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Not Just a Feeling Anymore: Empathy and the Teaching of Writing

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NOT JUST A FEELING ANYMORE:

EMPATHY AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

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Empathy has been studied in composition since the 1960s, although it has not yet been adequately defined or theorized. Compositionists tend to employ the common definition of empathy as a feeling of identification with others using the familiar metaphor "walking in another's shoes," derived from the liberal-humanist therapeutic paradigm of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, which assumes a universal and transparent human experience. The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical framework for empathy, answering the question: what is the function of empathy in the teaching of writing? Composition scholarship has shown three general orientations toward empathy: empathy embraced, empathy inferred, and empathy disdained. In response, I trace empathy's development across disciplines as an aesthetic, ethical, physiological, and psychological construct using current research that shows empathy is a multifaceted, complex, cognitive process. In psychology and neuroscience, empathy is on the cutting edge of research, visible as brain activity in fMRI studies, theorized to have a vital role in evolution, and studied for its efficacy as a vehicle for altruistic action on behalf of stigmatized individuals and groups. Building on this multidisciplinary foundation, I offer an updated definition of empathy that invokes these scientific discoveries in order to account for empathy's role in the teaching and study of writing

and rhetoric. I theorize there are five empathies at work in composition—relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy. I describe these empathies using another metaphor, that of a watershed, to illustrate empathy as part of a natural process whereby the five empathies are separate like the tributaries in a river system yet as inseparable as the water that fills them. Empathy's primary weaknesses, the familiarity and morality biases, are addressed; these are foundational to most criticisms of empathy. In the final chapter, I propose a sample course focusing on the study of rhetorical empathy, address the limitations of the study, provide many directions for further research, and argue that the study (and practice) of empathy itself and rhetorical empathy in particular are vital in today's uncertain times.

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I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together.

"I Am the Walrus"
The Beatles

Empathy is the most radical of human emotions.

Gloria Steinem

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CHAPTER 1

THE FUNCTION OF EMPATHY IN COMPOSITION

Introduction

The primary research question of this dissertation and from which many other questions arise is: what is the function of empathy in teaching and learning composition? I have been interested in studying empathy for several years after finding myself continually needing to employ it in many different writing situations with students, in thinking about the workings of rhetoric, and in trying to understand why critical teaching sometimes fails. In my research, I have found that empathy appears in the pages of English studies scholarship occasionally, although its presence is often implicit rather than mentioned directly. When writers do mention it, they tend either to embrace it as an ethical good or disdain it as an appropriating and colonizing emotional reaction akin to pity. These two positions, poles set far apart across a continuum, result in controversy when empathy is brought into discussion. Controversy arises because empathy's theoretical terrain has not yet been explored in much detail, which has not yet allowed for the possibility for different types of empathy to be applicable to different people and situations. Central to this controversy is the tendency to define empathy using metaphors similar to "walking in another's shoes," a difficulty that becomes clearer when one considers that those shoes are already full.

Compositionists recognize the need to theorize empathy. In May 2009, *College English* published two short, back-to-back pieces having to do with empathy: Donald Lazere's review of Stanley Fish's new polemic *Save the World on Your Own Time* and a comment and response by Richard S. Albright and Theresa Kulbaga regarding her May

2008 *College English* article, "*Reading Lolita in Tehran* and the Rhetoric of Empathy." Fish proclaims in his book that academicians have no business advocating for any cause, political or moral, in the classroom; among other criticisms specific to Fish's book, Lazere responds to the advocacy claim by saying:

> So would Fish perhaps acknowledge that evolving from a self-centered viewpoint to one capable of empathizing with that of others whose views may be 'coherent and persuasive' is a moral and aesthetic virtue—as is the resulting capacity to transcend racial, gender, class, party, or nationalistic prejudices, and to 'experience compassion for the sufferers'? Would he further acknowledge that pedagogy in rhetcomp and literature might conceivably provide effective means for expanding these capacities? (537)

In one short line, Lazere stakes an explicit claim for empathy in "rhetcomp" pedagogy. Additionally, Albright criticizes Kulbaga's argument that empathizing with Azar Nafisi's characters is tantamount to encouraging consumerist, superficial, Oprah's-Book Club-like reading practices, American imperialism, and support for military intervention against Iran (I explain Kulbaga's arguments in more detail in Chapter 2). In her response, she calls empathy a topic not yet adequately theorized, suggesting we need to "more effectively integrate critical studies of affect and ethics into our courses and scholarship" (541). This dissertation responds to Kulbaga's challenge. The implications of the small selection of arguments above are among the many reasons to study the role of empathy in so-called rhetcomp.

My aim is not only to unpack the commonplace definition of empathy, but more importantly to uncover what its function has been in composition studies, generate a more

thoroughgoing definition based on recent research in other fields, and apply that definition toward a theoretical framework for empathy's study and use in our field. Since empathy has applications both as a rhetorical and a pedagogical construct, I include both in my meaning of "composition" in my research question. When I refer to "our field," I mean both rhetoric and composition studies. What I call a commonplace is the use of metaphor to define empathy, the tendency to assume it means simply feeling another's feelings, implying an almost psychic connection. That particular construct of empathy, drawn from the liberal-humanist therapeutic paradigm of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, has garnered the disdain of a number of compositionists (Barak; Ede; Faigley; hooks; Kulbaga; Lassner; McKerrow; Pounds; Zappen) and especially cultural studies scholars who summarily dismiss it as useless or warn that it is damaging, colonizing, and even murderous (See Chapter 2, especially Berlant, Sommer, and Spelman). To examine empathy's possibilities more fully, I refer to other disciplines' conceptions of it, especially psychology where empathy has a long history of in-depth study extending into social and cognitive psychology including cognitive perspective-taking. The many threads of empathy unwind in other fields including its role in human evolution, the evolution and phenomenon of language, the movement toward socially just societies, and the attempt to understand the lack of social justice. The idea that such a profound and provocative concept is also central to composition will, I hope, excite and engage readers of this dissertation as much as it has fascinated me.

What Is Empathy?

While I discuss what empathy is and its function in composition extensively in Chapter 4, I will briefly state here how it has been conceived in composition and other

fields in order to set the stage. Above, I mention a common metaphor used to define empathy—"walking in another's shoes." The lack of a theoretical foundation for empathy causes it to be defined metaphorically even in scholarly articles in composition and cultural studies (see Chapter 2). For example, in an excellent and fairly extensive literature review, rhetorician Dennis Lynch all but executes empathy by scholarly firing squad using a metaphored definition that does not extend beyond "stepping into the shoes of someone else" (8; 10); the scholars he cites define it similarly. The point of his article is to argue for theorizing empathy and for a wider conception of it; but even by the end, he continues to employ the same definition, although readers emerge with a broader sense of empathy's possibilities. Since specific definitions of terms are foundational to any theoretical construct, it is no wonder that empathy is so quickly dismissed.

Metaphorical definitions are not used for the most part in explorations of empathy in other disciplines, especially in the sciences. Empathy, in fact, is one of the most exciting new fields in neuroscience; it would be a challenge indeed today to open an issue of *Scientific American Mind,* a popular magazine focusing on disseminating cutting-edge research in psychology, that would *not* have articles on empathy. It is even thought to have a large role in the evolution of social behavior and the origin of language (see Chapters 3 and 4). Using the various definitions, descriptions, and mechanisms of empathy gathered from a wide range of fields discussed in Chapter 3, I construct a more complex explanation which I describe at the beginning of Chapter 4, although I will state my definition of empathy here:

> *the affective and/or cognitive awareness of another's internal states and perspectives, the outcome of a process brought about spontaneously or*

over time by seeing, hearing about, or reading about another's condition and is often a conscious choice, a curiosity about others rather than passive reception. It is always mutable and limited, discursive, and shaped by cultural discourses that may promote or impede its accuracy.

My definition combines the descriptions and definitions for empathy of five scholars to whom I often refer in the following pages: Suzanne Keen, a literature professor at Washington and Lee University, Martin Hoffman and Mark H. Davis, both prominent researchers in psychology whose work on empathy is well-known in their field, and Stacey L. Sinclair and Gerald Monk, professors of counseling psychology who advocate a discursive approach to psychotherapy. Keen's definition of empathy is "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect [that] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (208). Hoffman notes the role of cognition in empathy and defines it as a process whereby the state of the observer is "more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" (30). Davis suggests empathy is a process composed of three types or levels as I often refer to them in this document: non-cognitive (infants crying upon hearing another's cry and mimicry); simple cognitive (the affective empathy of sharing another's emotional state); and advanced cognitive (the act of perspective-taking) (15-16). Sinclair and Monk describe discursive empathy as one that does not assume the transparency of another's experience but recognizes "the dominant cultural discourses" that shape the therapeutic relationship (343). Readers should be aware in the discussion that follows that although empathy, compassion, sympathy, and pity are often used synonymously in everyday parlance and especially in conceptions of empathy-like constructs that were

called *sympathy* and sometimes *pity* until the 19th century, these words mean very different things (see Chapter 3). Empathy is especially likely to be conflated with compassion (deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it). The definitions from which my own is developed underlie both my criticism of uncomplicated notions of empathy and my theory of empathy in composition including its five functions explained in Chapter 4. In addition, Keen theorizes that writers who attempt to move readers to new consciousness and pro-social action use three forms of "strategic" empathy: *bounded strategic empathy*, designed for an in-group audience who readily identifies with characters similar to themselves and situations similar to theirs; *ambassadorial strategic empathy*, designed to create empathy in specific readers for specific reasons; and *broadcast strategic empathy*, designed to stimulate feelings of empathy from all readers by narrative situations and characters appealing to a more universal audience (215). Keen calls these *strategic*; however, if they are strategic, they are *rhetorical*.

Toward a Theoretical Framework:
Empathy and bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy

As a further rationale for undertaking the examination of empathy's role in composition studies and to move toward a theoretical framework for this study, I turn to bell hooks' theory of engaged pedagogy, particularly her concept of mutual recognition. hooks' theory reflects the concerns and tensions evident in composition's treatment of empathy. Engaged pedagogy rests on a compassionate premise: to be effective, teachers need to be engaged with students, to nurture not only their classroom performance but their whole well-being: mental, physical, and spiritual. While it may be difficult to assess

which aspects of teaching are most effective, many compositionists would likely agree that the more they are engaged with students and the subject matter, the more excited students are about what happens in class. In addition, much of what they learn from courses happens outside the specific class environment, in other courses, in conversations with others, in internal conversations, in internal dialogues with authors they read. As engaged teachers, hooks equates that emphasis on students' growth with liberation from oppression:

> To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (13 *Teaching to Transgress*)

While some educators may look at such terms as *sacred* and *spiritual* and *souls* with some skepticism (or even suspicion), hooks' religious imagery emphasizes that engaged teachers care for the whole student not just his or her writing or even college degree. That is what it means to be *engaged*.

One aspect of engaged pedagogy is particularly pertinent to this study—hooks' concept of mutual recognition, i.e., the "will and desire to respond to our unique beings" (13). hooks uses this term mostly in the sense of resisting racism, but she unpacks it

further in *Outlaw Culture*. Mutual recognition is the moment when another's needs—his or her subjectivity rather than objectivity—are recognized and taken into account:

> If a person makes a unilateral decision that does not account for *me*, then I feel exploited by that decision because my needs haven't been considered. But if that person is willing to pause, then at that moment of pause there is an opportunity for *mutual recognition* (what I call the 'subject-to-subject' encounter, as opposed to the 'subject-to-object'). (287, hooks' italics)

That moment of pause, of subject-to-subject recognition is, by definition, empathy. Combining hooks' explanations of mutual recognition from *Teaching to Transgress* and *Outlaw Culture* reveals the value she places on the potential to see beyond each others' countenances to our mutual needs and feelings. hooks claims that every relationship we have with a student has the potential for mutual recognition/empathy, something so important she places it in a paragraph explaining what is *sacred* about teaching.

There are two aspects of engaged pedagogy that illustrate well the need to study empathy in more detail and are included here to introduce some of the challenges to empathy I will discuss later. One is the value hooks places on sharing personal experience in the classroom—a practice designed to engender empathy between students and teachers, a practice that demands teacher-vulnerability. It requires we take the same risks as students. If we ask them to write narratives about their lives, we must be willing to narrate our lives. hooks calls these "confessional narratives," although not all narrative writing is confessional nor is soliciting confessional writing necessarily a good idea, a challenge discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Whatever teachers ask, however, they must be willing to practice and be the first to share because "linking confessional

narratives to academic discussion [shows] how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material" (*Teaching to Transgress* 21). This is similar to David Bleich's pedagogy of disclosure; within such a pedagogy, everyone and his/her experiences become part of the curriculum.

Uncovering ways empathy has been mostly embraced, implicit, and disdained in composition studies is another challenge to empathy, which hooks' work presents and theorizes, and is an important component of this study. While hooks rarely uses the actual word *empathy*, her concept of mutual recognition implies an empathy-like construct such as the value she places on sharing personal experience as a way of knowing, an epistemology. If we value someone's experience and learn from it, we have engaged in perspective-taking, an act of cognitive empathy (see Chapter 2). She overtly embraces the value of empathy when, in *Teaching to Transgress*, describes her own attempt to understand more fully how it felt for Africans brought to the United States as slaves to lose their language and be forced to learn another. She says she could only begin to empathize with those Africans from long ago through her experience as a woman (168). In other words, she credits her experience as an oppressed woman with her ability to fully imagine the slaves' plight, although again, she does not use the word empathy but instead "imagines" in great detail what happened to them (168-69). The postcolonial scholars critical of empathy, whom I mention in Chapter 2, argue with this approach saying one person's experience with hardship does not provide any special insights into another's suffering. In yet another book, *Black Looks*, bell hooks' view of empathy aligns with the views of these same scholars. In it, she cautions that whites' desire to experience and know other races in popular culture commodifies and "eat[s] the

other," a term she borrows from Sigmund Freud (see Chapter 2). In a statement many readers might take issue with, she argues it serves as "spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). In hooks' view, empathy means appropriation. The tensions between hooks' three views are reflected in many composition and cultural studies scholars' attempts to address empathy or empathy-like constructs and serve as excellent examples of the complexity of a concept that is often reduced to walking in another's shoes.

Finally, hooks' use of empathy to understand and have compassion for students' cognitive and emotional dissonance when they are exposed to critical theory is an important area to be explored and theorized later in this dissertation. Students, especially those at community colleges but others too, may experience a great deal of pain when well-meaning critical teachers attempt to rip the rug of comfortable assumptions out from under them. hooks recognizes the need for "compassion" in these circumstances and shares a story of students who came to her and said, "'We take your class. We learn to look at the world from a critical standpoint, one that considers race, sex, and class. And we can't enjoy life anymore'" (42). From such classroom experiences, hooks has learned respect for their pain, for the fissures, internal, familial, and cultural, cultural critique may cause students. It is unclear, however, how far compassion and empathy extend for hooks, whether they extend, for example, to middle-class, white, Christian students who resist her ideas; she implies in *Teaching to Transgress* that students come to a critical point of view. What happens to those who do not? Are they still worthy of empathy and compassion? We cannot extrapolate the answers to those questions from her text. One of

the primary critiques of critical pedagogy is the failure to take resistant students seriously. This is an area this dissertation explores further.

A Word about Methodology

James C. Raymond argues rhetoric is a legitimate research methodology and the primary methodology of the humanities, and it is the methodology of this study. Richard Lloyd-Jones says rhetoric is the place where writing scholarship resides, a place where "scholar[s] of writing must first love the language; [they] must craft it as one would a fine cabinet, caress it as sculpture, live in it as architecture" (203). This dissertation is crafted within a love of language, yet it also relies a great deal on science. This study's data is the literature on empathy—some in composition to show how it has often been embraced, implicit, and disdained, but I especially focus on the literature of empathy in other fields, principally psychology and neuroscience. I use quantitative and qualitative data, speculations, and empirical studies of empathy from a wide variety of fields to complicate and theorize a definition and a place for empathy in composition studies.

The scientific research included in this dissertation is vital to the understanding of empathy for compositionists. Scholars in composition and other humanistic fields, such as cultural studies, have made poignant arguments about empathy and compassion often without researching what, if anything, more empirically-oriented fields have said on the subject. The claim of empathy as non-existent, inaccurate, or worthless for creating social justice espoused moderately by Dennis Lynch, Theresa Kulbaga, and bell hooks and vehemently by Doris Sommer, Lauren Berlant, and Elizabeth Spelman are all based on a common liberal-humanist definition that has held the popular imagination since it was created in the 1950s. This definition assumes individuals are autonomous agents,

independent of social forces, and readily transparent. Recent empirical research shows that virtually everyone except the mentally ill empathize, it is a cognitive process with limits and boundaries, and it can and does foment political activism. Raymond suggests that "The best humanists [should] first discover what science can say about a given subject" (783) before employing rhetoric to explore "what it cannot say" (783). It is on this foundation but certainly not limited to it that my dissertation rests.

The Form

In order to answer the question of what empathy's role is in composition studies, I begin with an overview of the need to study empathy, then more specifically examine the ways composition has addressed it so far, both explicitly and implicitly, and finally discuss constructs of empathy in other fields. From that basis, I develop a theory of empathy in composition studies ending with implications and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 1 justifies the need for an expanded look at empathy and opens with a call from Theresa Kulbaga to theorize it. I then discuss, very briefly, what empathy is, including the definition I come to in Chapter 4. This is to give readers an immediate sense that empathy is more than metaphorically stepping into another's shoes. Next, I present arguments about why empathy should be studied, including examples of how it is exercised as an ethical good without much, if any, theorizing. I then discuss as my theoretical framework bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, which relies, albeit somewhat indirectly, on empathy and shares certain similarities and concerns with my study. Finally, I explain the study's methodology and the form the dissertation will take.

In Chapter 2, I explore how empathy has been alternately embraced, inferred, and disparaged across several areas within and related to composition. In each of these sections, I provide examples of these positions, for instance, in the scholarship of self-disclosure especially in personal writing. Empathy has also been embraced, at least for a time, in the form of the Rogerian argument; debate about it raged throughout the late 1970s and early 80s in the pages of *Rhetoric Review*, *College English*, and *College Composition and Communication* among other publications. The thrust of the dispute was over the rise of social-epistemic rhetoric and composition praxis at what some scholars viewed as the expense of the process movement. The social focus in composition led to empathy becoming somewhat covert, although it was still present, as I argue in the section on empathy implicit. This section explores empathy implied in the rhetorical tradition and attends particularly to its implicitness and sometimes conspicuous absence in critical pedagogy. This discussion leads to the section on empathy disparaged, where I explore the most current and also the most vehement arguments, mostly from postmodern and postcolonial scholars. Each of these sections is balanced by arguments from opposing positions.

Seeking to create a deeper understanding of empathy for compositionists and in order to develop a more complex definition, Chapter 3 explores how empathy is defined and conceptualized in psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, feminist studies, and cultural studies. In the chapter, I draw heavily from fascinating research in the fields of psychology and neuroscience, where researchers have studied empathy extensively. Neuroscientists in particular are giving empathy a great deal of attention not only for its potential to unravel some of the mystery of human and animal socialization but for its

potential as a marketing tool. Psychologists, beginning in the mid-twentieth century and continuing today, explore empathy to discover why humans are both kind and cruel to one another and why, sometimes, they fail to act when action is most desperately needed.

Chapter 3 begins with a brief history of the definition of empathy and goes on to clarify the differences between empathy, sympathy, compassion, and pity. The next section shows empathy's physiological foundation and then challenges the tendency to assume empathy is purely emotional by providing evidence that it is both emotional *and* cognitive. Several components of empathy—imagination, identification, and decision—are then discussed followed by a section that addresses the matter of who feels empathy for whom and a section on gender and empathy. The last two sections of Chapter 3 explore concepts important especially to critical pedagogy—the relationship between empathy and altruism and the importance of widening the circle of empathy. If the empathy-altruism hypothesis is correct, then compositionists interested in social justice may find it easier to make an informed choice about whether to include empathy and the study of it in their classrooms as part of the goal to generate altruistic change within students.

The exploration of empathy in composition and other fields prepares for Chapter 4's advancement of a theory of empathy for composition studies in several areas. First, I articulate a definition for our field that encompasses empathy's emotional, cognitive, and discursive elements. This leads to a discussion of implications of the definition for teaching praxis. I then theorize five empathies at play in composition—relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy. Relational empathy is the perspective-taking and social competence we engage

in every day; it is vital to creating a classroom atmosphere where students feel their perspectives are valued and heard. Pedagogical empathy is discovering and understanding students' writing strengths and weaknesses in order to coach them more effectively. Critical empathy is conceptualizing and negotiating relations of power in the classroom; I argue that critical pedagogy's moral foundation is compassion and accusations of false consciousness can undermine that foundation. Rhetorical empathy is the way others' perspectives are considered when generating discourse; this section includes a discussion of three rhetorical empathies at work in literature and popular media. Discursive empathy focuses on the contextual role empathy plays in communication. I discuss the interaction of the five empathies and end the chapter with a discussion of empathy's biases and a cautious vindication of empathy in spite of them.

The final chapter returns to the importance of studying empathy in our field in order to understand how empathy functions in teaching and discourse. I begin the chapter by discussing ways to enact the five empathies (from Chapter 4) in the classroom to move students to a new, critical consciousness without invoking false consciousness dogma. I then discuss the limitations of my study. Finally, I suggest directions for further research on empathy in two areas—rhetorical empathy and empathy in the composition classroom. Rhetorical empathy in popular media can and does provoke both intercultural understanding and political rage, phenomena vital to study for a better understanding of today's uncertain times. In addition, I suggest possibilities both for qualitative and quantitative research on empathy in composition to discover, for example, how understanding students' writing backgrounds and attitudes helps us to help them. If our classes focus on issues of social justice, it would be useful to discover whether including

empathy in critical classrooms could influence attitudes and actions. I conclude by advocating for the inclusion of empathy education and its potential for creating a more just and peaceful society.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights composition's need to study empathy, a word sometimes haphazardly dropped into discussions as an unquestioned good. I provide a rationale for the need to examine what the function of empathy has been in rhetoric and composition and for compositionists to look beyond our own field to discover what empathy is and how it might illuminate theory in our discipline. To theorize empathy's place in composition, I discuss bell hooks' engaged pedagogy theory, one that, I argue, relies on an empathetic premise. I employ rhetoric as my methodology, the methodology of the humanities, while also making a case for my decision to use a considerable amount of scientific research to support my theory of empathy in composition studies. While many of the rhetoric, composition, and cultural studies scholars in Chapter 2 assert opinions for and against empathy, none have discussed or utilized discoveries about it in the sciences over the past twenty years. All that said, we cannot know where to go without knowing where we have been, which is where Chapter 2 begins.

CHAPTER 2

EMPATHY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES: EMBRACED, IMPLIED, DISDAINED

Introduction

This chapter explores how empathy has been conceived in our field and thus demonstrates the need to heed Theresa Kulbaga's call to study and theorize it. I address composition's three most common approaches to it mentioned in the chapter's title—empathy embraced, empathy implied, and empathy disdained. With few exceptions, all three have in common a central problem of conceiving empathy as decontextualized and positionless. In the section on empathy embraced, I focus on the problem of promoting empathy as a tacit ethical "good" in classroom practices in general, in self-disclosure, and as a key construct in Rogerian rhetoric, available to all without regard to context or position. The critiques of each position are then explored. My discussion turns, as the discussions did in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to empathy implied. The problem with leaving empathy implicit is that it remains un(der)theorized and ill-defined when not discussed explicitly, opening it again to criticisms of being decontextualized and positionless and, thus, difficult to justify. As Dennis Lynch points out, empathy's formerly central role (albeit rarely by that name) in the rhetorical tradition has been "all but abandoned by those theorists whose work fits within poststructuralist, postcolonial, or postmodern social theories" (6) largely because of the assumption that "empathy presupposes that we can fully and completely understand one another" (8). Empathy's role in critical pedagogy has also been mostly implicit, a surprise considering the fact that its basis, I argue, is compassion—the deep understanding of the suffering of another accompanied by the wish to relieve it. Perhaps that is because the metaphors used to

define empathy are problematic. Scholars who discuss empathy explicitly are often those who disdain it. Lynch's article provides a useful backdrop to this discussion because he articulates well the primary arguments against empathy from postmodern and postcolonial scholars. I focus on several key arguments, particularly empathy as appropriation, as colonizing, and as the commodification of suffering. I end the chapter with a few researchers whose work begins to approach empathy as a more complex construct than simply valorizing or disparaging it using a metaphor-based definition. This chapter prepares for subsequent discussions that develop a fuller understanding of empathy especially from the sciences. Although I analyze them in separate sections in this chapter, the implications and concerns of empathy in the teaching of writing, especially using a critical approach, overlap.

Empathy Embraced

Empathy has been embraced as a necessary classroom ethic, an unquestioned "good," and a tool that shows a love for students that is presumed to increase their engagement. In such an embrace, rarely is the efficacy of a generalized empathy questioned; it is assumed to be available to all students from all cultures in all situations at all times. Teaching practices that focus on student engagement invoke empathy because it is considered a key characteristic of good relationships. Empathy is also invoked and problematized in scholarly discussions surrounding student self-disclosure, including but certainly not limited to the common personal narrative assignment in first-year composition courses. One of the strongest endorsements of empathy as an unquestioned good was in the promotion of the Rogerian argument in the early 1980s, the critiques of which helped usher in composition's turn to the social. In the following three

sections on empathy embraced, I will focus first on classroom practice, then on self-disclosure, and finally on the Rogerian argument. My goal in doing so is to show that embracing empathy as an unquestioned ethical good can become a panacea for classroom management difficulties as well as the complexities inherent in student self-disclosure. Empathy embraced also overlooks postmodern criticisms of it as appropriation.

Empathy Embraced in Classroom Practice

As a value for teaching and learning, empathy was embraced in 1969 by Steven Carter who considered empathy in composition classrooms a solution to student passivity in the face of what we might now see as an example of Paulo Freire's banking system of education. Carter recalls one Professor Fader, who taught Renaissance literature at Michigan State University, complaining that the "'right answer/performance-oriented machine' at Michigan State became a [place where] students took everything [he] said at face value, wrote it down, and presumably ingested it for later regurgitation on an examination" (Carter 39). Carter suggests the solution to student passivity is what he calls the teacher's art of empathy, i.e., an engaging classroom persona (40), in order to get them excited about writing and ideas. He first encourages teachers to show enthusiasm for the subject matter, assuming that students will follow suit because the students' empathic tendencies will work inside them to generate the enthusiasm they see the teacher demonstrate. He also addresses more productive ways for teachers to comment on student papers, that instead of writing the word *cliché* on a student's essay, they should challenge the student to consider and write about how he or she really feels about the subject matter. Carter wants teachers to "crawl inside the passiveness and create the change in thought that will produce the change in writing" (41) and create writing

assignments in which students can connect their everyday life experiences to more abstract cultural ones like comparing the student's experience of falling in love to the institution of love and sex in America, ala *Playboy Magazine* (42). Presumably, such assignments combined with the teacher's art of empathy will enliven even the most apathetic students.

Another example of empathy as a classroom value comes from Marilyn Smith Layton, a self-described thirty-year teacher who says empathy is necessary in what she sees as today's less loving culture (329), although whether it is actually less loving is another matter. She defines empathy in relation to the memoir, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, where the author's former professor, Morrie Schwartz, says engaging people is about "being fully present" (qtd. in Albom 135) when listening to them in an "I-am-thinking-about-you climate" (Layton 330). Empathy is one among several classroom values with possibilities to "lighten and enlighten" the journey of education (332). The purpose for practicing empathy in the classroom is to create student engagement, like Morrie Schwartz (and Steven Carter above), and to mentor students. She says to "reach our students' heads, we must also find ways to engage their hearts" (330). Layton does not touch on cultural conceptions of empathy nor the potential consequences of empathic inaccuracy, which is a chief complaint among empathy's detractors, although many of those same detractors use similar definitions of empathy (see this chapter's section, "Empathy Disdained").

Empathy Embraced in Self-Disclosure

While Layton mentions, but does not focus on personal writing, others who embrace empathy focus almost entirely on personal revelations in the classroom and

empathetic responses to them as a key to engaged and engaging teaching. The following cautionary tales of traumatic revelations deliberately solicited in composition classrooms should not be interpreted as the all-too-common anti-narrative stance in academia. On the contrary, as Gian Pagnucci says, "Stories are how we think. How we talk. They form our governments, our religions, our cultures. They're how we fall in love. And how we fall out of it. Stories are what make us human" (7). However, to take this idea a step further, *why* do we tell them and *why* do they make us human? Because stories are the way we identify with each other. The way we find common ground, that our paths are not so lonely after all. *They are the way we empathize*. This innate human capacity (and need) for storytelling is different, however, from traumatic stories of abuse solicited under the guise of "empathetic" teaching and graded coursework.

