. Through this sort of comparative analysis, I was able to generate some theories about why the student essays and talk appeared to be so different.

Ethics

I took a number of methodological steps in an attempt to ensure that the research process was empowering and not silencing for participants.

1) *The study focused on writing practices, not the experiencing of violence.* While some of the participants did describe experiences with violence, they volunteered these stories themselves. My interview questions focused on the writing process and the essay the student brought to the interview, rather than requiring students to talk about the details, repercussions, or psychological experience of surviving or perpetrating violence. In some cases, I think my caution about compelling students to share experiences they didn't want to share may have made participants unsure of how much to share. In a few cases, it was not until I read students' essays that I became aware of the full extent of the violence they had experienced.

2) *Participation was entirely voluntary***.** Participants had to take proactive steps to participate in the study. After I visited a class, I emailed the students who had volunteered to participate to determine whether they were still interested before setting up an interview. While this extra step led to some attrition, it gave me two opportunities to explain the study and it gave students a chance to think about whether they truly wanted

to participate. I also made it clear that to participate in the study, students would have to be prepared to share their writing about violence, as well as discuss that writing process. This helped ensure that study participants were prepared to speak and write publicly about their experiences. Even after these initial steps, participants signed a confidentiality agreement and a consent form before participating. Finally, the consent form made clear that participants could withdraw from the study at any point.

3) *A high level of confidentiality was maintained***.** Another risk to participants in studies about violence is the potential compromising of their confidentiality. Given this danger, I built in several measures to ensure the confidentiality of participants: 1) participants in the focus group signed a confidentiality agreement, agreeing not to disclose identifying information about any of the other participants; 2) I removed any identifying details about participants immediately. At the same time, the consent form made clear that if I learned that they or someone else was in serious danger, I might be required to take steps.

Trustworthiness

I also built into the study a number of steps to build trustworthiness.

1) *Triangulation of Data.* While the study focuses primarily on the individual interviews I conducted with students, I used the focus groups and student essays as resources to help confirm and, when necessary, complicate my analysis.

2) *Confirming with Audio.* While I used a transcription service to transcribe my interviews, I re-listened to the audio recording for each segment of an interview that I closely analyzed.
3) *Use of Disconfirming Evidence.* After completing the initial open coding, the comparative thematic analysis, and discourse analysis, I searched for evidence within the transcripts and student essays that might disconfirm or complicate my findings.
4) *Revision of Research Questions:* I continually revised my initial research questions as my analysis took shape. For example, after experience, definitions of violence, and the differences between writing and talking about violence emerged as the most salient themes, I revised my research questions accordingly.
5) *Explicit Process:* I took careful notes throughout the research process: during the interviews, after the interviews, while I was open-coding, while I was comparing codes, and as I was using discourse analysis. In this chapter, I have attempted to make that process as transparent as possible.

Chapter Three

Partial Accounts: Students Define Violence

One of the central aims of this project is to learn more about how students define violence and how the university helps to shape these definitions. When I asked students about violence, I often asked them to explain why they thought their paper was about violence. I asked them if their understanding of violence had changed throughout the course of writing their papers. Sometimes I explicitly asked them to define violence if they hadn't done so in the course of our conversation. But, as I sifted through the utterances that make up students' attempts to define violence, I found partial and contradictory definitions, definitions that didn't appear to cohere around any consensus or easy thematization. Here are a few examples: "A lot of the time I think violence is characterized by ignorance and just blind passion." "I think that there's always some reason behind it and it's never a random act." "I just think it's any act of hatred, whether physical or emotional, with bad intentions towards anybody." "I strongly believe that violence can be unintentional." "It is part of a history of violence of other people like me and it recreates the same violence of denying someone their humanity." "Violence is an expression to me." "It's just an expression." "Violence has consequences beyond death and dying and carnage." "You can't eradicate violence completely; it can never happen."

It is not only students' own definitions of violence that seem to defy categorization, but also the issues that students wrote and talked about. Sometimes

students viewed their paper topics as about violence. In other cases, they were "connected to violence." In still other cases, they "could be seen as violence." Students shared papers about psychological experiments, school violence, racial profiling, geopolitical conflicts, individual murders, military battles, sex trafficking, violence in sports, violence in film and theater, the Holocaust, binge drinking, anti-discrimination polices, urban violence, and domestic abuse. It is no surprise that such wide-ranging writing about violence would also produce such partial and particular definitions of violence. Indeed, perhaps the most notable finding of my analysis of students' discourses of violence is that they are always partial and particular, linked closely with the instance of violence that students are writing about.

Rather than uncovering clear patterns in how students define violence, its agents, and its victims, I found two central questions that students' definitions of violence appear to cohere around: How is violence expressed? And where does violence come from? This chapter explores both of these questions, emphasizing the particular, contradictory, and partial ways in which students answer these questions across the interviews, as well as within a single conversation. This chapter, then, puts students' discourse in conversation with one another, as well as with scholarship concerned with representations, definitions, and effects of violence. At times this scholarship helps me to identify and explore the interpretative repertoires that operate in students' discourses; at other times students' discourses help call into question the universal reach of a particular theory. At other points in the chapter, students' understandings of violence are best explored by simply putting students in conversation with one another—and sometimes themselves.

Recognizing that students' understandings of violence are contingent, partial, and contradictory helps reveal that students' theorizations of violence emerge from specific social contexts. These contexts help students develop sophisticated theories of violence—and sometimes their own positionality within these theories. At the same time, their partiality emphasizes the ways in which the college classroom—and university more broadly—help shape students' very contingent understandings of violence. The flexible and fluid ways in which students adopted sometimes-contradictory understandings of violence within our conversations points to the ways that articulating their understandings of violence—in context—can afford students opportunities for reflecting on and revising these understandings. The fluidity and contingency of students' understandings of violence also suggests that most students have not developed understandings of violence that cohere to a single, coherent theorization of violence, what Eve Sedgwick has called "strong theory" (134). While students' understandings of violence often have something in common with well-known academic theories of violence, students tend to pick and choose theories that help make sense of the particular incident of violence they are writing about, moving between seemingly contradictory theories of violence. To be clear, most students were not familiar with the academic theories of violence that their own understandings resonate with; this observation simultaneously affirms the real-world applicability of say, Judith Butler or Hannah Arendt's theories of violence, while also suggesting that commonsense and contextual understandings of violence may not be fully accommodated by "strong theory." This chapter does not necessarily call for students to be trained in some canon of violence theories, but it does suggest that instructors, writing assignments, and the university play an important and under-examined role in

determining the contexts in which students develop theories and understandings of violence.

How is Violence Expressed?

As students worked to clarify their understandings of violence, one of their central concerns was about how violence is expressed. This concern played out in a number of scenes. The first scene attends to students' considerations of their own challenges of writing and speaking about violence. I use the example of a single student exploring the nature of her speechlessness after watching "Schindler's List " to show that students do not adhere to a single theorization of the relationship between language and violence when trying to make sense of their own ability to represent violence; rather, they rely on a network of competing theories and tropes. Next, I share a set of scenes in which students do not attempt to make sense of their own ability to express or represent violence but instead theorize violence as expression. Put simplistically, one student claims that language is violent, another claims that language is an expression that can be linguistic or gestural, and a third believes violence expresses itself when language fails. All of these understandings of violence as expression are emergent from—and sometimes justifications for—the particular incidents of violence students are writing and speaking about. The third scene examines the ways that violence is represented in pedagogical contexts, considering in particular the consequences of representing violence in numbers and images. By focusing on the contingent, contextual, and contradictory ways in which students think about how violence is expressed, we see that students' understandings of

this issue aren't fixed but are formed through interaction—interaction with texts, their classmates, their own writing, and myself.

Language and Violence

When students reflected on their own abilities to represent violence, they employed a number of interpretative repertoires: language is inherently violent, violence cannot be spoken about, violence must be spoken about. One student, Morissa, spoke at length about the difficulties she experienced speaking about "Schindler's List". In this first section, I explore the interpretative repertoires that operate in Morissa's discourse, as she proposes multiple theories for making sense of her own struggles to use language to represent violence. The competing interpretative repertoires at work in Morissa's discourse suggest that for students, the relationship between language and violence isn't a thing, or a single theory, but a contextualized process.

In this section, I not only explore the range of theoretical positions that Morissa adopts in her discourse, but I also put this discourse into conversation with a number of scholars who write about the relationship between language and violence. By putting Morissa in conversation with scholars like Hannah Arendt and Elaine Scarry, I am not simply "applying" theory to a student's interactional utterance. Instead, the theory helps me to identify and elucidate the nuances of Morissa's shifting theorizations, while Morissa's discourse helps expose the ways that these theories may be operationalized in students' understandings of violence. For example, in James Dawes' *The Language of War*, the central debate is over whether language and violence are mutually constitutive or at opposite ends of a continuum. He asks: "Is language the city gate that separates us

from violence or is it "a prison wall that implies a larger system of threat and coercion?" (19). Dawes's dichotomy is compelling: it helps to put scholars concerned with the relationship between language and violence—such as, Hannah Arendt, Elaine Scarry, Judith Butler, and Georges Bataille—in conversation with one another by neatly schematizing them, each theorist supposedly standing at one end or another of his fault line. However, Morissa's understanding of the relationship between language and violence disrupts the seemingly stable theoretical fault line outlined by Dawes; her commonsense approaches to this theoretical conundrum are often contradictory, suggesting that different social and rhetorical contexts may require shifting conceptions of the relationship between language and violence. Rather than a fault line, we see a network of possible theorizations that emerge out of the context of students' writing and talk.

Morissa was animated, open, and passionate throughout our conversation. During her college career, Morissa has taken a number of courses on the Holocaust and is deeply compelled by the subject matter personally, affectively, and intellectually. The paper she chose to share with me was a research essay that she had written about Josef Mengele for a Dutch history course. In addition to her thoughts about Mengele, the movie "Schindler's List" was a frequent touch point throughout the interview. Early in the interview, Morissa described renting "Schindler's List" in order to emotionally prepare herself for viewing the movie in class. She explains:

> I'd already cried two times in lecture because they showed pictures; so I was like, "This is not gonna happen." So I rented it, and I watched it with two friends. I didn't speak for two days after watching that movie. I literally just like didn't speak.
> …

> After I saw "Schindler's List" I didn't speak for about a day and a half. I literally did not speak. I didn't. I'm not gonna lie. I didn't process that as well as I should have. I didn't quite understand what I was watching. I was 18 years old. I should have understood. I didn't. I didn't speak for about a day because I was so taken aback, but that was the only time that I literally was like, "I don't know what to do." I literally couldn't speak after because that movie is like beyond graphic but beyond amazing.

Later in the interview, I asked Morissa why she thought the film made her unable to speak. She responded:

> What I meant when I said I couldn't talk the rest of the day, like I couldn't have normal conversations with my friends about boys the next day. Because I was just like, "This is so insignificant. This is so stupid." I wanted to talk about it and just make sure that I wasn't the only person that was freaking out about it, but I couldn't just talk about – I'm in a sorority, and we happened to have been – it was that time where we were like picking points for housing. They were all freaking out, and I was like, "Who cares?" I was like, "Are you kidding? I just watched 'Schindler's List'." I was just like, "This is so – everything else in the world is so stupid right now. This is ridiculous. You're worried about points. These people were worried about their lives." I wanted to talk about the movie, and we did in class. I think it's important to talk about it because you just shouldn't go home with those feelings by yourself.

In these excerpts, Morissa moves between varieties of—sometimes competing—interpretative repertoires: violence is an affront to human understanding; violence defines reality; representations of violence produce pleasure and horror; violent language carries historicity. Many of Morissa's interpretative repertoires share epistemological orientations with scholars interested in the relationship between language and violence. Read alongside one another, they help illuminate the resources Morissa has available to her for making sense of the relationship between language and violence, while also giving a commonsense twist to scholarly engagements with this issue.

For example, trauma theory, born out of Holocaust studies, provides one obvious gloss on Morissa's comments. In this approach, a focus on the psychic experience of trauma results in a crisis of representation, for the traumatic memory is unassimilable, returning unbidden in the form of flashbacks or repressed altogether. Holocaust studies scholars sometimes go as far as to suggest that the most ethical and appropriate representation of trauma is silence. However, the silence of the survivor is often at odds with the politics of witnessing: To not speak is interpreted as a denial of the event, as well as a denial to personal and societal healing. Yet, to speak is to suggest that trauma can somehow be known, thereby softening the ethical force of trauma's "affront to human understanding" (Caruth, 5). The ethical incompatibility of silence and speech in the face of atrocity has made trauma an attractive category through which to theorize the limits of language and representation.

One way to read Morissa's account of her speechlessness, then, is as a preservation of the Holocaust's "affront to human understanding." She explains that she was silent after the film because she "didn't process that as well as [she] should have. [She] didn't quite understand what [she] was watching." Here, she is taking a simultaneously psychological and ethical position. She experienced the movie as both cognitively and ethically unassimilable; in this moment in the interview, her reference to speechlessness works to emphasize the impossibility of understanding a limit-event like the Holocaust.

Elaine Scarry offers another theory of the relationship between language and violence. Her account of torture and pain focuses on the political implications of the way pain shatters language in the initiation of violence. For Scarry, pain is the absolute definer

of reality. Morissa does not discuss pain, nor do her own interpretative repertoires seem especially compatible with Scarry's, but we might extrapolate one important commonality between Morissa's account of her speechlessness and Scarry's account of pain. In Morissa's description, viewing "Schindler's List" produced a new reality, one in which she didn't care about boys or housing points, a reality where "everything else in the world is so stupid right now." This is by no means the same as if Morissa were experiencing language-shattering, reality-defining pain herself; however, in this excerpt, Morissa does seem to adopt a commonsense notion that bearing witness to violence creates a reality that forecloses other realities.

Scarry argues that pain's ability to shatter language and define reality has made it appear politically useful in cases of torture and war. Hannah Arendt takes up a broader version of this argument, suggesting that it is not only in the specific instances of experiencing pain that violence acts. Indeed, she explains that in totalitarian regimes "violence rules absolutely… everything and everybody must fall silent…the point here is that violence itself is incapable of speech, and not merely that speech is helpless when confronted with violence" (9). Only democratic language practices have the potential to emancipate people from the reign of force. For Arendt, language is an instrument of power, bringing about deliberation and consent; alternatively, violence is a kind of coercion and functions as language's opposite. Morissa's discourse doesn't directly engage with this issue. It is worth noting, though, that the classroom may function as a space of democratic language practice for Morissa. She explains that she wanted to talk about the movie and was glad that there was an opportunity to do that in class, since there was no such opportunity among her friends. Yet, while the classroom may function as a

space for talk, Morissa prefers talk that will help her emotionally process the course material over talk that privileges deliberation. She explains that talking is important because “you just shouldn’t go home with those feelings by yourself.” Later, Morissa explains that while representations of violence like “Schindler’s List” should be discussed in class, they should not be analyzed: “you should take that time and forget your lesson plan.”

Caruth, Scarry, and Arendt suggest, respectively, that violence can silence, destroy, or is opposed to language. These positions bear a relationship to one another, but they are not collapsible; in particular, the premises, contexts, and implications of their arguments invite vastly different readings in the context of determining students’ commonsense understandings of the relationship between language and violence. While Georges Bataille’s position on the relationship between language and violence is a seemingly radical departure from the stances of these scholars, he is interested in some of the very same contexts. In an essay about another limit-case atrocity, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he engages the relationship between “civilization” and violence. This civilization is neither Arendt’s deliberative democracy, nor is it her totalitarian regime. Instead, “civilization” is formed from conflicting elements, such as a concern for the future. This concern can produce peace, but it often gives way to the savagery of war in the name of national preservation. Therefore, civilization is itself the cause of war, yet this condition is distorted by an “idealistic dream” that imagines civilization as oppositional to violence (229). Bataille’s approach suggests a common origin of linguistic performance and atrocity, a space where pleasure and horror work in unison. A movie like “Schindler’s List” allows viewers to maintain their “idealistic

dream" that today's civilizations oppose violence, while aestheticizing atrocity. In Morissa's words, the "movie is like beyond graphic but beyond amazing." Indeed, a number of students express this mix of pleasure and horror in their encounters with violence; the aestheticization of violence provides students with access to affective responses that their other academic work does not. Part of this pleasure emerges from the opportunity to voyeuristically experience instances of violence, while ultimately affirming the distance between atrocity and their own, "civilized," lives.

Judith Butler's exploration of hate speech in *Excitable Speech* shares with Bataille the sense that language and violence are mutually constitutive. Yet, in comparison to the contexts explored by the other scholars cited here, hate speech can seem quite quotidian. This has made Butler's work a useful touch point for exploring the interpretative repertoires of students. While some students gather pleasure from marking the distance between their lives and atrocity, others are engaged in a project of linking everyday instances of violence with the structural violences that work to produce atrocity. These students, in the vein of Butler, suggest that language can work to repeat and concentrate the impact of violence, that language itself is violent, an understanding of violence that I explore in the next section.

For Butler, injurious speech is made of statements created by and carrying historicity. At the same time, silence can work to lock terms in place, "preserving their power to injure" (38). Keeping injurious terms unsayble arrests "the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose" (38). Morissa seems to be attempting to negotiate a similar theoretical conundrum. For Morissa "Schindler's List" reproduced language and images that were not only disturbing in and of themselves, but

carried with them an encoded memory that Morissa links to her Jewish background and Hebrew school education. Meanwhile, her impulse to talk, and to talk about the film, may be an impulse to rework the film's language and images, to unlock them from their power to injure her.

In her descriptions of "Schindler's List," Morissa adopts a variety of interpretative repertoires to explain her speechlessness: violence is an affront to human understanding; violence defines reality; representations of violence produce pleasure and horror; violent language carries historicity. Rather than cohering to a single theoretical paradigm, Morissa's meditation on language and violence moves across and between them. By beginning with the dramatic statement that "she literally didn't speak," Morissa emphasizes her sense that the Holocaust cannot be assimilated into language or understanding. This utterance has use-value within the context of our interview: it indexes her as deeply sensitive to and knowledgeable about the Holocaust, calling to mind Adorno's dictum that there is no poetry after Auschwitz, a trope undoubtedly familiar to her from her Jewish neighborhood and Hebrew school education. Later, the notion that violence renders Morissa's everyday life inconsequential by creating a new reality serves a different use value. It helps her make sense of the differences between the world she occupies as a student obsessed with the Holocaust and a sorority sister obsessed with boys and housing points. Her sense that the movie ought to be talked about in class has still another use value within our conversation. She addresses the purpose of our interview—to help teachers learn how to negotiate themes of violence in their own classes, even though this advice appears to be at odds with her professed speechlessness.

Morissa's ability to fluidly draw upon multiple and competing theories of the relationship between language and violence is remarkable. It suggests that students have a wide array of theories, tropes, and commonplaces available to them as they attempt to make sense of violence in social and discursive contexts. Rather than rigidly adhering to one theory or another, students appear to make sense of violence in context—in the relation to their essay, their experiences, and our conversation.

Violence as Expression

While Morissa reflected on the relationship between her own writing about violence and language, other students suggested that violence itself is an expression. While these accounts reveal something about the content of students' definitions of violence, they are most telling in their particularity and partiality. All three students I discuss in this section make sense of violence as expression in relation to their own classroom and writing experiences. This suggests the significant ways in which students' experiences at the university and in the writing classroom help to shape their definitions of violence. The contingent nature of these understandings at times appears to compel students to consider more expansive definitions of violence than they had previously considered and reflect on the ways those definitions position them. At other times, the contingent nature of these definitions appears to exclude other definitions of violence or interpretations of an event. The context of the interview provided students with opportunities to reflect critically on their definitions of violence, reconsidering them in light of the paper they had written, and may have limited these definitions, as students attempted to justify why a particular incident should count as violence.

One student, Amoi, shared an essay she had written for a creative nonfiction course. At one point in the interview, she informed me that the university itself was a site of linguistic violence. When I asked her to explain what she meant by this she described being interrupted by an English teacher in the middle of class, so he could tell her that she has "wonderful hair." As an African American woman, Amoi found this interruption to be inherently violent. She explained:

> So the violence of this person of power, drawing attention, you know, objectifying me, is part of a history of violence of other people like me and it recreates the same violence of denying someone their humanity…For me, the way I experienced it, it was violent in and of itself. I don't know how it's more violent than anything else…the reason why I experienced it so strongly, in that moment, was because it wasn't the only incident, it's everywhere and just that one person saying that one thing, it isn't just that one person saying that thing, it's all these people back through time, now and in the future that have said those things.

Amoi's example aligns with Butler's description of hate speech's violence. Butler uses the language of psychic trauma to explain that the force of injurious speech is not found in "the mere causal effect of an inflicted blow," but in the way the speech carries an "encoded memory or trauma" (36). Like a flashback, the trauma is relived in its linguistic substitutions; through hate speech, the scene of injury is restaged again and again. Amoi's professor's comment carries "historicity," restaging scenes of injury in which black women's bodies are made a spectacle. In restaging a long history of objectification, the professor's words are themselves violent.

While other students struggle to distinguish between physical violence and more expansive definitions that include language, gestures, and gazes, Amoi never distinguishes between the two. Her paper centers on an experience in which she believes that she was nearly abducted by a cab driver during her study abroad trip in Spain. The

incident was violent, she explains because it recalled histories of black women being objectified and vulnerable to violence. In both her paper, and this utterance, physical violence and historical violence—communicated through language and gesture—are the same because they are "denying someone their humanity."

Another student, Melisa, also adopts an expansive definition, though she is far more preoccupied than Amoi in considering the relationship between physical violence and other possible definitions. In fact, Melisa came to our interview prepared with a definition of violence, which she shared when I asked her why she thought her paper on racial profiling was connected to violence:

> Yes, I got a definition of it, but the initial thoughts are ignorant, I think they're ignorant. The initial thoughts are: it's an act that physically threatens, harasses or violates others. So I thought of examples: video games, you see them beating other people, crime, when you hear the news you see someone killed someone, someone raped someone, someone physically moved that person in a way that is unjust. Then, as I was thinking about it, with this racial thing, because this is about race, there were cases when people were deported, beaten, harassed, but there was a different sort of violence and that's the violence of someone's hatred, is what I wrote down. So the mere way that you look at someone could be violent, and the mere way you walk, the way you carry yourself as a person and the things you say can all be violent and that is—violence is an expression to me. It can be expressed in many, many ways, whether it's physical or just mental or emotional. Some examples I wrote down for that, when I was thinking about it, was nowadays you have violence online and you have violence in language, you have swear words; so many different ways to describe—to get your violence out. In this case, with my essay, which is called "Pull Out Your Race Card," it's like, "Let me see what race you are." That's violent to me, even that in itself, "Let me inspect you, as a human being, to see whether you fit into whatever margin that I've created for human beings." And it's not just physical, everyone thinks it's just physical, but it's much more than that, it impacts a person emotionally and mentally.

In this utterance Melisa attempts to work out the relationship between visible, physical violence and the notion of violence as a sometimes-undetectable expression. She begins

with the definition of violence she looked up before our interview—violence is an "act that physically threatens, harasses, or violates others" and offers a number of examples that emphasize the hyper-visibility of this sort of violence. She locates these examples, murder and rape, within the context of the news, further emphasizing their visibility and perhaps their primacy. Melisa contrasts the visibility of physical violence with the invisibility of "the violence of someone's hatred" and its sometimes subtle forms—a gesture, a look. The invisibility of this violence is reinforced, according to Melisa, by media discourses of violence. People who see these expressions of violence, "know it subconsciously…but they don't register it because it's not physically violent. It's not what the media has shown you, has tried to make you think is violence." This appears to be part of the power of violent expressions; when they're not physical, they are easier to ignore and become more insidious.

