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REVISING THE POLITICAL IN BASIC WRITING SCHOLARSHIP

ABSTRACT: This paper traces our scholarly constructions of Basic Writers' identities. Arguing that we have relied too much on the question, "Who is the Basic Writer," the author instead asks, "What are those students who are labeled 'Basic Writers' accomplishing in their speech and writing in our classes?" Her text offers a speculative model for analyzing Basic Writing student discourse, uses that model to examine the language used in an actual Basic Writing classroom, and briefly reviews the implications of such work for reforming contemporary Basic Writing scholarship.

From "Growth" to "Conflict": Challenging Our Scholarly Constructions of Basic Writing Student Identities

Historically, Basic Writing teachers and scholars have been concerned with one compelling question: Who is the "Basic Writer"? Despite Mina Shaughnessy's repeated pleas to not let the term's meaning become an abstraction, in 1977 she did furnish our first definition of Basic Writers: "beginners ... who learn by making mistakes" (5) and "aliens ... unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life" (40). Shaughnessy's discussion was wide-ranging and pictured the Basic Writer in both formalistic and psychological terms: as often displaying certain logical errors related to form, diction, and syntax as well as suffering from a characteristic lack of confidence. In subsequent years, however, the inclusiveness of Shaughnessy's definition began to strike Basic Writing scholars as problematic. In *A Sourcebook for Basic Writers*, Theresa Enos called attention to the perplexing nature of the term "Basic Writer" as it had developed, contending that it had "become so inclusive as to defy formal definitions" (v). Contributors to the volume tended to agree. Lynn Quitman Troyka, for example, traced the diversity of the terms "Basic Writer" and "basic writing," arguing that

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“basic writing has begun to lose its identity. The bandwagon effect seems to be taking over. The term basic writing is applied loosely to various populations of students” (13). By 1990, Andrea Lunsford and Patricia A. Sullivan pointed out in “Who Are Basic Writers?” that in the past “we simply held to a convenient, if indefensible circular definition: Basic Writers are those whom we place in basic writing classes. But this facile answer has never set well with scholars of basic writing, whose work over the last dozen years has consistently attempted more complete and richer definitions and answers to our title question” (18). Lunsford’s and Sullivan’s work aimed at identifying Basic Writers’ backgrounds, strategies and processes, prose forms, and situations in the academy. Most recently, though, various contributions to the *Journal of Basic Writing*, perhaps the primary scholarly site where the identity of the Basic Writing student has been constituted, reshaped, and revised, have exposed the very problematic nature of the term “Basic Writing” (Lynn Bloom, 1995; Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau and Gordon Brossell, 1995), questioning whether this category benefits or debilitates our students.

While an important concern, posing the question “Who is the Basic Writer?” has not come without its costs. This focus, which essentially poses as a problem of description or definition, may have led us to overlook the extent to which our scholarship also participates in the construction of student identities, often with dubious results. As Marguerite Helmers points out in her insightful 1994 text *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students*, Basic Writing research has, in the process of trying to describe the key characteristics of the Basic Writer, inevitably also constructed certain problematic identities for them. Unfortunately, such student identities, which have included representations of the Basic Writer as Other, lacking, different, or excessive, may be more enfeebling to our actual students than anyone can have intended. Helmers’ stunning examples reveal how Basic Writers have been depicted as natives, children, and animals: “unlike the popular representation of the adorable, innocent child, college beginners are [portrayed as] grotesque and deviant. They are stunted, undeveloped, young minds trapped in an aging body” (70). By depicting Basic Writers in terms of their deviances from the norm, our scholarship has tended to reinforce the norm, the pathology of the student writer, and the student’s codependence upon the teacher.

While most representations of the Basic Writer are perhaps not so explicitly disconcerting as Helmers’ work suggests, troubling features nevertheless continue to inhere in how we represent these students to ourselves. As Joseph Harris’ Fall 1995 *Journal of Basic Writing* article “Negotiating the Contact Zone” reveals, the three main metaphors which have dominated our scholarship – growth, initiation, and conflict – have pictured Basic Writers as cognitively immature, out-

siders to academic discourse, and signifiers of cultural marginality and resistance. The "growth" metaphor involved a shift of attention away from academic discourse, instead encouraging "teachers to respect and work with the skills students brought to the classroom" (29). Despite the positive connotation derived from the term, for Harris, it also tended to foster representations of the Basic Writer as "somehow stuck in an early stage of language development, their growth as language users stalled" (29). The "initiation" metaphor suggested that the "academy formed a kind of 'discourse community' with its own distinctive ways of using language" and the Basic Writing student needed to learn to assimilate or acculturate to a foreign linguistic system, one outside her/his home language, which is implicitly denigrated. The most recent, the "conflict" metaphor, Harris contends, criticizes the two earlier metaphoric allegiances, claiming instead that the Basic Writer is a nexus of clashing cultural forces and relations of power within the classroom. Scholars partial to the "conflict" metaphor, writes Harris, hope to both respect cultural difference and to teach academically authorized language use, usually by foregrounding the ghettoization, disenfranchisement, and alienation that Basic Writers endure.

Not all of the results of these metaphoric investments have been negative (especially the recent turn to the "social" under the aegis of the conflict model), but I do concur with Helmers and Harris that our scholarship has constructed notions of Basic Writing student identity that share several discomfiting characteristics. First, in spite of very different rhetorical approaches and espoused political investments, our arguments incline towards delimiting the Basic Writer primarily as the site of a problem, be it cognitive, discursive or social, even if we see this problem as somehow outside the student's responsibility or control. Second, even when our scholarship professes to be motivated by a desire to decenter and deprivilege our classrooms, the teacher's heroic expertise and pedagogy, critical or otherwise, are always central to the answer provided to solve this "problem."

There is another, and, I argue, more basic problem with the metaphors for Basic Writers' situations that dominate our scholarship: they betoken a troublesome willingness to ignore the fact that the students we call "Basic Writers" seldom, if ever, think of themselves as such — and that they rarely construe their tasks as writers in terms which accord closely with our preferred metaphors of "growth," "initiation," and "conflict." This does not mean, however, that our students fail to conceive of themselves as writers at all, but rather that their own ways of construing their identities as writers have been largely ignored. Certainly, some of the identities students take on as they struggle with writing tasks are as debilitating as the worst examples of our own attempts to classify them, but the fact remains that Basic Writing students themselves already concretely use discourse to alter, change, and

constantly recreate their social circumstances and identities — often in resourceful and helpful ways that have been largely overshadowed by our scholarship's presumptions. If our focus on the question "Who is the Basic Writer?" has resulted in incapacitating representations of students so labeled, it might be instructive to at least momentarily suspend our focus on that question and to ask another one instead: "How are those students whom we label 'Basic Writers' negotiating their own identities as writers in our classes?"