Jeffrey Berman, a professor of English at SUNY Albany, has probably had the most to say about empathy in self-disclosure, although despite six books and several articles on the subject, his work has not been widely cited. This may be because he advocates for the psychotherapeutic value of self-disclosure in composition courses and the personal narrative, promotes composition instructors' roles as would-be therapists (*Risky Writing* 48), and encourages confessional writing about "risky" topics in class such as suicide, abortion, rape, and abuse. While students writing about such subjects certainly need an empathetic approach from their instructors, these topics may re-traumatize and exploit students when intentionally solicited in college writing courses, warn Susan Swartzlander, Diana Pace, and Virginia Stamler in an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (B1). Yet Berman says he finds himself "drawn to these writings because they demonstrate students' efforts to confront and master aspects of their lives

seldom disclosed in more traditional writing courses [and that] their writing is not confessional but transformational" (*Risky Writing* 20).

Berman's naïve solution to the possible adverse effects of this pedagogy of disclosure is empathy. In his praxis, he centers on Carl Rogers' conception of empathy as "being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person" (Rogers, "Empathetic"). Berman adds the insights of philosopher Martin Buber, psychologists Heinz Kohut and George Mead, and literary critics Walter Jackson Bate and Karl Morrison, all of whom view empathy in different ways—one as a tool (Kohut); two as imaginative reconstruction (Mead and Bate); and two as a tenet of mysticism (Buber and Morrison). In his most recent book, *Empathic Teaching*, Berman's definition of empathy becomes "trying to understand another person's feelings and thoughts without losing sight of the differences between self and other" (32). He claims tackling risky topics and allowing students to write their lives in a "safe," empathetic environment, enables them to exorcise the ghosts of painful life events and, conceivably, write better. While he does address some of the concerns I have addressed below (*Risky Writing* 35; *Empathic Teaching* 34), Berman, in a few sentences, glosses over postmodern and cultural critiques of empathy that I explain in more detail in the section "Empathy Disdained".

It is not only Berman who advocates confessional self-disclosure in composition courses to generate empathetic understanding. bell hooks, who maintains conflicting views of empathy in the classroom, also advocates the classroom confessional although not in the same way as Berman. She says teaching as the practice of freedom involves mutual recognition, by which she means caring for our students' inner lives, transgressing

boundaries, responding to the unique beings of everyone in the class (13), and having "'subject-to-subject' encounter[s], as opposed to the 'subject-to-object'" (287). A subject-to-subject encounter is one in which each party recognizes the other's needs, feelings, and humanity. It is not difficult to see that empathy plays a part in hooks' conceptions of mutual recognition and engaged pedagogy. One way mutual recognition is accomplished in class is through confession. Arguing with feminist professor Mimi Orner who suggests that student confession is punitive, hooks urges teachers to confess along with students. She says,

> Empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my classrooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any ways that I would not share. When professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. (21)

Experience-sharing is the heart of hooks' engaged pedagogy, a place of empathy where she claims student voices are heard and valued as much as the teacher's, where the direct connection to students' lives is what makes them enthusiastically participate in discussion and presumably in their education in general. Everyone in hooks' classes writes and then shares a short personal narrative; no one is exempt including hooks. She says, "Sharing experiences and confessional narratives in the classroom helps establish communal

commitment to learning" and where differences, not just commonalities, are established (186).

Problems with Self-Disclosure

Practicing classroom empathy is not an adequate answer to the real risks students face when encouraged to disclose traumatic events. Some teachers, like Berman, equate such self-disclosure with expressivist pedagogy that "encourages, even insists upon, a sense of writer presence" (Burnham 19), although expressivism did not at its outset necessarily encourage students to write traumatic confessional narratives. As composition history shows, much writing instruction until the 1960s and 70s was taught via summarizing and interpreting literature with the idea that reading and writing about good writing would somehow produce it through a kind of osmosis/mimesis process. The so-called personal essay arose from a rejection of this pedagogy in favor of one that freed students from the bonds of abstract literary subjects to write about things they knew. James Moffett says in a 1965 *College Composition and Communication* article, "What most frequently freezes the student at one end of the abstractive spectrum is too much writing about reading" (247). Moffett does not discourage reading in the writing class, but rather than interpreting literature, students should use readings as models for constructing their own thoughts and compositions, "not as subject matter to write about but as a source of experience" (248). Such personal writing then is not confessional and self-focused but "de-centered" (148); in other words, enough time and distance have passed from the event about which the student writes that he or she can step away while still being a character or even protagonist in the action of the narrative, an actor in a community of consciousness (148). This movement away from abstraction is what

Moffett means by student-centered teaching, not students writing therapeutic confessional narratives; learners choose their own activities, teach each other, and integrate knowledge and experience (Moffett and Wagner 25).

With such freedom comes writing about what students deem important to themselves and their lives, which contributes to confessional self-disclosure and consequently the difficulty with responding empathetically. What students are asked to read in writing classes contributes too—not the abstract essays about the human condition but direct experiences of engaging protagonists with whom students empathize (accurately or not) such as those in works by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. It is not surprising with such examples that students write the divorce or death or confession essay David Bartholomae says we have all read ("Conversation with Elbow" 484). The truth is we have all read it. How we respond is at issue. In their textbook *Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13,* Moffett and collaborator Betty Jane Wagner devote an entire chapter on teaching students to write narrative non-fiction that includes an example of a student's painful experience when her brother was accidently shot. Moffett and Wagner treat this essay as a matter of course, just a writing assignment that asks students for a memory about someone important to them. There are no guidelines regarding how to respond empathetically, sympathetically, or otherwise. It seems to be included in their book as an exemplary piece of writing where the writer rises above her "limited educational opportunity" through a personal narrative assignment (326). Donald Murray briefly addresses the issue of writing as therapy, saying writing teachers are not and should not try to be therapists, yet acknowledges that whether we like it or not, writing is therapeutic. He does not "avoid it or prohibit it when it occurs, for

[he] has found students learn best when they feel strongly about a subject" (217). The heart of expressivist pedagogy is not empathetic therapy but development of an individual voice that occurs when students write about topics that are meaningful to them.

Although expressivist pedagogy may not have been intended to generate traumatic confessional narratives, the profusion of composition scholarship on the pitfalls of the personal essay and responding to it are evidence that such student writing is widespread. While empathy is supposed to mitigate the trauma both of the event and the writing, there are many risks associated with soliciting traumatic self-disclosure in college composition courses. Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler suggest "writing about childhood experiences could cause strong feelings of shame to surface; to have others read about their experiences could cause additional trauma" (B1). For example, after composing a narrative about an incident of childhood molestation, a student of Berman's writes, "I feel nervous and anxious as I write this essay. My palms are clammy, my mouth dry, and I feel as if I might be sick to my stomach. Recalling this incident sickens me. I feel as if this has just happened to me all over again" (Berman 9, original is in italics). In spite of this, she goes on to say she expects her experience in Berman's risky writing class will give her "a chance to get beyond these memories" (9). This student later credits the class with helping her recover from the event through sharing her story and hearing stories from other students and empathizing with them (9). For students who might actually be re-traumatized, *Risky Writing* contains a short section on referring students to counseling centers (two pages) and a longer one (three pages) on teachers avoiding legal trouble, but Berman's focus is on the therapeutic value of writing and empathy, not its risks.

Another problem that arises from these narratives is that teachers experiencing feelings of empathy and/or sympathy (or that they should and do not) changes the commenting and grading situation. Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler contend "students believe that the papers that receive the highest grades are those detailing highly emotional events or those that display the most drama" (B1). Addressing content in self-disclosing papers becomes difficult because commenting on the essay is equated with unempathetically commenting on the student's life (Morgan 88-89). Grammatical errors are especially problematic and often frame the discussion; for example, one frequent argument is that pointing out errors in comma placement is a hideous injustice in an essay about the death of a student's parent, sibling, or best friend. Marlowe Miller writes that one of his colleagues "copes with unbidden written expressions of personal experience from students with a startling rubric: Writing about the death of a loved one […] is always awarded a B" (98). The discomfort implicit in these claims highlights the conflict teachers often feel when faced with empathetic and/or sympathetic feelings (or the lack thereof) about or for their students and the summative aspects of evaluation.

In most arguments against soliciting personal revelations in the classroom, the assumption is that somehow non-personal writing is *not* revealing, *not* seeded with emotional landmines, *not* personal, *not* in need of empathy. The title of one of Donald Murray's articles says it succinctly: "All Writing is Autobiographical." "Susan", a presenter at a writing center conference, shared a story about a client who came for help on a paper for a psychology class for which the student was supposed to review an article from an academic journal. The article she chose was a study of reactions to first-time involuntary commitment to a mental institution. As the presenter and client worked

through the article, it became apparent (and the student eventually confided) that she had chosen the article because she had been involuntarily committed to a mental institution. This paper did not contain an overt confession; however, the writing tutor was faced with the same dilemma of responding appropriately. As writing teachers, most of us have received research papers on eating disorders, drug abuse, incarceration, bullying, abortion, and so on, which students claimed in conferences, end-of-the-essay/term reflection letters, and sometimes the papers themselves that they chose those topics based on personal experience. As I said in an article in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, students "disclose their cultures, political leanings, spiritual views, personal biases, habits, hobbies, and socioeconomic lives" (368) in papers that seemingly have nothing to do with so-called personal writing. If empathy, as Berman claims, is necessary when students write about overtly risky topics, it is just as necessary when they write about seemingly safe ones.

And what happens to empathy when students reveal views we find abhorrent? Susan shared another story about a student's response paper for a literature class that revealed his view of American Indians as lazy, alcoholic welfare cheats with criminal tendencies and too many treaty rights. Steve Sherwood writes about a similar experience when a student came to his university's writing center with a paper that began, "'To me, the biggest turnoff in the world is a woman with a briefcase in her hand'" (51). Sherwood says he not only disagreed with the writer but "took offense at his assumption that, being male, [Sherwood] must agree with him" (51). When warned that the audience might take offense, the writer said he did not care and had the right to express his opinion. The reaction of Susan's client was the same. These confrontations with ideas and people

whose sensibilities are so different from our own are also related to empathy. It is thwarted, and the thwarting is painful. As I explain in later chapters, empathy is not just something we choose; the tendency toward it is biological. When we are confronted with someone who thinks so differently, who is so separate, alien, other, the natural reaction may be to recoil. That can be a difficult quandary for caring teachers.

Empathy Embraced in the Rogerian Argument

The Rogerian argument, another example of empathy embraced, finally brought empathy to the fore in a spate of articles arguing for and against the efficacy and even the existence of the argument itself, signaling the turn to the social-epistemic in composition studies. Rogerian rhetoric/the Rogerian argument is a rhetorical strategy based on empathizing with one's "opponent." In their 1970 text, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, Richard E. Young, a founding member of Rhetoric Society of America and the rhetoric program at Carnegie Mellon University and linguistic anthropologists Alton Becker and Kenneth Pike, who originated the theory of tagmemics, sought to usher the study of rhetoric back in from the margins and to "create a new rhetoric and with that a new discipline that would take its place beside linguistics and literary studies" (Young 329). They introduced what has come to be called the Rogerian argument based on Carl Rogers' psycho-therapeutic theory that effecting change in people necessarily involves empathic understanding first, empathy "*with* a person, not *about* him" (Rogers, *On Becoming* 332). Young, Becker, and Pike's empathetic argument, as oxymoronic as that may sound especially given their continual use of the word *opponent*, involves understanding the reader/listener, validating his or her position, and convincing him or her to believe that they share perspectives in a series of four steps:

1) An introduction to the position and demonstration that the opponent's position is understood.
2) A statement of the contexts in which the opponent's statement may be valid.
3) A statement of the writer's position, including the contexts in which it is valid.
4) A statement of how the opponent's position would benefit if he were to adopt elements of the writer's position. If the writer can show that the positions complement each other, that each supplies what the other lacks, so much the better. (Young, Becker, and Pike 283)

Maxine Hairston's version, very similar to this one, suggests avoiding certain argumentative language in the first three steps, changes the focus to finding common ground in the fourth step, and adds a fifth:

4) Outline what common ground or mutual concerns you and the other person or group seem to share; if you see irreconcilable interests, specify what they are.
5) Outline the solution you propose, pointing out what both sides may gain from it. (376)

Young, Becker, and Pike and Hairston predicate this rhetorical strategy on the assumption that the arguers' positions are so entrenched that the argument is beyond the ability to reason about it; Rogerian rhetoric is to be employed in a contact zone where values and identities clash, and the audience feels patronized, ignored, silenced (Bator 428; Corder 21). Only listening without judgment and showing a deep understanding of

the audience's values and identities through empathy can the barriers to communication be broken.

Problems with Empathy in the Rogerian Argument

In spite of Rogerian rhetoric's less combative and more empathetic stance, many composition scholars have vehemently rejected it. For example, Lisa Ede argues Rogerian rhetoric is not even Rogerian, especially in the sense of Rogers' deep empathetic investment in his clients, and that Young, Becker, and Pike violate the "intent and spirit of Rogers' ideas" (43). To fully understand Ede's point, we need to understand Carl Rogers' conception of client-centered empathetic therapy: first, the therapist must be personally genuine; second, the therapist must accept the client unconditionally; third, the therapist must demonstrate real empathic understanding (paraphrased in Evans 29). Notice in Young, Becker, and Pike's four steps above, the idea first and foremost is to convince listeners to believe that they and the speaker share perspectives; however, this is for the purpose of the argument, not necessarily that both parties actually share perspectives. Next, Ede notes Young, Baker, and Pike's continual use of the word "opponent" which is manipulation rather than unconditional acceptance; in other words, those with whom one is arguing are accepted only insofar as the arguer pretends to accept the listeners' position while actually seeking to change it. This, of course, implies judgment rather than empathy because of the assumption that it needs to change in the first place. About real empathic understanding, Rogers says:

> If I can listen to what he can tell me, if I can understand how it seems to him, if I can see its personal meaning for him, if I can sense the emotional

> flavor which it has for him, then I will be releasing potent forces of change in him. (*On Becoming* 332)

Here too the idea is empathizing for the purpose of changing the client which seems to violate the principles of genuineness and unconditional acceptance; however, presumably the client has come to Rogers for help. Also, the premise of client-centered therapy is that the therapist comes to understand the client so deeply, including his or her underlying motivations, that the client cannot help but change. Ede's final argument with this part of Rogerian rhetoric is that true empathy is impossible to achieve in writing because of the distance between reader and writer.

Many of the other arguments against Rogerian rhetoric and, consequently, against empathy as a usable construct of rhetoric turned toward the social. James P. Zappen, in a 1980 article in *PRE/TEXT*, claims Carl Rogers' early theory of communication is flawed in that Rogers' approach assumes a one-on-one, equal relationship of the interlocutors, and Rogers even applies his theory to relations between the United States and the Soviet Union (Rogers 102). In a 1998 article about the relationship of empathy and rhetoric, Dennis Lynch claims that Zappen is among many who see empathy as "weak, epistemologically flawed, and politically suspicious" and that "Rogerian rhetoric is complicit in a depoliticizing culture of self-realization" (6). Zappen himself, however, offers only a mild critique of Rogerian rhetoric, even presenting his own modified version of the Rogerian argument and stating at the end of his essay, "there is reason to suppose that the application of the person-centered [i.e., empathetic] approach to knowing, doing, and making both individually and socially in more structured forms of communication is not only needful but possible" (108). In an especially scathing critique

of the Rogerian argument, Wayne Pounds disparages Jim W. Corder's conception of rhetoric as love and the Rogerian argument as its expression. Sardonically referring to Corder as "Professor Fog" throughout the article, Pounds uses Burkean transformation, identification, and representation to show that Corder's view of rhetoric as love implies a "unitary and homogeneous" *we* that "is ready to love first so that the reader cannot disagree without making himself seem a surly dog such as I may appear to be" (52). These arguments illustrate the problems with Corder, Hairston, and Young, Becker, and Pike's idealized *I* and *we* of Rogerian rhetoric and serve as fitting examples of empathy embraced as classless, raceless, and genderless, without conflict and ripe for therapy.

Phyllis Lassner makes the same argument against Rogerian rhetoric from a feminist perspective. She contends that the writer's empathetic voice denies otherness and represses justifiably angry voices, and further points out that marginalized people do not feel their experience represented accurately. Yet at the same time, her article ends with a call for what can be interpreted as nothing other than empathy:

> Exploring the anxieties that writer and reader might bring to an issue would be a first step towards demystifying a subject whose object remains unknowable until looked at as a real human being living in a culture of its own and with its own values, and yet very much a part of the more dominant culture with which it is at loggerheads. No matter how alien, how repugnant those values might be to the writer or reader, recognition that they share the same world might very well be the bridge on which argumentation can begin. (Lassner 230)

Lassner does not recognize that exploring a reader's and writer's anxieties is actually an act of cognitive empathy; therefore, she is in reality arguing that empathy can help humanize and demystify an other. Of empathy itself, she does not offer a definition other than citing the question of one of her students who skeptically asks about the ability to know what others feel (225). This simple definition, common especially in works critiquing empathy, implies a sort of spontaneous, psychic knowing of someone else's emotional state. If that is all empathy is, then the student's question is perfectly justified. However, empathy is a more complicated construct which proceeds from just such a process as Lassner advocates in the quotation above as I explain in subsequent chapters.

Empathy Implicit

Empathy is often implicit in composition and rhetoric scholarship, conceived of in various ways yet rarely referred to by its name. Perhaps that is because the word *empathy* often signifies "empathy embraced," an always good, always nice way of being that presents humanity as having some sort of common experience where we all want peace and harmony. Social-epistemic rhetoric tells us there is no common experience. The first problem with empathy implicit is that it is invoked regularly without having been theorized, as Theresa Kulbaga claims, or even defined adequately, as Dennis Lynch demonstrates (see the section later in this chapter "Postmodern and Postcolonial Critiques of Empathy"). The result is the second problem with empathy implicit—when it is mentioned, it is often unquestionably embraced as an ethical good or disdained as an appropriating and colonizing emotional reaction akin to pity. These two positions do not allow for the possibility that there could be different types of empathy applicable to different people and situations.

The strategy of understanding others' perspectives in order to persuade, however, has been with Westerners from at least the early Greek and Roman rhetoricians to today. In ancient Greece and Rome, empathy was implicit in the sense that there was no word for it other than *pity* and *sympathy*. In the 20th century, Kenneth Burke approached rhetorical empathy with his term *identification* and I.A. Richards with his concept of *feedforward*. However, where empathy's implicitness is most conspicuous both in the sense of it being present but unvoiced and it being absent yet necessary is in the scholarship of critical pedagogy. I argue critical pedagogy's very foundation is compassion. In spite of that, neither compassion nor empathy are often directly acknowledged or explored. The problem with this is particularly apparent in the idea of false consciousness, which can posit those students as deficit who accept and/or embrace the capitalist system and other traditional belief structures, as I explore in detail later in this section.

Empathy Implicit in the Rhetorical Tradition

Dennis Lynch's claim that "empathy used to be at the center, at the heart, of rhetorical studies" (5) is another example of empathy noted through implication because concept was not called *empathy* even though many of its elements were the same or similar. Nor was empathy (the concept at least) historically embraced as an ethical good. Today's compositionists often teach Aristotelian rhetoric in writing classes as a common method of audience analysis, which calls on student writers to anticipate the needs and concerns of the readers they plan to persuade without regard to the ethics of empathizing. At the beginning of his treatise on rhetoric, Aristotle teaches that producing effects, especially emotional ones, in listeners is the primary task of rhetoricians, the place where

they should "direct the whole of their efforts […] to understand the emotions […] to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited" (25). One of these emotions to stir is pity, a term synonymous with sympathy and compassion until the 19th century (Keen 4). While empathy itself is a word coined in the early 1900s (see Chapter 3), its notion is evident far earlier when Aristotle says that people feel "pity" when they remember a similar event or circumstance happening to themselves. And, like the psychologists and biologists of today who study empathy have "discovered," it is felt first for those near at hand:

> They pity those like themselves in age, in character, in habits, in rank, in birth; for in all these cases something seems more to apply also to the self; for in general, one should grasp here, too, that people pity things happening to others insofar as they fear for themselves. And […] sufferings are pitiable when they appear near at hand and […] people do not feel pity, or not in the same way, about things ten thousand years in the past or future. (Aristotle 154)

We can see from Aristotle's close analysis of this and over a dozen other emotions that, although it is to benefit the speaker, a cornerstone of Western rhetorical tradition is founded on understanding the sentiments, perceptions, and beliefs of others, i.e., empathy.

Cicero echoes Aristotle's concern with understanding an audience's emotions in order to better persuade them. In a dialog of Crassus to Catulus in *De Oratore*, Crassus says:

> nothing […] is more important than to win for the orator the favor of his hearer, and to have the latter so affected as to be swayed by something resembling a mental impulse of emotion, rather than by judgment or deliberation. For men decide far more problems by hate, or love, or lust, or rage, or sorrow, or joy, or hope, or fear, or illusion, or some other inward emotion, than by reality, or authority, or any legal standard, or judicial precedent or statute. (Cicero 328)

And how does one understand which emotions to excite? Antonius, when preparing for an important case, "engage[s] wholeheartedly in a consideration so careful, that [he] scent[s] out with all possible keenness their thoughts, judgments, anticipation, and wishes, and the direction in which they seem likely to be led away most easily by eloquence" (Cicero 329). This empathic rhetoric was illegitimately used by powerful speakers to persuade audiences back in ancient Greece and Rome and is still used that way in our own day. Many attempt to apply a connotation of unquestioned goodness to the idea of empathy, but as we see here and shall see in later chapters, its moral composition rests only in the uses to which empathy is employed.

Rather than focusing on exciting emotions, modern rhetoricians Kenneth Burke and I.A. Richards come much closer to the idea of empathy as a cornerstone of persuasion, although neither uses the word itself. Burke describes rhetoric as the process of identifying with others in order to persuade them, finding where the parties' interests and aims coincide—consubstantiality. Each individual is awash with his or her own motives yet becomes "substantially one" with another through the process of identification, not an identification complete in all areas of the parties' lives but through

engaging in some activity together. “In acting together,” Burke says, “men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (21). The persuasive process then involves “talk[ing] his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). Many unspoken assumptions and purposeful ambiguities rest here—thoughtless applications of Burke’s concept of identification are easily construed as depoliticized identification where equality, history, and positionality are not taken into account (Pounds 53). However, as the Greeks, Romans, and modern rhetoricians and psychologists note, we understand, identify, and empathize most readily with those most like us.

I.A. Richards’ conception of feedforward-forward better illustrates the relationship between identification and the potential for communicative success or failure, although once again, the conception of empathy rather than the word itself is invoked. Like Burke’s identification, communicative acts consist of assuming a shared understanding of what is being communicated by the interlocutors. Richards likens it to descending a stairway in the dark; one’s foot reaches forward for the next stair which is assumed to be there. In communication, whether in person or in writing, the communicator assumes and hopes for shared meaning, although this can be deliberately problematized for effect. If the receiver of the communication shares those same meanings and, by extension, culture and position (Richards calls these “comparison fields”), communication is successful, i.e., the next riser is found and communicative empathy occurs. The farther the interlocutors’ cultural stores of shared meanings are from each other, the less likely the communication will be understood in the way the communicator intended.

The Implicitness of Empathy in Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy with its goal of provoking political change is another location within composition where empathy lurks—valorized, problematized, yet almost always implicit. While empathy itself appears nowhere in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* it is not a leap to suppose that critical pedagogy is based in compassion, a deep understanding of the suffering of another accompanied by a wish to relieve it. Freire saw up close the plight of the oppressed as an educator of the poor in Brazil. Throughout the book, between every line, lies the ethical imperative of creating a more equal and just society. He rejects pity outright. Freire says, "No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates," which would be paternalistic expressions of humanitarianism rather than humanism from the oppressors (Freire 54). While he does not use the words compassion or empathy, he says in the preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that some may object to the book because they consider "discussion of […] love, dialogue, hope, humanity, and *sympathy* as so much reactionary 'blah'" (37, my italics). Freire claims that oppressors turn individual people, *I*s, into *it*s, yet through cooperation and dialogue, people, *I*s and *Thou*s, come together on equal footing to transform the world (167). Henry Giroux says that critical education not only promotes democracy but "engage[s] the ethical imperative to alleviate human suffering" (210) in which the contract is expanded and "the global becomes the space for exercising civic courage, social responsibility, politics, and compassion for the plight of others" (183). Ira Shor gets closer to the idea of empathy itself in *Empowering Education* when he suggests that critical education respects the knowledge and experience students bring with them to the classroom and even suggests teachers research "what students

know, speak, experience, and feel, as starting points from which an empowering curriculum is developed" (202). This researching and knowing of students is empathy.

Several scholars offer more explicitly empathetic approaches to students in critical classrooms, although the word *empathy* still does not appear. Jane Tompkins reminds us not only that what students think and feel is always more important than what we have to say but that the classroom "is a walking field of energy teeming with [students'] agendas" (659) the implication being that we do students a disservice by thinking our agendas more important than theirs. Kristen Seas claims resistance to cultural studies textbooks arises from asking students to accept assumptions and identities embedded in the reading and writing prompts therein. In order to complete the book's assignments, "obedient student[s]" must accept that they "should be taught cultural critique […] because [they] lack the skill to understand the meaning of culture" (437). Seas says "we need to respect the awareness students already bring to class and be careful that we do not force them to evoke assumptions about themselves that are disempowering or even completely false" (441). Russell Durst's book, *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*, describes a study examining student resistance to critical teaching in which he finds that most students are "career-oriented pragmatists" who resist politically charged topics and critical teaching (2). While he does not mention empathy directly, he does recommend "taking students' goals into consideration when designing curriculum, and then […] attempting to build a reflective, intellectual, socially aware dimension into this instrumentalist orientation" which "uses that careerism not as an end in itself but rather as a beginning point on which to build greater [critical] awareness and sophistication" (6).

Empathizing with students' goals while at the same time teaching cultural critique can be a quandary for community college teachers, particularly. For example, students, especially older ones, sacrifice a great deal to attend school and gain skills needed to obtain better jobs, yes, but they are also open to *education*; they know they will be exposed to new ideas or ways of thinking with which they may be unfamiliar. However, when negotiating liberatory pedagogy, they may be confused about "who is to be liberated from what" (Knoblauch and Brannon 60). Many are white but poverty-stricken or working-poor students who see a college education as their only way "up." To rise, one must be "down;" thus, they also see themselves as marginalized and resist being classified as privileged simply by virtue of being white.

Evangelical Christian students may arguably be the most vocal resistors in critical classrooms and the group with whom critical educators may be least likely to empathize. Even as caring, empathetic teachers, we may recoil at the unthinking, uncompassionate, one-sided arguments for right-wing dogma appearing in some students' papers that seem to come straight from pulpits and Rush Limbaugh. However, Elizabeth Vander Lei and Donald R. Hettinga tell us that "if we do not respect the faith of our fundamentalist students, we cannot expect them to respect our claims for civil, respectful uses of language" (723). Unless teachers have direct experience with religious faith themselves, though, it is difficult to imagine, to empathize with students whose faith *must* dictate the arguments they make. Even using the term "fundamentalist" is neither respectful nor empathetic. Evangelical Christians rarely, if ever, refer to themselves as fundamentalists

and may even take offense at it[1], yet most academic articles, even by Christian scholars, use that term to refer to evangelical Christians, like Vander Lei and Hettinga did above. Amy Goodburn points out that non-Christians may misread and subsequently miss opportunities to provide substantive comments on these students' papers, and therefore, recommends new ways to frame those comments. She suggests asking students of faith (any faith, not just Christian) to examine more extensively what is at stake in accepting alternative readings and/or interpretations of biblical stories or viewpoints on social issues, then has them outline a plan to address those difficulties, and finally, gives them the opportunity to write about the conflicts they face with their religious/spiritual identity every day in other classes as well as among their peers, teachers, co-workers, and supervisors (Goodburn 350). Goodburn's empathetic premise (although, again, she does not use the word *empathy*) is that there is a danger in "buying into critical pedagogical discourses that name and polarize students as the 'other' without fully understanding or appreciating the webs of reality in which they are located" (351). In keeping with Goodburn's warning, perhaps educators would better serve students by advocating for students' right to their *own* consciousness.

The Problem with False Consciousness

A vexing problem in critical education is both subtle and unempathetic (in the sense of failing to account for student positions)—positing students as deficit, not in the sense of marginalized knowledges or dialects as deficit, but positing students as deficit who accept and/or embrace the capitalist system, especially when coupled with

[1] The term "fundamentalism" was adopted from a series of essays written in 1910 entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. The term has fallen out of favor among Christians in recent years because of its association with extremists who commit violence against abortion clinics (Robbins).

"fundamentalist" religious belief. Ostensibly, critical pedagogy's goal is to promote an inherently nurturing democracy, where "'empathy' between two 'poles' [people] who are engaged in a joint search" transcends oppression and is "loving, humble, hopeful, trusting, critical" (Shor 95). Shor calls this "*extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary*" (94). The object of extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary is to examine and reveal students' false consciousness (94-95), posing students' own consciousnesses as problems in the critical classroom with the goal of "developing a consciousness which is less and less false" (Freire 130). False consciousness means failing to recognize oneself as exploited by the oppressor class and contributing to that exploitation by adopting the views of the oppressors. Divesting students of false consciousness and bringing them into the (politically left) democratic fold seems morally sound and beneficial to everyone, that is, except those students who do not think of themselves as alienated or consider capitalism alienating. Such students often resist the idea of false consciousness vehemently.