In setting up a contrast between visible, physical violence and invisible expressions of violence, Melisa indexes herself as the sort of person attuned to subtle injustices who "actually registers what [she's] seen." Despite the fact that Melisa calls a definition of violence ignorant if it only accounts for the physical "ignorant," she begins her definition with it. While she argues for a more expansive definition of violence than physical harm, her utterances reveal that she finds it challenging to articulate a definition of violence that calls the primacy of a physical definition into question. When she does offer examples of violence as an expression, she emphasizes the smallness of these expressions by using the word "mere." Violence is in the "mere way that you look at someone" or the "mere way you walk." The use of the word "mere" signals the potential invisibility of these expressions of violence, but it also casts them as smaller or less

significant than rape or murder. In the middle of the utterance Melisa explains that violence can be expressed in many ways "whether it's physical or just mental or emotional," which contradicts the case she makes at the end of her definition that "everyone thinks it's just physical, but it's much more than that." This contradiction suggests that Melisa is still in the process of building her definition of violence.

The occasion of the interview and the experience of writing a paper about racial profiling form the context within which Melisa is working to formulate a definition of violence that encompasses more than the physical. She must articulate a definition of violence that accommodates her findings and feelings about racial profiling. Melisa makes the initial connection between the topic of racial profiling and a definition of violence in physical terms, explaining "there were cases where people were deported, beaten, harassed." While deportation might not be automatically viewed as physically violent, Melisa is making a clear connection between deportations and when "someone physically moved that person in a way that is unjust." While Melisa doesn't put it this way, her definition of violence expands from individual violence—murder and rape—to structural violence—deportation. Since racial profiling is not always expressed with physical violence she struggles to find a more accommodating definition by first suggesting that there is "the violence of someone's hatred" and later describing racial profiling in these terms: "It's like, 'let me inspect you, as a human being, to see whether you fit into whatever margin that I've created for human beings.'" The violence of assessing another person's humanity is not necessarily visible, though in this case, its remnants are visible in profiling policies and, as Melisa says, even in the way a person is looked at. By the end of the utterance, Melisa has set up the news and "everyone" who

thinks violence is just physical as the straw man against which her argument is made: they're the ignorant ones who do not attend to the less visible and more insidious kinds of violence that affect her own racially profiled family.

Melisa's version of violence as expression is different than, for example, Amoi's. For Amoi, the words of her teacher carried historicity, repeating a historic scene of violence. In Melisa's case, expression can also be extralinguistic, communicated in gestures or gazes. While these expressions may not be as visible as a murder on the news, they carry consequences that impact the very assessment of another person's humanity. This definition of violence is, of course, partial. It doesn't contain a cohesive theory of violence as linguistic or symbolic, but is uttered in relation to, and as a result of, the thinking and writing Melisa has been doing about racial profiling. It is also an occasionally contradictory and ambivalent definition, as Melisa attempts to work out a definition of violence that accommodates both physical violence and her own experience of profiling as violent.

The notion of "expression" is also central to Katie's theorization of violence. Katie shared a paper she wrote for a course called "Detroit Connections," a mandatory outreach course for students in the School of Art and Design. Katie's class worked with students in a Detroit elementary school on art projects. In her essay, Katie reflects on her first impressions of "Detroit Elementary" and connects them to the course reading, *The Shame of the Nation*. When I asked Katie to describe her paper, she said it was about some of the challenges she thought urban schools faced. In particular, she focused on issues of socialization, explaining that one of the major challenges she observed was:

> The lack of ability of these kids to learn like social skills and like the need for like – like when we do our therapy and the need for that for like the

> control of like anger. Like kids don't know how to go – or how to express how they're feeling if they aren't taught, you know? And like especially if they go home and they're – these kids don't like understand the anger their parents are feeling, then they just get confused. And then they like bottle up that confusion until they can't like express it. And they just express it in a form of anger. And I think that leads to a lot of gun and gang violence in these cities.

As with Melisa, Katie's understanding of violence is partial and particular, shaped by the context of her writing. However, her notion of violence as expression differs sharply from Melisa's. Melisa's account focuses on the way violence itself can be a linguistic or symbolic expression, while for Katie, violence erupts when there are no avenues for other forms of expression. Where rational thought—or, white middle-class social skills—fail, violence erupts. A little later in the interview, Katie offers another example of how this anger expresses itself as violence, declaring that she was shocked to see students turning their wooden sculptures into knives and guns. She also chalks this up to students' lack of social skills or outlets to talk about their anger and confusion.

While Melisa's notion of violence as expression emphasizes its invisibility, Katie's is organized around culturally dominant images and explanations of violence: angry urban kids, guns and gangs, and wooden knives. It is, in part, the context of Katie's essay and outreach course that helps to shape this very partial understanding of violence as expression. She is enrolled in a course that requires her to use art therapy to "help" urban school children and then reflect on her experiences. If it is her job to "help" students "express" themselves in art, then these students must be lacking the tools to express themselves in the first place. The structure of Katie's service and writing experiences works to pathologize urban school children before Katie even meets them, structuring her expectations and potentially supporting expectations she already has.

Ultimately, her definition of violence as expression justifies her presence in the school and amplifies its significance. Katie might have understood the students' turning art projects into knives in any number of ways. She could have viewed it as typical play among children or as resistance to the missionizing efforts of undergraduates. Instead, she views it is an expression of violence, the result of urban students' inability to express themselves in socially acceptable ways, which affirms the importance of her work.

Later in the interview, Katie offers another explanation for the students' wooden knives: "It's almost like the fact that we put so much emphasis on the violence in inner cities is why they are so interested in it…And like, yeah, it's a big issue, but I think it's also a big issue because we make it a big issue. They're expected to do this because we associate it with being in ghettos and being in inner cities." Katie's previous comments included no first person pronouns, organized only around a "they;" this alternate explanation of the students' knife play positions Katie and an ambiguous "we" as complicit in urban violence. We might read Katie's "we" in this utterance as a veiled "I," suggesting that she acknowledges that she read the students' knife sculptures through the lens of her own preconceptions of "ghettos" and "inner cities." Katie's "we" may also index me, also a privileged white woman interested in education, as complicit in the production of expectations and stereotypes of urban violence.

Katie's second interpretation of the students' violent expressions still pathologizes the students, leaving little room for their agency or resistance. However, in this case, the notion of violence as expression acknowledges the structures of power at play in determining what counts as violence and creates an opening for Katie to consider the role she may play in determining its definition. Katie explains that while she didn't write

about this understanding of violence in her paper, she thought of it as we talked. It reminded her of the second book she read for the course, *Thirty-Six Children*, which she claims focuses on the way stereotypes and low expectations help shape students' performance in urban schools.

Katie views violence as an expression in two ways: violence erupts when there are no other available forms of expression, and violence is structured by stereotypes and societal expectations. These competing definitions reveal the ways that students' definitions of violence are shaped in relation to their writing and classroom experiences. In the first instance, Katie's definition of violence justifies the significance of her work in "Detroit Elementary" and in the second, it attempts to make sense of the ways her own privilege and expectations might structure not only her perceptions of urban violence, but urban violence itself. Yet, Katie doesn't seem to fully understand these different definitions of violence as competing, only acknowledging that she didn't write about her second idea. The way she moves fluidly within our conversation between these two notions of violence suggests that they haven't cohered around a single theory, but that her thoughts about violence are flexible and still very much in process.

Representations of Violence: Numbers and Images

We've seen that students explored the problem of language and violence by considering their own abilities to express violence and by thinking about violence itself as an expression. In the interviews, students also considered the ways violence is represented. In particular, students reflected on the pedagogical use-value of representing violence in numbers and images. Some students explained that numbers and statistics

enhanced their understanding of a particular incident of violence, while others found them empty of meaning, claiming that images of violence were more helpful for their understanding. That students had such different beliefs about the meaning-making potential of numbers and images suggests not only that this is a significant theoretical conundrum, but that the contexts of students' learning have significant consequences for their understandings of what entails a meaningful representation of violence, ultimately helping to determine their perceptions of what counts as violence.

Several students claimed that statistics about violence helped to communicate both the seriousness and significance of a particular event. Jacob described a particularly effective lecture about Russia and World War Two, explaining, "every single time [the professor] said a statistic he would be blown away…a lot of those numbers are crazy and lot of them were sobering. You know, like interesting. You know, just like oh wow." Jacob suggests that statistics carry shock-value, noting that his professor was blown away (even though "he's given this lecture a million times") and saying himself, "oh wow." The shock-value of statistics seems tied to the way they confirm the seriousness of a particular incident of violence. Karen, writing about school shootings explains that the topic is "pretty serious, especially the numbers—the statistics I said alone were kind of scary." In both of these cases, students' emotional reactions to statistics work in concert with their sense of an event's seriousness, reactions that seem to respond to the magnitude of the event or phenomenon they are writing about. Numbers, in these cases, signal the magnitude of an incident of violence, which helps students to justify their writing on two counts. It helps to explain their emotional engagement, but it also suggests

that the incident is worthy of study. Statistics that emphasize magnitude seem to help determine which incidents of violence are significant enough to write about.

Students don't generally believe that statistics provoke emotions. Jacob noted with some surprise that his professor seemed to use statistics not as a logical rhetorical device, but an emotional one. Morissa distinguishes between the use of statistics in her psychology classes, which she considers to be "academic" and "unbiased," and writing about Holocaust statistics: "If you're writing about statistics in the Holocaust, you're writing how many people died. So it is a very emotional thing." The students didn't speculate any further on why certain statistics might "be an emotional thing," but their references to shock and scariness suggest that they believe violent events of some magnitude disrupt their frameworks for understanding the world. Further describing the use of statistics as an emotional device in his professor's lecture, Jacob explains:

> These are the numbers. Like these aren't just numbers, you know. These are facts. Like whoa. You know. So I mean, and obviously when you hear them, you think of them as numbers even though you know, it's more than that. It's still hard to really think of it like twenty something million people, you know, whatever it is. It's impossible.

Jacob is adopting a common trope that statistics simultaneously communicate the undeniable truth of an event and the impossibility of comprehending it. Like the display of shoes at the United States Holocaust Museum or the list of names on the Vietnam War memorial, numbers appear to provide both the evidence for an event and its affront to human understanding. Jacob struggles with this contradiction when he claims that the statistics of Russian deaths are numbers, but more than numbers because they're facts. "Facts" in this utterance supersede the potential banality of numbers because they at once

represent lost human lives and the incomprehensibility of those very deaths. The statistics are at once real and unreal, "impossible," according to Jacob, to truly comprehend.

These utterances suggest that the pedagogical use-value of numbers and statistics to represent violence is partial. In these utterances students suggest that numbers at once affirm the veracity and significance of an event and communicate its incomprehensibility. Yet, for numbers to meaningfully represent violence in this context they must be so large as to be incomprehensible and shocking. In these cases, incidents of violence that can be represented by shocking numbers of deaths are also understood as incidents worthy of attention.

Other students report that statistics are not effective for representing violence. Michael explained that he found the films—both documentaries and Hollywood movies—he watched in a seminar on the history of violence to be "easier to comprehend" than the course readings. He said, "just reading about X amount of people, thousands of people died, to actually caring about the individual people, which made it – it humanized the situation to a level that you can't really get just by reading these abstract articles." For Jacob and Karen, an event's magnitude produced emotional reactions and a sense of significance, while Michael suggests that statistics are relatively empty of meaning. He substitutes "X amount of people" for "thousands of people died" as if to suggest that statistics representing massive numbers of deaths are as empty as X. If visual and narrative representations humanize victims of violence, the implication is that statistics dehumanize them.

Michael's sense that filmic representations of violence are preferable to statistical representations may be, in part, reflective of his own preferences. In this utterance he

doesn't seem concerned about issues of accuracy or significance, but about which representations of violence help him care about the incidents of violence he was studying. Yet, Michael goes on to explain that "actually seeing people killed also is just a little more emotional than reading about it…It made us care about the violence a lot more and took it away from just statistics to real people, which makes it more of a real effect." In this utterance, the notion of "care" doesn't just seem to be about engagement, but about representing violence in a way that makes it seem "real." If statistics help communicate the facts and veracity of an event, individual stories and images help make abstract events seem more "real" by making them more immediate.

For Morissa, images also make an event "real" in ways that statistics cannot. She explains that before taking courses on the Holocaust in college she

> had never been shown real pictures of the camps. I didn't know about the fact that – they showed us these pictures of them just waiting in lines, and you knew where they were going. There was a picture and they had smoke coming out of the chimney, and I guess those made it more real to me.

The documentary images that Morissa refers to here are, of course, different from the images and stories that Michael encountered watching a film like Hotel Rwanda, but the trope of the "real" also surfaces in this context. As with Michael, realness seems connected to immediacy for Morissa. When she says the pictures made the Holocaust "more real to me," she seems less concerned with the truth of the photos than with how they help make the Holocaust more proximal to her. The realness of images of violence comes not from their ability to communicate scope or magnitude, but the particular.

Students' competing perceptions of violence's representability in numbers and images demonstrates that the ways in which violence is represented actually help to shape

students' perceptions of what counts as violence. The students who found statistics to be meaningful and shocking, by implication, suggest that violence of some magnitude is most worthy of academic study. On the other hand, students who were moved by the immediacy of film and images, suggest that violence counts when it is made proximal to their lives. Indeed, for all of the students discussed in this section, their understandings of violence are intimately connected to the contexts in which they learned and wrote about them.

Where Does Violence Come From?

Students' talk about violence reveals that another central concern for them is where violence comes from. Their answers to this question were also partial, expressed largely in the context of their own papers and coursework. All students, though, in one way or another suggested that violence emerges from, and is to one degree or another determined by, a social field. While contemporary discourse often answers this question with depictions of evil masterminds—Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein are two recent examples –or troubled individuals—Jared Lee Loughner in Tuscon and Seung-Hui Cho at Virginia Tech—students tended to search for social explanations for incidents of violence. To some degree, this might be explained by the topics of their essay. With the exception of Morissa's essay on Josef Mengele, none of the essays focused exclusively on individuals.

Focusing on the social as a site for the production of violence creates a number of theoretical conundrums for students. What makes up the field of the social in a given incident of violence? In some cases it is a school, in others it is "society," a nation, or a

world. Some students locate themselves within the social world they're talking about, while for other students it is made up of distant actors. While some students take for granted the networks of power that structure the social, others identify histories of racism or imperialism as integral to the social worlds that produce violence. Students also struggle to make sense of the amount of agency afforded perpetrators and victims of violence. These are important questions; their very presence within the interview transcripts suggests that writing and talking about violence affords students opportunities to grapple with meaningful intellectual questions and important social justice concerns. At the same time, the partiality and contingency of students' responses—while at times impressive in their openness and flexibility—can lead to reductive accounts of violence, pathologized views of individuals, and generalizations about distant others.

Violence in Context

When students reflected on the origins of violence, they did so largely within the contexts of their own essays and learning. To some degree, this contextualizing allowed students to consider the ways that definitions of violence can shift depending on the social, political, and regional context. Lauren, for example, shared a paper she had written for a political science class about Israeli and Palestinian politics. In the paper, she reflects on her reactions to the computer game she was required to play for the class. In the game, the player acts as either the leader of the Palestinians or the Israelis and must make decisions—about building settlements, giving speeches, providing medical aid, responding to violence, etc.—in order to work toward a peaceful solution. Lauren observed that in the computer game, "killing one Israeli, it was practically equal to killing

50 Palestinians" in its consequences for peacemaking. Rather than suggesting that there is a single, universal definition of violence, Lauren's observation points to the ways that even determining what counts as violence is contingent.

Shaun grew up in Detroit and throughout our interview, referred to his experiences with crime and gun violence. As a result of his experiences in Detroit, he found his University of Michigan classmates' attempts to "be tough" frustrating, because they did not understand violence in the same terms he did. Shaun explained that "talking tough" at the University of Michigan where everybody is "busy flaunting things and talking about iPhones and Blackberries and North Faces and Ugg Boots" wouldn't be taken seriously within the context of the urban violence he grew up with in Detroit. By cataloging the expensive phones and clothing that represent the privilege of his peers, Shaun suggests that his classmates' understandings of violence and toughness are shaped by their privilege. He recognizes, in this utterance, that violence in Ann Arbor and violence in Detroit not only mean different things, but their very definitions are shaped by the contexts of poverty and privilege. Both of Shaun and Lauren's comments suggest, in very different ways, that writing about violence can help students see the ways that local contexts help to define the very boundaries of what counts as violence.

In other cases, the contexts of students' writing about violence seemed to invite generalizations about the origins of violence. For example, three students shared essays about the Zimbardo prison experiment, a video they had all watched in their introduction to psychology course. All the students agreed that the social situation of the simulated prison produced the aggressive behaviors; both the prison guards and prisoners were simply fulfilling roles. The students took this study as "proof" that "a situation can affect

a person and how they behave and what they think they're supposed to do… if [an individual is] put in a situation where they're equal or above other people, they might take charge." While the observation that social roles might shape human behavior is perhaps a helpful one in theorizing violence, it was quickly unmoored from the context of the study. Indeed, not one student noted that the study's make-up of white men might complicate the impulse to generalize from its findings. Instead, the students used the example of the Zimbardo case study to help articulate their sense of where violence comes from: individuals fulfilling their socially determined roles.

The students were quick to extrapolate larger social lessons from a single study. One student, Liz, explained that in her paper about the Zimbardo prison experiment, she was also required to connect the study to a real life situation; she chose Abu Ghraib. In her paper, Liz writes, "Zimbardo's study showed the affect [sic] that a situation can have on an individual's personality. In the Abu Ghraib case, war is the situation." Liz goes on to explain that "a role or situation that an individual is in can overpower the individuals' [sic] identities" resulting in behaviors that they would not ordinarily exhibit. Liz applies the "situation" of an experiment at Stanford to the "situation" of war, utterly ignoring the geopolitical conditions at play. American imperialism, the war on terror, shifting attitudes toward torture, the gender dynamics among the soldiers, and anti-Islamic sentiment play no role in her explanation. When talking about the lessons of Zimbardo in the interview, Liz explains, "people most likely wouldn't be inclined to do what happened at Abu Ghraib, but they were in that situation so they were more likely, especially since they got commands, and they were able to do that." Liz's vague language, for example saying, "do what happened" and "that situation" instead of actually using the word torture or prisoner

abuse or homicide, helps to emphasize how utterly devoid of context her statements are. Her language points to her attempt to universalize a definition of violence as the fulfillment of social roles, rather than acknowledging its specificity and, potentially, her complicity in the violence. By talking about "people" and "they" rather than the US military, Liz both universalizes the behavior of the soldiers and distances herself from their actions. Liz's vague language may also reveal her limited knowledge about the torture at Abu Ghraib and the larger geopolitical context into which it fits. Yet, she was quite willing to mobilize a definition of violence constructed in relation to one context—a single, much critiqued experiment with white American men—in a context about which she may know very little.

If the Zimbardo study created understandings of where violence comes from that are perhaps too mobile, Carly struggled to articulate the relationship between the individual experience of her grandmother in Poland and the larger historical context of the violence she was learning about. Carly wrote a reflection paper for her Slavic history course, for which she interviewed her grandmother. Carly's grandmother was born in Poland, orphaned during World War II and sent to live with a German family. According to Carly, her grandmother was eventually sent to a concentration camp and then immigrated to the United States. Carly's paper begins with statistics on the large numbers of children orphaned during the war and vague platitudes about the hardships they experienced. She then includes a few details about her grandmother's experience, focusing in particular on an incident in which her grandmother was helping the father of the German family she was living with in the garage he owned. He asked for the wrench, but because the grandmother didn't understand German, she handed him a screwdriver,

which he threw at her head. The paper ends with several paragraphs about how Carly's grandmother, "through hard work and perseverance was able to learn the language and begin building her ultimately successful lifestyle" in the United States. There is no mention of the concentration camp.

Carly's paper essentially claims that there were a large number of suffering orphans during the war and then describes her grandmother's experience to illustrate this point. The central incident of violence in both the paper and our conversation was the injury her grandmother suffered in the German garage, which Carly explains illustrates "the abuse that she went through just for simple miscommunication." It is peculiar that in a class about twentieth century Polish history, Carly focuses on a single, individual injury and offers the language barrier as an explanation for its occurrence. When I asked Carly how her paper connected with the larger issues in the class, she explained that they concentrated on "people as a group" rather than "get into the details about particular people." They discussed the way that "this group was exiled to concentration camps, whereas this group was sent here." It is as if Carly is unable—or unwilling—to think about her grandmother's experience in relation to the historical context she was learning about. Possibly, this is because Carly's grandmother, a Polish orphan, didn't fit easily into the groups Carly was learning about. Yet, she must have had some tools to understand the fraught relationship between Poles and Germans that might extend beyond "simple miscommunication." Also absent is the context of Polish complicity in the near-extermination of their Jewish population; it is as if considering the role that the Poles played in World War II—both their own occupation and their peculiar position as victims, witnesses, and perpetrators of the Holocaust—is too much to consider. Locating

her grandmother's experience within the larger historical field of violence would certainly disrupt the simple narrative of individual adversity and uplift that Carly's paper is oriented around.

The one connection Carly was able to make between her grandmother's experience and her learning about "groups" had to do with their experiences after the war. Carly explains that when the war ended and "people were able to kind of start to move on from that…people really, really suffered, and just the way that [my grandmother] is able to move past things even more quickly now." Carly's focus here and within her paper on the ways that her grandmother became a stronger and more admirable person as a result of her difficult childhood emphasizes the significance, for Carly, of understanding her grandmother's experience as one of individual adversity and uplift, rather than within the larger—and more complicated—field of historical violence. It is as if understanding the origins of the violence her grandmother experienced—and perhaps benefited from—outside of simple miscommunication would disrupt the story she wants to tell about her grandmother's resilience.

In some cases, an exploration of violence in context appears to reinforce the notion that different social fields produce different definitions of violence, which cannot be easily transferred to another context. Violence in Detroit means something very different than violence in its suburbs. Violence in Palestine has different political consequences than violence in Israel. In other cases, as with the Zimbardo prison experiment, the context in which students are learning about violence invites a generalized application of its causes. And in still other cases, like Carly's, students seem to resist contextualizing violence altogether. It is, undoubtedly, challenging to consider

how a specific local context might shape understandings of violence. Such thinking requires a relatively nuanced understanding of the politics and history of each context and we cannot expect undergraduates to have all of this knowledge at their fingertips. At the same time, it seems only fair that if students are being asked to apply, say, the Zimbardo prison experiment to Abu Ghraib, they might also be taught something about the geopolitical context that helps produce Abu Ghraib. Similarly, a student like Carly—who received an A on her paper—could be pushed to actually consider the relationship between her grandmother's experience and the larger context of the course material.

Disciplinarity

The disciplines in which students are writing appear to structure not only the content about which students write, but the vocabularies they use to talk about violence. The three students who wrote about the Zimbardo prison experiment use the language of psychology to form their understandings that "a situation can affect a person and how they behave and what they think they're supposed to do." An introduction to psychology course, like any introductory course, exposes students to the major debates of the discipline. The Zimbardo study is ripe for classroom conversations about whether human behavior can be attributed to situations or individual dispositions. This is an important conversation to have with undergraduates, but it also provides a limited framework through which to understand the initiation of violence. The conversation is ultimately about individual human behavior rather than, say, the legacy of imperialism, the maintenance of everyday inequalities, or the disciplining strategies of state terror. Any college course will frame—and limit—students' understandings of violence, often in

disciplinary terms. However, these curricular decisions do have consequences for how students understand where violence comes from. For example, one student explained that the Zimbardo study helped her think about why people might be violent, explaining, "some people are more inclined to be so because of their past situations." She goes onto explain that growing up in a violent home might be one explanation for why a person is violent. If we look at Liz's comments in the context of the situational attribution or dispositional attribution debate, they make sense in disciplinary terms. She's demonstrating an understanding of human behavior as shaped by situations, not innate traits, and then applying this understanding to another context. However, this particular set of disciplinary questions doesn't require Liz to speculate on what "past situations" might be: endemic racism, the maintenance of an unequal social order, a justification for the military industrial complex? Instead, the disciplinary frame of Liz's psychology class helps shape her focus on the decontextualized socialization of an individual within a family.