Certain trends in Basic Writing scholarship have already justified such an approach. In particular, the current re-examination of the social and political dimensions of Basic Writers' situations has suggested the need to closely analyze the minutiae of classroom activities instead of simply applying broad cultural categories in an attempt to understand them. Mary Louise Pratt's important conception of the Basic Writing classroom as a "contact zone" where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (Pratt 34), for example, has been justly criticized by Patricia Laurence, Barbara Gleason, Richard Miller, Francis Sullivan, and others. Their contention is that while the recent focus on the political dimension of Basic Writers' identities has been a great advance in Basic Writing scholarship, this turn to broad political identity categories can carry with it several potential dangers. The first of these has to do with what we might call the paradox of marginalization, the possibility that by focusing on one's "victim" status, one may unwittingly reproduce it. The second danger that has come under scrutiny of late, and the one that implicitly authorizes the argument that I am making, is that the very wide use of identity categories like race, class, and gender, which can represent such an important advance over purely "formal" criteria and definitions, can limit as well as open up our understanding of Basic Writers' situations. Scholars who think in terms of these political categories can make important contributions to our understanding of the social origins of Basic Writing, but these emphases may also relegate other contexts and metaphors for Basic Writers' situations to a kind of second-class status, less important, and implicitly less worth attention, than the "big" sociopolitical ones.

My purpose in this essay is to open an inquiry into other ways of representing Basic Writers' student practices and identity formations by examining a brief interaction that I recently observed in a Basic Writing classroom. Drawing upon discourse analysis research in Speech Communications and Conversation Analysis, I wish to suggest one possible avenue for the exploration of how our Basic Writers' constantly participate in "co-creating and reproducing social identities, and thereby context, through their ways of speaking" (Buttny 162). Simply put, I will, in the pages that follow, demonstrate some of the

insights that can be gained by observing the ways in which not Basic Writing theorists but Basic Writers themselves use verbal strategies and identity constructions in the writing classroom. Although considerations of space prevent a long discussion of key concepts in Conversation Analysis, it is necessary to highlight two that are of particular importance in the analysis that follows: “face wants” and “calls to account.” Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson point out in *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* that, while negotiating considerations of race, class, and gender, and other things within social interaction, people also often seek to maintain each others’ “face,” or the public self-image of identity they want to create for themselves. “Face” includes 1) negative face, the basic rights to freedom of action and freedom from imposition, and 2) positive face, the basic desire that one’s public self-image of identity be appreciated and approved. It should be self-evident that, when and if a student’s desires to preserve face are impinged upon by other peer group members, for instance, communication can break down, and other students may readily shift their own identity constructions to compensate for these changes. At such moments, another phenomenon often occurs which can also evoke race, class, and gender conflict. This phrase, “calling another to account,” involves creating talk designed to transform or challenge others’ negative evaluations of one’s identity.

Examining how Basic Writers in our classrooms continually use face-saving techniques and calling each other to account, one can view the sheer complexities that occur moment-to-moment in students’ classroom interactions, and the important ways in which such considerations can add to our understanding of how constructs like race, class, and gender may actually come into play as our students approach writing and editing tasks. Basic Writers seem to co-create, reproduce, and intervene in various constructions of social identity contextually since each identity must be performed—continually updated and enacted through communication. When we open our analysis to such possibilities, we may be better able to witness exactly where and how Basic Writers may themselves uphold or subvert their institutional marginality through their talk, complicating our scholarly constructions of them as political subjects of one sort or another as well.

Interaction in Action: Basic Writers Construct Dynamic Identities Within Peer Groups

I turn now to the verbal peer group interaction of a particular group of Basic Writers. At Syracuse University, most “at risk” writers are “invited,” sometimes as a prerequisite for their admission to a particular college, to participate in the Summer Institute run by Syracuse

University's Center for Academic Achievement for six weeks in the late summer. As the Center's brochure elucidates,

the Summer Institute program is designed for ambitious students seeking to enrich their academic experience and ensure a smooth transition from high school to college Any student who is uncertain about facing the challenges of entering a college environment—academic, social and personal challenges—should seriously consider enrollment in the Summer Institute.(1)

The students who are part of this project include both the Summer Bridge Program and non-sponsored incoming freshmen. Characteristically, these students need particular support in composition which will prepare them for the Writing Program's curriculum. Though not explicitly labeled "Basic Writers," these are students who take special preparatory classes before being "mainstreamed" into other Composition courses. These students continue to gain credit for regular visits to the Writing Center. Interestingly, ethnic status alone comes to signify the need for supplemental instruction in the language of the program's brochure, which states that "all pre-freshmen who are African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, and Mexican American are strongly urged to attend the Summer Bridge Program" (2). Perhaps as a result, this population of the summer programs is far more "diverse" than that which attends most credit-courses during the regular semester, hailing from small rural towns and urban metropolises, from exclusive, white neighborhoods and impoverished ghettos.

What follows is a brief interaction transcribed from one Basic Writing classroom designed to support such students at Syracuse University. I choose to limit my discussion to this particular piece of interaction for several reasons: 1) it represents a rather typical peer session among Basic Writers in this particular course; 2) it reveals moments in which the students are discussing politically charged issues, naturally opening themselves up to purely political analyses of their identities; and 3) it shows, in a relatively short exchange, how these Basic Writers are involved in reconstituting their relationships to identity constructions, institutional demands, and socio-cultural oppression. I center here upon their verbal compositions because often when we investigate how students construct themselves as writers and thinkers, verbal interactions are often overlooked in favor of investigations into students' written compositions.

These particular Basic Writing students, however, were not "mainstreamed" into typical Composition courses in the Fall. Instead, they participated in a three-year, grant-funded Writing Across the

Curriculum project with Syracuse University's School of Information Studies. Since Information Studies was an alternate admission program, it attracted many incoming freshmen who needed additional support to improve their speaking and writing skills and confidence. In the Fall of 1994 these students took a unique Composition course, designed to help them further the writing and thinking goals of their home college. Their discussions were recorded throughout the semester and then transcribed for the purposes of analysis and discussion in class. Though several peer groups met simultaneously at many times during this course, the particular group I cite here volunteered to be tape-recorded to serve as our sample group throughout the semester for our conversations about peer review.