This problem has not gone unchallenged by scholars. It falls victim to circular reasoning, among other criticisms; if one resists false consciousness, that proves one is a victim of it. This, say Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff, "condescend[s] to students from the start. It means that students who are not persuaded by radical politics cannot, by definition, be expressing an authentic desire" (203) but rather the desire of the oppressor. Furthermore, if the student's consciousness is false, a result of ideology, then the teacher's consciousness is, therefore, true; however, if we accept the view that all views are ideological so then is the teacher's even if it is "critical." Instead of positing students as linguistically deficit, David Seitz claims, false consciousness posits students as

politically deficit, "once again with implications of a moral lack" (509). Consciousness means awareness of our own existence, sensations, thoughts, and sense of identity; thus, false consciousness means false existence. This suggests a problematic disregard of students' feelings, thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs. It is antithetical to empathy, antithetical to liberatory teaching, and, one would think, antithetical to the idea of teaching as a humanistic enterprise.

A common complaint among scholars who advocate for more inclusive critical teaching is that critical pedagogy can ignore and even disparage the very students it seeks to liberate (Goodburn; Hairston; Klein; Trainor). Trainor cites several compositionists recounting examples of "ignorant" student(s)-comments in their courses (Knoblauch; Lazere; Rakow; Sleeter) in the literature review of her article "Critical Pedagogy's 'Other': Constructions of Whiteness in Education for Social Change." She says, "familiar though these characterizations of students in critical classrooms may have become, they are incomplete in a variety of ways [and] contribute to static, stereotypic pictures of white, middle class students and their values and beliefs" (632). Maxine Hairston, writer of the now much-anthologized polemic on critical pedagogy, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," complains critical teachers show "open contempt for their students' values, preferences, or interests" ("Diversity" 181; see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion). She was roundly criticized for this piece and quit writing for academia (255). Since then, composition scholarship of critical pedagogy has recognized to some degree the dangers inherent in direct accusations of false consciousness (even Shor stopped calling it "false" and began using the term "critical" consciousness in his book, *Empowering Education*), but it still struggles with finding a balance between liberatory

teaching and far-left proselytizing. One way to find that balance, says Stephen North, is to subject to critical scrutiny both teachers' and students' claims and "[teachers'] own visionary privilege" (134). Richard Fulkerson notes the "likelihood of indoctrination" (665), yet Henry Giroux says, at its best, critical pedagogy is "neither training nor political indoctrination; instead it is about a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to expand the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens" ("Academic Freedom" 31). However, he goes on to call critical pedagogy dangerous for Christian evangelicals along with neoconservatives and right-wing nationalists, all of whom he lumps together in the same sentence (31). On one hand, the critical vision for these citizens is an "inclusive" democracy (31); on the other, it is designed to equip students with:

> the skills and knowledge necessary for them to expand their capacities to both question deep-seated assumptions and myths that legitimate the most archaic and disempowering social practices that structure every aspect of society and to take responsibility for intervening in the world they inhabit. (32)

The implication of this statement is that the purpose of critical teaching is to expand students' capacity to see their religious faith (the "assumptions" and "myths" above) as an outdated, disempowering, and dangerous illusion. This statement also seems to assume students are so naïve they will not recognize the underlying goal of such teaching.

Empathy Disdained

Condemnation of empathy abounds in postmodern and postcolonial circles, especially in rhetorical theory and cultural studies; although there are several different

types of such critiques, I will focus on three—empathy is impossible unless it is complete and completely accurate, empathy commodifies feeling, and empathy appropriates the other. A number of arguments underlie these three, but they have in common one flaw, a definition of empathy that does not account for context. Dennis Lynch (5-11) and Theresa Kulbaga (506-514) provide useful backgrounds for understanding how criticism of empathy has shaped rhetoric under the influence of cultural studies. In this section, I examine Lynch's arguments which focus mostly on empathy's impossibility and move to Kulbaga's, which concentrate on various ways empathy is used to commodify feeling, especially in Oprah Winfrey's book club readers, presumably leading them to support military action against oppressive regimes through works like *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. I then shift to bell hooks along with cultural studies scholars Lauren Berlant, Doris Sommer, and Elizabeth Spelman, who agree that empathy appropriates the other by making him or her disappear. These are legitimate concerns when empathy is defined and practiced only as a metaphor. Not all scholars promote such a limited view of empathy, however, including Lynch; I provide an overview of the more complex conceptions of it. Lynch, Elizabeth Sturgeon, Kia Jane Richmond, and Krista Ratcliffe discuss ways of using empathy to recognize boundaries rather than attempt to eliminate them.

Postmodern and Postcolonial Critiques of Empathy

Once the Rogerian argument faded with the rise of social-epistemic rhetoric, empathy was brought out only to be pilloried. Dennis Lynch, whom I mention earlier, claims "empathy has been scrutinized, critiqued, and all but abandoned by many rhetorical theorists, especially by those theorists whose work fits within poststructuralist,

postcolonial, or postmodern social theories" (6). However, this was carried out mostly via inference rather than addressing empathy directly. Lester Faigley's most direct statement about empathy does not actually mention the word. He claims postmodern theory challenges the belief that we can understand others as they understand themselves and vice versa (231). The basis of this belief is two-fold: 1) an expectation that empathy must be complete or not exist at all, and 2) a denial of the possibility of any understanding of the other because of the ideological milieu in which we are enmeshed. Raymie E. McKerrow, a scholar cited in Lynch's literature review, notes that people who form the audience of discourse are "fictive […] exist[ing] only inside the symbolic world in which they are called into being" (95) and that through discourse we take on an "alter-ideology" (95) of the other that serves as center for discursive class struggle. Clifford Geertz refers to understanding the other but calls it "ethnocentric sentimentalism" (119) but that idea taken to its conclusion supposes that there is no inner life to understand for the anthropologist nor for the native (Chodrow 148).

One of the primary arguments against empathy is that it must be complete rather than partial, universal rather than particular. The supposition of scholars seems to be that empathy somehow *should* be universal, implying a view of empathy as an ethical "good." One common assumption about empathy that Lynch cites is that empathy cannot exist unless essentially I *am* you. To support his point, he cites philosopher Thomas Nagel (certainly no postmodernist) from the chapter "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" from Nagel's book, *Mortal Questions*:

> It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in

> one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. Insofar as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. (Nagel 169)

While this certainly lends humor to Lynch's argument and makes the idea of empathy laughable, humans are *not* bats and *can* understand the motivations and internal states of others to some degree, especially the closer they are to each other. Nagel himself says a few pages later in this same chapter that he "is not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor […] It is often possible to take up a point of view other than one's own, so the comprehension of such facts is not limited to one's own case" (172). Psychologists call this act of perspective-taking *cognitive empathy*.

The erroneous assumption that empathy must always be complete and perfectly accurate in order to exist is an objection that Lynch both cites and supports. He says, "Empathy presupposes that we can fully and completely understand one another" (8). In other words, Lynch claims if we do not *fully and completely* know what another is thinking and feeling, empathy does not exist. Empathy presupposes no such thing, however, any more than alienation presupposes the complete absence of human connection. This is an example of empathy being discussed and summarily dismissed based on its most simplistic, metaphored definition in lieu of its most nuanced. Lynch's concern here is that the other is *not* readily transparent and to even try to empathize with marginalized people further reinforces their weak positioning (9). Yet, learning how

members of marginalized groups think and feel is considered a worthy educational goal by bell hooks who, in spite of her concern with empathetic appropriation (see later in this section), encourages students and others to speak about their experiences advocating imagination's ability to connect, understand, empathize with others' experiences (*Teaching to Transgress* 89).

A further criticism is that empathy commodifies feeling and suffering especially in the reading of multicultural literature by white, American, middle class audiences in book clubs such as Oprah Winfrey's. Thoughtless and superficial identification with novels' characters generates reading practices "of power and privilege" whereby human rights issues raised in the books are reduced to an individualized "life-affirming look in the mirror," contends Theresa Kulbaga (510). Lauren Berlant, an English professor at the University of Chicago, argues that readers are privileged because 1) the sufferer is elsewhere and 2) readers may have the means at hand to reduce the other's suffering ("Compassion" 4), although whether they can or even should is another question. These scholars claim privileged readers consume stories and characters as well as culture in inappropriate and inaccurate acts of empathetic identification where "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks 21). To attempt to understand others is equivalent to assimilating them, their stories, their meanings which can potentially trivialize and distort their experiences (Shuman 4). This commodification of feeling, of suffering is tantamount to pornography, claims Carolyn Dean, a professor of international studies at Brown University. She asserts that widespread dissemination of images of extreme human suffering, even those in the Holocaust memorial on which her article focuses, dull empathy, increase compassion

fatigue, and are spaces where "expectancy, excitement, voyeurism […] violate the dignity of memory by decontextualizing the historical event, by appropriating it for our own pleasure" (Dean 102).

Although empathy may be disparaged by many scholars including Kulbaga herself, she still calls it "a key transnational feminist discourse" (507) that underscores the concern with Western, especially American, nationalism, imperialism, and global consumer culture. Kulbaga argues not for literature or empathy as sites for transnational understanding but rather, in the case of Azar Nafisi's memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* in particular, as sites of neoliberal commodification of empathy in the service of a nationalist agenda. Her definition of empathy is "the ability to imagine another as a distinct and unique human individual" (517) with Kenneth Burke's conception of identification informing her analysis. Kulbaga characterizes Burke's invitation to rhetoric as identification and division set "ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins" (Burke 25), and the memoir's "simultaneous investment in feminist discourses of empowerment, neoliberal discourses of individual choice, and US national discourses of freedom" (Kulbaga 508) serves as such an invitation. In the memoir, women in a covert book club in Iran read Western literary classics as models of democracy and as (self-)help for their "trapped situation as women" (Nafisi 19). Kulbaga critiques *Reading Lolita* for its obsession with the veil, its conflation of feminist empowerment with consumer choice and self-help pop-psychology, its incitement of rescue fantasies on the part of Western readers, and its nationalist agenda suggesting that rescue should take place through regime change via military force. Of empathy, she says:

> At best, the commodification of affective and ethical regimes such as feminism and human rights can open avenues for awareness, critical identification, and political action. However, we must ask if the empathetic identification invited by *Reading Lolita in Tehran* relies on consolidating existing US nationalist and imperialist fantasies concerning women's rights and rescue. (511)

While Kulbaga's interpretation of *Reading Lolita* as a call for war is problematic, she suggests rightly that the trouble with the book is not with empathy itself but with empathy consumption (514), which impedes real understanding of the material circumstances of disenfranchised women across the world and, at the other end of the continuum, by invoking public support for political change via war (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of empathy, rhetoric, and Kulbaga's interpretation of *Reading Lolita*).

Related to the commodification of feeling and suffering is another fierce criticism of empathy—appropriating the other. bell hooks calls this "eating the other" (21) and quotes Sigmund Freud who says, "the object we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such" (Freud 105). In other words, *you* turn into *me* as *I* consume *you* in unthinking empathetic identification with characters in books and films and news stories. For example, in the book club examples Kulbaga, Berlant, and Doris Sommer critique, contemporary fiction selections often include victimization narratives that encourage identification with characters as they rise above the circumstances of their pain. In Oprah's Book Club, guests are then asked what they learned about *themselves* through reading the selection and respond by "detailing how

their identification with the characters led them to confront their own repressed feelings," explains Kimberly Chabot Davis, assistant professor of English at Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts (401). Part of the problem is the question readers are asked; if it were more complex, such as ways their reading informs a new understanding of the circumstances and underlying causes of the marginalization of the story's characters, they might answer in a more thoughtful way. The result is scholars like Berlant and Sommer arguing that these readers cite decontextualized personal experience (their experience as women) as the grounds on which they base their empathy regardless of differences in social and economic position.

Berlant, Sommer, and bell hooks call this a hunger for knowledge of and empathy with the other a hunger for power, a force that denies, that explains away difference in its will to assimilate. Sommer, a Harvard literature and language professor, calls this a "murderous trope" (*Proceed with Caution* 22) that forces undue understanding of deliberately difficult texts written to be inscrutable to some readers. She says:

> Overlooking difference for the sake of a comforting, self-justifying rush of identification with characters or textualized experiences denies a text's specificity, its relative autonomy. The will to understand the other is therefore the ultimate violence. It is appropriation in the guise of an embrace. (Sommer, "Resistant Texts" 543)

Yet, bell hooks, a like-minded cultural critic whose metaphor for empathic appropriation is eating the other, also claims to have used her experience as a woman to gain understanding of Africans on slave ships as I explained in more detail in Chapter 1. Thus,

we find hooks using the same trope Sommer calls murderous to inappropriately identify herself with those enslaved Africans, essentially assimilating their experience as her own.

To Berlant, Sommer, and Elizabeth Spelman, professor of philosophy at Smith College, empathy is not only an infantilizing and colonizing emotion, but it does worse than nothing at relieving the political conditions oppressed people live under, a goal of critical education. In her analysis of Hannah Arendt, Spelman claims many expressions of compassion (of which empathy is a part) are "barely disguised forms of pity, that what is presented as an authentic and spontaneous concern for another human being is actually a selfish and cruel wallowing in the misfortunes of others" (65). Arendt's problem with compassion and its inability to affect political change is that in her view compassion "cannot be touched off by the sufferings of a whole class or a people, or, least of all, mankind as a whole. It cannot reach out farther than what is suffered by one person" (80). Spelman does not, for the most part, conflate compassion and empathy but sees empathy as a one-sided imposition on the sufferer, one-sided because it just feels rather than asks the other about her suffering.[2] Feeling compassion and, by extension, empathy, allows people to sense they are doing something about institutionalized violence and oppression (Berlant, "Subject" 54), yet, because it is felt privately, it only helps continue injustice ("Compassion" 9). Berlant maintains that political rage is much more effective at fomenting political change ("Subject" 83), although political rage seems to be equally effective at fomenting hatred, terrorism, and war.

[2] The definition of empathy I propose in Chapter 4 includes curiosity about others.

Toward a More Nuanced yet still Postmodern View of Empathy

While the scholarly views I have addressed in this chapter so far have fallen into the categories of empathy embraced, implicit, and disdained, some scholars have begun to approach a more nuanced and, consequently, more useful view of empathy. These notions have not yet been fully explored or theorized, but they do point to ideas my dissertation takes up in detail. For example, even as Dennis Lynch's literature review seems to sentence empathy to death, the point of his article actually argues *for* empathy's place in rhetoric, not as an uncomplicated "feeling your way into another's lived experience" (18) but as a space that is "situated within complicated social dynamics" (20). He does this by analyzing the rhetorical appeals in Temple Grandin's *Thinking in Pictures: and Other Reports from My Life with Autism* and Cornel West's book and speech, *Race Matters*. In both works, the authors invite readers into their worlds and yet draw proverbial lines in the sand, points which readers may not pass. Grandin does this through writing engagingly yet keeping an empathic distance from readers when, for example, she describes using a "squeeze machine" to help her understand the intensity of various emotions (12). West does it by soliciting empathy directly, calling for more of it in the world, and yet thwarting it by positioning himself in his embodied existence as a black male using white constructions of black bodies as erotic and transgressive (16). Through his analysis of these two writers, Lynch argues for an empathy with boundaries, although, unfortunately, he continually returns to the notion that to be real, empathy must be total. Yet in his conclusion, he argues for an empathy much as I envision in this dissertation, an empathy that is not transcendent but one that listens for "differing understandings—and for keeping those differences well-lit and clear" (20).

Other scholars argue for empathy as an ethical good yet also as a means to critical thinking, recognizing difference, and creating an atmosphere for students to be "politically engaged, analytical, responsible, and sensitive to the ethical dimensions of empathetic reasoning" (Sturgeon), which I argue for in Chapters 4 and 5. Philosopher Edith Stein, a student of Edmund Husserl, claims empathy is the vehicle through which human beings recognize the difference between *I* and *not-I*. Most teachers agree that helping students understand the *not-I* is an important critical goal; Carole Pelttari, Krista Ratcliffe, Kia Jane Richmond, Barbara Schneider, Murray McCowen Sellers, and Sturgeon all discuss empathy's value in helping achieve it. Pelttari, Sellers, and Sturgeon frame their classroom practices using readings, literary and expository, to foment empathetic understanding between the students in the class and with different others they encounter through reading. Pelttari categorizes three ethical orientations and their association with pedagogical theories and how these combinations affect writing instruction and teacher/student understanding and empathy. Sellers describes developing empathy through recognizing each individual student and the "pre-texts—knowledge, experience, and emotions" that students bring to literature which affect their understanding of the readings and their classmates. Empathetic thinking is the class goal in Sturgeon's use of Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen's popular composition textbook, *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, within which is a section on the psychology of obedience with two selections specifically focused on the torture of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Through several other readings in that section of the book, Behrens and Rosen attempt to show how everyday people are capable of committing atrocities by their obedience to authority figures. Sturgeon claims the "ethical

imperative of empathetic thinking" encouraged by these readings along with classroom activities helps students see beyond the "us and them" dichotomy in many news accounts.

Although these conceptions of empathy do not account for the possibility of it as appropriation, Ratcliffe, Richmond, and Schneider recognize empathy's dangers, offer more nuanced definitions of it, and create possibilities for empathy as a "code of cross-cultural conduct" (Ratcliffe 195) that does not exclude the very people it seeks to embrace. Richmond's exploration begins as a realization that her proclamation to a student of understanding "exactly" how he feels about struggling with writing is false. By appropriating the student's experiences as her own, Richmond consequently provides writing help that conforms to Richmond's experience rather than that of her student. She suggests empathy is not simply stepping into another's shoes as the metaphor so often goes but "responding to the emotions of another without relying on one's own affective state [which] involves understanding students from their own point of view" through dialogue (38; psychologist Martin Hoffman's definition in Chapter 3 is similar). This kind of communication, especially through careful listening, attempts to break down power differentials, "making connections rather than corrections" (44), although some say any such attempt perpetuates those barriers rather than minimizes them (Berlant; Sommer; Spelman). Making such connections Krista Ratcliffe calls rhetorical listening:

> A performance that occurs when listeners invoke both their capacity and their willingness (1) to promote an understanding of self and other that informs our culture's politics and ethics, (2) to proceed from within a responsibility logic, not from within a defensive guilt/blame one, (3) to locate identification in discursive spaces of both commonalities and

> differences, and (4) to accentuate commonalities and differences not only in claims but in cultural logics within which those claims function. (204)

What Ratcliffe is calling for here is purposeful identification with the other based on a recognition of similarities *and* differences, being receptive to others and to the negotiation that takes place in the process of understanding and identification. Understanding—empathy—in this case means not just listening "*for* intent but *with* intent" (205) and "argue[s] for what we deem fair and just while simultaneously question[ing] that which we deem fair and just" (203). This is purposeful empathy, making a deliberate choice to learn another's experience both individually and culturally. Barbara Schneider suggests that Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening can assist students to avoid narcissistic readings of multicultural texts where they claim shared identity with authors by comparing their ethnic identifications with racial ones. Rather than psychic phenomena which simplistic definitions of empathy imply, Richmond, Ratcliffe, and Schneider instead imply an empathic *process*, entered into intentionally and cultivated. That empathy is a process is key to scientists' understanding of it and is key also to the definition and claims I make for empathy in the composition classroom in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to show how empathy has been conceived in rhetoric and composition so far, the telos of which is to demonstrate the need to study it in a more rigorous way. Empathy is almost always associated with relationship building which, in turn, is associated more with personal writing than almost any other activity in our field. Yet here too empathy is much valorized and little theorized. The problems with empathy embraced are twofold. The first is that empathy becomes a panacea to the very

real risks students take revealing themselves in writing assignments. The second is that empathy embraced overlooks cultural, racial, gender, class, and sexual orientation differences in composition courses and in our understanding of rhetoric. The empathetic Rogerian argument was, perhaps, an attempt at making academic writing less combative and more relationship-friendly, but around this time the teaching of writing and rhetoric began to be concerned with the sociocultural construction of human experience, and this changed empathy into an appropriating, colonizing, and even murderous force in Doris Sommer's words.

While the discussion of empathy after the Rogerian argument turned to postmodern and postcolonial critiques instead of the praise it had received previously, rhetoricians' and compositionists' discussions of the term did not become much more nuanced as a result. The definition's "good" connotation remained; however, empathy began to be mostly implied or denounced. When it is only implied, its potential for grasping the possibilities and limitations of human communication are not examined to their full potential. This results in scholarly works that use different definitions, often simple, metaphored ones to try to describe a complex concept that has applications both in class and the myriad ways rhetorics affect culture. Empathy implied and/or ill-defined can lead to direct indictments and dismissal of empathy when, in Theresa Kulbaga's words, it is a "key transnational feminist discourse" (507). The works I have reviewed here show specific and significant weaknesses in the conception of empathy in composition and thus the need to examine what other fields have discovered about its nature, who experiences it, and what its possibilities are for provoking action on behalf of oppressed people. And that is what we shall investigate in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

EMPATHY IN OTHER FIELDS

Introduction

Relative to composition, empathy has been studied extensively across a remarkable range of other disciplines—mostly psychology but also philosophy, anthropology, economics, medicine, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology. These fields offer highly nuanced explorations of empathy that range from empathy as a physiological phenomenon to empathy as an ethical practice. This chapter explores how empathy is conceptualized in other fields in order to complicate the simplified notions and subsequent dismissal of it in composition. Each conception of empathy I describe in Chapter 3 is used specifically to formulate an updated definition for composition, which, in turn, will allow me in Chapter 4 (and hopefully other compositionists later) to better theorize its role in our field. Chapter 3 begins by providing a background, an examination of various definitions starting from its origin in the early 20th century yet also traces its development from the "Golden Rule" through Adam Smith and David Hume, who called it sympathy. In this section, I discuss important differences between terms used as synonyms of empathy. That is followed by a discussion of its physiological basis. Since most conceptions of empathy in composition focus almost entirely on affect, that is, empathy as a spontaneously occurring emotion, then it is useful to discuss other approaches to empathy which have roles for imagination, identification, and choice that rely on cognitive perspective-taking. I explore who feels empathy and for whom including gender differences in experiencing and framing empathetic identification. The last part of this chapter challenges the critiques of empathy I mentioned in Chapter 2—

that empathy, if it leads to action at all, benefits only individuals rather than stigmatized groups and does nothing to change institutionalized oppression. I discuss the definition and nature of empathy-induced altruism to show that empathy has the potential to become a foundation stone for social justice teaching in composition, to lay the groundwork not only for recognizing racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes and changing them but for taking action on behalf of oppressed groups. I end the chapter with scholars Steven Pinker and Martha Nussbaum who say empathy in education and popular media has the potential to increase understanding globally and create a more peaceful world.

Origins, Conflations, and Clarifications

It may be surprising for compositionists to know that empathy is a fairly new addition to the English language, expressed in different words over many centuries and even millennia, words with which empathy today is often conflated. Translated from the German *einfühlung*, empathy originated from the disciplines of philosophical aesthetics and psychology in the early twentieth century and meant "feeling into" (Koss 139). It describes the connection of the spectator in relation to a work of art where one's emotional reaction "create[s], as it were, both viewer and object, destabilizing the identity of the former while animating the latter" (139). In other words, the art takes on something of a life of its own while changing the subjectivity of the viewer, a concept that also transformed aesthetics itself by placing the spectator at the center. Theorists such as German philosopher Robert Vischer attempted to show *einfühlung* as a physical reaction in all parts of our bodies "usefully providing an explanation for the mystical shivers and goose bumps of aesthetic transport" (140). The viewer who experienced the appropriate

shivers at the appropriate times was "implicitly a man of property whose identity was destabilized within the confines of a relatively private realm, carefully circumscribed by the laws of decorum and propriety" (144). As empathy's definition has expanded, not only are today's empaths not just male and wealthy, but fMRI scans show different areas in both primate and human brains respond empathetically when exposed to various stimuli designed to elicit such responses (Keen 211).

Today's dictionaries' definitions of empathy are as varied as composition scholars' conceptions of it explored in the previous chapter. *The Oxford English Dictionary* retains the flavor of the original *einfühlung* together with its application to aesthetics: "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation." *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines it more closely to the way most people today use it: "identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives." Often people associate empathy almost exclusively with emotion, as literature scholar Suzanne Keen does in her definition cited at the beginning of Chapter 1 and elsewhere. A well-known example of this concern with feeling comes from popular culture: the character Deanna Troy from the 1990s television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a member of a race of empaths who psychically intuit others' emotions. While her character also demonstrates the ability to read thoughts occasionally, the focus of Troy's abilities in the show is almost exclusively reading emotions. *American Heritage*'s definition approaches those I will explore from psychology later in this chapter where the role of cognition is taken into account to understand not just feelings but situations and motives.

While the term empathy itself is new, the concept is not. An early example is the Golden Rule—*do unto others as you would have others do unto you*. Appropriated today by Christians who attribute it to Jesus alone, it has had much iteration across earlier times and cultures. Confucius expresses it in the negative—*do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself*—as does Hinduism, the Baha'i faith, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Some combine both. American Indian spiritual traditions as well as Jainism include creatures of the earth and the earth itself in that ethic (Beversluis). Likewise, Aldo Leopold suggests we need such an ethic toward the land, one that becomes as ingrained in our consciences as the "Golden Rule [that] tries to integrate the individual to society [and] democracy to integrate social organization to the individual. There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it" except an economic one that "entail[s] privileges but not obligations" (203). Today, these philosophies, at least in Western cultures, draw no differences, no alternate expectations of those from higher or lower social standing. *You* ostensibly means everyone, although in ages past, that was not the case. Women were chattel; slaves, disposable.

Regardless, the Golden Rule still requires empathetic imagination and, perhaps, a great deal of open-mindedness on the part of the *do*er especially when it comes to giving up social standing or values one holds dear. For example, before and during the Civil Rights era, good, "god-fearing," white Christians thought nothing of requiring African Americans to sit in the backs of busses, drink from different fountains, eat in different restaurants, swim in different pools, and use different restrooms while rarely considering how it would feel to be treated that way themselves. Religious missions can be thought of similarly. To missionaries, converting unbelievers is one of the most important

obligations of their spiritual lives; however, they are likely to resist fervently when those from other believing traditions try to convert them. Doing unto others demands we rise above our own beliefs and assumptions; it "bids you to expand your vision, see yourself in new relationships. It bids you to transcend your insulation, see yourself in the place of others, see others in your place" (Maciver 257). Given the highly structured social castes of early civilizations, such an ethic must have been unthinkable to many or that it applied only to those "like us."

What we call *empathy* these days, sentimentalist philosophers Adam Smith and David Hume call *sympathy*. Sentimentalism, also known as moral sense theory, assumes morality is inextricably bound with emotions; these feelings constitute a moral epistemology. The first words of Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* describe human beings as having the innate capability of being sensitive to the fates and misfortunes of others; we have pity and compassion and their happiness gives us pleasure (3). His description of our ability to do that is drawn from the emotional effect of applying the Golden Rule: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (3). *Conceiving* here is used not so much in the sense of apprehending an already existing thought, which would mean empathizing in a transcendent way and actually feeling the subject's feelings, but devising the idea through the imagination. Smith says we cannot actually feel the suffering of another, that our perceptions "never can carry us beyond our own person […] it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations" (3). Hume too surmised that imagination is the driving force of sympathy—it allows us to "enter deep into the

opinions and affections of others" (222). By force of imagination, these philosophers answer Dennis Lynch's doubts expressed in Chapter 2 about the existence of an empathy that is "complete." Empathy is not complete nor does it need to be. For Smith and Hume, imaginatively intuiting the needs of others and the subsequent feelings of compassion and pity that arise from them form the foundation of morality.

The difficulty compositionists face in theorizing empathy, illustrated in the previous chapter, stems from the tendency to use a liberal-humanist, metaphorical definition with which sympathy, compassion, and pity are often conflated; however, empathy differs from these in significant ways. The definition of empathy proposed by Suzanne Keen is an awareness of another's feelings accompanied by a spontaneous emotional reaction to them (208), not unlike the metaphor "walking in another's shoes." Since this metaphor is often used to show understanding of another's suffering, it is commonly assumed that the spontaneous emotional reaction is or should be sympathetic or even compassionate. In empathy, we think we feel the same feelings as another, i.e., feeling *with* them, whereas, sympathy carries the connotation of feeling *on behalf of* or *for* others. Interestingly, the prefixes of empathy and sympathy mean differently than we have come to use them over the years. *–sym* (synonymous with *–syn*) means together with; *-em* (synonymous with *–en*) means putting into. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, authors of the classic *Women's Ways of Knowing*, criticize the "feeling into" definition for being phallic and rely instead on Nel Noddings' definition of empathy as reception rather than insertion (30). Pity is often used as a synonym for sympathy but carries a patronizing connotation. Nor is it likely to inspire action. For example, we may pity the homeless, but

that does not mean we lower the window when pulling next to them at traffic lights and hand them money or food, or that we volunteer at the local shelter or food bank. Indeed, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, pity can be voyeuristic and pornographic in the case of marketing images of extreme human misery, "reducing[ing] human beings to commodities [through] the exposure of vulnerable people at the moment of their most profound suffering" (Dean 90). This commodification of suffering is one of the most serious arguments against empathy in cultural studies and critical theory. Compassion, which is accompanied in most definitions by the desire to alleviate suffering, may still not support taking action. A somber case in point is a draft addition to the *OED* in September 2002 adding "compassion fatigue" to its definition of compassion.