Lauren's political science course offers a different set of disciplinary concerns and vocabularies. As a fourth-year political science major, Lauren not only drew on the disciplinary learning she did in her class on Israel and Palestine, but also on a range of political science courses. She compared the actions of Hamas with those of ETA and the IRA and used these examples and others to speak more broadly about the "strategies of public policy" she has learned about in a number of political science courses. Speaking about what she has learned about violence from her political science courses, Lauren explains that her

> interest is in cause and effect, which is key to politics. The real implications of policies on the ground, not just politically whether

> someone backs down from a threat, but understanding the implications of things. These aren't just actions, but they're a lot more than that. They're calculated.

In this utterance, Lauren suggests that violence is a political tool. To understand why Hamas or ETA might use violence as a political tool, Lauren explains that one must understand the history of the conflict "because history informs what actions they're taking." According to Lauren, one must also take into account the ways "that conditions on the ground really impede any peace process." Lauren, using the disciplinary vocabulary of political science, explains that her real interest is in "cause and effect." Yet her understanding of where violence comes from is more nuanced than a simple cause and effect calculation. Rather than simply focusing on the actions of state actors, she considers the history of a conflict and the conditions on the ground, while also acknowledging that groups like Hamas or ETA make calculated political decisions based on these factors and others.

The framework of Lauren's disciplinary training has given her in-depth knowledge about the histories, policies, and conditions of particular regional conflicts. Instead of generalizing from this understanding, Lauren suggests that it might give her a framework for approaching the study of other conflicts. She explains that she took a history of the Holocaust class, which she acknowledges is "a different kind of violence," but she felt "numb" to all of the numbers and images. She wondered aloud if, had she taken that class later in her college career, she might "be able to see how actions and policies lead directly to that violence." In this utterance, we can see what Lauren understands to be the central disciplinary concern of her political science training: cause and effect. She seems to believe that an understanding of actions and policies can reveal

the causes of violence. Like with other disciplinary frameworks, the emphasis on cause and effect creates a partial understanding of the origins of violence. An account of the Holocaust's origins might well consider "actions and policies," but it might also consider the long histories of anti-Semitism in Europe or the biological racism of the nineteenth century. Importantly, while Lauren suggests that she might have applied her "cause and effect" approach to the Holocaust history course, she doesn't speculate on what she might have discovered. She doesn't attempt to draw parallels between the violence of the Holocaust and the violence in Israel and Palestine. Even when Lauren compares the political calculations of Hamas and ETA, she is careful to acknowledge that the groups have different histories, social conditions, and policies to contend with. Despite having a relatively nuanced understanding of why violence happens in a given regional context, Lauren is careful not to generalize this understanding. This is may be, in part, because she knows her understanding is partial and disciplinary. She prefaces her description of where violence comes from by saying, "my interest is in cause and effect, which is key to politics." In this way, Lauren is able to locate and name the particular set of questions and disciplinary concerns that inform her understanding of violence.

The students who shared papers from writing classes did not employ the same kinds of disciplinary frameworks or vocabularies to articulate their definitions of violence. Unlike, say, Lauren's political science class, these students' writing classes never explicitly addressed the issue of violence; indeed, all of the students I spoke with chose their own writing topic, so they were often the only student in the class writing about violence. In some cases, students referred to the learning they had done in other classes to articulate their understandings of violence. For example, Amoi's understanding

of violence as produced by "interlocking systems" of power, she explains, comes, in part, from her exposure to "critical race theory" in her African American studies and women's studies courses. The creative nonfiction course that Amoi was enrolled in gave her an opportunity to write about her experience in Spain in relation to some of the learning and thinking she has been doing about race and gender. She explained that she was "able to give words and definitions and point to different articles that I read that explain this experience." Amoi's comments suggest that one role the writing classroom might play in developing students' understandings of violence is in giving them opportunities to practice and extend the disciplinary approaches to thinking about violence to which they have already been exposed. In Amoi's case, the writing classroom gave her a space to apply critical race theory to her own experience.

While students didn't use rhetoric and composition-specific disciplinary frameworks to explicitly shape their understandings of where violence comes from, rhetorical frameworks do seem to influence how students made their arguments about violence. Melisa explained that she found an equilibrium between emotion and facts, which helped her "convince a lot of people and move a lot of people" to reconsider their positions on racial profiling. Melisa's comments demonstrate the ways that her learning about rhetorical appeals and audience shape how she writes about violence. They also shaped her research process. Melisa explained that she had three major categories of research. She researched statistics, "emotional content, which is abusive incidents," and "historical content, which is just the overview of how it came to be, the policy itself, and what other politicians think about it." Rather than assuming, as Morissa or Jacob does, for example, that statistics about violence are inherently emotional appeals, Morissa's

research approach is shaped by her desire to be persuasive in rhetorical terms. She gathers evidence that will enhance her ethos, pathos, and logos in order to effectively persuade her classmates to rethink their stances on racial profiling. Melisa even notes that she made sure to find statistics, because there are two people in her class that are only persuaded by logical appeals. The way Melisa has been taught to think about making arguments ultimately shaped what she learned about racial profiling and violence more broadly. Melisa's definition of violence as an often-invisible expression that denies someone his or her humanity is certainly linked to the persuasive context of her writing. She wanted to persuade her peers to view racial profiling as a hurtful policy, a stance that assumes that the violence of profiling policies is largely invisible in the first place. She then uses her understanding of rhetorical appeals to make this violence visible by incorporating statistics, examples of abusive incidents, and the history of racial profiling policies.

The genres of the essays students write in their composition courses also appear to shape their articulations of where violence comes from. Karen, a first year student, wrote about the phenomenon of school shootings for an assignment that asked students to write a causal analysis of a social phenomenon. Karen argues that "all these different influences of society could indirectly affect that person to actually carry out [a school shooting]." Karen focuses on three ways that "society" might contribute to the phenomenon of school shootings, citing "profit-hungry industries" that produce video games and music videos that instigate violence; "society's preoccupation with saving oneself at the expense of others," leading a potential shooter's peers to prioritize not

being a snitch over helping their classmate; and "society's indifference" to the potential school shooters.

Karen's assessment of the causes of school shootings is unidirectional. Society acts—or doesn't act—and this determines, at least to a degree, the potential school shooter's behavior. There is no consideration, for example, of how the potential shooter's behaviors might influence his or her peers' desire to intervene or how the adolescent consumer—including potential school shooters—might help shape the content of video games and music videos. The genre of the causal analysis essay invites this unidirectional understanding of the causes of violence by asking students to differentiate causes from effects; in the case of Karen's paper, society becomes the cause and the mind of the potential shooter, the effect. While a causal analysis does ask students to consider a number of causes and differentiate between primary and contributory causes, the genre also requires a unifying thesis statement. Thus, Karen gives violent media, peers concerned about snitching, and indifferent police and school officials a single name—society. "Society," is stripped of its heterogeneity and invested with unaccounted for power, so that Karen might offer up a cohesive explanation for the phenomenon of school shootings; the genre of the causal analysis essay values cohesiveness over comprehensiveness or complication.

The generic conventions of the causal analysis also imply that if a cause can be altered, the effects might be too. Karen explains that she hopes her paper might persuade her classmates to "start a chain reaction and start being more kind to people, opening up to people that they don't know, maybe they can stop something bad from happening." Karen hopes to combat "society's indifference" to potential school shooters with

kindness. Having just graduated from a high school environment rife with bullying, cliques, and gossip, Karen's call for kindness and friendliness is sincere and understandable. Yet, the genre of the causal analysis essay seems to support Karen's sense that a small change in the fabric of the high school social climate could address the phenomenon of school shootings, because one merely needs to alter one link in a linear chain of events. Karen wrote papers on other topics and in other genres for her first year writing class, so it is not that her first year writing class was promoting causal analysis as a discipline-specific way of thinking. In fact, causal analysis essays are often included in first year writing classes because instructors want to prepare students for the sorts of writing assignments they might encounter in a political science, philosophy, or history course. Yet, the generic expectations of the casual analysis papers did seem to shape, to some degree, Karen's understanding of where violence comes from; while Karen may leave her writing course with a diverse set of analytical tools and approaches, only one has shaped her understanding of violence.

If the contexts about which students write shape their understandings of where violence comes from, disciplinary frameworks and vocabularies also shape the ways students think about where violence comes from. Both cases produce partial and contingent understandings of the causes of violence. When, as with the students writing about the Zimbardo prison experiments, students are largely unreflective about the ways disciplinary frameworks might shape their understandings of violence, they can overgeneralize their understandings, unknowingly excluding other explanations for the initiation of violence. When, as with Lauren and Amoi, students can name the disciplinary frameworks that underpin their understandings of violence, they are less

likely to make generalized assertions about the causes of violence. This suggests that students in all disciplines would benefit from classroom conversations that make explicit the disciplinary frameworks and questions that produce particular—and partial—understandings of violence. This is true even in writing classrooms, where the content of the course material may never actually address the subject of violence. Nonetheless, the approaches students take to research, analysis, and persuasion are shaped by disciplinary and generic expectations; when students choose to write about school shootings, racial profiling, or other incidents of violence, their understandings of these phenomena are shaped by the disciplinary and generic frameworks of the writing classroom.

When they write about violence and reflect on that writing, students appear to be building theories about where violence comes from. This suggests that writing about violence affords students opportunities to consider questions that are intellectually meaningful and socially important. Yet, the partiality of their definitions of violence reveals that these definitions emerge from both the geopolitical or social contexts students are writing about and are shaped by disciplinary frameworks and conventions. When students are aware of the partiality of their accounts, they avoid generalizing about the origins of violence. However, when students are not fully aware of the limited nature of the contexts they're studying or the specificity of the disciplinary frameworks in which they're writing and thinking, they tend to build generalized definitions of violence that can be ideological and reductive. This suggests that students would benefit from pedagogies that illuminate the contextual and disciplinary nature of engaging with discourses and histories of violence and tools to help them think about their understandings of violence across courses and writing genres.

Chapter Four

Beyond Personal: The Co-Construction of Experience and Writing about Violence

Before she even made it through my office door, Melisa was apologizing for being late. She'd been looking forward to talking to me about her paper, she explained, ever since I'd told her writing class about my project. Was she too late? Did I still have time to talk with her? After I assured Melisa that I had plenty of time, she settled into a chair and set to work reading the consent form I handed her. Melisa was the second of the twenty-six students I would eventually interview about their writing on violence. I was immediately struck by the frequent appeals she made to her own experiences throughout the descriptions of her writing practices. This trend bore out through all of the interviews I conducted, suggesting that experience is a significant, though unpredictable aspect of students' discursive engagements with violence.

Over the next few months, I learned a great deal about Melisa. She is a third-year industrial design major with a penchant for large hoop earrings and t-shirts that sparkle. She likes writing when it challenges her thinking and allows her to challenge and inspire others. Melisa is a Bosnian refugee. She doesn't remember Bosnia very well, but does have strong memories of the violence and discrimination her family was exposed to as they moved around Europe. Eventually, her family was resettled in Michigan. Melisa hasn't taken many writing classes; in fact, she waited until her third year to take her

required writing class. She enjoyed this class because the students were allowed to choose their own topics. For the research essay that Melisa shared in our first meeting, she chose to write about racial profiling.

"Tell me a little bit about your paper," I asked Melisa. She spoke emphatically, gesturing to emphasize important points:

> The reason—the topic that I picked was racial profiling, and the reason why is because even within my own family it's always been discussed, "Do not discuss any topic about race with anyone, you don't know how it offends them, you don't want to cause any sort of drama about it." The reason I also don't usually discuss it is people in my family have been deported for whatever racist reasons so I discuss this because I didn't have enough knowledge on the policy and because it's seen as, and I even wrote this down, it seems like something that's overlooked in terms of its association with violence. Because it's a policy, it has a fancy package. People don't—if you don't know somebody personally who has been deported, you don't have that connection with the subject, you just think of it as something your government's created for you to follow and you don't truly think about the kind of impact it has on the citizens.

I listened carefully as Melisa spoke, trying to get a sense of what mattered to her as a writer. Indeed, the way students responded to this open-ended question revealed a lot about what they thought was most important to share about their essays. Melisa might have told me any number of things about her essay, including the assignment, the genre, the argument, her grade, or the research process. Instead, Melisa decided to tell me "the reason why" she chose to write about racial profiling.

One reason Melisa chose to write about racial profiling was because she believes it is important to write about issues "that people are scared of—basically, topics that they don't want to confront." She drew on experiences in her own family—being taught not to discuss race—to come to the conclusion that racial profiling is indeed a taboo topic. Another one of Melisa's writing goals is to persuade her peers to "be less self-centered and start paying attention to their surroundings." She utilized her authority as a person

impacted by deportation to compel her peers to consider the impact profiling has on other citizens. Racial profiling is also a policy that Melisa felt she didn't know enough about; without more information, Melisa did not feel confident revealing that people in her family had been deported. Thus, rather than suggesting that her experiences with profiling make her an expert on the topic, Melisa chose this topic to help make sense of her experiences. Later in the interview, Melisa used the theories, statistics, and vocabulary she gathered through research to articulate the reasons she believes that certain Americans are profiled. This sophisticated understanding can be contrasted with her sense—prior to research—that her family members were deported for "whatever racist reason." In her response to my question, and throughout the interview, Melisa linked each of the reasons for writing about racial profiling to her experiences.

Melisa's appeals to experience were varied and contingent. She called on her socialization in a family "that does not discuss any topic about race"; the events of profiling that she witnessed, as well as the ways those events produce her as a subject constituted, in part, by deportation and profiling; and the conditions that allow her to be sensitive to the societal implications of profiling. By offering these multiple versions of experience in response to my prompt "tell me about your paper," Melisa suggested that while the content of her paper concerns racial profiling, the process of writing this paper, including the reason for choosing the topic, was mediated by her experiences.

Melisa's response to my first question encapsulates a number of the patterns I identified throughout my interviews with students. In particular, I found that when students described their writing practices, many of them made unprompted appeals to experiences—in and out of school—to make sense of their writing choices. This chapter

will demonstrate that writing and experience are co-productive. I am not suggesting that certain experiences automatically lead to obvious essay topics or practices. Rather, I am arguing that writing about violence alters and shapes students' experiences. Students' essays themselves do not always make this process visible; however, students' talk about their writing practices reveals the extent of their experiential, affective, and subjective engagements throughout the writing process. This finding suggests that we must rethink the role that experience plays in student writing by attending to the talk that students do about their writing. In doing so, I found that students appeal to multiple definitions of experience—as a resource, as cultural practices, as interlocking structures of power, for instance—in reflecting on their writing practices.

Composition scholarship provides limited resources for making sense of the role experience plays in relation to the full range of students' writing about violence. As we've seen, there has been fierce debate about the place of students' experiences in the composition classroom in terms of autobiographical writing assignments, but this scholarship is inadequate for making sense of a student like Melisa's approach to a research essay, for it does not acknowledge the role of experience across a range of academic writing genres. Composition scholarship on experience tends to theorize experience, always in relation to personal writing, in three different ways. Advocates of personal writing suggest that when students can integrate course material into the familiar frameworks of their own experiences, they are more likely to enjoy and produce "good academic discourse" ("Reflections", 137). Scholarship opposed to teaching personal writing, suggests that it "creates the illusion of a unified and knowing self" (Faigley, 125). There is also scholarship that advocates for teaching students to understand

experience as evidence, helping them to see that "personal writing is not a reflection of a true, authentic self but is a representation of the most appropriate version of a writer for a particular text" (*Personally Speaking*, 126). Importantly, this scholarship calls into question a notion of student writing as a mimetic expression of students' experiences and selves. Yet, even Spigelman's formulation that students can consciously and rhetorically adopt the "most important version of a writer for a particular text" doesn't go far enough to theorize the relationship between experience and student writing about violence. I will demonstrate that students' reflections on their writing practices reveal that, at least when students write about violence, the writing process actually works to reshape their experiences. They do not simply rhetorically assemble their lived experience prior to writing an essay, but the process of writing and then reflecting on essays about violence helps students build new accounts of their experiences. This observation is crucial for building an anti-essentialist understanding of the relationship between student writing and experience. While composition scholarship tends to suggest that students have—in a foundational way—experiences that are consciously deployed or reproduced in their writing, my findings support an anti-essentialist understanding of experience. No clear-cut pathway links a particular experience to a particular writing outcome; instead, students' experiences and positionalities are forged in the course of their writing and continuing talk about that writing. These findings insist that we view writing as a powerful tool in the shaping of experience, not an automatic reflection of student experience or identity. For students, experience is variously defined, contingent, and continuously reshaped throughout their writing processes.

Joan Scott's "The Evidence of Experience" has been instructive to me as I've worked to make sense of the ways students appeal to experience when reflecting on their writing practices. Scott's reframing of the relationship of subjects and experiences encouraged me to look at the study participants not as "individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (779). Thus, the analytic work of this chapter takes seriously students' appeals to experience not by simply making these experiences visible, but by exploring how they operate in students' writing and reflections. I consider, first, the contingent and varied definitions of experience that operate in students' talk about their writing. I then explore how students' experiences with structural violence shape their attitudes toward writing about violence; the mobilization of affect in students' talk about their writing; and students' appeals to experience across a range of academic writing genres and essay topics. Finally, I explore the way that students' perceptions of the university mediate both their writing about violence and their experiences. I do so to emphasize the social and contextual nature of the co-production of writing about violence and experience, but also to show that students believe the university has the power to judge not only their writing, but their experiences, as well. While this chapter identifies and explores patterns in student talk about experience, I do not mean to suggest that experience operates in the same way for all students. Indeed, this chapter argues not only that students' experiences are widely varied, but more crucially that students' appeals to experience are varied, unpredictable, and sometimes competing. Nonetheless, it is clear that experience and writing are mutually constitutive in students' writing about violence.

Defining Experience with Violence

Across the twenty-six interviews with student writers, three appeals to experience are most common: experience as a resource, as a set of cultural practices, and as interlocking structures of power. I've chosen examples drawn from interviews with three students, Melisa, Lauren, and Amoi, to demonstrate how various definitions of, and appeals to, experience operate in students' talk about their writing practices. I also present an analysis of my interview with Michael to show how some students insist they have no experiences relevant to their writing about violence; in these cases, I argue, students' writing is also powerfully mediated by experience, though in less visible ways. Taken together, these examples exhibit not only the most common appeals to experience, but they also illustrate the ways in which writing about violence mediates and reshapes students' experiences.

Some students appealed to experience to explain how they formed opinions about, and approaches to, their essay topics and the writing process itself. In these cases, experience might be understood as the resources that students bring to the act of writing about violence. However, it would be a mistake to understand these resources as either fixed or foundational; they do not determine students' approaches to writing but are productive of and produced by the writing process itself. Reflecting on her writing practices, Melisa explains:

> First thing I did was write down everything that I can recall, incidents that I can recall in my life where the topic was brought up, so I wrote down, "Conversation with a friend about [racial profiling] a few years ago," wrote down, "Uncle getting deported," "Family friend getting deported," "Racism with my own family," how I felt about it.

Melisa begins her writing process by writing down "incidents" from her life in which racial profiling was "brought up." While this list includes events in which racial profiling occurred, it also includes conversations about profiling and Melisa's own memories of racism in her family. Thus, it is not a single discrete experience with racial profiling that determines Melisa's approach to her paper, but a collection of varied kinds of experiences that she identifies as resources for her writing. However, Melisa does not simply list these experiences; she also considers how she felt about them. These feelings offer her a way to both interpret her experiences and approach her paper, suggesting that her writing process and experiences help to construct one another. This co-construction is key to understanding Melisa's definition of experience as a resource.

This particular definition has a specific rhetorical use-value within the context of our conversation. Melisa appeals to experience-as-resource to explain how she generated the ideas for her paper. She explains that after her initial brainstorm, she asked a few of her friends how they "felt" about racial profiling, looked up a brief history of racial profiling, and "then just wrote down [her] thoughts." She went on to revise the introduction and "then after that it seemed as if every other paragraph just naturally flowed because of the intro." Melisa combines her own experiential knowledge of racial profiling with the feelings of her friends and some historical research in order to reach a productive starting point for her essay. However, Melisa's emphasis on her own and her friends' "feelings" about racial profiling suggests that experience works as more than a straightforward invention strategy; it does more than help her find something to say. By reflecting on her feelings about her experiences, Melisa is developing an opinion about racial profiling; by inquiring about her friends' feelings, she is discerning their opinions

in order to continue reflecting upon her own. By appealing to experience-as-resources, Melisa is articulating an approach to writing that doesn't simply use experience to begin her essay; the meaning she attaches to her experiences and her writing continue to inform—and alter—one another throughout the information-gathering stage of her writing process.

Other students talked about experience as a set of cultural practices and ideologies. This was particularly true for students of color, as well as white students with strong ethnic identities. Jewish students, in particular, referenced their cultural identities to signal cultural practices, ideologies, and political affiliations. One student, Lauren, shared a paper she had written for a political science class that she explains was about the "Arab Israeli conflict." In order to write this paper, Lauren was required to purchase a computer game called "Peacemaker," a game that simulates conflict in the Middle East. Her paper reflects on her peacemaking decisions and the game's simulated responses to her efforts. In her reflections on this paper, Lauren discussed the ways that the game, class readings, discussions, and the disposition of her professor contributed to her ability to better understand the conflict.

Lauren understands experience as a set of cultural practices and ideologies that interpellate her as a responsible subject. She explains:

> I am Jewish. I grew up with a very one-sided perspective of the conflict. As the class went on, I felt guilty about just not knowing and slighted by my Hebrew school for teaching me. I never realized actually how violent and aggressive Israelis were. I had such a one sided view of it. I didn't know that the Palestinians had lived there and we came in and decided we wanted to work the land ourselves and become part of the land and kick the Palestinians off. I'm really supportive now of a two state solution.

The phrase, “I am Jewish,” signals a set of cultural practices and ideologies, particularly those that shape a pro-Israel politics. Lauren suggests that she acquired these ideologies in Hebrew school and from her family (later in the interview she explains that her parents instructed her to keep the course a secret from her grandparents); however, the phrase “I am Jewish” suggests that this ideology was also produced through cultural identification. She calls upon this cultural identification again when she says “we wanted to work the land ourselves and kick the Palestinians off.” Neither Lauren nor her parents are Israeli, yet her version of Jewish identification nonetheless constitutes her as a part of the conflict. For Lauren, experience is constituted by practices and ideologies produced by cultural identifications.

In this segment of the interview, Lauren appeals to experience to make sense of her affective response to the course material, to mark the extent of her learning, and ultimately to articulate a sense of responsibility for revising her experiential ideologies. While Melisa’s experiences worked in concert with her writing process to produce an informed opinion, Lauren’s experiences and writing process conflict. This conflict makes Lauren feel guilty and slighted, but it is also indicative of how much she learned from the course and from her writing. Writing as a Palestinian/Israeli peacemaker, Lauren actually re-constituted her experiences of Jewishness. She performed the role of peacemaker in the game and learned about Israeli aggression and Palestinian displacement, which resulted in a revision of her cultural knowledge and ideologies; she is now a supporter of a two state solution. Lauren appeals to experience not to disavow it, but to articulate the ways in which her writing and course work allowed her to assess and reconstitute these experiences.

Another participant, Amoi, articulated a definition of experience that other participants hinted at but did not state as explicitly. For Amoi, experience is constituted by interlocking systems of power that help produce the particularities of her subjectivity but also work to constitute black female subjectivity more broadly. Amoi is a fourth year student who was enrolled in a creative nonfiction class. For one of her creative nonfiction essays, she wrote about studying abroad in Spain. As I state earlier, the essay describes an incident in which Amoi is nearly kidnapped by a man whom she believed to be a cab driver. In the essay, Amoi links this incident with other experiences of racism in the U.S., as well as the racism she witnessed in Spain; ultimately, the essay reflects on the ways in which her race and gender may have marked her as a target for the man in the car. In our conversation about her essay, Amoi explains that theorizing is an important part of her writing process:

> For me, more theorizing, that's—looking at things, structures, you know, kind of, this event happened because of these interlocking systems in place that aren't really specific to me but they are me, but it's not just me.