This specific peer group exchange involves four students (names have been changed) who describe themselves thus: John, an 18-year-old, African-American from Bronx, New York; Paulita, an 18-year-old Spanish-American from Queens; Kali, a 30 year old from Trinidad; and Teketa, an 18-year-old half-Portuguese, half-African-American. In this exchange, the students are discussing Paulita's first draft of her very politically-charged paper "My Tension with the term 'Latino.'" In this paper Paulita raises a critical question which has impacted her own identity, "What happened in order to come up with these names [Latino and Hispanic], and why has there not been a change in such a name which would better suit Spanish speaking people?" Though somewhat conflicted about how to put the draft together, Paulita argues very strongly in her paper that these terms are not useful labels for group identity which people can utilize in order to combat oppression since the first, "Latino," she contends, is a made-up word and seems to refer only to those people who have Latin American ancestry and the second, "Hispanic," was used for census purposes historically and doesn't fully designate the range of cultural backgrounds her people possess. Making the analogy with African-Americans' adoption of that same term to describe themselves and the political efficacy of such a choice, Paulita's paper advocates the use of a new term "Spanish American" because, for Paulita, it signals the allegiance of her people to be language-based. At this particular juncture, Paulita has just read her paper and the group begins to discuss it. While the politics of the content of Paulita's paper clearly impact the way in which this exchange unfolds, the exchange is also shaped by other important perspectives generated moment-to-moment by the students themselves, perspectives and positions which, as we shall see, are by no means fixed or unconflicted. Indeed, at the very moments in this exchange during which these Basic Writers are discussing issues of political identity, they simultaneously enact identities which appear to be far more complex.

In the sections that follow, short excerpts of transcribed conver-

sation will be periodically interrupted by cursory analyses of the ways in which “face wants” and “calling to account” might be thought to operate in the particular exchange documented below. Read within this framework, seemingly minor utterances that usually pass completely unnoticed can take on significance undisclosed when our focus, as Basic Writing theorists, is trained either on just the formal elements of student writing or on the broad identity categories we often use to describe them and to probe the social nature of their writing “problems.” None of the readings of the exchange that I offer are, of course, definitive, limited as they are by the relatively short list of analytic concepts I bring to bear. Often, my observations are necessarily speculative, since they represent an attempt to probe possible motives for particular uses of language: it is conceivable that widely varying readings might result from the application of different analytic emphases. It is nevertheless my hope that my analysis does demonstrate some of the insights that a similar but more extended approach to Basic Writers’ interactions can yield.

Stage One of Commentary and Response to Paulita’s Paper

John: [in a soft voice] I like it.

Paulita: Huh? What?

John: I like it.

Paulita: You do? Really?

John looks down and nods.

Kali: I follow you totally. I just want to argue with some of the points. [pause] I’m trying to be clear... The part where you talked about...you didn’t show us why the terms were derogatory.

I. John: [in a soft voice] I like it.

Trying to establish his own identity in the exchange as a peer reviewer who will not make waves, John simultaneously attempts to construct a set of common knowledges amongst group members. This is a critical maneuver, made possibly in part because of the charged nature of the claims Paulita’s paper offers. John then further indicates that he and Paulita share specific wants, values, and goals. He proceeds to satisfy Paulita’s desires to be considered one who produces good writing and is likable.

John effectively begins to construct his identity in this exchange by impersonalizing himself and the paper in question. He accomplishes this not in the most obvious way, by offering seemingly objective statements which are devoid of the “you” and “I” pronouns. Instead John achieves this by slyly choosing not to go “on record” — or to be just questionably audible. This early shift in John’s self-identity construc-

tion is significant: John will later move from one who is willing to be a character in the exchange to one who is willing to be the originator of it. John's positive politeness is designed strategically to combat the tension their very momentary identity positions are producing.

II. Paulita: Huh? What?

Paulita, however, demands that John either overtly agree or disagree with her own conception of the peer review situation. There is a real attempt to define the terms of the situation for their own purposes. Implicitly John is being asked to position himself vis-a-vis the claim her paper makes as well. In doing so, Paulita forces John to dispense with certain aspects of impression management since if she determines that he has purposely not gone "on record" with his comment, she could reasonably perceive this as a personal and political affront. Paulita also forces John to articulate more thoroughly what he perceives his relationship to the other members of the group, and his appropriate identity, to be at this moment. The setting for the peer revision group as Paulita articulates it is one of agreement or disagreement, the audience is Paulita primarily (with the other members yet to articulate their own relationships to the setting), and John's role, according to Paulita's framework, is to champion what she has accomplished in the paper or to expose what she hasn't and risk confrontation. As she calls him to account, Paulita tacitly asks John to construct an identity in terms of these factors alone. Simultaneously, Paulita's decision to call John to account reaffirms her membership in the peer group.

Paulita chooses to respond by questioning the relatedness of what John has said. In other words, Paulita is demanding that John give an account of himself since John failed to fully respond to the context which Paulita's original prompt created. As suggested earlier, every call to account demands a reassertion of a previous identity construction or the rearticulation of a new one. Not fulfilling the commitment offered by Paulita's prompt immediately raises all sorts of questions which Paulita forces John to answer when she calls him to account (i.e., What are his motives, intentions, and beliefs in not going on record? Did he do this because he didn't want to insult her, didn't want to incriminate himself, or didn't want to appear to support her work? In short, what is the provisional identity he is willing to adopt here?)

III. John: I like it.

By merely raising his voice in answer, John asserts his willingness to adhere to the tacit rules of peer exchange as well as his intention not to insult Paulita. Implicitly he also indicates an allegiance to Paulita's claim as well and to its political statement. Through this very action of giving an account, John newly constructs his identity for the

group: he is an overt advocate of Paulita's political position. John's identity vis-a-vis the group's perceptions has altered substantially. He is not undermining Paulita's framing of the peer review group's activity. John answered softly only because of an oversight. This also confirms John's position to Paulita, enabling another verbal sequence to occur rather than continuing the task of trying to establish what John's provisional identity is within the exchange. Though John was perhaps audible enough to hear, Paulita interestingly demands that he go on record, appearing openly accepting of her and what she has done within her paper. John's identity is newly constructed as supportive of group membership, establishing a common ground, and in support of members' face wants.