The Biology of Empathy

The arguments against empathy by many compositionists and cultural studies scholars such as Berlant, hooks, Sommer, and Spelman (among others, see Chapter 2), who maintain that it is a colonizing, appropriating, one-sided imposition on the sufferer, suggest that empathizing is useless and even unethical. To begin to better understand empathy, however, is to learn what actually happens to us physiologically as we experience it and that, unless we suffer from mental illness, we cannot *not* empathize. It starts, according to neuroscientists, as an automatic reaction, empathy at its most primitive, biological level. Empathy is thought to be a function of mirror neurons in the brains of humans, primates, and perhaps even other animals. They are a circuit of three types of neurons that fire not only when performing actions but also when *observing* actions. They also account for some imitative behavior and may form the basis of more sophisticated forms of empathy such as cognitive perspective-taking and

communication.[1] They were discovered in the mid-1990s accidentally when Leonardo Fogassi, Vittorio Gallese, and Giacomo Rizzolatti were working in a lab at the University of Parma in Italy studying neural activity in monkeys. They connected electrodes to individual neurons in a monkey's brain to observe the resulting activity when it reached for things. Fogassi happened to reach for a raisin to eat and noted a spike in the monkey's neural activity just as if it had grasped the raisin itself (Dobbs, 2006). In a follow-up study, Marco Iacoboni and Mirella Dapretto (2006), neuroscientists at the Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center at UCLA, found macaques' neurons fired in situations where objects were hidden, partially hidden, and offered in different manners. That mirror neurons fire during the observation of action is key because it indicates the ability to abstract an object, including another individual, in one's imagination, a central component of empathy.

Although mirror neurons may differ in humans, similar neuronal activity has been observed via fMRI scans when athletes watch demonstrations of technique, men and women watch pornography or witness someone in pain, and people hear about the actions or emotions of someone not present;[2] not only that but, significantly to compositionists interested in exploring empathy, it is mediated to some degree by morality, liking and disliking, among other factors. (Philosopher Adam Smith also noted this way back in 1759; see footnote on page 88). This can also be seen on fMRIs. For example, in order to establish how fairness influences people's feelings about one another, Tania Singer, of

[1] While mirror neurons have been pinpointed and mapped in primates, in humans they are theorized. fMRI scans on humans reveal brain activity in the areas corresponding to the neurons' locations in primates; however, because the process of discovering and mapping mirror neurons involves exposing the brain and attaching electrodes to it while the patient is conscious, we will likely have a long wait for their "discovery" in us.

[2] For a sampling of fMRI studies showing mirror neuron activation in humans, see Iacoboni and Dapretto (2006); Seitz, Nickel, and Azari (2006); Singer, et al. (2006); and Tankersley, Stowe, and Huettel (2007).

the Wellcome Department of Imaging Neuroscience at University College, London, in collaboration with a group of researchers, conducted a study in 2006 where participants observed confederates playing a game in which the confederates sometimes played fairly, sometimes unfairly in order to "induce liking or disliking" of the actors (466). Participants then rated fair players more likeable, agreeable, and attractive than the unfair ones. After observing the game and rating the players, the participants then observed the fair and unfair players receiving painful stimulation to their hands, which had been previously applied to participants and confederates alike, so everyone knew what the others felt. Interestingly, men revealed no increase in empathic brain activity when observing unfair players in pain; whereas, women showed empathic activity for both fair and unfair players (467). Several studies noted such gendered differences in the experience of empathy, something I will explore in greater detail in the section on gender and empathy in this chapter. The ability to imagine others' situations, the circumstances in which people experience feelings of injustice, and gendered orientations toward empathy are all of interest to compositionists, especially critical teachers. Educators regularly ask students to imagine other people and to develop a social conscience, in the words of Bruce Herzberg. These are predicated on our students' (and our own) ability to experience empathy.

Empathy: Affective *and* Cognitive

To further complicate the mostly affect-based definitions of empathy employed in composition that often lead to misunderstanding, many definitions in other fields maintain roles not only for emotion but also for cognition, automatic neurobiological function, and culture. Recall that Suzanne Keen's definition contains the familiar

construct of feeling another's feelings; the focus here is the sharing of affect, of feeling what one deems as another's emotional state. Often this idea is expressed as *actually* feeling another's emotions (Davis, et al.), although this is only possible in the most basic sense such as emotional contagion, which means experiencing an emotion simply upon seeing someone else experience it, for example, seeing a friend cry and crying ourselves. Students may even experience this in reading emotionally evocative texts that describe painful experiences. However, a perceiver may also feel sad for more complicated reasons. Suppose we cry with a friend when we hear the news that her mother has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Our tears flow partly from simply seeing our friend's tears (emotional contagion), partly from experiencing our friend's relationship with her mother over the course of the friendship (empathy), and perhaps partly from our own relationship with the friend's mother (grief). Our sadness embraces the whole history of the friendship including our relationships with the mother and her other family members, as well as the concomitant memories of all of them together.

In psychology's definitions of empathy that emphasize emotion, the affect element is almost always referred to as an unconscious emotional response[3]—the spontaneity of Keen's definition but based in awareness of another's situation. Neurobiologists especially concentrate on automatic processing of empathy through the activation of mirror neurons. The mirror neuron activity that accounts for simple

[3] For a smattering of definitions of empathy that focus on emotion, see Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks (2004); Decety and Jackson (2006); Hoffman (2000); Nettle (2007); Roberts and Strayer (1996); Seitz, Nickel, and Azari (2006); Shamay-Tsoory, et al. (2007); Singer, et al. (2006); Smith (2006); Strauss (2004); and Thompson (2001).

emotional reactions and imitative behavior is bottom-up processing[4] in humans and primates such as imitating facial expressions.[5] In other studies, fMRIs show that areas of the brain that activate when experiencing physical sensations such as pain are also activated when witnessing someone else experiencing those sensations[6], a construct that recalls Thomas Nagel's claim in the previous chapter that experience is not necessarily confined to a private individual.

While many current definitions of empathy have not departed from sharing emotion as their core, they now often include the role of cognition sometimes to the exclusion of affect. Compositionists' use of multicultural texts, service learning courses, and more would seem to indicate that we value cognitively understanding others. To describe cognitive empathy, researchers use a variety of terms to try to define this complicated concept—*understanding*, *awareness*, *indentifying*, *grasping*, *insight*, *perception*, *mentalizing*, and *perspective-taking* among others. Martin Hoffman (2000), a psychologist well-known for his work on empathy, notes that psychologists define cognitive empathy as "the cognitive awareness of another person's internal states, that is, his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and intentions" (Hoffman 29). His own definition of empathy entails a process whereby the state of the observer is "more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" (30).

[4] See Decety and Jackson (2006); and Lamm, Batson, and Decety (2007).

[5] There are a great many studies of empathy and facial expression. See Decety and Jackson (2006); Iacoboni and Dapretto (2006); Preston and de Waal (2002); Thompson (2001); and van Knippenberg and van Baaren (2006).

[6] There are also a great many fMRI studies on neural activity when witnessing others' experience of sensation. See Lamm, Batson, and Decety (2007); Jackson, Meltzoff, and Decety (2005); Morrison, et al (2004).; Paus (2001); Singer, et al., (2004); Singer, et al., (2006); and Vogt (2005).

Mark H. Davis (1996), behavioral sciences professor at Eckerd College in Florida, suggests empathy is composed of a set of three processes or levels: non-cognitive (infants crying upon hearing another's cry and emotional contagion); simple cognitive (affective empathy of sharing another's emotional state); and advanced cognitive (the act of perspective-taking) (15-16). Jean Decety of the Social Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Chicago and Philip L. Jackson (2006), a clinical neuropsychologist of the University of Laval, Quebec, maintain that most psychologists agree on three components of empathy, two of which are affective, and one of which is "a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person" (54). Often references to affect imply a cognitive capacity in the ability to understand the emotional state of someone else even if the empathizer does not share in that emotion herself. For example, Dolf Zillmann, a telecommunication and film studies professor who specializes in the psychology of media, suggests a multifaceted definition of empathy comprised of:

> A response (a) to information about circumstances presumed to cause acute emotions in another individual and/or (b) to the bodily, facial, paralinguistic, and linguistic expression of emotional experiences by another individual and/or (c) to another individual's actions that are presumed to be precipitated by acute emotional experiences. (40)

Zillmann's theory does not assume similar emotions on the part of the empath but rather a reaction based on receiving and/or perceiving information and intuiting the motivation behind the actions of another. Similarly, University of Kansas psychologists specializing in the connection between empathy and altruism, C. Daniel Batson and E.L. Stocks, and Nadia Ahmad, a private sector social psychologist, explain empathy again as an

emotional reaction toward others but precipitated by becoming cognitively aware of their circumstances (360). Often this cognitive awareness is a process that ends with taking the role of the other in order to adopt her point of view (Shamay-Tsoory, et al. 431, 2007).

Compositionists have many opportunities like these to engage in such role-taking that allows us to experience empathy both affective and cognitive in writing courses. hooks' engaged pedagogy seeks not only to empower students in the classroom, but teachers as well through a process of risk taking, of sharing ourselves and our experiences with students as we ask them to share theirs with us. We must "practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit" (21). This sharing process allows teachers and students to experience affective empathy in the sense of Keen's spontaneous emotional reaction to seeing, hearing, or reading about another, but it also allows cognitive empathy to build over time to develop deeper understanding between everyone in the class allowing difference to be recognized and appreciated but not dismissed. This evokes David Bleich's pedagogy of disclosure where disclosure both requires and generates understanding, a synonym in psychology for cognitive empathy. Both Bleich and hooks claim good teaching, collaborative and liberatory teaching, "asks to know *who is in the class with us*; it believes *what each person brings to the classroom must become part of the curriculum for that course*" (Bleich 47, Bleich's italics). It is a given that we empathize emotionally. It is part of our biology. Engaged pedagogy asks us to advance beyond that simple feeling, to allow deep understanding to take hold, to enable the cognitive empathetic perspective-taking that comes from getting to know each other to become part of our classrooms for both teachers and students.

Empathy and Imagination, Identification, and Decision

We have seen so far that empathy is both emotional, unconscious and with us from our most primitive ancestors, and cognitive, a construct to ponder consciously; however, most of the research in neuroscience shows *that* it happens and the parts of the brain *in which* it happens, but the *circumstances* vary tremendously in which one might feel empathy or cognitively share perspectives with another. These circumstances have many applications in composition and language studies. When looking at the myriad definitions of empathy, several common mechanisms emerge. One is the role of imagination,[7] the ability to form mental images of things neither perceived nor sensed physically. Imagination is at the core of our humanity. Humankind are symbol-using animals,[8] metaphorists, with our imaginations forming the core of language, for language expresses abstractly that which is perceived and even what is wished, feared, and fantasized. These images flow into the mind unbidden, but we also deliberately engage our imaginations and must to understand new and/or abstract concepts. Imagination as play is a source of great pleasure for most people and is the mechanism by which we read and write, engaging with people and places that we may never visit or even be capable of visiting. We are not capable of directly entering another's mind and reading their thoughts; however, we can certainly imagine his or her circumstances. Imaginative perspective-taking, indeed, imagination itself is, just like empathy, driven by the activation of mirror neurons (Modell 184, 2004).

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[7] See Nussbaum 302 (2001); Singer, et al. 466 (2006); Southard 201; and Strauss 432 (2004) for a selection of discussions on the role of imagination in empathy.

[8]See linguists Langer 36 and Sarbin and Juhasz; Sparshott 1 for discussions of humans' capacity for metaphor.

Adam Smith knew of imagination's role in empathy/sympathy centuries before fMRIs. To define sympathy, he placed primary emphasis on the imagination's ability to truly place ourselves in another's position. We conceive or imagine what we would feel in another's situation and can do so no other way (3). Claudia Strauss (2004), an anthropologist specializing in psychological anthropology at Pitzer College, has a similar view and calls empathy imaginative reconstruction (434). In other words, given information about the situation whether by seeing another's plight, hearing about it, or even reading about it, people develop mental images to recreate those events.

Another attribute of empathy occurring in several definitions is identification with the other. To return to the origin of the term *empathy* itself, *einfühlung*, in art it means to identify with the object so much, one is partially transformed by it (Vischer qtd. in Koss 139; Reese 146). To identify with someone is to feel a connectedness with his or her person or situation; in fact, in several thesauruses, the first synonym of identification is empathy.[9] In popular parlance we say we relate to people, connect with them, click with them, share chemistry with them. We find things in common between ourselves and others that cause us to associate ourselves and our situations with them and theirs. This is not unlike Kenneth Burke's concept of consubstantiality. bell hooks recounts several examples of empathy through sharing experiences, an activity which social psychologists Nancy L. Collins and Lynn Carol Miller say enhances empathy. In what hooks calls a heated exchange on abortion among a group of African American women and men of various classes and educational backgrounds, a woman approached hooks at the end and profusely thanked her. hooks says:

[9] See *Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*; *The American Heritage Thesaurus*; and *Encarta*..

> I could feel the hurt going away, that she could feel a healing taking place within. Holding my hands, standing body to body, eye to eye, she allowed me to share empathically the warmth of that healing. She wanted me to bear witness, to hear again both the naming of her pain and the power that emerged when she felt the hurt go away. (74)

Because of the sharing in the meeting and the subsequent sharing with hooks, identification took place in a deeply personal and significant way for both of them. People can identify with great diversity in the human condition in spite of differences in culture, educational background, and wealth. hooks and the unidentified woman above seemingly had little in common other than the color of their skin, but their conversation created identification which produced empathy—conversation *is* empathy when thought of as a meaning exchange (Lucas 374, 2007), in this case, through experience-sharing mediated through language (see also Chapter 4). While scholars may disagree on the meaning of any exchange since all verbal acts are "singularly unique" (Dobrin 140) and initiated by individuals, "it is recognized as language, however, only if it involves consensus—that is, only if it is already understood by the listener or reader" (Lundeen 91). Feminist theory suggests experience itself, such as that between hooks and the woman at the meeting, constitutes knowledge which, in turn, suggests empathy constitutes knowledge.[10] Belenky, et al. call this experience-sharing *connected knowing* (113).

Scholars in health care see empathy as a deliberately chosen act which is different from both compassion and altruism; recall compositionists Richmond and Ratcliffe in

[10] See also Ramazanoglu and Holland (1999); Reinharz; and Smith.

Chapter 2 proposing the idea that empathy is chosen. According to Julia Balzer-Riley (2004), a nurse educator and author of the textbook, *Communication in Nursing*, empathy is "the act of communicating to our fellow human beings that we understand how they are feeling and what makes them feel that way" (126). Empathy here not only involves understanding but also communicating that understanding. Physician James T. Hardee (2003) explains empathy as a curiosity about others, the satisfaction of which stimulates understanding. Psychiatrist Alberta B. Szalita adds empathy is a "readiness to respond to [someone else's] needs without making his or her burden one's own" (151). These constructions are based on finding out about others with the implication of asking people to share experiences, ala bell hooks. In hospitals, patients often share the experiences of their lives, some of which led them to receive healthcare in the first place. Once in the field after several years of intense training, nurses find one of their primary duties to be listening closely (C. Wilson, 2007) in Carl Rogers' sense of listening without judgment (Rogers, "Empathetic" 3) as well as attending to and responding to others (Preston and de Waal, 2002). Even imagination is a choice. I can choose what to imagine and what to avoid imagining if I wish to avoid feeling empathetic (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 373, 2004). Choosing empathy is closely related to the cognitive empathetic act of perspective-taking. It is one thing to imagine someone's circumstances, behavior, emotions, and thoughts and another to decide to move beyond the initial reflexive empathic reaction, to theorize in an "effort*ful* process" about that person's state, and choose to interpret the world from their point-of-view (M. Davis 17, my italics) in a way that is, perhaps, very different from one's accustomed frame of reference. Composition

instructors, composition textbooks, and composition course materials ask students to consider others' perspectives in class every day.

Who Feels Empathy and for Whom?

Who feels empathy for whom and under what circumstances is, like all other aspects of empathy, complicated; the possible answers are the basis for postmodern and postcolonial critiques of empathy I discussed in the previous chapter—too-easy identification silences others and makes them disappear, metaphorically speaking. In spite of those criticisms, fMRI studies show people almost invariably feel empathy to some degree. In fact, the lack of empathic capacity is a primary symptom of mental illnesses such as autism and schizophrenia as well as personality disorders such as narcissism and psychopathy. Some empathy studies show that primates demonstrate a surprising amount of empathy, sympathy, and compassion toward one another. For example, hundreds of cases have been documented where, after one chimpanzee attacks another, one of the onlooking chimps will embrace the victim, writes Frans de Waal (2006), an evolutionary biologist (31). Among humans, empathy can be experienced by and for almost anyone but is by far most common among family members and familiar others which originates in the evolutionary drive toward social cohesion. Psychologists Adam Smith (2006, obviously not the philosopher) and Evan Thompson (2001) claim attachment and empathy emerge first as mechanisms for care of infants enabling their survival in a harsh and dangerous world (Smith, "Cognitive Empathy" 4; Thompson 6). Part of the chemical basis for this attachment and consequent empathy is the release of endorphins and oxytocin that flood new mothers at the birth of a child and both partners during sexual activity, although less in men than women.

Although we extend empathy to strangers, groups, and even animals (a proposition helping to fuel critical and cultural studies scholars' disparagement of empathy as superficial identification), it is rooted in kinship (J. Wilson 42) and immediacy (Slote 27, 2007).[11] We get to know those closest to us best and have multiple opportunities to observe their reactions, moods, circumstances, histories, and stories. We do not just know *about* them; we know *them*. This makes these familiar others much easier to understand and imagine how they feel inside, identify with their decisions and dilemmas, and predict their behavior. Kinship does not have to be genetic. Studies show most parents of adopted children are no less loving and attached than parents of biological children, and if they have both adopted and biological children, they experience no feelings of difference between them (Smith and Sherwen). The abundance of children abused by step-parents (and even biological parents), however, is evidence that the bond immediacy and even kinship creates does not extend automatically to those closest at hand.

Though empathy is rooted in kinship and immediacy, even friendly strangers such as participants in psychological studies and students in classrooms can begin to feel empathy with one another especially when it is transmitted via facial expressions and experience-sharing.[12] Facial expressions convey another's internal condition externally which contributes to empathic accuracy (Preston and DeWaal). Astute teachers often search the faces of students to ascertain whether the lesson that day is understood. In the sense of empathy as a communicative process, "the display of a facial expression

[11] James Q. Wilson is the author of *The Moral Sense*, an exploration of the biology of morality, and Michael Slote is a professor of ethics at the University of Miami.
[12] We can even experience empathy via the media with people we have never and probably never will meet. See Anderson 101 (2006); Hoffman 214 (2000); and Keen 20 (2006).

congruent with the content of the partner's self-disclosure is a form of primary empathy […] a communicative signal that serves to 'show how you feel'" (Yabar and Hess 42, 2007) even between those who do not know each other. Self-disclosure, as I discussed earlier with the pedagogies of bell hooks and David Bleich, is a way strangers become familiar others through sharing stories, experiencing vicariously the other's circumstances and thus expanding knowledge on the part of the listener/empathizer (Belenky, et al 115). This is the essence of relationship-building both in and outside of the classroom, something so important Lad Tobin calls it our primary responsibility as successful writing teachers (15).

Teachers and students start as strangers when beginning a new semester in a composition course, yet often we manage to build trust, communication, understanding, and empathy over the course of the term. Sometimes students disclose the most intimate details of their lives in personal writing or even in assignments that are not designed to elicit disclosures at all. The intimacy of the page, the course itself, and the perceived empathy and compassion of the instructor create spaces for students to see us as confidants. Composition scholars such as Jeffrey Berman, Richard E. Miller, Dan Morgan, Lucia Perillo, Marilyn Valentino, I, and many more have written about how to respond to such students in compassionate, empathetic, and ethical ways. We write articles about responding, we stay late at work to help them, we concern ourselves with how our comments affect their emotional well-being. Why go to such lengths to essentially "embrace" our students? They are virtual strangers. The same empathetic response that drives helping behavior drives teachers to listen without judgment and help students make meaning in their work.

Gender and Empathy

Differences in gender and empathy have been well-documented in psychology (Davis 58-61; Hoffman) with recent studies drawing distinctions between men's and women's orientations toward and experiences of empathy, differences that also affect the composition classroom in a number of ways. While women tend to experience more affective empathy than men, that is not to say men do not experience empathy. An influential researcher in this specialization, Simon Baron-Cohen of the University of Cambridge, UK, calls these orientations empathizing (identifying with another) and systematizing (using analysis to discover the rules that drive a system) (361, 2003). What does that mean? Men are more likely to conceptualize empathy in terms of what "should" happen in a situation, i.e., by rules and justice; whereas, women tend to conceptualize empathy in terms of relationships[13], although I want to emphasize that these studies do not account for all men or all women in all circumstances, but rather show tendencies. The tendency for conceptualizing empathy as an orientation toward relationships or justice, however, is evident in student writing and in teaching orientations as I discuss later in this section.

An example of this finding is in anthropologist Claudia Strauss's 2004 study of differences between each gender's discourse practices in responding empathetically to moral dilemmas (447), a study compositionists interested in empathy could repeat. In her analysis of men's and women's verbal responses to hypothetical situations of poor people, she found women tended to imaginatively reconstruct the situations, indentify

[13]See Ford and Lowery; Gilligan; Singer, Seymour, O'Doherty, Stephan, et al. 467; Skoe, Matthews, Pratt, and Curror; and Wark and Krebs for more about gendered orientations toward empathy and empathetic justice.

with the people, and show awareness of their emotions; whereas, men had much more difficulty with understanding and sympathy (441). Strauss concludes the men's responses lack empathy and sympathy; they are, however, congruent with the orientation toward justice that Singer, Seymour, O'Doherty, Stephan, et al. and the other researchers found. One male participant in Strauss's study, when asked why people go on welfare, responds:

> Let's say that, you know, you've got a one-income family, not making enough money to survive, and they're way below the poverty level. Should they get welfare? Okay, she's at home with the child. Grant you, is there any other thing that you can do for them as opposed to doing welfare? (Strauss 441)

This participant framed the situation—one income family, poverty, an at-home mother—then uses a word key to someone concerned with justice: the word *should*. He continues arguing from the justice orientation saying that the poor woman is a stay-at-home mother and then asks rhetorically whether anything else can be done. In other words, under the circumstances the single mother with a child at home should get welfare because there are no other options. This man has turned Strauss's *why* question into one of empathetic justice rather than what she was trying to elicit—empathetic emotional identification.

Although their references to empathy itself are implicit rather than explicit, an article by Robert J. Connors and another by Elizabeth Flynn exemplify these issues in the field of composition and illustrate males' and females' differing involvement with empathy. Flynn reiterates Carol Gilligan's and Simon Baron-Cohen's claim that men tend to frame moral dilemmas such as Strauss's in a rule- and justice-orientation of competing rights (Flynn 426; Gilligan 19); whereas, women define them relationally (428) similar to

Belenky, et al.'s connected knowing and in terms of conflicting responsibilities (Flynn 426). Flynn focuses on four student narratives, two from females and two from males, to illustrate "typical" feminine and masculine orientations in writing assignments. Both female narratives emphasize relationships—one a hot-air balloon ride with friends and the other a fear-filled experience of taking the wrong train in a foreign country. The male stories were about individual achievement, one attained (a final flight to obtain a pilot's license) and one frustrated (regret for quitting competitive swimming). Connors locates this achievement and competition orientation in Walter Ong's theory that "masculine consciousness tacitly perceives most of life in terms of contest" (Connors 140). Connors describes educational practices before they became co-educational as much more combative, hence the thesis or doctoral "defense" tradition where not only professors but older students were expected to "attack" the defendant. Once men shared the classroom arena with women, practices like this, Connors says, "seemed violent, vulgar, [and] silly" (141), although obviously a milder form of the thesis and dissertation defense tradition is still actively exercised. While one could argue that these examples essentialize male and female gender roles, many men and women still enact them.

Today's educational practices, across disciplines but especially in composition, emphasize collaboration rather than competition, which tends to promote women's ways of knowing including empathy. Using the constructs above, we might predict differing approaches to empathy in critical classrooms, for example, a feminist critical classroom might emphasize relationships and empathetic understanding to engage students in critiquing what hooks calls the white, military/industrial, capitalist patriarchy and a masculinized classroom might emphasize a justice orientation to do the same. While it is

beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine gendered empathies in detail, composition scholarship of critical pedagogy bears out these orientations to some degree. hooks mentions empathy specifically and the value of bringing personal experience to the classroom to examine structures of domination (*Teaching to Transgress* 74, 89, 168); Lisa Delpit suggests a type of close, relational listening akin to Carl Rogers' (46) and "engaging in the hard work of seeing the world as others see it" (151); Rochelle Harris claims a role for personal narrative writing as a critical practice in which the relationships between teachers and students are foregrounded (416).

Paulo Feire, on the other hand, shows how the injustice of oppression works and advocates his famous problem-posing education but spends little time directly addressing relationships or compassion for oppressed students, although love is mentioned briefly as a precursor to abolishing oppression (90, 91). Regardless, compassion is inherent in and the point of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the endeavor of critical pedagogy. Likewise, Ira Shor's vision of the critical classroom is one that models democracy through a justice orientation—students create the "rules" and negotiate what is "good writing" for that class (and presumably elsewhere); critique is found in analysis, although again, compassion and even empathy permeate Shor's work even if they are not affirmed directly (*Empowering Education*). In spite of these differing gendered orientations and tacit classroom attention to relationships and justice, understanding of and respect for the other are present in both masculine and feminine conceptions of critical pedagogy and are considered crucial to the whole endeavor.

Empathy, Evolution, and Altruism

Empathy and altruism matter to many compositionists because of their belief that teaching writing is more than just about subjects and verbs and paragraphs and thesis statements, especially those classrooms concerned with social justice. Of the twelve pedagogies described in Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick's book, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, four of them could be considered critical; three are overtly so. Ann George claims critical pedagogy's goal is social action on behalf of oppressed people; many of the students in critical classrooms are not oppressed themselves, so this praxis asks (or at least hopes) for altruism from the students taught. Yet Lauren Berlant claims compassion and empathy do not lead to altruistic action and, instead, substitute for it. Since altruism on the part of students is considered an important goal of these educators and many other compositionists, information about the nature of altruistic action, current research on it, and knowledge about its relation to empathy and compassion would better inform such pedagogical practices.

Due to empathy's relation to altruism, empathy and especially its siblings, compassion and sympathy, have functioned evolutionarily as primary mechanisms of social cohesion, what Charles Darwin called the "foundation-stone of social instinct" (Darwin 375).[14] Altruism is defined as a "*motivational state* with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare" (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 360, my italics). I emphasize altruism as a motivational state as distinguished from a behavior because any number of motivations may drive helping behavior such as the desire to impress others and be

[14] The following researchers have done a great deal of work on the relationship of empathy and altruism, especially C. Daniel Batson. See Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks (2004); de Waal (2006); Eisenberg, Valiente, Champion (2004); Fong (2007); Hodges and Klein (2001); Krebs; Slote (2007); and J. Wilson.

recognized, coercion, or even, to cite a popular culture example, to be on a reality television show like Oprah's Big Give. Contestants are given money to distribute to others in a charitable way, and the giving at the end of the episode is assessed by a panel of judges. The winner, of course, receives plenty of recognition and some sort of material reward. Hardly altruistic.

Empathy-induced altruism often results from an observer experiencing empathic distress on observing another's suffering (Hoffman 30), which many studies and even some composition readings and course materials attempt to re-create. In an experiment from the early 1970s, Dennis Krebs, a Harvard psychologist, gave participants the choice of receiving money and shocking another (a confederate of the researchers) or giving the money to the confederate and receiving the shock themselves depending on whether the confederate won in a 50/50 game of chance. While not all participants experienced high degrees of empathic arousal, the ones who did were the most willing to help even at a cost of their own comfort (1144). In a study Hoffman cites, college students observed other students, confederates of the researcher, having to complete an irksome project. When a confederate displayed obvious signs of distress, the student could choose between continuing to watch the confederate suffer or take his or her place. Seventy-five percent of these students took the confederate's place, and fifty percent took the confederate's place even when offered the chance to go home rather than continue to watch (Hoffman 31). This reaction is evident in primates too. Frans de Waal (2006) recalls a Russian scientist, Nadia Kohts, who raised a chimpanzee that occasionally escaped the confines of the house and took a position on the roof. She tried to cajole it

down with food or threats, but nothing worked except when she sat and sobbed pretending to be in pain. The chimp then rushed down to put its arm around her (31).