Amoi's "theorizing" indicates that, for her, experience is constituted by interlocking and historical structures of power. She believes that "interlocking systems" constitute her as vulnerable, working to produce the event in Spain, and in turn, constituting the terms of her experience as a black woman. Experiences like these are not "specific to [her]" but "are her;" in other words, while the attempted abduction in Spain was a discrete event, it is linked, for her, to larger histories and structures of oppression that other black women share.

Amoi explained that she chose to write about racism in Spain because she didn't know how to talk to her peers or family about the time she spent studying abroad. "I

never talked about it," she said, "so going back and writing through it and going through it that way, kind of helped me process it more." The processing that Amoi did while writing about her trip to Spain was not simply a rehashing of events; rather, writing about her trip reshaped not only her perception of the attempted abduction, but the experience of being a black woman abroad and in the U.S.

Melisa, Lauren, and Amoi in one way or another understand their experiences and their writing about violence to be mutually constitutive. Indeed, most of the participants suggested that experience operates in this way when they write. Peter finds that his Russian background makes him especially engaged with his writing assignments on Russian and Greek history; simultaneously, writing assignments about Greek and Russian history help him "connect with his heritage." Morissa shared a term paper about Nazi experimentation on mentally disabled people. She described feeling angry, betrayed, and ashamed throughout the writing process because neither her family nor her Hebrew school taught her about the Holocaust experiences of non-Jews, despite the fact that her own brother is mentally disabled. Morissa claimed that this writing process reshaped the way the way she understands her identity and responsibilities as a Jewish American.

A few participants, however, claimed that their experiences were irrelevant to their writing about violence. Michael wrote a research paper about the politics of violence in Darfur for a class on the history of violence. He made a point of explaining that none of the students in the class was "directly impacted" by reading and writing about the history of violence. Yet, at another point, Michael told me that he found the films they watched in the course to be especially powerful, because they humanized victims of violence. He argued:

> It doesn't affect me. There are people in the world that care about them, just like my parents or my family cares about me. So, the fact that thousands of these people are dying, as a human being, you should care about it. And if you're an academic you should try to figure out why it's happening.

By explaining that none of the students was "directly impacted" and that the films "don't affect" him, Michael works to suggest that he has no experiences, outside of being a human being, that affect his engagement with the course material and his writing. These moments of disavowal are significant; by insisting on the distance between the course material and him, Michael reinforces the geopolitical barrier that preserves his privilege. This positioning also allows Michael to claim authority "as an academic"; in his articulation, an academic figures out why violence is happening from an analytic remove, rather than being affected by the violence. Michael's definition of violence, its actors, and experience relies on a personalized definition of experience, one in which experience is made up only of those events that have a direct impact—via victimization—on a person and the family that cares about him or her. Michael appears to understand experience as something a person does or doesn't have—a foundational possession, rather than a discursive construction. And yet, even as he is articulating this conception of experience Michael is reaffirming his own experience of privilege. While writing about violence does not reshape his experience in ways that he fully recognizes, it nonetheless helps to constitute his experience of privilege.

Toward the end of the interview, Michael explains that the women in the class reacted to the course material differently than he did:

> They wanted to cater their papers towards issues of feminism during that time and how girls were treated, whereas the guys were—while we were impacted by that, maybe not as much, because maybe it doesn't hit home as much …[which] is probably just inherent in being different genders.

In this moment in the interview, Michael argues for a more expansive definition of experience than his previous quote conveys. In his example, the women in the class have experiences relevant to writing about violence despite not being "directly impacted." According to Michael, the girls' experiences as gendered subjects produced writing about violence that engaged issues of gender, while those issues "didn't hit home as much" for him. Whether or not Michael is right about his female classmates' experiential engagement, his comments reveal his sense that a wide range of experiences shapes students' discursive engagements with violence; he simply believes he doesn't have any.

Michael also seems to suggest that even in its—perceived—absence, experience and writing might be mutually constitutive. That the issue of feminism "didn't hit home" for him helps to constitute his writing practices. Because he chooses not to write about issues of gender, he comes to see that these issues don't matter as much to him. These moments in which writing and seemingly absent experiences help constitute one another may be just as important for composition scholars to attend to as those in which students make clear links between their writing and their experiences. It is simply not true that Michael has no experience with violence or issues of gender; yet, his belief that he has no experience with these issues mediates and is mediated by his writing.

Through the lens of composition scholarship, students like Michael might be viewed as typical; he writes essays that are experientially removed, yet politically and intellectually engaged. In contrast, students who link their writing about violence with their own experiences are only discussed in scholarship that focuses on personal writing; in such scholarship, these students are depicted as a curious minority, reproducing their experiences on the page in response to inappropriate and invasive prompts. Yet, my

conversations with students suggest that it is actually students like Michael who are in the minority. Most participants suggested that their writing and experiences mediate one another in powerful and productive ways. By employing contingent notions of experience—as a resource, cultural practice, or structure of power—students work to position themselves within complex histories and discourses of violence.

Experience with Structural Violence

I have been arguing for an anti-essentialist understanding of the relationship between experience and student writing about violence. And yet, students did suggest that certain kinds of experiences and subjectivities might equip them with greater sensitivity toward the issues they are writing about. In particular, students reported that experiences with structural violence shape what they choose to write about, how they engage those topics, and their perceptions that writing should, ideally, challenge hegemonic beliefs.[3] Even in these cases, I argue that students do not understand these experiences with structural violence as foundational or essential. Instead, students understand their experiences with structural violence as resources that help them to write essays that challenge the status quo and are often understandable and persuasive to a wide audience. Thus, even as I explore the role varied experiences with structural violence play in

[3] In their own descriptions of their experiences, students did not use the word structural violence. If they characterized their own experiences at all they used words like "oppression." I've chosen to use structural violence here to emphasize the links students make between incidents of violence and the social structures that systematically produce them. Paul Farmer defines structural violence as "violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly—by everyone who belongs to a particular social order…In short, the concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression" (307). There are limits to the term structural violence: it doesn't fully take into account linguistic or symbolic violence; it can make the "social order" seem like a static entity; it doesn't fully acknowledge the relationship between individual acts of violence and acts by the state. However, I use it here less as a theoretical category than a descriptive one, as way of capturing the sorts of experiences with violence that students view as resources in their own writing about violence.

students' writing about violence, I understand these experiences to be constitutive of students' writing and not an ontological given that determines students' writing practices.

A common critique of personal writing assignments is typified in Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler's opinion essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The report relies on examples of student writing about violence to argue that personal writing assignments encourage students to disclose personal traumas and discriminate against students who have no traumatic experiences to write about by penalizing these students with lower grades. Whether or not this claim is accurate, it reveals a problematic attitude toward, and inaccurate understanding of, how experiences with oppression are mediated by college writing. First, it provides a limited understanding of the sorts of experiences with violence that students call upon as resources. The students I interviewed did not necessarily view their experiences with violence as traumatic, nor were they necessarily the victims of violence. The students I spoke with called on experiences with violence that included victimization, but also included witnessing violence, having cultural connections to historical violence, and having experiences with oppression. Second, the report implies that there is an automatic correlation between students' experiences with victimization and the writing they produce. The students I spoke with never suggested that their experiences with victimization—or, more broadly, structural violence—determine what or how they write. The evidence I present in this section suggests that composition scholarship must complicate both the depictions of which sorts of experiences and subjectivities are relevant to students' writing about violence and our understanding of the relationship among students' experiences, subjectivities, and writing.

Throughout our interview, Melisa referenced experiences with structural violence to explain her writing choices, suggesting that these experiences equip her with an ability to recognize the relationships between individual experiences of deportation and institutional law enforcement practices and policies. Melisa explained:

> People don't—If you don't know somebody personally who has been deported, you don't have that connection with the subject, you just think of it as something your government's created for you to follow and you don't truly think about the kind of impact it has on the citizens.

On first reading, Melisa's use of the second person appears to set up a binary between people who have witnessed deportation and those who have not, potentially suggesting that she occupies a position of unique and exclusive understanding. In fact, this is a much more inclusive second person; Melisa makes this comment in the context of describing her own learning, explaining that she wrote the paper because she didn't know enough about racial profiling policies. She credits her experiences with deportation as the impetus to learn more about government policies and suggests they are a resource for seeing the connections between an individual's experiences and institutional practices.

Melisa's experience with deportation not only provides her with resources for questioning what she perceives as taken-for granted policies; she believes it also makes her more persuasive. She reported that many of her classmates were angered and moved by what she had written because the paper "has an equilibrium between personal connection with the audience, but then the factual connection, as well" which allowed them to see that "there are certain things that should be questioned about our government in terms of racial profiling, where it's supposed to protect us, but inadvertently harms a lot of us." Melisa hoped that her paper persuaded her classmates to "be a little less self centered and start paying attention to [their] surroundings." Melisa argued that through

her writing, she was able to persuade her classmates to attend to their surroundings in a more informed way. Armed with the knowledge that racial profiling can be harmful personally, she explained that her peers also began to question government policies. Melisa's experiences witnessing deportation gave her a resource for understanding the complexities of racial profiling that her classmates might not share, but she did not view this experience as untranslatable; in fact, it was her ability to translate this experience into a persuasive paper that she found to be one of her writing strengths.

Amoi also suggests that experience with structural violence equips her with tools for understanding the relationship between individual experiences and structures of power. The "theorizing" that's so central to her writing process links, for example, the attempted abduction in Spain with larger histories and structures of oppression that other black women share. When I asked Amoi how she came to think about her own experiences in relation to interlocking systems of power, she responded, "I don't know." I asked if perhaps her coursework at the University of Michigan had helped her make some connections. She replied, "I guess in Michigan I've had classes that talked about that, but it's kind of part of just growing up with any type of stigmatized identity, you kind of—I don't know, it just makes sense that way." Amoi calls on her experiences of "growing up with a stigmatized identity" to explain the ease with which she links an individual experience of injury with larger structures of power, while diminishing the role of higher education.

For Melisa and Amoi experiences with structural violence contribute to their abilities to articulate the connections between individual injury and structures of power. Yet, these experiences are also quite different: Melisa draws on her experiences as a

witness to deportation, while Amoi's paper concerns her own vulnerability to violence. This suggests that experiences with structural violence cannot be reduced to essential traits, but are varied and unpredictable. Nonetheless, these experiences appear to act as meaningful writing resources for some undergraduates. Lauren's definition of experience—as a set of cultural practices and ideologies that interpellate her as a responsible subject—offers another way in which students might draw on experiences with structural violence. Of her experiences writing about Israeli and Palestinian politics she explains: "I was happy that I could research that and have that and almost disappointed in the new perspective coming out of the class because my parents were just like, 'Do not talk to Grandma and Grandpa about Palestinians or anything.' I don't, but I have more compassion for [my grandparents]." She spoke critically throughout our conversation about the one-sided view of Israeli politics she was exposed to growing up. In this moment she acknowledges the complications of expanding her worldview. Her exposure to the legacy of structural violence, via her grandparents' Holocaust experiences, allows her to be both compassionate about their lived experiences and acknowledge the limits of the politics it helped to produce.

During the interviews, not all students who experienced some exposure to violence were able to make connections between individual injury and structural violence. Carly wrote a reflection paper for her Slavic studies class about her Catholic grandmother's trials in and eventual escape from Nazi Poland. Describing the impact that her grandmother's story had on her life, Carly explained:

> I definitely see in my babcia where my mom and I both get our strength from, so—and then, like, knowing all the history behind it definitely throws things into perspective. Like, yeah, my life is hard, but she went through so much more than I did. So that kind of makes me grateful that I

> have such a great life here and all the work that she went through in order for that to be possible for us.

Rather than viewing her grandmother's experience in light of larger structures of power—or even the themes of the Slavic history course—Carly adopts an interpretation that emphasizes individual strength and uplift. If Melisa, Amoi, and Lauren's experiences suggest the varied nature of students' exposure to structural violence, Carly's words demonstrate its unpredictability. Students who have some connection with structural violence will not necessarily see it that way or be well equipped to consider the relationship between individual injury and larger structures of power.

Returning to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* report, we can see a number of problems. The report is concerned with the unfair advantage that students who write affectively compelling personal stories might receive. This focus on compelling narratives diverts attention from the writing resource that Melisa, Amoi, Lauren, and others are employing effectively: the ability to connect individual stories of injury with larger structures of violence. Experiences with structural violence might present some advantage in writing about violence, but this ability is one that writing instructors should be celebrating. This is especially true in cases where these advantages run contrary to the other kinds of advantages that the university tends to privilege. Amoi, for example, doesn't consider herself to be a strong writer. In fact, she explained that the paper she shared with me is the first paper she has felt like she has successfully written in over a year. She explained that she had been diagnosed with a learning disability which suggested that sequential thinking—and therefore, academic writing—is a challenge for her. The opportunity to write creatively and make connections between seemingly

disparate experiences and theories allowed Amoi to capitalize on her writing and thinking strengths.

The example of Carly demonstrates that the links between personal reflection and structures of violence are often contingent and contradictory. Her essay was affectively compelling; under Swartlander, Pace, and Stamler's limited definition of writing about personal trauma, Carly has an advantage over her peers who don't have exceptional Polish grandmothers to interview. However, if we understand students' experiences with violence as writing resources that extend beyond the narration of a compelling story, we can see that a student like Carly would benefit from pedagogies that ask students to consider the relationship between individual experiences of violence and larger structures of power.

Experience and Affect in Student Writing about Violence

Often, students described the relationship between their experiences, subjectivities, and writing in affective terms: students interpret their depth of emotional engagement with their writing as productive for their writing, productive for their own and their audience's engagement, and generative of persuasive moral authority. This finding adds important nuance to composition scholarship on writing about violence that tends to characterize emotional engagement with writing about violence as injurious or salutary. While this scholarship has acknowledged that emotional engagement is relevant to students' writing about violence, the injury/healing binary occludes the complex and variant nature of students' affective engagement by pathologizing it. The study participants described their emotions and writing as mutually constitutive and did not

suggest that their writing produced a single, final emotion like hurt or healing. Instead of simply "working through" emotional responses by writing about violence, students described a range of emotions as produced by and productive in their writing.

Morissa explained that researching Mengele's experiments was an especially difficult part of the writing process. She reported feeling disgusted by his meticulous notes and photographs, explaining, "For me, writing that part was very difficult for me specifically because I do have a mentally retarded brother… That was hard for me because he wouldn't have made—my brother Jon, not even a chance in hell." While many writers would certainly feel disgusted by Mengele's experiments, Morissa linked the disgust she experienced with an awareness about how those experiments implicated her brother as a disabled person. Lauren reports feeling both guilty and slighted as she researched and wrote her paper on Israeli aggression in the Middle East. In this case, Lauren's experiences with oppression are two-fold. On the one hand, she began to view pro-Israel Jews, like the ones who taught her in Hebrew school, as oppressors; at the same time, she explains that this research gave her compassion for her grandparents' pro-Israel politics because she realized how their own experiences with oppression inform their political ideologies.

Tim explained that learning about how his friend was mistreated as a result of prejudices against Muslim Americans made him feel bad. While he's careful to explain that he didn't actually mistreat anyone, he does feel bad that he hadn't realized how racial profiling might impact Muslim Americans. Tim struggled in the interview to acknowledge his own culpability in the production of prejudiced attitudes, but his encounter with structural violence did produce an affective response that he called on as a

resource in his writing. He explained that feeling bad was a result of "seeing the other side," but this also helped him to write a paper that acknowledged the other side. We might characterize Tim's writing experience as a working through of his guilt about his father's work in the FBI and his own prejudiced attitudes, but this is to see affect and writing as unidirectional processes. My findings suggest that it is more accurate to view both Tim's writing and affect as produced by and productive of his encounter with his friend's experiences with discrimination and his own privilege. Furthermore, this multidirectional process doesn't appear to have a single affective or ideological endpoint. Tim continued to respond affectively and critically as he discussed his essay with me, long after the paper had been written and turned in.

This small sample of interview participants described affective responses relevant to their writing and experiences that included disgust, guilt, and betrayal. While these are not positive emotions, they were productive emotions. All of the students called on these emotions to demonstrate their commitment and sensitivity to their writing topics and to articulate the power of their encounters with structural violence. That these negative-seeming emotions produced and were produced by writing that students found to be meaningful suggests that negative affect is a productive component of their writing practices and should not be understood as either damaging or a salutary "working through." The range and contingency of students' affective engagements with their writing about violence also suggest that they are not predictable or automatic. These participants experienced strong affective engagements with their writing because it was linked to their experiences—experiences that this study suggests are not only varied, but also mediated by the particular writing context. We don't know what affective

engagements, if any, will be mediated by students' writing about violence; however, these findings do demonstrate that to understand student writing about violence within the binary of injury and healing is to ignore the variety and multidirectionality of student affect. Furthermore, this binary ignores the vast array of productive resources students have for negotiating experiences with structural violence whether it be their own or others'.

Appealing to Experience in Writing about Violence Across Genres

In light of composition studies' scholarly and instructional expectations that writing about violence occurs largely in personal writing genres, it is noteworthy that the study participants reported writing about violence across a range of academic genres. Of the twenty-six students I interviewed, seven shared persuasive essays, five shared research papers, four shared analytical essays, three shared pieces of creative nonfiction, three shared personal writing assignments, two shared essays meant to demonstrate knowledge, and one shared a reflective essay. In one way or another, all of these students made appeals to experience as they reflected on their writing practices. In some cases, students also made appeals to experience in the essays themselves: the personal writing, creative nonfiction, reflective essays, and a few of the persuasive essays included references to students' experiences. These findings contradict composition scholarship that suggests that appeals to experience occur predominantly in personal writing genres.

Across this range of academic writing genres, one of the most common reasons that students appealed to experience was to reflect on the topic, or subject, of their essays. In particular, students choose topics that allow them to explore incongruities in their

experiences, resulting in unexpected conclusions that reshape those experiences. Thus, experience does not determine—in an automatic or predictable fashion—students' topic choices; rather, the particularity of students' experiences and the topic they choose are co-productive in powerful, but unpredictable ways. Examining the links students make between their experiences and topic choice is important not only because I found it to be a prevalent pattern across the interviews, but also because topic choice holds such a central place in composition scholarship on student writing about violence. This literature tends to suggest that we can determine a student's lived experiences by reading his or her personal writing and in turn, the literature suggests that students' experience with a particular topic may actually determine their writing. Instead, I offer an account of the contingent and varied ways in which experience and topic choice help to constitute one another in a variety of academic writing genres.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, some students appeal to experience in order to explain why they chose the topic they did. Morissa also focused on the reason she chose her topic when describing her essay to me for the first time:

> And for our midterm paper we just could pick any aspect of the Holocaust or of World War II to focus on… And I picked Dr. Mengele because it is a side of the Holocaust that people talk about, but they don't really want to talk about because it is so horrific. It is beyond terrible. Like the actual experiments, which is like interesting 'cause I – my dad's like a really big World War II buff, which is why I'm like this and I've learned about this since I was little. And I knew who Dr. Mengele was. I knew the Angel of Death. I did not know what the experiments were, to be honest. I knew that they were bad. I didn't know exactly what they were; so I was interested to find out. They were the most horrific things I've ever seen in my entire life. It was like—the fact that I know it was real was like so terrifying. So I decided to do a paper on that.

Morissa struggled to resolve an incongruity in her cultural ideologies and experiential resources. In her explanation for choosing to write about Mengele she focuses both on the

experiential resources provided by her family and her belief that there are gaps in that experience. It is through her father's interest in the Holocaust that Morissa "knew the Angel of Death." It is worth noting that Morissa claims she "knew the Angel of Death" not that she knew about him. Knowing about Mengele would entail factual knowledge of the experiments he conducted. To simply "know the Angel of Death" suggests a different kind of familiarity, the experience of growing up in a Jewish household with a World War II buff, who has taught her about the Holocaust since she was little. It is this familial and cultural knowledge, gained through experience, that makes Morissa "like this." "Like this" means she sees herself as not necessarily factually knowledgeable about Mengele, but rather, keenly aware of the existence of horrific social phenomena.

Much later in the interview, Morissa explained that she has "the most morbid taste" and has always been interested in "people who are oppressed," "people who are crazy," and "the downtrodden" as well as, "criminals, psychopaths, sex offenders, and the Nazis." She is a psychology major, concentrating in criminology, though she said her friends claim her major should be "degenerates." Thus, Morissa appealed to her early experiences with her father to explain not only how she came to know about Megnele, but why he is interesting to her; ultimately, she fit this particular writing choice into the larger complex of her school, career, and ethical interests. Morissa explained that these experiences with her father contributed to her ability to perceive the silence that surrounds Mengele's experiments and her own lack of knowledge about the experiments. Underlying both of these reasons is Morissa's assumption that it is important to learn and write about events in which aspects of the historical account have been silenced because they're so horrific. Morissa's reflections on her writing practices allow her to explore the

incongruities between her interest in exploring horrific human behaviors and her lack of historical and factual knowledge.

Later in the interview, Morissa appealed to another set of experiences to articulate an incongruity in her experiences. She explained that in Hebrew school "they talk only about Jews" while her Dutch history taught her about other "terrible, terrible, terrible things." She "learned about a whole part of the Holocaust [she] didn't even know existed, about the euthanizing of mentally retarded people." In Morissa's initial description of her paper topic, she described choosing to write about Mengele because it is a side of the Holocaust that people don't want to talk about. Her description of Hebrew school provides the evidence to support this assertion; it also suggests that Morissa's choice to write a research paper about Josef Mengele allowed her to explore an incongruity in her experience—the differences between her Hebrew school and collegiate exposures to the holocaust—which ultimately reconstituted her Hebrew school experiences.

In Hebrew school, Morissa learned about a single aspect of the Holocaust. Her Dutch history class didn't simply supplement this knowledge but also made her concerned about the discrepancies in her knowledge and the knowledge of others. She described furiously calling her parents and demanding to know why they never told her about this aspect of the Holocaust. Morissa's experience of this discrepancy led her to choose a paper topic that would help her learn about, and force other people to confront, an aspect of the Holocaust that she understood to be silenced. Morissa appealed to her socialization at home, combined with the discrepancy between her Hebrew school experiences and college experiences to articulate why she chose to write her essay about Josef Mengele.

The way that Morissa discussed these experiences in relation to one another, as well as in relation to her paper writing, demonstrates that for her, writing about violence is a dynamic process. She continued to explore the notion of why she's "like this" throughout the interview, offering a variety of explanations for how she has come to be interested in confronting horrific human behavior and events. Thus, we cannot view her subjectivity as an ontological given based on her experiences, nor should we understand her choice of paper topic to be predictable or automatic. Morissa was constantly reconstituting her subjectivity and experiences in relation to her learning and writing. At the same time, the relationship between Morissa's experiences and her writing choices is not automatic, but contingent upon Morissa's particular experiences in and out of school. She doesn't believe it is important to write about silenced historical events because she is Jewish or because she attended Hebrew school. Instead, Morissa's particular experience with the incongruity among her family socialization, her Hebrew school education, and her research paper writing helped her explain why she values learning and writing about silenced historical events. This sense is further strengthened by growing up with two disabled brothers, whom she thought of often in the process of writing her paper. While Morissa's experiences—and her reflections upon these experiences—are not made visible in the text of the research paper itself, there is no doubt that they mediate and are mediated by her writing process, beginning as early in the process as her choice of paper topic.

Morissa's case is evidence that we cannot continue to assume that experience matters only in autobiographical writing. Indeed, this case suggests that we must begin to consider what role experience might play in relation to all academic writing genres, if

writing and experience are indeed mutually constitutive. As instructors of first year writing know well, research essays are often read as a litany of facts, characterized by detachment and objectivity. Ideally, though, research is about discovery, which is precisely the tack that Morissa's appeals to experience allowed her to take. For Morissa, the genre of the research paper does not foreclose experiential engagement—instead, it helps shape it.