IV. Paulita: You do? Really?

John looks down and nods.

Paulita's response continues in the same vein of establishing an alliance with John, recasting the situation in such a way as to maintain the peer group's function as she wants it to operate. Her further insistence that she know definitively whether John is attempting to satisfy her positive face wants or not indicates that Paulita wishes to have her perspective of the peer group situation and its logics established as the valid one which will determine all further actions within the exchange. It also signals Paulita's desire to solidify, fix, and maintain the identities she and John have now constructed. Their alliance is not formed merely on their joint willingness to accept the claim her paper makes or their social positions. It also comes from a joint willingness to accept provisionally each other's present identity constructions and perceptions of the scene of verbal exchange. As a result, Paulita's own identity can also be made less tentative: she is a writer who produces good work (i.e., "likable" work) that has a valid political purpose. Here John and Paulita's language intervenes in the potential institutional construction of Paulita as a Basic Writer who is somehow lacking, whose work is sub par.

V. Kali: I follow you totally. I just want to argue with some of the points. [pause] I'm trying to be clear... The part where you talked about...you didn't show us why the terms were derogatory.

Kali's involvement shifts this interaction radically, though. Suddenly Kali refigures the frame in which the activity is taking place (the frame which heretofore has been about whether the paper was "liked" or not) and her claim politically valid or not. Instead, Kali proposes that the very purpose of the peer group interaction itself must be reinterpreted: it should be about clarifying particular points within Paulita's paper. Kali also challenges Paulita's conception of her own cultural framework: why are these terms necessarily derogatory in the first

place?

In doing this, Kali effectively throws Paulita's and John's contingently constructed identities into a tailspin because they have been constituted around certain cultural allegiances as well as agreements about the social setting of the exchange itself. Casually, Kali calls upon Paulita to account for her own actions within her paper, not within her verbal interaction. Here Kali also very much adopts the role of a teacher, giving her an established social identity to hide behind for the time being. She asserts the possibility of a hierarchy, a hierarchy in which she reigns as authority. Kali's adoption of this identity also signals her unwillingness to satisfy Paulita's face wants simply or easily. Kali's use of an institutionally sanctioned role is significant since it allows her to alter the frame of the activity with less disruption from the other group members. By assuming this new identity, Kali momentarily forces the group exchange to involve reconceptualizing the situation at hand rather than debating the social and cultural differences between the group members. Kali is able to effect this change partially because she is older than the other group members.

Stage Two of Commentary and Response to Paulita's Paper

Paulita: Okay.

Kali: It may just be me, but I never considered these terms derogatory, "Hispanic" or "Latino." When you talk about "Latino," aren't you talking about coming from a Latin American country? You are not talking about people who come from Central America are you? Are you pro-Spanish? There seem to be all these countries and ideas going on...

Paulita: You have to...

They talk over each other.

Kali: But, at home we had Spanish-speaking people...

I. Paulita: Okay.

Rather than answering Kali's many questions, Paulita claims a common ground with her, simply by seeking to avoid disagreement. This is a relatively new tactic for Paulita when dealing with group members, suggesting that she may have taken her cue from John's tactic several seconds before. By doing this, Paulita defers to Kali as authority rather than answer or dispute the import of her questions. We see Paulita adopting an identity which admits to the possibility of Kali's authority.

II. Kali: It may just be me, but I never considered these terms derogatory, "Hispanic" or "Latino." When you talk about "Latino," aren't you talking about coming from a Latin American country? You are not talking about

people who come from Central America, are you? Are you pro-Spanish? There seem to be all these countries and ideas going on...

Kali hedges at this point in her discourse, choosing to preface her statement with "It may just be me, but..." which will soften the criticisms she is about to offer. Kali may be hoping not to impinge upon Paulita's face wants while simultaneously offering a change in topic which is rather abrupt. Here Kali marks this change, and partially apologizes for it. Kali is willing to adopt a contingent identity of teacher/mentor here, doing so with some trepidation, as if the construction doesn't entirely fit. Likewise, Kali is communicating her desires not to impinge on Paulita's wants. As a result, Kali chooses a form of apology which indicates her reluctance. This choice allows Kali to construct the identity of a concerned, wiser peer, to appear as if she is not disagreeing with Paulita, while at the same time allowing her to contest Paulita's major premise and to hold a position of authority by virtue of this identity.

The hedging now accomplished, Kali goes on to claim, "I never considered these terms derogatory." Kali's decision to phrase this statement in this way rather than to say something like "'Latino' and 'Hispanic' are not derogatory names" may suggest that Kali has some sense that Paulita's frame of reference which she has brought to bear upon this situation is quite different from the one Kali brings, possibly due to differences within their cultural backgrounds. Kali's use of language here reveals that she senses this, though she does not articulate it as such at this point. Kali's choice to employ the past tense ("I never considered") rather than the present ("I do not consider") also makes Kali seem more distanced from her own perspective or interpretation, avoiding her further appearance as threatening Paulita's position and tentatively constructed identity.

The series of questions which Kali raises next are all aimed at ferreting out, from very different perspectives, why it is that Paulita is making the claim that she is making. She asks these round-about questions rather than simply going on record with the question, "Why are you making the claim you are making?" Kali once again invokes a combination of two negative politeness strategies, questioning and hedging. She continues to use these techniques to modify the force of her speech acts, and to evidence that she is not assuming very much about Paulita's face wants.

Kali's first question, "When you talk about 'Latino,' aren't you talking about coming from a Latin American country?" seems aimed at discovering in part whether she and Paulita both understand the term "Latino" to have been used as a way to categorize those who came from "Latin" countries, including Latin America, but not excluding others. Kali's utterance reveals that she wonders whether Paulita knows that the term "Latino" is often used to identify and designate

peoples in addition to those who come directly from "Latin America." In effect, Kali is saying that when Paulita uses the word "Latino," she seems to be referring only to "Latin American" countries. According to Kali, this evidences a rather limited understanding of the word "Latino." However, Kali's use of language here is clever. She reveals her ability to both make a statement and to recast that statement as a question so as to avoid face threat.

Kali follows up the first query with a second question which is designed to approach Paulita and her identity construction from a slightly different angle. Kali states, "You are not talking about people who come from Central America, are you?" This allows Kali to suggest she knows the answer to this question while suspending the actual condition of claiming that she knows the answer. Again, Kali's language allows her to hedge, by seeming to ask a question, while at the same time quite clearly making a statement.