This connection between empathy and altruism C. Daniel Batson calls the empathy-altruism hypothesis, and it is the subject of a great deal of current research in psychology, neuroscience, and economics. This hypothesis states that affective empathy leads to altruistic motivation to help the person with whom one empathizes (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 360) in an empathy>attitude>action progression (Batson, Chang, et al. 1657). Altruistic motivation is so similar to compassion as to be almost indistinguishable; the deep awareness of another's suffering is accomplished through cognitive and affective empathy, and altruistic motivation is the wish to relieve it. That means empathy is a precursor to compassion/altruistic motivation and often to action. Several studies reviewed in Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks (361-70, 2004) have shown that empathy-induced altruism not only leads to help but to more nuanced aid for those in need such as providing jobs or shelter for the homeless rather than reactive help such as handing them money on a street corner which could actually be harmful in the long term[15]. The definition of empathy I provide in Chapter 4 takes this idea a step further—that truly empathizing means recognizing that sometimes help is neither needed nor wanted at all. Empathy-induced altruism may also lessen aggression for whom one feels empathy,[16] although its opposite is also evident—altruistic aggression. In other words, empathy for person A incites aggression toward person B, who may have wronged or be

[15] See Sibicky, Schroeder, and Dovidio to learn about research regarding the kinds of help empathy-induced altruism generates.

[16] For a sampling of studies on empathy and aggression, see McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal; and Miller and Eisenberg.

perceived to have wronged person A (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 363). The studies on altruistic aggression suggest Lauren Berlant's argument that empathy lacks rage is inaccurate; this topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Empathy-induced altruism may engender more cooperation in high conflict situations[17], has been shown to lead to better attitudes toward marginalized groups and individuals, and increases the likelihood of action on their behalf[18], which is the hope of critical pedagogy.

The literature of critical teaching is frequently centered in the classroom and concentrates on the first two-thirds of Batson's empathy>attitude>action model. In these courses, class discussion and readings focus on "analyses of the unequal power relations that produce and are produced by cultural practices and institutions (including schools)" (George 92). Writing is steeped in the dominant discourses of the current socio-economic system, and, through the study of such discourses, writing teachers attempt to both make white, middle class students' powerful positioning visible to them and to liberate those who are oppressed by that system. Few of the many works on critical pedagogy I cite in this dissertation show models of it that leave the classroom; however, Ann George's definition states that it "envisions a society not simply pledged to but *successfully enacting* the principles of equality" (92, my italics). This, in essence, is the last third of Batson's empathy>attitude>action model of altruistic behavior. One way critical teachers have attempted to enact these principles is through service learning projects that expose students to marginalized others in person, viscerally rather than as human abstractions.

[17] See Batson and Ahmad (2001); Batson and Moran (1999); and Stephan and Finlay (1999) to learn more about empathy and cooperation.

[18] See Batson, Chang, et al (2002); Batson, Polycarpou, et al (1997); Byrnes and Kiger; and Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci for studies focusing on empathy for marginalized groups.

Bruce Herzberg says the program at his school succeeds in developing a "social conscience" and "a commitment to help more" (308), but his concern is that students move beyond simplistic identification ("he/she could be me") to recognizing the role of social forces in their own positioning and that of the people they help. Another dimension of Herzberg's concern that he does not articulate is that part of developing a social conscience is the empathetic ability to recognize when *not* to help (see Chapter 4's definition of empathy as having boundaries and the detailed discussion that follows). The awareness of institutionalized positioning, Herzberg hopes, will inspire students to go beyond doing their part to help the supposedly less fortunate and to transform the society that determines their so-called fortune (317). Compositionists like Herzberg, George, and many others construct critical teaching as a process of learning about others in order to change attitudes and inspire action. We could learn a great deal about our own critical goals by looking to the studies of Batson and many others in psychology who share an interest in promoting social justice.

Widening the Circle of Empathy for Members of Stigmatized Groups and Beyond

Particularly pertinent to this study is whether people can experience empathy for members of stigmatized groups with the assumption that empathy would lead to altruistic motivation and action on behalf of such groups, which is the goal of critical teaching. Many researchers say yes. Interestingly, most of those who say yes are psychologists[19] and most of those who say no have connections to the humanities, especially literature,

[19] See footnote 16 for those who support the view that empathy-induced altruism can lead to action on behalf of stigmatized groups.

language, and cultural studies.[20] The majority, however, are more cautious—yes, people can develop empathy for such groups but that empathy is not necessarily accurate nor automatically able to transform changed attitudes into action.

While still careful about agreeing that empathy can lead to pro-social action on behalf of stigmatized groups, Martin Hoffman urges educators to identify what he calls empathic biases as normal responses to earlier life in more closed societies. These biases are mostly centered on empathy for familiar others and those in the immediate vicinity—in-group bias, friendship bias, similarity bias, and what he calls the here-and-now bias (206-213) or, in Slote's terms, immediacy (22-23). I will add one more to these: what I call the morality bias, whereby we empathize with those whose morals we esteem.[21] The morality bias has troubling implications for composition especially in critical teaching where instructors' belief of capitalism as inherently dehumanizing conflicts with students' beliefs in it as the natural order (see the extensive discussions of teacher/student conflict in critical pedagogy in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4). Hoffman encourages educators to use the familiarity bias to define common goals, fears, hopes, and interests people share as well as the "surface differences that mask the commonalities" (294). The practice Hoffman advocates is not unlike bell hooks' vision of the role of experience-sharing in class. In fact, the familiarity bias may actually be one of empathy's most

[20] See my discussion in Chapter 2 Berlant, hooks, Sommer, and Spelman's views on the uselessness and danger of empathy.

[21] Adam Smith noted the morality bias. He said, "When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when, upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them. (11) In other words, we are about as sympathetic with people as we agree with them or see their behavior as moral. Sympathy *is* judgment (J. Wilson 32).

important attributes because it implies that empathetic understanding is a process rather than a spontaneous feeling. For example, friendships develop and grow in part because the friends increasingly empathize with each other, indicating a mutual capacity for perspective-taking that increases over time and knowledge. This demonstrates the great potential of empathy and, perhaps, empathy-induced altruism to be built, increased, and *taught* (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of this concept).

Batson and his collaborators conducted several studies which successfully induced participant empathy as well as altruistic action for a number of stigmatized groups using his empathy>attitude>action model including AIDS victims, the homeless, abusers of hard drugs, and even convicted murderers. In one study, participant attitudes toward the murderers were less positive immediately after the experiment designed to invoke empathy with the prisoners than they were a week later in a follow-up telephone interview that the participants did not realize was related to the original study (Batson 369-70) showing that the changed attitudes developed during the study did not disappear the moment it was over. Several other studies[22] have shown improved attitudes for a whole group when empathy was induced for only a single member of a racial or ethnic minority. To see whether improved attitudes actually resulted in action, Batson and a group of researchers conducted another study where participants were induced to feel empathy for a 22-year-old man in prison for selling heroin. In a variation of this same study with a different group of participants, they were told the young man was a fictional character. In both instances, after being induced to empathize with him through a perspective-taking activity, participants donated money to a drug-addiction counseling

[22] See Stephan and Finlay (1999); and Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci (2003).

program that could have been allocated elsewhere. While these results are promising, the morality bias still impacts helping behavior. For example, in a study of altruistic giving to poor, real-life welfare recipients, researchers found even the most humanitarian participants (those who attributed poverty to bad luck rather than "laziness") were inclined to give more to poor people who answered a self-report questionnaire saying that they were 1) looking for work, 2) wanted to work, and 3) had held at least one job for more than a year (Fong 1011). Most research on the link between empathy and pro-social behavior, says Batson, has measured attitude change toward stigmatized groups; he says more research needs to be conducted on action but "there may be real reason for optimism" (1666) that changes in attitude create action on others' behalf.

There are many ways groups in our culture seek a better world by promoting empathy. For example, museums go to great effort to create displays that help visitors not only understand the historical period and social milieu of the exhibition but develop a deep understanding of and empathy with the people who lived in that place and time. Consider, for example, a small museum in New York City focuses on the lives of tenement dwellers on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It consists of two tenement apartments set up as closely as possible to the way people lived there during the immigration boom of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth-centuries. The conditions under which the immigrants lived, vivid through the authenticity of the site, is designed to leave groups with a great deal of sympathy and at least cognitive empathy. A video presentation afterward featuring interviews with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the tenements' occupants as well as several more recent immigrants, brings observers up-to-date on issues having to do with immigrants (legal and otherwise),

immigration, and US policy. The appeal to empathy recalls Suzanne Keen's broadcast strategic empathy which is designed to "emphasiz[e] our common vulnerabilities and hopes" (142). In this case, the museum's explicit purpose is imparting information; implicitly, though, it is designed to inspire compassion for immigrants and to enact new attitudes and behavior on the part of the attendees.

Journalists too, in spite of the standard of objectivity, create empathy, sympathy, and compassion through news stories and photos. A single scene can evoke emotional identification. It would be a rare person indeed who did not feel a sense of vertigo accompanied by overwhelming sadness when watching video of people jumping from the windows of the World Trade Center towers. The wreckage was painful to see but the human story almost unbearable. When exposed on the nightly news to horrors perpetrated on people in far away countries, it is often not piles of bodies and utter destruction that capture us, make us protest, change our minds, and change our votes but human faces through which we see "loss, grief, and sorrow […]. We are beseeched by the living" says media historian and scholar Robin Andersen (102). We, said Al Gore in a speech given to "address the unfinished agenda" of civil rights, all suffer, and that "suffering binds us together, and enables us to see what we all have in common, and what we are called upon to do" (101). While Gore and the aforementioned journalists are no psychologists, there certainly seems to be a wide-spread assumption that it is possible for the circle of empathy to widen and that widening may inspire action.

Widening that circle of empathy is on the agenda of Steven Pinker and Martha Nussbaum, both of whom advocate empathy's, and in especially in Nussbaum's case, compassion's, ability not only to open minds and hearts to stigmatized groups but to

lessen violence in the world. Pinker, a Harvard psycholinguist, claims the world is more peaceful today than it has ever been. The predictable reaction to his idea, he says, is that people think it is "wacky"—this surely is a horribly violent era. However,

> People don't appreciate how much more peaceful our lives are now than they were a few decades, a few centuries, a few millennia ago […] It comes from expanding our circle of empathy, our ability to imagine ourselves in the shoes of someone else, and so all of the things in culture—fiction and history and memoir and narrative—force us to think 'Hey, that other guy is just like me. I could've been him. I think that's a major trend in reducing violence and torture and genocide on a world-wide scale. (Pinker)

While it is beyond the scope of my dissertation to support or refute Pinker's claim that the world is less violent (not *non*-violent) in detail, and certainly no one of conscience can ignore reports of atrocities and genocides across the world, several sources suggest his claim is accurate, at least to some degree. Two large scale reports, *Peace and Conflict 2010* compiled by The Center for International Development and Conflict Management (University of Maryland) and *The Human Security Report 2009/2010*, compiled by The Human Security Project (Simon Fraser University in Canada) show declines worldwide in armed conflict since the 1990s, although both acknowledge the potential for violence in unstable areas (Hewitt, Wilkenfeld, and Gurr; Mack). A map in *Peace and Conflict 2010* shows the risk of political instability worldwide on a scale of five risk levels (low, some, moderate, high, and highest). A large majority of the world's regions are at the two lowest levels (Hewitt, Wilkenfeld, and Gurr 6). Not only do these studies show less

violence on a national level, everyday interactions are less violent in Western culture and many other cultures today. Entertainments people regularly "enjoyed" throughout Western history such as cat burning, bear baiting, gladiators and others fighting to the death, and humans being mauled by wild animals have largely disappeared. Whether Steven Pinker can accurately attribute less violence to greater empathy may be debatable, Westerners even as early as Adam Smith and David Hume thought sympathetic feelings for and with others results in more compassionate behavior.

Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher from the University of Chicago, advocates strongly for compassion and empathy as a central focus of secular moral education (see also Chapter 5) for children starting in their pre-school years and continuing through college (. She recommends that ethics education start with imaginative exercises with groups that students would find it easy to relate at first and move toward "groups [that] might need more mental exercise before empathy can take hold" (430). It is works of art, she says, that "promote empathy across social barriers," that connect "these barriers and their meaning in a highly concrete way" (431). Her belief about the role of art in education is similar to those who advocate the inclusion of multicultural literature in composition courses to promote intercultural awareness and understanding. She does not mean teaching and learning high art for erudition's sake but for the sake of developing empathetic and compassionate human beings (432-33) who, presumably, would become active and passionate participants in the political process—the goal of critical teaching.

Conclusion

This chapter aims at resisting ill-defined notions of empathy in composition by exploring conceptions of it in other fields that have researched it in depth and showing

how such research can enlarge composition studies' understanding and use of empathy. Chapter 2 showed that when empathy has been defined in a liberal-humanist, Rogerian sense of the transparency of others' inner feelings without sociocultural context, compositionists have tended to respond to empathy in three common ways—embracing it, implying it, and disparaging it. This is partly because of the misunderstanding of and conflation with three similar words—sympathy, compassion, and pity, so this chapter began by providing background on the origin of empathy, how it has been conceptualized over time, and ways it is different from the other terms with which it may be confused. Rhetorician Dennis Lynch claims empathy must be full and complete to exist at all. Few outside the sciences, however, know the extent to which empathy is inherent to human behavior, physiology, and evolution. We cannot *not* empathize unless we are mentally ill or suffer from a personality disorder. In a recent story about empathy, NPR reporter Allison Aubrey said it is "fundamental to pretty much everything we do." However, to acknowledge Lynch's concerns, the problem for compositionists and other educators is controlling and educating our empathetic tendencies, to understand their boundaries and limitations.

One aspect of empathy vital for compositionists to understand is that it is not just a feeling, a view most the researchers I have cited in this chapter share. It is surprising that Suzanne Keen does not include empathy as a cognitive process in her definition, considering how much she looked to the sciences for research on empathy in her book *Empathy and the Novel*. Without cognitive perspective-taking, empathy remains vulnerable to Berlant, hooks, Sommer, and Spelman's criticisms of it as superficial identification and inappropriate assimilation. Cognitive perspective-taking allows

educators to move students beyond simply having some sort of emotional reaction to others' life circumstances or thinking they should. Awareness of others' internal states and perspectives is often what compositionists try to generate in students via reading assignments or service learning projects. Students do not have to experience some emotion with or on behalf of someone to understand disenfranchisement. Cognitive empathy also influences our commenting practices as we grow to know students over the course of the term. The fact that cognitive empathy also involves imagination and choice makes an exploration of those functions of empathy in other fields necessary since they are unaccounted for in composition's literature. Also unaccounted for are explanations of who is likely to empathize with whom and how that empathy is likely to be manifested in our courses by both ourselves and our students. The intense criticism of empathy from postmodern and postcolonial scholars is really a question of who empathizes with whom, to what degree, in what manner, and to what end. If empathy may lead, as C. Daniel Batson claims, to action on others' behalf, then understanding the circumstances in which that happens and repeating it in the classroom seems like a vital component to critical teaching where enacting the principles of equality are important goals. The explanations of each element in this chapter informs and undergirds my definition and theory of the function of empathy in the teaching of writing discussed in Chapter 4 as well as the conclusions I draw about empathy in composition in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

A THEORY OF EMPATHY FOR COMPOSITION

Introduction

Chapter 4 advances a definition and theory in response to the main research question: what is the function of empathy in teaching and learning composition? It also addresses questions raised by the research question. The study of empathy is important to composition because empathy defined accurately and based on current research has the possibility of changing our understanding of rhetoric, critical teaching, and everyday teaching practices such as commenting on student papers. Composition's social justice agenda is especially dependent on a nuanced conception of empathy given its goal of inspiring students to develop a social conscience and enact societal change. Creating a less problematic and more encompassing definition of empathy was the purpose of the overview of empathy in other fields in the previous chapter, which I use in this chapter to inform a new definition. In order to understand the significance of the new definition, I explain why I chose each term, how each one contributes to the definition, and what the definition means to the teaching of writing. The heart of this chapter and the dissertation itself is a discussion of the function of what I theorize are five empathies at work in composition studies—relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy. Throughout this work and in the definition, I endeavor to show that while empathy is physiological and almost ubiquitous, it is also discursive; subject to sociocultural forces which create boundaries and limitations to it. Many of these boundaries come from empathy's primary weaknesses, the familiarity and morality biases.

A Definition of Empathy for Composition

To understand the function of empathy in teaching writing or in any other field is not to ask whether or even if we should empathize. We *do*. It is biological. *How* we empathize is the question. Nor is empathy inherently good or bad or useless or colonizing. Empathy is a mental state and is therefore morally neutral in the way that sadness or joy or intelligence are morally neutral. It is as moral as the service to which it is employed, as thoughtful as the consideration applied to a person's circumstances and culture, as compassionate as the desire and motivation to help relieve suffering. Once we understand that, we must apply a definition for composition that is nuanced enough to encompass the various manifestations of empathy as outlined in the previous chapter. I propose one that combines Davis's, Hoffman's, and Keen's, along with concepts of Stacey Sinclair and Gerald Monk that I will introduce later in this chapter. The definition of empathy I propose is:

> *the affective and/or cognitive awareness of another's internal states and perspectives, the outcome of a process brought about spontaneously or over time by seeing, hearing about, or reading about another's condition and is often a conscious choice, a curiosity about others rather than passive reception. It is always mutable and limited, discursive, and shaped by cultural discourses that may promote or impede its accuracy*.

I will explain how I use key words in the definition. *Awareness* can be emotional or cognitive but more likely a combination of both. *States and perspectives* mean both another's internal emotional condition(s) and his or her approach to and interpretation of the world. By *outcome*, I mean empathy as the result of a process whereby a person

exposed to another's situation may experience one of Davis's three types of empathy resulting in an emotional and/or cognitive understanding of the other. To expand the uncomplicated definitions of empathy used to negate it, I call his types *levels*: non-cognitive (crying upon hearing another cry and mimicry); simple cognitive (the affective empathy of sharing another's emotional state); and advanced cognitive (the act of perspective-taking). This is not to say empathy or the process is static; it is fluid, ever-changing with the kind and degree of empathy depending on the circumstances and people involved. I say *spontaneously or over time* to account for both immediate reactions to another's situation and empathy that grows over repeated exposure and engagement with another. *Seeing, hearing about, or reading about another's situation* encompasses the ways we become aware of others' lives. A *condition* can mean a specific circumstance or situation such as one arising from a friend's divorce, for example, or a more general understanding of another. I use the term *conscious choice* and *curiosity* because empathy is not always an automatic response nor is empathy likely to be accurate when it is an automatic response. It is a conscious choice we can embrace or refuse. Finally, and importantly, I use the words *mutable, limited*, and *discursive* because empathy is not static but subject to change, boundaries, and sociocultural context. This more comprehensive definition has several important and, I hope, revealing implications for the composition classroom.

Beyond Another's Shoes:
Approaching Cognitive and Contextual Empathy

Each element in the definition above allows us to move beyond empathy as a simple emotional reaction generalizable to all people to a contextual empathy that opens

doors to understanding how we react to different students, how they react to different others, and what we hope to accomplish in choosing the pedagogies that guide our praxis. In bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, hooks suggests classroom sharing as a way to develop mutual recognition, which I liken to empathy in Chapter 1. Mutual recognition involves both the emotional and cognitive components of empathy that develop not only through the classroom sharing and the so-called confessional writing hooks advocates but also through more academic classroom discussions, conferences with students, and student assignments. Although confessional self-disclosure may generate affective empathy as well as sympathy and even pity because it focuses on revealing painful life events, this uncovers little of the cultural stores of shared meanings behind the events, nor of the cultural meaning of experience-sharing itself. This is not to say emotional empathy is not valuable. The practice of classroom experience-sharing might be better served, however, by adding to the sharing exercise an exploration of what sharing means in the students' experience and in that of various cultures as well as the meaning and significance of what is shared, what can be shared, and what is taboo.

This is where cognitive empathy emerges and its relevance to teaching is noteworthy. Teachers often already practice it. It is no stretch to say that when students write academically-oriented papers, they reveal much about themselves that enables teachers to understand their perspectives and anticipate the points of view they may adopt. That is one of the evolutionary functions of empathy, cognitive and otherwise—the ability to predict others' behavior. And what is the point of empathizing in this way? One is that it modifies our commenting practice, one of the most important and effective elements of teaching writing. Our comments on students' papers at semester's end are

often significantly more attuned to their needs than at the beginning because we develop cognitive empathy with them. We have grown to know our students from personal self-disclosure perhaps, but we have also become acquainted with them as people, having a sense of their cultures, political leanings, spiritual views, personal biases, and socioeconomic lives. We do not need to empathize fully to see that we have grown to know what to expect from students; that knowledge then becomes a useful element of our curricula. The teaching of rhetoric is another example. When explaining the foundation of it in beginning writing classes, part of the lesson is examining the cultural needs and expectations of audiences in order to better address their concerns in discourse, an awareness compositionists help students develop and practice both in class readings and writing papers. Another way students examine others' cultures is through so-called diversity education, prominent in undergraduate general education curricula in colleges and universities across the country. Such education is presumed to enable students to take the perspective of others, developing cognitive empathy that grows over time and with knowledge. The purpose of developing tolerance for diverse cultures and points of view is for students to become more open-minded and hopefully active citizens.

The idea that empathy is a process with the potential to increase over time and with knowledge lies at the core of its usefulness as a construct in education. As we grow to know people personally or we hear or read about their experiences, their cultures, their struggles, their joys, their pain, we build empathy. If social justice is the goal of creating an educated, politically engaged citizenry, then it behooves us as teachers to allow students the opportunity of getting to know unfamiliar others, if not directly in the classroom then through thoughtful analysis of popular media, written and visual, a critical

practice already enacted in classrooms across our field, although not specifically with empathy in mind. This, however, is empathy only from the creator's perspective and manufactured for a purpose with a specific audience in mind. The writer, speaker, or filmmaker may attempt to thwart empathy for some audience members (see this chapter's section on rhetorical empathy). However, middle-class white students from mostly white towns in mostly white universities may have little incentive or opportunity to explore other cultures and especially the idea of institutionalized racism without doing so in class. Critical teaching's goal is to inspire students to become activists in wide-spread resistance to dominant culture. Without empathy, the deep understanding piece of compassion, there is little reason, especially for students from the dominant culture, to consider social justice and those who need it more than academic abstractions.

Empathy as a conscious choice can and probably does influence educators' selection of course materials to maximize students' acceptance of teaching, critical or otherwise. In a composition curriculum that uses novels, for example, the works chosen often have a high degree of success in terms of engaging student readers through character identification. *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *The Color Purple*, *Black Boy*, *Native Son*, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are all classics of multicultural literature used in many composition courses. Presumably, identification with characters may lead to better, or at least more informed, attitudes toward the stigmatized groups to which the characters belong. In my tiny corner of the Pacific Northwest, teachers use local American Indian traditional stories as well as those of well-known Indian authors such as Sherman Alexie for the same purpose. The common freshman reader at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2010-11 is *Nickled and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in*

America by Barbara Ehrenreich, an engaging non-fiction account of the author's attempt to live on minimum wage. Readers empathize with Ehrenreich, engage in cognitive perspective-taking, and become aware of the difficulties of the working poor. But to what end? Presumably the purpose for this choice is not only to increase engagement in campus intellectual life (as IUP states on its website) but implicitly to influence students' political thinking and choices in the future. This is an example of C. Daniel Batson's empathy>attitude>action model of altruistic motivation at work. Educators know students can choose to ignore or disparage other cultures or remain blind to institutionalized oppression, but the assumption is that it may be more difficult when students become engaged with an individual through reading.

That empathy is deliberately chosen also affects educators in the way they interact with students each day. As we have seen in the previous chapters, empathy can be both a communication strategy and curiosity about others. Empathy as communication is Rogerian in the sense of understanding and recognizing the viewpoint of the other person and taking her concerns seriously when she may be upset and resistant. The choice to empathize in such situations may not be emotional at all, and, in fact, what we hear could even be shocking or abhorrent, but the idea is for the speaker to feel she has been heard regardless of our agreement. The choice is then made to stop the conversation completely, exercise curiosity, find out more, and then discover if and/or how to take action. One such example is Kia Jane Richmond, who discovered one day that her empathy stopped at the point she thought she knew "exactly" how her student felt about his writing difficulties. The problem, she discovered, was hers rather than his because she had stopped short of exercising curiosity and had relied instead on her own experiences.

It is through practicing empathetic curiosity that we discover the perspectives of others that underlie their concerns. However, when we are confronted with views objectionable to us, we may choose to reject empathizing. In the writing center session mentioned in Chapter 2, the tutor did not want to empathize with the racist student or even to echo what he said to indicate he was heard much less to ask why he felt that way. Listening in such cases may imply complicity. As Phyllis Lassner says, empathy can silence justifiably angry voices (see Chapter 2). Contextual and deliberate empathy reveals borders we sometimes choose not to cross.

What is the Function of Empathy in Composition Studies?

I mention the function of empathy in interactions between teachers and students earlier in the chapter, but I would like to explore the topic in detail here. Although the dictionary defines pedagogy simply as the art or profession of teaching, pedagogy encompasses far more, especially as an art. Beyond the curricula we employ, *a* (singular) pedagogy implies fundamental underlying assumptions of what this art entails, different to different pedagogues. Empathy is a fundamental underlying but mostly unrecognized assumption in many pedagogies. In this section, I draw together notions of empathy discussed in the previous chapters into five types of empathy that each have roles in composition studies: relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy. Underlying each of these "empathies" rests the definition articulated at the beginning of this chapter:

> *The affective and/or cognitive awareness of another's internal states and perspectives, the outcome of a process brought about spontaneously or over time by seeing, hearing about, or reading about another's condition*

> *and is often a conscious choice, a curiosity about others rather than passive reception. It is always mutable and limited, discursive, and shaped by cultural discourses that may promote or impede its accuracy*.

This empathy is a process both affective and cognitive and made up of three levels: non-cognitive, simple cognitive, and advanced cognitive.

With that understanding in mind, I use the metaphor of a river system to think of the following five empathies and how they interact. I draw on a watershed as opposed to walking in another's shoes because while empathy is a concept that can be defined in a dictionary and a dissertation, it is also a pervasive force that is easily taken for granted because of its sheer ubiquitousness. It also serves as an illustration of empathy as part of the natural environment, as natural to life as air, trees, and water. Empathy as a general concept is the water itself which is channeled through tributaries I call relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, and rhetorical empathy; they each come to a confluence with main river, discursive empathy. Discursive empathy is both the water, the source, yet is also the main channel of the river, i.e., an object of study in itself. As the scope of this dissertation is limited to empathy and the teaching of writing, I limit these "empathies" to those that fit within composition studies.

Relational Empathy

Relational empathy is the awareness of another's internal states and perspectives and is generally one-on-one, i.e., a single individual with another single individual, although relational empathy practiced by teachers and students creates classroom atmospheres where multiple perspectives are heard and valued. This is the perspective-taking and social competence people engage in with each other every day. Empathy is a

quality associated with friendliness and approachability. It should not be news to anyone that positive relationships with students in the classroom like employees in the workplace should matter and may contribute to motivation or the lack thereof. Relational empathy may manifest in any and all of Davis' three levels (15-17). We may experience the visceral form in a student paper that exhibits particularly good storytelling and description. When a student comes to us saying the reason she missed class yesterday was because she was just served divorce papers, we may experience second-level empathy having gone through that experience ourselves. Even if we have not, we can choose to engage third-level empathy, cognitive perspective-taking, to understand the student's circumstances. These levels and examples of relational empathy are basic to positive relationships with our fellow travelers through this life; students are no exception.

bell hooks' conception of mutual recognition in her theory of engaged pedagogy is another fitting example of relational empathy specific to the classroom. While there are many ways we recognize and sometimes, unfortunately, ignore who is in the classroom with us, empathy generated through self-disclosure via experience-sharing is one method of recognition which we have seen advocated in hooks' engaged pedagogy and examined in psychological studies investigating how people develop empathy with one another. I do not necessarily mean confessional disclosures, although they certainly do happen in the classroom and in student papers. What I do mean is that every time we and our students speak in class, when we give examples drawn from experience to illustrate a concept in a discussion, we reveal who is in the classroom with us. Even if educators do not employ or recognize empathy directly, knowing who inhabits that classroom, as

hooks and David Bleich point out, is a fundamental aspect of teaching, demonstrating respect for students. The revealing of ourselves, students and teachers alike, adds to the knowledge of everyone in the room, knowledge that forms the foundation of third-level empathy where it becomes perspective-taking based on knowledge rather than simply a visceral reaction based on emotional contagion or impulse.

Knowing who is in the classroom with us is not without difficulty especially in terms of the so-called classroom confessional. hooks advocates confession as a way of knowing predicated on the belief that the sharing of experience helps relate abstract concepts to real lives, specifically students' lives. In *Teaching to Transgress* (21 and 80-90), she responds to Mimi Orner and Diana Fuss who both, in different ways, discourage classroom self-disclosure because they say the presence of authority figures demands and shapes students' revelations and that such revelations rarely advance the discussion. hooks responds to the first by saying that teachers who ask students to disclose must disclose themselves. In an exercise, for example, where she asks students to write an autobiographical paragraph about an early racial memory, hooks writes and shares together with the students. To the second, she claims that dismissing student voices abdicates all authority to the teacher and to the scholars students read, a non-liberatory practice. Students who share their voices gain authority in the classroom and are valued as stores of knowledge otherwise inaccessible to class members. Building empathy in a classroom focused on mutual recognition accepts both the need to disclose and the need to remain silent. It recognizes that empathy is a matter of "the slow, gradual buildup of trust and understanding" (Bleich 44), the third and most nuanced level of empathy in Davis' three-fold process.