Tim, a first-year writing student, also chose a paper topic because he wanted to explore an incongruity in his experiences. He offered two explanations, at different points in the interview, for how he decided to write a paper on prejudices against Muslim Americans. Initially he explained that he chose the topic because he's "always been kind of fascinated with terrorism and its effects, but also what causes it" as a result of his father's work with the FBI. Later, Tim explained that he came up with his paper topic by doing some brainstorming. He thought he might be interested in writing about terrorism and then he thought of his friend who was fasting for Ramadan. Then "things just kind of fell into place"; he started thinking, "yes, there's prejudice against Muslim Americans, but where does that come from? Not only terrorism, but what else is behind that?" Tim explained that writing this paper allowed him to think about his experience in a new way. He said,

> Because my dad was in the FBI I kind of knew a little background on why they would screen for Muslim Americans…So I understood that side, but doing this paper made me understand the other side; like how you really have to be careful not to make blanket statements and not just focus on one group over the other.

As with Morissa, Tim's talk about his writing practices demonstrates that experience and writing are actually being co-constructed in his essay about prejudice against Muslim

Americans. This is not simply an example of a white student's attitudes about race changing through course material. The particularity of Tim's experience as the son of an FBI agent and friend to a Muslim American woman become mediated by his writing. It is by "doing this paper" that Tim came to "understand the other side," a practice that actually produced a new perspective on his experience.

While students writing research, persuasive, and analytic essays largely explained their topic choices with appeals to experience, students writing in response to personal essay prompts were more nonchalant in their appeals to experience. One student, Sean, shared an essay about being held at gunpoint. When I asked him to describe his paper, he explained:

> The experience was supposedly something that changed you. And this one experience that I wrote about just had the paper was written for me, so I just had to put it on paper and just add details. So I just picked that one. I could have picked a lot of other things, but that one stuck out…And I figure that was the easiest way to go about it.

While students like Melisa, Morissa, and Tim appealed to experience to explain how they chose their essay topics, Sean attempted to diminish the significance of experience in his topic choice. He chose the topic that "stuck out" and seemed like the easiest one to write about. By explaining that the experience supposedly changed him, Sean suggested that the experience may not have been as significant as the paper suggests.[4] While most students went to great lengths to explain the relationship between their experiences and their topic choice, Sean offers only a few sentences.

There are multiple ways to interpret Sean's comparative nonchalance. Because Sean's paper explicitly references his experience, he may have felt less of a need to

[4] Chapter five considers the significance of the discrepancy between the essay assignment and the way in which Sean interprets it, focusing specifically on why Sean does not consider being held at gun point to be an experience that fundamentally changed him.

expand on the link than those students for whom the writing and experiential links are less apparent in their essays. As I discuss in chapter five, Sean also has an interest in suggesting to me that gun violence is a regular part of his life, not an anomalous experience. The ambivalence with which Sean reports his experience stands in stark contrast to the impassioned and affectively engaged appeals of the other study participants, underscoring the un-extraordinary quality of such violence in his life. The impression Sean gives that he could have written about many experiences reinforces my claim that the relationship between experience and writing is not predictable or automatic. Sean did not choose to write about being held at gunpoint because it was the single most significant experience in his life; in fact, later in the interview, Sean makes clear that gun violence is not an uncommon experience in his life. Teachers and scholars cannot assume that Sean's experiences as an urban, black man will automatically result in a particular sort of writing, just as all women who attended Hebrew schools will not engage their experiences in the same way.

The composition studies' literature on personal writing is full of anxiety about the ways personal writing assignments force students to reveal their most intimate secrets, or feel left out if they don't have any secrets to reveal (Morgan; Swartzlander, Pace and Stamler; Valentino). Yet, Sean's nonchalant discussion of his writing suggests his experiential engagement with the topic may actually have been less rigorous than Morissa's, despite the fact that he was writing a personal essay. Sean "just had to put [his experience] on paper and just add details" while Morissa struggled to reconcile her experiences with Hebrew school, her brothers, and her research on Josef Mengele. Taken together, Morissa and Sean's discussions of their writing disrupt the sense that personal

writing inevitably produces deep experiential engagement within the writing process, while academic writing in other genres is far less experiential. This finding suggests composition scholars and instructors must expand our understanding of how experience operates in student writing; to do so, we must acknowledge that writing about violence mediates students experiences, even when the assignment itself does not require—and perhaps even sublimates—personal disclosure.

Experience with Violence and the University

I have argued that students' appeals to experience and their writing about violence are contingent, varied, and contextual. One significant context for the production of both writing and experience is the university itself. I argue in this final section that students' understandings of the university—and their perceptions of the experiences and writing that the university sanctions—influence their engagement with writing about violence and their appeals to experience. In the interviews, students defined the university in various ways. At times, it means invisible, institutional power and at other times, it refers to their perceptions of their classmates and instructors. Students' interactions with the university are inevitably particular and partial; from these partial perspectives, students construct different definitions of the university and have varied perceptions of how the university mediates their writing about violence and their experiences. In the interviews, some students explicitly refer to the university, while others identify the university more implicitly by referring to grades, patterns in instructor expectations, and patterns in their peers' behaviors. Thus, these findings are concerned with how students' constructions of the university mediate and are mediated by their writing about violence and experience.

In reflecting on their writing practices, students suggest that the university gives them tools to interpret and articulate their experiences in writing while at the same time it commands power to invalidate the experiences with violence that students write about. This finding confirms that students' academic writing is mediated by the social context of the university and cannot be understood as an automatic or predictable reflection of student experience. It also suggests that the stakes of writing about violence are high: students' perceptions of university expectations have consequences not only for what and how they write about violence, but for whether they view their experiences as institutionally valued.

In general, participants believe that the university frowns on writing that appeals to emotion or personal experience, despite the fact that emotion and experience appear to play powerful roles in student writing about violence. Melisa explicitly referred to the role of the university throughout our interview, constructing it as an institution with the power to make judgments about both the content and form of her writing. She explained that she used to focus primarily on university expectations of college writing:

> Before I was considering how people felt, I was also considering how the university would feel about it and what's the general look of it in a paper. Now I'm more concerned about the actual goal which is to affect people and make a statement with this paper rather than just cater to the way an outline or rough draft should look.

Melisa suggested that her writing goals, to "affect people and make a statement," are at odds with her perception of the university's goals for her writing, which she understands as interested in the form of the writing, including "the general look of it." The emotional and political impact of her paper, which she has come to see as its real value, does not appear to be something that she thinks the university also values. Despite the fact that the

process of writing this paper not only reshaped Melisa's experiences, but, according to her, the attitudes and beliefs of her peers, Melisa perceives the university as more interested in issues like learning to outline or writing a rough draft.

Sean, on the other hand, makes more implicit references to the university, though he also understands it as an institution with the power to make judgments about both the form and content of his writing. Sean described writing a research paper about urban violence in Detroit, which he thought he had written successfully, but received a C- on. He explained,

> Since it was where I was from I spent so much time, so many days looking up crime whether it was crime rates, crime articles, all types of things. I actually ended up getting a C- minus on that paper…it was just like, 'How is that even possible?' Like I put a lot of effort into this because not only as I started doing the paper things started getting more interesting to me so I would do and I'd be like, 'Oh that happened?' Or 'Dang, that's so crazy,' so—and it was like I did all of that and I got a C- on something that I felt so strong about. It was kind of like I don't think it would have made a difference.

A first-year student, Sean doesn't have the same understanding of academic writing protocols that Melisa does. While she is confident that she understands the discrepancies between her writing goals and university expectations, Sean seems mystified by these discrepancies. While he did not explicitly invoke the university as an institution with the power to make judgments about his writing, he did suggest that mysterious and powerful actors are making determinations about his writing that he does not understand. He believes that spending time, putting in effort, and writing about a topic relevant to where he's from should result in university-sanctioned writing. In the end, he determined that it doesn't matter whether or not he feels strongly about the topic, because it didn't make a difference. Both Sean and Melisa's comments betray their beliefs that writing about

violence should engage their emotions and experiences, but neither of them believes that the university shares those values.

While many students suggested that there were discrepancies between their understandings of the process of writing about violence and their perceptions of university values, they also suggested that the university provides them with tools to articulate and interpret their experiences with violence. Some students, like Morissa, Lauren, and Tim found that the university provided them with opportunities to investigate taboo writing topics, revealing stories, information, and attitudes that they had not considered before. For Tim, living on a hall with a Muslim American woman, learning about prejudice in his writing class, interviewing his friend for his paper, and then writing about US attitudes toward Muslim Americans helped him to see a side of the racial profiling debate that he had not considered before. For Morissa and Lauren, learning and writing about aspects of the Holocaust and Israel/Palestine politics conflicted with their family and Hebrew school experiences and ultimately altered their perspectives on Jewish history and identity. The university—including student residences, classroom learning, and course readings—provided these students with perspectives on their own identities and experiences that they had not previously been exposed to; the act of writing helped students assimilate these new perspectives, ultimately reshaping their experiences.

One of the consequences of the co-construction of experience and writing about violence is that it can make students' experiences vulnerable to judgment by others. Morissa explains feeling uncomfortable when each member of her class was asked to stand up and describe his or her paper. She felt like everyone in the class was "looking at [her] like, 'What the hell were you thinking?'" She felt as though her peers didn't

understand why she chose to write a paper about Josef Mengele, while they had chosen topics like the "Russian people in the Holocaust" or "the Hitler youth." Morissa explained that other students often think her interest in the Holocaust is weird; she wasn't simply uncomfortable presenting her paper topic because it was different, but because it made her seem different, and in turn invalidated the experiences and interests that help to constitute Morissa's subjectivity.

Amoi also expressed concern about her peers' responses to her essay. She explained that before the small group workshop she was afraid of what her workshop group would say, "like if someone had been to Spain before and was like, 'Oh, I never experienced racism in Spain so this is all invalid.'" It is important to note that Amoi believes the validity of her experience to be at stake, for Amoi believes that some experiences are recognized at the university, while others are not. In this particular instance, the university is constituted by her peers and she recognized that they have some power to invalidate experiences that constitute her subjectivity. This suggests that as students reshape their experiences in writing, one of the risks they focus on is the way writing about violence exposes them to the possibility of invalidation.

While participants believe their peers have the power to invalidate their experiences, they also find that other times they validate them. Melisa, for example, found that her peers were persuaded and moved by her writing, even when she didn't follow her perceptions of academic writing protocols. Sean reports that his peers were impressed by both his writing and his experiences. He explains that his classmates responded first to the content of his personal essay about being held at gunpoint and were a little impressed and a little intimidated by his experiences. But, as they continued

working with the essay, the other students said things like, "'Oh I didn't realize that you were really good at writing'…cause like I kind of put a lot into that one because it was something that happened to me. So everyone was like, 'I never met a boy that was just so passionate about writing about this.'" Unlike the essay on which he received a C-, Sean's notions of good writing—effort and passion—matched up with his peers' responses, responses that recognized both his experiences and his writing strengths.

Composition studies has long acknowledged that writing is a social practice; these findings support and nuance that position. In the case of student writing about violence, in which experience appears to play a central, but variable role, students believe their peers command the power to validate or invalidate not only their writing, but also their experiences. Crucially, this power is institutional: students understand their peers as a part of what constitutes the university, and as such they carry the institutional power to judge students' writing and experiences. This suggests that as we consider the role the university plays in producing student writing about violence, we cannot attend only to the power of grades, writing assignments, or the instructor; we must also consider that students themselves have the power to determine what kinds of writing and experiences are validated and recognized by the university, of which they're a part.

Indeed, the participants themselves have strong notions of what constitutes allowable academic writing in the university. These notions are certainly produced by what they are taught by their instructors and how they are graded, but they are also powerfully produced and reproduced by students themselves. In reflecting upon their writing about violence, most students strongly believed that academic writing should be both unbiased and relatively unemotional; at the same time, they found it challenging to

be unemotional and unbiased when it came to writing about violence, especially when this writing was constitutive of their experiences. Morissa explains that she worked to edit out a lot of the emotional content that initially went into her research and thinking about Mengele, explaining, "It was a real research paper…so I felt like I had to be kind of official and you're not supposed to have an opinion. Also, I couldn't say what I wanted to say, 'As a Jewish woman, I am disgusted and sick to my stomach.'" Morissa censored her strong emotional reaction—being sick to her stomach—which is intimately linked to her subjectivity and experiences as a Jewish woman. She believes that she must censor this response in order be official and unbiased. Melisa also believes that it is important to temper her emotional engagement with her topic, explaining that academic writing needs to have an "equilibrium between personal connection with the audience but then the factual connection as well." Her perception that the university sanctions unbiased and unemotional writing has been confirmed by her experiences at the university where professors have told her to "remove some of that fluff" in reference to personal anecdotes and affective content.

It is clear that while writing about violence provides students with valuable opportunities to reflect on and reshape their experiences, this process is accompanied by risks. As composition studies works to build an anti-essentialist understanding of the relationship between expereince and student writing about violence, we must also remember that when students write about violence they make themselves vulnerable to judgments not only about their writing, but also about their experiences. In some cases, this leads students to disguise their experiential and affective engagement because it does not conform to their perceptions of university expectations of academic writing. In other

cases, students worry that their instructors or peers will invalidate their experiences. Thus, acknowledging the co-construction of writing about violence and experience in our classrooms and scholarship also means acknowledging the ways the university itself mediates students' experiences and their writing about violence.

Chapter Five

LISTENING IN: STUDENTS TALK ABOUT WRITING VIOLENCE

In this chapter, I present the talk and writing of three students. A look at the discrepancies between student talk about their writing on violence and the writing itself helps to illustrate three major findings. First, it troubles an assumed binary between individual injury and structural violence, which is present in both the composition scholarship on student writing about violence and in the assumptions of trauma theory and common deployments of contemporary psychotherapeutic discourses. Second, it also demonstrates that writing about violence provides students with opportunities to explore their own positionalities within histories and discourses of violence, though students do not always take these opportunities. In other cases, students' self-positioning is not always visible in the writing they produce, even while it's a significant element of their talk about their writing. Finally, this chapter suggests that student talk about writing on violence is a valuable tool for learning more about students' writing practices.

Talking with students about their writing has also been valuable methodologically. At the end of this chapter, I'll consider the ways in which students' talk about violence helped to reshape not only their definitions of violence, experiences, and perceptions of their writing practices, but my own. Emphasizing the value of this dialogic process, the way meaning and interpretation are co-constructed and remade through talk, is perhaps this project's most significant finding. In light of this, I suggest

that teachers whose students write about violence might work to develop pedagogies that recognize that students' definitions of violence, understandings of their own experiences, and writing practices are in flux, constantly reshaping one another. Such a pedagogy also acknowledges the powerful role of talk in enhancing instructors' understandings of their students' writing practices and discursive engagements with violence, as well as its value as a tool for helping students' reflect on and revise their writing about violence. I suggest that reflective talk is also a valuable tool for helping students locate themselves within histories and discourses of violence; further, a focus on dialogue takes seriously the experiential resources students bring to writing about violence, while questioning commonplace assumptions about the education and political value of various academic writing genres.

Everyday Violence: Two Personal Essays

In this section, I share the writing and talk of two students, Sean and Ermira. Both students wrote personal essays about violence for their first-year writing courses. Both students' essays are not unlike the essays that appear in the composition scholarship that celebrates or critiques the personal essay. The essays foreground individual injury, dramatize a seemingly-life-changing event, and appear to assume a coherent and "authentic" version of the self. Yet, my conversations with Sean and Ermira tell a more nuanced story. Both students—to different degrees—resist a reading of their experience as a one-time exceptional injury.

Both students' experiences—Ermira's of physical abuse and Sean's of being shot at—could be viewed as traumatic. Indeed, both of their written narratives in certain

respects conform to the protocols of the trauma narrative. In the psychotherapeutic understanding of trauma, disassociation and repetition are trauma's primary characteristics. To illustrate this point, Bessel van der Kolk, a leading expert on posttraumatic stress disorder, compares traumatic memory with nontraumatic memory. He claims that in ordinary memory, remembered aspects of experience are integrated into a cohesive personal narrative. "The core pathology of PTSD is that certain sensations or emotions related to traumatic experiences are dissociated, keep returning in unbidden ways, and do not fade with time" (van der Kolk 382). Trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth and Shoshanna Felman use psychoanalytic theory about trauma to argue that speech and writing about trauma will also carry the characteristics that van der Kolk references. For these theorists, the bearer of trauma carries the undiluted inassimilable reality of the event in the "surprising literality and nonsymbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks" (Caruth "Trauma and Experience " 5). Therefore, speech and writing about trauma are born from the unconscious; they are unsymbolic, compulsive, and dissociated, resulting in narrative disruptions, silences, and repetition, at least until – via the talking cure[5] - they become integrated in a coherent sense of self.

Unusual among the syndromes defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the APA, PTSD is characterized by both its causes and symptoms (J. McNally 231). In order to be diagnosed with PTSD, a person must have experienced an: "Event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others or if the person's response [to an event] involved intense fear,

[5] The talking cure begins with Freud, Breuer and Anna O investigating the mystery of Anna O's "hysteria." In their meetings, Anna O and Breuer would engage in long dialogues, in which "the collaborations between doctor and patient took on the quality of a quest"; in the process of reconstructing Anna O's past, "the uncovering of recent traumas gave way to the exploration of earlier events" and Anna O's symptoms improved (Herman 12-13). Anna O termed this quest via one-on-one dialogue, "the talking cure."

helplessness, or horror" (DSM – IV). Diagnosis also requires symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks, disturbed sleep, hyper vigilance, or the markers of psychic numbing (DSM-IV). Even for clinicians, the nature of the event, the experiencing of the event, the re-experiencing of the event, and the patient's representations of his or her symptoms all hold a place in the diagnostic criteria for trauma. In other words, diagnosis cannot be made merely based on symptoms. These symptoms must attach themselves to a specific event and the literal re-experiencing of the event.

Cathy Caruth argues that trauma cannot be defined by the event itself, nor can it be defined "…in terms of a distortion of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significance attached to it" (Caruth "Trauma and Experience " 4). Rather, trauma exists "…solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth "Trauma and Experience " 4). PTSD's belatedness and literality work to mix the boundaries between the event, its experiencing, and its re-experiencing. For Caruth, "trauma" is located not only in the event or its re-experiencing; trauma is also characterized by the way the inscription of the experience belatedly possesses the one who experiences it. The very symptoms of trauma force us to recognize the atrocities that created them, for amnesiac reenactment[6] forces the literality of the horror on survivors far after the atrocities are said to have ended.

This notion of trauma, while ethically powerful, comes at a cost. Like the traumatic memory itself, the traumatic event becomes theorized as a break in history; traumatic events come to be thought of as aberrations and so the theory does not fully

[6] This is Van der Kolk and Van der Hart's term for the disruptive traumatic memory, including flashbacks and nightmares. In their theorizing, amnesiac reenactment is not recalled memory, but the emotive and sensory experiences of the original event recurring unsymbolically.

attend to the social, political, and structural realities that reproduce power and violence. This view of trauma also encourages us to view trauma itself as a pathogen, which in turn encourages us to see survivors as dis-ordered subjects in need of a cure. Of course, this cure – reintegrating the traumatic memories into a unified, singular personal narrative and subjectivity – is culturally constituted and reifies the western sovereign subject as normative and healthy. These medicalized and aestheticized notions of trauma problematically pathologize survivors, rather than attending to the forces that produce and reproduce the structures of violence with which survivors contend.

Ermira

Ermira's essay explores her motto: "Smile and move on." Her essay narrates a series of her life's challenges and successes, which she credits to the psychological and social power of smiling. The essay begins with a description of the abuse she suffered as a child in Albania:

> A slap, followed by punches which threw me to the ground, and were then followed by kicks to the stomach. I lay on the ground, quiet tears streaming down my face. When I felt as if I was going to die I quietly whispered, "Daddy, please stop you're hurting me". I was eight years old.

We might read the beginning of Ermira's essay as a kind of traumatic break. It dramatizes a scene of individual injury in vivid detail and we never learn what her life was like before this moment. The vivid scenic description that Ermira offers at the opening of this essay is distinct from the rest of the essay, which employs mostly exposition and meditation; this further enhances its emotional and psychological immediacy. Ermira also returns to this scene throughout her essay. She writes, "I do have moments when I remember my father and what he put me through. These moments bring tears to my eyes

and sometimes seem to break my heart." Later in the essay, describing her bruised face after a car accident, Ermira writes again, "I remembered my father." These moments resemble Caruth's descriptions of trauma's belatedness, returning unbidden through flashbacks.

In another sense, we might read Ermira's essay as an attempt to narrate a coherent, reintegrated narrative. Following this opening, Ermira describes arriving in the United States, her work managing a chain of dry cleaning stores and dancing at a gentleman's club, the challenges and disappointments of attempting to apply for citizenship, and a recent car accident. Throughout all of these experiences, Ermira applied her motto, smile and move on. Her smile, she explains, helped in securing her employment, released endorphins that helped her recover more quickly from the accident, and helped her get through the trials of her denial of citizenship. She credits her ability to "smile and move on" to her father, writing, "I do have one good thing from this monster however. He did teach me one thing in life. Because of what he put me through, I learned to wear these clothes, and walk out the doors of a house I called prison with a smile on my face." Ermira, in a sense, reintegrates the memory of her abuse not only by finding meaning in it, but by threading its positive lessons through the narrative of the rest of her life. The systems of violence and inequity that have, in part, shaped her life—the abuse, the denial of citizenship, the financial hardships of being estranged from her family—are sublimated in a narrative that focuses on a tale of individual injury and uplift.

The context of the interview, however, makes clear that Ermira views individual injury and structural violence to be deeply imbricated. We can also begin to see that what reads, in her essay, as a relatively simplistic and somewhat sentimental narrative of

personal uplift, is actually a strategic attempt to position herself as a capable and committed student. Finally, while the essay appears to position the experience of abuse as an experience from which she has recovered and learned important life lessons, the interview nuances this reading, demonstrating that Ermira views her experiences with violence as a personal and academic resource.

In this section of the interview, Erimira describes the process of writing the introduction that dramatizes her abuse:

> And then the introduction was just – it was like such a specific instance of like – it was just hard. I mean, it was just hard like remembering. It's not traumatic, it's not psychological trauma. But it was just like tough remembering that it's like seeing. And it was more of like kind of tough, but then kind of like relief, in a way. Because like look at where I am now, like I'm going to one of the best schools, and look where I was. Like I could have still been in that position, because it could have been like my husband hitting me instead of my father. So it's like kind of like sadness that it happened, but then relief that it's like where I'm at.

The first thing to note here is Ermira's articulation of a subjectivity forged in relation to violence. Rather than narrating an experience of injury followed by cure, she chooses a different binary: sadness and relief. She pauses after "it's like seeing," and we can actually hear Ermira abandoning a narrative of individual injury and recasting it as resource. The recollection of childhood abuse carries with it an opportunity to feel relieved – even proud – of all that she's accomplished.

This notion of experiences with violence as a resource comes up throughout the interview—at other moments, Ermira suggests that it is not only an emotional resource, but an academic one. Earlier in the interview she explains that she thinks she writes good papers because she's willing to take on taboo topics like the legalization of prostitution or constructions of virginity in Albania, explaining, "I don't want to do the environment,

recycling, like stuff that a lot of people would do. So I'm like what's something that I can do that no one—either no one's gonna do, or very few people are gonna argue it the way I'm gonna argue it." Here, Ermira, is explicitly calling on her experiences with structural violence to explain why she is able to create unique—and successful—academic arguments.