Kali's next question aims at yet another aspect of Paulita's perspective evidenced in the paper. By raising this next question, Kali puts aside her sense that "Latino" and "Hispanic" are not derogatory terms. Instead, she focuses elsewhere. If we are to believe Paulita's premise, that these terms are derogatory, why then does Paulita, in answer to the problem of "Latino" and "Hispanic," choose to advocate the term "Spanish-Americans" instead? For Kali, invoking this term implies that Paulita is only including those people originally from Spain who now live in America. This would mean that the term Paulita uses excludes many "Latin" peoples, people whom Paulita seemed earlier in her paper to want to include. Kali's question comes out bluntly, "Are you pro-Spanish?" She evidences both a desire to go on record and a desire to give Paulita an "out" by being slightly indirect (by using this question rather than offering a statement such as "You are pro-Spanish"). If Paulita's answer to this question is "yes," this may explain to Kali why Paulita chose to use that term of self-identification over another one, revealing that her construction of social identity may depend on the very kinds of exclusionary tactics she argues against. Curiously, it is the very issue of identity construction and naming that takes precedence at this point in the exchange. Indeed within the construction of their own identities here, the peer group participants seem to also challenge the use of specific terms to designate one's identity.

Kali then tries to end with a general comment which evidences her confusion, "There seem to be all these countries and ideas going on...." Here Kali uses a strategy of negative politeness designed to communicate Kali's desire not to impinge upon Paulita. She does this by employing the specific technique of impersonalizing both herself and Paulita in her last statement (not mentioning Paulita's paper). Through using this negative politeness strategy, Kali explains rather indirectly that she does not understand how Paulita's use of the term

“Spanish-American” will include or exclude specific countries and cultures. Kali also makes clear that she is not sure which ideas Paulita means to make central to her paper.

*III. Paulita: You have to...
They talk over each other.*

While the two talk over each other, what Paulita does say here is an example of negative politeness designed to communicate Paulita’s wants not to impinge upon Kali. Paulita, who has been a comparatively quiet member in the exchange about her paper until this point, is now willing to risk not minimizing the face threat to Kali. This overwhelming threat to Kali’s face wants is what enables Kali to feel comfortable enough to talk over Paulita, and to reassert her authority. Paulita’s relationship to the “you” she creates for Kali to inhabit here is rather abrupt and disdainful. Paulita chooses here, in essence, to speak to Kali as Kali has spoken to her up until this point, but with even more of a willingness to be direct rather than to question and hedge.

IV. Kali: But, at home we had Spanish-speaking people...

Kali changes the subject, avoiding unnecessary impositions on Paulita’s face wants. Kali now tries to make her own frame of reference for understanding the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” clearer to Paulita. She recognizes that their different cultural frames have not yet been exposed through the conversation as they have both engaged in it. Kali not only asserts a new cultural identity here, but also a new framework for putting pressure on the terms of American identity constructions. Kali, however, much like Paulita above, doesn’t get a chance to finish.

The Dispute Between Paulita and Kali

Paulita: Where are you from?

Kali: Trinidad and Tobago. There are so many different cultures where I come from. We don’t consider ourselves French or Spanish or anything like that. We, in Trinidad...

Paulita: Well... well... I’m not talking about people from Latin America or Spain or Europe. I’m talking about the people who were born here and have a Spanish background. Just like there are people born here, not in Africa, and we consider and call them African-American...

Kali: Yeah but... their foreparents came from Africa – from Africa directly? If that’s the case, calling them by their location wouldn’t be a derogatory manner, just like this – they came from a Latin American country, do you understand? their parents, their foreparents... You mean, you say, you were born here but your parents came from a Latin American country, you know? Or, from Spain?

I. Paulita: Where are you from?

Paulita newly asserts a tentative identity of authority here. Paulita seems to assume that she is entitled to interrupt Kali because she has just been interrupted by Kali. The strategy Paulita uses is a typical negative politeness strategy, questioning. However, Paulita does not hedge or qualify her question. Instead she asks it rather directly. Paulita's question is also meant to reveal the fact that Kali has left out an important element of her speech, an explanation about where she comes from and therefore the kind of cultural frame she brings to bear upon the situation. In addition, Paulita's question undermines Kali's position as "teacher" or "authority" since Kali has neglected to reveal a very important piece of information, an unteacherly mistake. The assumption that Paulita also makes with this statement is that the place from which Kali comes, and the framework that she brings to bear upon the discourse situation as a result, are not applicable to the situation which Paulita herself is explaining, nor compatible with the frame through which Paulita understands her own paper's argument to be made. Differences in cultural frame and in apparent identity construction, then, are being used to refute the validity of claims made about the formal features of a text.

II. Kali: Trinidad and Tobago. There are so many different cultures where I come from. We don't consider ourselves French or Spanish or anything like that. We, in Trinidad...

As Kali stops her flow of thought to answer Paulita's question, Kali makes clear her socio-cultural identities and frameworks for making sense of the issues of "race" raised by Paulita's paper. For Paulita, Kali's choice to reveal her primary framework for intelligibility, Trinidad and Tobago, makes clear the difference of her frame from Paulita's, enabling Paulita to garner the evidence she needs in order to dismiss Kali's earlier assertions. Kali qualifies her statement with, "where I come from." Though Kali believes that these differences in their cultural frames for intelligibility do not cancel out the other formal questions she was asking earlier, Kali keeps these issues in the background now, choosing instead to foreground other concerns.

In addition, Kali adopts a use of "we" here which is no longer connected to the "group we" she asserted earlier, a "we" which was meant to refer to the peer group in opposition to the positions offered by Paulita. It is specifically dependent upon a cultural "we," including those people from Trinidad and Tobago. Even though Kali doesn't get to finish her statements about the position of someone like herself, or others in Trinidad and Tobago before being interrupted, she does have a chance to articulate a position which sounds very different from Paulita's. For Kali, to call oneself "French" or "Spanish" is an incidental identity marker since, as she writes reflectively elsewhere, "Everyone in Trinidad and Tobago is of different ethnic and racial origin. We

are all mutts. Rather than claiming one ethnic or racial origin, we claim our status as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago first, and the geographical location of our ancestors only incidentally, if ever."

III. Paulita: Well... well... I'm not talking about people from Latin America or Spain or Europe. I'm talking about the people who were born here and have a Spanish background. Just like there are people born here, not in Africa, and we consider and call them African-American...