Pedagogical Empathy

Pedagogical empathy is similar to and uses relational empathy; however, it is especially focused on empathetic curiosity specific to classroom practices including discovering and understanding students' writing strengths and weaknesses in order to coach them more effectively, creating a collaborative learning environment, and making our expectations of students clear. These are all practices compositionists enact every day without necessarily considering that they are empathetic. I point out in Chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter that Kia Jane Richmond's reflection on her own teaching praxis led her to discover that when she claimed she knew what her student's writing problem was, she was actually conflating her own writing experiences with his (see Chapter 2). This epiphany underscored for Richmond the need to exercise empathetic curiosity when analyzing the writing difficulties of such students and avoid the solipsistic "empathy" of the self. Self-disclosure in writing conferences in the sense discovering and understanding students' needs adds insight to writing evaluation allowing us to better focus our comments. Where do students' strengths and weaknesses lie? How have experiences with previous teachers shaped these strengths and weaknesses? Where do students feel unsure of themselves? Joseph Mackall suggests listening to students' stories, i.e., experience-sharing, builds the trust they need to feel to write for us in a new collegiate environment (24). He also visited the towns where his students grew up to better understand their origins, which Mackall then applied to his own life and upbringing.

Mike Rose gives an example of a way composition teachers can exercise pedagogical empathy with students in his article "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the

Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer's Block." In a small study of blocked student writers, Rose finds "all [were] operating either with writing rules or with planning strategies that impeded rather than enhanced the composing process" (124). For example, one student could not write past the introduction because in high school her teachers demanded the first paragraph explode off the page grabbing the reader's interest immediately. I worked with a student in our writing center whose work contained only a few bland lines in each paragraph. After getting past a blockade of defensiveness about adding any material at all, I discovered, through empathetic curiosity, that she was scolded in the past for not inserting paragraph breaks correctly. To keep from being hurt that way again, she wrote only enough to be sure where the paragraph break should occur. Researching/exercising curiosity about students applies to critical teaching too; Ira Shor suggests teachers research students' background cultures to know where to begin classroom analyses of power relations. These stories illustrate the value of cognitive perspective-taking. We cannot know what blocks our students' ability to complete assignments or their willingness to accept new points of view without asking them, without having a purposeful curiosity about their writing lives.

This not only helps writing problems but can help us focus on and encourage their strengths in various types of writing and/or aspects of the process. Empathy as curiosity and the knowledge gained in satisfying that curiosity gives us a wealth of information about students. We all have some who excel at narrative but have difficulty with research or who organize so well that their writing is stilted and tedious. With information and knowledge, we can encourage the student who is good at narrative to use it to illustrate points or write captivating introductions in research papers and other assignments. One

student of my acquaintance had such a talent, and her advanced composition instructor encouraged her to use a narrative/descriptive introduction to a fact-based paper. This encouragement not only led to great success in that assignment, but helped with the research writing as well. That student has been using what her teacher termed "the cool tool" ever since, through three degrees and a PhD program. Back in the advanced composition course, consider what happens when the student who is organized is paired with the narrative writer; they can share and learn effective narration techniques and organizing skills (the narrative writer I mention still struggles with organization). All this requires finding out, once again, who is in the classroom with us, only this time using that information to enhance collaborative practices in the classroom.

Collaborative classrooms are ones that flow with third-level empathy through conversation. Recall Kenneth Bruffee's oft-quoted passage, "If thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing is internalized talk made public and social again. If thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized" (210). Conversation thought of in this way invites students to share in what may be an entirely new discourse, advanced, thoughtful, intellectual, although sometimes not present in the cultures from which they arrive. As I wrote in "Getting Personal: Responding to Student Self-Disclosure," students are meaning makers, rivers of conversations, personal and academic, in which the very act of communication, of understanding the meaning made between conversational partners, is empathetic. Conversation *is* empathy (374).

Classroom conversations and discussions are bridges to academic culture that students may have difficulty crossing without being able to connect abstract and

controversial ideas to their own lives, to empathize with real people affected by those issues. Consider the discourse with which students arrive from home—it is derived from conversations about work, family, personal lives, religion. Talk with peers and teachers in college invite students into a new culture, a new way of understanding, a new conversation. For example, Bruffee cites a story about a class taught by John Trimbur in which a student, "Mary," has difficulty beginning an assignment that asks students first to read an interview between Studs Turkel and a former Ku Klux Klansman and then explain the Klansman's rejection of racism. Mary has trouble with this assignment because of her family's cultural prohibition against judging others. To her, explanation is equivalent to judgment. Finally, in a collaborative group discussion, a classmate offers a metaphor of religious conversion to help Mary understand the Klansman's change (Bruffee 10-11), an experience with which Mary is familiar from her own cultural conversation. The academic artifact, the Turkel interview, along with collaborative talk enables Mary to cross a conversational bridge between the personal and the academic through empathy that invites her into a new conversation.

This is an example of empathetic cognitive perspective-taking especially on Mary's part but also on the parts of her fellow students and Trimbur. It illustrates the value of students understanding of different others, recognizing reasons they fail to complete assignments, and welcoming students into academic culture. Mary begins to empathize with another through a different way of thinking about the other's experience and how to explain that experience without the act of explanation being an act of judgment. That does not mean she empathizes with the Klansman either completely or not at all. The religious metaphor helps define for Mary what "change" means, the word

Trimbur uses to describe the assignment, when presented with an image from her own culture. Mary's colleague in class also exercises cognitive perspective-taking in recognizing Mary's difficulty and offering a solution. Teachers may never realize the myriad ways in which culture influences students' problems completing assignments, nor might students recognize or be willing to admit it. They may not even be aware their academic problems are culture-related; however, in Mary's case, a perceptive peer helped solve the problem in a collaborative group. Bruffee again, without mentioning the word empathy, supports the value of cognitive perspective-taking through the conversation of humankind.

Another place in writing instruction to apply cognitive perspective-taking is in clarifying our expectations for class assignments. One evolutionary function of empathy throughout human history is its role in helping us anticipate the behavior of others. While this anticipation is never a perfect predictor of what our associates, neighbors, friends, and family will do, it does enable and sometimes compel us to adjust our actions in light of their wants, needs, and sometimes vague expectations. Students often feel disturbed by vague expectations. In fact, one common reason they visit writing centers is to interpret instructors' assignments. Educators, especially in the humanities, may express discomfort with making assignments too specific because it supposedly positions him or her at the center of the classroom. Nebulous instructions, however, when students' grades are at stake, can be disconcerting especially to students new to college. No matter how much we educators would like students to focus less on grades, until we stop giving them, students will still feel anxious about them. On the other hand, teachers complain students want to be led and fed, i.e., led by the teacher to every morsel of information and

subsequently fed it—Freire's banking system. Educators need to strive to find a balance between vague assignments and those that try to micromanage the students' every word, a balance that can be found through anticipating what students want to know, an act of cognitive perspective-taking.

Cognitive perspective-taking of the type I discussed above is encouraged in leadership seminars for business people across the country, with techniques designed to promote a positive, productive work environment equally applicable to promoting a positive, productive classroom environment. Libby Wagner, a composition instructor for over twenty years and now a management consultant, suggests four factors that promote learning and whose absence impedes it in both classrooms and workplaces. They are respect, empathy, specificity, and genuineness. Regarding specificity, she maintains students are more successful when given specific expectations of assignments. The expectations set forth in the syllabus should also be specific. One key area which may harbor the greatest need for specificity is in giving feedback. Numerous articles and books appear in the literature of composition on feedback techniques such as minimal marking, sandwiching positive comments around suggestions for improvement, pointing out patterns of error instead of individual errors, and so on, but consider again the empathetic value of specific comments. When compositionists point out specific passages in student work that are effective and why, and do the same for the ineffective ones, students can better anticipate our wishes, to plumb that abyss, that great mystery of "what the teacher wants." This is yet another act of cognitive perspective-taking. Some may argue that by being specific, we fill students' papers with our ideas rather than theirs; however, we give the grades. We do have expectations even if they remain unarticulated.

And if they remain unarticulated, we leave students at a disadvantage even if we mean well, and once again, the teacher "owns" the class. We wield classroom power and inhibit democracy when we keep information to ourselves which leads to the need for critical empathy.

Critical Empathy

Critical empathy has to do with the way empathy functions in negotiating and conceptualizing relations of power and, unlike relational and pedagogical empathy, moves beyond an individualistic orientation. While critical empathy does apply to individuals within the classroom setting, Todd DeStigter defines critical empathy as a "disposition which urges us to understand the powerful structures and ideologies that constrain people to think and act in prescribed (often exploitative) ways" (318) that also recognizes that empathy risks appropriating others. Sometimes critical empathy is concrete as when we and our students read, share, and discuss life situations of real people. Sometimes it is abstract, a concept examined in the classroom as something individuals and institutions do and do not practice in decision-making. Sometimes it is decidedly rhetorical in the way arguments are structured. Critical empathy can act as a bridge at one time and an impasse at another between teachers and students and between students and marginalized others.

Critical empathy is important to compositionists because many practice some form of critical teaching in their writing classrooms, if not critical pedagogy per se. In the previous chapter, I mention that three of composition's twelve pedagogies can be considered overtly critical. Ann George defines critical pedagogy as a set of teaching praxes which "envisions a society not simply pledged to but successfully enacting the

principles of equality, of liberty and justice for all" (92). Students analyze institutions and cultural practices that maintain the power status quo and develop ways to oppose it. Social critique uncovers ways in which institutionalized oppression is maintained for the sake of the privileged few; its primary weapon is its ability to mask itself as "the way things are" which traps both the oppressed and the oppressors in a nexus of behaviors designed to keep the structure in place—everyone accepts his or her place in the hierarchy as the natural order. The assumption of this critique is that a society lacking equality, liberty, and justice is morally corrupt. Those not receiving such benefits, the oppressed, suffer physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Therefore, a pedagogy that seeks to relieve this suffering is, by definition, compassionate. Critical pedagogy's compassion lies not in compassion's common connotation and conflation with pity; as Freire says, "no pedagogy that is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates" (54). Instead, critical pedagogy's compassion arises from the word's denotation—deep understanding (empathy) of the suffering of another coupled with a wish to relieve it. Critical empathy combines all three levels of empathy, especially the cognitive.

Many popular films and novels produced worldwide can be construed as empathy-based arguments for greater understanding of "strange" cultures, oppressed classes, or marginalized others, with some designed to inspire radical action such as Kulbaga assumes underlies *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Consider *The Kite Runner*, *Not Without My Daughter*, the Richard Wright classic *Native Son*, any number of film and theatrical versions of *The Diary of Anne Frank,* and so on—the empathetic appeal on behalf of people in need of aid and understanding are too numerous to mention. All

contribute to ways Americans conceptualize distant and/or different others. The protagonist of the 2009 film, *Precious*, a horrifically abused, obese, black teenage girl from Harlem, *New York Times Magazine* editor Lynn Hirschberg calls "a stand-in for anyone—black, white, male, female—who has ever been devalued or underestimated." While Hirschberg may be accused of overgeneralizing, such cultural artifacts as well as political rhetoric, judicial decisions, the rhetoric of business ventures, foreign policy rhetoric and decisions are all fodder for critical empathy, an examination of power relations in a framework of empathy including its absence.

Character identification in films or novels such as that described by Hirshberg recalls hooks, Sommer, and Spelman's warnings that empathy kills the other. For example, if Precious is a stand-in for anyone, she is appropriated as "us" and disappears. However, true third-level, cognitive and critical empathy does not dichotomize difference as something to accept or reject. In other words, just because the word *empathy* appears does not mean overlooking difference and embracing our common humanity. Empathy that fails to acknowledge difference is not empathetic. It is, rather, narcissistic, one-sided, and false. It is identification that has little to do with the other and everything to do with the self.

Third-level critical empathy is knowledge about the other based on recognizing the differences between *I* and *not-I* and where those boundaries lie. Most of the time, the view of empathy as solipsistic is applied toward middle-class whites' (especially students') views of marginalized others, in the case of our present discussion, in composition classes examining cultural artifacts like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph where students call on their experiences of suffering to empathize with

engaging characters. The problem lies with leaving critique at that, hoping somehow identifying with characters will change students' attitudes about race and oppression. Examinations of what empathy is, why students empathize, how it is used rhetorically, and how it shapes (or could shape) business and public policy and policy statements can yield a wealth of thoughtful classroom discussion and analysis.

This is all well and good when it comes to critiquing abstract power structures and generating compassion for others; however, teachers sometimes unwittingly allow those same power structures to emerge in critical classrooms, creating student resistance. The problem happens not only because students are not taken seriously, but the implicit message to middle-class, white students in critiques of white dominance is that they *are* the oppressor. Their specific roles in the dominant system of power are another dissertation entirely, but being characterized as oppressors is difficult to accept, especially for students who consider their views anti-racist and have many friends of other cultures. Being characterized as oppressors is even more difficult to accept for poor whites who come to community colleges on government retraining benefits or welfare-to-work programs such as WorkFirst. They have experienced little if any of the power afforded the dominant class despite their whiteness. Rather than theorize first and ask questions later, critique best begins by asking C.H. Knoblauch's famous question: "Who is to be liberated from what? Who gets to do the liberating?" (15).

One site many composition educators begin is the powerful critique of the so-called American dream, the seemingly thoughtless rush to embrace capitalist, competitive, acquisitive culture. However, the sole purpose of college for many students is a "better" job or more money. This may clash with teachers who see beyond students'

perhaps limited view of their own and their society's possibilities. However, if critical pedagogy is truly based in democracy, we must at least acknowledge if not "honor students' professed desires to get the credentials needed to secure professional-managerial jobs" (George 101). At community colleges, students often need jobs that simply pay more than minimum wage. Honoring them and their dreams requires empathy, cognitive perspective-taking, and reconciliation of our vision with theirs. A critical teacher's pessimistic vision may be students becoming cogs in the machine, perpetuating the unfair distribution of pecuniary and social privilege; a student's vision may be herself becoming a middle-class citizen able to afford at least a few American luxuries. To put this into Freirian perspective, critical educators may perceive these students as expecting an education where they are fed information, a "concept […] well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it" (Friere 76). Often these students "support the very practices that victimize them" (Berlin 34)—the definition of false consciousness.

Assuming "false consciousness" (33) of students, however, denies critical empathy and is, in the words of Jeff Smith, "undemocratic at best, if not infantilizing and frankly oppressive" (317). Lisa Delpit too suggests we may be quick to claim false consciousness on students' parts and deny their interpretations of the world (47). While seemingly striving for students' well-being, attempting to divest them of false consciousness wrests power once again from their hands and puts it in the teacher's, who becomes the authority on whose consciousness is true and whose false. This does not imply a lack of feeling on the part of instructors for their students. On the contrary,

committed critical teachers see a Borg-like corporate culture ready to assimilate students. It does, however, indicate an empathetic disconnect in the classroom. For professors with tenure, which effectively renders them immune to job loss, to suggest that disenfranchised students resist and reject their own aspirations of class mobility could be considered a middle-class luxury. It is a blow to young students' hopes and dreams and ludicrous to older, working-class students with children who must sacrifice their already-scarce time and money to attend college, resources which would otherwise benefit the family. Teachers must take great care to use cognitive perspective-taking or risk losing credibility entirely as they attempt to teach students to be more informed and critical citizens.

Arguably the most problematic students to progressive educators yet equally in need of empathy, critical and otherwise, are not necessarily marginalized others but white, middle-class conservatives especially students of faith, i.e., "fundamentalist" Christians. I use the term "students of faith" to denote not only Christian students but students who view life through a lens of faith that influences their coursework. If they disclose their faith and especially their conservative opinions in class discussions or in assignments, students may find that teachers differ with their views on everything from morality to politics to science. Mark Lilla in an editorial in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* claims academicians often regard these conservative ideas as pathological and the students who hold them as needing to change. While he may be overstating the case for many of us, Lilla has a point. In my ten years of studying composition from my master's program in 2001 to the close of my doctoral program in 2011, I have come across very, very few articles advocating anything close to a conservative political view.

Maxine Hairston's infamous and much vilified polemic "Diversity, Ideology and the Teaching of Writing" comes immediately to mind along with several equally polemical responses to it a year later, after which she vowed never to publish in composition again (and never did). Her politics are not particularly conservative in her article other than advocating a return to process pedagogy. She says writing should be at the heart of writing courses and that attempts to deal with diversity and ideology in writing classes reduce the complexity of such issues to "stereotyping and superficial thinking" (190). In fact, Hairston advocates empathy as an inroad to discussions of cultural issues in the classroom. She, like bell hooks, promotes valuing marginalized others through experience-sharing which creates critical empathy:

> I believe, however, that we can create a culturally inclusive curriculum in our writing classes by focusing on the experiences of our students. They are our greatest multicultural resource, one that is authentic, rich, and truly diverse. Every student brings to class a picture of the world in his or her mind that is constructed out of his or her cultural background and unique and complex experience. As writing teachers, we can help students articulate and understand that experience, but we also have the important job of helping every writer to understand that each of us sees the world through our own particular lens, one shaped by unique experiences. In order to communicate with others, we must learn to see through their lenses as well as try to explain to them what we see through ours. In an interactive classroom where students collaborate with other writers, this

> process of decentering so one can understand the "other" can foster genuine multicultural growth. (190)

In other words, it is writing itself that generates cognitive perspective-taking and multicultural understanding, a view similar to the pedagogical foundation of an assignment of Claude Mark Hurlbert's which he describes both in his graduate courses and in the anthology *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers*. In this assignment, students in a textbookless course write what they are burning to tell the world. Diversity is generated organically from the students in the class, just as Hairston advocates. Granted, she could make a little clearer the influence of culture on those supposedly unique experiences, but that is part of empathetic understanding—to know, to recognize how both individual experience and culture shapes human beings.

While I do not necessarily agree with Hairston's view that the study of ideology does not belong in the writing classroom, I do think that our own ideology influences our ability to understand and accept some students especially conservatives, which then affects relational, pedagogical, and critical empathy. When conservative students reveal themselves in our classrooms, that empathetic and ideological disconnect becomes a barrier to mutual recognition (see the section "The Morality Bias" later in this chapter) and contributes to student resistance to critical teaching. We say we tolerate all views and want students only to "make a thoughtful case for their position;" however, Richard Fulkerson articulates the common result—"a socially committed teacher will rarely find contrary views presented by an undergraduate to be sufficiently 'thoughtful'" (666). I admit this has been true for me and my students an uncomfortable number of times, for

example, when I receive "the abortion paper." I try to avoid it by suggesting that students cannot do justice to such a topic in the space of five or eight or ten pages or even, in the case of my basic writing students, a paragraph. In spite of that admonition, these papers still come. When I comment on them, I am always torn. Inevitably, they seem to me (especially the paragraphs) to be one-sided diatribes that dismiss the pain and complicated situations of women seeking abortions along with the issue's equally complicated ethics. I find myself scrutinizing each fallacy and finding fault much more often than papers with which I agree. Nor is it only abortion. Students write papers here in the northwest corner of Washington State that negate American Indian hunting and fishing rights, whale hunting as cultural revitalization, and Indian casinos. With these too, I try to resist the urge to rip to shreds what I view as their specious arguments. And I am one of the more empathetic teachers I know.

What we need to understand to enact pedagogical and critical empathy in the classroom is, like Lilla suggests, to learn what conservative arguments are on various subjects, allowing us to make more informed comments to help students better articulate their views and make their arguments "sufficiently thoughtful." There has, after all, been a strong intellectual tradition of conservatism in Western political philosophy throughout our country's history. We may not agree with these ideas, but we could help students discover a more rigorous foundation for their beliefs than those promoted by today's radio and television ideologues. It would also help to empathize with them relationally. To recognize, for example, that some students of faith *must* write papers against abortion. Most everyone they love and respect and most everything in their culture and books of scripture *demands* that they stand up for what they believe, even if they are persecuted for

it. Whether a professor's disdain of their ideas counts as "persecution" is another matter, but to them it counts. And to these students of faith, abortion is akin to *the Holocaust*. It does not matter that *we* think the comparison is baseless, misinformed, and perhaps even dangerous. *To them*, stopping abortion is all that matters. To empathize with these students, to value them as subjects worthy of mutual recognition and democracy, means to understand what accepting our ideology will cost them—their families, their culture, their religion.

Teacherly critical empathy means recognizing that some students may never be able to talk to their families about what they learned in class because it would be greeted with derision and with the expectation that the student defended the conservative view not only against the teacher but possibly against the whole class. That is a tall order for an eighteen-year-old. Or even a thirty-five-year-old. We not only need to exercise empathy with students holding conservative beliefs but also to understand students' focus on college as a path to a career and earning power. As I said earlier, older, working-class students and their families make great sacrifices for one member to go to college. The idea that doing so is somehow oppression is absurd to many of these students. It condescends to them and devalues everything they are trying to accomplish. No wonder some students resist critical pedagogy. Critical empathy not only means understanding students, but looking inside ourselves and seeing our own resistance. It means seeing that our own ideology is, after all, "only" ideology, just like theirs. As postmodernists and critical pedagogues point out, there is no ideology-free zone.

Rhetorical Empathy

Rhetorical empathy shifts further beyond the individual orientation of relational and pedagogical empathies and the larger, social justice focus of critical empathy. James Berlin argues that "in studying rhetoric—*the ways discourse is generated*—we are studying the ways in which knowledge comes into existence" (32, my italics); rhetorical empathy has to do with the way empathy functions in generating that discourse. Here, however, I limit it to persuasive discourse because the last of the five empathies, discursive empathy, encompasses the larger domain of Berlin's definition. The definition of rhetoric as more than just means of persuasion fits the multitude of ways people use language; rhetoric shapes events enabling them to come into being both as historical events and as discursive constructions that assume different forms depending on speakers, audiences, and situations. What I call *rhetorical empathy* here is that aspect of rhetoric that considers, sometimes unconsciously, the perspectives of others when generating persuasive discourse. By discourse, I mean mainly written and spoken language, but I would like to venture beyond the conventional understanding of it as linguistically-based to rhetoric as image in artistic and journalistic works as well as in our bodily presence, the image of ourselves and its effect on others.

Empathy fits particularly well with traditional understandings of rhetoric as Andrea Lunsford states in her contention that the Rogerian argumentative technique, i.e., the empathetic argument, is fully accounted for in the Aristotelian tradition (148), but empathy also moves rhetoric beyond that traditional understanding. Aristotelian rhetoric demands that the rhetor engage in assessing an audience's emotions as well as having a thorough grasp of how and under what circumstances emotions are provoked. This does

not necessarily mean sharing emotion with an audience. It implies cognitive analysis and at least superficial perspective-taking with a specific purpose in mind. Sometimes, however, perspective-taking means much more. Empathy is a threshold, a liminal space between rhetor and audience, between *I* and *not-I*, where close consideration of the other's perspective shapes discourse and knowledge as meaning is made when one person understands another. Understanding is negotiation based on each person's interpretation of the other, one to form the message and one to receive it, yet both are changed by the negotiation, by the mutual recognition present in understanding, adding to the socially constructed knowledges in which we are enmeshed. Consider, for example, that I would frame a conversation about Washington State's "Death with Dignity Act" with my husband, a critical care nurse, very differently from one with my students and different still from one with a conservative, Christian friend. All these conversations, both in the sending and receiving of messages, involve negotiating the meaning of words as well as meanings generated from various presuppositions about what exists, what is good, and what is possible (Berlin 21). We attempt, with varying degrees of success, to interpret those messages, but the very fact that we frame them differently for different audiences indicates that empathetic perspective-taking influences the production of our discourse. Even the image of ourselves we put forth when dressing for work in the morning is cultural negotiation that engages cognitive perspective-taking. If I am an administrator, I am much more likely to wear a suit and, if male, a tie. Why? Because I know cultural signals send the message "I am in charge" if I dress that way. I also know because of the way people react to me. If I teach, on the other hand, I may be more likely to dress casually, especially if, philosophically, I advocate a student-centered classroom. Casual

dress says, "I am one of you." Students presumably see us as more approachable in casual dress, although making such assumptions neglects that fact that no matter how we dress, students are well aware that we give the grades. The messages we send, whether by spoken or written discourse or the discourse of appearance, is rhetorical and interpreted through cognitive perspective-taking.

In the study of the rhetoric of literature, Suzanne Keen claims a large role for empathy in both the consumption and production of literary works. She argues empathy occurs not only in face-to-face situations but also through reading and defines it as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect [that] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (208). Keen provides a great deal of research from neuropsychology and other fields to support her contention, although her definition overlooks research showing the empathy is not only emotional but cognitive. Keen suggests two categories of empathy as it relates to literature, one reader-focused and one writer-focused, what I call readerly and writerly empathies. Readerly empathy occurs most easily when readers identify with characters whose cultures and, perhaps, situations are similar (214; see also Krebs 1145 and Louie 568). Writerly empathy occurs when writers employ various narrative techniques that create characters with whom we (and often writers themselves) identify; narrative situations can also invite empathy in ways we would never otherwise encounter.[1] Authors can accomplish this through extended internal views of characters and using the first person (Booth 245). This helps create the perception of characters as complex beings we can understand even if we do not agree with their actions. Some bring particular

[1] For an extended discussion of narrative techniques designed to generate readerly empathy, see Suzanne Keen's book, *Empathy and the Novel* (2007).

difficulties and problematize the whole idea of readerly empathy such as Bigger Thomas, the violent, almost hopelessly angry and hate-filled protagonist of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, a work that is sometimes assigned in composition courses that use literature as an introduction to multiculturalism presumably in hopes that students will gain a better understanding of racism and oppression (Webster and Walter). That view, while naïve to some literature scholars like Berlant, Schneider, and Sommer, assumes readers' empathetic identification with literary characters can lead to changed attitudes and eventually to pro-social action (Batson's empathy>attitude>action model once again), a view Keen explores but does not necessarily advocate.

She does, however, advocate the view that *writers*, and by extension I would add film directors and visual artists, often seek changed attitudes and pro-social action on the part of their audiences; it is this aspect of Keen's theory of narrative empathies in which I am especially interested. She says writerly empathy designed to move readers to new consciousness and even pro-social action consists of three forms: *bounded strategic empathy*, *ambassadorial strategic empathy*, and *broadcast strategic empathy*. Bounded strategic empathy is designed for an in-group audience who readily identifies with characters and situations similar to theirs; ambassadorial strategic empathy is designed to create empathy in specific readers for specific reasons; broadcast strategic empathy is designed to stimulate feelings of empathy from all readers by narrative situations and characters appealing to a more universal audience (215). She calls these *strategic*; however, if they are strategic, they are *rhetorical*. As I said, Keen does not make the claim that reading necessarily leads to pro-social action, although she does discuss many authors who claim just that, who, using strategic empathy, hope to "alter readers' views

about the extent of the empathetic circle" (xxii) and provoke altruistic motivation and action.

The study of these constructs, bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast rhetorical empathies, would be useful both in the classroom and in answer to Theresa Kulbaga's call for a greater understanding of empathy as a key transnational discourse. Consider the evolution of the rhetoric used to justify the Iraq war under the Bush administration. First, it was marketed rhetorically as a hunt for weapons of mass destruction because Americans feared chemical, biological, and nuclear attack after 9/11. This could be considered bounded or ambassadorial rhetorical empathy because the message was designed for an in-group audience (scared Americans) and for a specific purpose—fomenting war (despite the benevolent connotation of the word "ambassador"). Next, it was dubbed Operation Iraqi Freedom, which implied the freeing of the inhabitants of Iraq, appealing to Americans' empathy and compassion using broadcast rhetorical empathy that also attempted to appeal to citizens of other countries.

As more images, news stories, novels, and films circulated and Americans began to learn more about Middle-Eastern culture, broadcast empathy and perhaps covert ambassadorial empathy grew stronger and more common. One such work was Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* published in 2003. Kulbaga and others, especially Hamid Dabashi from Columbia University, make the debatable claim that this book is a disguised attempt to solicit the support of the American public for US military action against Iran by using empathetic identification with and compassion for the women in the story who are forced to wear veils and submit to abusive husbands and an abusive government. Kulbaga asserts that the empathetic appeal in these texts cannot

be separated from global consumer culture, geopolitics, and American imperialism, "public rhetorical spheres of influence in which empathetic identification and military violence are not necessarily considered mutually exclusive" (518). In other words, she is claiming that this example of rhetorical empathy is designed to inspire empathetic aggression (see Chapter 3) rather than pro-social action.

What about rhetorical empathy as an appropriating and colonizing force especially in the consumption and production of literature and other media? As I point out in previous chapters, Berlant, Sommer, Spelman, and hooks use the most visceral form of empathy, that which is akin to pity, as the grounds, the definition, on which they negate it. In the definition I propose at the beginning of this chapter, empathy sometimes occurs spontaneously but is more often a process, a conscious choice, and limited (see the next section discursive empathy which discusses empathy's boundaries). This allows for an empathy that is not appropriating, colonizing, and commodifying, which is not to say more thoughtful empathy happens by chance. Certainly feelings of sympathy and pity are brought about by images of and literature about suffering. But pity is not empathy. What these scholars are talking about is commodifying *pity*. If readers of novels about suffering say they relate to characters in superficial ways, that is not a failure of empathy because there is no empathy there, no real understanding of another's internal states or perspectives.