In order to cast her experience with violence as a resource, Ermira resists pathological readings of her experience. In doing so, she demonstrates an understanding of the ways broader cultural narratives of pathology and disorder could damage her student ethos. Using the language of diagnosis, she insists, "It's not traumatic, its not psychological trauma." Using "it's not traumatic," rather than "I wasn't traumatized," Ermira puts even more distance between the potentially pathological reading of the event of abuse and her own subjectivity. She relies on the language of therapy to resist a pathologizing frame throughout the interview, claiming: "I don't have all these disorders" and of her workshop group, "they weren't there to be my therapist." I have no way of knowing whether Ermira was traumatized or not, but for the sake of this analysis, what matters is that Ermira demonstrates an awareness of—and resistance to—the cultural scripts that could damage her capable-student-ethos.

Ermira positions herself as a capable student frequently throughout the interview, relying most often on the trope of professionalism to counter pathology. She says that she views school as a business and notes that the fact that her peers "criticized her essay shows that they were professional about it." She explains that she wouldn't have wanted to share the essay with the whole class because she "didn't want a pity party" since that would mean she wouldn't get "constructive criticism on her essay." The trope of

professionalism serves a many-tiered purpose throughout Ermira's discourse: it works to construct her as a serious and capable student; it distinguishes her from her peers who she says are too focused on partying and socializing; and it capitalizes on Ermira's strengths—that she's worked since the age of thirteen; that she's responsible and focused—while pushing back against culturally powerful readings of her subjectivity, as an immigrant, English Language learner, or victim of abuse.

The dichotomy Ermira sets up between pathology and business is somewhat problematic—it casts the personal outside the realm of the academic. At one point Ermira even says "business is business and personal is personal." At the same time, it suggests that the academic is impersonal, linked to measurable outcomes. Yet, in this utterance, even Ermira's own discourse troubles this characterization of the personal as existing only in the private sphere. Indeed, individual injury and structures of violence are deeply imbricated in Ermira's response when she says, "I could have been in that position, because it could have been my husband hitting me instead of my father." She's linking an individual experience with injury to patriarchy and the cultural constitution of domestic violence in Albania. At other points in the interview, she talks about how Albania's culture of corruption and her father's position of power meant there were no authorities to whom she could turn. Ermira's exploration of her own experience of violence is inextricably bound up with the structures of violence, patriarchy, and power that produced the abuse and would—she predicts—produce future abuse had she stayed in Albania. The imbrication of individual and structural violences, combined with Ermira's resistance to pathology and construction of oppression as resource, all work to recast

violence not as an exceptional one-time-traumatic break, but as ordinary. Violence is constituted as a part of Ermira's student subjectivity, not a threat to it.

Sean

Sean's narrative describes a twenty-four hour period in which he was hospitalized for alcohol poisoning and then shot at the following day while picking up a friend. Sean describes the alcohol poisoning in the first paragraph of his essay to frame his overall thesis that these two incidents "forced [him] to appreciate the smaller things in life" and prompted him to stop being "a fast-paced person who lived only for the moment." Most of the essay, however, describes his run-in with Lucky who shot at Sean and his friends.

The narrative is interrupted throughout with italicized descriptions of the shooting, like this one:

> "Get out of the car now!" Lucky screams at us from the street while he clutches Ashley by her arm. Her face is that of someone who is in pain. "What the hell is going on here Ashley? You got guys picking you up now," he says as he cocks his silver 9mm pistol back. "Answer me, girl!" She stands there silently with a dumbfounded look on her face. I sat here wondering what she is thinking right now. Thoughts of an escape are running through my head as sweat is running down my face and fingers.

Like the opening scene to Ermira's essay, these scenes might be read as flashbacks, interrupting the otherwise meditative narrative with present-tense reenactments of the incident. In the interview, Sean reveals that incidents like this are not unusual in his life, but the essay itself, with its vivid descriptions and life-lesson motif, make it seem like this is a one-time aberrant occurrence.

The essay itself is organized around explaining the events that led to Sean's epiphany that he should give up his fast-paced lifestyle. Sean offers virtually no

commentary to help the reader locate this incident within the larger structures of violence that might have helped to produce it. Sean describes pulling up to Lucky's house and seeing "several more guys sitting on the porch with guns of all shapes and sizes. The most vivid of all the guns was an AK-47. Some of the guys were wearing red hats while others may have only had on a red shirt or red pants." With this description of the guns and red clothing, Sean hints at the possibility that Lucky and his friends are in a gang but does no more situating than this. Instead, the narrative returns to the theme of Sean's personal transformation. At the end of the essay, Sean writes, "I learned a step of survival in this crime and murderous infested city which I call home." Again, Sean hints at the structures of violence that surround his daily life, but this reflection is also situated within the frame of personal growth, and it doesn't explore any of the other implications of this experience.

I spoke with Sean in his second semester at Michigan. Much of our conversation centered around the transition from his Detroit high school to the University of Michigan, focusing on concerns that were largely social—linked to race, class, and urban space. We also talked about the paper I read from earlier that Sean wrote for a writing class, which is meant to help underprepared students gain the skills necessary for first year writing. As we talked, it became clear that despite the individualizing frame of his essay, Sean views his personal experience with violence within a larger understanding of structural violence. Like Ermira, he resists a pathologizing reading of his experiences, while trying to make visible a subjectivity forged in relation to violence. Despite the similarities between Sean and Ermira's discourse, race, gender, and the specter of "Detroit" mediate Sean's talk in ways that are also quite distinct from Ermira's explorations of violence.

In this section of the interview, Sean and I discuss how his peers responded to his essay. He explained to me that being shot at "doesn't wear on him emotionally or mentally" and I asked him why he thought this was the case. He replied:

> Growing up in Detroit, period. Just growing up where I grew up, seeing it happen to other people, seeing other people get shot. That's it, just like living 18 years of my life like that every day. It was like, "Oh, it happened to me, just like it happens to the other 80-some percent other black people in Detroit." I didn't really think anything of it, but it was kind of like, "Oh yeah, that's crazy." I mean you kind of move on. I could call anybody on my phone and they could tell me something that happened to them or something that happened to somebody they know—a similar situation.

I asked him, "Does it feel weird to be in a place where people responded to that paper, like, 'That's crazy'?"

> Yeah, because it was like I'm pretty sure I was the only guy, or just person, period, who has had a crazy – like a lot of these people, a lot of my friends at least come from suburban schools outside Detroit and they really don't have the opportunities for that to happen to them, or they're not from this state. There are some people who are from the same areas around me and they have had similar things, but for the most part a lot of my friends don't hang around here, like they've been to Detroit but basically they're just outsiders of it, so they don't really have the chance for it to happen to them.

Throughout the interview, Sean indexed himself in raced, classed, and spatial terms. While this indexing is sometimes uncritical and frequently essentializes himself and his peers, it also reveals the ways in which Sean is attempting to use his experiences with violence to differentiate himself from his peers and to cast this difference—as Ermira does—as an asset. While his class says his experience sounds "crazy," Sean says he didn't think anything of it, working to differentiate himself from his new black friends that come from the suburbs. Instead of likening himself to his peers, he indexes himself as "like 80-some percent other black people in Detroit" and any one of the Detroit friends in his phone who had had a similar experience. While Ermira worked to construct a

school-congruent subjectivity of professionalism, Sean's concerns are largely social and caught-up in a culturally familiar performance of black masculinity.

Yet, Sean also demonstrates an understanding of the spatialization of race and class, as he does this indexing, differentiating between urban and suburban blackness. Later in the interview, when Sean describes his roommate he says: "he's African American like myself. He grew up probably like three blocks outside of Detroit. But at the same time, as close as he was to Detroit, he was no part of it." Sean doesn't seem to know entirely what to make of this observation – but, it does seem to confirm his sense of his own unique-ness among his University of Michigan peers. It is this "difference" that Sean attempts to cast as an asset in our conversation.

Throughout the interview, the word "Detroit" does a lot of work, functioning as a metonym for gun violence, as well as corruption, poverty, and deep institutionalized inequities. Sean capitalizes on national and local narratives about Detroit when he answers my question about his resilience with, "Growing up in Detroit. Period," suggesting that that's all he has to say to make 18 years of his life intelligible to me. And yet, Sean also suggests that Detroit is unintelligible unless you grew up there, emphasizing that even people who had grown up near Detroit or visited it are still outsiders or, in the case of his roommate, "no part of it." Sean, who could easily think of himself as an outsider at the University of Michigan, turns the tables—everyone else is outside.

Sean even goes so far as to suggest that exposure to gun violence is an opportunity—saying that his Michigan friends "don't have the opportunities for that to happen" and "they don't have a chance for it to happen to them." In a university

subculture where, as Sean puts it, “everyone’s trying to be tough”, exposure to gun violence may well function as an opportunity—to prove his maleness, toughness, or urbanness. Even more interesting than this, however, is the work Sean’s notion of exposure-to-violence as-opportunity does to push back against pathologizing readings of Sean’s experience and essay. His discourse complicates the versions of violence—individual injury followed by an epiphany—that his essay presents. The essay conforms to the most reductive generic expectations—trauma, epiphany, healing—and narratives: Sean decides to pull himself up by the bootstraps and give up his fast-paced lifestyle. Yet, in his talk, Sean refuses to characterize gun violence as exceptional—in his own experience or among the people of Detroit—insisting that “he was pretty much used it” and had lived “18 years of his life like that every day.”

Sean’s talk reveals the imbrication of the personal and structural in sites of violence in ways his essay does not. His experience with Lucky is inextricably linked to “Detroit” and all that it stands in for. Whether he’s conscious of it or not, Sean’s insistence on the ordinariness and collectiveness of his experience has a powerful politics. It puts his own experience with violence into a racialized, specialized, and culturally specific context, rather than presenting it as a decontextualized, individual injury. Furthermore, it resists the possible bootstraps or black exceptionalism reading that his essay invites.

Reflections

It is has, at times, felt most comfortable to believe that Sean and Ermira’s talk about their writing on violence is somehow truer than their writing. This project has a

strong stake in demonstrating that students are capable of understanding violence structurally and that they are able to carefully consider their own positions within those structures. It is, therefore, tempting to view Sean and Ermira's writing as produced simply by genre codes and to view their talk as the fuller, more truthful depiction of their understandings of violence and their own experiences. The mode of analysis I utilize, comparing their essays to predictable trauma narratives and then using examples of their speech to disrupt this narrative, reveal my preference for the claims made in their talk.

Undoubtedly, the lines of inquiry I followed in the course of the interviews were also born out of my desire to uncover the sophisticated understandings of violence and experience operating in students' discourse. For example, toward the end of my conversation with Ermira I asked her, "Do you see any relationship between the abuse that you're writing about and the larger context of violence in Albania, and in that region?" This question certainly reveals my interest in the ways students might think about individual experiences of violence within larger social and political contexts. While I wondered if the 1997 Albanian rebellion or the Kosovo war played a role in Ermira's writing about domestic abuse, she responded by describing the culture of corruption that kept the authorities from intervening in the abuse in her home. Ermira explained, "Yeah. I mean, I did touch on it a little bit. It's, you know, first of all, it's not even – it's, and I don't know, maybe in theory, abuse is illegal… Albania is like it's run on corruption. Like my father, he had the jobs of all these people in the palm of his hand. You know, if someone tried to do something about it, just fire him." Ermira begins her response by affirming my question, immediately saying "yeah. I mean, I did touch on that a bit." Following this affirmation, however, she struggles to justify her response, beginning her

sentence multiple times with “it’s” “you know” “first of all” and “I don’t know” before finally responding. It is clear that Ermira wants to help me; she wants to affirmatively answer a question that appears to be important to me. While Ermira does not answer the question in the way I expect by talking about political and national violence, she does appear to understand that I’m asking her to link her individual experience with violence to a larger social context and she finds a way to do so.

My interests and desires helped shape how students like Ermira made meaning in the interview context, just as students’ perceptions of their instructors’ desires shape how they write their essays about violence. This does not mean that students’ talk or writing isn’t meaningful or worthy of study, but serves as a reminder that their definitions of violence and representations of their own experiences are always co-constructed, created within the context of a specific rhetorical situation. Barbara Biesecker defines a rhetorical situation in the following way:

> Neither as an event that merely induces audiences to act one way or another nor as an incident that, in representing the interests of a particular collectivity, merely wrestles the probable within the realm of the actualizable. Rather, we would see the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations. (“Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation,” 126)

This definition of the rhetorical situation helps remind us that the important question is not which version—the essay or the interview—is more authentic. Understanding Ermira’s utterance as rhetorical compels us to ask a different question: what subjectivities and social relations are made possible by the interaction that Ermira and I shared? My question positioned Ermira as knowledgeable about the structures of violence in Albania and capable of linking those structures to her own experience. Her desire to help me (or perhaps to appear intelligent, expert, or simply help me save face) made possible an

affirmative answer that she then had to justify with what turned out to be a very sophisticated answer about the relationship between corruption, patriarchy, and domestic violence.

Students' talk about their writing on violence cannot be understood as more true or authentic than their writing. Instead, talk offers something much more important: an opportunity for students to produce new identities and social relations. In the case of Sean and Ermira, the identities made possible by the interview are just as contingent and performative as those made possible by their personal narratives. One version is not more true than another; what matters is that they are different. It is the presence of this difference that has important implications for both composition scholarship and teaching, and for personal writing and writing about violence in other academic genres. It suggests that when scholars characterize personal writing as apolitical and solipsistic, as a curative route to self-discovery, or as evidence of students' split subjectivities, we risk not only misreading student writing about violence, but the students themselves. Sean is not only the student whose life was changed forever when he was held up at gunpoint. He is also the young man whose subjectivity was forged in relation to everyday violence. Knowing that Sean can tell these competing stories about himself changes the way I read his essay. Initially, I read Sean's description of Lucky and his friend's red hats and shirts as simply problematic, relying on stereotypes of gangs, rather than addressing the larger structures of violence that produce gun violence in Detroit. Perhaps Sean's description of the shooters' clothes was his way of acknowledging larger structures of violence and his familiarity with them. By subtly alluding to the gang colors, he positions himself as a Detroit insider, able to read the codes of a particular urban world. If I were Sean's

teacher, I might have asked him about this writing choice. Why does he allude to gang colors here? Does he expect the audience to recognize his reference? What does he hope his audience learns from this reference? What does this allusion say about him? What does it say about the larger structures of violence in Detroit?

Attending to Sean and Ermira's talk gave me an opportunity to read their essays and subjectivities more generously and in multiple dimensions. I have admitted my preference for the subjectivities and social relations made possible by their talk over those made possible by their personal essays. One reason for this preference is that it is more pleasurable to interpret student discourse generously than suspiciously. In "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," Eve Sedgwick proposes "reparative reading" as an alternative to the hermeneutics of suspicion that structure most critical work in the humanities. To read from a reparative position she explains, "is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparative positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones" (146). "Horror" is probably too strong a word for the expectations we have of student writing, but the way that Sedgwick describes reparative reading resonates with my experience of analyzing Sean and Ermira's essay. Reparative reading is characterized by hope, not suspicion; it privileges surprise, not anxious anticipation. While paranoid reading is associated with negative affect, reparative reading, according to Sedgwick is characterized by pleasure. I approached my interviews with a strong sense of hope, hope that students are capable of thinking about violence, writing, and their own

experiences in ways that the composition literature has not yet allowed for. Not knowing what I might find, I was open to surprise and gained great pleasure from the unexpected turns that our conversations took. While I did not expect Ermira to answer my question about the larger context of violence in Albania with a description of corruption, I was delighted that she did. She made a connection between the violence in her home and Albanian cultural norms that was not only unexpected, but that I did not have the knowledge to make.

My preference for Sean and Ermira's talk about violence is surely connected to the pleasure I gained from the interviews themselves. While I approached their essays with suspicion, I read the interview transcripts with generosity and hope. It is the case that Ermira and Sean's essays do not reveal the complexity of their understandings of violence and experience in the way that their talk does; it also the case that by adopting a reparative position both during the interview and in my analysis of students' talk, I was open to this complexity. Recognizing my role in the production of Sean and Ermira's discourses of violence does not make these findings less trustworthy. In fact, they suggest that talking to students about their writing on violence might makes possible the production of new subjectivities and social relations, not only for students, but for instructors, as well.

One of the pleasurable surprises in both Sean and Ermira's talk was the way the personal and structural appear to imbricated in their talk. Indeed, much of my analysis of student talk highlights and applauds the moments in which students contextualize an incident of individual injury within larger structures of violence. In highlighting the ways that students make connections between single incidents of violence and the social

structures that systematically produce them, I do not want to suggest these students are talking about violence somehow more correctly than other students. Indeed, I hope this dissertation has shown that students define violence and their relationships to it in myriad and shifting ways; it would be both impossible and a mistake to insist on one single, correct understanding of violence. At the same time, when students view their own—and others'—experiences with violence as productive of and produced by structures of oppression they are better able to situate themselves within histories and discourses of violence, rather than somehow outside violence. Sean and Ermira's talk demonstrates that students are immensely capable of exploring the relationships between the individual and structural when given the opportunity to do so. This suggests that writing about violence might be a valuable tool for helping students explore relationships between the individual and the structural. Sean, for example, might have been encouraged to unpack the many meanings of "Detroit" rather than relying on stereotypes and dominant narratives to define them.

The recognition that the personal and structural are imbricated in students' talk about writing on violence doesn't only apply to personal writing. Indeed, scholars and teachers of writing might benefit from drawing less strict boundaries between autobiographical writing and other academic writing genres, focusing instead on creating more opportunities for students to make visible the intricate and unpredictable networks of experience that appear to inform their writing about violence. This is important not only for students like Ermira and Sean where experiences with violence are central to their student identities, but for students with limited experiences situating themselves within histories and discourses of violence. The competing narratives Tim told about the

reasons he chose to write about racial profiling serve as an example of the ways that encouraging students to talk about their writing on violence might help them position themselves in relation to histories of violence. Tim initially told me he decided to write about profiling because his father was in the FBI during 9/11, so he felt like he already knew a lot about the topic. Later in the interview, Tim told me he chose to write about profiling because he had become friends with a Muslim American woman on his hall and wanted to know more about her experience. I don't view these stories as competing—it is true that profiling is a topic about which Tim knows a lot and very little. Indeed, as we talked, Tim made steps to reconcile these two origin stories, acknowledging his own—and his father's—complicity in the production of hegemonic narratives of and attitudes toward Muslim Americans. These are acknowledgements that the genre of research paper provides few opportunities to explore or express, but the opportunity to reflect on his writing process and learning made possible.

No matter what the genre, writing about violence is always already about the individual and the structural, compelling students to confront their own positions within histories and discourses of violence. This important experiential, affective, and political work is often invisible in students' essays no matter what the genre, but at least in some cases, it appears to surface in students' talk about their writing on violence. Questions as simple as: "Why did you choose this topic?" and "What was the experience of writing this paper like?" gave the study participants opportunities to reflect not only on "how" they wrote, but "why." While composition instructors regularly ask students what they might change about an essay, we rarely ask them how their essay may have changed them.

By asking students to consider how writing about violence may have reshaped their experiences, understandings of violence, and perceptions of their own positions in relationship to violence, I do not want to suggest that every student will or must be transformed by their writing on violence, nor do I want to suggest that there is a politically or ethically correct outcome of these reflections. I do want to suggest, however, that students should be encouraged to consider their own positions in relation to the violence they are writing about. When Tim and I talked, for example, he did not only articulate the distance between his experiences and those of his Muslim friend, he also acknowledged the points of overlap. This does not mean that he viewed their experiences as in anyway the same; he acknowledged points of overlap when he reflected on the ways 9/11 shaped his own perceptions of Muslim Americans and the ways those very stereotypes help to sustain the discrimination that his friend experiences. Tim's self-positioning was made possible by the occasion of talk. The rhetorical situation of the interview made possible the production of new subjectivities and social relations as Tim and I attempted to make sense of his writing together. This suggests that it is not talk in and of itself that promotes reflexivity and self repositioning, but what talk makes possible. Tim could occupy a different position than the one afforded by his essay and we both took pleasure in making meaning about his essay, understandings of violence, and experiences together. No matter how much we emphasize the recursivity of the writing process, final essays—like Sean and Ermira's—can appear to lock student identities and understandings of violence in place. Opportunities to talk and reflect on this writing—in terms of both process and content—can help loosen seemingly fixed identities, positions, and definitions for both students and their teachers.

Distant Violence: Limits of Writing on Violence

While writing about violence appears to present students with opportunities to consider their own positions within structures of violence, we've seen a number of examples—the Zimbardo prison experiment papers, Karen's school shooting essay—where this does not happen, or happens in problematic ways. However, talking to students about their writing on violence might help to surface some of the ways that students distances themselves from, over-identify with, or essentialize instances of, violence.

Amanda shared with me an essay in which she analyzes a short story, "Natasha," by David Bezmozgis. The story focuses on two teenagers, Mark and Natasha. Natasha's mother, a recent immigrant from Moscow, has just married Mark's uncle and the two teenagers engage in a forbidden sexual relationship. At fourteen years old, Natasha enters into her relationship with Mark with previous experiences of sexual exploitation. Amanda's essay focuses on the motif of sex in the story, arguing that "sex is the force that exposes each character's vulnerability, leaving them frantic for rescue." Amanda's essay reads like a typical literary analysis; she analyzes quotations from the story to explore the motif of sex and rescue. Amanda explained that she thought the essay was suitable for the study because the story was really about sexual abuse, though her essay itself makes only vague allusions to sexual exploitation.

During the interview, I asked Amanda what she remembered about the experience of reading the story. She explained that the first line really jumped out at her "and then, when you get into it and Natasha starts talking about how she was involved in sexual

videos with older men and other young girls her age when she was in Russia—and it is really shocking just kind of—to hear that." I think it's possible that Amanda chose to describe this aspect of her reading experience because she thought she was supposed to be talking about violence and exploitation in the interview. While Natasha's sexual history is certainly relevant to the story, it is not necessarily the story's central concern. However, a second look at Amanda's essay confirms that learning about Natasha's sexual history might, indeed, have been an especially compelling component of Amanda's reading and writing experience. In her essay, she notes that Natasha "casually brings up sex in conversation" with Mark, saying, "I've done it a hundred times. If you want, I'll do it with you." In her analysis, Amanda claims that "this simple statement about her sexual history reveals pages and pages of her personal history; where she has been, what she has done, that her childhood was seemingly stolen." What reads as a reasonable, if somewhat unsupported, moment of analysis in Amanda's paper begins to look like evidence of some troubling assumptions as Amanda and I continue to talk, for Amanda seems to have filled in the blanks of fictional Natasha herself.

As Amanda finished describing the story to me, she summarized her reactions saying, "I guess it kind of put in perspective the kind of lifestyle that maybe kids lead all the time in other countries." Curious about the connections Amanda was making between fiction and the lifestyles of kids in other countries, I asked her if she was making "real world connections" with the story or just saw it as an interesting piece of fiction. Amanda responded:

> No. I read articles in magazines – in Time and Newsweek – about—I think it's—what is it—like Vietnam or somewhere over there in that area where sex slaves do exist for girls as young as five years old. And I don't know why, but, for some reason, even before reading this story, I just had

> this impression of Russia as they use—all the young Russian girls are all very beautiful, but they're all very promiscuous—or not even promiscuous—just have been used a lot by older men, maybe just by the way they all seem to get married really young to older men.

In this utterance, Amanda reveals some of the assumptions that she brought to her reading of "Natasha." To some degree, Amanda's perceptions of the sexual exploitation of girls seem to have driven her analysis of "Natasha," shaping her sense that Natasha's childhood "has been stolen" and filling in details about "where she has been" and "what she has done." Amanda's vague understanding of sex trafficking becomes mapped onto a fictional story, which ultimately reinforces the assumptions that drove her reading in the first place. Amanda admits that she had an impression of Russian girls as "very promiscuous" but revises this initial statement, saying "or not even promiscuous—just having been used a lot by older men." This phrase, "used by older men," repeats an earlier description Amanda provided of Natasha, who she explained, "was sexually exploited by older men." This revision and repetition suggests that Amanda is using the fictional story to inform her assumptions about Russian girls. However, Amanda revises her statement about Russian girls one more time, this time saying, "they all seem to get married really young to older men." This time, Amanda is mapping her "impression" of Russia onto the information she gathered from the story. This utterance suggests that Amanda merges her assumptions about Russian culture with quotations from the story to simultaneously inform her literary analysis and her perceptions of the sexual exploitation of Russian girls.