Before Paulita interrupts Kali, all that Paulita could've learned from Kali's last discourse exchange between them is that Kali's cultural frame of reference is different from her own. Therefore, this must be enough to suggest to Paulita that Kali's comments heretofore have been inappropriate since they have not been in keeping with the frame of reference to which all of the other peer group members ascribe (namely, they are "Americans" and have an American conception of the way "race" is constituted). The two "wells" at the beginning and the significant pauses between them seem to indicate Paulita's trepidation about going on record, and yet her desire to do so at this point. Paulita chooses to start to say something which might be viewed as a face threat, and instead abandons it, and leaves it hanging. Since Paulita thinks that Kali's frame of reference is inadequate to understanding the frame of reference in which Paulita's paper was created, Paulita appears to be empowered to say that Kali's frame is wrong when she propounds, "I'm not talking about people from Latin America or Spain or Europe."

Paulita then reasserts that Kali's frame is inadequate to judge the import of her paper by implying that most of Kali's comments must have been made with the inappropriate cultural frame. For Paulita, clearly, this also raises the question of whether any of Kali's earlier comments are at all relevant to Paulita's paper itself. Paulita states, "I'm talking about people who were born here and have a Spanish background." Paulita's comment leaves ambiguous whether these people have a "Spanish background," which is based simply in the Spanish language or traditions, and whether all of these people have lived in Spain.

Paulita then goes on to draw out the analogy she made earlier in her written paper: those people who were born in the United States but have a "Spanish background" are similar to people who were born in the United States "not in Africa, and we consider and call them African-American." The "we" she articulates here is meant to encompass the other group members, excluding Kali, as well as the other people who live in the United States. Paulita's use of "we" aims at avoiding impinging on Kali's wants. Still, by excluding Kali from this "we," Paulita threatens Kali's face severely.

IV. Kali: *Yeah but... their foreparents came from Africa – from Africa directly? If that's the case, calling them by their location wouldn't be a derogatory manner, just like this – they came from a Latin American country, do you understand? Their parents, their foreparents... You mean, you say, you were born here but your parents came from a Latin American country, you know? Or, from Spain?*

Since Kali has evidenced an earlier problem with the analogy Paulita makes between “African-Americans” and “Spanish-Americans,” it is not surprising that Kali takes exception to it here. Again, Kali qualifies herself. Kali may do this in order to avoid imposing too greatly upon Paulita’s face wants with her change in topic. Kali seems to agree to what Paulita is saying with the “yeah,” though this agreement is quickly followed by a qualifier. Again Kali asks questions seemingly in order to minimize face threat. However, like Kali’s earlier questions, these function almost like statements. Her choice to repeat “from Africa” two times in the first sentence indicates that she is perhaps uncomfortable with proceeding to take on an identity of authority in the conversation since she has been told earlier by Paulita that her cultural frame is inappropriate to the situation. Kali tries to stick with the analogy that Paulita has made between the situation of “African-Americans” and “Latino-Americans.” The label “African-American” suggests that the people came from Africa, and “Latino-Americans” implies that the people come from the many Latin American countries. Thus Kali is able to argue that if “Latino-American” is a derogatory term for those people, “African-American” should be for those other people.

After making these connections, Kali’s language seems to literally fall apart. No longer comfortable assuming the identity as teacher, Kali appears to have been rearticulated as an “outsider” to the group, changing her own identity construction. As a result, the rest of her questions are aborted attempts at continuing the line of reasoning, and thus make little sense to the average listener or reader. Interestingly, it would seem that the other Basic Writers in the exchange have marginalized her precisely because of her cultural frame. One important thing to be learned from this part of the exchange is the way in which cultural frames for comprehending and conceiving of one’s environment and identity are not only important for understanding each other’s perspectives. A difference in cultural frames and social norms can easily be used against someone as a weapon to save face. Kali’s language in this section was effectively dismissed because of this difference in cultural frames, and this by Paulita, a young Basic Writer whose paper purports to respect the integrity of cultural frames for herself and others. However, avoiding the risk to one’s face wants is sometimes a greater concern than grappling with the other social issues raised by one’s paper.

The Dispute Between John and Kali

John: No, I don't think she's trying to say...

Kali and John talk over each other

John: She's saying that if you come from Africa or Nigeria, you should say, "I'm from Africa" or "I'm from Nigeria." But, if you are born here and you are black, you want to call yourself African-American because...

Kali and John talk over each other.

John: Yeah. Or, their grandparents were born in Africa... They fade away from saying they are "African."

Kali: I understand what you are saying – but you are American – you are American, but of a certain descent.

I. John: No, I don't think she's trying to say...

Kali and John talk over each other.

John intervenes at this point in the exchange which has, up until this point, largely been between Kali and Paulita. With his use of "No," John once again exposes his alliance with Paulita, this time by deciding to go on record. John asserts his identity here as allied with Paulita's, one in conjunction with his cultural identity as an African-American male. John qualifies his speech slightly so as to not completely impinge upon Kali's by saying, "I don't think she's trying to say..." By asserting "I don't think" rather than "She's not," John speaks so as to offer this as his "opinion" or perspective rather than as a principle or rule. In this way, John takes responsibility for being the person who has this perspective rather than implying that because Kali's frame is different, she cannot judge (which would certainly have been a face threat). The fact that Kali interrupts John at this point indicates that Kali senses the on record nature of John's comment and wants to circumvent it, wants to respond to a potential threat to her own face.

II. John: She's saying that if you come from Africa or Nigeria, you should say, "I'm from Africa" "I'm from Nigeria." But, if you are born here and you are black, you want to call yourself African-American because...

Kali and John talk over each other.

In this piece of discourse, John is trying to tell Kali what he thinks Paulita is saying since he believes, given Kali's different frame of reference, that she might just have misunderstood Paulita. If this is the case, Kali was not threatening Paulita's face wants and John has been on the defensive for nothing. Utilizing the plural form of "you" so as not to threaten Kali's face wants, John impersonalizes both himself and Kali. Instead, by using "you" in this way, John is giving Kali the

option to interpret it as applying to her rather than to the rest of the group members, if she so chooses.