Certainly parts of novels are meant, as Sommer says, to be inscrutable to some readers, i.e., white readers. Those parts we could characterize as being controlled by bounded rhetorical empathy. Do authors intend, however, for readers to experience no empathy at all? Certainly not. There would be no novels if there were no characters with

whom to identify. Many, if not most, novelists, at least those whose books sell in the United States and Europe, do not, *cannot*, rely entirely on non-white, in-group audiences. What then of the rest of the novel, those parts that are not designed to be inscrutable? If those authors intend the audience to find some common ground with the characters and perhaps even learn something from the authors' works, one of the great pleasures of reading for many people, then the supposedly superficial rush of identification with characters is more than justified. This complaint belies yet another assumption about empathy which is similar to Dennis Lynch's argument against it, that we empathize fully and completely or not at all. If we remove the foundation of faulty assumptions from underneath empathy and *then* explore what it means to empathize, suddenly it seems not quite so appropriating, colonizing, commodifying, and useless after all.

Discursive Empathy

Discursive empathy is where the five empathies I propose along with the research on empathy in other fields come to a confluence, where the terms of the definition I set at the beginning most resonate. Discursive empathy has to do with the role empathy plays in communication, in generating discourse—James Berlin's definition of rhetoric—with all of its attendant social construction and choice. I begin with Dennis Lynch's conception of rhetorics of promixity as well as a new psychotherapeutic paradigm termed *discursive empathy*, formulated by psychologists Stacey L. Sinclair and Gerald Monk (2005), a theory that rejects the traditional liberal-humanist views of empathy that rely on a self independent of sociocultural context and instead relies on a poststructuralist accounting of the self as arising from competing cultural discourses. This foundation will help show how empathy mediates discourse (and vice versa) and, consequently, meaning making.

The dangers and limitations of empathy from a wide range of rhetorical perspectives that Lynch summarizes in the literature review of his article are echoed by Sinclair and Monk's critique of the liberal-humanist therapeutic paradigm advocated for the last thirty years in counseling psychology. Sinclair and Monk trace the development of this model of self as independent agent to Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (among others). This self is autonomous, unified, and apart from the influence of culture. Maslow's pinnacle of an individual human's progress, self-actualization, Sinclair and Monk call the "epitom[e] [of] the liberal-humanist position that individuals are capable of being in charge of their own lives" (335). Empathy in this therapeutic approach supposes that, while human beings are separate, unique individuals, there is also a universal human experience that the therapist can access. This is the essence of Rogerian empathy, including that which informs Rogerian rhetoric—the feelings and experiences of the client/audience can be grasped accurately while the therapist/rhetor maintains the separateness of his or her own identity.

What Sinclair and Monk call the "liberal-humanist" approach to empathy is the same one that informs virtually all of the definitions of empathy used by compositionists and described in Chapter 2. For example, Lynch, in spite of his complex notion of understanding others through his theory of rhetorics of proximity, could not bring himself to call this process empathy because to do so, working from the liberal-humanist definition, would have neglected necessary limits to it; in his words, "empathy presumes that we can fully and completely understand one another" (8). Although Theresa Kulbaga does not credit a source for her definition, she claims, "empathy [is] defined as the ability to imagine another as a distinct and unique human individual" (517), a definition that

recalls liberal-humanist psychology's "notion that human beings have a unique inner core" (Sinclair and Monk 336). bell hooks' reference to mutual recognition is similar: engaged teachers approach students with "the will and desire to respond to our unique beings" (13). Like the compositionists and cultural studies scholars who have disparaged it, Sinclair and Monk's critique of psychology's liberal-humanist underpinnings of empathy rests on similar grounds: that Rogerian-style empathy "naïve[ly] privilege[es] the individual and his or her inner process as distinct from the sociocultural context" (336). Their critique is aimed not at dismissing empathy out of hand but to argue for a nuanced form of it, a discursive empathy that accounts for both the therapist's and the client's participation and positions in the cultural discourses, dominant and otherwise, in which they are immersed.

What Sinclair and Monk offer is the heart of one of the most important points of this dissertation—the recognition and valuing of limitations to empathy while, at the same time, not dispensing with it. Third-level empathy, cognitive perspective-taking, concedes that empathy exists but is never full and complete; indeed, "empathy" that fails to recognize spaces where it does not exist is not empathy at all but narcissistic self-delusion. Lynch begins to approach this idea through his rhetorics of proximity by which he means there are boundaries in our identification with others, and, therefore, we can draw near but not cross those thresholds. Likewise, Sinclair and Monk point out that the therapeutic approach of discursive empathy demands therapists:

> on a constant basis, review the dominant cultural discourses that are helping shape the relationship they have with the people they are working with. In this way, therapists do not presume to understand their clients'

> experiences; rather they spend time 'unpacking' the cultural knapsack that each client carries. (343)

Therapists ask questions that help clients name the assumptions that direct their behaviors and discuss those assumptions as being "outcomes of various positions taken up in amongst a sea of discourses" (344). Asking such questions requires empathetic curiosity, a key component in the definition I provide at the beginning of this chapter. By recognizing beliefs and assumptions as culturally situated, people can decide to embrace or resist discourses that "restrict and restrain [their] behavior, and may also offer the potential to liberate them from oppressive cultural practices" (341). Compositionists have been saying this since the 1980s.

While Sinclair and Monk's focus is on helping clients identify and resist such discourses in order to overcome personal problems, this idea has significance in our field because these culturally situated discourses mediate meaning, understanding, and misunderstanding. To illustrate, I will resurrect an old idea here, I.A. Richards' theory of feedforward. This theory asserts that we anticipate, *feedforward*, our words being understood in a certain way by our audience, which is then confirmed (or not) by the *feedback* received, i.e., a response that indicates how our communication is understood. Whether we are understood or not depends, like Sinclair and Monk say, on culturally-situated conversations and understandings surrounding us and our interlocutor. Richards calls these comparison fields, the communicative and experiential contexts from which we draw to create mental representations of what is said. The farther our stores of culturally shared meanings—comparison fields—are from each other, the less likely we will understand one another. This ability to understand one another depends on a kind of

ideal speech situation such as Jürgen Habermas envisions (paraphrased in Foss, Foss, and Trapp 247). We feedforward a conversational partners' reaction to our claim, assuming he or she is a rational, equal participant in the discourse and will understand us as we intend, as we understand ourselves. This is what I mean when I say conversation *is* empathy, although an empathy that is necessarily incomplete, the degree depending on the depth of our stores of shared meanings.

This idea has currency in neuroscience as well. The interchange between conversation partners—and, conceivably, for our purpose as compositionists, between readers and writers—neuroscientists say, is facilitated by mirror neurons, the physiological basis of empathy as discussed in Chapter 3. Since mirror neurons *represent* action, they also "represent the link between the sender and the receiver of each message" in communication (Rizolatti and Arbib 188); in other words, through mirror neurons, the receiver "understands" the action/words and constructs an appropriate response. Alvin Liberman, an influential researcher on the psychology of speech production, describes the discursive boundaries of communication in a way not unlike I.A. Richards' feedforward and feedback:

> In all communication, sender and receiver must be bound by a common understanding about what counts; what counts for the sender must count for the receiver, or else communication does not occur. (qtd. in Rizzolatti and Arbib 188, 1998)

Liberman's statement also recalls Sinclair and Monk's discursive empathy because what "counts" is, of course, situated within a sociocultural context. The specific sociocultural phenomena that determine what counts are similar to I.A. Richards' comparison fields

and are similarly limited in discursive ways. Richards says, the "comprehending of any utterance is guided by any number of *partially* similar situations in which *partially* similar utterances have occurred" (Richards 23, my italics); Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp paraphrase Richards' account of communication as a transfer of symbols through similar experiences as "an experience occur[ing] in the hearer's mind that is like the experience in the speakers' mind" (29) which is facilitated by familiarity and close relationships (Ogden and Richards 206-7). Where familiarity and closeness are absent, empathy and, consequently, communication is less likely to occur. This is the essence of discursive empathy.

Thus despite empathy being "all but abandoned" (Lynch 6) by postmodern and postcolonial theorists because of its perceived limitless intrusion, discursive empathy recognizes boundaries to understanding. Discursive empathy is the essence, the foundation of the definition I suggest at the beginning of this chapter. Anticipating how another person will respond to our message is making a conscious choice to be cognitively aware of their internal states and perspectives; however, we must realize, as rhetors and rhetoricians, that those understandings are highly contextual. Compositionists and rhetoricians have been reluctant to recognize that considering audience means empathizing because of the cultural baggage of empathy's liberal-humanist connotations, as well as its conflation with compassion and pity. Empathy is not an always-good ethical imperative. It is a useful tool as "good" as the purpose for which it is employed. Audience analysis—discursive rhetorical empathy—likewise, is simply a tool. Examining discursive empathy would allow compositionists to reopen discussions of rhetorical empathy, whereby the degree to which we empathize and why becomes the object of

study, recognizing and studying the limits to understanding as well as the sometimes-surprising sites in which we do understand each other. Recognizing the discursive aspects of empathy reenergizes discussions of relational and pedagogical empathy with students, those with whom we empathize and those who seem other. The study of the cultural stores of shared meanings surrounding the writing instruction we and our students experience(d) may help us better understand how to help them and to recognize when we are relying on our own experiences instead of theirs in, for example, writing conferences. That is what Kia Jane Richmond means when she discusses her "empathy" being her own experience infiltrating her perception of her student's experience.

The part of my definition of empathy gleaned from Suzanne Keen asserts that empathy happens not only through direct experience with another but also through reading about another's condition; this too is an area where readerly empathy may inappropriately conflate readers' own experiences with those of the characters they read. Rather than something teachers need to thwart, discursive empathy reimagines the empathetic reading experience as something to study, to directly confront ways in which the cultural discourses of readers' promote and impede empathic accuracy with characters in literary works. Many in our field already engage in these activities in the classroom every day. We ask students to analyze audiences; we ask them, in Peggy McIntosh's words, to unpack their invisible knapsacks, which is actually an exercise in empathy. On one hand, white students realize how utterly different their experiences are from those of people of color, yet through recognizing where empathy stops, understanding—cognitive perspective-taking—begins.

The Relation of the Five Empathies

These five empathies work both together and separately and are a part of what we do each day even if we do not know about pedagogical empathy or rhetorical empathy or critical empathy. Discursive empathy, the most encompassing of the five, suggests a way of thinking not only about what writing is but how we, within the context of culture, frame our experience and communicate. It begins with the activity of mirror neurons that, as we have seen, not only govern automatic empathic reactions but also influence communication allowing our brains to mirror action, essentially creating an embodied process of thinking (Powell, 2007). For example, to *talk about* fishing requires *imagining* fishing which is similar, at least to our brains, of *doing* fishing. Such mirroring is not a static activity but changes with culture ("Culture Influences Brain Cells," 2007). This means the doing of fishing appears differently in each fisher's brain, depending on her culture and experiences with it as well as all the conversations about fishing she has had throughout her life. The conversation of humankind structures all of our conceptions of what exists, what is good, and what is possible. When two or more interlocutors join in conversation about something, their previous experiences and conversations guide understanding and successful communication (or unsuccessful, as the case may be). In other words, the fishers' stores of cultural shared meanings, i.e., discursive empathy, allow them to understand one another, allow communication to take place.

Those fish stories also guide their brains' images of what fishing *is*, what it *looks like*, and what it *means*. While each interlocutor likely pictures the activity slightly differently, the closer in location, position, situation, and experience, the closer those mental pictures may be, again an example of discursive empathy. While each

conversational partner has not had quite the same experiences, they may be similar enough, as determined by their respective cultural practices of fishing, that successful communication can take place. If the interlocutors' fishing locations are very different, the conversation changes; salmon fishing in the Pacific Northwest is different, for example, from fishing for catfish in the South or fishing for marlin from a yacht in the Caribbean. Position and situation add to the mix. American Indian subsistence fishers and white sports fishers, for example, have completely different cultural stores of shared meanings and mental pictures surrounding salmon fishing in the Pacific Northwest. Their positions are so fraught with power differentials, the purpose for which fishing exists, the cultural meaning of catching fish—in other words, the implications for what exists, what is good, and what is possible—that these two people who both love fishing may not even be able to have a conversation at all. They speak the same language, they catch the same species, it has the same or similar effects on their taste buds, and they both enjoy the activity, but they cannot empathize and thus have difficulty communicating. This is not only discursive empathy at work but also critical empathy. Critical empathy accounts for spaces empathy does not, cannot, or will not exist. Thus discursive empathy is both the physiology of communication and the meeting and sharing of culturally-based communication with critical empathy determining where people can and cannot share perspectives. This is not unlike many extant theories of discourse.

Rhetorical empathy is within the domain of discursive and critical empathy because it is a way we use language to communicate persuasively but that communication is limited. While James Berlin's definition of rhetoric (the ways discourse is generated) makes it almost indistinguishable from discursive empathy, here I

stress rhetorical empathy's persuasive qualities. Rhetorical empathy can be thought of as an attempt to control the variables of how a communication will be received by others and is, in that sense, both individual-to-individual and one-to-many. Rhetorical empathy from the author's point of view is a unidirectional imagining and cognitive perspective-taking of potential readers' cultures, conversations, experiences, expectations, and needs. Since the audience has no contact with the author, readers experience empathy with the content and characters the author creates. While an author or director of a film must rely solely on cognitive perspective-taking to imagine his or her audience, readers' experience of empathy through character identification is likely to be much broader and at all three levels.

To return to Theresa Kulbaga's analysis of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, in the actual experience on which Nafisi bases her memoir, she describes relational empathy with her students individually but she also practices rhetorical and pedagogical empathy in the literary works she chooses for them, works Kulbaga claims "favor […] bootstrap style individualism and free choice" (508). It is Nafisi's empathic accuracy that Kulbaga questions here; Nafisi imagines "her girls'" fascination with Western works and assumes their need for individualism and free choice. Just because Nafisi's choices may not be accurate do not mean they are not empathetic. Nafisi's exercise of rhetorical empathy extends not only in the novel but toward American readers, an empathy that apparently resonated deeply as evidenced by its 117 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list as well as numerous enthusiastic reviews from prominent publications like *NYT* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Whether readers of *Reading Lolita* now advocate regime change is an open question but illustrates that these

empathies are indeed an important part of a transnational rhetoric as Kulbaga says, especially as they result or attempt to result in social action.

Relational empathy, while the most visceral and the one with which we may be most familiar, still plays a large part in the other empathies. While discursive, critical, and rhetorical empathies are more encompassing, at the same time, they all involve people communicating and affect communication. Relational empathy is the act of understanding the perspective of another by seeing, hearing about, or reading about another's condition and is, in that sense, unidirectional and one-on-one for the most part. It is also never complete, always partial. Conversational partners, like people who enjoy fishing, share common ground which is, at least to some degree, understandable at any one or all three levels of empathy. Pedagogical empathy is similar but deliberately chosen for the purpose of helping students become better writers through specific knowledge of their strengths, weaknesses, and writing experiences.

While analyzing, categorizing, and labeling work well for developing Western theoretical traditions, doing so also tends to atomize and even shrink the emergent concept. I explicate each empathy individually in this section, create a watershed metaphor and a fishing example to more easily imagine these empathies and how they interact, but this explication likely leaves out a great deal and especially minimizes the interaction of all five empathies. I analyze and explain them not to deconstruct empathy but to complicate it. Most of us tend to think we know what empathy is, a metaphor for kind and gracious conduct, walking in another's shoes, a "rule" Westerners even deem "golden". Empathy is likely not five separate things but likely not just one either. It is an

intricate web of behaviors and attitudes that affects our personal, political, and global lives every day even when we do not recognize it.

Empathy's Biases: A Cautious Vindication

The Familiarity Biases

Although we have seen the many arguments against empathy from compositionists and cultural studies scholars, the main difficulties can be distilled to concerns about empathic biases, especially the familiarity biases. Who empathizes with whom and why? I addressed the doubts of compositionists extensively in Chapter 2, but these questions are being asked outside our field as well. Consider the controversy generated when, upon Supreme Court Justice David Souter's retirement, President Obama suggested that justices need "that quality of empathy, of understanding and identifying with people's hopes and struggles as an essential ingredient for arriving at just decisions." The Republican conservative senator, Jeff Sessions, in an editorial in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* asked rhetorically whether empathy with one side precludes empathizing with the other. The thrust of his argument is that we can only empathize with one "side" at a time, and that side is usually comprised of those with whom one is most closely associated, an argument similar to those posed in Chapter 2. The assumption of this argument is that someone who comes from a working-class and/or non-white, non-middle-class background such as Justice Sonia Sotomayor will empathize only with litigants who share her experience. We have seen, however, that while the familiarity biases are alive and well, people can still empathize with others quite unlike them. Consider the study, for example, that examined participants' attitudes toward convicted murderers. While certainly one might pity, have compassion for, and even empathize

with victims, developing empathy with the killers shows the human capability of empathizing with *very* different others and more than one person at a time.

In composition courses, students may tend, at least at first, to empathize only with those espousing one side of an argument or with one character or set of characters in a literary reading; recognizing that, most compositionists and, indeed, most colleges and universities consider it important that students learn to see, evaluate, and value varied perspectives on social issues. At my community college, not unlike many across the country, one of the four core critical thinking competencies of the general undergraduate curriculum is to recognize how individual perspectives and values influence critical thinking. In the English department, two of the outcomes of the advanced composition course and evidenced in the outcomes of the less advanced courses including basic writing is the ability to demonstrate an awareness of how personal biases influence one's own view and affect a piece of writing. Students also demonstrate the ability to weigh and summarize opposing views fairly and accurately. The assumption behind calling these *competencies*, that is, abilities students have acquired over the course of their educations and have demonstrated in order to graduate from the institution, assumes these competencies are *taught*.

If we educators, compositionists and otherwise, teach these competencies, it is vital to understand what biases are, the factors that influence how students develop them, and how their opinions can change. Empathy and the familiarity bias exert a tremendous influence over students' views of social issues in two ways. One is empathizing with people affected by public policy and the other is the empathic influence of the ideology of students' family and friends. For example, suppose a composition instructor introduces

a unit on feminism, not an unusual choice in our curricula. The unit likely consists of readings, some academic and abstract, some highly personal and emotionally evocative. The two-fold effect of empathy occurs most obviously with the emotionally evocative readings where students may empathize and sympathize with the most sympathetic character(s), yet they also carry empathetic inclinations from their families that can enhance or block their recognition of feminist concerns. If their home culture does not accept feminism or even views it with contempt using terms like Rush Limbaugh's *feminazi*, encouraging students to accept a more balanced view or even any feminist views at all may be difficult if not impossible because of the empathic bond with their families, i.e., the familiarity bias. Accepting feminism may also come at great cost to such a student, a cost they may not be willing to bear—the loss of the acceptance and love of their families. It is also a developmental leap to realize one can identify with more than one person or group at a time. Educators need to understand, to empathize with these students, even if they do not agree with their views, and especially to recognize the cost not only of accepting higher education's admittedly "liberal" views of social issues but grasp that there is familial and cultural pressure to not listen to such views at all. This cultural divide is a continuing challenge to college and universities' core requirements of recognizing and/or appreciating cultural diversity.

The Morality Bias

While the familiarity biases influence both students and educators, the morality bias is much more troubling. While most of us would not go so far as to describe conservatism as "pathological" (Lilla), left-leaning views are widely held and propagated by faculty and administrators, not just as a result of thoughtful reflection and study but

also because of empathy with familiar others holding our moral ideology. Recall David Seitz' argument against critical pedagogy I mention in Chapter 2. He says accusations of false consciousness posit students as politically deficit, "once again with implications of a moral lack" (509). Do these students, these victims of false consciousness, really lack a moral foundation in their lives? Probably not. They, for the most part, are law-abiding citizens who help their neighbors just like us. What they lack is the *same* moral foundation as ours; therefore, empathy fails with these students. Attempts at teaching critical consciousness fail because of the interference of the morality bias and the resulting empathetic disconnect on both sides of the lectern. Some teachers do not fully understand or value the perspective of students who do not share left-leaning moral views. Some students' views even seem abhorrent. Likewise, students do not fully understand or value the perspective of teachers who do not share right-leaning moral beliefs, and often so-called liberal (especially leftist) ideologies are intolerable to conservative students. What is the result? Resistance all around. There are any number of composition books and articles dedicated to students resisting teachers but few, if any, to teachers resisting students. While attributing all student resistance of critical pedagogies to empathetic disconnect oversimplifies a complex problem, we cannot ignore empathy's vital connection to understanding resistance, both our own and our students', if we are to succeed in our goal of having students at least recognize the value of others' positions.

Conclusion

This chapter explores important aspects of the function of empathy in composition and develops a theory for it including an expanded definition of empathy as a conscious choice to take the perspective of others in an always-contextual milieu. It is

vital for compositionists, scholars who study the use and structures of power in language, to study ways empathy affects discourse, how it shapes what can and cannot be said and who can and cannot say it. That analysis is not predicated on empathy being an always-ethical, always-accurate, and always-available to everyone everywhere shibboleth. Quite the opposite. It is through the study of empathy's boundaries that we better understand communication and the lack thereof. In class, seeing empathy as cognitive perspective-taking allows us to move beyond the Jeffrey Berman-type writing-as-psychotherapy classroom or one where empathy becomes a panacea to the lack of student engagement. It allows teachers to better understand students' writing strengths and weaknesses and to use that knowledge to help them become better writers. A class which accounts for empathy is one in which the interaction of our own perspectives with the perspectives others is explored in rhetoric. Its basis arises from the five empathies I theorize function in composition courses—relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy, which have all been heretofore mostly implicit and are now explicit in our understanding of how writing is taught and how communication functions. While any model or metaphor for complex theoretical constructs is necessarily reductive, I provide a model of empathy as a watershed to help visualize it as a part of the natural world and as an explanation of the empathies' interaction. We are still left with the empathic biases of familiarity and morality, which are inherent in the human experience of empathy, but I end with a cautious vindication of them. Recognizing the discursive nature of the empathetic experience will allow us to better explore and understand it. That is where the next and final chapter leads.

CHAPTER 5

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR EMPATHY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

Introduction

As I have tried to show in the previous four chapters, empathy is much more than assuming our feelings are the same as another's. In Chapter 4, I discuss empathy's function in composition studies, applying a more complex definition to change our conception of composition's landscape through the five empathies described in the previous chapter—relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy. Here in Chapter 5, I try to come to terms with this changed landscape by suggesting strategies to better incorporate the empathies in the writing classroom, and by discussing some limitations of empathy and the limitations of this study, proposing areas for further research, and reaffirming the importance of studying empathy in composition and especially in rhetoric in order to understand its function in discourse, where it provokes both intercultural understanding and political rage. The chapter ends with an admittedly utopian view of empathy's possibilities as a widespread ethical imperative.

Empathy Enacted in the Everyday Composition Classroom

While there is hardly a homogenous, "everyday" composition classroom, what I mean to discuss in this section is empathy enacted in the many writing courses that do not focus on critical teaching as a primary (or even secondary) goal. As I said in the section on pedagogical empathy in the previous chapter, empathies are enacted in composition courses in many ways that educators may not at first recognize as being empathetic. Concerning relational empathy, knowing students is important. Knowing them means

identifying the contextual imbrication of students' writing and personal experiences that at times stymie them and at others enable them to write better than we do. Knowing students in this way is pedagogically useful, but it is also relationally useful. There is no doubt that forming positive, productive relationships with our students benefits teaching and learning. Lad Tobin says creating and maintaining positive relationships with them is "the *primary* thing we do if we want to be successful writing teachers" (15, Tobin's italics). bell hooks, by advocating engaged pedagogy and mutual recognition, agrees. As we see in Chapter 3, empathy is a vital part of such relationships. Empathy leads to liking, liking to trust, trust to willingness to experiment with writing and/or ideas. While liking is no substitute for effective implementation of curricular goals, it would be hard to implement much of anything in a climate of *dis*like. Relational empathy is foundational to creating a classroom environment in which students can thrive.

A useful tool to begin to use empathy pedagogically is to exercise empathetic curiosity by asking students at the beginning of the term about their writing experiences. This is not unlike Ira Shor researching students' cultural and political lives but, instead, focusing on their writing lives. For example, students could write an in-class essay on an experience that shaped them as writers, or they could respond to a set of specific questions about what they know and/or were taught about writing. Also useful would be eliciting stories of how they learned something new. The responses can suggest ways to approach teaching that takes into account their previous experiences and successes. (I do not mean to propose some sort of learning styles inventory, as that theory has been increasingly discredited.) While he does not explain his methodology for discovering his students' past experiences, Mike Rose, in his article "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and

the Stifling of Language," gives an excellent example of the usefulness of understanding students' writing backgrounds in class. He lists five blocked writers, Ruth, Laurel, Martha, Mike, and Sylvia, and the rules which stymie them and five non-blocked writers, Dale, Ellen, Debbie, Susan, and Miles, and the more flexible rules which help guide but do not impede their writing. Asking in-depth questions, thus exercising empathetic curiosity, yields a host of disempowering perceptions of what writing is supposed to look like to which Rose would otherwise have had no access. At the end of his article he suggestions taking a writing history inventory (134), the results of which are used to "reveal which rule or inflexible plan […] may lie at the base of the student's writing problem" which is what makes a remedy possible (134). Compositionists have likely used such strategies in class and may have even read this not-so-new article yet not considered its empathetic basis. The strategy Rose proposes is an act of cognitive perspective-taking made possible by exercising empathetic curiosity to improve pedagogy.

It is again by employing empathetic curiosity that teachers can give help attuned to students' writing difficulties rather than appropriating their writing experiences as our own as in Kia Jane Richmond's article. This is a space where both pedagogical empathy and discursive empathy operate. Pedagogical empathy causes teachers to seek answers to questions about students' classroom lives; discursive empathy causes teachers to examine their own privileged positions as writers and educated people, perhaps coming to the teaching profession never having imagined themselves as anything other than members of the professional class who write well. From such a position, it is difficult to imagine accurately the problems struggling writers bring to class. Community college instructors

often work with a very diverse student population, with some from working-class/working-poor families who may never have developed the love for reading and writing that the educator brings the writing process. Teachers may also work with immigrants, legal and otherwise, refugees from war-torn regions, military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, non-native speakers of English who may or may not be literate in their own languages. There are few options to work effectively with such an array of experiences other than to exercise curiosity and begin teaching from what we learn by asking.

Another empathy to enact in writing classrooms is rhetorical, both with students imagining an audience for their own writing and with a rhetorical analysis of course readings and other materials. Aristotelian rhetoric is based in empathy as I argue in Chapter 2 with Aristotle himself urging speakers to know and understand the emotions and beliefs of others in order to persuade them. Freshman English classes frequently include Aristotelian audience analysis as a method of writing persuasive discourse. Framing I.A. Richards' feedforward as rhetorical empathy is another way to teach persuasive writing; our identification with others' cultural stores of shared meanings—empathy—contributes to communication and sometimes to misunderstanding. Not only are these examples of rhetorical empathy useful in teaching students to write, but they are effective analytical tools when approaching readings and course materials. Questions about readings often center on trying to discover what perspectives and assumptions the author brings to the work and what the author seems to assume about readers. Suzanne Keen's rhetorical empathies—broadcast, ambassadorial, and bounded—would be interesting new elements to examine in class. In what ways do authors solicit readers'

empathy and even compassion and in what ways do they hold us at arm's length or even thwart our understanding? Why do they do so? Writing instructors already encourage students to ask similar questions of the materials presented to them in class. This exercise names the phenomenon of understanding others as empathy, something they are already somewhat used to thinking about, and frames the discussion in, perhaps, a less abstract way. Asking students to define empathy in the class and discuss what roles it plays in communication would inspire lively class discussion and may lead them to think in new ways about different others.

All this might sound like empathy embraced but for the fact that we sometimes do not, cannot, or choose not to empathize or, more important, choose not to act even though we empathize. The latter implies the important distinction between empathy and compassion and compassionate action on behalf of others. Mike Rose mentions one of his blocked students, Laurel, turned in papers weeks late (128). Although Rose seems to have compassion for her in still accepting those assignments, not all compositionists are so tolerant even if they do empathize with the cause. At other times, students miss class for days or even weeks—with a good excuse, yes, but the empathy teachers may or may not experience with students who lose a loved one or experience domestic violence during the term does not necessarily translate into tolerating late or shoddy work or extended absences. A further difficulty with empathy, also illustrated in Chapter 2, is whether empathizing (or not empathizing) the content of a student's essay changes the grading situation. An obvious example of this is the self-disclosing essay. Does our empathy or, moreover, our compassion make us overlook the student's fragments and comma splices? The answer depends on the teacher. In composition studies literature on responding to

student self-disclosure, including my own contribution, there are no sure answers or even good answers to this question. Asking it implies that the experience empathy is equivalent to acting on another's behalf. The point of this dissertation is not to argue for action; it is to realize that empathy has a visceral affect on classroom dynamics. Self-disclosing essays are only one way student writing affects our empathy. Students sometimes espouse views intolerable to teachers. Empathy thwarted also can change the grading situation as Richard Fulkerson claims when he says compositionists rarely find arguments they disagree with in student papers sufficiently thoughtful. My point, again, is not to argue for some sort of solution to this conundrum or even that there is a solution. My point is that students' and teachers' empathy and their lack of empathy affects the classroom every day in a host of ways.