The picture Amanda creates of sexually exploited girls is an imaginary one, which to some degree, Amanda seems to know. When I asked her if she identified at all with Natasha, she explained that she didn't because Natasha "almost seemed really—almost—

I don't know how to put it—magical." Natasha is both real—a reflection somehow of all Russian girls—and unreal, a magical fiction. This sense of the imaginary plays out in Amanda's descriptions of the reading she's done about "sex slaves," as well; they exist in an imagined east in "Vietnam or somewhere over there." The portrait Amanda builds of an imagined world of sex slaves and child brides allows her to both distance herself from, and sympathize with the experiences of an exotic other. Explaining that "Natasha" was her favorite story of the semester, Amanda says, "I just also thought she was a really interesting character overall just because she was such a damaged person" and that she "sympathized" with Natasha more than the other characters they read about because she "had such a rough childhood and was exploited to such a degree." Amanda's fascination with and sympathy for Natasha is driven by her reading of the character as damaged and exploited. Her attempts to situate Natasha's individual injuries within a larger context of violence largely fail, since the world Natasha comes from is just as essentialized and exoticized as Amanda's reading of Natasha herself.

This is clearly an instance in which writing about violence does not compel a student to thoughtfully theorize the relationship between individual injury and structural violence, nor does it lead Amanda to position herself within or in relation to histories and discourses of violence. The case of Amanda does, however, point to the potential pedagogical use-value of talking to students about their writing on violence. It was through talk that Amanda revealed the assumptions that drove her interest in and analysis of the story. While Amanda's essay itself reads like a typical undergraduate literary analysis, our conversation revealed some of the assumptions about violence and the victims of violence that, for Amanda, the story actually reinforced.

Reflection

By remaining open to surprise and hoping that students might reveal sophisticated understandings of violence and their own positions in relation to that violence, I was sometimes disappointed in or shocked by what students said. Amanda is one of these students. The generalizations she made about Russian and other Eastern women were troubling. Yet, I do not want to suggest that we should reject or disallow this kind of troubling speech, for it helps reveal the assumptions that undergird Amanda's essay, as well as my own biases. Indeed, a pedagogy that works to incorporate talk is valuable not only for the opportunities it provides students to position themselves within histories of violence, but also for helping teachers consider the invisible assumptions at work in student writing about violence. These opportunities will be especially important as themes of trauma, violence, and abuse are increasingly included in global multicultural curricula. I'm sure Amanda's teacher, who assigned readings from a wide array of global contexts did not imagine that "Natasha" would reinforce stereotypes about Russian women, leading Amanda, at least, to exoticize and essentialize not just a fictional character, but a whole nation of women. Furthermore, I'm sure Amanda's teacher did not intend for this story to affirm her students' privilege and reinforce a binary of self and other. Amanda's talk, however, compels us to consider the risks of assigning readings about global violence. Of course, I am not suggesting that we exclude stories like "Natasha" from university courses, but am insisting that we provide students with tools for ethically interpreting and representing such stories.

While analysis of Amanda's discourse is critical, I want to make clear that neither she nor her teacher are the object of my critique. Rather, my critique is meant to surface some of the invisible ways that the well-intentioned inclusion of texts about global violence can actually subvert socially just pedagogical aims. I also want to suggest that by providing students with opportunities to talk about and reflect on their writing practices, the dynamics of exoticization and over-identification might become more visible in our classrooms. Amanda remarked a number of times throughout the interview that "Natasha" was her favorite story of the semester. When I asked why she explained that she found her to be a really interesting character because "she was such a damaged person" and that she sympathized with her. Amanda's explanation of why she like the story so much might be an excellent jumping-off point for a discussion of how Natasha, Russian women, and exploited women are represented in the story. Follow up questions might include: What are the effects affectively, politically, ethically of the story's representations of Natasha? What assumptions about Russian women do we bring to this story and are they confirmed? How does the author use language, context, and characterization to provoke our sympathies and to what effect? What other kinds of engagement with Natasha does this story make possible (disgust, dismissal, empathy, pity, re-affirmation of our own privilege)? In following this line of inquiry, a teacher might help a student like Amanda begin to critically reflect on the power of her own interpretations of others. This line of inquiry would also work to surface the assumptions that students might bring to the text. If the teacher found that students were, indeed, reading the character, Natasha, through their assumptions about Russian women, child brides, or sex trafficking, she might consider pairing this text with another depiction of

Russian women, an academic essay about sex trafficking, or other texts that might complicate students' initial interpretations.

Not only can talk about violence surface students' assumptions and ask students to occupy alternative and critical subject positions, but it also provides an opportunity for instructors to examine their own biases. Unlike many of the students I interviewed, Amanda shared no experiences of her own with structural violence. In fact, Amanda made sure that I knew that she was "not a victim of sexual abuse or anything." I know very little about Amanda's background, yet her uncritical self-positioning as distant and distinct from Natasha led me to assume that she benefits from unacknowledged privilege. This, in turn, led me to read Amanda's discourse more critically than I did Sean or Ermira's. To some degree, this stance was purposeful. Sean is not an especially successful student, yet I believe his experiences with structural violence should be recognized as a resource, not a liability, in academic contexts. This does not mean, however, that I should not also work to read the discourses of students like Amanda with the same generosity, even when it disappoints me.

Implications and Conclusions

It is clear that students are writing about violence in courses and genres across the university, yet they are not always given opportunities to reflect on the political and ethical stakes of this writing or their own positions within histories and discourses of violence. The field of rhetoric and composition with its interests in writing as a process, focus on the rhetorical effects of language, and commitment to undergraduate education may be an important site in which to develop pedagogies that help students respond

ethically to the writing about violence they do in their university coursework. In the following section, I reflect on the various definitions of violence that operate in this project and the ways that students' discourses on writing and violence have helped me reshape my own definition of violence. In describing the ways that this research process reshaped my own definition of violence, I offer not a single definition of violence, but strategies for thinking about how we understand the violence that operates in student writing. I also consider the pedagogical approaches that might emerge from this approach to thinking about violence in student writing. Finally, I return to the notion of talk to consider the findings on talk that this project offers and the pedagogies that we might develop based upon these findings.

Defining Violence

I have been hesitant throughout this project to offer a single definition of violence. Part of what is so remarkable about these findings are the varied, competing, and changing ways in which students themselves define violence. Crucially, these shifting definitions are not haphazard; they are produced in relation to distinct contexts—students' experiences, the disciplines in which they're writing, the incident of violence about which they're writing, the interview itself. I want to suggest that this very partiality is instructive to teachers. Asking students to write a cause and effect essay about school shootings will produce definitions of violence that foreground single causes and single effects. Exposing students to violence measured in statistics—numbers of dead, for example—will suggest that meaningful violence is defined by magnitude. Teachers and the university itself must begin to see that the ways we represent violence, the genres in

which we ask students to write about violence, the places and people we privilege in our depictions of violence are all part of an often-invisible curriculum that helps to structure how students define, interpret, and represent violence.

Even as I insist that we acknowledge the shifting and partial definitions of violence that operate at the university and in students' talk, my analysis betrays a preference for definitions of violence that account for what I have been calling structural violence. In this project, the term structural violence is quite expansive, referring to the links students make between incidents of violence and the social structures that produce them. Of course, the kinds of violence that students refer to might be given many other names; deportation, for example, might be called in another context, institutional violence. Structural violence, as I have used the term in this dissertation, does not preclude other labels, but instead foregrounds societal complicity in violence in a way that a term like "institutional violence" cannot. The term institutional violence suggests that violence is produced by people in power and does not acknowledge the ways that students might participate in or benefit from institutional policies. Paul Farmer defines structural violence as "violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly—by everyone who belongs to a particular social order…In short, the concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression" (307). This rather expansive definition of structural violence has a pedagogical use-value; it insists that students consider where they are in the social order that produces violence. Think of Tim, who located himself in the social order that stereotypes Muslim Americans in order to sustain discriminatory practices; or, Lauren, who recognized herself as part of a social order that politically and financially supports the Israeli occupation. This definition of

structural violence insists that students locate themselves within the social order that sustains and benefits from violence.

My conversations with students have not only helped me see the pedagogical use-value of understanding violence structurally, but they have also helped me consider how and where we find violence. I have suggested that discourses of violence often operate beneath the surface of university curricula; my analysis is also interested in methodologies of exposure, revealing students' often-invisible experiences and understandings of violence. It is tempting, therefore, to adopt a pedagogy that works, in this same vein, to expose hidden violence. Yet, the talk of students like Sean and Ermira, suggest that this might be missing the point. Violence is an integral and hypervisible part of students' lives. Sean's insistance, for example, that violence produces his everyday life, is a position that has reshaped my perceptions of how and where we might locate violence. What would happen if we encouraged all students—not just those who grew up surrounded by urban violence or domestic abuse—to see that violence is not exceptional, but actually helps to structure the social order in which we all live? Eve Sedgwick explains:

> The force of any interpretative project of *unveiling hidden violence* would seem to depend on a cultural context…Why bother exposing the ruses of power in a country where, at any given moment, 40 percent of young black men are enmeshed in the penal system. In the United States and internationally, while there is plenty of hidden violence that requires exposure there is also, and increasingly, an ethos where forms of violence that are hypervisible from the start may be offered as an exemplary spectacle rather than remain to be unveiled as a scandalous secret. (140)

The risks, according to Sedgwick, of focusing primarily on unveiling hidden violence are that we begin to believe that exposure itself is emancipatory and learn to ignore the hypervisible violence all around us. My conversations with students like Sean and Ermira

have compelled me to understand structural violence not only as violence that is exerted systematically, but also as the kind of violence that can hide in plain sight. This notion that violence is not exceptional, but part of the everyday, has important political, ethical, and pedagogical implications.

Rethinking Experience

In viewing violence as part of the everyday, rather than exceptional, we might reconsider how experiences with violence are depicted in composition literature that tends to exoticize or pathologize students who write about violence. We might begin to see that these students are not exceptional, but instead attempting to make sense of their positions within a social world that is partially structured by violence. In this way, experience with structural violence might come to be seen as a political, intellectual, and writing resource, rather than a cause for concern. At the same time, we must be careful not to make assumptions about the relationships between students' experiences and their writing practices. The findings in Chapter Four suggest that students' experiences are not predictive of their writing or topic choices, but are actually shaped by them. The recognition that writing about violence (in a range of academic genres) actually reshapes students' experiences points to the importance of continuing to break down boundaries between autobiographical and other academic writing genres. Some of this work must be done in composition scholarship itself. By limiting scholarship on writing about violence to debates about personal writing, we reinforce the notion that experiences with violence are only relevant to writing on violence when students disclose troubling experiences. Scholarly attention to student writing on violence in other academic genres might help

expand scholarly and instructional expectations that writing on violence is automatically autobiographical and apolitical.

Composition scholarship must also begin attending to the relationships between experience and a range of academic writing genres. In the nineties, scholars like Patricia Bizzell or Candace Spiegelman introduced the hybrid-writing genre, in which experience is valued as legitimate academic evidence. This hybrid writing asks students to locate their experiences within larger academic conversations and social worlds. This scholarship is important, but it focuses only on the usefulness of experience in academic writing, not necessarily the ways that academic writing reshapes experience. What is called for then, is a theorization of experience that acknowledges the recursive nature of writing about violence and students' experiences. The recognition that student writing about violence reshapes students' experiences could also lead to the development of new academic writing genres. For example, students might be asked to keep a writing journal in which they describe the experience of researching and writing about violence and reflect on their affective and subjective relationships with this writing. Students might submit a reflection piece along with their final essay that comments on how their definitions of violence, perceptions of their own experiences, or relationship with the course material changed or didn't change over the course of writing the essay. Still another assignment might ask students to first draft an essay about violence that does not include their experiences and then ask students in a second draft to layer in analyses of relevant experiences, in order to emphasize the ways in which the writing process might alter students' perceptions of their own experiences.

At the same time, the unpredictable, contingent, and sometimes competing ways that students appeal to experience when writing about violence emphasizes the impossibility of assuming that students' experiences are predictive of particular paper topics, interests, or positions on violence. Teachers must resist the urge to imagine that a student writing about suicide must be suicidal herself, or that a Jewish student writing about the Holocaust has a predictable experiential investment in the course material.

Students reported that they often elided or disguised their affective and experiential engagement with their writing on violence, because they believed it was not allowable within university discursive protocols and worried that their experiences would be invalidated. Teachers who have students writing about violence might work to make their expectations of student writing on violence far more explicit: Are students allowed to use the first person? Can they show their biases? Are there certain positions on violence or essay topics that are not allowable in the classroom? Is it appropriate to include their affective responses and what are some strategies for doing so? What explicit and implicit criteria are being used to assess essays on violence? Making these expectations explicit will not only help students write about violence more successfully, but it may help to minimize students' fears that writing about violence—even in non-autobiographical genres—makes them vulnerable to invalidation.

Contexts of Violence

In order for students to acknowledge the relationship between a particular incident of violence and the structures that help produce it, students may need to have a relatively nuanced understanding of the politics and history of a particular incident of violence.

Amanda, for example, struggled to make a meaningful connection between Natasha's (fictional) experiences with violence and the structures of patriarchy and global capital that help produce this sort of exploitation because she has only vague ideas about sex trafficking and knows very little about the history or politics of Russia. It is quite understandable that these topics—the geopolitics of sex trafficking, the history and politics of Russia, the role of global capital in the exploitation of women—would not be addressed in Amanda's first year writing course. Yet, I want to suggest that when it comes to reading and writing about violence, teachers—especially writing teachers—must provide students with some tools to contextualize the representations of violence about which they're being asked to write. As I suggested earlier, this could be as simple as pairing "Natasha" with another short story about Russian women. Without this sort of contextualization even the most well-meaning attempts to include depictions of global violence in first-year writing courses run the risk of reproducing students' stereotypes and exoticizing or pathologizing the victims of global violence.

Another risk of presenting students with decontextualized depictions of violence is that it makes explanations of and definitions of violence appear generalizable. The students who wrote about the Zimbardo prison experiment, for example, freely generalized the notion that individuals act violently when fulfilling socially determined roles. In this case, it is essential that teachers emphasize the contextual nature of the violence they are studying and discuss the ways a particular understanding of violence may or may not be mobilized in other contexts. There are examples in this study of instances where this contextualization was done quite successfully. Lauren, for example was able to articulate the ways that violence for Israelis and violence for Palestinians

have different definitions. The global turn only makes this need for contextualization stronger. We saw in the case of the textbook, *Global Issues, Local Arguments: Readings for Writing*, a chapter organized around "Human Rights: Trafficking of Women and Children and Forced Child Labor;" this chapter includes texts written about Eastern Europe, China, and Central Africa. Rather than carefully delineating the differences between human rights violations in these regions, the chapter introduction lumps them together suggesting that trafficking and forced labor are universal problems endemic to the developing world. This textbook section is characteristic of the work global multiculturalism does to decontextualize and universalize particularized instances of global violence; teachers attempting to include global themes in their courses have a responsibility to reverse this trend, but giving students tools to contextualize the instances of violence about which they're learning.

Disciplinarity

The ways in which students understand the relationship between individual instances of violence and the structures that produce them are also shaped by the disciplines and genres in which students write about violence. When, as with the students writing about the Zimbardo prison experiments, students are largely unreflective about the ways disciplinary frameworks might shape their understandings of violence, they can overgeneralize their understandings, unknowingly excluding other explanations for the initiation of violence. When, as with Lauren and Amoi, students can name the disciplinary frameworks that underpin their understandings of violence, they are less likely to make generalized assertions about the causes of violence. This suggests that

students in all disciplines would benefit from classroom conversations that make explicit the disciplinary frameworks and questions that produce particular—and partial—understandings of violence.

This is true even in writing classrooms, where the content of the course material may never actually address the subject of violence. Nonetheless, the approaches students take to research, analysis, and persuasion are shaped by disciplinary and generic expectations; when students choose to write about school shootings, racial profiling, or other incidents of violence, their understandings of these phenomena are shaped by the disciplinary and generic frameworks of the writing classroom. In certain respects, the writing classroom is a more challenging space than others to consider the disciplinary codes that might shape student writing about violence. While the psychology students writing about the Zimbardo prison experiment were all writing about the same topic, very often a writing classroom might only have one or two students who have chosen to write about violence. In other respects, however, the writing classroom is an ideal place to consider the ways disciplinarity and genre might shape writing about violence. Genre study, as well as conversations about disciplinary writing are already a part of many first-year writing courses. Discussing the ways a cause and effect essay privileges a certain definition of violence and its origins in a student's essay on school shootings would be a meaningful pedagogical exercise for all students in the class.

The Value of Student Talk

The previous section suggested that by viewing violence as structural and everyday, while also recognizing that students' understandings of violence are in constant flux, we can help students begin to locate themselves in the social order that helps to produce violence and avoid reproducing binaries of self and other when they read and write about violence. To some degree, I suggest, these goals might be achieved by reconsidering the way experience operates in student writing about violence and by being explicit with students about the contexts that surround the incidents of violence about which their writing, as well as the disciplinary frameworks that might help shape that writing. I also want to suggest that talk is a valuable tool for helping students reposition themselves in relation to histories and discourses of violence. As this chapter suggests, it is not talk in and of itself that makes this reposition possible, but the opportunities that talk affords. First, talk creates a new rhetorical situation, one that affords new or alternative subjectivities and social relations. While, for example, the genre of the research essay did not provide Tim with an opportunity to reflect on his role in the production of hegemonic narratives about Muslim Americans, our conversation did. The rhetorical situation of the research essay required Tim to take up a position of commentator, analyzing the effects of stereotypes from a stance of analytical distance. The interview, however, provided a different sort of social occasion, one in which Tim could locate himself within the discourses and histories he was writing about.

Talk also provides an opportunity for teachers to take-on alternative subject positions and social relations. Often teachers are required to perform a hermeneutics of suspicion, assessing gaps in student learning and grading student performance. However,

the occasion of talk makes a different stance possible. In this chapter, I have offered a description of what it might look like to approach student discourse from a reparative position. Such a position encourages teachers to interpret student discourses generously, to sustain a position of hope and an openness to surprise. Rather than looking for confirmation that student writing about violence is apolitical or solipsistic, I took pleasure in learning about the myriad ways that students were defining violence, interpreting their own experiences, and engaging with discourses of violence in theoretically and politically sophisticated ways. Such a stance might go a long way to reshape instructors expectations of writing on violence and replace the anxiety of reading about student disclosure with the pleasure of seeing students engage discourses of violence in ethically, politically, and theoretically sophisticated ways.

Indeed, many of the students I have profiled in this dissertation are already able to identify the multiple temporalities, identities, and locations that are present in a given incident of violence, providing them with multiple opportunities to locate themselves within these histories, as well. Lauren considers how her own politics and the pro-Israeli politics of her family might be linked to the violence of the Israeli occupation. Amoi acknowledges that the historical objectification of black women impacts how she perceived the actions of a Spanish cab driver. Tim considers how his father's job with the FBI shaped his own perceptions of Muslim Americans and his previously unconsidered support of profiling policies. The occasion of talk gave students opportunities to reposition themselves in relation to the incidents of violence about which they were writing and it gave me an opportunity to acknowledge the sophisticated theories and meaningful experiences that students are already bring to their writing about violence.

Remaining hopeful and open to surprise also means that we will sometimes be disappointed in what students say. However, this chapter suggests that this disappointment might also be productive. It can help us to identify and pedagogically respond to the problematic assumptions or positions that some students might bring to their writing on violence. It also provides an occasion for instructors to reflect on our own biases and assumptions, forcing us to confront, for example, the ways that we might privilege certain definitions of violence, strategies for self positioning, or student experiences. Finally, this disappointment reminds us of our political and ethical imperative as teachers, for students must be encouraged to move beyond reductive and ideological explanations for the origins of violence, the impulse to other and exoticize the victims of violence, or the desire to let their own complicity in histories of violence go unacknowledged.

Perhaps most importantly, a focus on student talk about violence reminds us that understandings of violence and experience are partial, contingent, and socially maintained. Academic writing alone can appear to fix students in place. Ermira becomes the student who was abused. Liz becomes the student who inappropriately generalizes the findings of Zimbardo to Abu Ghraib. Yet, we know this is not how the writing process works; a final essay does not represent the entirety of who a student is or what she is capable of. Incorporating talk into the practice of writing about violence can help loosen seemingly fixed identities, positions, and definitions for both students and their teachers. The incorporation of talk also helps to remind us that definitions of violence—and our positions in relation to it—are always co-constructed. We do not live outside the social

order that sustains structural violence, but within it. While academic essays alone may require students to take stances on the causes of violence, the effect of an experience with violence on their own subjectivities, or the impact of violence in a particular geopolitical context, talk can help students—and instructors—to see that the ways we define violence, its actors, and our own positions in relation to that violence have significant social and political consequences.

As universities continue to canonize themes of trauma, violence, and abuse via global multicultural effort and as structural violence continues to maintain local and global inequality, it is essential that we give our undergraduates tools to write and think about the violence they encounter in their coursework and in their lives. The courses, genres, and contexts in which students are writing about violence are varied and context-specific. Therefore, this dissertation does not attempt to offer a single set of pedagogical strategies for engaging student writing about violence. Instead, I hope that the voices of the student writers I have presented here help to illuminate a way forward.

We cannot ethically allow violence to uncritically operate beneath the surface of university curricula. We must acknowledge that the university participates in the production of violence discourses and shapes—through course content, disciplinarity, genre, and global multicultural curricular efforts—how students position themselves in relation to these discourses. This will require universities to take account of where and how violence operates in course requirements. A number of universities, for example, require English majors to fulfill a world literatures requirement. One course option includes Greek and Roman literature; the other is called literature of atrocity and focuses

on writing from largely the global south. We must begin to examine the definitions of violence, its victims, and its actors that such curricula promote, for it is irresponsible of universities to participate in the depiction of violence as something that happens only to distant others.

Composition scholarship must also make efforts to trouble a scholarly legacy that has conflated personal writing with writing about violence. We can do so by attending carefully to the examples of student writing we deploy when critiquing or justifying personal writing assignments; we must consider the consequences of deeming personal writing about violence as solipsistic, apolitical, salutary, or damaging for the sake of a larger claim about personal writing assignments. We must also begin to produce scholarship that accounts for the writing about violence students do in other academic genres. Such scholarship will help expand scholarly and instructional expectations of writing on violence and begin to provide teachers with new ways of reading and responding to their students' essays about violence. This is increasingly important as global multicultural curricula introduce themes of trauma, abuse, and violence to our classrooms.

Composition scholars and teachers must also begin to rethink the ways we characterize the relationship between experience and writing about violence. Rather than assuming that certain experiences will lead predictably to certain kinds of essays about violence, we might come to see that writing about violence actually helps to reshape experience in powerful and pedagogically productive ways. Composition scholarship has long been concerned with the relationship between students' identities and their writing practices; beginning to think about writing and experience as co-constructed may open up

new avenues for considering how the process of writing might have real consequences for the construction of student subjectivities, self-position, and experience. This finding also emphasizes the need to draw less stark boundaries between autobiographical writing and other genres of academic writing.