It's interesting that John begins by giving examples of people who do not live in the United States and how they name themselves since he appears to be trying to convince Kali of the relevance of Paulita's argument. This is particularly important since Kali is not from the United States and will certainly identify herself with the first people whom John mentions. In other words, Kali might be less concerned with how her "race" was represented and much more with the fact that her country was represented, that she was from Trinidad and Tobago. John's use of "but" in the sentence "but, if you are born here and you are black" hedges the propositional content he is about to offer, and serves as an important way to shift the topic slightly. John's language here also brings an important immediacy to bear on the subject. The suggestion for people not from the United States is a "should" while the suggestion for the people of the United States is a "want to." By using these words here, John offers a very indirect imperative for what Kali should do (how Kali ought to name herself, the deterministic identity she ought to adopt) while only seeming to mirror the transparent and pre-existent "wants" of Blacks in the United States to call themselves "African-Americans." The first group appears to have little choice, the second, a great deal. John does this very subtly so as to avoid any risk of overtly threatening Kali's face wants.

III. John: Yeah. Or, their grandparents were born in Africa... They fade away from saying they are "African"

Here John claims a common ground by agreeing with Kali, suggesting that they share common points of view, opinions, attitudes, and knowledge. He leaves the implicit idea in the air, however, making the utterance somewhat incomplete. John's choice of the "they" is interesting since both he and Teketa, the most silent member of the group, consider themselves "African-Americans" and have at other moments in the course talked about "African relatives" or "African heritage." Here John chooses not to construct his own identity as raced in this way. He doesn't mark himself or Teketa as among "them." What this reveals, then, is John's willingness to ally himself with and ingratiate himself to Kali without overtly using a positive politeness strategy which might invoke comment and disillusionment from Paulita, his openly avowed ally. John seems to choose an identity construction more in alliance with Paulita and the peer group situation at this moment than in advocacy of his African-American identity specifically.

IV. Kali: I understand what you are saying... but... you are American – you are American, but of a certain descent.

Kali responds directly to John here. Her reference to “you,” unlike John’s, is aimed towards John himself rather than a “plural you.” This first part of Kali’s discourse participation employs a positive politeness strategy determined to claim a common ground with John so as to satisfy John’s face wants. Kali claims here that she “understands” his point of view, opinions, and attitudes possibly in order to both seek agreement with him as well as to avoid disagreement which might threaten his face wants and erupt into a dispute. The “but,” however, reveals Kali’s reluctance to make that change in topic. The pause after the “but” would seem to imply that her reluctance is so strong, it may be causing her to re-evaluate whether she ought to change the topic after all. This notion bears out, of course, when Kali says awkwardly in the last part of the sentence, “but you are American—you are American, but of a certain descent.” This seems to be a mere repetition of what John has said earlier. The only main difference between these two accounts is the way in which the two writers/speakers use language. The “you” Kali uses here, though it could well be meant to include other people who call themselves “African-Americans,” seems to be directed very much at John as well. One is left wondering what change in topic Kali abandoned in favor of merely reiterating John’s point, why she abandoned it, and whether her choice to abandon it was due to the fear that she could potentially threaten all members’ face wants if she said it as she originally intended. Despite these students’ own discussions about “raced” and “cultured” positions, their use of language reveals a whole host of other identity constructions which, at given moments, override them.

This section of discourse also seems to signal the demise of Kali’s authority in the group as “teacher,” facilitator, or advanced peer. Though Paulita’s perspective earlier threatened Kali’s face wants in major ways, it appears that through John’s positive politeness strategies Kali became more convinced that she should abandon her earlier considerations. Her desire to be considered part of the group appears to have ended up being too strong in the face of John’s positive politeness strategies to risk any more face threatening acts with the group. She therefore appears to momentarily abandon the earlier identity she adopted.

The Intervention of Teketa

Teketa: The thing I got out of it... They basically use Hispanic-American for census purposes. Then you talk about how other people name themselves – like “African-American.” What else about the term “Hispanic” don’t you like? What else bothers you? Okay, now that you have a sense of that – tell us what other things. That way you can create a balance between the use

of "African-American" and then why you don't like the other [the use of "Latino" and "Hispanic"].

Kali: Yeah. That's good.

Teketa: I think her transitions are very good.

Kali: Yeah... (pause)

Teketa: Who is next?

I. Teketa: The thing I got out of it... They basically use Hispanic-American for census purposes. Then you talk about how other people name themselves-like "African-American". What else about the term "Hispanic" don't you like? What else bothers you? Okay, now that you have a sense of that—tell us what other things. That way you can create a balance between the use of "African-American" and then why you don't like the other [the use of "Latino" and "Hispanic"].

Teketa decides to enter this discussion only after the disputes between Paulita and Kali as well as John and Kali have ended; therefore, many of the major issues of authority and face saving have already erupted. Moreover, when she does speak, Teketa directs all of her commentary to Paulita, making her less likely to offend any group members' face wants. Lastly, Teketa chooses to speak at a juncture when, due to the limited time left in the peer group situation, the group must begin to move on to the next student paper.

Teketa begins with a statement, but leaves it unfinished. She follows this aborted statement up with a reiteration of a point that she heard in Paulita's paper, that the term "Hispanic-American" is insufficient for Paulita's purposes because it is not a term claimed by those people, but one given to them by the United States' government. After establishing a positive position vis-a-vis Paulita by repeating Paulita's own words, Teketa begins to ask a series of questions: "What else about the term 'Hispanic' don't you like? What else bothers you?" These questions seem to be designed to get Paulita thinking beyond the fact that the term was used for census purposes and on to other considerations. Here Teketa adopts the identity of facilitator.

Teketa's next decision is also very important. Rather than assuming a negative position in relation to Paulita after these questions, she presupposes a situation in which Paulita will be able to provide answers to these aforementioned concerns to Teketa's satisfaction by saying "Okay, now that you have a sense of that." This is a positive politeness strategy used to presuppose Paulita's success. Here Teketa assumes that Paulita will cooperate with her because it will be in their mutual and shared interest for her to do so. The next part of Teketa's statement, "tell us what other things," creates a new relationship between Paulita and the other Basic Writers in the group. It suggests that the "us," a relatively new construction of group identity, is repre-

sented as interested in cooperating with Paulita and helping her to achieve what she should want to achieve with the paper. It also is sufficiently ambiguous as to not threaten Paulita's face wants.

In the actual exchange, Teketa states, "That way you can create a balance between the use of 'African American' and then why you don't like the other [the use of 'Latino' and 'Hispanic.']" Here Teketa uses yet another positive politeness strategy aimed at claiming a common ground between herself and Paulita, but also between Paulita and the entire peer group, it would seem. She accomplishes this through noticing or attending to Paulita's wants. Teketa recognizes that Paulita hopes to draw a connection between the plight of African-Americans in terms of naming and the Spanish-American population. Teketa realizes that this is Paulita's desire, approves of the desire, and, in this sentence, suggests how she can realize that desire. Interestingly, here Teketa appears to resist the very construction of her identity as static, as an African-American woman alone, in favor of helping Paulita to clarify the ideas in her paper.