Empathy and Critical Teaching

A positive relationship with students is key in helping them be open to exploring new points of view. While teachers are not therapists, teaching and therapy do share a similar goal—to change behavior. Human behavior means the way people respond/react to their environment; education means developing one's capacities for responding to that environment. The need to educate therefore assumes a therapeutic aim: an individual's capacities are un- or underdeveloped and require change. When teaching writing, we ask students to change the way they respond to their environment by, for example, suggesting the need to develop the organizational structure of an essay and ways to do so. Think, however, of what we ask students to change when we suggest new ways of envisioning their social environment. Instead of accepting comfortable notions of meaning that have seemed inherent to their lives, we ask them to change the way they think about

everything from their families to the entire political, ethical, and economic structure. As bell hooks' student says, "'We take your class. We learn to look at world from a critical standpoint, one that considers race, sex, and class. And we can't enjoy life anymore" (42). hooks reminds us that the change critical teaching demands of students requires a compassionate approach, of which empathy is an inseparable part.

There is no doubt many teachers of writing would like to see their students make this change and move to new consciousness. The first step in that process, whether we are radical teachers or just want students to become better at critical thinking, must be to ask ourselves what our goals are in moving students to new understanding and/or action. Perhaps we "just" want them to think more deeply about issues addressed in the classroom to help them become better writers within the context of curricula and goals for undergraduate education. Perhaps we want more. The second step is more difficult, more risky, more empathetic. It is to ask students what *their* goals are. To advocate any change, we must first recognize that many, if not most, students go to college to gain skills and credentials needed to work in a career of their own choosing. If most students want to become better writers for a better shot at a career, and our goal is to subvert that desire, we must recognize that students have every reason to resist. Empathy coupled with respect becomes even more imperative in such cases.

To be a critical teacher is to accept being a leader, an influencer, which may seem to counter the goal of critical teaching; however, it is inescapable that in spite of liberatory aims, critical pedagogy can be the most teacher-centered and least empathetic of all pedagogies. Sometimes that is because the underlying assumption is that (conservative) students are mistaken and the teacher is not, and the underlying curricular

objective is for students to change to the teacher's ideology. Perhaps acknowledging that assumption directly at the outset of both courses and scholarship would make critical teaching less hypocritical. Consider that we teachers have been comfortable thinking critically for quite some time, and it may even be engrained in our consciousness from early on if we come from literate and liberal families. Asking students to change the foundational beliefs and principles of their lives is monumental and may come at great cost to them, a cost they may not be willing to bear. Recognizing the cost to students of a changed ideology is empathetic. The loss they face is real—not only loss of face with friends and family, but the possible loss of family entirely. Libby Wagner, the former compositionist and now management consultant I mention earlier, describes three reasons people resist change—they fear it, they resent it, and they disagree with it. Extrapolated to students, they fear loss and the unknown, they resent being told their views are wrong, and they disagree with the views we present as correct. The realm of the critical is the realm of the unknown for many students. Suddenly, uncomfortable gray areas emerge in ethical regimes that were previously concrete. Students are not unaware that accepting new views will change them and their world fundamentally.

Students resisting resistance has long vexed the critical community. For example, each of these well-known composition monographs have chapters on resistance to critical teaching: Hurlbert and Blitz' (1991) now-classic *Composition and Resistance*; Russell Durst's *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition* (1999); Andrea Greenbaum's edited collection *Insurrections: Approaches to Resistance in Composition Studies* (2001); and Joe Marshall Hardin's *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition* (2001). Fear of change inspires some of

this. Students resent and disagree with the change agent, which often results in resisting the critical teacher rather than critical teaching inspiring students to resist domination. However, they are also dismissed by the same scholars who attempt to liberate them; for example, they and the teacher-scholars who support them are labeled anti-intellectual by Gary A. Olson, in a forward to Andrea Greenbaum's book. He says, "this book is itself an enactment of resistance […] against the growing anti-intellectualism in the field" (xii). In other words, resistance to critical teaching is not just a difference in ideological bases but is disparaged as less rigorous, less academic, and less intelligent.

So how is the problem of student resistance to critical teaching solved? First, painful as it may be to see students willingly embrace the dominant culture, accepting student resistance is fundamental to the practice of democracy. I considered saying that empathizing with students who resist is also foundational, but it is not. We choose to empathize or not. Empathy, however, would go far toward helping critical teachers understand students who resist and, consequently, understand student resistance. Discovering why they resist and caring about their opinions rather than dismissing them as obtuse is part of helping the change process. Providing students with more information and including them in decision-making, even those who resist liberal or radical ideas, at least makes them part of the class, part of the model of democracy that Ira Shor practices in his classroom. He advocates, as I discuss earlier, researching students. Once again, we are brought back to knowing who is in the classroom with us. Shor goes so far as to call this the first responsibility of critical teachers (*Empowering Education* 202). Respecting students in such a way helps ease them into change, makes it more likely that they may accept at least some of it.

Empathy Education and Moving Students to Toward a Social Conscience

Composition courses, especially those focusing on critical teaching, would be ideal sites for testing the efficacy of C. Daniel Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis. As Ann George explains, the basic goal of critical teaching is to study unequal power relations, but it does not stop there. It is to "help students develop the tools that will enable them to challenge […] inequality" (92), a goal based in compassion which, in turn, is based in empathy. Chapter 3 touches on Batson's empathy>attitude>action model which has clear applications to classroom teaching. As bell hooks directly and Claude Hurlbert indirectly point out, empathy is generated via the students in the class by seeing, hearing about, and reading about others' experiences, in hooks' classes through classroom sharing and in Hurlbert's through student writing. This is also the basis for teaching empathy to young children in programs such as Seeds of Empathy (a program for preschool children) and Roots of Empathy (for grade-schoolers) (see also later in this chapter). The problem with classroom experience-sharing, besides all the difficulties inherent in confessional disclosure, is that the ability to gain knowledge about others' lives is limited to those in class. Suppose the courses we teach are not filled with students of diverse backgrounds but are almost entirely white and middle-class. What then? Composition instructors can and do choose to incorporate literary narrative and/or artifacts of popular media to introduce perspectives from other cultures to generate understanding, empathy, compassion, and questions.

This is a common practice in cultural studies pedagogy, a praxis which considers the ways in which we ourselves and what we think of as knowledge are structured by cultural norms and mores. Adding the study of empathy would enhance cultural studies

pedagogy and help accomplish critical goals. Discussion questions could begin with how we know what we know. What is the role of other people in knowing what we know? What can we know about them? What are the limits of knowing others? How do others communicate what they know to us and vice versa? This would be particularly effective in leading up to discussing rhetoric in the communicative process. As I argue in this dissertation, rhetoric and communication are, to great degree, empathetic acts yet also spaces in which empathy is absent or refused as in miscommunication. A useful construct to frame this discussion is rhetorical empathy, especially Keen's bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast empathies. How is the author using one or more of those empathies to encourage or thwart readerly identification with characters? To what end? What does the author ask of the audience? How can students use empathetic appeals to draw readers into their own writing? How does empathy relate to the classical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos? Several threads of empathy weave into the pedagogical tapestry of composition, just a few of which are mentioned here. Teachers wishing to incorporate it will undoubtedly find many other ways empathy fits into composition theory—feminist pedagogy, expressivist pedagogy, writing center pedagogy, basic writing pedagogy, and so on. It would be impractical to describe them all here, but suffice it to say, the study of empathy is rich with ways to think about human communication.

A Sample Course for Composition/Rhetoric Focusing on Empathy

I will discuss an example here of a composition course I propose similar to one Bruce Herzberg describes in his article "Community Service and Critical Teaching;" however, mine focuses more overtly on studying empathy. In this course, students research and write about so-called compassionate organizations along with working in

one. These organizations seek ours and our students' attention on and off campus with a myriad of rhetorical tropes which students examine. The example I provide includes a service learning component, but that is not necessary. I would like to emphasize here that the study of empathy in composition courses and elsewhere does not equal service learning nor does it equal attempting to solicit students' compassion. The compassionate organizations they study can be community groups, state-wide organizations, federal programs, or global initiatives. First, students discuss such groups in general—who they are, what they do, why they do it, whom they serve, how their messages are spread, and what the roles of sponsors/donors are. Course readings include some history of compassionate organizations and other material to generate discussion. In Herzberg's service learning course, students read Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* to gain perspective on institutional roles in illiteracy. In my hypothetical class, we might read Barbara Erenrich's *Nickled and Dimed,* for a first-hand account of what it is like to be working and poor, Mark Robert Rank's *One Nation Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All,* which provides social context for understanding poverty, and perhaps Laurence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie's *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* to add the historical context of helping behavior. The class narrows its research to specific groups operating within the community, groups which may have ties to larger organizations. Students then gather material from these groups that represent the perspective of both the recipients and the donors—brochures, websites, applications to receive help, radio programs, and so forth to discover what they can about the groups' missions, visions, and moral underpinnings. The discussion then extends to close analysis and critique of these organizations.

Keys to this project are analyses of the organizations' rhetorical appeals including appeals to empathy and compassion as well as reflection and analysis of students' own perspectives. Keen's rhetorical empathies (bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast) are used to understand strategies various groups use, to what degree they call on potential donors' feelings of empathy, compassion, sympathy, and pity. During the course of the term students select an organization with which to work journaling their experiences with the providers of help as well as those receiving it. Interviews may be conducted with those giving and receiving aid that are then analyzed and reported in a final paper. Students reflect on their reading, their work at the organizations, their encounters with the people there, and their own feelings, both positive and negative, to better understand the work of compassionate organizations and what work students might do in the future to further their visions of social justice. Part of this assignment, in keeping with its student-centered, empathetic premise, is having students create, analyze, and revise their own visions of a just society. I would, once again, wrest power from the hands of students if I impose my own view of social justice on them.

The combined elements of such a project would help students see their lives as a fusion of social forces affecting them and everyone around them. It would also give them a chance to determine what they see as their roles and responsibilities to the greater good, helping them to become better informed donors of time and resources. Students themselves can analyze Batson's empathy>attitude>action model to see if, how, and to what degree it has influenced their work during the term, in past charitable undertakings, and ones they may undertake in the future. My hope is that such a project would not only help students understand the rhetorical power of empathy, compassion, sympathy, and

pity but understand the value of cognitive perspective-taking and how that perspective-taking informs helping.

Limitations of This Study

Perhaps the most crucial limitation of this study is its wide scope in such a small space. I have merely scratched the surface, so to speak, of empathy's role in composition and especially rhetorical studies. My purpose has been to provide an overview, to make the implicit explicit, to provide a definition that both accurately encompasses what other fields have said about empathy that is valuable to composition studies, and to provide enough information to inspire other researchers and myself to carry empathy studies forward in our own field. To do so though, I have cornered empathy into five small boxes: relational, pedagogical, critical, rhetorical, and discursive. A concept as broad as empathy has implications far beyond any categories researchers might assign it.

For example, the scope of just relational empathy and its effect in classroom interactions is enormous. Our relationships with students and the degree of empathy and liking may have a substantial effect on learning and writing confidence. David Bleich claims knowing who is in the classroom with us (empathy) determines the curriculum of that class. What are the implications of the meaning of that statement? What is knowing? Who knows whom and to what degree? How does that knowing create contact zones in class? I have had several graduate students communicate with me regarding the study of empathy as an ethical construct in the classroom, always (so far) with the connotation of empathy as an unquestioned good. How do they define empathy? How would their scholarship differ if they considered discursive empathy? Does relational empathy enacted in class actually increase student engagement or, in Marilyn Smith Layton's

view, show love? Does it turn our classes into therapy sessions? What sorts of therapeutic roles *do* teachers play, especially in English classes where students become overtly confessional on the page or in person? Therapists seek to change the behavior of clients; as I mention earlier, teachers not only seek to change their students' linguistic behavior but, in the case of critical pedagogy, students' behavior and attitudes outside their writing and collegiate lives. Again, what does it *really* mean to know who is in the classroom with us? How does knowing and not knowing and refusing to know affect students and what they take from composition courses? Each of these questions and dozens more could be dissertations in themselves. These issues, concepts, and theories offer far more questions than answers.

Another difficulty of this study is one to which virtually all studies are vulnerable, and that is researcher bias. Strictly scientific or not, no study can completely remove the researcher from the researched. Many of the research methodology courses I have taken in English studies advocate overtly recognizing the role of the researcher. While this is mostly discussed in regard to gathering raw data, it also applies to gathering bibliographic data. While I have attempted to account for empathic biases to which we are vulnerable in our feelings of connection to others, I believe in empathy as an ethical construct. That it is good most of the time to empathize. We should know, at least as much students allow us to know, who is in the classroom with us. I believe it is helpful to know students' experiences with writing to help them overcome blocks to it. Yet, I also think that knowing is not enough. Perhaps believing that empathy is mostly a good thing has led me to sources that venerate it and away from those that urge a more cautious approach. Furthermore, my belief in empathy as an ethical good may seem to put me in

the category of those empathy embracers I critique in Chapter 2. However, I acknowledge empathy's boundaries, that there are borders I may not cross. I also understand that empathy is only as moral as the uses to which it is employed.

Directions for Further Research

Rhetorical Empathy

Rhetorical empathy has been studied little since the demise of the Rogerian argument, especially given the liberal humanist definition of feeling another's feelings. How have rhetorical empathies been employed in the US? Some research has touched on this in literature but there is still much to be explored, which is one goal of Suzanne Keen's research on empathy in novels. How do writerly and readerly empathies differ rhetorically? I used Keen's empathies recently in a paper comparing the use of rhetorical empathy in Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*. Racism characterizes the lives of both novels' protagonists, yet Silko casts Tayo in a much more empathetic light than Wright does Bigger Thomas. In fact, Bigger's unquenchable anger is more akin to Tayo's antagonist, the flat character, Emo, portrayed as blood thirsty and evil. How does the cultivation and thwarting of readers' empathetic identification function for writers? For readers? In another example illustrating Berlant, Sommer, and Spelman's concerns, how can viewers empathize with the protagonist of the film *Precious* when she is viciously abused far beyond even the imagination of many, yet still can function, as Lynn Hirschberg of the *New York Times* asserts, as a young "everywoman"? Rhetorical empathies are employed to serve ethical functions in most literature and film. What are they, how do they work, whom do they serve, and what are their results?

As I mention several times in this dissertation, one important area of study for those interested in rhetorical empathy is to heed Theresa Kulbaga's call to study empathy as a key transnational feminist discourse. She begins this area of research with her analysis of the function of empathy both in the reading of and reaction to *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. There are innumerable books, films, and musical works that employ appeals to empathy in various forms that could be analyzed in similar ways. Keen's rhetorical empathies would serve well in such analyses; however, what other rhetorical empathies are at work in our culture? Rhetoricians may theorize more of them or further dissect bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast empathy. How might the new definition, offered in this dissertation, of an empathy that moves beyond the female, beyond liberal humanism, expand our understanding of rhetorical empathy's function in discourses? How rhetorical empathy functions in the production of news would also be crucial to explore. Such rhetoric would vary greatly given each region's cultural traditions and the media used to disseminate news. Not only would the study of popular culture artifacts and news media be apt for exploration but studying rhetorical empathy (or the lack of empathy) employed in the making and disseminating of foreign policy decisions and the responses to it, as well as in diplomatic efforts, would undoubtedly yield surprising, disturbing, and potentially useful information.

One way Kulbaga limits the study of transnational rhetorical empathy is by naming it a feminist discourse. In the controversy leading up to Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's nomination, Rodger Citron and Dahlia Lithwick complained that empathy was code for woman because of the feminine connotations employed by editorial writers and columnists. As we have seen, gender has little to do with empathy

other than males and females having different orientations toward it. Men (at least Western men), as the research cited in this dissertation shows, tend to have a justice orientation toward empathy; that is, they are inclined to base identification with others within a framework of ethics and rules. We have also seen, in relation to this justice orientation, that in several experiments men tend to experience greater activity in the pleasure centers of their brains when punishing unfair game players with shocks. How does *this* function transnationally? Recall that Lauren Berlant's complaint about empathy is that it lacks rage and is, therefore, useless politically. That is an example of empathy as code for female. On the contrary, empathy has been linked in several studies (Batson, Shaw, and Oleson; Vitaglione and Barnett, 2003) to anger and even aggressive, punishing behavior on behalf of a victim or victims. How are rhetorical appeals to empathetic rage used to focus that rage politically? What role did it play in the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s? What was its role in World War II in generating support for defeating those responsible for Pearl Harbor or the Holocaust? What role in rallying Americans' support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11? What role in fomenting terrorism at home and abroad? Such studies may shed light on the role of rhetorical empathy in understanding today's political violence.

Empathy in the Composition Classroom

In terms of empathy in the composition classroom, there are many avenues of potential research that can explore specific elements of empathy in praxis. For example, consider the claim Mike Rose makes that students bring to class faulty conceptions of rhetorical strategies that stymie their writing. To what extent and how does composition instructors' understanding (i.e., third level empathy) of individual students' previous

writing experiences inform the ways they work with those students? How are those experiences solicited? How does knowledge of those experiences influence instructors' comments on students' papers? How does it affect the curriculum of the class? This idea returns us once again to asking ourselves the important question of who is in the classroom with us. How does false empathy ("my experience equals your experience") affect students, our suggestions, and their writing? What assumptions do we make about students based on memories of our own writing and how we were taught? How does that affect our classroom teaching? Many composition instructors assume that because "it helped me learn to write; therefore, my students will learn best that way too." This is a form of teacherly "empathy" which makes the other, in this case the student, disappear. Several of my suggestions here rest on the assumption that knowing students is important and, essentially, equals empathy; however, perhaps the first question to ask in terms of teacherly empathy is whether knowing students matters at all. David Bleich thinks so. If knowing them does matter, how much? In what ways? What is the difference between knowing them and engaging in teacherly cognitive perspective-taking?

Related to this question of teacherly empathy is how our identification with students (and lack thereof) affects them and the classroom environment. Do students' politics and/or religion affect our comments to them in person or in their papers? Richard Fulkerson claims it does. Recall that he points out that from one side of our mouths we claim we do not care about students' politics, only that they make thoughtful arguments, yet the more we disagree, the less thoughtful we view their arguments. Is Fulkerson accurate? If so, how does it play out in classrooms? What do those comments look like? How do they affect students personally? How do these comments affect the revision

process? How does our identification with and assumptions about students affect our treatment of them in class? Do we call on them more/less? Challenge them? Avoid them? What does it mean in the classroom when we assume they are cultural dupes, victims of false consciousness? How does that affect retention? How can we better engage students with whom we cannot or will not empathize? What is the role of empathy in the contact zone? How do gendered teaching orientations affect classrooms, i.e., relational and justice orientations? How do they affect critical classrooms? How does our identification with and treatment of students inhibit/promote democracy? Part of the theory in this dissertation is that teacherly identification and lack thereof affects students in both overt and subtle ways and that we need to understand the interaction of these forces.

Another area of study should be course materials such as textbooks, literary narrative, and film that attempt to cultivate student identification with marginalized others. It would be a difficult task indeed to find a textbook without multicultural readings. The almost ubiquitous inclusion of such materials in textbooks seems to assume (or hope for) a process at work similar to Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis—students read about others, identify with them, feel compassion, and decide to take action. Do the authors of these texts and the readings within hope to solicit student empathy by the inclusion of these materials? To what end? What are the writers' and editors' assumptions of students? Are they accurate? How do texts such as literary narrative solicit identification with marginalized others? Are such solicitations successful? What does success mean? Does identifying with marginalized others actually cause (middle-class white) students to examine the content of their so-called invisible knapsacks? If so, how? Does it inspire resistance against the dominant culture and altruistic action on

behalf of those others? Another example of textbooks whose purpose is to develop critical consciousness are those oriented toward cultural studies, for example, *Signs of Life in the USA*. Kristen Seas probes its review and discussion questions (see Chapter 2) and shows how the prompts construct students as culturally ignorant "coerc[ing] them to adopt assumptions and reach conclusions that force them to reposition their own subjectivities, thus inspiring resistance" but toward the textbook and class rather than the dominant culture (436). Is she accurate? What exactly are students' reactions to such texts? *Are* students culturally ignorant? By whose standards? Are they less ignorant after class? In what ways and why?

Yet another relatively common practice in composition courses is generating empathy through classroom experience-sharing such as bell hooks advocates. But so does Jeffrey Berman, the composition instructor who solicits confessional narratives about abuse, molestation, and suicidal ideation from students (see Chapter 2 for a detailed critique of this practice). He uses disclosure and empathy for reasons which seem to originate in the idea that empathizing is somehow good. How it helps students and how it helps writing is less than clear to those who do not advocate such practices. hooks advocates confessional self-disclosure for the purpose of examining and resisting dominant ideology and calls empathy mutual recognition. How does mutual recognition function in the classroom? Does it, indeed, create a critical consciousness in students? How does that critical consciousness affect students' writing and thinking? Does it inspire resistant action outside the classroom? What about Berman's practice of the personal classroom confessional? In what ways are students affected by graded coursework that demands confession? Why do writing teachers employ self-disclosure in

classrooms? What roles do writing and writing courses play in resolving internal conflict? Does writing about traumatic events create better writers? If so, how? Most compositionists do not directly solicit confessional narratives in writing classes, yet students still confess. Unbidden, they write these narratives in our classes again and again. Somehow the feeling of empathy from a caring teacher, the anonymity of the computer screen, confessional literary readings, and personal narrative essay prompts invite self-disclosure. Why? Why do students write these papers? Is it a need, a call for perspective-taking, for empathy, by our students? If so, what kind of understanding do they seek when writing such papers? How should we handle them—both the students and the papers? What are the effects on students of the various commenting and grading strategies scholars suggest such as that of Marlowe Miller's colleague who always awards death narratives a B? What actually happens to students when we comment on the surface errors in these papers, a practice against which some scholars warn?

The study of empathy in composition has great potential to uncover ways our understanding of students and their understanding of others affects the teaching of writing. It should be obvious also that the importance of studying empathy, especially rhetorical empathy, reaches far beyond the confines of the writing class. Empathy is vital to the teaching and learning of writing and vital to the promotion of classroom and civic democracy. Much of this potential research rests on one important concept, arguably the important part of this dissertation although my actual articulation of it consists of only sixty-four words. It is the definition of empathy. If we are going to study it at all, if we are going to draw conclusions about its efficacy or lack thereof, we must first know what are talking about when we talk about empathy.

Conclusion

I confess. I believe in empathy. Not unproblematically. Not universally for everyone, everywhere. Not as a solution to all the world's problems. But to me the study of empathy reaches beyond the writing classroom. It is the study of hope for a more peaceful world. Evolutionary biologists claim empathy is a building block of social cohesion and stability. I believe them. It is reflected in the great many adaptations the world over of what we Westerners so arrogantly claim as our own, the Golden Rule. Perhaps empathy is so ubiquitous in our everyday interactions with friends, colleagues, and fellow beleaguered shoppers in supermarket check-out lines that we fail to realize its importance. Since I started this project and even before, I had great difficulty understanding the vehement objections to empathy. I suppose I thought, and by and large still do, of empathy as an ethical good. I have discovered through this research that those who claim empathy is invasive refer to an empathy that is empathetic in name only. True empathy understands and respects boundaries. At the same time, many, especially the powerless, the voiceless, *want* to be understood. But they want to be understood on *their* terms, in *their* world. At the 2008 United Nations Alliance of Civilisations conference, Jordanian Jamal Al-Tahat proposed that the right to be understood should be added as a article of human rights. In response to the West's stereotyping of the Arab world and Arabs' stereotyping of the West, he suggests opposition to all forms of misinformation both for the immediate future and "for the sake of humanity."

That hope, that opposition to misinformation, lies in education. Such education is not the responsibility of only one field of study or teaching it to only one age range of students; the responsibility belongs to all educators. Understanding the perspective of

others, third-level empathy, cannot start too early nor continue too long, and it may begin, depending on students' developmental levels, with more visceral first- and second-level empathy. One program that has received some popular attention, particularly with the Dalai Lama's visit to the United States and Canada in 2008, is The Roots of Empathy, developed in Canada in 1996 after series of school violence incidents in Ontario. According to their website, the program's "mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults. Its vision is to change the world - child by child." The founder, Mary Gordon, cites research showing the program's effectiveness at reducing bullying in school (among other positive results) in the appendix of her book *The Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child*.[1] The focus of this program is education both in the traditional sense of learning about the world and in learning to make healthy choices which lead to happy lives. As these children become the decision-making adults who determine the world's course, it is hoped that they will make those decisions based, at least in part, on the empathy and compassion they learned early on.

But what happens in education beyond childhood? In Ann George's words, critical pedagogy "envisions a society not simply pledged to but successfully enacting the principles of equality, of liberty and justice for all" (92). The underlying assumption of this statement is that we pledge allegiance to a country that delivers neither equality nor justice, at least for *all*. But why even bother with this whole notion of equality, liberty, and justice? Having some people, or even a great many, lacking these advantages will not

[1] This research was conducted by Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, an associate professor of educational psychology at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, BC, Canada. She is also researching the effectiveness of MindUP, a program designed to develop emotional balance and well-being in young people. Schonert-Reichl's research specific to these programs has not yet been published in peer-reviewed journals.

stop the engine of government and commerce. We bother because of compassion. Even if we, as members of the professional middle-class, benefit from the current economic and social system, we bother with equality and liberty and justice because we see people suffer without them. Compassion is the deep awareness of others' suffering coupled with the wish to relieve it. Critical pedagogy equals compassionate, empathetic pedagogy. The trick is to find the delicate balance between students' right to their own consciousness, even their right to oppose social justice teaching, and teaching that inspires as many of those students as possible to go forth from our classes and help create a more just society.

Critical pedagogy is sometimes called radical pedagogy because it seeks to overturn the current social and economic structure. I began this dissertation with a quote from Gloria Steinem: "Empathy is the most radical of human emotions." I use her words in the sense of political radicalism, that is, wanting/demanding systemic change soon. In an email to me, Steinem explained that she uses it a bit differently:

> I'm using 'radical' in the literal sense of going to the root [the dictionary's first definition]—for example, the root of our ability or inability to be violent toward or otherwise hurt others. If we truly empathize with someone, we will be unable to cause her or him pain without also feeling it, thus empathy can uproot violence—except that necessitated by immediate self-defense.

These two definitions are not so different, especially in the demand of systemic change for equality, liberty, and justice. We commit violence against our fellow citizens when we, with our hands on our hearts, proclaim liberty and justice for all when they are not

yet a reality for so many. Radical empathy is a call for political change to end violence not through political rage but through *understanding*. It is a hope for peace.

* * *

Throughout this work, I have shown empathy has a multitude of applications in the classroom in general and the composition classroom in particular, not the least of which is our hope that educating students to work for peace, equality, liberty, and justice will bring about a more just society. I have shown that empathy happens both consciously and unconsciously, that it is advantageous in cultivating relationships with students, that it is necessary pedagogically to understand students' approaches to and experiences with writing to help them become better writers, that its relation to rhetoric is a rich field to be mined both by students in class and researchers, that it is a vital part of critical pedagogy, and that it even has the potential to explain aspects of the phenomenon of language. I cannot help, however, continuing to return to empathy as a source for good in the world and to think of it in a much wider sense than whether or not it exists or is useful in teaching writing. Empathy studies is gaining interest and momentum among powerful and influential thinkers who are finding ways to incorporate and apply it across a wide range of endeavors in the United States, Western nations, and beyond. Martha Nussbaum, the University of Chicago philosopher I mentioned in Chapter 3, along with Daniel Goleman and the Dalai Lama advocate empathy education starting in preschool; Steven Pinker, the Harvard psycholinguist I also mentioned in Chapter 3, suggests popular culture has and will continue to spread empathy and promote peace globally; Nobel Prize winner Jeremy Rifkin, an economist and advisor to leaders of the European Union on environmental and energy issues, advocates it as part of the solution to global

environmental catastrophe, and President of the United States, Barack Obama, claims an empathy deficit is a major impediment to social justice ("Remarks of Senator"). As my husband, Campbell Wilson, continues to say, empathy is a resonance whose time has come.

What if empathy and its sibling compassion became primary ethical imperatives? This, as I have pointed out, is the dream of critical teaching. Imagine workers having a greater share in the fruits of their labor and relegating alienation to a dusty corner of the past. An empathetic society would likely be a sustainable one where Aldo Leopold's land ethic is so ingrained that we automatically consider more than economic prosperity when contemplating the effect of our activities on land and animals. Imagine understanding and accepting others instead of proselytizing. An empathetic world would be one in which the cultural needs and concerns of local people are taken into consideration and fairness rules in all financial transactions. Imagine foreign policy being guided by empathy rather than economic and military might. Imagine, as Ann George puts it, "a society not simply pledged to but successfully enacting the principles of equality, liberty, and justice for all" (92). Just imagine.

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