Finally, this project suggests that the field of composition may benefit from renewed attention to the methodological and pedagogical value of attending to student talk about writing. At least when it comes to writing about violence, students appeared to benefit from conversations about their writing that were relatively expansive in scope. Much of the classroom talk about writing—workshop, peer review, conferences—focuses exclusively on what students might do to improve their essays. This sort of talk is undoubtedly important, but it may not be providing students with opportunities to take up new positions in relation to their writing, to reflect on the political or ethical consequences of their representations of violence, to consider the disciplinary, generic, or experiential forces that may have produced a particular definition of violence, or to consider how the process of writing an essay about violence reshaped their own experiences. Renewed attention to talk also has important implications for composition scholarship. It helps to remind us that the writing process, and student understandings of violence, are recursive and ongoing, a stance that can get lost when we study essays alone. Attending to student talk may also provide scholars with new strategies for interpreting students' experiences, writing, and self-positioning. By adopting a reparative position, I was willing to be surprised by the students I spoke with, open to their expertise and experiences, and hopeful about what I might find. I was reminded of the ways that my own self-position, the questions I ask and the interpretative mode I adopt co-

constructs meaning in my interactions with students. Liberated from the authority of "teacher," I was open to learning from the students with whom I spoke.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Recruitment Letter

Study Title: Composing Violence: A Study of Undergraduate Discourses and Writing about Violence

Researcher: Hannah Dickinson, PhD candidate in the Joint PhD Program in English and Education at the University of Michigan

Contact Information:
Address: 610 E. University, JPEE, Room 2022, SEB, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109
Email: hdickins@umich.edu

Purpose: This study will investigate how college teachers can better respond to students who write about violence. The overall study seeks to describe how, why, and what students write about violence in the college classroom.

Inclusion Criteria: If you are an undergraduate who has written a nonfiction essay about violence for a U of M class, you are eligible to participate in this study. All kinds of nonfiction essays (research papers, personal essays, response papers, literary analysis, and many other genres) may have violence as a theme. Research participants should be prepared to share a copy of this essay with me.

List of Procedures: All interviews will be conducted in my office in Tisch Hall.

- **Initial Interview**: The first interview will take approximately 45 minutes. In this interview, you will answer questions about your writing process and the essay you brought to the interview. This interview will be audio-taped and you will receive $10 for your participation.
- **Group Interview:** You will also be asked to participate in **one**, video taped, focus group interview. Because college writing is often workshop based and social, it is important for me to know how students talk about their writing with one another. During the interview, you (along with the other 3-4 people participating in the interview) will be asked questions about your writing process and the essay you brought to the interview. The focus group will be video taped, so I can tell which participant is speaking when. The focus group will take approximately 1 hour and you will receive an additional $10 for your participation.
- **Exit Interview:** In the exit interview, we will debrief your experiences with participating in this study. I will share with you the data I have collected and you will have an opportunity to provide feedback on my results. This interview will last 30 minutes. You will receive an additional $20 in compensation for your time.

Please tear off the bottom this form and check the appropriate box:

O **I am interested in participating in this study. You may email me to set up an interview.**

Name:_____

Email:_____

O **I am not interested in participating in this study.**

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Because I am conducting qualitative research, some questions may change slightly in the context of the interview. However, this protocol includes all of the questions and the possible follow up questions that I will ask in both individual interviews and focus group interviews.

Background Questions:

1. What year are you in?
2. Which school are you in?
3. Where are you from?
4. Overall, what has your college experience been like at the University of Michigan?
5. What have your experiences with writing been like here?
6. If First years: Can you describe your experiences with writing in high school?

Where

1. Can you describe the class that you wrote this essay for?
   1.1. Why did you choose to take the class?
   1.2. What sorts of topics/issues did you discuss in the class?
   1.3. What other sorts of reading/writing tasks did you do in the class?
   1.4. Did you enjoy the class?
   1.5. How big was the class?
   1.6. Did you feel as if there was a sense of community in the class?
   1.7. Did you feel anonymous in the class?

What

2. Can you describe the essay you brought with you today?
   2.1. What was the writing prompt for this paper?
   2.2. What kinds of examples do you use in the paper?
   2.3. What other authors (if any) do you cite in your paper?
   2.4. How do you introduce your paper?
   2.5. What knowledge do you hope your reader comes away from your paper with?
   2.6. What is the main argument of your paper?
   2.7. How this essay different than /similar to the essays is you usually write?

How

3. Will you describe the process of writing this paper?
   3.1. Did you model this paper off of anything you read for the course?
   3.2. Was this paper influenced by anything else? TV shows? Movies? Books?

3.3. How did you choose which examples to use?
3.4. How did you decide what your main argument should be?
3.5. How did you decide how to introduce your essay?
3.6. Describe the process of revising this essay.
3.7. Describe the process of editing this essay.
3.8. Was this writing process similar to the ways you usually write papers?
3.9. Does this essay sound like the essays you usually write?

Who

4. Will you describe who the audience for this essay was?
   4.1. What is the instructor for this course like?
   4.2. Do you feel like you trusted him/her when you wrote the essay?
   4.3. What made you trust/distrust him/her?
   4.4. How did your instructor respond to your essay?
   4.5. How did you feel about his/her response?
   4.6. Did you share this essay with the class?
   4.7. How did your classmates respond to this essay?
   4.8. How did you feel about their responses?
   4.9. Have you shared this essay with anyone else?
   4.10. Do you plan to share this essay with anyone else?

When

5. When in the semester did you write this essay?
   5.1. Why do you think you wrote the essay at that point in the semester?
   5.2. Can you imagine having written the essay earlier/later in the semester? Why/why not?
6. What year were you in when you wrote this essay?
   6.1. Why do you think you wrote the essay at this point in your college career?
   6.2. Can you imagine having written this essay later/earlier in your college career? Why/why not?

Why

7. Why did you decide to write your paper about violence?
   7.1. The follow up questions for this category are especially difficult to predict. I imagine that answers will emerge in the previous questions that we can refer back to here.

Final Thoughts

8. Is there anything else that you think it's important for me to know about your essay, your writing process or you?

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interviewer: Why don't you start and tell me about the papers you thought you wanted to talk about.

Interviewee: The first paper I wrote was for my World Politics Intro class and it was about Ata, which is the Basque, _____ is the terrorist organization. It was really about threats and promises. I talked about how the Basques, they want self ____ and really the only thing that they're going to do is perform terrorist acts.

The other one I did was for my Arab Israeli Conflict class. I brought this one because I thought it was interesting, the writing process. We had to buy this game. It was called Peace Maker. You essentially had to try and make peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There were all these ways that tested the variables that you use. There were three settings. There's calm, tense, and violent. I haven't done violent, but I've done calm and tense.

We had to pick what we thought might – I wanted to deal with the poverty and so I would perform certain actions like giving them some sort of goods and services and then violence would break out. I actually never won the game.

Interviewer: Is that a computer game?

Interviewee: It's a computer game and I still play it. It's very fun. They say try the other side or try and get your violence down. I've always had moderate violence though. However, it was a really interesting experience. I thought that was one of the more interesting papers that I've written. That was this summer so it's fresh in my mind.

Interviewer: Let's start with that one and then maybe our conversation will move to the other one or even the other two that you brought. Tell me a little bit. Set the scene for me. Tell me what the class was about and what the class climate was like.

Interviewee: It was called Arab Israeli politics. It was a Poli-Sci class. I'm a Poli-Sci major. It was during summer term so it was a small class, kind of a smaller environment, which I really liked. Things went

fast. We were learning pretty quickly about the history of the region and the political landscape and why things are happening now. We really learned that religion aside it has a lot to do with the history of people gaining their independence. It's essentially what we learned in a nutshell.

This was the second paper that we wrote where we were learning about actions that the leaders have taken, whether it's building the wall separating occupied territories, and what consequences that has had. Things like that we were learning.

Interviewer: Interesting. Now, tell me a little bit about the assignment. You talked a little bit about it.

Interviewee: The assignment was essentially use this game and we're playing with independent and dependent variables. Let's see what I wrote. My dependent variable I chose was the Palestinian quality of life because they're very poor in the occupied territories. My independent variable was –

Interviewer: Take your time. Look back. It's no problem.

Interviewee: I tried freezing settlements to see how that would lead to cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis. That was my focus, to increase cooperation through economic development. I provide medical aid and then I upset the president and protests break out. They tried to make it very real, which is interesting. I have since won the game many times, I would like to point out. When I had written the paper I kept ending with an _____. So the complete outbreak of violence. I think I've found some better ways of mediating.

Interviewer: Talk to me a little bit about what strategies you tried initially and then what's been successful.

Interviewee: I didn't really understand developing relationships and working the approval ratings. There are so many elements from it that they tell you how you're doing, like groups and leaders, and they say their satisfaction rating whether it's going up or down. And then other variables like sympathy in the peace process and if you're playing from the Palestinian side the chances of an independent state. So you get to see what actions you're performing, how people are reacting.

I don't think I really paid attention to that at first. I wanted to give them medical aid. I knew they weren't doing too well. That upset

the Palestinian president. He was saying, "I refuse the aid. I think that's rude of you to even do that." I'd say, "What are you talking about? These people are living in poverty." In doing that, people got upset. They smuggled lots of bombs and stuff. I think that the mechanisms that I tried were something that would incite something in these people. Freezing settlements is a big deal rather than lowering trade restrictions. I froze settlements.

Interviewer: Which didn't go over very well.

Interviewee: No. Very, very, very mad. I said that I took the risk of freezing the settlements and the Palestinian people increased dramatically. I did listen to the president's advice. He said that peace cannot be possible without the continuation of – so I strengthened the cooperation between us but I wrote that the people became incensed over the maneuver. And my inability to reconcile decreased Israeli support with increased Palestinian approval hindered any progress.

It always ended up that I couldn't please both people and I tried. Even when I knew that my own approval rating if I was the Israeli prime minister, because you're the Palestinian authority or Israeli prime minister, and one would get very, very angry. It was very interesting because I learned that how I saw it was killing one Israeli, it was practically equal to killing 50 Palestinians. The Israelis really take that as a huge hit if it's one person, whereas 15 Palestinians can die and it didn't seem as much of a – people were aggravated but it didn't seem to equate to that kind of thing.

I handed in this paper and then I started playing the game more. Then I would start out instead of just going along I strategized. I strategized using words instead of actions really as much as I could. Obviously they usually called them empty words. Gradually I learned how when you say something how to – I learned how to talk to both peoples to deal with the government and not doing these things by myself. I learned what tools I had.

You perform whatever action, if it's for example lowering trade restrictions and it goes a few days and then you see what happens. Sometimes these little rotating circles will pop up in east Jerusalem and if they're red that means that something violent has happened. If they're white, and it's usually a protest or something nonviolent. In an intense climate usually three or four pop up and you click them and they're actually really realistic. If it's some sort of event, you can watch a video about it. There's one that always gets the people very, very angry when they call someone in my cabinet. I

don't know there was something about broken windshields and blood and – I always know when that one pops up that it's not good.

I almost wish that I had done this at the end of the class and not in the middle, but I liked the thing we did at the end of the class. We were learning a lot about the history of it and I didn't really know the mechanisms that were currently being dealt with. I didn't know there was a wall. I feel terrible for not knowing these things even though it apparently really decreased the violence in those areas.

Really the only measure of success, you get your independence date, but then they show your level of violence. In moderate they say this is kind of in parallel to what you would see in real life. I don't think you should be able to win the game because I don't think it's possible to have peace. But it was pretty realistic. It used real events to show what would happen or what has happened when they've performed whatever policies they've instituted.

Interviewer: It sounds like a really interesting exercise.

Interviewee: It was. I was like I'm paying $20.00 to write a paper and it turned out to be a really, really cool experience like I've never had in any class.

Interviewer: Is this a topic that you knew very much about going into the class?

Interviewee: I was here for summer so I said I need to take a Poli-Sci class to fill requirements for my major. This appealed to me. I am Jewish. I grew up with a very one sided perspective of the conflict. As the class went on I felt guilty about just not knowing and slighted by my Hebrew school for teaching me. I never realized actually how violent and aggressive Israelis were. I had such a one sided view of it. I didn't know that the Palestinians had lived there and we came in and decided we wanted to work the land ourselves and become part of the land and kick the Palestinians off.

I'm really supportive now of a two state solution. I pay attention now more to what's going on and I get frustrated and then I like that I know politics from another region. Through this class I got the other side. I wanted to take it because I wanted to learn about it. It was one of the more interesting classes available. It turned out to be more than I expected in a great way. It's a conflict, Arab Israeli conflict class. I knew it was going to be an understanding of two sides and I was amazed at how neutral the class was. We

had great debates and everything, but my instructor never pushed one way or the other and I couldn't imagine how that would be possible. Just learning the history and then learning what policies are going on now. I'm really glad I took the class. It was one of my favorites.

Interviewer: That's really great. I do want to get to the paper, but I'm just curious. What did the instructor do that communicated that kind of neutrality?

Interviewee: It's so funny because I kind of can't even remember how she did it because it was just kind of so flawless. We would do a lot of debates and be put on a side. I always got put on the side that I wanted to argue against. But it was completely arbitrary who went where. I would be put on a side that was supportive of Israeli aggression and I didn't support it and I was like, "This is ridiculous." I think she nurtured this kind of – it was maybe also the fact that I came in there knowing one thing and learning about it. It was so extreme to me because it was something that I had known nothing about. Things she would say about the conflict and I was just like, "Oh my goodness." I wish I could say how it went so well.

Interviewer: Sometimes it just happens that way.

Interviewee: Yeah. We had a great class dynamic. We knew what we were in for. We knew that it was kind of something that _____ kind of a sensitive subject. She treated it that way. Also, it was her really saying this is what happened. These people did this and then this happened and then this happened and this happened. She didn't blatantly say, "Israelis are aggressive" but these are things that I would pick up and make my own decision about.

The third paper we wrote was a simulation paper and we all ended up being actors. I turned out to be a leader of Hamas in Gaza. I was like, "I am not telling my grandparents about this. They will be shocked and telling me why am I taking this class?" I was so happy that I had gotten someone that I could learn. Researching is one of my favorite things, so I spent so much time researching because I found it so fascinating what my actor had to say and about the poverty and the strangulation of their people. I was happy that I could research that and have that and almost disappointed in the new perspective coming out of the class because my parents were just like, "Do not talk to Grandma and Grandpa about Palestinians or anything." I don't, but I have more compassion for them.

I think the fact that my instructor was able to cultivate that. It was interesting. We had a great class dynamic. Everyone helped each other. No one was judging anyone for what they were saying or thinking. That helped too.

Interviewer: Now, tell me about the process of writing this paper. What was the paper prompt?

Interviewee: The prompt was really use this game. Pick an independent and dependent variable. I'm so bad with these. I saw her saying that we needed to do this and I was just like, "I took stats already." It was really just whatever your goal was, pick a dependent variable and then choose how you think you can affect that, what would affect that. My dependent variable I chose was cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians and we had ways of measuring it. The independent variables were various mechanisms that we would use to, for me, achieve better cooperation. We could pick anything.

When I played the game I kind of sometimes say, "Oh, I wish I –" For me I really wanted to learn the effects of giving speeches and stuff and how that affects approval ratings for your own people. Really you could have any as long as you have those operating mechanisms that will somehow affect your dependent variable. And using the game to measure it was – go buy the game and go play. That was the assignment.

Interviewer: So you played your game a couple times and then?

Interviewee: I played the game and I was writing down – you'll perform an action and then the clock will go for a few days and you see what happens to the arrows. The hand shaking, is it going down? Is the peace sign going up? You see what outbreaks happen. I was getting a lot of that. I was getting really frustrated but I would write out, "On this day I did this and this was the reaction and I ended up gaining seven points in approval. Or this is what my approval out of 100 was now." I think I've achieved peace in about a year and a half.

You end up making a little over 30 moves just to try and – I would do something and then it set me back and I'd have to write down and I'd look up and say, "Oh my gosh. I had a 14 and now I have a -14." And kind of trace what I did to see. And I realized that it wasn't so easy to just give medical aid. You can't just give it to them. There were steps that I had to take in order for them to even

accept it. And even then sometimes they'd get offended. I would play the game a few times so I'd have these sheets of paper with just dates and trying to also record the reactions. The Palestinian president said that, they show his reaction. He said, "Peace cannot be possible without the continuation of settlement activity." So I was trying to really get the detailed reactions and him saying that was part of my motivation to freeze settlements, which is a very extreme thing to do.

Looking back I probably wouldn't have done something that extreme. I really didn't learn until after my paper. I always had an outbreak of the third _____, which was really scary. I was very upset. I couldn't understand why I couldn't win. There are different levels and it became easier once you achieved the first step. When you get to the second level, that's when things start warming up and it's easier to have structured dialogue. I never got passed level one while I was writing my paper so I didn't really know that there were more things you could do as you went up in the levels. I was kind of restricted to level one which is just you're trying to build a foundation. I was building and it was falling down. I'd try and build it up again, but it just seemed like every time there was this point of no return that once I had hit, anything I did would upset someone and, I mean, outbreaks of violence. You see four little circling things around cities and it's red and you're just like, "Oh no. What do I click first?" And when there's a red violence and there's a white one I would just, "Okay. I'll do the bad one." Bad news, good news even though it's not always good news.

I essentially concluded that even though Peacemaker said that I lacked the balance, flexibility and patience demanded of successful leaders, I kind of called that point of no return quicksand. You just make one step and it's deeper and deeper and then there are so many other variables that I had to deal with I couldn't do what I wanted to do. But we also had to say whether we thought it was realistic. I thought it was realistic in that conditions on the ground really impede any peace process. Things that I hadn't really taken into account, politicians can't just do stuff. I was happy that I had learned that.

This was a 500 word essay so it was really short. Even though my hypothesis didn't really carry out, I still thought that done right it would have been more realistic. That I wasn't very flexible and patient. When you do win, they say, "Congratulations. You did it." They tell you when you win and then they pop the screen which is the level of violence. Because I've been winning now it's

more – I usually have average moderate violence, which is realistic. One time I did have a low level of violence, which I was very happy about. But I'm sure that was when I was playing the calm mode.

I've never done violent. I'm actually too scared to because I can't handle that much. I'm just imagining these red circling the cities on the screen and I can't handle five at a time. Three at a time was enough. When violent things would pop up it was they'd have pictures of people crying or protests, even young kids protesting. When I'd provide medical help they'd get very, very angry. Probably for an assignment like this I really can't imagine learning about it another way, how to be a peacemaker. It's something that I wouldn't have gotten from just learning about the violence from reading _____. It was something that playing the game definitely enhanced my overall understanding of what really happens and how difficult it is.

Interviewer: I'm interested in that comparison from this to learning about violence in a book. How would you characterize the difference?

Interviewee: I'm thinking, I took a intro media process or whatever it was and they do a lot of studies on violence and media. If little boys become aggressive when they play video games. That's not the violence that we see here but I was like, "Okay. Yeah. Duh. Makes sense." Obviously we'd have in our textbook pictures throwing rocks or just numbers. This happened and they started launching bombs. It didn't have the same effect as myself being responsible for causing outbreaks and violence where I could see how what I did directly lead to whatever. If there was a suicide bombing in ____ or something. Learning about something that happens is different than feeling responsible for it. I wasn't crying or anything, but in a unique way.

Interviewer: Has that sense of responsibility translated at all outside of the class?

Interviewee: It certainly has. It was through the third assignment that we had really the Palestinian suffering and a lot of stuff which just seemed so cruel. And I would find that when I would be playing the game again what I was working for is trying to open borders. And trying to help. I took a history of the Holocaust class and I think that's a different kind of violence but it's a lot of numbers. Maybe if I took the class now I would really be able to see how actions and policies lead directly to these violent outbreaks.

The Holocaust, I've been learning about it my whole life and I'm almost numb to numbers and everything. I know that in this class we would watch images and videos and stuff about that. It felt different. If I would watch them now my interest is cause and effect, which is key to politics. The real implications of policies on the ground, not just politically whether someone backs down from a threat. Understanding the implications of things. That these aren't just actions but they're a lot more than that. That they're calculated. When violence happens that a lot of things are responsible for that. The main effect that it had was really seeing the cause and effect.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense to me and it sounds like it was a really powerful experience.

Interviewee: It was. I can't believe I still play the game. I don't tell people. I'm still friendly with people in my class, which is nice, but I don't tell them I'm still playing. I griped about it before writing it and then I really played the game and I said, "This is a great project and a great thing to do." And worth $20.00, $19.95.

Interviewer: As we move towards wrapping up, you said something a minute ago about how your sense of what violence is or what causes violence, how that changed. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Interviewee: I also wrote this paper.

Interviewer: We can talk about the other one too if you want.

Interviewee: Really it was Spain and Eta how this back and forth and back and forth and they say Eta, they do a lot of bombings and killings, really violent things. The way I saw it was just Spain does this and then Eta responds and then Spain responds and then Eta threatens. It was really just this linear kind of this is what happens rather than – Spain saying this causes Eta to respond in this certain way. The effect that that has on the response of Spain, how strong their reaction has to be. And realizing how effective and not effective violence is. That these two studies between Hamas and Israel and this Eta and Spain, violence doesn't work, doesn't move anything any further. The learning of how these people operate, that these are their means of getting what they want even though when they do it they don't get what they want as far as Eta is concerned.

What I gained from this, which is important being a political science major is the effect the policies have. I really didn't

understand the strategy of public policy. Through this and through the class I really was able to learn that these policies and violence are really interrelated in complex ways, very complex ways.

Interviewer: It sounds like there's sort of a theme here for you in your Poli-Sci classes. Is that true?

Interviewee: Well, these both have a new world politics classes. I just noticed. When I thought about which ones, immediately I said I wanted to do this and the one about Eta. It was definitely about policy and about threats and promises and this is about operating mechanisms and whatever affect they would have on mean Palestinian quality of life, lowering violence, cooperation. Understanding it in that way, being able to perform it in that way, I kind of looked at what I wrote.

I wrote this a year ago and kind of understood it a little more or thought about it in different ways why Eta does the things that they do, why they bomb and why a lot of suicide bombs and things like that. Both conflicts have such a history that really interests me because all of history informs what actions they're taking and a lot of time the reactions are the same, violence. And you have set people and – I still don't understand or I'm trying to understand why a lot of times you have Palestinians and Israelis and the terrorist group, why they respond with violence, which the _____ violence is a threat. But then I looked at violence as a response.

Interviewer: That's really powerful.

Interviewee: Yeah. Both of these classes, one lended to the other very well.

Interviewer: Do you have any guesses yet to your question about why they respond to violence?

Interviewee: I think to myself, I don't understand because this has been their response forever. Eta, they want self determination and Spain doesn't want to negotiate with terrorists. I found a great quote that it was really about someone from the IRA, The Irish Republican Army, and he said, "_____, we take power in this country with a ballot box in one hand and a rifle in the other." And how they want their ballot but the only way they know how to get it is through rifles and bombs and stuff.

I still don't understand how their policies don't change. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

That's insanity. I definitely try to understand why the same responses are happening and why they don't get anywhere, why the conditions are the same for both really than they were years ago, decades ago even, maybe less with the Israeli conflict. It's something that I definitely do think about, that I've come to think about, and especially I play this game more. It's something that I've come to want to understand.

Interviewer: Do you think you'll go into policy work?

Interviewee: I'm not sure. I'm really not sure what I want to do.

Interviewer: What year are you?

Interviewee: I'm a senior so I should be making these decisions. It peaked my interest. It did.

Interviewer: Interesting. Well, is there anything else you feel like we should have talked about or I should know about you?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: That's really interesting.

Interviewee: I give this to you, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. It looks like, if you have comments from your professor I can make a copy and hold onto the copy if you want it.

Interviewee: I think I have memory disk. I just didn't have the means to print it out this morning. I did well on that one so I don't mind. I have copies. Do you want me to just give you that one?

Interviewer: If you don't mind giving me that one too, I'm happy to take a look at it. It sounds like they sort of go together in your experience.

Interviewee: They really do for me.

Interviewer: And this one, do you want a copy or this one's fine too?

Interviewee: I have a copy. Will I be getting these back?

Interviewer: I'm happy to get them back to you, yeah.

Interviewee: That would be great.

Interviewer: I'll just make a copy now and then we don't have to worry about it unless there's somewhere that you need to be right now.

[End of Audio]

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