II. Kali: Yeah. That's good.

Kali's reply to Teketa is also one further example of a positive politeness strategy, the expression of interest, approval, and sympathy with Teketa. By seeking agreement with Teketa, Kali does a very strategic thing. She not only allies herself with another member of the group (until now she is without overt allies). She also associates herself with someone whose positive politeness strategies are greatly affecting Paulita's relationship to the group (making this relationship seem more positive than it has heretofore), and with someone who is indicating that the entire group shares a common goal, to help Paulita realize her aims for the paper.

III. Teketa: (long pause) I think her transitions are very good.

The long pause in the discussion indicates that members are now at a loss with how to proceed. Identity constructions by individuals have been constructed provisionally so far. Now that a group identity has been constructed provisionally, members seem confused. All face wants seem to have been at least somewhat restored through Teketa's contribution to the group and Kali's seconding of Teketa's assertions. Though her comment is a very positive one (and aimed at extending the positive politeness strategies Teketa offered earlier), she no longer speaks to Paulita as "you." Instead she uses an impersonal reference, establishing a common ground with the other members of the group around Paulita and Paulita's paper.

IV. Kali: Yeah... (pause)

Kali's "Yeah" in response suggests that she may want to affirm

Teketa's desire to establish this common ground with the other members of the group. Kali may be deciding to leave off here because 1) the problems that will come up now if she does threaten Paulita's face wants cannot be resolved in the remaining time left for her paper; 2) she doesn't want to break up the common ground of the group as established by Teketa; and 3) she isn't quite sure what else she might say about Paulita's paper that hasn't already been said. Kali's identity and assertion of it here appear to demand the subversion of that authority in favor of establishing the group's folk logics and values.

V. Teketa: Who is next?

The fact that Teketa responds next is very telling. Clearly the group members have run out of time to attend to Paulita's paper. However, in general, it has been Kali who has assumed the role of authority, and has acted as the group member who most clearly took up the position of authority in the group. Despite the disputes between Paulita and Kali as well as Kali and John over gaining the authority within the group, none of these members actually succeeded in gaining that authority for very long. Instead, by saying very little and resolving the group's problems at the end through positive politeness strategies, Teketa has been able to take up that identity rather easily. She dictates the next stage in the peer revision group with her on record question, "Who is next?"

Teketa's intervention reveals several things about how issues of authority are finally settled in Basic Writing peer groups: 1) Authority is often lost to two members of a dispute (in other words, neither one wins). One real trick to gaining authority in the Basic Writing peer group is to make your aims seem to be the other members' aims, your wants to be their wants. This allows one to say what one wants to say about the paper's goals, strengths, and weaknesses, but make all of these opinions seem to originate from the writer of the paper. In other words, positive politeness strategies could offer more ways to gain authority within a peer group than cultural positioning or other equally relevant identity markers alone could. 2) There are particular techniques which Teketa used which helped her to do this such as speaking personally to Paulita with a singular form of "you," seeking agreement between herself and Paulita, and being optimistic about Paulita's ability to revise the paper, and 3) Shifts in identity construction by group members occur constantly, especially when members are called to account or face threats are redressed.

Self-Performative Constructions of Student Identity: Implications for Future Basic Writing Scholarship

Since this analysis is necessarily speculative in nature, I will now discuss some of the potentially useful questions it raises. First, what possible implications might this kind of analysis of our students' exchange have for future Basic Writing scholarship? Examining students' moment-to-moment interactions in this way can reveal not "who Basic Writers are" but how those who are labeled as such construct new identities, new senses of intersubjectivity, and new conceptions of the situations at hand. This may potentially elucidate how these contingently constructed identities enable them to grapple with larger social and political forces. Though student identity construction often involves self-characterizations according to race, class, and gender distinctions, the nature of the Basic Writers' interaction itself and the students' perceptions of it continually shape how they construct their identities. In many ways, then, it would appear that students themselves may indeed already momentarily resist rigid constructions of their identities through the very actions of their own interaction. This suggests that we cannot adequately understand our students' identities unless we look very closely at the interactions in which they construct them, a task which we have yet to fully undertake. Similarly, it would appear that political subversion of dominant discourses which produce student identities (institutional, societal, and scholarly) can occur at some level within students' verbal exchanges quite frequently. This possibility might cause us to re-examine our applications of politically-invested analytic lenses to their situations alone, then, since such applications may run the risk of denying the complexity of our students' own contingent creations of identity and politics through their interactions. Extended examinations of the Basic Writing students' peer interactions inside our classrooms also hold the potential to expose the various ways in which teachers, Basic Writing Programs, and college/university administrations may assume relationships to Basic Writers which Basic Writers' language itself actually defies.

How might such an analytic, if only in a very preliminary way, help us to revise our construction of Basic Writers' student identities within our scholarship? First, those of us concerned about Basic Writers' social situations may want to look carefully at how we utilize the "conflict" metaphor. If this metaphoric allegiance can lead us to claim that Basic Writers exist on the "margins," as either victims or resistant entities, as discussed earlier, this may indeed prove limiting. As Maureen Hourigan's *Literacy as Social Exchange: Intersections of Class, Gender, and Culture* clarifies, a politics of difference based on "contact

zone" pedagogy has the potential to be liberating for many Basic Writing students, but it can be equally disempowering to others — particularly, as Hourigan points out, our many Basic Writers who do not possess the luxury of "class assurance," and therefore the advantages often needed to challenge class privilege (51). Reading Basic Writers' situations as "subject to the system" or "disruptive to it," Basic Writing Programs as complicitous in student oppression or radically fighting against it, our roles as Basic Writing teachers as promoters of contact zone pedagogies or supporters of the status quo, inevitably masks the complex dynamics of our students' identity productions and the relationship of such identity productions to other variables. Ironically enough, then, the broad range of Basic Writers' situated identity reconstructions in face-to-face conversation, real-time computer communication, and through written composition are variables for which our Basic Writing scholarship has yet to fully account. Twenty years after the publication of Shaughnessy's landmark *Errors and Expectations*, this seems a crucial next leg of our journey in the now well mapped Basic Writing "frontier."

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